

“PUTTING ON THE FULL ARMOR OF GOD”

Part 1

(Ephesians 6:14-17)

As we continue in our study of Ephesians, this morning we are going to talk about putting on the full armor of God. Every year 175 million Americans – half of our country's population – visits a zoo. Going to a zoo is the perfect outing for a family or to take a date – it's like an amusement park with lots of and smiling, happy faces. One study showed that zoo visitors leave with lower blood pressure and feeling less stressed.

Yet, at the same time, a zoo is one of the most dangerous places on earth – along with the cuddly koala bears and playful monkeys, there are animals that want to bite you, stomp on you, maul you, and eat you. How is it possible that you can feel so happy and safe when you're surrounded by predatory animals? When you visit the reptile section, filled with deadly, poisonous snakes, there is a protective glass barrier between you and the snake. You can get eyeball-to-eyeball with a large python and feel no fear as long as you're standing on the other side of the glass. When you visit the lion and tiger section, there is a tall mesh fence enclosure between you and them, and you can gaze at them free of concern for your safety. When you visit the gorilla section, a protective fence along with a deep moat stands between you and the gorilla. As long as you're on one side of the barrier, and the animal is on the other side of the barrier, you can stroll peacefully through the zoo without fear. But if the glass barriers and fence enclosures are suddenly removed, the zoo is one of the scariest, most dangerous places on earth.

Last week we saw in Ephesians 6 how you and I as believers in Christ live in a spiritually dangerous world. We have a spiritual enemy called the devil – the god of this world – who along with his vast army of demons wages war on us. Satan has a very simple goal and mission: He wants to keep unbelievers from believing in Christ, and He wants to keep believers trapped in sin and ineffective in their Christian life. 1 Peter 5:8 says the devil roams around like a roaring lion seeking someone to devour. He's a predator who wants to kill, steal, and destroy.

But, the Bible says, you have nothing to fear if you are in Christ. When you are saved and born again, you are adopted into God's family and become his child. As His child, He seals and protects you by the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit, and He promises to see you all the way through this life to heaven. But until we arrive in heaven, we continue to live on Satan's turf – we live in a cursed world ruled by the prince of darkness who wants to destroy us. He cannot destroy our salvation, but He can tempt us and oppress us and deceive us and keep us from being all God wants us to be.

Last week we learned that in order to defeat the enemy we must do three things: We must be strong in the Lord, realizing that we are powerless in our own strength; we must stand firm and not give in or give up when attacked; and we must put on the full armor of God.

SLIDE OF ROMAN SOLDIER. As Paul writes the book of Ephesians from a prison cell in Rome, he observes Roman guards coming in and out, and notices how they're dressed – he sees their breastplate and helmet, he sees their belt and shoes, and sees their sword and shield – and he sees all their armor as a picture of the protection God has provided each believer to stand strong against the attacks of the enemy. Paul's mind is also drawn, no doubt, to several Old Testament passages where God is pictured as a warrior fighting for His people, such as in the book of Isaiah where God is seen wearing a helmet and breastplate and a sword attached to His belt. God equips us with the same armor that He wears.

In verses 13-17 Paul lists six pieces of spiritual armor we are to put on, all of which relates to something he's already talked about in Ephesians. In chapters 1-3, you'll remember, Paul talks about our identity in Christ – our new position as believers – and our spiritual blessings in Christ – what we possess by becoming part of God's family. So in these six pieces of spiritual armor, Paul is reviewing truths he has already written about.

Let's read verses 13-17 and then talk about what each piece of the armor means in the spiritual battle we face... “Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.”

We could easily do six sermons on each piece of armor, but we're going to split the difference and talk about three pieces today, and three next week. Before we talk about each piece of the armor, it's important to understand that the emphasis in these verses is not on the physical pieces of armor – the emphasis is on the spiritual provision they represent. In other words, we shouldn't overanalyze what part a helmet and a breastplate plays in warfare, but focus on what spiritual provision they represent. That's the main focus of the passage.

It's also important to see that Paul doesn't seem to have any particular order in which he lists the pieces of armor, he's simply listing various spiritual provisions and protections we need to put to use. The main message in each of these is: In Christ you have been given everything you need for victory – your responsibility is to put each piece of God's armor on.

He starts with the **belt of truth**... “Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around you waist.” The KJV says, “Gird your loins.” For a soldier to gird his loins meant that he was ready for war. It's similar to saying, “Roll up your sleeves and get to work.” A Roman soldier's belt was where he kept his weapons – his sword, his dagger, and his arrows. It was kind of like a policemen's belt that holds his gun and bullets and handcuffs – all tools he needs to keep law and order. A belt also served the purpose of keeping any loose clothing from interfering with running or fighting – you would tuck it into your belt before battle. To have your belt on meant you were ready for battle.

As believers we are to put on the belt of truth. It is fitting that truth be the first piece of the whole armor of God because truth is foundational to God's order and design for life. Simply put, truth is what corresponds to reality. Truth is not subjective – it's not based on personal feelings or opinions – truth by nature is objective – it's based on what is real and factual. To say that the Rogue River flows into the Pacific Ocean is not an opinion, it's an observable, geographic fact. To say that two-plus-two equals four corresponds to mathematical reality.

If truth is foundational to life, then where is truth found? The thinking that dominates our culture today is that truth is relative – it's not fixed or absolute – truth is whatever you determine it to be. The most recent example is the belief that a man can become a woman or a woman can become a man. A person may believe this, but it doesn't correspond to biological reality. The common buzz-phrase we hear is: This is my truth – what might be true for you is not true for me. But the reality is that truth is truth regardless of what you believe. No one says, “Gravity may be true for you, but not for me,” and then jumps off a tall building. Gravity is true whether you believe it or not.

If truth is so important, where is truth found? The Bible declares that God is truth and the absolute standard of truth. If He is the only eternal, self-existent being in the universe, then He is the truth and the source of all truth. As His creation we don't have to be in the dark about what truth is because God reveals Himself to us. The Greek word for truth *aletheia* means "unhidden," – God's truth is open and available for all to see.

God reveals Himself in three primary ways. The first is through **creation** – Romans 1 says that what may be known about God is made known to everyone by simply observing the created world. The second means of revelation of truth is **Jesus**, who came to earth to reveal the truth about God and is the embodiment of truth. The third way God has revealed truth is through the written **Word of God**. The Bible tells us who God is, how we can be made right with God, and what God's will is for our lives. We don't have to guess about what truth is – truth does not change with the times. The Hebrew word for truth *emet* means "firmness," "constancy" and "duration," which speaks of the eternal, unchanging nature of truth.

Truth is vital in spiritual warfare because Satan's primary tactic is deception – he deceptively works to bend and twist and redefine truth so that we will believe a lie. John 8:44 says that Satan is a liar and the father of lies – lying is his native tongue. As we saw last week, Satan does not come to you as the prince of darkness, wearing a red cape with a pitchfork in his hand – he comes as an angel of light, tricking you into believing something that is not true. He uses the same tactic with us that he used with Eve in the garden when He cast doubt on God's Word... "Did God really say?" as well as doubt in the goodness of God... "God is trying to keep something good from you." He said, "You can make your own truth, Eve, you can decide for yourself what is right and wrong."

To stand strong against Satan's deception, we need to put on the belt of truth – we need to know the truth and live daily in the truth. To know the truth means that you continually, daily immerse yourself in the truth of God's Word – you read it, you listen to teaching and resources online that explain what it means, and you come to church to study the Word with fellow believers.

And once you know the truth, you live in the truth. When the enemy tries to deceive you, you're ready – you have your belt of truth on – and you say, "That's a lie." When everyone else in culture follows a lie, you say, "I'm sticking with the truth, I'm trusting what God says even if I'm the last person standing." By putting on the belt of truth, you gird your loins and you stand ready for anything that comes against you.

Next, we come to **the breastplate of righteousness**. The breastplate covered a soldier from his neck to his waist, both front and back. It was similar to a bullet-proof vest that protects the heart and vital organs. Our breastplate as believers is *righteousness*. Righteousness is a word found often in the Bible, and the basic idea of righteousness is that of morally acceptable behavior – righteousness is being right in the eyes of God in every part of our lives – in our inward character and our outward behavior. Just as God is the standard of truth, He is the standard of righteousness. He is perfect in all His ways, and in order to go to heaven we must be perfect as God is perfect. How do we do that?

One way that was tried by the Pharisees was to achieve righteousness through human works and efforts – to pray and fast and give to the poor – to be the kind of person that God will accept. The problem with this approach is that even if we are really, really good, we still fall far short of God’s perfection. Jesus exposed how the Pharisees, while outwardly quite stellar in their behavior, were inwardly full of pride and greed and lust. Isaiah 64:6 says that compared to God’s righteousness, our righteousness is like filthy rags.

The good news of the gospel is that God has made a way for us to be righteous, and that is by sending His Son to be righteous on our behalf. 2 Corinthians 5:21 says... “God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” On the cross Jesus took our sin upon Himself, so that when we place our faith in Him, His righteousness is imputed to us and we are declared righteous in God’s eyes. The righteousness of Christ protects us from God’s judgment of sin. When we get to heaven and God asks us: Why should I let you in? You say, “It’s not by my works of righteousness, I stand in the righteousness of Christ.”

One of the areas where Satan attacks us is in making us feel like we don’t measure up to God’s standards – that we’re not good enough – that we’re not worthy of God’s love. He tries to get us to doubt that we’re actually saved. We defeat these accusations and doubts by standing in the truth that we have been made righteous through Christ, and once we’re in Christ, nothing can change our status.

We also defeat Satan by living a righteous life. When we’re saved, God not only declares that we are righteous, but He calls us to live a righteous life. In Ephesians 4:1 Paul writes, “I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received.” Now that you have been given a righteous status by God, live up to your new status by living right. Ephesians 4:24 says, “Put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.” Paul goes on to describe what a righteous life looks like: speak truthfully to your neighbor, in your anger do not sin, do not steal, do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouth, get rid of bitterness and an unforgiving spirit. In other words, since God saved you, since you are born again into a new person – act like who you are – live a righteous life that is pleasing to God.

Why is living the right way so important in spiritual warfare? It’s because if we are living the wrong way – if we disregard the commands of God and live like the rest of the world – we will be weak and ineffective in our Christian life. Ephesians 4:27 says that sin gives Satan a foothold. You don’t want to give Satan a base of operation from which to work – whether it’s the sin of anger or lust or envy or pride – you don’t want these sins to take root in your heart. The enemy attacks us in our areas of vulnerability, and tries to keep us in bondage to sin. If he can do that, he’s won.

Putting on the breastplate of righteousness protects you from being ensnared in sin. Practically speaking, this means when the enemy tempts you to sin, you say, “That’s not who I am – I’m not a slave to my flesh – I’m a child of God who has been made righteous in Christ – and I have been given the supernatural power of the Holy Spirit to overcome any temptation and walk in freedom.” As long as we live in this world, we will continue to struggle with sin. But as we walk closely with Christ, over time the appeal of sin will decrease and we will see it for what it is. As someone said, “We will never be sinless, but we will sin less and less.”

When we do sin, we will feel guilt and remorse, and we’ll be quick to confess our sin and seek God’s forgiveness, which He freely gives. And we keep on keeping on – we don’t give up – we stand strong in Christ’s righteousness, and through His power strive to live a holy and righteous life.

In verse 15 we come to the third piece of armor – **the shoes of the gospel of peace**... “and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace.” Footwear was an important part of a soldier’s overall armor. Roman soldiers wore leather boots with sharp nails sticking out of the bottom – kind of like football or baseball cleats. This footwear gave them both stability in hand-to-hand combat, and mobility to advance against the enemy.

Our shoes as believers is the “readiness that comes from the gospel of peace.” Readiness speaks of being ready and prepared. This phrase has been interpreted in two ways. The first is that the gospel of peace prepares us to stand strong against the enemy – the emphasis being on the peace of the gospel we *experience*. The second view is that we are prepared and ready to proclaim the gospel of peace that sets people free from Satan’s tyranny – the emphasis being the peace in the gospel that we *proclaim*. I think both of these views fits the imagery of readiness – that the gospel of peace gives us stability to stand firm and the mobility to advance the gospel of peace in the world.

Let’s talk first about how the gospel of peace prepares us to stand against the attacks of Satan. The gospel – a word we use a lot – means “good news.” The gospel is the good news that Christ has provided a way of salvation from sin through His death and resurrection. It’s good news because without Christ’s death and resurrection, we stand eternally condemned in our sins. Satan wants to do whatever he can to divert us from the gospel, to confuse the meaning of the gospel, or to add to the gospel. It is beyond tragic that many churches today don’t talk about the gospel – they talk about self-improvement or social justice, but they don’t talk about the gospel which is the answer to all of the problems we face.

Here Paul refers to the gospel as the “gospel of peace.” Jesus, the Prince of Peace, came to earth to bring us peace with God through His death on the cross. Romans 5:1 says, “Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.” Sin caused us to be separated and alienated from God, but through Christ we be at peace with God.

In addition to having peace *with* God, we also daily experience the peace *of* God that allows us to have deep, abiding peace in the midst of the storms and trials of life. Philippians 4:6-7 puts it like this, “Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”

It is so important that we arm ourselves with the peace of God because the enemy tries every way possible to get us to worry and fret, to be overcome with anxiety and fear – because he knows that will neutralize us. Today is the Super Bowl, and a large part of what will determine who the winner will be is how each team plays under pressure – with the game on the line with 100 million people watching. How does the quarterback respond when he’s being blitzed and has a 300 lb. defensive lineman barreling towards him? The greatest athletes all those who perform well under pressure – who are calm in the eye of the storm when everyone around them wobbles under the pressure.

The Greek word for peace – *irene* – means “rest and tranquility,” as when Jesus rebuked the wind and the waves and said, “Peace, be still.” Even though the storms of life may rage around you, you can be calm and tranquil because the presence and power of the Holy Spirit lives in you, giving you the assurance that God is in control of every situation and will see you safely through the storm.

When facing spiritual warfare, the temptation is to shrink back and retreat. But the Christian soldier who prays and depends on God, will calmly face the foe and not be overtaken.

In addition to standing our ground, shoes are also made for moving. God wants us to go out into lost and dying world and preach the gospel of peace. Isaiah 52:7 says, “How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, who proclaim peace, who bring good tidings, who proclaim salvation.” It’s a beautiful thing when the good news is proclaimed and those who are held bondage to sin are delivered.

As Romans 10:14 says, how can people hear unless someone preaches to them? As messengers of the gospel of peace, we need to be ready at all times to advance the gospel. Satan doesn’t want that – he knows that each person who comes to faith in Christ weakens his control – and he does everything in his power to keep you from spreading the good news. His primary weapon is fear... “What will people say? What will they think about me? What if they reject me? What if they ridicule me? It’s easier just to blend in and create conflict.” This explains why most Christians are not in the regular habit of sharing their faith. The enemy has successfully convinced them that the cost of sharing the gospel is too high.

Over and over in scripture we are commanded to be bold – not bold in our own power, but in God’s. The Christian who has put on the full armor of God is ready and prepared to advance the gospel against the darkness. 1 Peter 3:15 says, “Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have.” We have good news that the world desperately needs to hear, and we overcome fear by having our feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace.

I realize that we’ve covered a lot of ground this morning, and I want to make sure that we leave this morning with some practical applications regarding each piece of armor...

Number one, be sure you put on the belt of truth. Have a plan to feed you mind truth. Get on a Bible reading plan so that you are daily immersed in the truth. Listen to good sermons and teachings on line that will help you understand all the riches of God’s Word. If you want some good resources, I’d be glad to share some with you. And once you hear the truth, make sure you live out the truth in your daily life even if everyone around you believes a lie.

Number two, be sure you pay attention to the way you are living – that you are living righteously – not perfectly – but living in such a way that you’re not giving the enemy a foothold – a base of operation in which to work that will keep you in bondage. Rather than give in to repeated patterns of sin, commit yourself to overcoming them in God’s power.

Number three, be sure you have peace with God and the peace of God. If you haven’t trusted Christ as your Savior from sin and received his forgiveness, God invites you to do so right now. He has provided a way for you to be reconciled to Him through the death and resurrection of Jesus, and you can be at peace with God by accepting His free gift of salvation.

Once you trust in Christ, you can experience the peace of God – that no matter what is going on around you, you can have the calm assurance that God is with you and will see you through your trial.

And once you have experienced peace with God and the peace of God, you can have boldness to proclaim the gospel of peace with those in your life that still live in darkness.

We live in a dangerous world with spiritual forces of darkness that want to devour and destroy us, but if we’re on the right side of the fence – if we are standing in the full armor of God – we have nothing to fear – we are fully equipped in God’s power to handle anything that comes against us.