

What On Earth Am I Here For?

Ephesians 6:10-20

“Put Your Armor On”

Introduction

For the past several weeks we have been discussing our purpose here on earth. Upon careful examination of The Holy Scriptures, we have been able to ascertain that we were created by God for specific purposes. We were designed: 1) For God's Purpose; 2) For God's Pleasure; 3) To Belong To a Church Body; 3) To Become More and More Like Christ; and finally, 5) To Fight Spiritual Warfare. For the last two weeks of this series, I would like to focus on the Spiritual Warfare component of our life's purpose. I believe that it is incumbent upon those of us who teach to “equip the saints”, as it were (**Ephesians 4:12-16**), to enable them to fight in the spiritual battle to which we have been called. Therefore, if we are to engage in spiritual warfare, then we must know how to prepare ourselves for such an endeavor. The Apostle Paul, in his letter to the church at Ephesus (ancient city located in modern day Turkey), went to great lengths to explain to the Believers that they should be fully aware that the struggle's in this world are not initiated by man, but rather, are demonic in nature. There is a spiritual realm that we cannot see, and it is in this realm that demonic forces are arrayed against the Church, “pulling the strings”, as it were, to hinder the spread of the gospel. Most Christians aren't even aware of it, but there are demonic hierarchies that are controlling the actions of the Kingdoms of this world (**Daniel 10:12-21**) and have been for centuries. If you wonder why our nation seems to be slipping toward the brink of godless anarchy today, it is because of the demonic forces, hidden from view, who are waging war against The Church of Jesus Christ. Satan is working overtime. I believe it is because he knows that his time is almost up (**Revelation 12:12**).

Paul even goes so far as to say that God intends for the Church to be so in tune with His purposes, that these demonic forces should be able to observe The Church and ascertain what God is doing (**Ephesians 3:10**). Just imagine that for a moment. We, The Church, the army of God, are to follow His leading so closely that Satan has to watch the US in order to figure out what God is doing!!! The forces of evil that are fighting us are deriving “intel” from watching what the Church is doing in this world. Now, I don't know about you, but I sure don't want the devil to look at Freedom Fellowship and come to the conclusion that God is sleeping! My desire is that when the devil looks at what we are doing he will find us busy doing a mighty work on God's behalf. This is exactly the kind of Church that God wants us to be. That being said, if we intend to be about God's mission in this fallen world, then we had better be prepared for a battle, for the enemy will only leave us alone if we are idle. Since we cannot be both idle and obedient, then we had better be ready for attacks that are guaranteed to be coming our way.

Near the close of his letter to the Church of Ephesus, Paul explains that in order to be a soldier in God's army, one must be prepared to do battle (**Ephesians 6:10-20**). As Paul was writing this letter, he was, in fact, in prison, chained between two Roman soldiers. As He wrote, he used the imagery of his Roman guard's uniforms as an example of just how the Believer must equip himself to face the demonic armies arrayed against the Church of Jesus Christ. Paul insisted that we as Believers must, just like those Roman soldiers, put on armor to fight OUR spiritual battles. Unlike the Romans however, our armor needs to be spiritual in nature, rather than physical. We must protect ourselves with what Paul called “The Armor of God” (**vs. 11**). In order to face the devil, we must be cloaked with power from on high, for apart from being fortified by God's might, we would stand no chance against the adversary. Paul uses every piece of the Roman soldiers uniform as an example of the spiritual things that we need in order to fight the good fight. Every piece of the armor has significance: The Belt, Breastplate, Boots, Safety Helmet, Shield, and Sword. The imagery that Paul employs here is simply incredible. For the next two weeks, I would like to examine each piece of “The Armor of God”, so we can know just how to equip ourselves for the Spiritual Battle to which we have been called. This week we will study the first three pieces of the armor: The Belt of Truth, The Breastplate of Righteousness, and The Boots of The Gospel of Peace.

The Belt of Truth

Paul reminded the Ephesian Believer's that their struggle was not against "Flesh and blood" (mankind), but rather against The Devil and his armies (**vs. 10**). The word that is translated "wrestle or struggle" (depending on your Bible translation) actually refers to a specific type of wrestling. Pale (Pronounced pa'-lay in the Greek) is actually Greek wrestling. The rules of this type of wrestling were very specific. The two opponents would struggle against each other in a circle drawn upon the ground, much like our collegiate and Olympic wrestling of today. Each participant would try to score points against his opponent by either flipping him on the ground or pushing him out of the ring. Three points were all that were needed to achieve a victory. If a wrestler was able to pin his opponent to the ground so that he was immobilized and then place his hands around the man's throat, then this was known as a "submission" and the match was over.

Think about the imagery that Paul is using here. The devil is your adversary. The word "*devil*" in the greek is diabolos and actually means "the slanderer" or "false accuser". It is more of a title than a name actually. You see, there is a "slanderer" out there in the spiritual realm that wants nothing more than to disqualify you as a soldier of the cross. He cannot take you away from Christ (**John 10:28**), so he doesn't even try that. All he needs to do is to disqualify you, so that you can no longer compete. The devil wants to use every device (scheme - **vs. 10**) at his disposal to pin you to the ground and put his hands around your throat (figuratively speaking). If he can defeat you, then you cannot be effective in spreading the gospel of Christ. If he can defeat you, then your life has little purpose. If he can defeat you, then he will use your demise to discredit the Name of Christ. There is nothing more effective in turning non-Believers away from the Gospel of Jesus Christ than a disgraced Believer. The devil can't send you to hell, but he would sure love to send others there BECAUSE of you. THIS is what's at stake in this spiritual war! Paul admonished the Church at Ephesus to take this battle seriously and get ready for it.

The first piece of armor that Paul mentions is The Belt of Truth. A Roman soldiers tunic was almost like a dress. It was a loose fitting garment that had a hole cut for his head and two others cut out for his arms. The tunic draped over his body and came to just above his knees. The only thing that kept this loose fitting piece of clothing from getting caught on everything was a tight fitting leather belt around the soldier's waist. This belt cinched up the tunic and molded it to the soldier's body. Otherwise, he would not be able to fight effectively. His tunic would be a hindrance to him in battle were it not for his belt.

Paul says that, as believer's, we too must be wrapped with a belt. He calls it "The Belt of Truth". As Christians, we MUST know what we believe. We must be "wrapped" in the truth. We need to know the difference between truth and falsehood. Jesus said, I am THE WAY, THE TRUTH, and THE LIFE (**John 14:16**). If we are to be followers of Christ, we must know the truth about who Jesus is. We must learn of who He is by studying His Word. In short, we cannot fight in this spiritual battle if we do not know what we believe. There is not, nor has there ever been, an excuse for a believer to be unfamiliar with God's Truth. Without sound doctrine, we can be easily deceived into believing any falsehood. Paul says that we must be able to take a stand against the devils schemes (**vs. 11**). The word used in the text for schemes is "*Methodeia*" in the Greek. It is the word from which we derive our word method. We know from reading scripture that one of the devil's "methods" to ensnare people is to confuse them about God's Word. Remember what he said to Eve in the Garden of Eden? "Did God REALLY say that (**Genesis 3:1**)?" The devil loves to take scripture and twist it, in order to pin believers to the ground spiritually. We must be so wrapped up in Truth that we cannot be deceived by him. How tight is your belt this morning? Are you so wrapped up in Christ and His Holy Word that you cannot be deceived by the devil's unholy distortions of truth? If not, then might I suggest that you spend more of your time in prayer and Bible study? If you don't want to be disqualified, then you had better wrap yourself in the Truth!

The Breastplate of Righteousness

It is not enough just to KNOW the truth. The effective soldier in the army of Christ must also LIVE according to the truth. This is called righteousness. When we become a Christian, we are covered in the righteousness of Christ and justified before God (**Romans 5:19; 1 Corinthians 1:30**). However, this is not the end of the process, but only the beginning. Then Holy Spirit begins to do a work inside us. He begins to change us from the inside out. This process, that we discussed a few weeks ago, is called sanctification, and it is simply put, The Holy Spirit's way of conforming us into the very image of Christ (**Romans 12:2**). This process so radically changes our wants and desires that we no longer just know the Truth, we earnestly strive to LIVE by it. This is the Breastplate of Righteousness that Paul urges us to put on. We Put-On Christ, and then we LIVE according to His Truth. A Christian who does not long for the Truth, nor have any desire to live by it, is in fact not a Christian at all. For it is impossible to have a real encounter with Jesus and not be forever changed as a result. Many people met Jesus as He walked this earth, but only few ever recognized that He was God in the flesh. Those who saw Him in this light left everything to follow Him and were subsequently never the same again.

The devil is fully aware that he cannot take away a believer's justification in Christ, so he doesn't even try. His strategy, therefore, is to try and tempt a believer to sin, so that he can damage his credibility. If the devil can get a believer to stray away from living according to the truths of God's Word, if he can entice a believer into sin of any kind, then he can once again render him ineffective as a soldier in the army of God. If the devil can cause you to perilously succumb to your temptations, then he has you pinned to the floor, spiritually speaking. You cannot fight spiritual warfare by saying, "Do as I say, and not as I do". Soldiers in this army must live out the righteousness that we say we stand for. This doesn't mean that we are sinlessly perfect (this side of Heaven), but it does say that we have turned from our sin and have decided to follow Jesus.

Once again, it would be wise for us here to fully comprehend just how the devil will try to entice us to "take off our breastplate" as it were. By studying the scriptures, we can see just how the devil will entice us to sin. He uses these three very effective wrestling moves to try and pin us down or throw us out of the ring: The lust of the eyes, the lust of the flesh, and the pride of life. Let us return for a moment to the Garden of Eden and see the moves that he put on Eve on that fateful morning. He enticed her with the beauty of the forbidden fruit (lust of the eyes), and that it was good to eat (lust of the flesh), and it was desirable for gaining wisdom (pride of life). He appealed to her very own nature to get her to sin against God. If you look at Christ's temptation in the wilderness (**Matthew 4:1-11**), you will see him doing pretty much the same thing. However, Jesus wasn't about to fall for that. The devil will try to use the very things that you desire to trip you up and pin you down. He will use sex, money, power, relationships, or any other flashy bait that he can hook you with to bring you to ground. Make sure that you are not only wrapped in the Truth of God's Word, but also covered in righteous living, or you will lose this battle. Sadly, I know too many people who have let their lust drag them away to their own demise (**James 1:13-15**). Don't be one of them. Put on your breastplate.

The breastplate of a Roman soldier was made of metal, or thick leather, and was intended to protect his vital organs from harm. The devil longs to destroy you (**1 Peter 5:8**). Make no mistake about it. If you put on Jesus and live according to His Word, you will "protect your vitals" and be an effective leader in The Church. One of the requirements for Pastors and Elders and Deacons in The Church of Jesus Christ was that they be "above reproach" (**1 Timothy 3:2**). This simply means that upon careful examination of their lives, there can be nothing found in them that would be an embarrassment to The Church. In short, they have to practice what they preach! Living a righteous life will serve as a protection against the enemies attacks. Live a life so led by The Holy Spirit that you live what you believe. This Breastplate of Righteousness will keep you ever safe from harm.

The Boots (Shoes) of The Gospel of Peace

We must not get so caught up in the imagery of the armor that we miss the real truths that Paul is trying to describe for us. Truth, Righteousness, and The Gospel of Peace are three things every believer needs to survive in this wicked world. Paul uses the soldiers “shoes or boots” as an analogy for The Gospel of Peace. So, just what is The Gospel of Peace, and why does Paul compare it to the combat boots of our armor? The gospel (in the Greek *euangelion* meaning “good news” and where we get our word “evangelical”) is the message of the saving grace of Jesus Christ. Why did Paul compare it to shoes? Because it is The Gospel upon which the Church stands. Jesus told Peter that on the solid rock of the Gospel He would build His Church, and the gates of hell would not prevail against it (**Matthew 16:18**). This comment by Jesus was made after Peter responded to Jesus’ question of **“Who do you say that I am?” (Matthew 16:15)**. Peter replied, **“You are The Christ (Messiah). The Son of The Living God” (Matthew 16:16)**. The “gospel”, or good news, is the established Truth that Jesus is in fact God in the flesh, and that His sinless life and atoning death paid our sin debt in full. His resurrection from the dead assures us that we too will live for an eternity with Him. All that is required of us is to BELIEVE in this Truth and surrender our lives to Christ as Lord and Savior, and we are guaranteed to be returned to a “right standing” with God.

When I was younger, we used to sing a song in church that said:

*My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus Blood and Righteousness .
I dare not trust the sweetest frame, but wholly lean on Jesus name
On Christ The Solid Rock I stand, all other ground is sinking sand
All other ground is sinking sand.*

In Paul’s day, a Roman soldier wore a sandal/boot that had cleats, usually made of nails, that helped him to hold his grip upon the earth as he fought. The Gospel of Jesus Christ is what gives us our firm foundation so that we can “do all to stand” as Paul so aptly put it (**vs. 13**). Why does he call it “The Gospel of Peace”, you might ask? Because it is knowing to the depth of our very soles (pun intended), that we have Christ and thanks to His death upon the cross, we are in “Right Standing” with a Holy and Righteous God! It would be utterly impossible for “believers” to resist the devil, when they have doubts about their own salvation. To quote a sign that I’ve seen countless times at restaurants, “No Shoes, No Service! You cannot take a stand for Christ, unless you are assured of HAVING Christ! To be able to rest assured that your sins are in fact forgiven, and that you indeed HAVE Christ, brings you a peace that passes all understanding (**Philippians 4:7**). That being said, are you absolutely SURE of your salvation this morning? Do you know beyond any doubt that there has been a time when you turned from your sin and surrendered your ALL to Jesus as Lord and Savior? I’m not talking about just believing in Jesus here. I’m talking about believing enough that you BELONG to Him. If not, then today is the day to set things right. Wouldn’t you like to leave here today standing on a foundation of peace? God wants you to have peace at the very core of your being. He wants you to know for sure that you are in right standing with Him today. He wants you to rest in the knowledge that you are safely secured in the arms of Christ. Don’t you want that as well? How long has it been since you truly felt at peace with God? It’s time to put on your shoes so you can stand!

Today we have attempted to explain the first three components of “The Armor of God”. Next week (Lord willing), we will attempt to describe the remaining three. There is a spiritual war going on all around us. Although we are unable to see the enemies arrayed against us, they are there nonetheless. If we are to be victorious, then we must go into battle protected by The Armor of God. We must be wrapped in the Belt of Truth, protected by The Breastplate of Righteousness, and standing firmly upon The Gospel of Peace. We were created to fight this battle, but not in our own strength. We are called to resist the enemy in the power of The Almighty God! Are you ready for the war?

And ALL God’s people said... TRUTH!!!