

## Ephesians 6:10-20      God's Armor

The belt of truth, the breastplate of righteousness, the gospel of peace, the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation, the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God, and all kinds of prayer.

According to the way a Roman soldier dressed in the time of Jesus and Paul, this is the vision of a believer prepared for spiritual battle, not against human adversaries, but against “powers and principalities, the powers of this dark world and against spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms;” because the “battle is not against flesh and blood.”

Now there may be some among you that have seen enough of the military imagery for a lifetime or two and might be better able to relate to an expression of the spiritual life that makes use of other images; a mountain to climb, a long journey, a race to run, an inner struggle.

If that is the case I hope that you will bear with us today because Paul has given to us the spiritual life in this garb; it is a fight, like the fight against cancer, or racism or sexism; not against people, but against spiritual powers.

What we see here is a recognition that the life of a Christian is awake to the presence of evil, and is aware of the need to resist it, to live a life in opposition to it. It

is not small part of a redeemed life - it *is* the redeemed life. Paul gives this imagery of armor as a visual aid.

### The Belt of Truth

He begins with “truth” and likens it to a belt around the waist. In our national discourse, this first image might seem comical. It seems like on every single issue, people disagree. Where there is factual data, people disagree about the facts; and where there is not, wild opinions fly. What someone holds to be true very often depends on who they listen to and decide to believe. What is this truth that Paul is talking about?

Let me suggest that here Paul is speaking about something other than small scale truths, but transcendent truth; not what Frederick Buechner called “particular truths,” but “truth itself.”

Truth itself regards the sovereignty of God over history as well as over each of our individual lives. Truth itself regards the inescapability and universality of sin, which affects human thought and action in every situation.

Truth itself regards God's merciful and loving nature, as expressed to us through the life and death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, meaning for us that redemption, forgiveness, transformation is real, at hand, part of what is true.

Truth itself is about our holy destination, heaven itself, which is not a fanciful dream but a substantial reality. Carry this truth with you, gird yourself with it.

### The Breastplate of Righteousness

The belt of truth is our attitude of the mind, there is justice, and mercy, and meaning. Righteousness is a word which refers to actions. Words like honesty, integrity, honor, helpfulness and generosity; fairness, goodness; all these and more refer to a way of life that is not cynical or selfish, but authentically established in the soil of the convictions previously mentioned.

Right thought and right action does not mean that you will always know the right solution to every problem, but you can always be honest, live out of your true self; you can believe in the goodness of things and find some way to act out these beliefs, even if it means to give a word of encouragement to someone, offer a “cup of cold water,” let go a prayer for someone’s health.

### The Gospel of Peace

The idea of the gospel of peace is in line with these first two items. There is a profound difference between wishing someone else’s harm or just plain not caring about them, on the one hand, and willing their health and well-being and being willing to sacrifice for it on the other.

To shod your feet with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace acknowledges the many distorted and contradictory circumstances of life among people, but it prepares the heart for friendship no matter the darkness of the hour, and is ready to do peace when the opportunity for it arises.

### The Shield of Faith

And what shall we say about faith? It sits next to God’s grace as the foundation of the spiritual life, of life itself really. Without it, there is no possibility for healthy relationships with God or anyone else, or with the world of nature. Faith is a risk. It is a bet on the goodness of things. Faith acknowledges it has no scientific proof but believes anyway, and acts on that belief.

I can think of ways that faith is lacking, but Paul says to carry it like a shield, never dropping it or throwing it away. It is the only way to function in the contradictions; like war or civil strife or polarity in culture; like depression or cancer or any other threat to our health; or the tension with those perhaps that are closest to us and whom we love the most. Always trust, always believe; and faith, to quote Buechner again, is a “nonetheless.”

I am working my way through the Psalms with Eugene Peterson and ran across an interesting commentary this week. It was the 106th Psalm verses 40 and 44 which read:

“Thus the anger of the Lord was kindled against his people . . . Nevertheless, God regarded their distress and heard their cry.”

And the commentary; “People connect cause and effect with a therefore; God connects them with a nevertheless. The logical consequence of sin is damnation; the gospel consequence is salvation. “Nevertheless” is one of the most important words of scripture, for it miraculously joins human sin with God’s salvation.”

The Helmet of Salvation and Sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God

That salvation is a way of thinking about what is true; Paul envisions it as a helmet to protect the head from harm, so that one can always think in gospel terms. Wear it.

And the sword of the Spirit/Word is the only offensive weapon believers have in their arsenal, a weapon that only makes sense in tandem with faith’s shield because it means that God both enables us to act faithfully and protects us from spiritual harm.

Prayer

And it is connected by prayer, Paul says all kinds of prayer. This past summer we had a series of prayer meetings. I was not sure what would come of them. I

am not going to share particulars, but there is some interest, and I should say that perhaps there is also some need, to work toward’s the strengthening of our church’s prayer ministry in the coming year. Be looking forward to more information about it in the coming weeks and months.

For today it is enough to say that Paul treats prayer like a glue that holds truth and righteousness, and peace and faith and salvation together with the Spirit, setting the believer’s life in distinction to all other ways of living; not in the sense that believers are less vulnerable to life’s hardships and dangers, but even when beaten down they can know what it means to be full, healthy, and strong.

The result is the strength to stand! Which means the strength to act, to live, to love, to persevere, and to rejoice.

[Back](#)

[Home](#)