

The Whole Armor of God

Our Only Strength

Ephesians 6:13

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Our Only Strength

Scripture

A few weeks ago we began a sermon series in Ephesians 6:10-24 that I am calling, “The Whole Armor of God.”

So far we have examined our spiritual warfare and our terrible enemy in this warfare. Today, I want to examine our only strength in this warfare.

So, let’s read about our only strength in Ephesians 6:13, although for the sake of context, I shall read verses 10-13:

¹⁰ Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. ¹¹ Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. ¹² For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. ¹³ **Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm.** (Ephesians 6:13)

Introduction

Winston Churchill became Lord of the Admiralty in Great Britain just before World War I. He immediately organized various aspects of the British Navy in anticipation of the looming war. In Parliament he secured funding by vivid, lucid descriptions of abstruse technical matters. Describing the impact of a shell upon a warship, he told the House: “If you want to make a true picture in your mind of a battle between two great modern iron-clad ships, you must not think of it as if it

were two men in armor striking at each other with heavy swords. It is more like a battle between two egg-shells striking each other with hammers...really needs no clearer proof.”¹

As weaponry developed in the first part of the 20th century, there was a growing and powerful strength delivered by each of the various weapons.

Christians need to understand that we are engaged in spiritual warfare. Prior to becoming Christians we were, as it were, in Satan’s army. We belonged to him prior to salvation, but now we belong to Christ, and we are, as it were, in Christ’s army. Bryan Chapell has a nice summary of the differences in his commentary on Ephesians. He notes the differences between our past and our present:

Once We Were	Now We Are
Dead (2:1)	Alive (2:5)
Under the dominion of Satan (2:2)	Seated in the heavenly realms (2:6)
Objects of wrath (2:3)	His glorious inheritance (1:18)
Separate (2:12)	Brought near (2:13)
Foreigners (2:19)	Fellow citizens (2:19)
Aliens (2:19)	Household members (2:19)
Denied gospel mystery (3:5)	Understanding gospel mystery (3:4)
Infants (4:14)	Maturing in Christ (4:15)
Old self (4:22)	New self (4:24)
Darkness (5:8)	Light (5:8) ²

¹ Manchester, William. *The Last Lion* Box Set. Little, Brown and Company. Kindle Edition.

² Bryan Chapell, *Ephesians*, ed. Richard D. Phillips, Philip Graham Ryken, and Daniel M. Doriani, Reformed Expository Commentary (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2009), 332.

Our terribly enemy in our spiritual warfare is the devil, as Paul wrote in Ephesians 6:11. He is a formidable foe but, as we noted previously, he is not omnipotent, omnipresent, or omniscient. Nevertheless, he is far more powerful than we are. So, if we are to achieve victory in our spiritual warfare against the devil and the rulers, authorities, cosmic powers over this present darkness, and the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places, it will be because of our only strength, which is the power and provision of God himself.

That is why James, the brother of our Lord himself, wrote, “Submit yourselves therefore to *God*. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you” (James 4:7). And it is also why Paul wrote in Ephesians 6:13, today’s text, **“Therefore take up the whole armor of *God*, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm.”**

Lesson

Ephesians 6:13 teaches us that God is our only strength in our spiritual warfare.

Let’s use the following outline:

1. The Clothing for Our Spiritual Warfare (6:13a)
2. The Conquest in Our Spiritual Warfare (6:13b)
3. The Calendar in Our Spiritual Warfare (6:13c)
4. The Conclusion in Our Spiritual Warfare (6:13d)

I. **The Clothing for Our Spiritual Warfare (6:13a)**

First, look at the clothing for our spiritual warfare.

Paul said in verse 13a, **“Therefore take up the whole**

armor of God....” Earlier, Paul said in verse 11a, “Put on the whole armor of God....” And the reason for putting on **the whole armor of God**, Paul went on to say, is so “that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil” (6:11b).

John Stott makes the following comment, “The expression *the whole armor of God* translates the Greek word *panoplia*, which is ‘the full armor of a heavy-armed soldier,’ although ‘the divineness rather than the completeness of the outfit is emphasized.’ The point is that this equipment is ‘forged and furnished’ by God.”³

John MacArthur says, “God gives no deferments or exemptions. His people are at war and will continue to be at war until he returns and takes charge of earth. But even the most willing and eager soldier of Christ is helpless without God’s provision. That is Paul’s point here: **take up the whole armor of God**. We have his provision in being his children, in having his Word, in possessing his indwelling Holy Spirit, of having every resource of our heavenly Father. God is our strength, but his strength is appropriated only through obedience; his mighty **armor** must be put on (v. 11) and taken up (v. 13).”⁴

In the coming weeks we will examine each piece of **the whole armor of God**. But, it is important for us to remember now that if we expect to be victorious in our spiritual warfare against our terrible enemy we must **take up the whole armor of God**. There simply is no victory without it; we will experience defeat after defeat if we neglect any one piece of it.

Boice notes in his commentary that many preachers and commentators say that Paul got his ideas about taking up the

³ John R. W. Stott, *God’s New Society: The Message of Ephesians*, The Bible Speaks Today (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1979), 275.

⁴ John F. MacArthur Jr., *Ephesians*, MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press, 1986), 343.

whole armor of God from being chained to a Roman soldier. As he looked at the Roman soldier and assessed each piece of his armor, he may have thought how it revealed a truth about the armor Christians need to wear in our spiritual warfare.

However, Boice goes on to say that he is inclined to think that Paul got his ideas about **the whole armor of God** from the Word of God. Paul, of course, had saturated himself with the Word of God, and he would have known that in Isaiah 59 there is a picture of God putting on his own armor. Isaiah 59:17a says, “He put on righteousness as a breastplate, and a helmet of salvation on his head.” And since that is exactly the same phrase as in Ephesians 6, Boice concludes that Paul got his ideas from Isaiah rather than from a Roman soldier.

The reason that is important is because when Paul speaks of **the whole armor of God**, as he does in Ephesians 6, “he is not thinking of it only as the armor which God supplies—his in the sense that he gives it—but rather that it is God’s own armor, that which he himself wears.”⁵ So, Boice concludes:

What do we need if we are to fight against Satan? Is it truth? Yes, we need truth, but not just any truth. We need God’s own truth: the truth of God, which we find in Scripture. Do we need righteousness? Yes, but not just human righteousness. We need the righteousness of God. The gospel? It is God’s gospel, God’s good news. Peace? It is God’s peace. Faith? It is faith from God, a fruit of the Holy Spirit (Gal. 5:22). Is it salvation? God is salvation. We must be armed with him.⁶

Do you remember the account of David and Goliath?

⁵ James Montgomery Boice, *Ephesians: An Expository Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Ministry Resources Library, 1988), 240.

⁶ James Montgomery Boice, *Ephesians: An Expository Commentary*, 240.

Goliath taunted the people of God, and there was no one willing to take on the giant. When David, who was just a teenager at the time, heard that God's name was being profaned by Goliath and the enemies of God, he was dismayed. He volunteered to go and fight against Goliath. King Saul was unwilling for David to fight Goliath without any armor, and so he gave David his own armor. He clothed David with his own armor, but none of it fit properly. So, David took off Saul's armor and went to fight against Goliath with only his sling. And as Boice says, "*Only* his sling? Yes, in the sense that the sling was the only thing to be seen. But in reality David went out in God's armor. For if ever a man was clothed in God's truth, God's righteousness, God's gospel, God's peace, God's faith, and God's salvation, it was David. And he was invincible. In God's armor David was prepared, not only for physical battle, but for all spiritual battles as well."⁷

And so shall we be, if we are properly clothed for our spiritual warfare.

II. The Conquest in Our Spiritual Warfare (6:13b)

Second, notice the conquest in our spiritual warfare.

Paul said in verse 13b, "**...that you may be able to withstand....**" The purpose of taking up the whole armor of God is so that we may be able to withstand against the schemes of the devil, and to be victorious in our wrestling against the rulers, the authorities, the cosmic powers over this present darkness, and the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.

Why do so many Christians fail to stand in their spiritual warfare? Why do so many believers fall in their Christian lives?

⁷ James Montgomery Boice, *Ephesians: An Expository Commentary*, 241.

The Whole Armor of God

It is not because God has failed to supply us with everything necessary to be able to withstand against the devil and his schemes. No. It is because we have failed to take up the whole armor of God.

When Martin Luther stood before the Diet of Worms, he was accused of heresy. He was asked to condemn what he had written as heresy because he declared that people are saved by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. After having received a night to think about his answer, he came back the next day and declared—in part—to the Diet, “My conscience is captive to the Word of God.... Here I stand, I cannot do otherwise.” Taking up the whole armor of God means being faithful to the Word of God **that you**, like Martin Luther and many others, **may be able to withstand** against the devil.

III. The Calendar for Our Spiritual Warfare (6:13c)

Third, observe the calendar for our spiritual warfare.

Paul said in verse 13c, “...**in the evil day**....” I don’t believe that Paul was referring to one specific day in the future that he was calling “**the evil day**.” Rather, Paul was simply meaning “the evil times” or “the evil season.”

My own view is that **the evil day** has been with us ever since the Fall of Adam and Eve into sin. And the days of evil will be here until the return of the Lord Jesus Christ.

So, let us not let our guard down, and let us be aware that the days of evil are upon us and we are constantly in battle.

IV. The Conclusion of Our Spiritual Warfare (6:13d)

And fourth, look at the conclusion of our spiritual warfare.

Paul said in verse 13d, “...and having done all, to stand firm.” Actually, Paul really set out a fourfold emphasis on standing. The purpose of taking up the whole armor of God is “that you may be able to *stand* against the schemes of the devil” (verse 11), “that you may be able to *withstand* in the evil day, and having done all, to *stand firm*. *Stand* therefore...” (verses 13-14a). John Stott notes, “This fourfold emphasis on the need to ‘stand’ or ‘withstand’ shows that the apostle’s concern is for Christian stability. Wobbly Christians who have no firm foothold in Christ are an easy prey for the devil. And Christians who shake like reeds and rushes cannot resist the wind when the principalities and powers begin to blow. Paul wants to see Christians so strong and stable that they remain firm even against the devil’s schemes (verse 11) and even *in the evil day*, that is, in a time of special pressure. For such stability, both of character and in crisis, the armor of God is essential.”⁸

Conclusion

Therefore, having analyzed our only strength in Ephesians 6:13, let us remember that it is only by the strength of God that we are able to stand firm.

In his commentary on Ephesians, Dr. James Montgomery Boice tells the following story:

Some years ago at an early Philadelphia Conference on Reformed Theology, the theme was the biblical terms for salvation, and Dr. John H. Gerstner spoke on “The Language of the Battlefield.” In developing this theme Gerstner spoke of four great spiritual battles: (1) the battle of *Satan against God* early in the history of the universe, which Satan lost; (2) the

⁸ John R. W. Stott, *God’s New Society: The Message of Ephesians*, 275.

The Whole Armor of God

battle of *Satan against man (Adam) without the God-man (Jesus)*, which Satan won; (3) the battle of *Satan against the God-man*, where Satan thought he had won by killing Christ, but had actually lost; and (4) the battle of *Satan against a man (Peter) who was joined to the God-man (Jesus)*, where Satan was also defeated.

The chief contrast in this message was between the second of these battles (Satan against Adam) and the fourth (Satan against Peter). In the first one, Adam seemed to have everything he needed to prevail. He was without sin and had every possible inclination to goodness. Yet he fell, because (we must assume this) he did not avail himself of the strength of Jesus Christ, the God-man, which was certainly not withheld from him. In the second battle Peter seemed to have nothing. He was sinful, weak, proud, vacillating. He even had the arrogance to tell Jesus, “Even if all fall away, I will not” (Mark 14:29) and “Lord, I am ready to go with you to prison and to death” (Luke 22:33). Peter did fall. He denied his Lord three times, just as Jesus predicted he would. Yet that was not all that happened. Jesus foretold Peter’s defection, but he added, “Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers” (Luke 22:31–32).

In other words, Jesus told Peter, “Peter, you are weak in yourself. Left to your own devices you will certainly fall. You will be no more permanent than chaff when the wind blows upon it. But I am for you. I am on your side; and since you are united to me by saving faith, I have prayed for you, and because of my prayer you will not be destroyed but will instead be strengthened. You will fall, but you will not fall away. You will be turned aside, but you will also be turned back, and when you are you will become a pillar of strength for your brothers.”

Gerstner pointed out that there is a hymn we sometimes sing that goes, “Lord, we are able.”

“That was written by Peter,” Gerstner said. Peter said,

“Lord, I am able.” But when he was tempted by Satan and fell, Peter discovered that he was not able. So he revised that hymn to read: “Lord, we are not able.” He learned that only as he was united to Jesus Christ could he stand his ground and be victorious.

Gerstner adds, “That man, in all his pristine glory, made in the spotless image of God with holiness, righteousness, and knowledge, was able to be brought to ruin by satanic temptation proved that we never of ourselves are *posse non peccare* [able not to sin]. But no matter how weak our faith, how meager our discipleship, how much we shame the name of Christ and have so often to repent and turn home again—no matter how we fail, because we are united to Christ with a love which will never let us go, Satan with all his craft and power cannot stand against us and we can conquer him. . . . Even in our best condition we cannot meet Satan; but in our weakened and debilitated state, sinning far more than we live virtuously, we are able to conquer him because Christ has given us the victory.”⁹

Brothers and sisters, that is our only strength in our spiritual warfare. So, let us **take up the whole armor of God, that we may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm.** Amen.

⁹ James Montgomery Boice, *Ephesians: An Expositional Commentary*, 241–242.

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Sermons by Rev. Freddy Fritz

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