

Examining Your Armor Part 2

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Ephesians 6:17

Let me ask you a question today: Where has God called you to stand? Where is the place in your life that he has called you to do battle, to take and hold ground for his kingdom and stand against our enemy?

This morning we are continuing in our series on spiritual warfare and the armor of God called "Hold your Ground." As we've gone through this series, one of the things I've tried to point out is that there are places in our lives where God calls us to fight this battle and stand. They could be in any number of places. Maybe for some of you the battleground is a personal struggle, like discouragement or truthfulness or temptation. Maybe your battle is you against sin. Maybe for some of you, the battleground is in a relationship with a co-worker or a friend. Or maybe the battleground is your marriage. Maybe unresolved conflict is occurring in one of those relationships, and it's sidelining you from the real battle. You're not thinking about how to bring Christ's influence to what's around you. You're just thinking about that conflict, and it's a battle. Maybe your battleground is old-fashioned hand to hand spiritual warfare. I have spoken with people who said "I feel like I am actually doing battle with some kind of evil spiritual presence in my life." Maybe it's that. Or maybe your battleground is a space in your life like your job or family. Maybe your job is to stand with your kids or grand-kids and the battle is simply to bring the influence of Christ into that space. Where is God calling you to stand?

Well, we've been thinking about that as we've gone through this series. The way we've been thinking about it is by looking at a passage that talks about the armor that God provides to help us stand in this battle. We've looked at three pieces of the Christian's armor so far. We've seen that each piece has both an objective, or receiving aspect, and a subjective, or doing aspect. Each one is both something we receive from God and something we do for God. So in our passage we have talked about the belt of truth, which is the belt of truthfulness. It is both God's truth that we receive and the truth we speak. We have talked about the breastplate of righteousness, which is the righteous status we receive and also the righteousness of doing what's right. We have talked about the shoes, which are the readiness that comes from the Gospel of Peace. The shoes are both the peace we receive from the gospel and the readiness to make the first move and make peace with others. So we talked about these receiving and doing parts to our armor. We said that the receiving aspect of each of these is found in the gospel.

Well, today we want to finish up our study by looking at the last three pieces of the Christian's armor which are the shield, the helmet and the sword. Let me invite you to turn in your Bibles to Ephesians 6:10-17. Today our sermon is going to be pretty simple. We're just going to look at these last three pieces of armor one at a time, and see how each one protects us from spiritual damage, both through what we receive and through what we do.

My prayer for you today, as it has been through this whole series Church, is that you will recognize the battle, that you will recognize that God made you to live for something bigger than just yourself, that you will recognize that you have a job to bring the healing, loving, righteous influence of Christ to every area of your life, every area where God has called you to stand to your family, to your job, to this neighborhood. My prayer is that we will arm ourselves and each other for this battle and stand. So let's just read Ephesians 6:10-17. Paul closes the book of Ephesians this way:

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. And in all circumstances, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

- Ephesians 6:10-17

So as we've gone through this armor piece by piece, we are beginning to see that the armor covers us from head to toe. There's a piece of armor for every battle we face in our life, no matter what that battle is. We've also seen that each piece of armor calls us to do something to protect ourselves from spiritual harm. We expose ourselves to spiritual harm. We weaken our influence for Christ, when we take off truthfulness, when we take off righteous behavior, when we take off our readiness to make peace. So we have a piece of armor for every battle we face and each piece calls us to do something. Now today, we want to start with the shield:

The Shield Encourages Us to Believe in God's Goodness

Paul says this:

And in all circumstances, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one.

- Ephesians 6:16

So last week, I said the shoes were the most confusing piece of the armor. If the shoes are the most confusing piece, the shield is definitely the coolest. There were two kinds of shields:

1. A little thing called a "hopsis."
2. Then there was this bad boy that Paul is talking about. This shield is called a "thura" which is the Greek word for door. It was about 4 ½' tall and 2' wide. They could latch together to make a wall. Here's how they made it. They took two layers of thick planks about as wide as your hand and curved them so they wrapped around your body. Then they covered them with layers of canvas and covered that with calf-skin. Then before battle, they would soak this whole contraption in water.

Paul says "take up" the shield, because these things were heavy so you didn't just carry them around camp. You only picked them up when you went to the front lines of war. The way they worked was that when your enemy shot a flaming arrow or lance or dart at you, that arrow would sink deep into the shield and the wet leather and canvas would cover up the tip of that arrow and smother the flame. If you think about this shield of faith, what it represents is fairly obvious: Objectively, with regards to what we receive, the shield represents The Faith. The truth, the doctrines, the teachings that we have received about who God is (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) and about his character and about the gospel .The Faith.

But with regard to the doing aspect of this shield, Paul calls it "the Shield of Faith," because it encourages us to believe in God's goodness. At all times, notice Paul says take this shield up "in all circumstances".

See, Satan has these flaming arrows that he shoots at us. They come in lots of forms like medical diagnoses, and biting critical comments and adversity and pink slips from our jobs, and parents that split up, and the death of people we love, and stories in the news about how Christianity couldn't possibly be historically true. These arrows tell us that God's not real, and that our experience of Christ is not true, and that it's not worth it to follow Christ, that it won't pay off in the end. They can make the faith we carry seem awkward and unwieldy. Just like in Roman times, there can be a great temptation to give in to fear and drop that heavy shield and abandon your post and run. And listen closely, some of you are wrestling with this right now. Maybe you or someone you love dearly is facing incredibly difficult circumstances, circumstances that make you wonder if God really sees and cares. Or maybe they make you wonder if God is even real. Maybe you are wrestling with your self worth. Maybe the enemy is telling you that you're not loved, not forgiven in Christ. Maybe he's telling you God can't use you. Maybe you're just tired, tired of the battle, tired of serving and not seeing the results you think you should. Maybe you're tired and

you're wounded and you just want to take off your armor and sit on the bench for a while. Really maybe you do. And I understand. Serving the Lord is hard. Who could blame you if you just stepped out of battle for a while?

But it's not about not being blamed. It's about standing your ground for God's Kingdom. So Paul tells us to kneel before God, ask him to help us see his goodness, dust ourselves off, pick up our shield and head back into the fray. The Shield tells us to believe in God's goodness. Now, the next piece of armor is the helmet:

The Helmet Encourages Us to Hope in Our Salvation

Look at what Paul says, five simple words:

Take the helmet of salvation

- Ephesians 6:17

So Paul says to take up, or you could almost translate it “grab,” the helmet of salvation. Again, here’s a picture of what he was referring to: Every Roman soldier had as part of his armor a helmet. Some of them were fancy, like the one with the giant scrub-brush on it (I don’t know what that was for) and some of them were more basic. It might be made of leather or bronze, but it usually had an iron skullcap. It had a lining either of cloth, if it was a lighter helmet, or sponge if it was heavier. Every soldier had a helmet. Paul says “take up” the helmet, because the helmet was actually kind of hot and uncomfortable, so it was usually the last piece of armor a soldier put on before the battle joined. So he had to take it up.

Now just like all the other pieces of armor, this helmet has both an objective and a subjective aspect. An objective, or receiving aspect of this helmet, is that it is the salvation that we receive in the gospel. In the gospel, we have received salvation. That is, in many ways the most central thought of the gospel we are saved. We were sinners who needed a Savior. And in the gospel, we have a Savior. As we said last week, Jesus came and he lived the life I should have lived and died the death I should have died. So that in the gospel, through faith, I can exchange my sinful, wrath-deserving status for Jesus’ sinlessness and obedience. So that from a legal/judicial standpoint when God looks at me he sees the sinlessness of Jesus.

In the gospel, we are truly eternally saved. So that we’re not just forgiven, we also have an amazing future! I only understand just a little about what will happen to us in eternity. Scripture says some awesome things about it. It is called “the hope of glory,” the idea that we are going to be restored to all that God made us to be. Scripture tells us we’re going to have stuff to do. People are frequently surprised by that. We won’t be sitting around playing harps. There are things to discover, things to do, lives to be lived, relationships to catch up on and grow. The Bible calls it “A new heaven and a new earth.” Creation will be renewed and removed from the futility it now experiences

Listen, there won’t be any sickness, no Cancer, no HIV, no malaria., no global warming. We’re going to take care of our earth, no weeds, no environmental disasters, no droughts or famines, no Justin Bieber albums (there’s a specific verse.) Just kidding! But Scripture calls it “An inheritance that can never fade away.” It calls it “true riches.” Scripture says “Eye has not seen, nor has ear heard, nor has entered into the heart of man what God has prepared for those who love him.” Sounds like a pretty good deal to me! So in the gospel, we have received this Salvation. That’s the objective part of this piece of armor. That’s why it’s called the Helmet of Salvation.

Just like with all the other pieces, there’s a subjective aspect to the helmet. There is something that it calls us to do. Paul says we are to “take up” or “grab” the helmet, so there’s clearly

something we are supposed to do with it to arm ourselves. But here's the thing: Paul is writing to Christians. Technically, you can't "take up" salvation if you're a Christian, because if you're a Christian you already have it. Salvation is not something you pick up when you're having a rough day. It is something you either have or don't have.

So how is salvation something that we can "take up" to arm ourselves for battle? How do we "do" this? I think Paul gives us the answer in 1 Thessalonians. 5:8. That is another passage about the armor. But there, Paul states it a little differently. He says "Put on as a helmet the hope of salvation." The hope of salvation. I think the way we arm ourselves with salvation is by hoping in our salvation. Think for a minute about that Roman helmet. What that helmet really meant to a Roman soldier can be summarized in three words: "No Death Blow." With that helmet, there was No Death Blow. Yes, there was always the chance that you could be struck somewhere else besides your head and die. You could receive a blow to a vital organ or maybe slice an artery and bleed to death. But your head is the most vulnerable part of your body. Chances were if you were going to receive a death blow it was going to be to the head. There was always that danger in combat that someone would hit you from behind with their sword, or a stray arrow would catch you in the head, or your opponent would hit your head with almost anything, and that one blow would be your undoing. But with the helmet, you were protected. It came down and covered the back and sides of your neck. It protected your skull. It might have pieces that protected your jaws and your eyes. So that you could go into battle knowing that there wasn't going to be that one blow that took you out.

Knowing that enabled the soldier to go into combat with full confidence they didn't have to worry about that random blow that was going to take them out. If you've ever seen a kid put a football helmet on, you get the idea. It fills them with confidence. It almost makes them want to smash into something, because with the helmet, they feel safe!

I think that's what it means to hope in our salvation, to lean into the battle, because we know that there won't be a death blow. No matter what's going on in our lives, our biggest problem has been solved, our biggest danger has been averted. We will most assuredly be saved! That means the frustrating, terrible, rotten week you had with all the garbage you had to wade through at work is not a death blow. Your lost job not a death blow. Seniors, your aches and pains, and I know they really hurt, are not a death blow! Salvation is coming. Your conflict with your adult children, your horrible relationship with your parents, people's disapproval, not a death blow. Your failed marriage, not a death blow. Your shame, your addiction, your sin, not a death blow.

Christians, listen to me closely: There is no death blow. In fact because of our salvation, even death is not a death blow. I was talking to my Dad on Father's Day last Sunday. I asked him how he was doing, and he said "Well, I have a lot of aches and pains and some medical issues, but I'm still alive and kicking." I said "Well, I guess that's better than the alternative." He said "I'm not so sure about that!" He wasn't being flippant. He's not depressed. He's just saying death isn't a death blow for him. It's the gateway to glory! Because of our salvation, there is no death blow.

When Paul calls us here to take up the helmet of salvation, he is calling us to live with that perspective to know that there's a bigger picture here, and in that bigger picture we win! So that as we face these struggles and spiritual battles, we never ever lose sight of that larger longer-term perspective, no matter what our circumstances.

So (1) the shield calls us to believe in God's goodness, and (2) the helmet encourages us to hope in our salvation both now and in the future. Now the last piece of the armor is the Sword:

The Sword Encourages Us to Speak God's Word

Paul gives us this last piece of this armor. Look at what he says:

Take the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

- Ephesians 6:17

So most Roman soldiers had one of the swords that Paul is referring to here. Here's a picture of it. It was called a "gladius," and it's not a big broad-sword. It was a short two foot by two inch stabbing sword. It was light and sharp, and it was perfect for standing your ground and defending yourself when you were under attack.

Paul calls the sword here the "word of God." So when we think of this sword, especially with regard to the objective or receiving aspect of it, we probably think of our Bibles, and we're right to do that. The Bible compares Scripture to a sword Hebrews 4:12 says this:

For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.

- Hebrews 4:12

The Bible is a sword. When I was a kid we used to have Sword Drills where the Sunday school teacher would call out a reference in your Bible, like Isaiah 53:6, and the first person to look it up and read it would get a point. They would always try to trick us by saying "Hezekiah 3:14." Hezekiah is not a book in the Bible, but the Bible is a sword.

In Paul's day, he would have been referring to the Old Testament and the teaching of the Apostles, because they didn't have the whole Bible when he wrote this. But we rightly think of the Bible when we think of the Sword.

And Church, let me just say the Bible is an amazing resource. Scripture is clearly one of our most powerful weapons. This week I went to Creed Camp where our teens were at and spoke on Tuesday night. The topic they gave me was "God's Word offers life." As I thought about that, I got so excited and I wish I could share with you just a tiny bit of affection of the amazement of the reverence that I have for this book.

The Bible is truly amazing. When I started reading this book, it changed my life completely. I have found that where there is confusion in my life, God's Word brings truth. Where there is pain, God's Word brings comfort. Where there is despair, God's Word brings hope. Where there is doubt, God's Word brings faith. Where there is fear, God's Word brings courage. Where there is sin, God's Word brings forgiveness.

It transforms everything. I can't tell you how many times I have been with people facing sickness and heartache and even death, and we open up the word and we read it and it changes things. Kelley and I have been with people in the hospital who were in their final moments of life. I can

remember one particular wonderful Christian man who had been unresponsive for the whole day, and then we began to read out loud to him what the Bible says about eternity. We saw the blood pressure go up and the hand moved, because they recognize the truth and power of the words of this book.

Listen, you guys this thing is a treasure chest. It is so powerful. Just last week before the service I had someone come to me who was facing real mistreatment and injustice at work. I said “Let’s read a Bible passage about that,” and we read Psalm 37. It gave instruction and gave God’s perspective on the issue. It changed things!

Please read your Bibles! Don’t start in Deuteronomy! Classic rookie mistake. Start in the Gospel of John or the Psalms, but don’t miss out on this treasure!

That’s not all there is to it. This is the last time I’m going to say this, but Just like with all the other pieces of armor there is both a receiving aspect and a doing aspect with the Sword here.

Remember, without both of these our protection is not complete. It’s not enough to receive God’s truth. If you want full protection, you have to speak the truth. You have to be a person of integrity. It’s not enough to be declared righteous. If you want full protection from Satan’s attacks, you need to live righteously, and on and on. OK? It’s not enough to have salvation. We need to hope in that salvation. So it is with the sword. It’s not enough to know God’s word. There’s also a doing aspect.

Let me show you what I mean. Look at verse 17 again:

Take the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

- Ephesians 6:17

See that word “word” there? The “the word of God?” That’s not the normal word for the word “word” (does that make sense?) The normal word for “word” is “logos.” It refers to the written word. But the Greek Word that’s used in verse 17 is much less common. It’s “rhema,” which means “the spoken word.” I think the point is that we have to speak the word of God. That does mean you and me individually speaking and praying the truths of Scripture when we are under attack.

But I think it also means something else. This really brings me to where I want to sort of close this series. We have to speak the word to each other. We have to share the encouragement of Scripture with each other. It’s not enough for us to just arm ourselves. We are called to help one another by speaking God’s word to each other. This doesn’t just go for the sword of the spirit. It’s true of all the armor. One thing I noticed, as I studied this passage, is that all the commands in this passage from the command to stand to the command to pray to the commands to put on the individual pieces of armor are actually in the plural. Every one of them in the Greek is a “y’all.”

The idea, I think, is that we are not just to be a community of individuals that is armed for the spiritual battles we face. Rather, we are to be a community that arms one another. We are to encourage one another to be truthful in the words we speak. We are to really do life together and

encourage each other to be upright in our behavior, to reconcile with one another, to believe in God's goodness even when it's hard to see it, to hope in our salvation. And here, we encourage one another to arm ourselves with Scripture and change the way we think. We are to be a community that fights this battle together, a community that loves and encourages and arms each other as we stand and hold the ground that God has called us to.

Well, those are our six pieces of armor: a belt, a breastplate, some shoes, a shield, a helmet and a sword. Let me close today with the question I opened with: Where is God calling you to stand today?