

November 30/December 1, 2024

Put on the Full Armor of God
Salvation is a Life: A Study in Ephesians
Ephesians 6:10-24
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The Christian life is not lived out on a playground; it is lived out on a battle ground. That's why we need to put on the full armor of God in order to stand firm. That's what we want to talk about this morning. If you have a Bible, turn with us to Ephesians, Chapter 6, as we finish up our study on the book of Ephesians. In chapter 6, verse 10, Paul starts with the word **finally**. It could easily be translated *in summary*. So, he's going to pull all this together using a very clever metaphor. He says,

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might. (*NASB, Ephesians 6:10)

The Greek word, translated **be strong**, is actually a passive verb, so probably better translated, *be made strong*. It isn't so much that we're going to go out there and be strong. It's more that we have been given everything we need to walk in a manner worthy of the gospel, that we've been given everything we need to be made strong. What we have to do is choose to believe that it's true. Verse 11:

Put on the full armor of God,

So, remember, Paul is a prisoner in a Roman prison. He's going to tell us in a few verses that he's in chains, which probably means he's chained to a Roman guard. They would take like six-hour shifts and keep rotating around. Now certainly the guard that he would be chained to would not be in full armor, but it is highly likely that he's in a place where he sees the soldiers come and go. As a matter of fact, it's pretty likely, actually, he sees them come, put their armor on, and go out. So as he's thinking about how to summarize the truths that have been discussed in this letter, he comes up with a very clever idea. He's thinking, "You know, these great truths are like pieces of armor that we put on in order to go out and do battle." So the different pieces of armor are just a clever way to review what we've covered in Ephesians. So, put on the full armor of God. Now the phrase **put on** is a command, and I think it's fairly obvious that the only way the armor is going to help is if we put it on.

When I was in college, I had a motorcycle. This was the late 70s. There were no helmet laws, and so that concerned my parents. So my parents graciously bought me a motorcycle helmet, and most days it sat very safe in a chair next to the door. I could not even tell you how many times my mom said to me, "Bryan, that helmet does no good sitting in a chair," and she's right about that. In order for it to actually help, I'd have to put it on. So in this case, putting it on means to believe that God tells the truth. That's how we put the armor on.

...so that you may be able to stand firm...

(That's a military phrase. It's used three times in this text. It basically means to hold your ground, to withstand the attacks of the enemy...that we **stand firm**; we stand strong.)
...against the schemes of the devil. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places. (Vs. 11-12)

So Paul specifically identifies that we have an enemy, and his name is the **devil**. This is the third time in Ephesians he's brought this up. This is not about being lost in the wilderness, and you're trying to figure out how to survive for a while. This is about having an enemy that is hunting you down and will do everything in his power to make your life miserable. He has, at his disposal, an entire army in the heavenly places, so there is this cosmic war going on. And he says we need to be aware of the **schemes**—could be translated *the strategies* of the devil. Now the name **devil** actually means *accuser* or *slanderer*. So when Paul writes to the Corinthians, he says we should not be ignorant of the **schemes of the devil**. If his name is *accuser* or *slanderer*, it's pretty obvious what his strategy is. In John chapter eight, Jesus identifies him as a liar. But he's not just a liar. He says he's *the father of lies*, and he first shows up in Genesis chapter three, as *the serpent*. And what does he do? He lies. He lies about God and who He is. So if he can break down our view of God and then convince us to go down a different path, he can make our lives miserable. So it's important to understand that the *accuser*, the *slanderer*, is coming after you. The essence of spiritual warfare is not the weird Halloween, ghoulish things that people think about. That's not what it is. It's actually very straight forward. He's a liar, and he's going to lie to you to try to get you off track, to destroy you.

So at the foundation of our conversation this morning is that you have to wrestle with, "Who do you think is most likely to be the liar, and who do you think is most likely to tell the truth...the one whose name is accuser, slanderer, the father of lies, or the God of the universe who sent His Son to be your Savior? Which one do you think is most likely to be the one that tells the truth?"

Therefore, (in light of this) take up the full armor of God, so that you may be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm. (Vs. 13)

The Greek **take up** again implies I don't have to go out and find the armor. I don't have to go out and make it. It's right there. It's already forged. It's already furnished. All I have to do is choose to put it on. Again, you imagine maybe Paul can actually see the soldiers picking up the different pieces of their armor and putting it on. And he's saying that's what we need to do. So starting in verse 14, there's 6 different pieces of armor.

Stand firm, therefore, HAVING GIRDED YOUR LOINS WITH TRUTH,

Now that's not exactly a phrase we use all the time. I'm going to go out on a limb and say probably no one during Thanksgiving dinner said, "Hey, you need to gird your loins!" (*laughter*) You're like, "What in the world does that mean?" It was a very common phrase in the first century. Basically, what it referred to was pulling up your undergarment and tucking it into your belt in order to run or in order to fight. That was referred to as *girding your loins*. Probably the bigger picture for a Roman soldier is it means putting on a heavy leather belt. It wasn't just a belt. It was more like a skirt or an apron. Most of the other pieces of armor somehow attached to this belt. So

if the belt broke or the belt came off, typically everything falls apart. So it was a very significant piece of the armor.

So in this case, what is our belt? And the answer is *with truth*. It's choosing to believe the truth. All through the book of Ephesians, we've learned about what is true of us in Christ, but you have to decide whether you think that's true or not true, because the way you put on the armor is you believe it's truth. Everything else we're going to talk about falls away if you do not think there's such a thing as truth. This is a challenge in our culture, where we have so devalued truth that we want to convince ourselves that truth is whatever I need it to be. I need to believe my own truth, and somehow reality is supposed to adjust accordingly.

You might say we live in a Bob Ross world. Now if you're not familiar with Bob Ross, he's the painter on PBS. This is no criticism of Bob Ross. I like the show. It's very soothing, kind of therapeutic. So it's not a criticism of Bob Ross, because I know he has quite a cult following, and I'm trying to save myself some emails. (*laughter*) But if you watch the show, here's what he says. "When you're painting a picture, you can do whatever you want, because it's your little world." So he says you can put a happy little tree over here. You can put a cute little waterfall over here. You can put a nice, smiley little bush over here, and he's right. In a painting, you can do whatever you want. It's your little world. But that's not reality. You can't just make up truth in your own little world and think reality is going to adjust accordingly.

It's what Francis Schaeffer used to call "true truth". There's simply truth that's true because it lines up with reality. So in order to put on the armor, it starts with an understanding there is such a thing as truth. So we've got to decide, "Do I think it's most likely God tells the truth, or the one whose name is slanderer and accuser is more likely to be the one telling the truth?" Second piece of armor:

And HAVING PUT ON THE BREASTPLATE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS, (Vs. 14)

The breastplate was a metal plate, usually attached to leather. It went over the soldier's head and actually covered the breast, front and back, in order to protect the vital organs, and then it attached in some way to that belt. So what is the breastplate of righteousness? The question is, "Whose righteousness are we talking about?" Because if you think that the breastplate to resist the attack of the lies of the enemy is your righteousness—your good works, you measuring up, you being a really great Christian—then your breastplate is made of paper towels, and it's going to be very easy for the enemy to penetrate. I wish it was true that, as a Christian, I lived out the Christian life perfectly every day. I wish that was true, but, sadly, it's not true. We make our mistakes; we make our messes. We have good days and bad days. We have good weeks and bad weeks, and we don't always get it right. So the accuser, the slanderer, he's really good at pointing his finger at you and saying, "You know, you're kind of a loser. You're never going to figure this out. You're never going to get it right. I bet God is embarrassed that you're His child. Whatever made you think you could be a Christian, is ridiculous." And he just comes at you with the lies. And if you think the protection is *your* performance, those lies are very effective.

I find myself wondering how many people walked through these doors this morning, and that is how you're feeling. You're feeling discouraged; you're feeling overwhelmed; you feel like you've

blown it again. You're wrestling with your shame and your guilt and wallowing in the dark room, and the messaging feels right. It's like, "I am a loser. I'm never going to get this right. It's been another bad week." But what we've learned in Ephesians is it's not our righteousness. It never has been. Not by works...not by works...not by works! It's on the basis of God's grace, through faith. When I put on the breastplate of righteousness, I recognize that even on my worst days, when I've blown it again, I stand right before a holy God. So, I don't just stand. I stand firm because I've never stood in my own righteousness. I stand in the righteousness of Christ.

Third piece of armor, verse 15:

And having shod YOUR FEET WITH THE PREPARATION OF THE GOSPEL OF PEACE;

So he's talking about here, the boot of a Roman soldier. The boot was made of leather, came about halfway up the calf, and was tied together with leather laces. Most of the foot was covered; the toes were open. But the Roman boot was unusually comfortable. So in the ancient world, it gave the Roman army a distinct advantage. They were known for being able to travel long distances very quickly because of the comfort and endurance of their footwear. Consequently, it gave them a huge advantage in maneuvering around their enemy.

The other thing that the Roman boot offered that gave them an advantage, were cleats...like spikes on the bottom of the boot. Most combat was in close quarters—hand to hand combat—and all it took was one slip, and it was probably fatal. So these boots with these cleats made it possible to have more sure footing to fight the battle. So Paul is identifying these boots with the preparation of the **gospel of peace**, **gospel** meaning *good news*. **Peace** we've talked about—the flourishing that comes with the new life that we have in Christ. But it's very interesting the way this is worded, because it's preparation for going out, going out with the good news of flourishing. A Roman soldier doesn't put on his boots in order to sit behind a desk. The whole point of putting the boots on is it's preparation to go out; it's preparation to go into battle.

We, as soldiers of Christ, don't just stand there and take a pounding. We need to put on the boots and head out. We have a mission. We have an assignment. This isn't just seeing how many arrows you can take. It's like, "Put on the shoes and let's get out there and deliver the good news of flourishing to the world!" But along comes the liar, and he says things like, "You know, nobody out there wants to hear it. You try that out there, and they're just going to laugh at you. They're just going to make fun of you. Nobody wants to hear it. Keep it to yourself." Or maybe the lies are, "Really, you're such a lousy example of a Christian. You're really going to go out there and tell somebody else how to live? Have you thought about what you did this last week?" So the lies keep coming, to basically convince us to keep it to ourselves, because nobody out there wants to hear it. But that is a lie! The reality is, as a culture we are not doing well. We are falling apart. The suicide rate is skyrocketing. The addiction rate is skyrocketing. The anxiety rate is skyrocketing. We are falling apart as a culture. There may be some people out there that would say, "I don't want to hear it." Okay, but I can assure you there are lots of people around you and they're scared; they're confused; they're fearful; they're anxious. They're wondering, "Is there such a thing as living life with meaning and purpose?" They're wanting help. They just don't know what to do. They don't know where to turn. So our assignment is to put on the boots and to take the good news of flourishing that is available in Christ to the people around us. Verse 16:

In addition to all, taking up the shield of faith, with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one.

So I don't know what you think of when you think of a Roman shield. I think a lot of people think of a round shield, kind of like a trash-can lid. But that's not what this is referring to. This is referring to the Roman shield, which was a large rectangle that pretty much went from the top of your head to the bottom of your feet. These shields, as a rectangle, were able to lock into the shield next to them. So when the Romans went out in battle formation, they formed what was referred to as a Roman phalanx. And what that meant is: imagine a rectangle, and all the soldiers on the front, the back and the sides, all have these large shields locked into one another. So it's a solid wall moving forward. This made it almost impossible to stop the Roman army.

So when he's talking about this **shield**, what is the shield? It's the **shield of faith**. Again, faith is one of those words we throw around a lot, but it's very abstract, and it's like, "What exactly does that mean?" So I like the very practical definition. It's believing God tells the truth. That's faith. Ephesians has been full of absolutely amazing truths of who we are in Christ, but I can't prove that to you. I can't prove to you that you were chosen by God before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before Him in love. I can't prove to you that God has lavished His grace upon you; He's lavished His riches upon you. I can't prove to you that you are seated with Christ in the heavenlies. I can't prove to you that God has made you a masterpiece of His grace. I can't prove to you that one day God will hold you up and the angels will gasp at the wonder of what you have become on the basis of God's grace. I can't prove that to you. You just have to choose to believe God tells the truth.

Again, we're back to our question: Who do you think is most likely the liar, the one whose name means slanderer or accuser, or the one who sent His Son to be your Savior? **The Shield of Faith!** Verse 17, two more pieces:

And take THE HELMET OF SALVATION,

The helmet is pretty obvious. It's hard to imagine a Roman soldier marching into battle without his helmet on. He's not going to last too long. That's why he keeps saying, **Put on the full armor of God**. So the helmet has to do with protecting the head, which reminds us the importance of protecting our minds. It's very common today that people think with their feelings, and as long as you think with your feelings, you're an easy prey for the liar, because our feelings don't always accurately reflect truth. So I have to be disciplined to think with my mind.

So when it says **the helmet of salvation**, what do you think of when you hear the word **salvation**? What a lot of people think of is something that happened in the past when I got saved like, "Ten years ago, I was saved." But it's important to understand the New Testament talks about salvation in all three verb tenses...Past Tense: I was saved in the past...Present Tense: I am being saved by the power and presence of Jesus in my life...and, ultimately, Future Tense: I will be saved. Ultimately, my salvation will come to completion, and I will ultimately experience the fullness of my salvation!

Now, I would suggest to you that I think when we talk about salvation, most of the time the tense we use is the past. “I was saved five years ago.” But it’s worth noting that is the least referred to in the New Testament. The one that is referred to the most is probably the one we refer to the least, and that is future salvation. There’s this consistent reminder that, as a believer in Christ, this life is going to be hard. It’s going to be full of struggles. It’s going to be full of ups and downs. There’s lots of stuff that happens, but, ultimately, He promises, “I’ll get you to the finish line. I’ll finish what I started, and the end of the story will be absolutely magnificent.” And there’s nothing anyone can do to change that, to diminish that, or take that away from you. So no matter what things look like in life, we know in Christ, the end of the story is glorious, and that gives me what I need to stand firm against the liar. The last one:

...and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. (Vs. 17)

So, again, I don’t know what you think of when you hear that word **sword**, but it’s not the big, long, gladiator kind of sword. It’s a Greek word that means a short—about 18-inch dagger—that attached to the belt of the Roman soldier, primarily used as a defensive weapon in close combat. So what is that weapon for us? It’s **the word of God**. It’s the truth of God that tells us what we need to know in order to stand firm against the lies of the enemy.

Probably the best example of this is in Matthew’s Gospel, when the devil tempts Jesus. What does Jesus do? He pulls the dagger. All three times He quotes Scripture at the devil. Lies...lies...lies! I find myself thinking that if God in the flesh used the dagger, then I probably need to use the dagger. So I need to understand what’s in the Book...understand it, believe it, in order to have the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

So think of it like this. Think of an area in your life where you would say you have expertise. It could be something related to your job or a hobby, whatever that is for you. But everybody has something where they’re like, “I feel like I have a lot of confidence; I have a lot of expertise in this.” Now, imagine someone coming along trying to lie to you about things in your area of expertise. Whether that comes through the Internet, or whether that comes face to face, you would be like, “No, that’s a lie. That’s a lie...that’s a lie...that’s a lie.” It would be pretty easy for you, because you have this confidence that “I know it’s true, so that tells me that’s a lie...that’s a lie...that’s a lie.” That’s the basic idea. The more I understand and believe the truth, the more I’m able to identify, “No, that’s not true. That’s not true, that’s a lie,”...in order that we might stand firm. Verse 18:

With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints,

So think of the atmosphere around putting on all this armor, as an atmosphere of prayer. I have the indwelling Holy Spirit. I’m dependent on God. I’m doing all this in an atmosphere of prayer, of dependence upon God. I don’t go into battle alone. I love the way verse 18 ends, because essentially, what it’s saying is this: Think of a small child. It’s not going to work to put all this Roman armor on a small child and send the child out to battle. Even though the child has all this armor dragging along, it’s not going to work. The child is just not ready to do battle.

You have the very same thing in the spiritual world. New believers do not understand all this. They don't know it all; they don't understand it all. They have no idea that any of this that we've talked about in Ephesians is true. It takes all of us years to learn more and more of this. So, consequently, what happens is the enemy is going to make a mess of them. What the end of verse 18 is saying is that we also can petition on behalf of those not ready to fight their own fight, in order that God can intervene and protect them. So it's the idea that, hey, we're in this together, and we're all at different stages of learning and understanding this. And there's people around us, they're just not equipped yet to fight the fight. So I don't just have to sit back there and think, "Oh, this is terrible, they're getting beat up." I can intervene on their behalf that God protect them, that God put the armor on them, until they are mature enough to get it and understand and stand firm themselves. Verse 19:

And *pray* on my behalf, that utterance may be given to me in the opening of my mouth, to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains; that in *proclaiming* it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak.
(Vs. 19-20)

So Paul even says, "You can even pray for me. I welcome your prayers, your intercession for me." Now, if that was me, I'd say, "Pray that I'll get out of prison. I don't really like it here." It's not what he asks for. He says, "Pray for me that I would have boldness to proclaim the gospel to these people who are with me in prison." Verse 21:

But that you also may know about my circumstances, how I am doing, Tychicus, the beloved brother and faithful minister in the Lord, will make everything known to you. I have sent him to you for this very purpose, so that you may know about us, and that he may comfort your hearts. (Vs. 21-22)

I love the fact that the great theologian Paul is a very caring pastor. Paul is in prison, but he's concerned about them because they're so concerned about him. So he's going to send Tychicus to them in order to tell them, "Hey, Paul is doing okay. You need to be comforted. You don't need to worry about him." This is why I think pastors make really good theologians. It's because we're not arguing the technicalities of theology in a classroom. Theology is intended to help people. If theology doesn't ultimately help people, we're missing the point. That's what theology is all about. He ends then with the benediction, verse 23:

Peace be to the brethren, and love with faith, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Grace be with all those who love our Lord Jesus Christ with *incorruptible love*. (Vs. 23-24)

That benediction is full of words we've seen throughout Ephesians: *peace* and *grace* and *love* and *faith*, which is the final reminder that we have been given everything we need in order to walk worthy of the gospel, empowered by the Spirit of God. It's there! We just need to choose to believe, to put on the full armor of God, that we may be able to stand firm against the lies of the devil. It's a reminder that salvation isn't ultimately just a ticket to heaven. **Salvation is a life!**

Our Father, we're thankful this morning that You have given us everything we need to stand firm. Lord, may we choose to believe who we are in Christ, in whose name we pray, Amen.

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