

“The Armor of God”
Ephesians 6:10-18
February 24, 2002

Text Comment

In verses 11 and 12, which we considered last Lord’s Day morning, we have been reminded of the power and the ferocity of the adversaries we face. We too often forget our place in the great cosmic battle that is being fought out in human history, with all human beings, wittingly or unwittingly, serving as the foot soldiers of two great armies. We too often forget what Paul is emphasizing here: viz. that the great issue of our lives is not our own peace and happiness, but the fortunes of the spiritual kingdom of which we are a part. When we became Christians we enlisted! And a battle is now raging in which we are called to fight. Happily, we already know that we are on the winning side! In verses 13-18 we are told how to fight effectively, what resources we have been given with which to prevail in battle against the enemies of God. All of these are summed up as the full armor of God, first mentioned in v. 11 and then again in v. 13.

Remember, Paul would have been thoroughly familiar with the appearance of a Roman legionnaire. Indeed, in view of the fact that Paul was under arrest in Rome when he wrote this letter, some have wondered if there weren’t a soldier standing nearby at the very moment Paul penned these words. He would look up at his guard, at what he was wearing, and then look down at his paper once again and write another sentence about the Christian’s armor or equipment.

- v.13 We have already read in 5:16 that “the days are evil.” Paul is thinking about our present situation, though by “evil day” in the singular, he may also be thinking about the concentration of evil either in some particular historical moment or at the end of the world. Even then the Christian will stand and can stand against even principalities and powers if he or she is clothed in this armor.
- v.14 The command “to stand” is the main thought of these verses. It has been mentioned already twice, in vv. 11 and 13.
- v.15 We are dealing with a metaphor, of course, in all of these references to specific pieces of armor. We ought not to spend time trying to figure out why, for example, the breastplate is righteousness and truth is a belt. Actually, much of the language that Paul uses here is influenced more by the Old Testament than by any particular understanding of the armor of a Roman soldier. For example, the shoes – presumably the military boots – go with “the gospel of peace” because of Isa. 52:7: “How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news, who proclaim peace...” “Readiness,” then, suggests that the gospel prepares one, or makes one ready for combat with the evil one. In Isa. 11:5 it is said about the Messiah that “righteousness will be his belt.” And in the LXX, the Greek translation of the OT which Paul is using here, that same verse continues: “with truth bound around his sides.” The Lord of Hosts is, in the OT, often depicted as a warrior doing battle on behalf of his people and often as clothed in armor.

- v.17 The particular term for sword that Paul employs here refers to the sharp, short sword carried into combat by the Roman soldier. It was the primary offensive weapon for close combat.
- v.18 The NIV begins v. 18 as if it were a new sentence, but actually it is not. There is no main verb, but rather two participles: “praying” and “keeping alert.” The main verb is still the imperative “Stand firm, then,…” in v. 14. That tells us that v. 18 goes with what has gone before and is a continuation of the thought about the whole armor of God. As the sword is a weapon, so is prayer. To pray “...in the spirit...” is to pray with the guidance and the help of the Holy Spirit. Remember how much a Trinitarian Paul is in Ephesians. We are to pray in or by the Holy Spirit – in dependence upon him – to the Father, in the name of the Son.

Taken as a whole, the exhortation to put on the armor of God, which is another way of saying what Paul said in v. 10: “be strong in the Lord and his mighty power,” is intended to convey the fact that the necessary resources for this battle we must fight against the devil and his powers have all been provided us in the gospel of Christ. In general, as we noted last week, “To put on the armor of God” means the same thing as, in 4:24, “to put on the new man or the new self.” That is, it means to live out of and according to and in the reality of that new life that God has given us in Jesus Christ by the Holy Spirit. Paul is applying the reality of our new circumstances, of our new situation in Christ, of our peace with God, of our confident assurance of eternal life, of our relationship with God as Father, as Savior, as Advocate, as Comforter, as King and Master to our daily lives as Christians and, in particular, to our struggle against the powers of evil in this world.

It is because “putting on the armor of God” simply means living our lives in the full reality of and in faithfulness to the gospel of Christ, simply means living in the full light of what God has done for us and given to us, that, through the ages, Christian writers have written great treatises on the Christian life under the guise of explaining what Paul means here by each piece of the armor of God.

The Puritan classic of William Gurnall, *The Christian in Complete Armour*, in my edition runs to 1,189 pages of double column and relatively small type. If typeset in a more contemporary style, it would run to 2000 pages. Gurnall has attempted to draw from these few verses in Ephesians 6 an entire account of the Christian life. And there is nothing improper in that attempt. For what is the armor? It is, Paul says, truth, righteousness, peace, faith, salvation, the Word of God, and prayer. What, pray tell, is left to say about the Christian life that is not covered in those all-embrasive terms. Lloyd Jones preached 52 sermons on vv. 10-18 in his great series on Ephesians. And, taking the text, as he did, working out in detail the implication of each great general statement, elaborating the meaning of each comparison with a piece of armor, he might just as well have preached 152 more sermons. This is a gateway to everything about the Christian life.

And, so, it seems to me that we ought, instead, to consider, with Paul, the main point of his famous metaphor of the Christian in full armor, rather than to use it as an invitation to talk about anything or everything concerning the Christian life.

And the main point is clearly this: we will defeat the devil and his powers, we will live as we should, we will enjoy the blessing of God, *to the extent that every day we live in the full, active engagement with and according to the reality of our new life in Christ*. Paul is not so much here giving us specific instructions about how to beat back this particular temptation of the devil or how to prevail in this particular struggle or that. It is not Paul's purpose that we figure out exactly what the arrows are or precisely how we are to wield our shield against them.

What Paul is saying in this great metaphor, and saying over and over again for emphasis, is that Christians live the Christian life, they live godly and fruitful lives, no matter the opposition of the evil one, *when and only when they are really, decidedly, purposefully, intentionally, and thoroughly Christians in heart, speech, and behavior*, that is when they actually live their day to day lives in the full confidence of all that God has done for them, given to them, and promised them.

Every Christian knows that we often do not live that way. We do not live firmly believing all that we have been told, conscious of and alive to the reality of our new life in Christ, absolutely convinced that every promise God has made to us will be kept and kept perfectly. Far too often it is otherwise. We forget what God has done, what he has given, what he has promised and live in this way or that as if we were not Christians at all.

That is what Paul is saying. Be Christians, really be a Christian, all the time and in every way and the Devil will have no hold on you. You see, Paul says, put on *God's* armor. It isn't yours. It's his. The armor is everything *God has given you, of himself and of his gifts*. Each piece of armor is some divine gift or some divine virtue or some divinely appointed means of access to God: truth, righteousness, peace, salvation; even faith, which we exercise, is not only God's gift to us, as Paul already said in 2:8, but it is the means by which we obtain all the rest of his gifts. Prayer is our action, but what it is is access to God himself and his power on our behalf.

It would take too long to demonstrate this fully, but every dimension of the Christian life mentioned here – truth, righteousness, peace, salvation, faith – has already made its appearance in Ephesians. We have already been taught that each of these things is part of the gracious gift of new life that God has given us. We've heard, of course, a great deal about salvation already in Ephesians. "For by grace you were saved through faith..." But consider "truth" as, for example, in 5:9 where we read that truth is part of the fruit of the light in which Christians now live.

The whole armor of God is God's salvation in all its parts. And putting on that armor is simply to live in the full realization of that salvation in all its parts. *To put on the armor of God is nothing more nor less than to preach the gospel over to yourself and live in obedience to your own sermon*. It is to remember the promises of God and live accordingly. It is to apply to each momentary situation in life the reality of your knowledge of God and his love, your forgiveness in Jesus Christ, and the presence with you of the Holy Spirit.

There is not a weakness in your life, a place where you are susceptible to the temptations of the evil one, but the gospel, if only you will believe it and practice it, furnishes a completely adequate defense.

There is not a problem or struggle in your life, something that threatens to unman you or demoralize you or nullify your assurance of salvation that the gospel does not have an entirely satisfactory solution for.

There is not a sin that bedevils you that you cannot put to death with the weapons that the gospel furnishes you. There is not a suggestion that the devil ever plants in your mind for which the gospel does not have a decisive and utterly satisfying answer. *But, and this is Paul's point, you must put the gospel on, you must preach it to yourself.*

When we went to Scotland in 1975, Florence and I met in church a lovely couple, Gordon and Myrtle Anderson-Smith. Myrtle worked in the University Library and so I would see her day by day. Gordon was working on his own Ph.D. in New Testament at Manchester University in England, though living in Aberdeen. By the time we got to know them, Gordon was already suffering with the brain tumor that would take his life in March of 1980 at the age of 39. He had had surgery for a cyst in his brain years before, but now the tumor had returned with a vengeance. Very interestingly, the onset of his final illness followed closely on his completing a series of sermons on Ephesians 6:10-18 in a Manchester church.

Gordon was a young man with a great deal of drive. He believed that he had been called to be a minister and he was committed to the best possible preparation for that calling. He loved books and was building a great library. I remember one day finding him in an Aberdeen bookstore that was having a sale, having a minor argument with Myrtle over the number of books he intended to buy! Before I knew him, he had both completed his divinity studies in Scotland and studied at Westminster Seminary in Philadelphia for a year. And now he was engaged in his Ph.D. studies. Interestingly, his thesis was to be a study of the spiritual forces of evil, "the principalities and powers" in the writings of the Apostle Paul. My pastor, Mr. Still, who was also Gordon's pastor, wondered out loud in a sermon whether the devil was attacking Gordon in particular to keep him from exposing him in a church that had largely forgotten about spiritual powers and the reality of the Christian's contest with the evil one. He was devoted to his studies. But illness continued to derail him. He was in and out of hospitals, he lost much of the use of one eye, suffered paralyzing headaches and, finally, began to have trouble even writing legibly.

Among Gordon's papers was found a brief survey that he himself had written of the last years of his life, from 1971-1979. This is all he wrote:

1971-1972	Westminster
1973	Marriage – good year
1974	Operation
1975	Sickness
1976	Bereavement (his mother died that year)
1977	Bereavement (his father died that year) [Gordon had a particularly close and affectionate relationship with his godly parents.]
1978	Mental seize-up
1979	Depression

Then, underneath that, in letters “as child-like in shape as they [were] in size” he wrote this comment: “GOD HAS UNDERTAKEN.”

There it is! My brothers and sisters, there it is! Do you see it? The armor of God! And a man who had put it on. In one of his sermons on Ephesians 6:10-18, Gordon had taken up the idea of the “helmet of salvation.”

“What does that mean? [He asked]? I think it means this: ‘A mind preoccupied with thoughts of our great salvation.’” [Sinclair Ferguson, *Undaunted Spirit*, 119]

That is what the armor of God is, taking his great salvation to heart and thinking and living accordingly! And wearing *that* armor, even the devil cannot bring a man down, even a man who dies young of a wasting disease.

And that is what the armor of God must be for you as well. A mind preoccupied with thoughts of your great salvation. A mind chock full of the promises God has made to you and *believing every one* of them. A mind filled up with the things that belong to our peace. A mind conscious of the teaching of the Word of God and ready to spring into action at any moment on the strength of that teaching.

The Devil’s scheme, perhaps, is to bring you to feel alone, isolated. Put on the armor of God. What has God given you, what has Christ given you for this? What have you to answer the evil one at this moment?

“I will never leave you or forsake you,” Jesus said.

“When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you.... For I am the Lord your God, the holy one of Israel, your savior.”

When the Devil would persuade you to be discouraged, sad, and tempts you to think that it seems as if the world is weighing you down and you cannot find any joy and gladness in your life, put on the armor of God.

“For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen but what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.”

When the Evil One brings against you great temptations and you do not know if you can resist them, put on the armor of God.

“For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who had been tempted in every way, just as we are – yet was without sin. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.”

“God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.”

“Father, not my will, but yours be done.”

When Satan conspires to make you face the opposition of others, put on the armor of God.

“...if God is for us, who can be against us?”

When the Evil One accuses you and gleefully rubs your nose in the full measure of your sin and makes you wonder if God can possibly still love a child as rebellious, as unworthy, as unprofitable as you are, put on the whole armor of God.

“However, to the man who does not work, but trusts God *who justifies the wicked*, his faith is credited as righteousness.”

“...though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow”

“As far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us.”

When the Devil entices you and makes the world beckon, put on the armor of God.

“What does it profit a person if he gain the whole world and lose his soul?”

“The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever.”

When Satan insinuates into your heart the fear of death, put on God’s armor.

“To live is Christ and to die is gain.” “To die is better by far.”

“Today you shall be with me in Paradise.”

“To be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord.”

When the Devil puts you at ease you find yourself succumbing to the desire to lead an easier life and growing content with that measure of godliness to which you have so far attained, put on the armor of God.

“...since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus...who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the Right Hand of the throne of God.”

“We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ to give an account of the deeds done in the body, whether good or evil.”

And when, finally, the Devil, the Master-liar, causes you to doubt that you are a Christian at all, put on the armor of God.

“I give them eternal life, [says the Lord], and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand.”

“I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him for that day.”

And, on and on it goes. No matter the problem, the affliction, the temptation; no matter the scheme that Satan tries on you, there is in the gospel, in what God has done for you, given to you, and promised to you the perfect defense and the perfect counter-attack.

“And when the strife is fierce, the warfare long,
Steals on the ear the distant triumph-song,
And hearts are brave again, and arms are strong.”

There is the experience of Christian men and women putting on the armor of God and standing fast in the teeth of the worst that Satan can contrive to do! Filling the mind with the gospel of Christ, preaching it over again and again to our own hearts, enumerating the exceeding great and precious promises of the Lord, *and then* living accordingly; living in keeping with what God has done and said; living out this great salvation that Jesus Christ suffered and died to give us. To put on the armor of God is to be determined to think and to live *like a Christian* in everything; to be a follower of Christ in every way, to behave like a child of your heavenly Father ought to behave. To put on the armor of God is another way to say “walk with the Lord” or “live by faith.”

God and Christ and the Holy Spirit have done these extraordinary things for you, exploits that for their mystery and love and grandeur will be sung for eternity to come. Live like it! They have made these breathtaking promises to you. Live like it! They have drawn near to be with you. Live like it! Think like it! Feel like it!

That is what Paul means by putting on the armor of God or putting on the new man.

Be what thou seemest; live thy creed.
Hold up to earth the torch divine.

Listen to Samuel Rutherford put on the armor of God. Here he is telling a friend and, no doubt, himself, why he must never slack in fighting the good fight and standing firm in warfare against the Devil.

1. Weeping and gnashing of teeth in utter darkness, or heaven’s joy.
2. There is sand in your glass yet, and your sun is not yet gone down.

3. Consider what joy and peace are in Christ's service.
4. To have mercy on your seed, and a blessing on your house.
5. To have true honor, and name on earth that casteth a sweet smell.
6. How you will rejoice when Christ lays down your head under his chin and dries your face and welcomes you to glory and happiness.
7. Sin's joys are but night-dreams, thoughts, vapors, and shadows.
8. What dignity it is to be a son [or daughter] of God.
9. That your enemies should be the tail and you the head. [Letter CXXII, 247-248]

There is armor enough, brothers and sisters. Put it on!