

Ephesians: *Preparations for Battle*
Ephesians 6:14-15
October 15, 2023

As we approach the end of our journey in the book of Ephesians, we are looking at Paul's final teaching regarding spiritual warfare in Ephesians 6:10-18. Last week Paul pulled the curtain back to reveal that our wrestling is not ultimately against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, the authorities, and the cosmic powers of this present darkness—those who Paul refers to as the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. As those saved and set apart by Christ, Paul calls the Church to stand against the schemes of the devil, to withstand in the evil day, and when we are prepared and well-equipped, to stand firm against the temptations and attacks of the Enemy. To that end, Paul calls the church to take up and put on “the whole armor of God.”

There are three items of armor that Paul tells us to put on, and then three items that we are to “take up.” We'll look at those items that we are to put on this morning, and we'll look at the three items we are take up next Sunday. So, let us stand and read Ephesians 6:14-15: 14 Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, 15 and, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace.

My message shall fall under three subheadings: 1) Girded by Truth; 2) Covered in Righteousness; and 3) Prepared with Peace. Now, as is often the case when I deliver a message, I want to begin with a few disclaimers before we get started.

First, I must remind you that Paul is not saying anything NEW in our text this morning. Paul is simply recasting the truths he has already proclaimed within a dramatic metaphor of spiritual warfare because the truth is that Christians are always in war time until the end of the age, and we must remain in a constant state of readiness when it comes to our faith, our character, and our conduct.

Second, let's not get overly distracted by the metaphor of armor and weapons. Remember that we operate under many metaphors including scattering the seed of the Gospel and following our good Shepherd through the valleys and the green meadows. Spiritual warfare is real, but I would not have you dwell upon the darkness that is out there; rather let us be prepared for whatever comes as those who have the joy of the Lord as our strength, amen?

Third, I would ask that you not confuse the teaching of Paul here in Ephesians 6 with what many people describe as “deliverance ministry.” Paul is not teaching us how to exorcise demons or anything quite so dramatic. Paul IS equipping us to defend our hearts and minds against the Liar, even as he charges us to stand firm for the sake of advancing the Gospel in this evil age. That said, a Christian who takes this teaching to heart and puts it into practice will have all the power, light, and weaponry necessary to withstand the evil day and to push back this present darkness.

Finally, my treatment of this text is not in any way intended to be comprehensive. Dr. Lloyd-Jones wrote 750 pages on these 8 verses. The honorable Alexander MacLaren devoted a sermon to each part of the armor as well...and I'm pretty sure I could do the same. My goal, however, is to equip you to step out and be the light of Christ, not impress you with everything that I know and everything that could be said about these powerful images that Paul provides here in Ephesians 6. As always, I encourage you to read deeply to further your understanding and application of these timeless truths found in scripture. OK, let's get started.

I. Girded with Truth

So, having warned the young believers in Ephesus that they knowingly or unknowingly are in an everyday battle with the powers and principalities in the heavenly realm, Paul then charges the believers to take up and put on “the whole armor of God” so that they may stand against the Enemy. Now, scholars have long imagined that Paul drew upon this military metaphor because he was writing from Rome where he lived for several years under house arrest, chained to a Roman soldier all day every day. (show image of Roman soldier) Although it is possible that the imagery here in Ephesians 6 was associated with the soldier’s gear, I think it is more likely that the garb and weapons of the Roman soldiers reminded Paul of many scriptures, particularly in the book of Isaiah, where God and His Messiah are pictured in military imagery (more on that in a minute). Whatever the case may be, Paul begins unpacking the “whole armor” imagery in vs. 14 where he writes, “Stand, therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth...”

OK, first of all, we must forgive the ESV translators because they chose not to translate this passage as it is written in the Greek. The actual Greek translation here is literally, “Stand, then, girding your loins in truth.” Now, we do not often speak of “girding our loins” and I suspect most of us are generally uncomfortable with whatever mental picture is currently coming to our minds. However, we must remember that the ancients did not wear “pants” as we do today. They didn’t have belts that fit into belt loops; instead, they generally wore loose fitting robes of various lengths. (show image of “how to gird up your loins”) So, when it came time for a man to engage in battle or any type of strenuous activity, he would gather up the lower folds of the robe, pull them through his legs to the back side, and then tie the loose material in a knot close to his waist, enabling mobility without the garment getting caught up or causing the man to trip over his garment when attempting to run or fight a battle. Now, the Roman soldier did not need to tie up a long robe, so it’s possible that Paul is using an old expression of “getting ready for war” but actually referring to the soldier’s belt as part of the whole armor of God that needs to be put on for battle.

If you are weightlifter, you might be better off thinking about this image as putting on a lifting belt. Anyone who has ever worn a weightlifting belt or any kind of support belt will tell you that you feel a lot stronger with the belt firmly around your waist than when you take it off, right? That’s the idea here. The Roman soldier would wear the “belt” as a means of securing his garment, carrying his sword, fastening his breastplate, and providing some much-needed back support. The girding was a necessary first step in preparation for war.

Now, in addition to the imagery of the Roman soldier, we can also assume that Paul is pointing back to the great messianic prophecy in Isaiah 11:5 where the prophet states: “He shall be girded with righteousness around the waist and bound with truth around the sides.” (NETS). The soldier of Christ will be girded for battle in a manner that imitates his King.

The point here is not so much the girding as what is being used for the girding. Paul says, “Stand, then, having girded your loins *in truth*.” The picture is that only by girding ourselves in truth will we be able to stand firm against the Liar...girding ourselves in anything else is a recipe for defeat.

Now...truth is one of our favorite subjects here at Colonial, but there are two ways for us to understand Paul’s use of that word here in Ephesians 6. First, Paul may be referring to

“objective truth” which would be *the* truth of the Gospel and *the* truth of God’s Word (Paul would have likely used “the truth” if he meant objective truth). The other possibility is that Paul is referring to “subjective truth,” which would serve as a challenge to gird oneself with absolute sincerity and truthfulness, as opposed to deceptive exaggerations and disingenuous behavior. So, which one is it? Well, it’s obviously both! The belt of God’s armor is objective truth that we receive from God, but when we take that truth up and put it on, it requires us to be truthful and sincere.

By the way, we’re going to see this dual application in every piece of the armor. In each part of this armor, we have that which is given to us by God, but then we have an active role in “taking up” and “putting on” that which has been given to us.

In the case of girding ourselves in truth, we must remember that objective truth is given to us by God...that’s what makes it objective. God has revealed Himself on His own terms in nature; God has revealed Himself on His own terms in history as recorded by the writers of the law and the prophets; and God has very specifically revealed Himself on His own terms through His only Son, Jesus of Nazareth as we meet Him in the four gospels. Because of God’s specific revelation, and because of the death and resurrection of Jesus that was accomplished in history, we can objectively know that we are loved, forgiven, and adopted as children of God if we have repented and received Christ by faith. We can objectively know that we have a new identity in Christ. That truth has been given to us...it is a truth that we receive. However, we must “take up” that truth and “put it on.” The objective truth of what God has done in Christ will not change our lives and inform our conduct if we do not take it up and put it on...and that is very much the point Paul is trying to make here.

The evil day is coming...be it an all-out assault on our souls, or a season of tremendous fortune...either can lead us to fall into temptation. To defend ourselves from evil, we need to put on the objective truth of the Gospel and thus live out that truth in our conduct and character. Objective truth, once taken into the human heart, begets the conduct of truthfulness. The deeper we embrace and gird ourselves with the truth of the Gospel, the more likely we are to shun deceptive, disingenuous conduct. We will be those who walk in the light with absolute sincerity and pure hearts as opposed to those ‘having the appearance of godliness but denying its power.’ Alexander MacLaren devotes a great deal of time to this point. He writes:

Absolute sincerity and transparent truthfulness may well be regarded as the girdle which encloses and keeps secure every other Christian grace and virtue. We shall be blind if we do not recognize that the average Christianity of this day suffers from nothing more than it does from the lack of this transparent sincerity, and of absolute correspondence between inward fact and outward expression. This absolute sincerity is hard to attain, and still harder to retain. Hideous as the fact of posing or attitudinizing in our religion may be, it is one that comes very easily to us all, and when it comes, spreads fast and spoils everything...all the subsequent graces largely depend for their vigorous exercise on the prime virtue of truthfulness.¹

Church, think about it: how compromised is your soul when you knowingly deceive people into believing that you are a better and more faithful person than you actually are? When we live deceptively, we’ve already lost the battle before the first shot is fired. This is particularly true for those who occupy roles in Christian leadership. Think of how many examples we know of those who presented themselves as exemplary Christian leaders, preached great sermons, wrote

¹ Alexander MacLaren, *Expositions of Holy Scripture: Ephesians*, p 346.

wonderful books, counseled and rebuked people in Jesus' name, only to discover later that they were intentionally deceptive about their adulterous affairs or their extortion of church funds. Every time that happens, all the hordes of hell throw a big party to celebrate their decisive and devastating victory. Nothing spoils and corrupts the progress of the Gospel like disingenuous, deceptive, insincere people who promote the name of Jesus. Sadly, there seems to be no shortage of such people in local churches; yet the whole world is looking for Christians who live sincerely and truthfully, with honesty and integrity. Is it hard to live that sincerely? Yes. Is it possible to live sincerely and without deception? Yes...and it is absolutely vital if we are going to withstand the Evil One. Better to be honest about your doubt than pretend that you have none. Better to be honest about your attraction to another woman than to live deceptively in an affair. Better to admit your ignorance than to present yourself as learned. We all have warts. We all have weaknesses. We all have flaws. Believe it or not, that is not news, nor are people disappointed to learn that we aren't perfect. The world doesn't need perfect Christians; but the world is desperate for TRUTHFUL Christians who live in absolute sincerity—whose outer lives are lived in direct correspondence with their inner lives.

Listen: if you commit yourself to live a sincere and truthful lifestyle as a follower of Jesus, you will be constantly tempted by the devil...that's a fact. However, if you intentionally deceive people and feign your spirituality, *you are tempting the devil!* You are literally presenting yourself (and those you influence) as low hanging fruit for the Enemy to devour. Church, if we are not willing to walk truthfully, the battle is lost before it has even begun. As my grandmother used to say, "Tell the truth; shame the devil." Our Enemy hates the Truth. When he lies, he speaks his native tongue; so the first essential means of taking up and putting on the armor of God is embracing God's objective truth and then living truthfully, with absolute sincerity. OK, let's look at what comes next.

II. Covered in Righteousness

The second part of God's armor that we must put on in order to stand against the Enemy is the breastplate of righteousness (show pic of soldier). Again, this imagery is likely pointing back to God as the righteous warrior in Isaiah 59:17 where the prophet writes: "He put on righteousness as His breastplate." Remember, Paul has called the Christian to take up and put on the whole armor of God as a means of imitating God (Eph. 5:1). It's God's armor that we are putting on...not ours. Which means it's God's righteousness we are putting on...not ours.

Now, righteousness is not a fun word for most of us. As soon as someone even says the word, the first thing that comes into our minds is a person who is "self-righteous." We imagine that goody-two-shoes who looks down on everybody else because they think they are so much better than us average people, right? We actually think of the self-righteous person as a bit evil...and that's not wrong. MacLaren sums up the question of righteousness in a way that is quite helpful: As all sin has one root and is generically one, so all goodness is at bottom one. The germ of sin is *living to oneself*; the germ of goodness is *living to God*. There is only one way in which any soul that has been living for self (and

therefore to sin) can attain to living to God (and therefore can be righteous). We must *receive* if we are ever to possess the righteousness which is of God and which becomes ours *through Jesus Christ*.²

Do you hear what MacLaren is saying? None of us are capable of being “righteous” through our own efforts. We are inherently selfish people, and that means we are hopelessly unrighteous. However, there was One who lived a perfectly righteous life. He was never once selfish. He never once offended God. He never once sinned and fell short of God’s glory. Jesus took on flesh and became one of us, yet He maintained a perfect relationship with the Father...that is until He went to the cross. For there, on the cross, a great exchange took place. Jesus took on our unrighteousness...which required the Father to turn His face away from His beloved Son. Jesus bore the horrible penalty of our sin...it was a horror beyond description; but he suffered in our place so that we might be given HIS righteous standing before God...so that the Father would never have to turn His face away from us! That’s the Gospel! The ONLY righteousness that a Christian can ever have is the righteousness of Jesus that was given to us when Jesus took our sin and atoned for it on the cross. How do we get that righteousness? Our righteousness comes through faith in the One who died for us. When we place our faith in Jesus, His righteousness is imputed to us, and the Father forevermore looks upon us as those who have never sinned. We have been made right with God. That is the objective truth that we must receive. And then we must take it up and put it on...which means we step into every day covered with our Lord’s righteousness...not our own.

Now, when we put on the righteousness that has been given to us, that righteousness should, over time, lead to righteous character and conduct because we are now free to live for Christ, right? We no longer live in fear; we no longer live as slaves to our appetites; we live in victory as those who have been saved and adopted as children of God! We are free to be generous; we are free to be selfless; we are free to serve our neighbor as an act of worship to our Lord and King. And we are free from shame. Church, the righteousness of God is what defends your heart from the accusations of the Enemy. When Satan comes to shame you and accuse you and rob you of your joy, your heart is covered with the righteousness of God! But don’t let that righteousness become an objective fact that you refer to only in times of crisis. You are in a battle every day, which means you need to always be cultivating habits and conduct that are consistent with the righteousness you have been given by grace through faith. Cultivate every part of your life with the seeds of righteousness so that your life bears fruit that is consistent with your new identity. As MacLaren writes, “Untilled fields bear abundant weeds. The used tool does not rust, nor the running water gather scum.”³ If you neglect the righteousness that you have been given, if you practice sin and disregard God’s call to a life of purity and integrity, you may objectively have God’s righteousness, but the end result is that you will be very vulnerable to Satan’s attacks. Let us be active in putting on the breastplate of righteousness so that the enemy will have no opportunity to damage our hearts and declare victory over our lives, amen? Let us look now to the third part of the armor that Paul tells us to put on.

² Ibid., pages 350-351.

³Ibid., p 353.

III. Prepared with Peace

The ESV translates vs. 15, "...and as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the Gospel of peace."

The literal translation reads "and having dressed your feet in readiness of the good news of peace." The language Paul employs here points back to Isaiah 52:7: How beautiful upon the mountain are the feet of him who brings good news, who publishes peace, who brings good news of happiness, who publishes salvation, who says to Zion, 'Your God reigns.'

The Greek word for *good news* that we find in Isaiah 52 is the same Greek word used here in Ephesians 6:15, *euangelion*, where we get our English term "evangelism". The Old English translation was *godspell*, which was formed from the derivative of good ('god') and the word 'spell' which used to mean news or story. Eventually the 'd' was dropped and that is where we get our current word for good news...the Gospel.

So, here's the picture that Paul has painted: in order to stand firm against the Enemy, we must gird our loins with truth, cover our hearts with righteousness, and adorn our feet with the good news of peace—the Gospel.

Now, as was the case with the belt of truth and the breastplate of righteousness, the shoes that we put on for spiritual warfare are those GIVEN to us by grace. They belong to God, and they have been given to us as part of God's armor. So what has God given to us here to defend ourselves from Satan? He has given us PEACE. The good news of the Gospel is peace with God.

If I had to sum up the number one problem that I encounter every single day with people that I meet, it is their lack of peace with God. And there are many different kinds of people who lack peace with God for many different reasons.

The atheist, for example, lacks peace with God because he is working so hard to convince himself that God doesn't exist. To be an atheist means we must deny that there is any design in the universe, but everything in the universe points to a Designer. We must deny that there are any laws in the universe because that would require a Lawmaker. To be an atheist requires us to deny a Cause for the universe, but all the evidence suggests that the universe had a beginning, which necessitates a pre-existing Cause. Atheism requires a tremendous amount of faith to constantly deny what is, for the vast majority of people on planet earth, self-evident. So obviously the Atheist has no peace with God.

Many religious people have no peace with God. So many religious people of various religions all over the world live in fear that god or the gods will not accept them because they have done too many evil things. They strive every day to pile up good works, but they have no peace or assurance that they have ever done enough good to offset the bad.

There are many people who attend Christian churches that have no peace with God. These are people who have heard the good news of the Gospel many times, but they still don't trust God. When they experience loss, sickness, or conflict, they immediately begin to wonder if God is punishing them, or at best, ignoring them. You would be amazed at how many people still believe that whatever fortune they are currently experiencing reveals God's pleasure or displeasure based upon their recent performance.

Church, let me ask you a question? Do you have peace with God? Do you know, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that you are found completely acceptable in God's eyes? Do you know that, should this be your final day, you will be welcomed into the open arms of your Savior? Do you know and believe that God loves you sacrificially and unconditionally with pure, *agape* love? Do you know and believe that our God reigns, no matter how horrible or painful our current circumstances might be? Do you know and believe that God has a plan for your life that is for your ultimate good and His ultimate glory? Do you have peace with God? Listen: there is no other source of peace for the human heart and mind than finding peace with God; and there is no hope of peace with God if you do not know Jesus. Jesus made peace with God possible for those who will repent and believe in Him, for He alone suffered the cross as a perfect sacrifice that purchased our forgiveness and reconciled us to the Father. This is the peace that God gives us in His Son, and that peace means that Satan cannot touch our souls...but that won't stop him from trying!

Such is why, when we step out into the world, we must always be adorned with the readiness of the Gospel of peace. We'll need that peace when we go to war with the spiritual forces of evil. MacLaren writes:

The Gospel is a peace-bringing power in the midst of this picture of fighting. The Gospel brings us peace first, and then it says to us, 'Now, having got peace in your heart, because of peace with God, go out and fight to keep it.' For, if we are warring with the devil we are at peace with God; and if we are at peace with the devil we are warring with God. So the two states of war and peace go together. There is no real peace which has not conflict in it, and the Gospel is 'the Gospel of peace' precisely because it enlists us in Christ's army and sends us out to fight Christ's battles. The only way to realize and preserve 'the peace of God which passes understanding' is to fling ourselves manfully into the fight to which all Christ's soldiers are pledged and bound.⁴

When I think about the fierce spiritual battles I have fought throughout the years, I find MacLaren's insight to be proven true. When evil raged all around me, when the threat of harm was imminent, when my heart pounded and fear pressed down upon my soul...it was then that the peace of God was my greatest weapon. As Paul writes in Romans 8: What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare His own Son but gave Him up for us all, how will He not also with Him graciously give us all things? Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the One who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us...for I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels or rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

So, what does it mean to "put on" the readiness of the Gospel of peace? It means we constantly preach the Gospel on three fronts. First, we must preach the Gospel of peace to ourselves. We must constantly rehearse who we are and what Christ had done on our behalf so that we don't believe the lies of the Enemy. Secondly, we preach the Gospel of peace to our Enemy! When Satan begins to whisper temptations and lies, we preach the Gospel to Satan and remind him that he has no claim on us. Finally, we must be ready to share the gospel of peace with those who have no peace. Remember, the armor of God is not only for our protection; it is also a means of taking Enemy ground. If you truly have the peace of God in your heart, your heart should break

⁴ Ibid., p 355.

for those who have no peace. So many people are hostage to the Enemy's lies; it is incumbent upon all believers to share the peace of God with those who don't know...we must always be prepared with the readiness of the Gospel, amen?

Alright, we have made it halfway through "the whole armor of God," and next week we shall look at the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit! For now, as you step back into the battle, be sure to gird your loins with truth, don the breastplate of righteousness, and adorn your feet with the readiness of the Gospel. Do these things, and you will be prepared for the battle that awaits us all.

Will you pray with me?

Image of Roman Soldier:

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TIM SWEATMAN

HOW TO GIRD UP YOUR LOINS



1: THE TUNIC wouldn't allow you to do heavy labor or fight in battle, necessitating the "girding" of one's loins.



2: FIRST, hoist the tunic up so that all the fabric is above your knees. This will give you mobility.



3: GATHER all the extra material in front of you, so that the back of the tunic is snug against your backside.



4: ONCE the excess fabric is gathered in front, pull it underneath and between your legs to your rear. This feels much like a diaper.



5: GATHER half of the material in each hand, bringing it back around to the front.



6: FINALLY, tie your two handfuls of material together, and you're all set for both battle and some hard labor. Go forth, be ye men, and gird up your loins!