



*To Know Christ . . .  
and to Make Him Known*

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**“The Full Armor of God”  
Ephesians 6:10-20**

In *The Encourager*, Charles Mylander tells this story:

Sunrise was dawning when Los Angeles motorcycle police officer Bob Vernon saw a red pickup truck speed through a stop sign. This guy must be late to work, he thought to himself. He turned on his emergency lights and radioed that he was in pursuit. The pickup pulled over, and the officer approached.

Meanwhile in the truck, the driver thought, “The cops already know!” He was scared. He rested his hand on the same gun he had used a few moments before to rob a twenty-four-hour market. The sack of stolen money was beside him on the seat.

The officer said, “Good morning, sir, may I see your—” He never finished the sentence. The driver shoved his gun toward the policeman’s chest and fired from just inches away. The cop was knocked flat seven feet away.

A few seconds later, to the shock of the criminal, the officer stood up, pulled his service revolver, and fired twice. The first bullet went through the open window and smashed the windshield. The second tore through the door and ripped into the driver’s left leg.

“Don’t shoot!” the thief screamed, throwing the gun and sack of money out the pickup window.

What saved the policeman’s life was dozens of layers of Kevlar, the super strong fabric used for bulletproof vests. Only three-eighths of an inch thick, Kevlar can stop bullets cold.<sup>1</sup>

Armor matters, doesn’t it? Just ask Officer Bob Vernon, or ask those who have served in Iraq or Afghanistan over the past seventeen years.

Or ask the Apostle Paul. He’d tell you, as he has here in our text for today, Ephesians 6:10-20, that spiritual armor—the armor of God—is crucial in our battle against the powers of evil. Listen to what he said. *Read text . . .*

***The reality of spiritual warfare . . .***

Someone has said that one of Satan’s greatest successes in the modern West is to convince people that he doesn’t exist. Indeed, the scientific mindset seems to have trouble with anything it

can't empirically see, touch, and measure—the ultimate of materialism.

In 1941 in the preface to his little book *The Screwtape Letters*, C. S. Lewis wrote:

There are two equal and opposite errors into which our race can fall about the devils. One is to disbelieve in their existence. The other is to believe, and to feel an excessive and unhealthy interest in them. They themselves are equally pleased by both errors, and hail a materialist or a magician with the same delight.<sup>2</sup>

Lewis was right!

Any honest reading of the New Testament will acknowledge that it takes very seriously the reality of Satan and demons—the evil one and his associates. As Charles Talbert puts it, they are “evil spiritual powers that are hostile to humans. They impinge on human life, controlling those outside the Christian fold and warring against those within the fold.”<sup>3</sup>

The question is whether we today accept that reality. I do. There are some things so evil in this world, and some things that happen that are so strange, especially in places in the world that are still in great spiritual darkness, that they can only be adequately explained by the existence and activity of the devil and the demonic. Spiritual warfare is a reality.

Now remember Lewis' caution against “an excessive and unhealthy interest in them.” I am *not* one of those who sees a demon behind every bush, or believes that the old comedian Flip Wilson's “The devil made me do it” is a legitimate excuse for sinful and evil behavior. But I take Scripture seriously as it describes the activity of Satan and his cohorts and the warfare they wage against the saints of God!

### ***Put on God's armor and stand . . .***

Now over the past couple of months as we've been looking at some key passages from Ephesians, we've seen Paul use the image of *walking* six times to describe the Christian's journey through life.

But here in this passage, he shifts the image, and calls on believers to put on the full armor of God and *stand!*

Paul begins this last major thought unit in this letter by exhorting his readers to **be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power** (6:10).<sup>4</sup> In the context of Ephesians, God's mighty power is His resurrection power—the same power by which He raised Christ from the dead (1:19-20; 3:20-21). It's not that we are strong in our own power; we are empowered by God as we depend on Him and yield our lives to Him so that He might work through us. In fact, it could be translated as Talbert does in his commentary, **Be empowered by the Lord and by the power of his might.**<sup>5</sup>

He then urges them to **put on the full armor of God**, in order to stand against the forces of evil (6:11-12):

**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.**

He repeats his call to put on the full armor of God, emphasizing the necessity of standing our ground in this spiritual warfare. Look at how he puts it:

- **Take your stand** (6:11).
- **Stand your ground** (6:13).
- **Stand** (6:13).
- **Stand firm** (6:14).

What Paul is doing here is like the ancient general's speech to his troops before a battle.<sup>6</sup> A more recent version of this was when General Norman Schwarzkopf, commander of the coalition forces in the 1991 Persian Gulf War, sent a message to his troops to rally them as Operation Desert Shield was about to transition to Operation Desert Storm, telling them that *they* must be the thunder and lightning of Desert Storm.

Paul declares that as we put on this full armor of God, the Lord empowers us to stand our ground against the enemy and his schemes. So what does this armor consist of? It is complete, with every element that would be needed in warfare in Paul's day. It includes a belt, a breastplate, shoes, a shield, a helmet, and a weapon.

The belt is **the belt of truth** (6:14a). It is the truth of God, the truth of the gospel. It's the truth about God's covenant faithfulness.<sup>7</sup> He is always true to what He has promised. Buckling the belt of truth around our waist enables us to stand firm against the enemy.

The **breastplate of righteousness** also relates to God's covenant faithfulness (6:14b). God is always right and just in His dealings, and always keeps His covenant.

The shoes are **the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace** (6:15). It's important for the soldier's feet to be protected, and this peace is related to the wholeness that salvation and God's kingdom reign bring.

The **shield of faith** provides protection from the enemy's fiery arrows (6:16). The ancient soldier's shield was often long and curved, made out of wood and covered with leather. When a line of soldiers stood shoulder to shoulder and put up their shields, it formed a barricade. Burning arrows could create a gap in that barricade, giving the enemy an opening. So before a battle, soldiers would soak their shields in water so that when they were hit by burning arrows, they wouldn't catch fire and the arrows would burn out.

Earlier in our service today we read Isaiah 59:9-20. In v. 17 of that passage, the LORD puts on **righteousness as his breastplate** and **the helmet of salvation**. Paul says we are to do the same (6:17a). The **breastplate of righteousness** protects us with God's covenant faithfulness; **the helmet of salvation** protects us with God's own security and strength!

The last item is **the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God** (6:17b). Just as Jesus used the word of God to resist the devil when the devil tempted Him in the wilderness, so should we.

And putting on this armor is to be accompanied by **pray[ing] in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests** for all the saints. Paul asked them to pray especially for him and his ministry (6:18-20).

When you look at all that Paul is saying here, isn't he telling us that *the full armor of God provides everything we need to stand firm in our struggle against the powers of evil*? He has provided it, *but we have to put it on!*

### ***Putting on the armor . . .***

So how do we put on the full armor of God?

Years ago I went through the training to lead the *MasterLife* discipleship process. One of the most helpful things to me in that training was a prayer pattern based on this passage. It goes something like this . . .

Father, help me to put on Your full armor so that I may stand against the devil's schemes, so that in the evil day I can withstand, and having done everything, to stand. So help me to stand firm, putting on the belt of truth to gird my emotions and the breastplate of righteousness to guard my heart. Help me to fit my feet with the readiness of the gospel of peace, to take up the shield of faith to quench all the flaming arrows of the evil one, to put on the helmet of salvation to guard my mind, and to take up the sword of the Spirit, which is Your word, as the weapon for my warfare. And help me to pray in the Spirit at all times with all kinds of prayers and petitions for all the saints, and for Your ministers.

I have found that to be a meaningful and very helpful prayer pattern.

### ***No armor for the back . . .***

There's one more thing about this passage that's important for us to note.

Thomas Hardcastle was a Baptist pastor in England in the 17<sup>th</sup> century—a time when that could get you thrown in jail. In fact, throughout his ministry he spent about 41 months in jail. When the Church of Christ in Broadmead at Bristol contacted him about becoming their pastor, he responded that he was willing, but one of the two things that stood in the way was that he was presently in prison for his preaching! He eventually went to Bristol and served the church for seven years until his death. During his tenure at Bristol, he was twice imprisoned for six months for being a Baptist preacher.

During his second imprisonment, he wrote a weekly letter to be read to his congregation—really a weekly sermon. In the first of those letters as he was writing about his imprisonment and how Jesus warned that His followers would face persecution, he said: “Religion is still for standing and going forward. There is no armor for the back.”<sup>8</sup>

Retreat is not an option in this spiritual warfare! To retreat is to open ourselves up for greater attack.

*The full armor of God provides everything we need to stand firm in our struggle against the powers of evil.*

The question is, are we wearing it?

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<sup>1</sup> Submitted by Mike Neifert, Lynn, Indiana, to *Leadership*, Vol. 16, No. 3 (Summer 1995), 39.

<sup>2</sup> C. S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters* (Uhrichsville, OH: Barbour Publishing, 1985 reprint), 7.

<sup>3</sup> Charles H. Talbert, *Ephesians and Colossians in the paideia Commentaries on the New Testament* series (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 169.

<sup>4</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, Scriptures quotations are from the HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION® (1984 edition).

<sup>5</sup> Talbert, 162.

<sup>6</sup> Talbert, 159.

<sup>7</sup> Talbert, 155-166. His comments have guided my interpretation of the various parts of the armor.

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.thefreelibrary.com/%22No+armor+for+the+back%22%3a+a+sermon+written+from+Prison+by+Thomas...-a0134257561> (accessed 08/30/2018).