

# THE ARMOR OF GOD

*By Jim Mersereau*

In chapter six of his letter to the Ephesians, the Apostle Paul teaches a very straight-forward lesson concerning the reality of spiritual warfare. Paul's object in this passage of Scripture is to make it clear that in addition to what we experience in the physical realm, there is also a great deal of corresponding activity taking place in the spiritual realm that is actually linked to, and mirrors, what takes place on earth. Paul wants his readers to understand that the real battle is a spiritual one.

## ***The battle is real***

*"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 the 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." Ephesians 6:10-13*

Verse ten is interesting because here Paul issues an imperative command. He tells us to "be strong". Paul commands us to be strong and he tells us that the strength we are to be strong with is the Lord's mighty power. The mighty power that raised Jesus from the grave and gave Him the ultimate victory over death has also been made available to His followers so we can win the spiritual battles we are involved in every day. But, we have to make a decision, day-by-day and moment-by-moment, to access the power and apply it to the situations of our lives.

Even though Satan is already a defeated foe, and his destiny of spending eternity in the lake of fire is a foregone conclusion, until that time he is actively trying to keep people from faith in Christ so he can drag them to hell with him. And, he is also doing his best to make the followers of Jesus as miserable and as ineffective as he can. So people are subjected to constant spiritual assault by the forces of darkness and the only way we can withstand the assault, and win the battle, is if we make a decision to access the spiritual power the Lord makes available to us. Although the final outcome of the war is certain, there are still many daily battles that must be fought. The rest of the passage deals with how to fight those battles.

In verse eleven Paul begins to explain how to do it. He writes, "*Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes.*" When Paul writes about the "schemes" of Satan he's talking about strategies and tricks the devil will use to entice and fool people. You see, evil seldom appears evil until it accomplishes its goal. The Bible says that Satan comes to us disguised as an angel of light. At first his presence never seems evil and his ways appear innocent and fun. He then uses tricks and clever strategies to fool us into doing things we shouldn't. Once he gains a small foothold in our lives by making the sin appear attractive, fun, desirable and even legitimate, he then begins to lead us deeper and deeper into that sin. It's only after it has entered our

lives, spread like a cancer, and done its damage that we begin to see it for the ugly thing it is but by then it's too late. In verse eleven Paul cautions us to be aware that is how Satan operates.

In verse twelve he goes on to explain that the real battle we are engaged in is not against people in the physical realm. The *real* struggle we face is not the life issues of sexual immorality, addictions, greed, etc. Those are merely symptoms of a much deeper spiritual battle. Paul explains that there are actually mighty powers of darkness lurking in the unseen world that have power, authority, and influence over events in the seen world. They are wicked spirits, evil rulers, demonic authorities who are real, powerful, and whose influence should not be underestimated. They can cause great harm to those who allow themselves to fall under their power.

An important application which comes from this truth is that people are not the enemy. We are not fighting against people but against Satan and his demonic forces. People often succumb to Satan's deceit and tricks, and consequently become tools in his hand to carry out his evil schemes, but the real enemy is the one behind the evil deed, not the people being used to implement it.

In verse thirteen Paul quickly returns us to the subject of the armor of God and our need to be clothed in it. We need to be clothed in this armor so we can take a stand against those powerful forces of darkness, and still be standing when the battle is over.

Let me be clear here that the battle Paul was referring to is the everyday battles that you and I engage in. He was talking about the daily temptations to sin and rebel against God; the momentary weaknesses that lead to things like lust, theft, anger, or any of the various other temptations we are exposed to on a near continuous basis. Paul was teaching that the armor of God that he is about to instruct us on will help us to resist those temptations and to still be standing tall for Jesus when it's over. The battle is real; it's against mighty powers of darkness in the spiritual realm, and we need help to fight it. Paul then teaches about the armor of God that is always available to all believers in Christ.

### ***God will equip us for the battle***

*“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. In addition to all this, take 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 6:14-17*

As Paul was writing this letter he was being held as a prisoner in Rome, actually chained day and night to a Roman guard. The standard uniform of a Roman soldier in that day included a breastplate, heavy belt, foot protection, helmet and shield. In your mind's eye you can probably visualize Paul as he was writing this section of his letter, glancing at his guard and making the connection between physical armor and spiritual armor. Paul's readers too were very familiar with the armor of a Roman soldier and so they would have immediately made the connection as well.

Using his Roman guard for a model, Paul goes on to describe the six pieces of spiritual armor we need in order to fight our battles against Satan and his demonic forces,

and he lists them in the order that a Roman soldier would have put them on.

1. In verse fourteen Paul instructs us to put on **the belt of truth**. In those days the Roman soldier wore a loose fitting tunic that was essentially a dress that hung down to his knees. But since combat in those days was mostly hand-to-hand, the tunic would get in his way and hinder movement of his legs as he was fighting. So in preparation for battle he would gather up the tunic and tie it securely with, or tuck it into, the belt he wore around his waist.

Paul's analogy with respect to spiritual armor is that the belt that pulls up all the loose ends that could hinder us is the belt of truth, or truthfulness. We are to view our situations through the lens of truth. We are to make no excuses for ourselves or in any way attempt to rationalize ungodly behavior. We fix our minds on what we know to be true, as taught by God, and we refuse to allow Satan to trip us up with clever lies and distortions. Our thinking and our conduct is guided by truth.

2. Verse fourteen also instructs us to put on **the breastplate of righteousness**. For the Roman soldier the breastplate was a thick leather vest that covered the full torso and therefore protected the heart and other vital organs. Paul's point for us is that God's righteousness will protect our heart.

When we have clothed ourselves in the righteousness of Jesus then our heart will be protected. This is an important point because it is in our heart, that special place where thoughts, emotions and feelings all combine to determine our behavior, that we ultimately decide whether or not we will honor God with our actions. If we have the habit of living in obedience to Christ then He will clothe us in His righteousness and Satan will not be able to penetrate the protective covering of righteousness to get to our heart. When godly righteousness is part of our lives, when it is something we put on every day, we gain protection from Satan's evil strategies. That's why daily prayer and Bible study are so important. Being clothed in the righteousness of Jesus protects our heart and helps us to stand strong against the enemy.

3. In verse fifteen we are instructed to put on **the shoes of peace**. Roman soldiers wore thick sandals with studded soles that helped them grip the ground in combat. That footwear gave them sure footing as they engaged the enemy. The peace that comes from the Gospel provides us with a sure footing as we engage our enemy Satan.

Because we understand the Good News of what Jesus Christ did for us, we now have a sense of peace and confidence as we face the struggle with the enemy of our souls. We know we can have the victory in every situation if we will just rely upon the Lord, and that gives us a great sense of confidence and security – a sure footing as we face-down Satan and his demonic forces. That's the power to resist. It's what Paul was writing about here. Because we understand the power available to us through Christ, we have a great sense of peace and confidence and we can firmly stand our ground.

4. In verse sixteen Paul instructs us to also take up **the shield of faith**. Even with all the pieces of armor already mentioned, the soldier still needed to carry a large shield. The shield was a big, oblong piece approximately four feet high and two feet wide. It was made of thick leather and was held in a wood or iron frame.

In those days the most common form of attack, especially at the beginning of the

battle, was for an enemy to launch a barrage of flaming arrows. This would start brush fires all around the soldier and would also catch his clothes on fire if the arrow hit him; so just before the start of battle the Roman soldier would soak his leather shield in water to help extinguish the flaming arrows of the enemy.

Paul reminds us in this verse that our enemy also launches flaming arrows at us. His are the flaming arrows of temptation, doubt, anger, lust, despair, trials and frustrations. For Christians our shield is the shield of our faith in Christ. It is our total reliance on God and complete willingness to do whatever He asks of us, even if it's not easy and doesn't seem to make sense. We choose to believe His promises to us and to trust Him no matter what we are faced with. We acknowledge that our God understands Satan and his schemes much better than we do and so when it comes to standing against Satan, we place our complete faith in God and do exactly what He tells us to do. Our faith in Him becomes our shield against the flaming arrows of the enemy.

5. Verse seventeen then gives us instruction about **the helmet of salvation**. The helmet protected the soldier's head. Roman helmets were usually made of thick leather with a brass or iron frame. No arrow or sword could penetrate a good helmet. Paul's point is that our salvation should act as a helmet to protect our mind as we engage in the battle.

We should remember that Paul was writing this letter to people who were already believers. So he isn't saying that his readers should *get* salvation but rather they should *utilize* the salvation they already have as a means of protecting their minds when they're being assaulted by Satan.

With the assurance of our salvation firmly planted in our mind, we can face the current attack from Satan with the firm understanding that we are already assured of ultimate victory, we are going to heaven no matter what, and Satan can do nothing about it. This current battle we are facing is just another attempt on his part to harass us and make us miserable on the journey, but it's all really a bit silly and futile because he has already lost the battle for our soul. So with that understanding we can look at Satan as sort of an evil little clown prancing around the edges of our path annoying us, throwing stones at us, but not able to prevent us from arriving at our ultimate destination in heaven. We are saved and there's nothing he can do about it. Our salvation is the helmet that protects our mind and helps us keep this spiritual battle in its proper perspective.

6. Finally, verse seventeen tells us to arm ourselves with **the sword of the Spirit**. Don't miss the point that the sword is the only offensive weapon we're given. Up to this point all of our equipment has been purely defensive in nature, designed to protect us, but the sword is made to attack.

The sword, the offensive weapon God gives us to attack Satan with, is the Bible. As we use the Word of God against the devil the Holy Spirit gives it penetrating power and a sharp edge so it is an effective weapon against Satan. When Satan brings the battle to us and attempts to tempt, trick or deceive us, we have a weapon with which to attack him right back.

Jesus modeled this strategy for us in Matthew 4:7-10. There we find Jesus in the wilderness for forty days while Satan repeatedly tested and tempted Him. In response, Jesus used the Word of God as a weapon against Satan and we read that Satan was

defeated.

We've been given the same weapon that Jesus used. We too can use the Word of God as a weapon against Satan. If Satan comes at you with the temptation to cheat on your income tax you can hit him right back with the eighth Commandment, "*God said, 'You shall not steal.'*" If he is enticing you to envy your neighbor's new car you tell him, "*God said 'You shall not covet.'*" If Satan is trying to convince you that you may as well give into temptation because you won't be able to resist it forever anyway, you can quote 1 Corinthians 10:13, "*God will not allow me to be tempted beyond that which I can endure, but when I am tempted He will provide a way out so I can stand up under it.*"

And if you're just plain tired of the Devil harassing you and you want him to go away, hit him with James 4:7 and command him to leave you alone: "*Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.*"

We prepare ourselves for the battle with the belt of truth, determined to stand for what we know is true. We cloth ourselves in the righteousness of Jesus and that protects our heart from temptation. We have sure footing to stand strong in the battle because we are secure in Christ. We use our faith in God as a shield to ward off the flaming arrows of the enemy. We protect our mind with the assurance of our salvation, and we use our knowledge of God's Word as a weapon against the devil. That is the armor of God and we must make it a point to put in on every day. How do we do that? Paul tells us as he closes the letter.

### ***The importance of prayer***

*"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 saints. Pray also for me, that whenever I open my mouth, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should."* Ephesians 6:18-20

Prayer is the answer. When we intentionally place ourselves before God in a condition of prayer, He uses that to outfit us in His armor. We are to pray at all times and on every occasion. In other words, there is no time and no situation in which we do not need to be dressed in the armor of God. So we pray about everything. We are to stay alert, aware of every situation the enemy may try to use against us. We are to pray for ourselves and for others.

As we recognize a battle brewing, we prayerfully review the items of God's armor and ask the Lord to clothe us in them. Your prayer could be something like this:

"Lord, as I face this situation I ask you to help me see it clearly so I can stand firmly in the truth. I ask you to protect my heart with the righteousness of Jesus. I ask you to give me a great sense of peace and confidence so I can stand firm. Please strengthen my faith in You and help me to rely completely on You in this situation. Help me to remember that I am saved, a child of God headed toward my real home in heaven, and that this current battle is just a little skirmish along the way. And bring to my mind the appropriate Bible verses that I have read and memorized so I can use them as a weapon against the evil one."

And then you go boldly forward to meet your enemy head-on. With confidence and assurance you stand up to him, you resist him, you hit him with the appropriate Bible verses, and then you watch him run away. Prayer is the means by which God equips us for the battle.

Someday we will be in a perfect paradise where there are no struggles. In the meantime we live every day in the midst of great spiritual warfare – a battle for the hearts, minds and souls of men, women, boys and girls, and we are all part of that battle whether we want to be or not.

Paul began this passage by commanding us to be strong in the Lord. That command presumes that God is eager and willing to *make* us strong and that any lack of strength is completely our own faults. *We can have* a great sense of peace and confidence in the midst of the battle, but it will only come from the Lord and we will only get it if we are properly prepared. Don't let Satan catch you without your armor on.

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(For an expanded teaching on this subject refer to chapter fourteen of the book, "Walking With Paul, A Journey Through The Lessons Of Ephesians" by Jim Mersereau. Available at [www.JimMersereauBooks.com](http://www.JimMersereauBooks.com))