

The Whole Armor of God

Our Shining Armor – Part 1

Ephesians 6:14

Rev. Freddy Fritz

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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, our terrible enemy, and our only strength in this warfare. Today, I want to examine the first part of our shining armor in this warfare.

So, let’s read about our shining armor in Ephesians 6:14, although for the sake of context, I shall read verses 10-14:

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. ¹⁴ **Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness,** (Ephesians 6:14)

Introduction

In his letter to the Ephesians, the Apostle Paul wanted believers to understand that we are engaged in a powerful supernatural warfare. He wrote in Ephesians 6:12, “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.” Whether we like it or not, Christians are conscripted into this great warfare. We now belong to the army of God, as it were, and we battle against the devil—also known as Satan—and his demons.

In his commentary on Ephesians, John MacArthur lists a number of ways in which Satan opposes believers, some of them direct and obvious, while others are indirect and subtle.

First, Satan opposes believers by impugning God’s character and credibility. He did this of course with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. Adam and Eve enjoyed a wonderful relationship with God. They trusted him completely until Satan came along and caused them to doubt God’s Word. He succeeded, as you know, and ever since that time the devil’s supreme desire has been to convince people that God is untrustworthy. He has caused untold numbers of people to doubt and deny God’s Word as the word of truth. Christians impugn God’s character and credibility when we doubt his goodness, love, power, grace, and mercy. Christians impugn God’s character and credibility when we lose a job, a loved one, or our health, and then blame God for that loss.

Second, Satan opposes believers by bringing trouble into our lives. At the most extreme end is persecution of Christians. Some Christians are so persecuted that they lose their freedom, jobs, families, and even their lives. But Satan also brings trouble by means of peer pressure. Some Christians fear criticism and want to be accepted, and so they capitulate to that pressure.

Third, Satan opposes believers through doctrinal confusion and error. Satan “disguises himself as an angel of light” (2 Corinthians 11:14), and infiltrates churches to spread doctrinal confusion and error. That is why there is such a vast difference in doctrine between so many churches. Satan convinces Christians that the Word of God is difficult to grasp and that they are not able to

understand the Word of God. So, Christians don't study God's Word for themselves. They don't attend Bible studies in order to grow in their understanding of God's truth. And the result is that millions of people join churches that are nothing but a "synagogue of Satan" (Revelation 2:9; 3:9).

Fourth, Satan opposes believers by hindering their service to God. For example, Satan opposed the Apostle Paul's work in Ephesus through "many adversaries" (1 Corinthians 16:9). When I was a student at seminary, a seasoned and gifted pastor was taking an advanced degree. I sometimes used to drive to Sunday worship with him and his wife. He said once that he and his wife often used to have significant spats on a Saturday evening. When I became a pastor I noticed that my wife and I more often than not had arguments on—you guessed it!—Saturday evenings. When Christians want to get active in ministry in the church, Satan finds ways to hinder their service to God.

Fifth, Satan opposes believers by causing divisions. Nothing more effectively hinders the church's testimony than division among its members. Satan knows that he has won the battle when Christians don't love each other or serve each other or help each other or forgive each other. That is why Jesus prayed so fervently for the unity of his followers (John 17:11, 21-23), and he commanded them to be quickly and willingly reconciled to each other (Matthew 5:24).

Sixth, Satan opposes believers by persuading them to trust in their own resources. Christians are not able to do God's work in their own power and strength. We must not rely merely on our knowledge of God's Word. Instead we must be filled with the Spirit and rely upon him. That is why prayer is so important. It is an expression of our complete dependence upon God and the resources that only he can supply.

Seventh, Satan opposes believers by leading them into hypocrisy.

One of the schemes of the devil is to populate churches with religious unbelievers and also with real believers who live disobedient lives. Every church has people who profess faith in Jesus but do not actually possess Jesus. Some of these people merely attend church; for them, they hope that God will reward them with life in heaven because they at least attended worship services on Sundays. Other unbelievers, however, get actively involved in the life and ministry of the church. They may even get into leadership positions. The problem is that they have no saving faith at all, and in the end they are mere hypocrites. But, there are also believers in the church who really are united to Christ by faith but are not dealing with sin in their lives. They are acting hypocritically, and Satan is having a field day because of them.

Eighth, Satan opposes believers by leading them into worldliness. This is a great danger for those who live in relative ease and prosperity. There are no outward concerns and so people are able to live and work and play without the threat of grave danger. However, Satan uses that to cause believers to become materialistic, self-satisfied, self-indulgent, hedonistic, and content with the things of the world. That is why the Apostle John wrote in 1 John 2:15–16, “Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world.”

And ninth, in a way that summarizes all the ways just listed, Satan opposes believers by leading them to disobey God’s Word. As John MacArthur writes, “Because God wants us to act faithfully, the enemy encourages us to act unfaithfully. Because God wants us to live morally, the enemy solicits us to live immorally. Because God wants us to speak the truth, the enemy tempts us to lie.

Because God wants us to love, the enemy tempts us to hate. Because God wants us to be content with what we have, the enemy tempts us to covet. Because God wants us to live by faith, the enemy tempts us to live by sight. And so with every command and standard of Scripture.”¹

Knowledge of the devil’s schemes is just the start. In order to stand against the schemes of the devil (Ephesians 6:11) and to withstand in the day of evil (6:13), Christians need God’s provision. God has provided believers with his own armor, “the whole armor of God” (6:11, 13). Partial armor is insufficient. Believers must put on the whole armor of God in order to stand against the schemes of the devil (6:11).

Lesson

Paul lists six pieces of armor in Ephesians 6:14-17. In today’s text, Ephesians 6:14, we learn about two pieces of armor that are part of the whole armor of God.

Let’s use the following outline:

1. The Whole Armor of God Includes the Belt of Truth (6:14a)
2. The Whole Armor of God Includes the Breastplate of Righteousness (6:14b)

I. The Whole Armor of God Includes the Belt of Truth (6:14a)

First, the whole armor of God includes the belt of truth. Paul wrote in Ephesians 6:14a, **“Stand therefore, having**

¹ John F. MacArthur Jr., *Ephesians*, MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press, 1986), 345–348.

fastened on the belt of truth....” John MacArthur describes the tunic and belt of a Roman soldier as follows:

The Roman soldier always wore a tunic, an outer garment that served as his primary clothing. It was usually made of a large, square piece of material with holes cut out for the head and arms. Ordinarily it draped loosely over most of the soldier’s body. Since the greatest part of ancient combat was hand-to-hand, a loose tunic was a potential hindrance and even a danger. Before a battle it was therefore carefully cinched up and tucked into the heavy leather belt that girded the soldier’s loins.²

According to Paul, the Christian’s **belt** is **truth**. What did Paul mean? Commentators are divided on whether **truth** refers to “God’s truth” (that is, Christian doctrine) or to “truthfulness” (that is, sincerity of heart). I think that John Stott is right when he suggests, “Perhaps we do not need to choose between these alternatives.”³ Quoting William Gurnall, Stott notes that **truth** comprises both views; one will not do without the other.

James Montgomery Boice rightly observes, “It is significant that Paul puts truth first. This suggests that successful spiritual warfare begins with fixing Christianity’s great doctrines firmly in our minds. Or to put it another way: It is dangerous to rush into battle without having the great doctrines of the faith fixed firmly in our understanding....In Christianity truth comes first, then action follows.”⁴

My dear brother and sister in Christ, the first piece of armor is **the belt of truth**. Have you **fastened on the belt of**

² John F. MacArthur Jr., *Ephesians*, 348–349.

³ John R. W. Stott, *God’s New Society: The Message of Ephesians*, The Bible Speaks Today (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1979), 278.

⁴ James Montgomery Boice, *Ephesians: An Expository Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Ministry Resources Library, 1988), 244.

truth? Do you read your Bible? Do you study your Bible? Are you growing in your understanding of the truths that are in the Bible? Are you sincere in your desire to grow in understanding God's truth?

James Montgomery Boice writes:

I think it was Andrew Bonar who first imagined a situation in which a Christian dies and goes to heaven and there meets some of the authors of the biblical books: Ezekiel, for example, and next to him Malachi and Amos and Habakkuk, and maybe Isaiah. They manage to strike up a conversation, and the Christian is glad to meet these men God used to write the Bible. "Ah, Ezekiel, what a pleasure to meet you!" he says.

"I am pleased you are glad to meet me," Ezekiel replies. "Tell me, what did you think about my book?"

The Christian has to answer, "I'm afraid I didn't really read it."

Malachi is there, so he chimes in. "Well, my book is a lot shorter than Ezekiel's. Certainly you read it! What do you think of what I said?"

Again the Christian has to admit that he has not read it. "Malachi? Is that in the Old Testament or the New Testament?"⁵

In our spiritual warfare against our terrible enemy the first piece of armor that God provides us is **the belt of truth**. Let me encourage you to read God's Word daily. Let me also encourage you to join a Bible study. We have a Bible study for men, and a Bible study for women. We also have Adult Bible Fellowships on Sunday mornings that are excellent opportunities for you to read and learn and apply the Word of God so that you are prepared to stand against the schemes of the devil.

⁵ James Montgomery Boice, *Ephesians: An Expository Commentary*, 245.

II. The Whole Armor of God Includes the Breastplate of Righteousness (6:14b)

And second, the whole armor of God includes the breastplate of righteousness.

Paul wrote in verse 14b, “...and having put on the breastplate of righteousness....”

MacArthur describes the Roman soldiers breastplate:

No Roman soldier would go into battle without his breastplate, a tough, sleeveless piece of armor that covered his full torso. It was often made of leather or heavy linen, onto which were sewn overlapping slices of animal hooves or horns or pieces of metal. Some were made of large pieces of metal molded or hammered to conform to the body. The purpose of that piece of armor is obvious—to protect the heart, lungs, intestines, and other vital organs.⁶

According to Paul, the Christian’s **breastplate** is **righteousness**. Like truth, this can also be understood in two ways. Commentators are divided on whether **righteousness** refers to “imputed righteousness” (that is, the righteousness of Jesus that is credited to a Christian so that he is able to stand before God) or “actual righteousness” (that is, specific acts of personal obedience). John Stott says that “it may well be right to combine them, since according to Paul’s gospel the one would invariably lead to the other.”⁷ That is, because we have received the righteousness of Jesus we then walk in obedience to God.

John MacArthur puts it this way, “Imputed righteousness

⁶ John F. MacArthur Jr., *Ephesians*, 351.

⁷ John R. W. Stott, *God’s New Society: The Message of Ephesians*, 279.

makes practical righteousness possible, but only obedience to the Lord makes practical righteousness a reality.”⁸

But James Montgomery Boice writes the following:

If I had to choose between the two possible meanings of righteousness in this passage, I think I would pick the second, for this reason: In this context Paul is urging those who already are Christians to “put on” God’s armor. If they are Christians, they have already been clothed with God’s righteousness in the first sense. Therefore the only thing they can put on is practical holiness expressed in righteous thoughts and deeds.⁹

John Stott makes an important point about the **breastplate of righteousness**. He writes:

Some expositors have maintained that in God’s armor, although there is a breastplate, no protection is provided for the back. They then go on to argue that we must face our enemy with courage and not run away from him, exposing our unguarded back. John Bunyan made this point in *Pilgrim’s Progress*. When Christian reached the Valley of Humiliation, “he espied a foul fiend coming over the field to meet him,” whose name was Apollyon. “Then did Christian begin to be afraid, and to cast in his mind whether to go back or to stand his ground. But he considered again that he had no armor for his back, and therefore thought, that to turn the back to him might give him greater advantage with ease to pierce him with his darts. Therefore he resolved to venture, and stand his ground.” It is a good point of spiritual counsel, but remains a doubtful example of biblical exegesis, for the soldier’s breastplate often covered his back as well as his front, and was his

⁸ John F. MacArthur Jr., *Ephesians*, 352.

⁹ James Montgomery Boice, *Ephesians: An Expositional Commentary*, 246.

major piece of armor protecting all his most vital organs.¹⁰

So, according to MacArthur, “To **put on the breastplate of righteousness** is to live in daily, moment-by-moment obedience to our heavenly Father. This part of God’s armor is holy living, for which God supplies the standard and the power but for which we must supply the willingness. God himself puts on our imputed righteousness, but we must put on our practical righteousness.”¹¹

So, the whole armor of God includes the belt of truth and the breastplate of righteousness. That is to say: *we must know doctrine and live in obedience to God.*

Conclusion

Therefore, having analyzed Ephesians 6:14, let us put on the whole armor of God so that we may stand firm against the schemes of the devil.

James Montgomery Boice tells about a conversation he once had with John Nyland, a former lineman for the Dallas Cowboys and later for the Philadelphia Eagles. He believed there were only two kinds of sports: the “easy” sports everybody else did, and the “contact” sports in which men over two hundred pounds took part.¹²

The Apostle Paul would say that Christians are engaged in the most difficult of all “contact” sports. Let us put on the whole armor of God so that we may stand firm against the schemes of the devil. Amen.

¹⁰ John R. W. Stott, *God’s New Society: The Message of Ephesians*, 278.

¹¹ John F. MacArthur Jr., *Ephesians*, 353.

¹² James Montgomery Boice, *Ephesians: An Expository Commentary*, 243.

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Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church (PCA)

Answers for Life!

Address: 19911 Bruce B. Downs Blvd., Tampa, FL 33647

Telephone: (813) 973-2484

Fax: (813) 973-4673

Email: Office@TampaBayPresbyterian.org

Web site: www.TampaBayPresbyterian.org