

“The Body of Armor”

Psalm 144; Ephesians 6:10-20

October 8, 2023

I'll never forget a time at Duke Divinity School where an outside speaker was arranged to give the lesson one particular day. To make matters a bit complicated, let's just say that, at the time, this particular issue was being hotly debated inside the church. The topic, to say the least, was controversial in most quarters. But here was this speaker, smiling and happy. He launched into his lesson for the day. Right from the onset, it was very clear that the speaker that day was on one particular side of this hotly-debated issue. In fact, as he got going, it became more and more clear that not only was he on a side, he was in fact going to talk about his side for the entirety of the lecture. The thing was, he was literally preaching to the choir on an issue that a great many of my classmates and I felt was unsettled. But what stuck out the most for me was how unprepared the guy was. You see, it was kind of like he was expecting a lazy river. We all like those, don't we? You hang out in a tube and just gently float around a big circle. It's very relaxing, isn't it? Well, here was this guy thinking this session would be just like a lazy river when, in fact, it was like combat.

As a matter of fact, I think that my general, day-to-day operating mode is to treat life like it was one long, languid lazy river. That each day is just designed for me to enjoy and coast through the waters, carefree and without any worries. I'd like it to be like that, I really would. In fact, there's a philosophy that treats life like that, it's called being an Epicurean. Now, sometimes, we just get this crossed up and think that Epicureans just like to eat good. And they do. But the reason they liked to eat good is that, ultimately, they were hedonists, placing their ultimate meaning upon feeling good. I like to feel good, don't get me wrong. I mean, it beats the alternative, doesn't it? I mean, do any of us really wake up in the morning and think, “gosh, I'd really like to feel bad today.”

But, in some respects, living life like a semi-Epicurean misses the point as to what Paul is teaching us about here in Ephesians. This is another one of those “Therefore” moments in the course of the letter. Throughout Ephesians, Paul lays out the theology and then, with a therefore comment, begins to explain precisely how that theology plays out in real time. In this particular setting, Paul is announcing that there's a conflict at the heart of our world and that, by ignoring it, we are making life more difficult for ourselves and for the people that we love.

And you know, this is an area where the Bible has radically reshaped my beliefs. I mean, if you met me on the streets as a freshly-minted PCUSA Pastor, this is not a sermon I would've preached. Because like most Presbyterians and nearly all of the clergy, we're rationalists. That is to say that we believe that our minds somehow capable of sorting out all the competing data the world offers us. Using tools like logic, deductive reasoning and mathematics, all of life's mysteries can be solved and figured out. It's a fine way to be, for most parts. But the problem becomes that what the Bible tells us is that we're in the midst of a cosmic conflict between good and evil, right and wrong. That standing in this fight are God and a character, my rational mind bristles against. The Devil.

Talking about the Devil, especially during the month of Halloween can be particularly difficult as much that is known about this Biblical character is derived more from fantasy than from the pages of Scripture. But this problem isn't necessarily a new one. You'd be surprised by the number of people who conflate John Milton's “Paradise Lost” with the actual Bible. But while our imaginations are filled with red, horned creatures running all through our minds like a psycho-killer from a slasher movie, the Bible is more subtle about Him.

The Old Testament speaks of the devil as the tempter or the accuser of mankind. We see him in Job and in other places in the Old Testament. The New Testament provides us further detail. One reading from Revelation is highly important. **Revelation 12:7-9:** *“Now war arose in heaven, Michael and his angels fighting against the dragon. And the dragon and his angels fought back, but he was defeated, and there was no longer any place for them in heaven. And the great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world—he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him.”*

In the tapestry of Scripture, a compelling figure emerges—a figure that stands as a symbol of rebellion, temptation, and evil itself. This figure is the Devil, also known as Satan, a name that echoes with the weight of spiritual warfare and deception. To understand the Devil, we must turn to the

sacred pages of the Bible, where his presence and influence weave a narrative thread that spans from the dawn of creation to the final reckoning. At the heart of the Devil's story lies his origin. He was not always the embodiment of malevolence we recognize today. In the beginning, he was a radiant angel, created by God, endowed with beauty and power. But pride took root in his heart, and he coveted a position higher than his allotted station. This celestial rebellion, marked by defiance and ambition, led to his expulsion from the heavenly realms. The once-glorious angel became the adversary, the enemy of God and all that is holy.

Throughout the Bible, we encounter the Devil as the ultimate adversary, the great deceiver. His role in the narrative of humanity is that of a tempter, a cunning force that seeks to divert God's creation from the path of righteousness. In the garden of Eden, he whispered doubts into the ears of Adam and Eve, sowing the seeds of disobedience and sin. He preyed upon our Lord Jesus Christ in the wilderness, attempting to lead Him astray. The Devil's tactics have not changed—doubt, temptation, distortion of truth—all aimed at undermining our faith and trust in God. The Devil is the wellspring of evil and spiritual darkness, a source of moral decay and destruction. He is the father of lies, the one who instigates wrongdoing, and the orchestrator of chaos. In moments of moral dilemma and when we confront the pervasive evil in our world, the Devil's influence is palpable, seeking to tarnish God's creation and disrupt His divine plan. Yet, the Bible also reveals a glimpse of the Devil's ultimate destiny—a destiny marked by defeat and judgment. In the apocalyptic visions of the book of Revelation, we see the Devil cast into the lake of fire, a place of eternal torment, where his power will be vanquished forever. The victory, we are assured, belongs to our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

As believers, we engage in spiritual warfare against this formidable adversary. Armed with the armor of God and fortified by faith, we resist the Devil's temptations and stand firm in our devotion to the Lord. Our faith in Christ grants us the strength to overcome the Devil's influence and walk in the radiance of God's truth. The battle may be fierce, but the ultimate triumph is secured through the grace and power of our Lord. That's why we need to stop thinking about this life like a lazy river and realize that we're engaged in Holy combat.

And so, we need to be prepared. It stinks not being prepared. One time, I stepped in to a kitchen to help a friend out who'd recently become the head chef at a restaurant. He'd only been doing it a couple of days when, according to him, he had to fire everyone on staff. I've forgotten why he had to do that, Mike was a bit hot-headed, but he did and I went over on a particularly busy night, just to help him out. According to him, all I was going to have to do was come in a prepare orders, everything else would be ready to go. But, well, it didn't turn out to be like that. My station wasn't prepped at all. It was one of the worst night's I've ever spent in the restaurant industry. I mean, food must've taken an hour or longer for some tables. It was awful. When you're not prepared, that's just how it goes.

You know, I read these books called "A Song of Fire and Ice." You've probably head of the series even if you don't think you have. On HBO, they made a series out of these fantasy books and called it Game of Thrones. In that book, they're constantly talking about living in the long summer but that, winter is coming. The people are always saying like, reminding themselves that leaner days lie ahead.

Perhaps we should've started saying that in the church three decades ago, maybe then there would've been some urgency. But now, winter has arrived and things look rather bleak. I mean, just look at our pews. Fewer and fewer people are coming to church. We see the lack of enthusiasm played out in empty seats. If we think about this in terms of warfare, I think it's safe to say that we're getting our butts kicked. I mean, we're not even the Ukraine in this thing. No, they're doing far better than we are. And I think it comes down to this. Knowing the state of the world that we're in and then following Paul's instructions and putting on our armor and getting ready for battle. We need armor, that's for sure.

The **belt of truth**, as described in Ephesians 6:14, is one of the essential components of the armor of God. It plays a pivotal role in the spiritual warfare Christians face, serving as a foundational piece that holds the entire armor together. The Apostle Paul, in his letter to the Ephesians, urges believers to "*stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist.*" The significance of the belt of truth lies in its role as a symbol of integrity, honesty, and unwavering commitment to God's Word. In a

world filled with deception and falsehoods, truth is the anchor of our faith. Jesus Himself proclaimed, *"I am the way, the truth, and the life"* (John 14:6). This divine truth serves as the bedrock upon which our spiritual journey is built. In the early Christian Church, thinkers and theologians emphasized the importance of truth in the life of a believer. **Augustine of Hippo**, a renowned theologian, remarked, "The truth is like a lion; you don't have to defend it. Let it loose; it will defend itself." This quote underscores the inherent power and self-evident nature of truth. When we gird ourselves with the belt of truth, we align with God's unchanging, eternal truth, which stands as an unwavering standard in a world of moral relativism.

The belt of truth also serves as a defense against the schemes of the Devil, the Father of Lies. The Devil seeks to distort, manipulate, and obscure the truth, as he did in the garden of Eden when he deceived Eve. But by donning the belt of truth, we are equipped to discern his deceptions and resist his temptations. As Jesus declared, *"You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free"* (**John 8:32**). In our daily lives, we are called to live in the light of God's truth, exemplifying honesty, transparency, and integrity. The belt of truth reminds us to be people of our word, to speak the truth in love, and to stand unwavering in our faith, guided by the unchanging truth of God's Word.

The breastplate of righteousness, as described in Ephesians 6:14, is another integral part of the armor of God that plays a crucial role in the spiritual warfare faced by Christians. The Apostle Paul instructs believers to *"stand firm then, with the breastplate of righteousness in place."* The breastplate, traditionally a piece of armor protecting the chest and vital organs in battle, *symbolizes the righteousness that comes through faith in Jesus Christ. It represents the moral and spiritual purity granted to believers through their relationship with Christ.* Righteousness, in this context, refers to being in right standing with God, justified and declared innocent of sin through the grace of Christ.

In **Romans 3:22**, the Apostle Paul affirms this concept, stating, *"This righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe."* It is not a righteousness earned by our own efforts but imputed to us by God's grace when we put our faith in Christ. This breastplate serves as a reminder of our secure position in Christ and our protection against the accusations of the enemy.

Saint Augustine, a prominent Christian thinker, beautifully articulated the significance of righteousness when he said, "Right is right even if no one is doing it; wrong is wrong even if everyone is doing it." This wisdom underscores the importance of aligning our lives with God's standard of righteousness, even when the world around us may stray.

The breastplate of righteousness also guards our hearts against the attacks of the adversary, who seeks to accuse and condemn us. The Devil is often referred to as the accuser of the brethren (**Revelation 12:10**), and he attempts to undermine our confidence and faith by pointing out our failures and sins. However, when we have the breastplate of righteousness in place, we can boldly declare our righteousness in Christ, knowing that our sins are forgiven and our standing before God is secure.

In practical terms, wearing the breastplate of righteousness means living a life of holiness, pursuing moral purity, and walking in obedience to God's commandments. It means cultivating a character marked by integrity, honesty, and righteousness, reflecting the righteousness of Christ that covers us.

The shoes of readiness, as mentioned in Ephesians 6:15, are another vital component of the armor of God. These symbolic shoes represent the readiness and eagerness that comes from being grounded in the gospel of peace. In a practical sense, these shoes are not physical but spiritual. They enable us to walk confidently and securely in the gospel's message of peace. This readiness is twofold: first, it prepares us for the spiritual battles we face, knowing that we are anchored in the truth and peace of the gospel. Second, it equips us to share the message of peace with others.

The gospel of peace reminds us of the reconciliation we have with God through Jesus Christ, who is our ultimate source of peace. As the Apostle Paul wrote in Romans 5:1, *"Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ."* This peace transcends worldly understanding and provides a firm foundation for our lives. In **Romans 10:15**, Paul emphasizes the importance of sharing this gospel of peace with others, saying, *"And how can anyone preach unless they are sent? As it is written: 'How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!'"* Our readiness with these shoes of peace not only protects us but also enables us to

bring the message of peace and reconciliation to a broken world. In a world filled with turmoil and strife, the gospel of peace stands as a beacon of hope and reconciliation. It calls us to be peacemakers and ambassadors of Christ's love and peace. The shoes of readiness enable us to walk confidently in our faith, prepared for the battles of life, and ready to share the gospel's message of peace with those who desperately need it.

The shield of faith, as described in Ephesians 6:16, is a powerful component of the armor of God. It serves as a defensive barrier against the fiery darts or flaming arrows of the enemy. *This shield represents the unwavering trust and confidence that believers place in God and His promises.* The imagery of a shield is significant because it was a critical defensive tool for Roman soldiers in battle. Just as a physical shield protected soldiers from harm, *the shield of faith protects Christians from the attacks and temptations of the evil one.* It is a shield that can extinguish the flaming arrows of doubt, fear, and deception aimed at undermining our faith. Faith, in this context, is not merely a passive belief but an active, living trust in God. It involves confident reliance on God's character, His Word, and His promises. The author of Hebrews defines faith as "*the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen*" (Hebrews 11:1). This unwavering assurance becomes our shield.

Throughout the Bible, we see examples of individuals who demonstrated this kind of faith. Abraham believed God's promise of a Son, even when circumstances seemed impossible (Genesis 15:6). David faced the giant Goliath with unwavering trust in God's deliverance (1 Samuel 17). These heroes of faith held up their shield of faith against adversity and emerged victorious.

The shield of faith also plays a crucial role in our spiritual battles. When doubts, fears, and temptations assail us, we can raise our shield of faith by clinging to God's promises and standing on His Word. It allows us to deflect the attacks of the enemy and remain unshaken in our trust in God's faithfulness. A well-known Christian thinker, Martin Luther, emphasized the significance of faith when he said, "Faith is a living, daring confidence in God's grace, so sure and certain that a man could stake his life on it a thousand times." Luther understood that faith was not passive but a bold, active trust in God.

The helmet of salvation, as mentioned in Ephesians 6:17, is a crucial element of the armor of God. *It symbolizes the assurance and hope that believers have in the salvation offered through Jesus Christ.* Just as a physical helmet protects a soldier's head in battle, *the helmet of salvation safeguards our minds and thoughts.* It reminds us of the secure salvation we have received through faith in Jesus Christ. This salvation includes forgiveness of sins, reconciliation with God, and the hope of eternal life. The helmet of salvation provides assurance and confidence in our identity as children of God. It assures us that we are saved, redeemed, and eternally secure in Christ. This knowledge helps guard our minds against doubts, fears, and the lies of the enemy.

One of the most profound Christian thinkers, C.S. Lewis, reflected on the concept of salvation when he said, "God cannot give us happiness and peace apart from Himself because there is no such thing." Lewis understood that true salvation is not just a future destination but a transformative relationship with God that brings inner peace and joy.

The sword of the Spirit, as described in Ephesians 6:17, is a fundamental component of the armor of God. It represents the Word of God, which is a powerful offensive weapon in spiritual warfare. A sword is an instrument of attack and defense, and the sword of the Spirit serves a similar purpose in the believer's spiritual battles. It symbolizes the authority, truth, and power of God's Word. When wielded effectively, it can defeat the lies, deceptions, and temptations of the enemy.

The Word of God is a double-edged sword, capable of discerning and penetrating the deepest parts of the human heart and soul (**Hebrews 4:12**). It is both a defensive and offensive weapon. Defensively, it helps believers stand firm against the schemes of the devil by providing guidance, wisdom, and discernment. Offensively, it can be used to proclaim the truth of the gospel, to resist temptation, and to expose falsehood. When faced with spiritual battles, Jesus Himself demonstrated the effective use of the sword of the Spirit. During His wilderness temptation, Jesus responded to Satan's temptations by quoting Scripture, saying, "*It is written...*" (Matthew 4:1-11). In doing so, He relied on the truth and authority of God's Word to resist the enemy.

Christian thinkers and theologians throughout history have emphasized the central role of Scripture

in the life of believers. Martin Luther famously stated, "The Bible is the cradle wherein Christ is laid," highlighting the foundational importance of God's Word in understanding and encountering Christ. In practical terms, the sword of the Spirit reminds believers of the need to immerse themselves in the Scriptures, to meditate on God's Word, and to be equipped with its truths. By doing so, they can effectively wield this powerful weapon to overcome the spiritual challenges they face.

In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.