**SPIRITUAL WARFARE REQUIRES SPIRITUAL WEAPONS**

**PART III**

**THE ARMOUR**

**Ephesians 6:13-17a**

**INTRODUCTION**

Please turn in your Bibles to Ephesians 6. Today we continue our series on spiritual warfare as we finish off our journey through the book of Ephesians. At the heart of this series is the truth that **Spiritual Warfare Requires Spiritual Weapons.** In our first message on spiritual warfare we looked at the War, and how important it is for us to live our day to day lives with the knowledge that this war is being waged all around us: in our homes, our workplaces, our leisure, our thoughts, our churches. In our second message we looked at the Enemy, and how our text teaches us that he is hidden, personal, and powerful. He is a rational being whose hatred is personal, whose resources are innumerable, and who does his best work hidden in the shadows, whether through the undermining of families, disunity in churches, or the entrenching of entire thought patterns that stand as barriers to belief in Christ. Now that we’ve looked at the War and the Enemy, today we get to look at the Armour.

When I used to work as a criminal lawyer, there were many things that could have caused me stress: interacting with criminals, speaking with hard-headed prosecutors, navigating through the business side of my practice, or buckling under the burden of carrying my clients’ reputation and liberty on my shoulders. But none of that really bothered me. The thing that bothered me the most was this: the fear that I might come to a trial unprepared.

Most of you have probably heard the saying “don’t bring a knife to a gun fight”. Trials are messy affairs that aren’t that different from battles. You have two sides that are in adversarial positions pitted against one another, each trying to win the war of convincing the judge or jury that their arguments should be accepted. The thing that drove me to prepare as much as I did, going over the evidence again and again, reading as much law as I could, was that I didn’t want to show up with a knife at a gun fight. I wanted to show up with a big bazooka, and I would do that by always making sure I was more prepared than my opponent.

I wonder how many of us have shown up with a knife to this gun fight that we call the spiritual war. Or, to get more relevant to our topic today, I wonder how many have shown up in street clothes to a battle that calls for armour. For we have an enemy who is aiming his flaming arrows at your heart, and if you come unprepared, he will strike you down.

**Read** **Ephesians 6:13-17a**

Before we begin looking at each individual piece of armour, I want to begin with the question, “what does it mean to put on the armour of God?” It means at the very least that God supplies it. But God doesn’t actually wear armour. Instead, when God is described as wearing armour, the armour signifies the characteristic or attribute of God that he is about to act on. For example, Isaiah 59:16-17 says:

He saw that there was no man, and wondered that there was no one to intercede; then his own arm brought him salvation, and his righteousness upheld him. He put on righteousness as a breastplate, and a helmet of salvation on his head.

When Isaiah writes that God put on righteousness as a breastplate, he’s not saying literally that God strapped on a piece of metal. Instead, he’s saying that God is preparing himself to act righteously, in accordance with his own righteousness. The breastplate of righteousness is God’s righteousness. And so, when we are told to put on the armour of God, we are being told to put on God himself. We see this also in Romans 13:12-14:

The night is far gone; the day is at hand. So then let us cast off the works of darkness and put on the armour of light. Let us walk properly as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and sensuality, not in quarreling and jealousy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.

To put on the armour of light is to put on the Lord Jesus Christ. This means that, if we are to put on the full armour of God, we need more of God in our lives. We need to be filled with the Spirit. We need the closeness of God’s presence through daily dependence on him, through the consistent practice of the spiritual disciplines, through growth in godly character. As we look at each individual piece of armour, we can’t forget that, ultimately, putting on the armour means having more of the presence of God in our lives.

Today we’re going to address our defensive armour: the belt, the breastplate, the shield, and the helmet. Next week we will talk about our offensive arsenal: the shoes, and the sword.

(1) **THE BELT OF TRUTH**

The “belt” refers to the leather apron which hung under the armour and protected the thighs, rather than the sword belt that hung over the armour. It’s the first thing a soldier must put on, before the breastplate, the shoes, or the helmet. Likewise, the belt of truth must be put on first before any of the other pieces of divine armour.

So what is this belt? By simply reading the phrase, we could conclude that it means a couple things. It could mean “truth” on a conceptual level, where putting on the belt of truth would mean a commitment to seeking true knowledge. It could also mean living as a truth-speaking person, where one resolves to always speak the truth and never lie.

When we’re trying to define terms in the Bible, it’s always important to use the Bible to define the terms. Words don’t always mean what we think they mean, and sometimes a word will have one meaning in one book of the Bible and a different meaning in another!

So if we actually look through Ephesians, we find that when Paul speaks about “truth”, he’s referring to something that not many of us would think of based solely on a plain, surface-level reading of our text. Look back at 1:13:

In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit.

Paul equates the “truth” in this verse with “the gospel of your salvation”. Therefore, it is the gospel that we need to fasten on before any other piece of armour can be added. We need to arum ourselves with the good news that Jesus has died for sinners, taking our place on the cross as our substitute, bearing the penalty that we deserved because of our sin, and that through the cross, the forgiveness of sins is available to anyone who trusts in Jesus. If you’re here today and you’ve never put your trust in Jesus, you’re in a spiritual war in which you’re completely unprepared. But it doesn’t have to stay like that. The good news of the gospel is available to anyone who would come to Jesus and ask him to save them.

The gospel here is called “the word of truth”, or “the belt of truth”. Every day we’re going to hear a thousand things that aren’t true: wear these clothes and you’ll be as attractive as these models; drive this car and you’ll have as much fun as these actors; work this kind of job and make this amount of money and you’ll finally be happy. In a world full of shifting facts, empty promises, and deceptive claims, the gospel alone stands as a pillar of truth.

We live in a time when truth doesn’t seem to matter. Today’s mottos are “what could be true for you may not be true for me” and “truth is what I determine it to be”. Jesus, speaking against our culture, tells us that what you believe is completely irrelevant to what is true and what is not. Truth is truth, whether you believe it or not, and the staggering claim that Jesus made is that the truth is found in him: “I am the way, and the truth, and the life”, Jesus said in John 14:6. Believe the truth in Christ and you will be saved. Don’t believe the truth in Christ and you will be condemned.

I know this is a hard teaching to hear in our day and age. We want to get along with everyone, which is a good thing, but we want to do that by affirming the truth of what everyone else believes. We’ve been trained to test not the truth of what people believe, but their sincerity. If someone really believes that their religion is true, or that their views of the afterlife or of God are true, then we say “who are we to question them?” But the gospel, and the gospel alone, is the word of truth, and for us to put it on as the belt of truth, we need to believe with all our hearts that it is true for all times and for all peoples. Every other idea, every other philosophy, will fade away in the passing of time. But we need to be able to say these words from 1 Peter 1:24-25 with confidence:

All flesh is like grass and all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, and the flower falls, but the word of the Lord remains forever.

(2) **THE BREASTPLATE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS**

Second, we need to put on the breastplate of righteousness. The Roman breastplate was the biggest and heaviest piece of armour a soldier would wear, as it covered the entire front torso, from the shoulders down to the waist. But soldiers were willing to bear the weight of it, because it protected so many of their vital organs.

So what is this mighty breastplate that we are to strap on? Once again, we need to ask ourselves what Paul means by “righteousness” in Ephesians. Most of the time, when Paul speaks about righteousness, he’s talking about the righteousness of Christ that is freely given to believers. It’s imputed righteousness, the righteousness that is credited to our account as a gift. For example, when Paul talks about righteousness in Romans, he’s talking about the imputed righteousness given to believers. But in Ephesians, Paul means something different. Look back at 5:22-24:

(You were taught) to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.

We see here that, when Paul is talking about righteousness in Ephesians, he’s talking about living with righteousness, not being credited with righteousness. The whole context of Ephesians 4 is of turning away from the old manner of life and living in the new life of the gospel. It’s about “walking in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called”, as 4:1 puts it. Our old life was characterized by unrighteousness, and our new life must be characterized by righteousness. So when we are urged to strap on the breastplate of righteousness, we are being urged to live righteous lives.

Righteous living is one of the greatest protections we can have against the enemy’s attacks. A few weeks ago I was at a toy store with two of my boys. You know how kids are in a toy store: they’re touching everything they can, pushing buttons, trying toys out, wanting to see everything. Martin, who is 2 years old, was playing with a huge garbage truck that had all the trimmings: bright colours, chrome in the right places, even an adjustable side mirror. One thing it didn’t have were doors that opened. But Martin didn’t know this. In fact, he believed with all his heart that the doors would open if he just pulled hard enough. So he pulled and wiggled that adjustable side mirror, trying to get the door open, until that little adjustable side mirror snapped off.

Immediately I grabbed that little adjustable side mirror and tried to put it back in place, but no luck. It was broken. We all know what I should have done – tell the store! But what did I do? I hid the little adjustable side mirror and walked to a different part of the store. No one noticed. Over the next five minutes I wrestled with what I was going to do. The first thought I had was that, if I told the store, I would likely have to pay for the whole truck. “You break it, you buy it”. So I casually walked back to the truck and checked the price tag: $99.99. I didn’t want to pay $99.99 because of a broken adjustable side mirror. So I figured, “if I don’t say anything, no one will ever find out, and I won’t have to pay for that truck.” I was right…but only partially.

Even if no store employee knew, I knew that I was responsible for that broken toy. If I left the store without telling the store, I knew that my conscience would be heavy. I would be plagued with the burden of knowing that I didn’t do what I should have done. But more importantly, I knew that God knew as well. I knew that this deception, this sin, would fracture my relationship with God, because ultimately it wasn’t a sin against the store. It was a sin against God. So after a few more minutes of internal wrestling, I picked up that garbage truck, told myself that I would pay the debt that Martin couldn’t pay, and told the store clerk what happened.

This is what the Bible calls integrity: doing what is right all the time, regardless of the circumstances, whether people see or don’t see. It’s private righteousness, and it is a powerful protection against Satan’s attacks. For example, in Proverbs 10:9, it says:

Whoever walks in integrity walks securely, but he who makes his ways crooked will be found out.

There is a security in walking in integrity that guards your conscience. If I had walked out of the store without telling anyone, I can just imagine the flurry of Satan’s darts of accusation that would be aimed at me. “You call yourself a Christian? How can you pastor a church when you’re such a big liar? How can you ever teach about telling the truth again, or about integrity? You’re a hypocrite and a failure!” When we walk in integrity, he doesn’t have any of this ammunition.

Walking in integrity also guards your witness. Imagine if the store found out about the broken side mirror, viewed their surveillance footage, discovered that Martin was responsible, and saw that all his father did was hide the broken mirror? And then imagine one of those store clerks coming to our church one day, recognizing me as the irresponsible father, and concluding that Christians are all hypocrites? Such a small, sinful act can have devastating ripple effects on the effectiveness of your Christian witness. But if we walk in integrity, putting on the breastplate of righteousness, we leave no one with an excuse to dismiss the power of the gospel to change lives. It doesn’t guarantee that people will become Christians, but it does guarantee that we’re not to blame for why they didn’t become Christians. As Titus 2:7-8 says,

Show yourself in all respects to be a model of good works, and in your teaching show integrity, dignity, and sound speech that cannot be condemned, so that an opponent may be put to shame, having nothing evil to say about us.

My story has a happy ending. Thankfully, after I told the store clerk, she was just so happy that I told her that she didn’t charge me anything. But walking in integrity and putting on the breastplate of righteousness won’t always end this way. The breastplate is a heavy burden to bear. There will be times when we will have to pay the $99.99 and face the consequences of doing the right thing, whether it be to our career aspirations or our bank accounts. But it will be worth it, for Satan will have nothing to accuse us with, and we will be able to stand against his schemes.

But what if you haven’t walked in integrity? What if you have failed to put on the breastplate of righteousness? Don’t be afraid. Behind the breastplate rests the belt of truth, the gospel. It is the last line of defence, and the only defence that you need. The enemy’s arrows may pierce your righteousness, but they cannot pierce Christ’s righteousness, which covers you like an invincible cloak. So when you sin, run to the Saviour. Satan may accuse you before God, but because of Christ’s death on your behalf, God’s verdict will always be “not guilty”, “not guilty”, “not guilty”.

This is indeed why we are urged in our text to “put on the full armour of God” in verses 10 and 13. As we go through each piece, you may think “yep, got that” for some “and uh, that one could use a little work” for others. If we are to stand against the enemy’s attacks, it won’t be enough to have some pieces of armour and not others. We need to put on the whole armour of God, if we are to stand against the schemes of the devil. The breastplate of righteousness is like a paper shirt without the power of the belt of truth. Your righteousness is an important line of defence, but it is ultimately unable to adequately protect you in this war. It is the gospel, the “belt of truth”, that we must put on first.

(3) **THE SHIELD OF FAITH**

The piece that ties them all together is the shield of faith. The shield that Paul has in mind was not the small round one which left most of the body unprotected, but the large shield which covered the whole person. It was so large that the Greek word for the shield was literally “door”.

The amount of attention that Paul gives to the shield of faith is extremely important. Among all the various parts of our spiritual warfare and armour, none receives more attention than the shield of faith. Indeed, Paul shows us that it is more significant, more essential than the other pieces when he says that it is the shield of faith that we must take up “in all circumstances”, and it is the shield of faith that is able to “extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one.”

But how can this be? What could possibly be more significant than the gospel or living righteously? The answer is that it is only by faith that we benefit from the power of the gospel, and it is only by faith that we are able to live righteously.

William Gurnall, the Puritan pastor who wrote the classic work on spiritual warfare called *The Christian in Complete Armour*, said that faith is the most important grace that Christians can have in this life. He acknowledges that 1 Corinthians 13 says that, of the three virtues that abide – faith, hope, and love – the greatest is love. But then he explains that the reason why love is the greatest is that love will remain in heaven, whereas faith will disappear. “Love is clearly the greater”, he says, “because it is the end of our faith. We see by faith so that we may enjoy by love.” But then he says this about the importance of faith in this life:

Before the Christian can enjoy heaven’s rewards, however, he must live in a spiritually militant state here on earth. From this practical perspective love must give way to faith. It is true – love is the grace which will triumph in heaven. But it is faith, not love, which is the conquering grace on earth. “This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith” (1 John 5:4) (p. 33, Vol. IV)

The reason why faith is so central to the Christian life is that it is the conduit that brings God’s power to bear on believers. We see this earlier in Ephesians. For example, in 1:19 Paul prays that we would know “what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe”. And again, in 3:16-17 Paul prays that we would be “strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith.”

But how are we strengthened by God’s power through faith? The first is in relation to the gospel. The gospel is the good news that Jesus has died for our sins, and that he offers the forgiveness of sin to us as a free gift. Faith is the means by which we receive this free gift. As Paul said in those beautiful words in Ephesians 2:8, “For by grace you have been saved, through faith.” We receive the gift of salvation through faith when we trust in Christ to save us.

This means that it isn’t enough to just know the gospel or to even recite the gospel every day. The belt of truth is inadequate by itself. We need the shield of faith to activate the belt of truth by believing the good news that Christ has died for us, taking away the guilt of all our sins.

* When Satan tempts us to believe that God condemns us, we need to have faith that God welcomes us into his household as his children through the adoption we’ve received in Christ.
* When Satan seeks to use our trials and our sufferings to cause us to doubt the goodness of God, we need to have faith that the worst thing that could have happened to us – eternal separation from God – will never happen to us because of the goodness of God in Christ.
* When Satan tells us that we need to look to our families, or our work, or our possessions in order to find happiness, we need to have faith that the deepest longings of our hearts for meaning, for love, for satisfaction, can only be found in the infinite worth and love of Christ, shown must fully on the cross.
* And when Satan tells us that we’re not good enough for all these gifts, we need to have faith that all of it is given to us freely: not because we’re worthy, not because we’ve been good, but solely because of God’s gracious gift to us – a gift that we could never earn even if we tried to obey him for a thousand years.

Faith also activates the breastplate of righteousness. Part of the way that we grow in righteousness is through hard work. We need to exert our willpower to not lie, to walk in integrity, to obey God’s commands. But God doesn’t want us to just rely on ourselves. He wants us to rely on him. He wants us to believe that as we work, he is also working in us, and that he will bring our sanctification to completion. That’s what it means to take up the shield of faith.

(4) **THE HELMET OF SALVATION**

Let me conclude with the helmet of salvation. Like the belt of truth, this also refers to the gospel. For as Paul says in 1:13, it is “the gospel of your salvation”. But unlike the belt of truth, the emphasis here is not on the truth of the gospel, but on its power. We have been saved from everything that might endanger us. We’ve been saved from the wrath of God, we’ve been saved from eternal condemnation in hell, we’ve been saved from the attacks of the enemy. It’s a done deal. Our salvation is past tense. “For by grace you have been saved, through faith”, Paul tells us in 2:8.

Therefore, as we enter into this spiritual war, the greatest war ever known to man, we can fight with the knowledge that we have been saved. We need not ever fear that the tides of the battle might turn against us. Christ has won the victory. He has saved us. There is nothing to fear. There is a final battle to fight, but it is to be fought with the knowledge that our enemy is defeated.

So, church of God, warriors for Christ, take up the whole armour of God – through confidence in the truth of the gospel, through righteous living, through faith that channels the power of God to us, and through the knowledge of our completed salvation – and together, we will stand against the schemes of the devil.