

The Armor of God – Part I – Ephesians 6:13

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INTRODUCTION AND REVIEW

I'd like to ask you to turn with me in your Bibles if you would to Ephesians chapter 6 this morning. If you'll remember way back about a month and a half ago when I did my most recent message on Ephesians (before I got really sick and missed a couple Sundays and then went on vacation), we are currently tackling the last 15 verses in the book of Ephesians, a section that is introduced with the important word, "Finally." With this word, Paul is getting our attention and indicating that he's about to share with us his final thoughts and what he wants us to remember as he closes. After all that he's taught us thus far in Ephesians, he's leaving us with the final instructions we need to be able to live out the life-changing truths he's given us.

And this is what he leaves us with: "***Be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might.***" This is Paul's final point in these last 15 verses of Ephesians. He doesn't point us to ourselves and our own willpower and determination. He points us to the Lord and to complete and full reliance on him. He knows that we can only walk worthy of the calling we've received when we give up on our own abilities and learn to be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. What we must understand and believe if we are ever to live as God designed, is that the Christian life is not about you and I doing things FOR God, but rather, it's about you and I learning to walk in such close relationship with and dependence on God that he accomplishes his will through us by his power and for his glory.

Let me say that again: the Christian life is not about you and I doing things FOR God, but rather, it's about you and I learning to walk in such close relationship with and dependence on God that he accomplishes his will through us by his power and for his glory.

Do you see and understand the difference? The very common “Christian” mentality of doing things for God, places me and my talents and my willpower and determination at the center and promotes the idea that I’m doing favors for God and that he really needs me. It’s completely man centered and tends to bring legalism and either guilt or pride depending on how successful we perceive ourselves to be. On the other hand, when you and I learn to be strong in the strength of the Lord, walking in dependence on his Holy Spirit, God is at the center where he belongs and he accomplishes miraculous things through us and receives the glory he deserves.

This, my friends, is the most important truth each of us needs to take hold of and believe if we ever hope to walk worthy of the calling we’ve received. It’s the difference between religion and relationship, and I will tell you that I’ve attended many churches over the years that are stuck in religion, endlessly trying to doing things for God and paste on good behavior, rather than learning to walk in an abundant life-filled, dependent, love relationship with God, allowing him to lead the way, strengthen, empower, and bring about true life change as he deals the heart issues and the lies we’re believing.

So as we move through these final 15 verses of Ephesians, keep your eyes open, because they’re all about the practicalities of how we can learn to be strong, not in our own strength, but in the mighty strength of the Lord. Paul is going to show us that we can be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might, by putting on the full armor of God and by praying at all times in the Spirit. This is what we’ll be looking at in detail as we move through the remaining verses of Ephesians.

By way of a brief review, last time we tackled verses 10 to 12 and saw that we need to put on the FULL armor of God. In order to adequately protect our new selves, we need all the armor, not just a few pieces. Each element of the armor is essential if we’re to be strong in the Lord and the strength of his might.

Paul also gave us a clear and concise reason why we need to put on the full armor of God. And the reason he gave us is this: ***“so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil.”*** We were reminded that there is a real devil alive and active in the world today. And until we come to a practical, living belief in the reality of the devil and his schemes, life is simply not going to make sense and we will be grossly unprepared for the battle that is currently raging all around

us. We're told in Scripture to "***be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.***" We must not take him lightly or act like he doesn't exist, but we also don't need to live in fear of him because God is on our side. And if God is for us, who can be against us?

We also saw last time that the armor of God is what gives us the power to stand firm against the lies and accusations and attacks of the devil. To put it negatively, without putting on the full armor of God we will not be able to stand firm against the devil. It's that crucial to the struggle we're facing every day! If we want to stand firm in our faith and stay faithful to God through the myriad struggles and battles and lies and disappointment we face each day, we need to put on the full armor of God. To not put it on is to go into the battle unprotected and vulnerable, an easy target for the enemy. But when we put on the full armor that God has provided us we have the power to stand firm. It's able to keep us rock solid and immovable against the battering, relentless attacks of the devil.

The spiritual battle we're facing right now is not described by Paul as some distant battle that's raging in the distance. It's not something we can just ignore and be fine. It's hand to hand combat that's coming directly against you and me, and will put us flat on our back with devastating consequences if we don't wake up and learn how to protect ourselves.

And as we fight this battle, we also need to know who our real enemy is: the spiritual forces of wickedness...the rulers, powers and world forces of this darkness. If we're to win this battle, standing firm and walking worthy of the calling we've received, each of us needs to see beyond the flesh and blood person that seems to be doing battle against us and realize they're not the true enemy. Our true enemy is the spiritual forces of wickedness, with their leader the devil, using ill-equipped people to do his dirty work.

And when we are able by God's power to correctly identify the enemy, only then are we equipped to continue relating in a godly way with the difficult people in our lives, praying for them, confronting them in love, and continuing to treat them in a godly manner, rather than responding in anger and treating them the same way they've treated us. We also saw that we need to examine our own lives and motives and the ways we're treating other people and ask God to

enlighten our eyes and show us any ways that we've allowed Satan to use us for his purposes.

So that's where we left off last time, and today we'll pick up our study in verse 13. But let's read verses 10 through 18 of Ephesians chapter 4 as we begin to closely examine the full armor of God over the next few weeks:

10 Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might. 11 Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil. 12 For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places. 13 Therefore, take up the full armor of God, so that you will be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm. 14 Stand firm therefore, HAVING GIRDED YOUR LOINS WITH TRUTH, and HAVING PUT ON THE BREASTPLATE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS, 15 and having shod YOUR FEET WITH THE PREPARATION OF THE GOSPEL OF PEACE; 16 in addition to all, taking up the shield of faith with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. 17 And take THE HELMET OF SALVATION, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. 18 With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints...

May the Lord bless the reading of his Word.

TAKE UP THE FULL ARMOR OF GOD

So we begin today with the word, "Therefore." Paul has just given us an eye-opening picture of the spiritual, hand-to-hand combat each of us is facing on a daily basis, and he says, "***Therefore, take up the full armor of God.***" Having just made us keenly aware of an intense spiritual battle raging all around us, led by the devil himself and for which physical strength and human wisdom are completely inadequate, he reminds us what we need to win this battle: the full armor of God.

And notice that we shouldn't just leave it laying there on the ground, admiring it and studying its craftsmanship, we need to take it up and put it on. The full armor

of God will do us no good if we don't put it on. Just knowing that it exists and understanding what it does is not enough. We need to actually put it on and use it if we want to come out victorious in this battle.

Now I know most of us here are pretty familiar with the armor of God. We can appreciate the word picture it gives us and can relate to the idea of a battle and the importance of armor. But my guess is that most of us are not fully wearing the armor and using it as God intended, and as a result we often fall victim to Satan schemes in our lives. So as we begin to study each piece of armor, I want to challenge you to be thinking about how you can actually put the armor on in your own life and what each piece really means in the practical daily battle that you're facing. Paul is calling us to action here. He's calling us to put it on and take it up... To move beyond just head knowledge to actually putting the armor to use in our own daily lives and challenges.

So what will this armor do for us if we truly learn to put it on and take it up in a practical sense? Well Paul isn't going to leave us wondering and in the dark on this question. He tells us to ***take up the full armor of God, so that***... And he gives us two specific abilities we will be given as a result of taking up the full armor of God... These are abilities that we would not otherwise have without the armor. And these two abilities are the power to resist and the power to stand firm.

THE FULL ARMOR OF GOD ENABLES US TO RESIST

Paul tells us first that as we take up the full armor of God we will be able to resist in the evil day. The armor of God will give us the power to resist the schemes of the devil and his attempts to deceive us and draw us away from God and to cause us to doubt his goodness and faithfulness. This idea of resisting also implies action. Resisting brings up the image of active warfare.

As the devil and his forces come against us we take up our sword and do battle with him. We don't let him gain any ground, but fight him off by the power of God. To not resist is to just fall back in weakness and let Satan take us wherever he will, using us as his pawns and ultimately ushering us into hopelessness and defeat and despair. And his ultimate goal is to turn us completely against God, something I'm sure all of us have seen happen in people we've known throughout the years.

So what does Paul mean by the evil day. He says the full armor of God will give us the power and the ability to resist in the evil day. Try to remember for a moment way back to the first Sunday of 2016, when we were in Ephesians chapter 5 and talking about how to make the most of our time. In that passage Paul told us to make the most of our time because the days are evil. We looked at the meaning of that word translated, "evil," and found that it often means "full of labor, annoyances, and hardships." And wouldn't you say that's a pretty accurate description of most of the days we spend here on the earth? Would you say you experience a little bit of labor, annoyances and hardships each day of your life? We all do every day, don't we?

But Paul seems to be talking here about a specific day that he calls "the evil day." I get the idea of a particularly challenging and difficult day when our faith is really being put to the test. And if we think back through our lives, I'm sure we can all identify a few particular days that we would label as evil... Days when we received devastating news and our world seemed to be crashing down around us... Or days when we came under incredible spiritual attack and temptation... Or maybe days when depression and hopelessness were all we could see.

For me one of the most challenging evil days I've faced was when I received a phone call from my sister telling me that three of my nieces had just been killed in a plane crash. My brother and his wife had been flying from Anchorage to Port Alsworth, Alaska when they got into white-out conditions and ended up crashing on the thin ice of Lake Clark. They all survived the initial crash, but then the plane broke through the ice and my brother and his wife weren't able to get the girls out of the plane before it sank too far for rescue. And let me tell you, when days such as these arrive in our lives, we need every available piece of the armor of God to be able to resist the despair and hopelessness and fear and anger that Satan will try to overwhelm us with, and to continue to stand firm in our faith.

None of us have been guaranteed a long and full, problem-free life. In fact Jesus himself said, "In this world you will have trouble." None of us know what challenges we will face and what we will have to deal with and overcome. But we do know there WILL BE challenges and temptations and circumstances throughout our lives that will overwhelm our ability to endure by our own strength and human abilities. But the great news for us is that Jesus also said, "Take courage, I have overcome the world." We can endure and stand firm when

we walk by his power and take up the full armor of God. Whether we like it or not we will all face the evil day and when it happens we'll need to be prepared to resist and stand firm in our faith.

THE FULL ARMOR OF GOD ENABLES US TO STAND FIRM

So the first thing the armor of God will enable us to do is to resist in the evil day. But there's something else it will do for us as well. Paul tells us it will also enable us to stand firm. If you'll remember from my last message on Ephesians, to stand firm means to stand still and immovable like the foundation of the building. It speaks of holding your ground in a battle and standing undefeatable in warfare. When we take up the full armor of God we will be able to stand firm in the worst of storms and the most intense battles that Satan can bring our way. And isn't this something that each of us needs in our daily lives? I don't know about you, but I'd like to spend some time learning how to take up the full armor of God in a practical sense. What a promise this is for us!

Now we've all seen movies or read books about champions and warriors that had so studied and practiced and immersed themselves in the tools and practices of warfare, that they seemed undefeatable and could successfully fight their way through the most intense battles, fighting off attackers coming from every direction and leading their army to victory even against what seemed insurmountable odds.

While I was sick with bronchitis recently, trying to rest and recuperate, I spent some time reading a classic book called Ivanhoe by Sir Walter Scott. In that book the character Ivanhoe was one such champion. He came as a mystery competitor to a medieval knight competition and was able to fight off even the most respected and skilled knights, defeating one after another and fighting off attackers from all sides. However, after winning the competition he collapsed from exhaustion and injuries he had sustained in the fighting. In the story he was nursed back to health by a Jewish maiden who had compassion on him. However, at that time in English history the Jewish people were regarded as the outcasts of society and a people accursed by God. They were treated in the most horrific manner and disrespected and dishonored by nearly all people in England.

But as the story goes on, Ivanhoe's health gradually improved under the care of this Jewish maiden. Meanwhile, this Jewish girl was falsely accused of witchcraft because of her amazing medical skills and a secret medicine she used that seemed to have miraculous qualities. During her trial it appeared that she was going to be convicted because of false witnesses that were brought forward, and she ended up asking that her guilt or innocence be determined by a fight or duel between a knight chosen by her accusers and a champion that she hoped would arise on her behalf. If her champion won the duel, she would be declared innocent, but if the other knight came out victorious, she would be declared guilty and be burned at the stake.

Of course the chances of a champion arising voluntarily on behalf of a Jewish maiden, were slim to none since, as we already mentioned, Jews were almost universally regarded as the scum of the earth. But this appeared to be her only hope and she decided to trust her fate to God and pray for a miracle. And you can probably imagine what happened now. When Ivanhoe heard that the Jewish girl who had shown compassion on him was being tried for witchcraft and needed a champion, he immediately started traveling at top speed on his horse to get there and fight on her behalf before the time deadline for a champion to arise had expired.

But the big problem was, Ivanhoe was not back to full health and really was in no state to fight a battle with one of the best knights in the land. And when he finally arrived at the battle scene after a day's long horse ride, he was already about to fall off of his horse from physical exhaustion and his horse was also about to collapse. And yet the fight had to proceed at that very moment according to the rules that had been set for the trial. So as Ivanhoe and the other knight charged toward each other on horseback with their javelins, at the first clash Ivanhoe's horse fell to the ground. Ivanhoe was able to get up and was ready to continue battle on foot, though he was barely able to walk straight because of his exhaustion and wounds that had still not fully healed.

But wait, the other knight had also fallen off his horse and was not getting up from the ground. It was soon determined that he had suffered some sort of heart attack or stroke and was dead on the scene. The trial was over and the Jewish maiden was freed and declared innocent. The conclusion was: the Lord had spoken.

I tell you this story because I think it gives us a good illustration of the battle each of us is called to fight by being strong in the strength of the Lord and in the strength of his might. Our battle is spiritual and one that we cannot win with our physical strength and human abilities. But it's one that we can win hands down by trusting in the Lord and walking in his power. We may feel physically exhausted and worn out and close to giving up, but God is fighting for us, and when we seek him and rely on him and trust in his power, we are undefeatable and can resist and stand firm against any opponent and against the most overwhelming spiritual forces of wickedness that Satan can rouse up against us.

OUR RESPONSIBILITY IN THE BATTLE

And back in Ephesians 6, verse 13, I want you to notice that little phrase: “**and having done everything.**” Paul says, “**Therefore, take up the full armor of God, so that you will be able to resist in evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm.**” This phrase, “and having done everything,” speaks to our responsibility in the battle. There's a false teaching out there that arises sometimes when people begin to learn about this concept of walking by the Spirit and giving up on our own strength. Some people will take it to the extent that we no longer need to do anything. They start thinking we just need to sit around and wait for God to motivate us and move us and get things done for us. In their reaction against legalism and the idea of doing things for God in their own strength, they go to the opposite extreme and promote doing nothing unless God gives them a deep desire to do it or physically moves them to action.

But what Paul is telling us here in verse 13 is that we still have a responsibility to take action and to walk and move and do things. But we do these things as we walk with him, rely on him, pray without ceasing for his strength and wisdom, and follow his prompting and guidance. I like the way it's been described by Jerry Bridges in an article he wrote in *Modern Reformation Magazine* in 2003: he called it “dependent effort.”

Again Ivanhoe provides a great illustration of this point. How successful do you think Ivanhoe would have been at rescuing the Jewish maiden if he had just sat at home and hoped for the best for her? Instead we see him moving out even in his physical weakness and doing what he knows is right and good even if it costs him

his life. And it's God who gives the victory and wins the battle. And the same is true for us when we move out according to his will and rely on his strength and power and wisdom as we go. Having done everything, we stand firm because God is fighting for us, protecting us, and accomplishing his will through us.

As some of you may know, my daughter Hailey has some serious fear of the dentist's office. Can any of you relate? Well in one of our recent battles to get a cavity filled, she got extremely afraid and wouldn't cooperate with the dentist. In this process she asked me to pray that God would help her do what she needed to do. We prayed right there in the dental chair, but we still didn't make any progress because she would never open her mouth.

Afterwards, she said, "Dad, why didn't God answer my prayer and help me?" What fun questions we get to answer as parents sometimes! But as we discussed this, I tried to explain to Hailey that we need to cooperate with God if we want to see him work. We pray for strength and courage, but if we don't start expressing our faith in God by walking and allowing him to give us strength and courage as we go, we aren't going to experience his miraculous work. If after praying for strength and courage at the dentist's office, we then refuse to open our mouths and trust that God will conquer our fears and take care of us, we're not going to experience his provision. We're going to sit there with our mouth closed and eventually get kicked out of the dentist's office.

Instead, God calls us to pray and then step out in faith, continuing to pray as we go. We don't pray and then lock ourselves in our room and expect God to work through us. We pray and then walk out in faith and as we do God provides the strength of his might and gives us what we need to fight the battle and be able to resist and stand firm.

CONCLUSION

My friends, we've been given an amazing promise and gift from God. We've been given everything we need to be able to resist the devil's lies and schemes and attacks, and to stand firm in our faith, protected perfectly by the power of God, through even the worst situations and circumstances we will ever face in this life. And this gift we've been given is the full armor of God. In the coming weeks, Lord willing, we're going to immerse ourselves in the process of understanding each

element of the armor of God and considering how we can practically in our daily lives wear this armor and use it to fight the spiritual battle that we're in right at this very moment. We're going to learn how to be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might, walking out in power by faith and with peace and joy and steadfastness through both the good and bad times of the life we've been given.

Let's prepare our hearts and ask God to open up our eyes to these powerful truths in the weeks to come and equip us to truly walk worthy of the calling we've received, accomplishing his will and experiencing his love and life and power in the everyday circumstances we walk through each day of our lives.