

## OUR ARMOR EPHESIANS 6:10-17

Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.

Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.

Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God...

**A teenager** gets injured in a car accident because he didn't click his seat belt... **A police officer** is killed in the line of duty, because he chose not to wear the bullet proof vest issued to him for his protection...

**A whitewater rafter** falls into the water, hits his head on a rock, and drowns... he wasn't wearing his helmet.

*We've all heard these kinds of tragic stories...* If the injured person had just used the safety gear they were issued they would've walked away from the danger unscathed! But just possessing protective equipment doesn't make a person safe! *You've got to put it on!*

Last week we started a series of messages in Ephesians that we entitled “**The Unseen War.**”

The Christian life is not a *playground*, it's a *battleground*. We live in the midst of a lethal conflict.

We're part of a battle. You and I live behind enemy lines. We live and move in a world manipulated by Satan and his demons - cut off from the light of Jesus.

And when our lives start shining God's light the devil fights back. He tries to rob us of our blessings. He wants to snuff out our light and witness. And he has a bag-full of tricks and schemes he uses against us.

In verse 11 Paul calls them “**the wiles of the devil.**”

And yet God has not left us defenseless in this unseen war. He's equipped us with a full wardrobe of protective gear designed specifically for Satan's assaults. Paul refers to it as, the “**armor of God.**”

Several years ago, Nike started producing special uniforms for college football teams. They called them “**Combat Uniforms.**” They were designed to be colorful, and edgy, and cool. The only problem with these uniforms was they didn't help you play better football.

The Dawgs wore the silly things once - in a dreadful loss to Boise State - then they put them on the shelf.

But realize, you won't have this problem with God's *combat uniform*. God's armor is made for performance.

His armor is all about victory and holiness - not just *“looking cool.”* Strap it on and you become invincible.

The **"armor of God"** is made of supernatural steel that's been hammered on the anvils of heaven.

This special armor is held together with divine rivets.

God's combat units are created according to spiritual specs - and it's perfectly suited for the devil's devices.

*Here's the only catch... You've got to suit up!*

This is why Paul tells us in verse 11, **"Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand..."**

The armor of God does you and I absolutely no good hanging in our closet - or left in the pages of Scripture.

You've got to suit up, and strap it on!

Did you know 20,000 Americans die each year, *who would still be alive if they'd just buckled their seatbelt?*

And who knows how many folks with a ship-wrecked faith would still be growing and vibrant Christians if they had just **"put on the armor of God"**... Hey, **when it comes to God's armor don't leave home without it!**

Last week we talked about **our adversary** in this spiritual battle. This week we'll discuss **our armor**.

And notice first, in verse 11, Paul instructs us to put on *“the whole armor of God.”* Each piece of this supernatural armor is vital. Neglect one section and you leave yourself vulnerable. If Satan spots a chink in your armor he’ll know exactly where to aim his attack...

In Medieval times the *night* before a squire was *knighted* he’d spread out all the pieces of his armor - then pray until morning light - offering his soul to God.

This AM we'll act similarly... We'll spread out the pieces of our armor and rededicate our souls to God.

Then when we leave today I’ll challenge you to *put it on*. It’s time for you and I to win victories for Jesus.

One last point of introduction... Paul wrote this letter to the Ephesians while he was a prisoner in a Roman jail. It’s probable he was chained to a Roman soldier.

At the very least there were legionnaires coming and going around him who were wearing their armor.

This is why as Paul writes of our spiritual armor he compares it to the armor worn by the Roman military...

It created a vivid mental picture for the Ephesians.

And the first piece of armor he mentions is **the belt of truth**. The Roman Soldier's belt was a wide, thick leather strap that wrapped around his waist. Flaps from the front of the belt protected his abdominal area.

The belt was the hub of his protection.

His sword - his various pouches - including his flask (or canteen) - even his shield - hung from his belt.

When a soldier readied himself for combat he "*girded*" - or tighten his belt a few notches. This drew his sword in - toward his side. It locked his breastplate into place. It was like a football player buckling his chin strap - "*girded*" meant a soldier was ready for action.

In ancient times people viewed their loins as the seat of their emotions. And it's a natural association...

When I get nervous, or excited, or scared - I feel it in my stomach - my bowels start to churn. Even today we make this association. We speak of "*gut feelings,*" "*intestinal fortitude,*" "*a stomach full of butterflies.*"

One of the ways Satan likes to keep us ill-prepared for battle is by toying with our emotions.

The Devil likes to play pinball with our hormones - he exploits our sensitivities - he runs with our insecurities.

He moves in the realm of feelings. And in doing so, Satan can keep us spiritually paralyzed and defeated.

All human beings are prone to get trapped on the *emotional* roller coaster from time to time.

Over the course of her lifetime a female will be pre-puberty, premenstrual, pregnant, postpartum, pre-menopausal, menopausal, etc, etc... and at each stage there seems

to be a syndrome attached. I mean, every phase of a woman's life is emotionally-charged...

And men too get emotional... stressed-out, over-worked, pressure-packed, anxiety-filled jobs play with our emotions. Everyone these days lives *on the edge*.

Have you ever gone home from church on Sunday feeling excited and ready to serve the Lord - only to wake up on Monday in a funk - feeling depressed?

Satan manipulates our emotions - then gets us to base our faith on our feelings. He'll suggest, "If you were really a Christian you'd be joyous and jubilant all the time. You'd never feel down. Hey, maybe you're not a Christian after all?" Satan wants you to gauge your *spiritual position* on your *emotional disposition*.

Fall for that trap and the wildest ride at Six Flags will be tame compared to the havoc Satan will play on your spiritual life. When our *faith* is based on our *feelings* - when *devotion* is tied to *emotion* - doubt takes over...

*You're going to be up and down - in and out - right and left... You'll still be headed down the "the straight and narrow" - but you're liable to be all over the road.*

A believer in Jesus gets a grip on his emotions by tightening up a couple of notches on the belt of truth!

It's the truth of God's Word - the assurance of His promise - my resolve to trust the Lord regardless - that guards my emotions from all this satanic tampering.

The first lesson every believer needs to learn is that our faith should be based on **fact not feeling!**

*Hey, I'm not a Christian because I feel like one!*

I'm a Christian because God promised me in His Word that the day I asked Him to save me He would!

And though *my feelings* may change *the facts* never do! It's been said, "The devil lives in the realm of feeling, but Christians should live in the realm of fact."

Listen carefully to one of my favorite poems, "Three men were walking on a wall - Feeling, Faith, and Fact.

When Feeling took an awful fall, then Faith was taken back. So close was Faith to Feeling, that he stumbled and fell too. **But Fact remained and pulled Faith back, and Faith brought Feeling too."**

When a Christian bases his faith on the facts - the truth of God's Word - then his or her feelings will follow.

Love, joy, and peace flow out of our trust in the work of Jesus and our confidence in God's Word. But base your faith on feelings - and doubt, anxiety will creep in.

In your mind right now... grab the belt of truth - the truth that Jesus loves you, and accepts you, and will remain faithful to you forever - and buckle that truth over the sadness, or fear, or worry you feel. Strap it on!

Pull that truth tight to yourself!... Notch it up!

Choose today to live your life, and base your faith on what God has said about you - not how you feel!

The second piece of armor that Paul mentions to the Ephesians is **the breastplate of righteousness**.

The breastplate was made of either metal or tough leather. It covered the soldiers from the neck to waist.

The breastplate was attached to the belt. And it protected the most vital human organ - the heart.

Just as the abdomen was viewed as *the seat of the emotions* - the heart was *the home of the desires*...

To say someone sings from their heart - or plays a sport with all their heart - or puts their heart into their work... it's to say they're motivated by *intense desire*.

When you become a Christian the Bible says that spiritually speaking God does a heart transplant in you.

He gives you *a new heart - a new set of desires*.

Now that I'm a follower of Jesus there're a lot of activities I suddenly want to do that didn't appeal to me before. There're also activities I no longer want to do that I use to do regularly. *Jesus transforms my desires*.

You could say, "**Jesus changes our want-tos...**"

*Spiritual desires* replace *selfish desires* - *godly urges* replace *greedy urges* - the glory of God becomes my chief ambition. In Christ I get a new set of wants.

Yet as I said last week Satan doesn't play by the rules. He doesn't respect or even acknowledge our new desires. He certainly doesn't support them.

His strategy is to tempt you with the old desires - inflame the old passions - reactivate the latent lusts.

*He'll send some old buddies over with a cold six-pack... He'll have your former boyfriend FB you... Out of nowhere an opportunity arises to make big bucks...*

Satan does whatever he can to revive your *carnal cravings* - to lure your heart away from God. He wants you to slide back into the sin you escaped in Christ.

It's been said, "Free cheese is always available in mouse traps." Satan makes temptation *oh so tempting*.

How do I learn to resist the bait - the free cheese - the dangling carrot? There's only one way - by protecting *my heart (my desires)* with *the breastplate!*

Remember, the breastplate was attached to the belt of truth - and Jesus said it's the truth that sets us free.

To put on the breastplate of righteousness is to believe the biblical truth that I'm not the same person I use to be - that in Christ I have a whole new identity.

The old person I use to be, the old nature, died on the cross with Jesus. Now through His resurrection power I'm a new man - with a new nature, new desires.

Believe that by God's grace you're now something *clean*, and *pure*, and *forgiven*, and *empowered*, and *eternal*, and even *useful* for the Master's purposes.

Right now strap on the breastplate... Suit up!

Put on new desires - not your own righteousness, but the righteousness you've inherited in Christ!

I love the story told about the great, church father, Augustine... Before he became a Christian, Augustine was was a real party animal. He had a mistress. He shacked up with a gal and had a child out of wedlock.

Shortly after his conversion he was walking down the street when he was seen by his former girlfriend. She came running towards him, "Augustine, it is I, it is I."

Augustine took off in the opposite direction, shouting, "But it is not I, it is not I!" The old desires no longer feel *right* when you really see yourself as *right with God*.

Often the legionnaire's breastplate bore the insignia of Rome. He wore the Roman crest over his heart.

It was a badge of honor. The soldier was proud to have been chosen to protect history's greatest empire.

While wearing that breastplate he avoided anything that would disgrace the cause for which it stood.

Likewise how can we entertain a thought - or harbor a desire - contrary to the cause of Christ when the breastplate of righteousness sits over our hearts?

Let's desire nothing that will shame His name!

Notice too, the soldier's **sandals of peace**.

Understand, we're not talking about a pair of flip-flops. These were battle cleats - leggings fit for the rigors of combat - an infantryman's war sandals.

The sandals were half-boots made of leather straps. They had an open toe, and they laced up the shins.

Their soles were studded with hobnails that provided traction on slippery surfaces. In the words of Larry Munson, *“they would kick you with a hobnail boot.”*

The sandals worked like baseball cleats. They enabled a soldier to dig in and stand his ground. The spikes on the soles of the shoes provided him stability.

When you're engaged in hand to hand combat firm footing is strategic. If the enemy can trip you up - or knock you off balance - then you're a sitting duck.

*And the same is true in this unseen war...*

Satan tries to knock the props out from under our faith. Bump us off balance - trip us up - just confuse us for a moment - so *as we're stumbling, trying to right ourselves, he can stab us with his deadly dagger.*

Here's how this works... You're cruising along in your Christian life, doing great - until someone asks you a hypothetical question to which you lack an answer...

For example, *How will God judge the pygmies who die without ever getting a chance to hear the Gospel?*

Wow, you've never thought of that!

The question throws you for a loop. The frustration you feel - not knowing the answer - grows into doubt and confusion. For a moment your faith begins to falter, *and as you start to stumble, Satan slips in the knife.*

Here's another unsettling scenario... Rather than *a question you can't answer* - it's *a situation you can't explain*. A good person suffers. A guilty man walks.

You pray for a reason, but the heavens remain silent... *How could God allow such a horrible thing?*

Over time you start to doubt God's goodness, His grace, His fairness... In this season of doubt, Satan slips in, and causes mayhem. He hijacks your faith...

How do keep your footing when you're forced to walk through dark places - down lonely, confusing paths?

**You need your feet shod with the peace of God!**

God's peace acts like a pair of cleats. It holds my balance when I start to stumble - or make a sharp turn.

When God's peace is real and tangible, I don't need an answer - or an explanation right away. The peace of God provides us with stability in the face of *events we can't explain* and *questions we can't answer*.

A soldier in combat kept getting depressing letters from his wife. Her letters were full of petty complaints.

This soldier needed his wife's encouragement, but all she provided were an itemized list of her grievances.

Finally, the frustrated husband wrote his wife back. He pleaded, "**Please honey, stop the nagging! Let me enjoy this war in peace.**" *Well, if you strap on God's promise you'll know peace even in the midst of battle.*

Who can forget Paul and Silas in the Philippi jail?

Their backs were beaten into bloody ribbons. They were hanging from the stocks in a cold, damp prison. Rats are nibbling at their toes. Bugs are crawling over the rest of their bodies - *and all they're guilty of is preaching the Gospel...* Imagine their complaints!

Yet Acts 16:25 reads, "At midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God..."

*How can that be?* How can you be in such agony, yet still be praising God... There's only one answer... They were wearing "*the sandals of the Gospel of peace.*"

Jon Courson is the pastor of Applegate Christian Fellowship in Oregon. Jon lost his daughter in a fatal automobile accident. At her memorial service Jon testified of the tremendous peace God had given him.

He said that when he trusted God, an amazing peace ruled his heart. But when he tried to make sense of his daughter's death God's peace would vanish.

Suddenly, it dawned on Jon. The Bible calls God's peace... "*the peace that passes all understanding.*"

In his search for understanding he sacrificed God's peace. Jon realized there're times when you can't have both. *Understanding* and *peace* don't always ride tandem. Sometimes you have to choose. Did he want *understanding* or *peace*? And Jon chose God's peace.

When life stirs up the pot - when there seems to be no *answer* or *explanation* for what's happened - let the supernatural peace of God bubble up from within and comfort your troubled heart. Despite your *ignorance* or *distress* hold on to God's peace, and rejoice in Christ!

The answer you need will come in *due time*.

In the *meantime*, remember this,, "*What's over my head is still under God's feet!*" As Blaise Pascal once said, "*The heart has reasons that the reason knows nothing about.*" *Suit yourself up with sandals of peace!*

Notice another piece of the armor - **“above all, taking the shield of faith.”** The Roman soldier carried a shield that was 4 feet long by 2½ feet wide. It was made of brass and covered with multi-layers of leather.

Before a soldier went to battle he'd soak it in water.

The wet leather extinguished the flaming arrows shot by the enemy. After the battle the shield looked like a porcupine - a leather pelt covered with quills or arrows.

It was a common practice in ancient warfare to dip your arrows in tar and set them on fire. The archers lined up side-by-side and shot in a single barrage.

When a flurry of arrows were launched the shield was large enough for a soldier to place it on the ground and crouch underneath. It was *whole body protection*.

This explains Paul use of the phrase **"above all, taking the shield of faith"**. The shield complemented all the other pieces of armor. It provided overall protection.

And this is comforting to us in the spiritual battle we face - for Satan doesn't just fight with single thrusts.

There are times when he and his demons launch from all directions. They fire whole volleys of flaming arrows, at the same time. Satan's **"fiery darts"** might include a simultaneous attack of anger, and doubt, and jealousy, and lust, and arrogance, and bitterness...

*For the moment there's nowhere to run - nothing you can do.* When you're under a heavy attack just crouch behind your shield of faith - trust God and wait on Him!

1 John 5:4 tells us, **"This is the victory that has overcome the world - our faith."** Don't get caught off guard. Keep the shield of faith nearby at all times.

And there's one more feature of the Roman shield that I should mention - these shields were gang-able. Their edges were made to interlock with other shields.

When a barrage of fiery arrows came falling from the sky a Roman soldier was trained to turn to his buddy next to him and link shields together. Multiple shields formed a massive metal roof over the top of a battalion.

The shield was a constant reminder that soldiers were better protected when they fought side-by-side.

*And how we need that same reminder in the spiritual battle!* Make sure you're fighting alongside other believers. We're stronger when we're linked together!

Our final piece of armor is **the helmet of salvation.**

The Roman helmet had to be strong enough to withstand the blow of a hammer, or a battle-ax.

In the front the helmet covered the forehead. On the sides there were plates over the cheeks. In the back it extended beyond the collar to protect a soldier's neck.

Then for comfort and cushion it was lined with a sponge that acted like a shock absorber. The Roman helmet was similar to a modern day football helmet.

*And what football player would venture onto the field without a helmet?* There're are guys who've lost their helmet in the middle of a play, and risked the danger.

But you'd be a nut to neglect strapping on a helmet!

Likewise no soldier would dare go into battle without his helmet. Without a helmet his chances of survival were slim to none. A *helmet-less* soldier was *hopeless*.

In essence this is what a helmet provided - *hope!*

Even if the soldier made a mistake - and suffered a blow - he might still survive if he was wearing a helmet.

And this is what *the helmet of salvation* provides us... *spiritual hope!* 1 Thessalonians 5:8 tells us, "Putting on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet the hope of salvation." As Christians we have a bright future. Untold treasures and pleasures await us in this life and in heaven to come. We have great hope!

But we need to *keep our hope in mind - and keep our minds on hope*. We do it by *putting on the helmet of salvation*. Every choice, every decision, every consideration we make should be filtered through the grid of our salvation... *As a child of God is this fitting?*

*Given my destiny is this really appropriate?*

I read of a dad who took his little boy to the pet store to purchase a puppy. The little boy took a look at the litter of new puppies and told his dad he wanted the pup who was wagging his tail. His dad asked him *why?*

He replied, "*I want the one with the happy ending!*"

One day every trial begun on this earth will finish with a happy ending! We'll all be wagging our tails in the end! Our problem though is remembering *the future* in the face of *the present*. We need to stay hopeful.

Right now we're *dragging* not *wagging*.

We're in the process of enduring the trial - not celebrating the victory. But the celebration will come.

Today we're sowing seeds, but in the end we'll reap the harvest. This is why we need to strap on the helmet of salvation and hope. Refuse to take it off. *To endure our temporal trials we need an eternal perspective.*

Satan is the author of negative attitudes and cynical assumptions. He'd love to lodge negative thoughts in your mind. Turn you into a sour, bitter, angry person.

*But the Devil can't do it if you're wearing God's helmet, and your focus is fixed on His salvation!*

Evil thoughts are Satan's fiery darts.

*Has it ever happened to you?* Out of the blue an evil thought flashes across your mind. Like a lightning bolt.

You might even be sitting in church, and suddenly a shameful, perverted, embarrassing thought runs through your brain. You think, *"Where in the world did that come from?"* Well, *it came from our enemy...*

Martin Luther compared evil thoughts to birds in the sky. *"You can't keep them from flying over your head, but you can keep them from nesting in your hair."*

The devil can send an evil thought across the screen of my mind, but I don't have to dwell on it. I can put on the helmet of salvation, and redirect my thoughts.

Philippians 4:8, *"Whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy - meditate on these things."*

You strap on the helmet of salvation - *the helmet of hope* - when you chose to retrain your mind to think God's thoughts, and dwell on life from His perspective.

The Black College Fund has a motto, “A mind is a terrible thing to waste.” And God has the same slogan.

Put on your helmet and think in light of God’s Word.

In conclusion, notice the one part of the body that’s not protected by any armor? The answer... **our back!**

God provides no armor for the rear. *Why?* He has no plans for our retreat. He’s called us to resist the devil - not tuck tail and run! Take note of it, three times in Ephesians 6 Paul says to “**stand**” against the devil.

I love the motto of the French Foreign Legion. It’s *almost* biblical. It reads, “**If I falter push me on. If I stumble pick me up. If I retreat shoot me!**” Always remember, God has no armor for the backside! James 4:7 tells us “**Resist the devil and he will flee from you.**”

When I played football in High School the first few days of practice were always in shorts and cleats. The coaches put us through a week or so of conditioning.

We’d run a few plays - catch a pass or two - get our legs under us... but everyone knew in a few days it all would change. *You could be a superstar in shorts and cleats... you could get the impression that football was all fun and frolic...* But everyone knew it wasn’t really football until the pads came on and the hitting started.

*And the same is true in the Christian life.* When you’re first saved it’s like shorts and cleats. You’re jogging about feeling great - this new life is a breeze...

But I'm warning, there's an unseen war - a spiritual battle. And it won't be long before the hitting starts!

As that famed philosopher, Mike Tyson, once said, "Everybody has a plan, until they get punched."

And when you get punched, what will you do?

You'll definitely need some pads. Here's the good news, God has issued us all the equipment we'll ever need - not just *under armor*, but *the whole armor*.

**A belt of truth** - *Guard your feelings with the truth.*

**A breastplate of righteousness** - *Watch your desires.*

**Sandals of peace** - *Choose God's peace.*

**A shield of faith** - *Above all, have faith.*

**A helmet of salvation** - *Strap on pure thoughts.*

*Don't leave your spiritual protection hanging in your locker... Suit up! Strap it on! Put on the armor of God.*

*It's time we lived in victory - not defeat! Let's put on the whole armor of God and let's do it today!*