

## EPHESIANS #100 6:14 5-31-15

### ***THE BELT OF TRUTH***

(Ephesians 6) We have sung today that great hymn, “Onward Christian Soldiers, marching as to war.” I remember well the movie *Patton* starring George C. Scott in which General Patton is quoted as saying that man’s accomplishments in war have dwarfed everything else he has ever done. Theodore Roosevelt always felt that war did something positive for a people that nothing else could do. Indeed it is war that brings out the worst in men and the best in men. When we realize that we are in a life and death struggle we put aside childish concerns and concentrate our whole energy on winning the war. We realize then that a deflection of focus could cost us in a huge way. We don’t want to make any decisions that would give an advantage to the enemy. Therefore, when it comes to our weaponry we want the best. There will be no compromise here. If I am gonna go into battle I don’t want it to be in a second grade, economy-version tank. I want the best equipment possible. And I want the best training I can get on how to use it. You talk about a motivation for study! Hey, getting A’s doesn’t motivate everybody - obviously. But survival is a commonly powerful form of motivation. If my life is hanging on my understanding of something I am going to study it with focus, intensity and tenacity. What we look at today in God’s word is no less important. There is a spiritual war going on - we have read about it in Ephesians 6 and the issues at stake are more than life and death. More than life and death? Right, what is on the line in this battle has implications for eternal life and eternal death. We will read verse 10-13 which remind us that we are engaged in battle with the forces of darkness and then we will go on to read the description offered of the armor of God. **10-17** *Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might. <sup>11</sup> Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil. <sup>12</sup> For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places. <sup>13</sup> Therefore, take up the full armor of God, so that you will be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm. <sup>14</sup> Stand firm therefore, HAVING GIRDED YOUR LOINS WITH TRUTH, and HAVING PUT ON THE BREASTPLATE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS, <sup>15</sup> and having shod YOUR FEET WITH THE PREPARATION OF THE GOSPEL OF PEACE; <sup>16</sup> in addition to all, taking up the shield of faith with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. <sup>17</sup> And take THE HELMET OF SALVATION, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of*

*God. Our text for today is 14 Stand firm therefore, HAVING GIRDED YOUR LOINS WITH TRUTH, and HAVING PUT ON THE BREASTPLATE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS.*

Here we go - last time we looked at the exhortation to stand firm. We saw that we have an enemy to fight and a duty to stand, but we are also given an armor to protect us. We are described by Jesus as lambs going out in the midst of wolves, but very much like our Master who is both the Lamb of God and the Lion of Judah, we are, by grace, mighty lambs, well-armed lambs. We are Lambos. Watch out! By the grace of God we will stand firm against the attacks of the enemy and we will not be destroyed because we fight in the protection supplied to us by our great King and Commander. Today we begin to inspect this armor, understand this armor, and we learn how to use this armor. We begin here in verse 14 with what I will call the belt of truth. Specifically it says that we should gird our loins with truth. Now, I don't know about you but "gird" and "loins" are not words I use very often. My dictionary says that "gird" means *to encircle or bind with a flexible band*. Women used to sometimes wear "girdles" which are close-fitting undergarments that extend from the waist to below the hips in the region encompassed by the word "loins." A belt is a more or less narrow girdle. It girds one's waist which is also part of one's loins.

How this relates to the activity of a soldier is easy to figure. The normal garb in the Roman culture was a tunic, which was a long, loose-fitting robe. The usual way of wearing the tunic was no good for running, or abrupt movement because it would easily get in the way. Therefore, the soldier or worker, or anyone engaged in vigorous physical activity, would have to first pull the tunic up and secure it around one's waist, thus giving themselves freedom of movement. It was a way of preparing for something physically intense. In our day the closest thing would be to tell someone to "roll up their sleeves." We know that means that there is something physically demanding ahead and the sleeve-rolling is a prelude to it. The phrase *gird your loins* is found elsewhere in Scripture. In Exodus 12 we read God's instructions for the passover meal, on the original passover night when the angel of death would slide through the Egyptian nation and God's people were told how to take the passover meal 11 *Now you shall eat it in this manner: with your loins girded, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand; and you shall eat it in haste—it is the LORD'S Passover.* Why would they want their loins girded? The same reason a soldier would. They were to be ready to move quickly at a moment's notice. Having your loins girded became a synonym of *being ready*. In Luke 12:35 *Be dressed in readiness, and keep your lamps lit.* Literally, the Greek says, "let your loins be girded." ® so that there will be no delay when it's time to move

out. I Peter 1:13 is very interesting. I give you the King James Version because it is closer to the original. It says 1:**13a** *Gird up the loins of your mind.* (KJV) This is really calling for the same thing as our text. Paul of course, isn't interested in a readiness for physical battle, but a battle in the mind and in the heart. The belt we are to use for this girding is not a belt of leather, but a belt of truth which makes us ready, which at least gets us on the way to being fully-equipped soldiers for the Lord.

Alright, thus far we have been looking at the meaning of the phrase found in our text, what it means to have your loins girded. Now let's take a look at the reason we need this piece of armor. Why must we gird our loins with truth? Three reasons I will offer: One is that truth is the foundation of the Christian life just as the belt is the foundational piece of fighting equipment. There is an order to the listing of our armor here. It doesn't go from top to bottom, or bottom to top. It goes in the order the soldier would put on each piece. It starts with the pulling up of the tunic, the tucking it into the belt and ends with the picking up of the sword. So, the belt is the foundational piece of armor, just as truth is the foundation of the Christian life. My oh my, how critical this is for us to understand! The New Testament says that we are saved by believing the truth. Christianity is more than a belief system, but it certainly is a belief system that makes claim to being true. When Jesus spoke of the man who builds his house on a firm foundation, that foundation that can weather the storm is the foundation of the truth of God's word. And if anyone is to have a faith which will endure the storms of this life it must be built right there. On truth. You can't build a lasting spiritual life on feelings. But isn't this what some try to do? Some persons come to a church or to a religious meeting and find themselves encouraged, find themselves feeling better about life, and so they join that group, they catch on with the group's values, they affirm the group's beliefs, but they have never really developed any conviction of their own about these beliefs. The beliefs were never really important to them, what counted from the start were the feelings, the friends. What happens to this person when the enemy attacks, when the challenges come, when the storms blow? These are the many individuals who have built their spiritual houses on sand and great will be their calamity. God's word tells us that truth must be at the bottom of everything, supporting the whole. It is the foundation of our spiritual house, the root of the spiritual plant, the belt of the spiritual armor.

Secondly, we need to gird our loins with truth because this is how we become mature soldiers. You know I Peter 2 about growing through the pure milk of the word. Now consider this teaching

from the gospel of John. In John chapter 17 Jesus is praying for His disciples and says to his Father in **17** *Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth.* **17** *Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth.* What is the instrument God graciously uses to make us fit and ready soldiers? Is it not the truth. Truth! This is God's way, His means of grace, for spiritual growth and if you come up with a different way take heed. You can grow in knowledge without growing your soul, but you aren't going to grow in your soul without growing in knowledge. II Peter 3:**18a** *Grow in the grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ.* We learned this back in Ephesians 4:15 where it says that we grow up in the body of Christ by speaking the truth in love. There is no substitute for the truth, not great prayer meetings, not exciting worship, not accountability groups, not happening music. Those things are great when they are built on truth but we must have truth around our waists! It is this conviction that drives our ministry to center on teaching God's word. When we went looking for a youth pastor this last year our primary concern was not to get a fun guy, or an athletic guy, or a hip dude. We were concerned that our young people be outfitted as Christian soldiers and that begins with the truth. So we wanted someone who could teach. Listen, I am all for revival in the church of our day. God knows we need it, but revival never does lasting good where there is not a foundation of truth. Greg Asimakoupoulos says that when we teach we "*are laying the logs of truth in the fireplace of Christian community so that when the Holy Spirit ignites a flame of faith, there is something to sustain a fire.*" Did you get that? That was well-put. Listen to it again. *We are laying the logs of truth in the fireplace of Christian community so that when the Holy Spirit ignites a flame of faith, there is something to sustain a fire.*" It is possible to have truth without passion, and that is no good. But if you have passion without truth it soon fizzles and fades. We need the belt of truth because that is what makes us mature soldiers.

Thirdly, we need to put on the belt of truth because it is truth that counters the attacks of the devil. Verse 12 says our fight is not with flesh and blood but with the spiritual forces of wickedness. We fight against the one who is called *the father of lies, the deceiver*. Satan's primary weapon is the lie. This is what he used with Eve. This is what he always uses. And if you are going to fight lies, what do you use? Truth. Satan's armies are called the world forces of this darkness. How do you combat darkness? With light. So Paul, when he gets to describing the armor we use against the father of lies, starts off with the belt of truth. Of course! David Noebel is the founder of Summit Ministries, an organization devoted to preparing Christian young people to survive and thrive on the college campus. And do you know how Summit prepares kids to make it at college

and not be devoured by the enemy? With lots of teaching. Ephesians 4:**14** *we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming.* How do you avoid getting tossed and carried and tricked and deceived? The next verse says you do it by speaking the truth. You put on the armor. David Noebel urges Christian parents not to send their kids to a secular college unless they have read about 25 books he specifies, the first of which is the Bible. Nowhere do the winds of falsehood blow more vigorously than on the college campus. There you are catechized in the ways of evolutionism and relativism and secularism. There you find a despising of our Christian heritage. And friend, it just isn't wise to go there or send your child there without making sure the loins are girded with truth.

Now don't think, that the belt of truth only matters when you encounter the more academic attacks of the enemy. No, no. Satan's lies hit every one of us in very practical ways. Satan will tell you that your self-denial is foolishness, there is no reward for godliness, you had better listen to the world. The devil plagues you with guilt, pounds you with fear, seduces you with lust. At every point the antidote to his poison is the truth. In I Thessalonians 4 and I Corinthians 15 God speaks of the fear of death. Is it just a cold, hard ending? No, and the apostle answers the enemy in both passages with the doctrine of resurrection. In Thessalonians he says, "this is truth, now comfort each other with these words." In I Corinthians 15 he says, "this is truth now labor on in the confidence that your labor is not in vain." Romans 8 presents faith in the sovereign love of God as the key to endurance in the midst of suffering. The Bible does this at every point, answering the deceiver with the truth that counteracts his lies.

Now, there is a reality though that distresses the Lord when He looks at the spiritual climate of the modern church. The New Testament makes such a huge deal of teaching and knowledge and truth but when God looks at the church what does He see? When I listen to what is often said in the church it concerns me because not only are we not teaching the truth, we actually imply that it is not important. An objective assessment of our values as Christian people will conclude that we think music is important. We think pep talks are important. That is what many sermons are. But instruction in the truth is really of little consequence. And as a result we head to battle unarmed and ill-equipped. Hosea 4:6 says, "My people are destroyed for lack of what?" It is for lack of knowledge. Hosea 4:**6a** *My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge.* We get destroyed because we go up against a lying enemy unarmed with the truth. And again, I say, that few seem to even

think that truth matters anymore. There was a day when men fought and died over doctrinal commitments but now you have intermarriage between people of different faiths to an extent that was unimaginable even a generation ago. And the reason is that truth claims don't count. Being a Christian or Jew or Catholic or Muslim has nothing to do with any truth convictions. It is just your heritage, your tradition. What really matters is some vague commitment to niceness. But truth and falsehood are categories that matter to God. They matter to Satan. And I pray once again they will matter to us.

So we have seen why to gird your loins with truth; let's look now at how. What practically does this mean? If I am to gird my loins with truth, if I am to prepare for battle this way, what must I do? Two things: ® Study and preach. ® The truth is your protection so get it known and make it known. The study part I think you understand. Truth does you no good until you have uncovered it. The belt of truth lying in a bag in the attic will never get you ready for battle. You have to search it out. That means you gird up the loins of your mind. You commit yourself to some hard thinking, to some real study. You put yourself around sound teaching. Proverbs 2 says **2a** *Make your ear attentive to wisdom.* It says of knowledge **4-5** *If you seek her as silver and search for her as for hidden treasures; <sup>5</sup> Then you will discern the fear of the Lord and discover the knowledge of God.* But there is a searching involved here. There is some work involved here. Charlemagne, the French King, used to sleep with a Bible under his pillow in hopes that the truth would seep into his brain magically but it doesn't work that way. Getting to know the truth takes some effort, but when you see that truth can save your life in battle, you will do whatever is necessary.

The second aspect of putting on the belt of truth I described as preaching. You have to study the truth and then you have to preach the truth, and by *preach* it I mean to say that not only should you preach it to others, you have to remind yourself of it. We each need to erect a little personal pulpit in our souls and keep it occupied, constantly preaching to ourselves, constantly telling ourselves what is true, taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ, so that we have both direction in life and motivation for life. And let's face it, if we fail to speak truth to ourselves, the devil is going to be there speaking lies. In our self-directed preaching it is important that we identify the lies Satan is telling us and counteract them specifically. When I do counseling one of the main questions I ask myself as I listen to someone is, "What lie has this person believed that is at the root of his or her problem?" You can ask yourself that question. 99% of counseling that goes on in the world is self-counseling. The Christian is well equipped to do that if we know the truth, but we

have to learn to apply it to our lives. Ask yourself, “what lies am I listening to that are messing me up here?” Behind all of our fears, and all of our anger, and all of our guilt as believers there is a lie of Satan into which we have entered. We, like Eve, are listening to the enemy and it will lead us astray. And no matter how badly you want to do what is right, if your mind is tuned into Satan’s channel you are doomed.

The enemy of our souls throws some tough stuff at us. We get hit with things that challenge us. And what are the various responses available to us when we are challenged, when something threatening comes our way? They all start with the letter “F.” Fight, flight, freeze. You can see it in animals. One dog, if you threaten it, will attack you. Another will run away. A third might crawl up in a ball and do neither. You have probably seen these various reactions in yourself. I certainly feel them. The urge, the compulsion to go after somebody with your fists or with your words. More common for me, especially as I have aged, is to run away, to flee, to find a safer, happier place to be, whether a place of body or a place of mind. Maybe a third alternative is the “freeze” option which involves staying in place but just going numb. I won’t run away, but I will attempt not to care, not to feel, any more. Now – these are gut-level, non-rational responses. But, as thinking creatures, we aren’t left to respond like a dog or a deer, we can evaluate our options, we can choose to act and re-act in a way that is not determined by our feelings or impulses. We can feel fear in our hearts, we can sense the impulse to quit or run away or lash out but then we can stop, ponder and re-direct our thoughts and our choices. I found myself precisely at this point while I was in Georgia last week. Some things were coming my way that I found threatening. I noticed my chest tightening up, my jaw growing more tense. Anxiety was knocking on the front door and joy was leaving out the back. I was getting whapped by the devil and his lies. But, thankfully I had time to go off by myself to pray and to preach. I reminded myself of the truth – that I am loved by the King of the Universe, that I am a blood-bought son of the living God and if He is on my side whom then shall I fear? Of what shall I be afraid? The Lord is my shepherd I shall not want. I reminded my heart that God is my Father and everything I feel when something threatens my child, He feels toward me. He will come to my defense. He won’t let me be destroyed in the end. His purposes for me do not exclude trials. Indeed, I remember that He appoints trials for me, but then He turns those trials to gold and in them, in Him, I will rejoice. I remember that He who did not spare His only son, but delivered Him up on my behalf will not withhold from me now any good thing. In short, I preached the gospel to my own heart. And I listened and I reacted to the gospel with something else that

starts with the letter “F.” Not fear, not fight, not flight, but faith. Faith grew in me as I strapped on my waist the belt of truth. That’s how it works for me. That is how it works for all God’s children, I think. We don’t react to the attacks of the enemy by escaping to some drug or some fantasy or some addiction. We strap on the truth when we remind ourselves of the glorious words of our Savior that tell us we are loved by Him, that we are safe in His arms, that we are covered by His wings. And in that sweet place, we find strength to face the day, to face the foe and to be more than conquerors through Him who loves us.

Knowing this the devil hates it when he sees you picking up the belt of truth. He hates it when you start preaching to yourself. So, this is what we want to do every day, many times a day. Think of ways right now – that you can remind yourself of the truth, preach to yourself the gospel. Maybe a podcast or radio show you can listen to, a message you can post on your wall, in your car, by your computer, some verses you can memorize. One of my favorite ways of preaching to myself is through music. I use that to remind my heart *How marvelous! How wonderful! is my Savior's love for me!* I remind my heart that if God is for me, who can be against me. That *His love never fails, it never gives up, it never runs out on me.* This isn’t just wishful thinking, this, my friends in Jesus is the truth. So, if we expect to be able to change, if we hope to have victory we must not only find the belt of truth, we have to put it on, we have to apply it to ourselves. This is the good word of God to us. Stand firm therefore, having girded your loins with truth.