

The Fully Armed Christian Soldier - 1

The Christian's Armour

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Dear congregation, the things we value most in life whether it be the spiritual relationship that a believer has with God in a personal growing way or the blessing of a close and intimate marriage or the blessing of a life of contentment and commitment through a disciplined lifestyle are not easily obtained nor easily retained and spiritual life and in everything valuable in life even in the realm of nature, the way to success, real success is often through struggle. The way to profit is often through pain. Now that is, of course, due ultimately to our deep fall in Adam but it's a fact of life in which we now live. You don't have children as women, pain-free. You don't have an intimate marriage without real communication and sometimes sensitive feelings. You don't have spiritual life without struggle. You can't grow without struggle.

I once read a story of a man who found a cocoon of the emperor moth and took it home to watch it emerge and one day a small opening appeared and the man watched as he saw and heard the creature inside for several hours struggling but he couldn't seem to, the creature couldn't seem to get itself beyond that certain point so the man decided something was wrong and he took a pair of scissors and he snipped just a little bit off the end of that cocoon. Suddenly the moth emerged easily, its body large and swollen, its wings small and shriveled. And the man expected in a few hours everything would be alright but it wasn't. That moth never developed into a creature free to fly but it spent its life dragging around a swollen body and shriveled wings. You see, the point is that that constricting cocoon and the struggle was necessary to pass through the tiny opening because it was God's way of forcing fluid from the body into the wings and so the so-called merciful snip was really most cruel.

Now God says of the day of judgment when all his own shall pass into the gates of heaven, these are they who have come out of great tribulation, struggle. In this world God leaves us like a moth going through that cocoon so that we learn to deny ourselves and take up a cross and follow Christ; so that we learn the narrowness of the way. You see, the Christian way is not a middle way between extremes but it is a narrow way between precipices. It's a way of holy warfare. These are they that have come out of great tribulation. John Bunyan learned that so well that he wrote a whole book about it that we know as the great classic "The Holy War." But others of our forefathers also wrote great

classics on this very theme. In fact, this portion, Ephesians 6:10-20, has been extensively written on by the Puritans, thousand some pages of it.

This is reality in the life of the believer and with God's help what we want to do on the occasional afternoons I have opportunity to speak to you, we want to follow this section of Scripture piece of armor by piece of armor and look one sermon devoted to each piece of armor, look at how we use that armor to fight the Christian life, the Christian warfare, and this afternoon we want to begin this series by looking at the armed Christian soldier as a whole, and we will do that from verses 10 through 13.

10 Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might. 11 Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. 12 For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. 13 Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.

So the theme is to be the fully armed Christian soldier. The fully armed Christian soldier. First we want to see his battle to be fought; second, his formula for victory; and third, his motive for fighting. The fully armed Christian soldier: his battle to be fought; his formula for victory; his motive for fighting.

A true believer is just that, a true believer. To be a believer means that we have saving faith. Now saving faith is paradoxical in the sense that it is a living reflection of the cross. A person who is a true believer is someone who believes the unbelievable. It is someone who forgives the unforgivable and someone who loves the unlovable. A true believer by faith surrenders the unsurrenderable and finds love as he gives it away. A true believer lives a paradoxical life. The poor in spirit find the kingdom of God. Those that mourn are comforted. Those that are meek inherit the earth. Those that hunger and thirst after righteousness are filled. You see, it's through cross to crown, through death to birth, through giving to receiving, through becoming nothing to obtaining all, through knowing the hellishness of my own heart to knowing the heavenliness of the heart of God.

Now all of this entails self-crucifixion, mortification. It demands a surrender of self-identity so that we no longer become our own in order to obtain divine identity but belong to Jesus Christ, and the first step on that road of real spiritual sanctification upon being born again is already a wrestling step, a step of warfare. I believe it was William Gurnall who did so much writing on this passage who said something like this, he said the Christian walk is like walking between a narrow, walking on a narrow path between two rows of hedges and behind the hedges on both sides are the forces of evil aiming at the one traveling down that narrow path. You see, Satan wants to have you and he will unleash all the powers of hell to get at those who name the name of Christ because he's a bitter enemy of Christ and he can't get at Christ so he gets at the crown of Christ, which is true believers.

So the very first thing we need to realize as we approach this text and this section of Scripture is that we have to do here with a very powerful enemy, an enemy who will not leave us for the rest of our life, an enemy who is not a creation of human imagination but as real as we are. His name, of course, you know that, is Satan. Now Satan is so real and so powerful that we cannot withstand him in our own strength. He's a liar. He's a murderer from the beginning. He's a deceiver. He hates God for his own sake and everything that is dear to God he hates too for the very reason that God loves the things that belong to him.

Now the worst thing we could do is, the very worst thing we could do is to pretend Satan doesn't exist, to ignore his reality. That's what a lot of people do, in fact, people today, you know, people that say they're Christians, make jokes about Satan. You've heard those jokes. People say, "Oh, the devil made me do it," casually, flippantly, and they don't seem to have any feeling of what they're saying, no reality. You see, when God isn't real in our lives, Satan isn't real. But when God is real and sin is real, the enemy is real as well. Oh, these people may not absolutely deny the existence of Satan but they are ignorant of his devices and Paul says that we must not be ignorant of his devices. We need to be aware of the stratagems of Satan, stratagems that he uses, tailor makes to each of our lives to get us to stumble and to fall and to wallow in sin. So he uses our personalities, he studies us, he watches us, he sees our weaknesses, he saw Peter's weakness, got him to deny he knew Jesus, saw David's weakness with Bathsheba. We cannot minimize these things.

Satan is very observant and he knows where you and I are about to fall, and we have very different temptations, don't we? I remember distinctly riding with a man many many years ago and he wanted to tell me something very personal and finally it came out. We had ridden miles and miles and with cheers he told me his addiction to country music. What a temptation country music was to him. Wherever he went and he traveled and he was always tempted by country music. Well, I shook my head inside because if you paid me a thousand dollars I couldn't listen through country music for 30 minutes I don't think. It's just not the least temptation in my life for country music. I hardly know what it is. But this man was sorely tempted by country music. Well, the same exact way to come to me and tell me what country music is because he's going to tell me it was something else, but this man was sorely tempted by Satan with country music.

So Satan knows exactly what can get us to fall. He knows our weaknesses. Paul puts it this way in our text, we wrestle not against flesh and blood, we're not just wrestling against man to man, not a 50-50 proposition, but wrestling against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places, all names and expressions that describe the power of Satan and all the arch-enemies, all the devils that he has at his command in his army. So the Christian is not called to a life of ease but he's called to a life of warfare, a wrestling match, if you will.

Now Paul says three things about this battle by way of introduction. He says, first of all, it's a fierce battle. It involves force of light and darkness, so it's a battle that we cannot tolerate compromising. It's a conflict with life and death, eternal consequences are at stake. This isn't just a wrestling match between teenagers and one wins one time and one

wins another time and it's all in fun, this is a close battle. We come to hand-grips with Satan. It's more than ordinary fighting. This opponent seizes us and we wrestle with him. The prince of darkness is also the angel of light. What a challenge to be aware of his devices, coming from the dark side, coming from the light side, boy, that's a tremendous challenge. We need so much help.

Secondly, it's not only a fierce battle but it's a spiritual battle. A spiritual battle and that makes it all the more challenging, doesn't it? Satan doesn't come at us with tanks and atomic weaponry but he comes on a level of flesh and blood. He comes doing holy warfare. He aims at spiritual things. He aims at truth, at righteousness, at the battle for the kingdom of Christ, a battle for holiness at a daily practical level. So he comes with invisible weapons to fight invisible enemies to destroy us.

Then thirdly, it's a necessary battle. Paul refers to that here, that we are in an evil day. He says, "Wherefore," verse 13, "take unto you the whole armour of God that you may be able to stand, withstand in the evil day." That evil day refers, of course, to the entire New Testament era, the day in which Christ has now been resurrected and Revelation 12 tells us that the devil is frustrated because the Christ child is snatched from him. So now he concentrates his attack more furiously than ever upon the woman of Revelation 12 which is the church of the glorified Christ.

So this day is always present and personally it's a short day for all of us. Our lives are so incredibly short. Just last night I was speaking to someone 73 years old and she said, I like this, "Gone in a moment. I'm a widow now and I was just married 15 years and those 15 years with my second husband, it's but a shadow and it was gone." You see, we're in this tabernacle and in this tabernacle we groan being burdened but it's a short fight but that's all the more reason that we care about this fight and we get the victory in this fight because we need die and the result of how this battle goes impacts our eternal destiny. So this is a tremendous battle, a necessary battle. No believer can get away from this battle. It must be fought.

Now Paul tells us that this battle is not only serious and necessary but it's also a battle against overwhelming odds and that seems very discouraging but Paul wants to be honest with us. It's against overwhelming odds when we weigh up against it in the strength of our own flesh because, you see, the problem, our own natural flesh is an ally of the enemy in this battle. Our own natural flesh wants to go along with Satan and what Paul wants to tell us from the outset not to discourage us but to teach us what to expect, to be realistic with us, he wants to tell us that we cannot stand in our own strength. We need help. You know, when you counsel people that often it is really true that half of the problem is getting to convince them, getting them convinced rather than they need help. That's what Paul is doing in his opening verses. He says, "My brethren, be strong in the Lord and the power of his might. Put on the whole armor of God that you may be able to stand." You can't stand on your own that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.

Well, having set that up, Paul then proceeds to tell us his formula for victory. His formula for victory and that's our second thought. There are three reasons that the living church do not fall prey to the wiles of the devil. The first reason is that they are secure in the person of God's dear Son. "No man shall pluck them out of my hand," Jesus said. That's comforting. The second reason is that Christ has spoiled Satan of his dominion over the elect. You can read that in Hebrews 2:14 that he has destroyed him who had the power of death, and in Colossians 2:15, and having spoiled principalities and powers, very same words, the powers of evil, he made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it, that is, on the cross he triumphed over Satan. And then thirdly, God himself gives to his people practical advice, personal strength, necessary armor to gain the victory and that's what Paul especially focuses on in this portion of God's word.

Paul is dealing here with the practical nuts and bolts of how to live the Christian life in battling against sin and as he does so, Paul sets the framework and says there are really three things you need to do. 1. You need to be strong in the Lord, in the power of his might. This is Paul's command. Paul is like a beloved General commanding his troops and he's saying to his troops which are his readers of all ages we must picture the church of Jesus Christ as a large platoon ready for battle. The General knows that his soldiers are nervous and afraid, the enemy is strong, they're outnumbered, so he sends his messenger from headquarters, he sends his Drill Sergeant or rather his Captain and he says, "Be strong. Be strong in the Lord and in the power of his might." Don't be yourself, you see. That's the formula for failure, but be strong in the Lord. So in the very first lesson Paul wants to lay before us his, "Don't think you can fight this battle in your own strength but do it in the strength of the Lord." Isaac Watts, a great poet, put it so beautifully. "From thee the overflowing spring, our souls shall drink a fresh supply. While such as trust their native strength, shall melt away and droop and die."

So I wonder, friend, are you engaged in spiritual warfare? And if so, do you realize really, is part of your very daily existence, your conscious daily existence that you are fighting this battle in God's strength? That you don't have the strength yourself to fight it? But it is him, in the Lord Jesus. Be strong in the Lord. You see, so often I fail when I look at myself or when I look at Satan. Now either way you can look at yourself, you can give up before you start because you've failed so many times or you can look at yourself and be proud and think you can do it and you stumble and fall, but either way you go wrong, you go wrong, wrong, wrong. Paul says, "Be strong in the Lord," and that strength begins by realizing your own weakness so that you take refuge to the Lord.

So that's the first thing, the second thing is put on the armor of God. You must use what God has given you. So this armor is not something that you choose, it's something God has chosen for you as a Christian and what has God chosen for you? Well, that's what this whole series of sermons will be about. He's chosen truth, verse 14. He's chosen the breastplate of righteousness. He's chosen shod feet. The shield of faith. The helmet of salvation. The sword of the Spirit. And prayer. These are our weapons. This is the outfit of the fully armed Christian soldier.

So Paul says you've got to put these things on. You can't leave them in the closet. You must wrestle to wrestle and you must wrestle in wrestling. You must use these things. Just pray for strength to use them and you must have strength when you use them.

Then the third thing, put on the whole armor of God. That deserves notice all by itself, doesn't it? It doesn't do any good if you go out to fight a battle hand-to-hand with other soldiers and you put on the breastplate of righteousness but you forget to shod your feet or put on the helmet. He'll go right for your head or for your feet. Paul says put on the whole armor of God. What can you dispense with in this list of armor? Nothing. You can't dispense with it. With the girdle. You can't dispense with the breastplate. You can't dispense with the helmet, the shoes, the sword, the shield. You see, it's not one piece but in a sense it's as it were, it's one outfit, it's but one piece in a sense that you need the whole thing. So a Christian has got to battle with great care. He's got to use all the available weaponry and go out and fight the Lord's fight, put on the whole armor of God. And every piece of armor, as we will see, of course, points to Jesus Christ and what we have in Christ. That's why Paul can say elsewhere put on the Lord Jesus. That's really what it is, to put on the Christian armor, it's a putting on of Jesus.

Well, then Paul also sets before us, thirdly, his motive for wrestling, why must he battle this way, why is it so difficult and why should he stand, and why is all this effort worth it? Well, that's our third thought. Paul tells us he has two motives: the first is defensive and the second is offensive for fighting this spiritual battle.

The defense motive you can read in verse 13, "that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day." [unintelligible] ...if you use the breastplate of righteousness. So one motive is simply to survive and to ward off all these things so that no weapon that is formed against us shall prosper; that no persecution shall demolish us, not even death; so that even when the surges of death wash around us and beat over us, death may be counted gain by faith through the Lord Jesus Christ.

The second motive is the offensive one and Paul's focus is really on this one, isn't it? Verse 11b, "that you may be able to stand." There's something different between withstanding and standing. Verse 13, "and having done all to stand." Do you see the negative, "that you may be able to withstand and having done all to stand," to go forward in the strength of the Lord our God. So there's a victorious motive here, there's a positive motive, there's a Christ-centered motive. I don't only fight the Christian battle to maintain status quo and to fight off all the darts, but I fight the Christian battle to go forward in the strength of the Lord my God, making mention of his righteousness even of his own way. I go forward standing as an amazing monument of the persevering grace of God in my life. I go forward, says Paul, more than conqueror in Jesus Christ my Lord and the Captain of my salvation and the finisher of my faith, and my glorious Redeemer. I go forward and I go forward with an eye to the great reward, Paul says, the reward of immortality, [unintelligible] in lights with him who is immortal as a candidate for the reward of the glorious heaven, the reward of grace, for the unfading crown, for the overcomers peace to sit down with the Lamb of God and to lay aside or to enjoy eternal rest in the Lord Jesus Christ.

So Paul says, you see, that my one grand goal in life is to fight this battle not only to withstand the evil but also to stand in the strength of the Lord and to go forward as marching soldiers, onward Christian soldiers, to enjoy the pleasure of the Lord forevermore. Thus the ultimate goal is God's glory, to be with him and to praise him for whom all blessings flow, to stand even in the evil day. You see so often today we are prone not to stand, even people who are true Christians are prone to say, "What's the use of battling this battle? That is so fickle anyway, I'm so sinful and I'm so corrupt, I might as well give in." And they give in and don't fight, or else they fight wrongly, they fight in their own strength. Well, all of this is wrong, says Paul. You must put on the battle, you must put on the armor, you must put on the whole armor and you must do it to stand and to glorify your God.

Well, let me give you, then, by the way of closing this afternoon four quick closing applications. The first is remember your present state, your present condition. Today you and I are in evil days, so that means we ought to expect trouble, we ought to expect satanic wiles and devices. We ought not be surprised when Satan comes in clever ways. But Satan uses our greatest weaknesses and confronts us with them all the time. He knows so we ought not be surprised. That's the first thing, expect if you're going to be a Christian, expect the harassment of the enemy.

The second closing advice I leave with you is examine your armor. Is it divine armor? Is it in good shape? Is it rusty? Are you using it? Throw away all your armor that's not godly and put on the armor of Ephesians 6. John Calvin said the greatest tragedy in the Christian life is to hang the Christian armor on a hook. Friends, I admit I'm terribly guilty of that. I do too much cooking with the Christian armor. I know what I should do, I know what I should use, I even know something of how to use it but it's so easy to hang it on a hook and to settle on our lees. Examine your armor.

Third, let God's grace in Jesus Christ sustain you. Depend entirely upon God. Lean on him. Do you remember what David said? "My soul followeth hard after thee, O God." That's the way to live. And remember that as you lean on God, that all those who lean on God shall be victorious. They may lose a few skirmishes along the way but we won't lose the whole battle because those who lean on Jesus will experience that Jesus has gained the victory over Satan and that for Satan to destroy us he must destroy Christ first and that is impossible because we are in Christ if we're believers. So don't despair. Let the grace of God sustain you. Wait on the Lord. Wait, I say, O my soul, on the Lord that he will care for you.

Fourthly and finally, let the glory of God animate you. Think of a coming day, the day when you will stand, dear believer, in the presence of God through the righteousness of Christ. Oh, what a day when all the fighting shall be done and all the shadows shall flee away and we shall ever be with the Lord and all our bitters will be turned to sweets and crosses to crowns, the sorrows to joys. No more battle. No more wrestling. Happy day. Happy day when we shall say forever, "Not unto us, O Lord, but unto thee, to thy glory be all glory and dominion." This is the way to fight the Christian warfare.

I close with this little poem.

"Stand up, stand up for Jesus,
Stand in his strength alone.
Beyond the flesh will fail you,
Ye dare not trust your own.
Put on the gospel armor,
Each piece put on with prayer.
Where duty calls or danger,
Be never wanting there."

Amen.