

What is the
**ARMOUR
OF GOD?**





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Imagine a highly-trained soldier who's sent into battle. He's got years of experience, the latest weapons and his battle-ready regiment surrounding him. There's only one problem, he's only wearing jeans and a t-shirt. No matter how good he is as a soldier, without his protective helmet and body armour, he won't last long in the middle of a war zone.

Armour is all about having protection in dangerous situations. But it isn't just for the armed forces.

We all wear armour at different times in our lives, more or less . . . Whether it's the shin pads we put on to play football, the seatbelt we pull round us when we're in the car, the oven gloves we use to get dinner from the oven or the big winter jacket we have out for the cold months, we all instinctively 'suit up' with protective 'armour' in some form every day. Wearing 'armour' is such a normal part of life that we probably don't think of it in those terms.

So what about our Christian lives? The Bible tells us to suit up in the armour of God because the spiritual world, like the physical, is full of danger. Yet while we protect ourselves against what we can see without thinking about it, the "armour of God" described in Ephesians 6 is confusing at best. What's it for? What is it? And how can this armour become as instinctive as putting on oven gloves when getting things out the oven?

Many books have been written on the armour of God in much more detail than we can go into here. But we hope this overview is a helpful way to start thinking about what it means to be suited up for God, ready for the battles that lie ahead.



The full armour of God

Be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armour 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 armour 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 round your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. In addition to all this, 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.

And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord's people.

—Ephesians 6:10-18



What's it for? (Ephesians 6:10-13)

Before we look at the armour itself, we need to understand the reason we're wearing it in the first place. When we became Christians, we became friends (and allies) with God. But that means His enemies became our enemies. In Ephesians 6:10-18, these enemies are called "the devil" (v.11) and "the spiritual forces of evil" (v.12). The spiritual dangers we face are actively against us, like enemies in warfare, looking to break us in any way they can. That's why the Bible describes us as "soldier[s] of Christ Jesus" (2 Timothy 2:3). The armour itself is like the gear someone in the armed forces would put on to go out to the battlefield.

Let's look at our attackers in a little more detail:

"The devil's schemes" (Ephesians 6:11): The devil is the ultimate enemy of God. Whatever God builds, the devil wants to tear down. God gives us the united, safe family of the church; so the devil looks to split it up with disagreements and pride. God gives us His peace and forgiveness in Jesus; so the devil fills our minds with all the shameful things we've done to make us feel guilty and hopeless.

The devil's tactics to bring us down are called "schemes". He is a trickster who deals in lies and deception. He makes us forget about his existence so

that we're unprepared for his attacks and unable to recognise them for what they are. He works away at us bit by bit, drip feeding us guilty, fearful memories that soon become a landslide burying us deep in misery.

It's the same with the way he tempts us. He'll show us things that look like a bit of fun, with little consequence. But as he invites us back to them again and again, too late we realise we're enslaved to them, without the choice or power to free ourselves.

In verse 16 his attacks are also called "flaming arrows". In ancient warfare, arrows with a flaming point were fired at enemy soldiers to cause maximum damage and injury. As Christian author John Stott explains, the devil fires at us flaming arrows like "guilt. Other darts are ... doubt and disobedience, rebellion, lust, malice or fear,"¹ and anything else that can inflame our minds and hearts. When these things hit us, they engulf us, taking our attention away from Jesus and His love.

"The powers" and "the spiritual forces of evil" (v.12): Paul doesn't explain the evil spiritual forces that work with the devil. He simply warns us of them. He describes them as having authority and power. The power of these evil forces does not mean they can win. On the cross, Jesus beat sin, death and every evil thing. Victory is guaranteed. But their power shows they have not yet admitted defeat. They still work to disrupt our walk with Jesus and our effectiveness at sharing His rescue.

These spiritual forces target us relentlessly. There are no treaties, truces or codes of honour, like in

human wars. They are ruthless as they seek to drag us away from Jesus and the truth of the Bible. The lack of detail about these “forces” means we shouldn’t limit our expectation of their attack. They can use anything—from our own selfishness to the unkind words of a friend; from a suggestive ad on TV to a long supermarket queue—to distract us and pull us away from our closeness with God.

We do need to remember, however, that we cannot simply blame every problem, mistake or bad choice on these spiritual forces. We are warned that “each person is tempted when they are dragged away by their own evil desire and enticed” (James 1:14). We are ultimately responsible for how we live and the decisions we make (Matthew 15:19)—even if we are presented with lots of different temptations looking to exploit the weaknesses and “evil desire” warring within us (see Galatians 5:16-26). We can be so easily led away from God! This is why we need to be on our guard and suited up in His armour.

“Our struggle is not against flesh and blood” (v.12): Despite how we may feel, people are not our real enemy. It’s hard to accept this on days we’re being bullied because we follow Jesus. Yet Paul states that our real battle is not against people, no matter what they may do to us.

You might be thinking, *Hang on, didn’t Jesus tell us to pray for our enemies who persecute us? Surely that means that people can also be our enemy?* But that’s the whole point. Jesus describes our human enemies as people to

pray for (Matthew 5:44); whereas in Ephesians, we're told to "stand against" the devil and spiritual forces. This is a significant difference! People are made in God's image, and we hope that they turn to Jesus and join us in His family. Our stance towards them is to offer love and Jesus' welcome. Our stance towards the evil forces is only ever to stand firm and defensive in our armour.

People can be used by the evil spiritual forces—we see that in countries where Christians are hounded and killed for their faith. But we still need to understand people are not the *real* enemy. If we see people, governments or social structures as our evil enemy, we may well stop praying for them, expecting them to trust Jesus or looking for God to work His purposes in them.

Standing our ground: We would all like to have peaceful lives, enjoying God's presence and our Christian family. But these things are not going to just happen; we are going to have to be active in our relationship with God. The spiritual forces are not going to take it easy, so neither can we.

Yet this armour is not given so we can go on the attack. In a sense, we don't need to go looking for trouble, it'll come to us soon enough. This armour is given so we can "stand". It is about having stability in our relationship with God, no matter what we may be going through. While we're not looking for trouble, we should be expecting it. So what exactly is the armour we need to "put on" so we can "take [our] stand"?

¹ *The Message of Ephesians*, John Stott (pg. 281)



What is it? (Ephesians 6:14-17)

Paul likens the armour of God to the heavy armour of warfare; like that which a Roman soldier would have worn. There are six elements that make up this armour:

The belt of truth (v.14): A Roman soldier's belt held his tunic together so he could march without tripping. Having the truth of the gospel buckled round us allows us to see the devil's lies all the more clearly. The truth revealed in the Bible tells us everything we need to know about God, what He has done for us in Jesus and who He has made us to be. With our minds centred on this, we will have great balance to our walk with God; just like a soldier marching forward without tripping.

It's also right to think of this truth as honest living (See Proverbs 10:9; Ephesians 4:25). The devil deals in lies—as soon as we do the same, we are falling into his traps. If we're hiding things or if we're dishonest to get ourselves out of trouble or gain some advantage, we're no longer walking in truth. Transparent honesty stops us relying on ourselves to make things work out, and instead trusts our past, our consequences and our plans to God. When our lives are so clearly dependent on God's provision, we'll be much more focused on Him, rather than letting anything else direct our steps.

The breastplate of righteousness (v.14): The breastplate, which would have covered most of the soldier's body, including his vital organs, is likened to "righteousness". Our restored, right relationship with God is our fundamental spiritual protection. We are covered in Jesus' perfection. We know that even while we await the completion of our salvation and perfection in heaven, all our past and future wrongs have been paid for. We are justified before God and cannot be accused of anything (Romans 8:33), no matter what guilty feelings the devil tries to fire our way. Now nothing can separate us from God's love (vv.38-39).

Our feet fitted with gospel readiness (v.15): Many Bible teachers agree the boots Paul was talking about had heavy-studded soles. They gave soldiers a solid stance and stopped their feet from slipping, making them ready for action. Our firm footing and readiness comes from the gospel. Knowing the salvation we have received, we should want to take the good news about Jesus out to the world. Whether we're talking about Jesus with our friends, or travelling the world to share Him, this proactivity is part of the armour of God.

If you want to be good at football, you have to play it regularly. If you don't, you lose the skill, strength, stamina and instinct for it—no matter how well you understand the theory of the game. In the same way, actively sharing the gospel keeps its story central to our lives. Having conversations about Jesus with our non-Christian friends keeps us on our toes, makes us draw closer to God with their questions and insults,

and forces us to have the good news at the forefront of our minds.

Living with a gospel readiness keeps us looking for God to use it to challenge and rescue people. If we're regularly exposed to its power, it won't become mundane or ordinary—it will stay fresh and exciting. And far better than anything else we're offered!

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The shield of faith (v.16): As with the shoes, Paul had a specific shield in mind here. It was a long, oblong Roman shield that covered the whole of the soldier. Importantly, these shields were designed to not only stop enemy arrows, but also to halt flaming ones so their fire wouldn't spread and harm the soldiers.

How does this work for us? Proverbs reminds us that “[God] is a shield to those who take refuge in him” (30:5). That, really, is what our faith is. It's not just that we believe in Jesus—we depend on Him for everything. We trust who He *is*—that He loves us, knows us and is always with us. He is our only hope. And so, whatever happens (good or bad, unsettling or traumatic), our first response should be to bring it to God and take refuge in Him.

When the devil fires doubts and worry at us, our faith drives us to God's promises. When the devil fires

temptations at us, our faith sends us to hide in God, our “fortress” (Psalm 91:2). When the devil says we can’t do it, our faith looks to God’s strength. When the devil says we *can* do it, our faith listens to God’s authority and leading.

The helmet of salvation (v.17): This part of the armour is all about our security in God. Our helmet, protecting our heads and our minds, looks back at the completed work of Jesus which has already saved us. It also looks forward to the certainty that our salvation will be perfected on that day we stand before Him and are welcomed into His home forever.

What allows us to hold our heads up with confidence is the knowledge that we are saved. However we look today, and however we have stumbled, we will be made completely “holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation” (Colossians 1:22). This confidence in God’s unstoppable transforming work in us gives us the motivation to focus on Him, join in with what He’s doing in us and find joy first and foremost in our relationship with Him.

The sword of the Spirit (v.17): The last piece of the armour is our sword, the only part that can be used in attack as well as to defend ourselves. The sword Paul was thinking of was a short sword, used in close combat. This is a good image for us to have in mind, as it reminds us that our battles with the evil spiritual forces are personal. We cannot hide behind our family or church. The devil seeks us out specifically to disrupt and harm us.

This sword is explained as “the word of God” (v.17). “The word of God is alive 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 powerful weapon. As we read it, it not only reveals the lies of the devil, but God’s Spirit uses it to cut through to our own thoughts and motives to correct and shape us.

We should never forget how important it is to study the Bible. It is where the **truth** is found, our **righteousness** in Jesus is made clear, the importance of the **gospel** is promoted, our **faith** is strengthened and our **salvation** assured. By reading it and getting to know God, we become all the more aware of how different and wrong the devil’s voice is. In this way, we can use the Bible to fight against his attacks (as Jesus did in Matthew 4:1-11).

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How do we wear it?

“Put on the full armour of God” (Ephesians 6:11): Wearing the armour of God isn’t a physical process, like putting on clothes; but neither is it just a fuzzy, abstract concept. The armour of God is our relationship with Him. It is our total dependence on and need for Him in everything. Or, in other words, God is our armour (for example, see Psalm 97:10; John 17:15; Philippians 4:7; 2 Thessalonians 3:3). We find strength for the problems, temptations and worries we face in knowing who our God is, that He loves us faithfully, that Jesus has secured our salvation and that heaven is certain.

While our armour depends on God, Paul still says we need to put it on. It is true that our strength only comes from God, not us. Yet if we’re passive, we can become complacent or simply drift away from God, bringing distance into our relationship with Him. When this happens, it is much easier for the devil to put selfish or distracting things in our minds. If we are not near to God, we are stripping ourselves of our defence. Our minds will not be filled with the truth and love of His Word, and we will easily fall victim to the devil’s “schemes” and lies.

“Be alert and always keep on praying” (Ephesians 6:18): It is through an attitude of prayer—

continually going through all things with God and talking to Him about them—that we best experience His armour. This lifestyle makes us “alert”. If we are praying for opportunities to share our faith, we will be looking for those opportunities. If we are praying about our weaknesses, we will be

readied for and expecting attacks to those areas. If we are enjoying our closeness with God, we will not be looking for satisfaction anywhere else.

Let’s think for a moment about the events in the garden of Gethsemane the night Jesus was arrested. The devil had already “entered into” Judas (John 13:27) to try and bring Jesus down. So Jesus spent that time in the garden talking with His father (Matthew 26:39,42,44) and readying Himself for what was going

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to come next. By comparison, His disciples slept (vv.40,43,45). Jesus said to them, “Watch and pray so you will not fall into temptation” (v.41), but they didn’t, and the temptations soon followed. Jesus, being grounded and steadied

in His relationship with His Father, went out to meet His betrayer and the mob (vv.46,50), ready to be taken away. He was not protected physically, because the armour is not physical. But He was protected in His heart and mind; His confidence remained in God. Jesus was not dragged away from His Father because of this trauma, but clung harder to Him.

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His disciples, on the other hand, were anything but prepared. Peter, relying only on himself, tried to fight his way out (v.51; and see John 18:10), and then “all the disciples deserted him and fled” (Matthew 26:56). Even though Peter followed Jesus from a distance, it’s clear that he wasn’t belted in truth. As soon as his identity was challenged, Peter gave in to the temptation to lie, denying Jesus to save his own skin (see Matthew 26:69-75).

Ultimately, none of the disciples stood their ground, because they were not suited up. They were not alert to the danger, expecting an attack or prepared to face an enemy. So they fell as soon as they were hit with the flaming arrows of fear and panic.



Armour for today, not forever

In 1655 William Gurnall published *The Christian in Complete Armour*. It included nearly three hundred chapters! So clearly there is much more that could be said on the subject of the armour of God. In his work, Gurnall reminded his readers that in heaven there would be no need for armour, only robes of glory. But for now, our armour is to be worn “night and day; we must walk, work and sleep in [it], or else we are not true soldiers of Christ.”²

In this armour we are to stand and watch, and never relax our guard. The battle is fierce and constant, which means we will either be drawing closer to God and His strength each day, or drifting further from Him. There is no room to just coast along. While we have good days and bad days, boring times and busy times, the evil forces are always trying to drag us from God, so we must be actively clinging to Him and the complete protection He has given us in Jesus. Temptations, doubts, change, problems, stress—these things can happen any time, out of the blue. So we must be ready. We’ll see our armour at work when our first response to all these things is to turn to God.

There is much more that could be said on the spiritual battle we face as Christians, and we encourage you to talk with someone in your church about the things you’re struggling with. You can also read more in *I’m a new Christian: Why is it so hard?* at **ourdailybread.org/lookingdeeper**

² *The Christian in Complete Armour*, Gurnall, I (pg. 67)



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