



Lesson 4 | The Gospel Armor

“Put on the whole armor of God.” – Ephesians 6:11

The right clothes for the right job can make a big difference. A firefighter who goes into a burning house wearing a soccer jersey is in trouble. A soccer player lining up on the field wearing a firefighter’s outfit would also be set up for major failure. A soldier walking out to the battlefield in a t-shirt and shorts is not going to have a good day. As we have seen, the Bible depicts us as at war, and the Bible also tells us what we need to wear if we are going to fight in this war.

We are in a war, and we have looked at the enemies we face in this war. But the Bible also gives us instructions about how to prepare for this war. Since this is a spiritual battle, the armor that’s given to us is spiritual. But we shouldn’t mistake the fact that these are metaphors to mean that they are in any way less real. The importance of spiritually suiting up is just as critical as the need for a soldier to get dressed when he goes to war. The soldier who shows up on the battlefield unprepared might just end up a casualty. The Christian who walks out into the center of spiritual warfare unprepared just might end up a spiritual casualty.

Why might we be tempted to think that putting on spiritual armor is less necessary than a soldier suiting up for battle?

What could be the terrible consequences if we don’t take the spiritual war around us with the deadly serious attention it deserves?

The Need for the Armor (Ephesians 6:10-13)

Paul begins by laying out the need for the armor God provides. He wants us to feel the heat of the flaming arrows flying by our ears so that we know how important it is we suit up. The opening verses of this section paint a picture of the fight going on all around. Like the servant of Elisha, we need to have our eyes opened to the never-ceasing battle we face.

The Need to be Strong

The opening charge of Paul is to “be strong in the Lord.” This important opening command has two parts, each of which is important. First, there is the command to be strong. This means we must be ready to fight, all of us. As the classic Christian hymn puts it, none of us gets to go to heaven “on flowery beds of ease.” This will require effort, it will require focus, and it will require discipline. According to Scripture, we are all soldiers on the front line. Many people today would be uncomfortable with this kind of call to be

strong, emphasizing our weakness and strongly pointing to the need to rest in God's all-sufficient grace. While it is certainly true that we need God's help (as we will talk about in just a minute), there is still effort that needs to be put forward by believers.

Why do you think believers today are uncomfortable with strong calls to action?

But it is not enough to be strong, because we don't have the strength we need. Instead, the Bible calls on us to be strong... in the Lord! It is through "the power of his might" that we have the strength needed to endure. This is encouraging, because although we don't have the strength we need, our heavenly Father does! Through the power of God Himself, we can take a courageous stand against the attacks of Satan.

How is it that we receive this strength "from the Lord"? What does that look like practically Monday through Saturday?

The Need to Stand

Christians are called to take up a defensive stance here. The image is that the forces of evil are coming at the Christian like a tidal wave, and the Christian is called to keep standing even after facing wave after wave of attack. These attacks could come at any time, and they will come relentlessly. Paul says that our fight is not a physical fight, but it is no less real. We are facing off against the supernatural forces of evil, and we must be ready for their attacks!

What are some of the ways Satan and his forces attack Christians?

What happens if we fall before the enemy?

These attacks come in "the evil day." This likely refers to the fact that the days we live in our evil, but also that there are certain days which are particularly evil. Satan knows when Christians are vulnerable, and he will often throw his darts whenever he sees an opening.

How can we prepare for the specific attacks which Satan will send our way? When are Christians most vulnerable to his attacks?

The Pieces of Armor (Ephesians 6:14-17)

Paul gives several different pieces of spiritual armor that we should take. Many have observed that Paul seems to be inspired here by the description of the Messiah's armor in Isaiah 59:17, where God is described as having the breastplate of righteousness and the helmet of salvation. Although Paul was likely inspired by this passage, he uses the concept to describe the way believers should prepare to fight the good fight.

The Belt of Truth

In ancient warfare, the belt was more of a large girdle than what we would normally think of as a belt. This piece of clothing would hold the soldier's armor tight against his body so that he would be able to move

freely. Just as the belt held everything together, so for the believer it is truth that pulls all of the armor together.

One of the questions about this piece of armor is whether Paul is thinking of God's truth (the Bible) or whether he is thinking of our need to be truthful (integrity). In other words, should we think of this passage as

How would being dishonest or a person without character leave one open to the attacks of Satan?

The Breastplate of Righteousness

Much like the previous armor piece, there is debate about whether the breastplate of righteousness is the righteousness provided by Christ, or the practical righteousness of living for God. Both are true to some extent. If we do not have the righteousness of Christ, then there is no hope that we will be spiritually victorious. It is only through his work on our behalf that we can hope to be practically righteous, to live rightly. But the emphasis here is probably on personal righteousness.

How is the righteousness which comes from Christ related to the righteousness God expects of us as His children?

In what way does practical righteousness (doing the right thing) protect us from Satan?

One of the most important ways to protect ourselves from doing wrong is by doing right. Disobedience to God in small areas opens us up to greater attacks from Satan in other areas. We are either walking in the Spirit or walking in the flesh, and if we are walking in the flesh that makes us open to Satan's attacks.

Shoes of the Gospel of Peace

What purpose would a good pair of sandals play for a soldier?

Much like modern times, shoes in ancient warfare provided the soldier with a firm footing from which to attack. If you fell while running at (or away from) an enemy, you wouldn't be very successful on the battlefield. In a similar way, Christians must have a sure footing in the gospel of peace, that is, the gospel which brings us peace.

Once again, there has been debate over what exactly the gospel of peace here means. Does this mean we go out with the gospel of peace? Or that the message of peace which comes from the gospel gives us a sure footing in our battle against Satan? Since this is a defensive weapon, and not an offensive one, and since Paul could have been clearer if this was about the proclamation of the gospel, this is probably a reference to the personal peace that the gospel brings. Because the gospel can still our anxieties, it can give us a firm footing for when Satan begins unleashing his attacks.

How does the truth of the gospel bring peace to an anxious heart?

How can worry and anxiety leave a Christian open to the attacks of Satan?

The Shield of Faith

Paul gives the purpose of the shield in this verse: the shield is used to block against the fiery darts of the wicked. Satan will launch lies, temptations, doubts, and all kinds of other attacks our way to try and get us to doubt God and do what makes sense to us. Sometimes that means running from a problem God told us to face. Sometimes that means running to a sin God told us to stay away from. At its core, all of it is a failure to trust God. The response is to take up the shield of faith – to believe who God is and what He has said. Only then can we resist the attacks that come from Satan.

Take a particular sin and trace it back to the root problem of what someone is not believing about God's character or His Word. Then explore how greater faith can enable you to be strong in those moments.

The Helmet of Salvation

The first four pieces of the armor – the belt, the breastplate, the shoes, and the shield – all of these deal with our responsibility in our sanctification. We are called on to, with God's help, be people of integrity, righteousness, peace, and faith. These last two items, however, focus more on God's side of things. The first is the helmet of salvation. Just as a helmet protects a person's head, so realizing that we have been saved by God gives us confidence in our battles with Satan.

How does meditating on what God has done for us in Christ protect us from Satan's attacks?

How can Satan use doubt about our salvation to keep us from having spiritual victory?

The Sword of the Spirit

The final piece of the armor is the easiest to figure out because Paul comes right out and says what it is – the Bible. Many have observed that the sword is the only offensive weapon that Paul includes in the list of spiritual armor. The way we push back against Satan is not with our own cunning arguments, or by outsmarting a foe who is thousands of years old and has seen more than you or I could possibly imagine. No, it means turning to the Word of God and holding to that truth and boldly proclaiming that truth. As we study God's Word and know God's Word, we will be able to better use the Bible in our battles with Satan.

How does Satan attempt to keep us from using this weapon?

How can we more effectively study, learn, and know God's Word so we can be better prepared to fight the good fight?

So what does being spiritually ready look like? It looks like trusting in the Lord for strength to stand against the attacks of the evil ones. Specifically, it means being a person of integrity and righteousness because Satan will look for faults in our character as a chance to attack. It also means that we look to the gospel to calm our anxious hearts and to give us courage that we are God's children and have all we need to succeed in Christ. Finally, it means believing what God has said and using God's Word to push back against the forces of darkness.

Which of the pieces of armor has been the most impactful for you in this study? Is there one "item" in particular that you need to more consciously put on?