



## A Post Tenebras Lux Study on Ephesians...

### The Whole Armor of God...

### Ephesians 6:10-24

<sup>NIV</sup> **Ephesians 6:10**...Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. <sup>11</sup> Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. <sup>12</sup> 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. <sup>13</sup> 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. <sup>14</sup> Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, <sup>15</sup> and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. <sup>16</sup> In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. <sup>17</sup> Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. <sup>18</sup> 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. <sup>19</sup> 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, <sup>20</sup> for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should. <sup>21</sup> Tychicus, the dear brother and faithful servant in the Lord, will tell you everything, so that you also may know how I am and what I am doing. <sup>22</sup> I am sending him to you for this very purpose, that you may know how we are, and that he may encourage you. <sup>23</sup> Peace to the brothers, and love with faith from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>24</sup> Grace to all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with an undying love.

This morning we come to the conclusion of our study on the Epistle to the Ephesians. If I could remind of any one thing about our study, it would be that the Epistle to the Ephesians has been about the marvelous unity we have in the

body of Christ. Now, I say that knowing full well that we do not agree on everything in this place. I say that knowing full well that churches across the Metroplex do not agree on all the points of dogma that are so important to us here at Arlington Presbyterian. But on the other hand, I know full well that God does have a faithful remnant that holds on to the truth of the gospel just as vigorously as did the Reformers and our Presbyterian forefathers.

Now, one of the things that has been most interesting in the political proceedings of the past few days has been the way in which the political pundits and practitioners have made a point of referring to the intentions of the founding fathers with regard to matters like impeachment. It is amazing to me that there can be such a diverse understanding of something that seemed so important to the founding fathers. But more importantly, the same is true of the Apostles and the Reformers. They were very clear on the core of Christian thought and yet today there is a wide difference in the modern interpretation of that which is important and that which is secondary.

For Paul, the primary issue was the gospel.

<sup>NIV</sup> **1 Corinthians 1:17**...For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel-- not with words of human wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power.

For Luther the primary issue was the gospel. He said it was the article by which the church stands or falls.

**"Whoever departs from the article of justification does not know God and is an idolator," wrote Luther. "For when this article has been taken away, nothing remains but error, hypocrisy, godlessness, and idolatry, although it may seem**

**to be the height of truth, worship of God, holiness, etc."** (What Luther Says [St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1959], Vol. II, pp. 702-704).

For Calvin it was the same. He said it was the hinge upon which everything turned.

The theme of justification was therefore more lightly touched upon because it was more to the point to understand first how little devoid of good works is the faith, through which alone we obtain free righteousness by the mercy of God; and what is the nature of the good works of the saints, with which part of this question is concerned. Therefore we must now discuss these matters thoroughly. And we must so discuss them as to bear in mind that this is the main hinge on which religion turns, so that we devote the greater attention and care to it. For unless you first of all grasp what your relationship to God is, and the nature of his judgment concerning you, you have neither a foundation on which to establish your salvation nor one on which to build piety toward God. (Calvin's Institutes 3.11.1)

Now, I mentioned all that because as we consider the issue of unity in this place, we have to consider what it is that unites us. I was speaking to Mike and Leslie Hamlin at our care group the other night and Leslie said something that caused me to reflect all over again the marvelous unity we have in Christ. She said, **"You know every time we read the Apostle's Creed or we read from the Confession of Faith, I can't help but think about the millions of believers that have read the same thing before us. I can't help but think about how we are joining in with them in our worship."**

That is so true. But really it is greater than even that, because the Apostle's creed and the Confession were not always available to all Christians. But the ideas they represent were certainly available. When we enter into worship we are, in fact, joining in the worship of all the ages. We are joining in the worship that is going

on non-stop in eternity. We are entering into the worship of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. We are entering into the worship of Samuel and David. We are entering into the worship of John the Baptist and Paul of Tarsus. We are entering into the worship of Athanasius and Anselm, and Luther, Calvin and Knox. We have been incorporated into the glorious body of Christ, the church and because we have we are urged by Paul in verse 10 to remember all that has happened:

<sup>NIV</sup> **Ephesians 6:10**...Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power.

Notice, Paul reminds the Ephesians to be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. He does that as an encouragement to base their reliance on the Lord. So much of what we hear today is man-centered. We are reminded over and over again of all the things we must do to be spiritually strong; we are reminded of those things we must do to grow and be powerful, productive Christians. But Paul is concerned that we rest in the Lord. It is an often repeated phrase in the Psalms.

<sup>NIV</sup> **Psalm 71:5**...For you have been my hope, O Sovereign LORD, my confidence since my youth. <sup>6</sup> From birth I have relied on you; you brought me forth from my mother's womb. I will ever praise you.

<sup>NIV</sup> **Psalm 119:7**...I will praise you with an upright heart as I learn your righteous laws. <sup>8</sup> I will obey your decrees; do not utterly forsake me.

We are to trust in the Lord's strength. We are to rely on His goodness and His mercy. But that does not mean that we are to sit passively and make no effort to grow. All of the Christian life is a raging battle. Yes, we are to rest in His strength

but He has supplied us means to grow and we are to use them. Now, it is interesting that refers to these helps as if they are military provisions.

<sup>NIV</sup> **Ephesians 6:11**...Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes.

Paul reminds to the Ephesians to put on the “**full armor**” of God. He is doing so to remind them there are different elements of the armor God has provided. He is also doing so to remind them that this armor is complete; it is full and not lacking in any of the protection that we need.

And there is a specific reason that we need to put on this armor. That reason is that there is a real scheming devil out there. He has plans and he is out there seeking out ways to implement them. It seems to me that there are two extremes that we ought to avoid. First, we ought to avoid the idea that the devil is so powerless that he is no longer to be given any consideration. Peter reminds us that that is really not the case.

<sup>NIV</sup> **1 Peter 5:8**...Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. <sup>9</sup> Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings.

It is a sobering thought to consider that there is really an enemy out there. It seems to me that whenever we forget that we are in trouble. When we fail to recognize that the enemy really exists and that he really wants to do us in we are always shocked when he makes his presence known.

My dad always used to tell a story about his rude introduction to the presence of the enemy. In World War II, his first glimpse of the reality of the presence of the enemy occurred the first day he arrived in New Guinea. He got off a ship and was picked up by a troop transport to be taken to the place where his unit was bivouacked.

The truck he was riding in had about thirty men sitting in the back. There was a young Lieutenant standing up in the back of the truck and he was barking out instructions to the new men. The truck had gone about a mile and the men were listening intently to the young officer. All of sudden, my dad said they heard one lone shot and the Lieutenant was stuck right about where in my dad's words "**the straps of his overalls would have crossed**".

The men hunkered down looking for the origin of the shot and there was only one isolated palm tree about a hundred yards away. One man on a heavy caliber machine gun blasted away at the tree. My dad limbs and leaves began to drop and after a few seconds a single very dead Japanese sniper fell to the ground.

My dad said it was the single best lesson he learned in the whole war. There really was an enemy and he had every intention of inflicting damage.

But secondly, we ought not to be so fearful that we attempt nothing for God. Indeed we have provision for battling Satan and his minions; that provision is the full armor of God. But Paul is focusing here on the first idea.

<sup>NIV</sup> **Ephesians 6:12**...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.

So often, we think in terms of our enemies as being people. But Paul says that our enemies are not **“flesh and blood”**. Rather our enemies are **“powers and spiritual forces of wickedness in heavenly places”**. It is fashionable today to refuse to talk about demonic influence. If you do you will be viewed as some sort of wild-eyed charismatic, but that is not the position that Paul took. He says our real enemies are spiritual.

As a result, God has granted us weapons of warfare. He has granted us weapons that must be used if we are to withstand his onslaughts.

<sup>NIV</sup> **Ephesians 6:13**...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.

The armor that Paul has in mind here is the full battle armor of the Roman soldier. It is weaponry that is both defensive and offensive. We are to don this armor because there are **“evil days”** ahead. I would remind you that Paul’s ultimate desire is that we endure in the faith. We know that from his repeated use of the phrase **“stand”**.

<sup>NIV</sup> **Ephesians 6:11**...Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes...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 around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place,

In particular, Paul wants the Ephesians to be able to stand in the “**evil day**”. Now there are a couple of ideas that he could be communicating here. Some scholars think he is talking about a day of great future judgment, like the judgment of God. Others think that he is talking about those days of heavy distress and evil that fall upon us as individual Christians. I think that better fits the context. There is not a one of us that will not face such days. It may be that you are young and inexperienced and you may be thinking that the battle is not harsh, that the days are not evil. If that is the case, I want to offer two words of admonition to you: wait...prepare.

If you intend to live righteously, if you intend to serve the Lord with any kind of diligence, you will face the onslaught of Satan. And when the “**evil day**” comes it will be ferocious. If you do not believe me, believe the grizzled old battle-hardened veterans we have here. Ask Jim and Polly Lovett, or Alna Jones or John and Lydia Duke or Avis Brice. They will tell you there are “**evil days**” out there. Days that are so singular in their intensity that it seems like the very foundations will be shaken. And how do you survive such days? You survive them by resting the strength of the Lord and by employing His full provision, the armor of God. With all of that having been said, let’s look at that armor.

<sup>NIV</sup> **Ephesians 6:14**...Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place,

The idea of girding the loins carries with the notion of a belt. In Roman times it was a substantial belt made of leather. It accomplished two things. First, it held in place the flowing garments that soldiers wore and kept them from being

hampered when they marched. Secondly, it provided a place to support other weapons.

Now the Christian belt is described as truth and there may be one or two ideas associated with it. First, Paul has made a point throughout this epistle that Christians should speak the truth and we should. Our words to believers and unbelievers alike ought to be filled with truth. But early in the church, most commentators understood this to refer to the truth of the gospel. The understood it to refer to the truth of Christ's atoning work. Now, the interesting thing here is that there is no **"the"** in the text. The word truth has no definite article. Usually when that happens the word picks up a more generic sense. So some scholars say that here it should be translated sincerity or integrity.

There is no place in God's glorious new society for us to be schemers or deceitful. We are to put away every sort of lying and deception; we are to be pure in our words and deeds. We are to abandon cleverness and any sort of deceit. We are not to use as Stott puts it, **"the devil's means to fight the devil"**.

Yet, both ideas are true. We should speak doctrinal truth and we should speak the truth in love to our brothers and sisters.

But we are also to put on the **"breastplate of righteousness"**.

In Paul's day, Roman soldiers wore a protective breastplate. It was usually made of leather and then covered with metal. It was vital to protect a soldier's most vulnerable areas.

Now our first thought here is to say that this is the imputed righteousness of Christ. And indeed we are to appropriate his alien righteousness. We have been covered by His blood and His righteousness has been put on our account. We are to rest in it. But there is also the sense here that we are to be personally righteous. We are to strive to be holy. We can rest in Christ's righteousness and if we do not pursue personal holiness our armor will have chinks in it. It is amazing how people today take the command to be holy so lightly. It is not that they wrestle with it and recognize the difficulty. Rather, it is that they do not so much as even consider it. But the breastplate of righteousness includes both the imputed righteousness of Christ and the righteousness of our own character and conduct. I love the words of Findlay when he says:

The completeness of pardon for past offence and the integrity of character that belong to the justified life are woven together into an impenetrable mail.

Oh, the joy of having lived a life of purity. Oh, the joy that would come from a clear conscience before other men and before Satan. I think we have in the past few days seen the necessity of staying pure and above reproach. We have seen the lives of otherwise good men stained by acts of indiscretion and sin. Now, let me ask you which one of those men now wishes he had not lived more righteously. Which one of those men now thinks that the frivolity of sin was worth the pain it causes? We too are to think that way. If we have failed in our holiness, we are to muster up new courage and strength. Past failure is not to preclude us from seeking present holiness with all of our hearts.

But notice what Paul says next. There are other weapons of Christian warfare to be appropriated.

<sup>NIV</sup> **Ephesians 6:15**...and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace.

When Paul speaks of the having our feet shod with the gospel of peace, it promotes an image of the ancient footwear of Roman soldiers. They wore open-toed sandals that were fastened to their feet with leather straps. The bottom of their sandals were hobnailed. They were sort of the modern equivalent of football cleats. They were intended to give Roman soldiers sure footing on the battlefield and they were light enough to allow him to run at full-speed.

It seems with this first idea that there are two thoughts being communicated. Having our feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace could mean that we are resting in the gospel applied to us. This reassurance will give us firm footing in the evil day. Or it may mean that we should be prepared to present the gospel of peace as we go about.

Either way the truth of the gospel invites the anger of the devil. That is why the next element is so crucial. Satan's attacks will be cruel and merciless so Paul exhorts us to take up the shield of faith. The shield that Paul is referring to here is the ancient Roman shield the *scutum*. It was not the small round shield that you sometimes see in movies. It was a tall shield sometimes four or five feet high. It

had a wooden frame covered first with linen and then with leather. It was usually covered with metal on the top and on the bottom. It was specifically designed to stop arrows dipped in pitch and that is the image set forth here.

Paul says we take up this shield to quench the fiery darts of the devil. There has been a lot of speculation about what the fiery darts are but I take them, as do most commentators, to be the accusations of the devil that would rob us of our confidence in Christ. The devil is constantly slinging fiery darts that inflict our conscience and destroy our confidence. It is this shield of faith, a resolute trusting in all that Christ has accomplished on our behalf that quenches his fiery accusations.

<sup>NIV</sup> **Ephesians 6:17**...Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

Finally, Paul mentions two last things the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit.

Roman helmets were usually made of bronze or iron. They were intolerably heavy but they were vital for the soldier's protection. Often soldiers wore sponges under their helmets to help soften the weight. Roman helmets could take a direct blow from a sword and not be pierced only an ax or a hammer could penetrate it.

The Christian's helmet is his hope of salvation. We know that because Paul uses the same metaphor in 1 Thessalonians.

<sup>NIV</sup> **1 Thessalonians 5:8**...But since we belong to the day, let us be self-controlled, putting on faith and love as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet. <sup>9</sup> For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>10</sup> He died for us so that, whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with him.

The sword that Paul mentions here is the short blunt stabbing sword used by Roman soldiers. It is the two-edged *machaira*. It was used in hand to hand combat. It was never thrown.

Paul is saying our offensive weapon is the Word of God. But the Greek word that is used here is particularly related to written Scripture. The words of Scripture are our offensive weapon whether we are talking about defending ourselves against the schemes of Satan or cutting away the defenses of unconverted sinners in evangelism. All of which means that we ought to be about the task of reading and memorizing Scripture to defend ourselves and the gospel from the schemes of Satan.

Finally, Paul talks about the attitude we are to possess as we put on the armor of God. He says we are to commit ourselves to prayer. He says we are to do so all the time with all perseverance and we are to do so for all the saints.

<sup>NIV</sup> **Ephesians 6:18**...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. <sup>19</sup> 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, <sup>20</sup> for

which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should.

Now, prayer is not technically a part of the list of God's armor. Paul describes it rather a spirit of readiness with which we are to implement the use of God's armor. It is the same kind of attitude Paul is talking about in 1 Thessalonians 5.

<sup>NIV</sup> **1 Thessalonians 5:16...** Be joyful always; <sup>17</sup> pray continually; <sup>18</sup> give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. <sup>19</sup> Do not put out the Spirit's fire;

Now, the interesting thing is that Paul is bringing the subject back to Christian unity. He says that the Ephesians should be in a state of perpetual prayer and that state of prayer is to be on behalf of all the saints. They are to continuously pray for their brothers and sisters in Christ and Paul includes himself in the list as a ambassador of Christ who also needs their prayers.

Now having gone through the list together it is easy to see why we are so susceptible to the attacks of Satan. I mean think about the list of things that Paul has told us to do. He has told us to do truth, but we do not. Because of our fear of being exposed we hide our sin from one another. We are defensive and fearful of being found out.

Yet, Christ was not that way. Every description of Him is a description of sincerity and His obedience to the truth.

<sup>NAS</sup> **John 1:14...** And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.

**<sup>NIV</sup> John 14:6...Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."**

Or if we consider the personal righteousness that we are to display, we are also left licking our wounds. We know we are to be holy and yet we are not. We know we are to obey God's laws and to obey them fully, but we do not. But Christ did. He obeyed every command of God both in its application and intention. He obeyed on our behalf, so that His righteousness could be counted for righteousness that we do not possess.

And it is the same for all of Paul's commands to don the armor. It is the same for reading and memorizing the Word of God, or exercising faith to quench Satan's fiery darts. We fail and yet Christ succeeded on every level on our behalf.

There is a sense in which Christ became our armor before God. He wore a crown of thorns that He might become our helmet of salvation. His feet were pierced with cruel Roman nails that he might make our footing sure before God and in the face of Satan. His precious side was pierced that He might become of breastplate of righteousness. He absorbed in His own body both the wrath of God and the fiery darts of Satan that He might become our shield of faith. He prayed for us as our get High Priest and He ever lives to make intercession for us

before the Father and in the face of our accuser. Christ is our armor to help us stand in peace and unity together as His glorious new society.

He is all those things to us and yet we go through life so often oblivious to His glorious provision. We tend to be indolent and slothful in appropriating Him as our armor. Still, He is there. May we begin to alert to our enemy and may we be even more alert to the kindness of our Great High Priest so that we see His hand and His goodness in all the providences of our lives. When we do that we will be filled with gratitude for all that He has done and will be filled with awe and wonder for all His mercy and will be moved anew to pursue obedience.

Let's pray.