

Armed with Sincerity

Ephesians 6:14

Halifax: 9 November 2008

Introduction:

Last week, we took a look at what God's Word says to us at the end of this great epistle to the Ephesians.

- Ephesians 6:10 begins with the word “finally” because the apostle is closing out what he has to say...
 - In the first three chapters he set forth as fully as he could the grace of our Lord that comes to us in salvation through Jesus Christ...
 - Throughout these chapters he expresses his earnest desire that the Ephesians will grow in their understanding and appreciation of the riches of this grace.
 - Oh that we could see more of it!
 - These words are not just for the Ephesians, they are for us also.
 - And then after showing the riches of God's grace in Christ,
 - He begins to admonish the Ephesians in chapter 4—urging them to walk worthy of the calling they have in Jesus Christ...
 - to put off the old man and to put in the new man that is being renewed in the image of God...
 - In this section, the Lord calls His people to live the new life that you have in Christ...
 - He calls you to be adorned with it—
 - to walk in it so that it permeates everything we do.
 - He is calling you to be beautiful in His salvation—
 - to live as His children who are empowered by His grace.
 - And it is after showing us this beautiful life that we are called to live that we come to Ephesians 6:10.
 - And here the Apostle says “finally” because he is giving his concluding exhortation...
 - And this concluding exhortation is that we be sure to arm ourselves with the armour the Lord provides...
 - He is reminding us that in this world, we will have tribulation in Christ.
 - As soon as we turn to Him, there are many hostile forces that are aroused.

- They rally against us in a struggle to turn us away from the Lord and from His salvation.
- They are enemies that are crafty and powerful and cruel... and they are many...
 - They are so capable that they can even turn intelligent human beings to spiritual darkness so that they even deny their own Creator, and do it with pride.
 - They can cause churches that were once faithful bearers of the truth to grovel in the mire of corruption and unbelief.
- If we do not fight in the strength and grace of the Lord,
 - we will not be able to stand.
- I warned you last week that this is a real threat!
 - Just look at all the churches that have not stood!
 - Just look at all the individuals that have not stood!
 - These apostates did not reject the Lord all at once...
 - It happened gradually.
 - It happened because they did not arm themselves with the whole armour of God.
 - They went into battle in their own strength.
 - The evil day came—the day of testing and temptation—and they could not resist their powerful enemies.
- Christian, you are fighting against enemies that are much stronger than you...
 - And if you have come into the church without the Lord—if you have come on your own,
 - you will not be able to stand because you are really not standing at all.
 - If you are a Christian only in a nominal sense and not in truth, they will at last destroy you.
 - It is only those who truly come to Christ and so clothe themselves with His armour that will endure to the end.

And this morning we come to verse 14—Eph 6:14—where the Apostle Paul begins to describe the different pieces of armour that make up our panoply...

- He appears to be thinking of the Roman armour that would have been such a familiar sight as he saw Roman armies going out and coming in from battle...

- and he also appears to be thinking of allusions to armour in the Old Testament where we read of Christ—
 - In Isaiah 11:5 with righteousness as the belt of His loins and faithfulness (or truth) as the belt of His waist...
 - or in Isa 59:17 where we are told that He put on righteousness as a breastplate and a helmet of salvation on His head.
- It is an apt picture of the equipment we need as we go into spiritual conflict with the principalities and powers in the heavenly places...
 - as they bring an attack against us with an earnest desire to separate us from Christ—to turn us from Him and His salvation...
 - We need to be armed for the fray,
 - we need to be armed with the armour that attaches us to Christ our Saviour and that He gives to all who trust in Him.
 - It is of the highest importance for you to see that you have this armour!

And today I want to look at the very first piece that you are told to put on...

- The order more or less follows the order in which each piece would be put on...
 - And in 6:14, we have the first one...
 - It is the belt of truth—
 - We are to see that our waist is girded with truth...
 - Notice that he does not exactly tell you to put this belt on,
 - but rather to see that you have already put it on...
 - It is the belt or sash that the soldiers wore so that everything would stay in place...
 - So that the tunic they wore in those days would stay up out their way,
 - The breastplate also attached to this girdle as did the sword.
 - This belt was foundational to the soldier's attire.
 - It kept everything together.

Now as we examine this “belt of truth,” I want to look at three things this morning:

First, at what it means to gird yourself with truth...

Second, at why it is important for you to have this piece of armour...

and third, how you can be sure that you are clothed with this belt of truth.

So first of all,

I. What does it mean to gird yourself with truth?

A. There are two ways to look at what is meant by “truth (alhyeia)” here...

- This word has either an objective meaning or a subjective meaning...
 1. Truth in the objective sense refers to what is in accord with reality—
 - And in particular, with what is in accord with the eternal God who made the world.
 - He is the foundation and starting point of all truth, and whatever departs from Him is false and untrue.
 - God’s word is truth. It gives us the truth about God and about ourselves that we are blinded to in this fallen world.
 - There is no doubt that we must take objective truth into the battle with us if we are going to stand.
 - Even Jesus repelled that attack of Satan in the wilderness by quoting from Scripture...
 - He fought off the attack with truth in this objective sense.

TRANS> But unless Paul is repeating himself in verse 17,

- He is probably not using truth in this objective sense in verse 14 when he tells us to see that we are girded with truth...
 - In verse 17, he tells us to take the sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God—
 - That is where he tells us to take truth in the objective sense...
 - So here in verse 14,
 - the belt of truth is usually thought to refer to truth in the subjective sense.
- 2. Truth in the subjective sense speaks of sincerity—
 - a. It refers to a person who is true... free from pretence, falsehood, and deceit.
 - that you are not a hypocrite...
 - that you are not divided in your loyalty...
 - that you are sincere.
 - b. The Scripture very often uses the word truth as synonymous with sincerity.
 - 1) For example, in our Old Testament reading from Joshua 24,

- Joshua recounted to the people how the Lord had redeemed them out of Egypt and taken them to be His own people,
 - and how He had, as promised, given them the land of Canaan...
 - And now at this crucial time of their beginning to live in land,
 - he admonishes them to see that they are sincere...
 - In Joshua 24:14, he says:
 - Josh 24:14: "'Now therefore, fear the LORD, serve Him in sincerity and in truth, and put away the gods which your fathers served on the other side of the River and in Egypt. Serve the LORD!'"
 - You see here that serving in truth is serving with sincerity.
- 2) In 1 Kings 2:4, David, in speaking to Solomon, urges him to sincerity by recounting God's words of promise to him in which the Lord said:
- 1 Kings 2:4: 'If your sons take heed to their way, to walk before Me in truth with all their heart and with all their soul...you shall not lack a man on the throne of Israel.'
 - Obviously, the call to walk in truth with all the heart and with all the soul is a call to walk in sincerity.
- 3) David refers to truth in this same way in Psalm 51:6 where he says
- Psalm 51:6: Behold, You desire truth in the inward parts...
 - Truth in the inward parts refers to sincerity of purpose within, freedom from duplicity and hypocrisy.
- 4) And in the New Testament, truth is used in the same way in 1 Cor 5:8 where Paul is giving instruction about the manner in which we ought to come to the Lord's Table.
- He says,
 - 1 Cor 5:8: Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.
 - Here again, truth is put up together with sincerity to speak of truth within.

TRANS> So it would seem that this first piece of armour has to do with sincerity.

- But in saying this, I do not want to give the impression that objective truth and sincerity are mutually exclusive...
 - Quite the contrary!

3. The fact is, the sincere person will always embrace objective truth...he will embrace the truth of God.
 - a. I know this is a harsh thing to say—
 - It is really to say that those who do not accept the truth are hypocrites...
 - but I do not say this on my own opinion or as a personal judgement against others—
 - I say it because the Word of God says it...
 - Romans 1 tells us that the person who rejects God’s word is not being sincere—true within...
 - For the truth of God is clearly seen through the things that He has made.
 - Furthermore, we are made in His image and His law is written on our hearts...
 - So those who deny Him or those who worship idols, no matter how much they may claim to be sincere,
 - are not really being honest within.
 - Romans 1 states very clearly that even though they knew God, they did not honour Him as God...
 - There is a dishonesty with them...
 - a suppression of the truth that they know.
 - And so also when the gospel comes to us apart from the Spirit’s transforming work upon our hearts,
 - we reject it even though it is self-attesting...
 - It is something that is recognised when deception and dishonesty are removed.

TRANS> What I am saying is that the person who is sincere within will receive God’s truth with readiness.

- b. Jesus makes this relationship between objective truth and sincerity very clear in His teaching.
 - 1) He speaks of those who are “of the truth” meaning those who are sincere...they are true within...
 - And He shows that the characteristic of them is that they “hear His word”—they receive it, they embrace it, they accept it...
 - 2) You can see this in His conversation with Pontius Pilate when Pilate asks Jesus if He is a king and He says,

- John 18:37: "You say rightly that I am a king. For this cause I was born, and for this cause I have come into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice."
 - You see how objective truth and subjective truth are brought together.
 - Jesus came to bear witness to the truth—that's objective truth...
 - Those are of the truth (that's sincerity—subjective truth) hear Him.
 - Those who are "of the truth" embrace the truth when it is presented to them.
- 3) In John 16, He explains that the Spirit is the one who brings us into the truth—
- He is the one who convinces the world of sin, righteousness, and judgement...(objective truth)
 - But He does this work of convincing us by making us sincere.
 - He takes away the corruption that blinds us and causes us to reject the truth when it comes to us...
 - He first makes us sincere within—
 - a people of the truth—
 - and then we welcome the truth instead of pushing it away and denying it.
 - This teaches you that there is no room for boasting if you have received the truth,
 - for we would all reject the truth unless the Spirit changes us.
 - As fallen creatures, rejection of truth is our default mode.
 - Without the Spirit, you are characteristically an insincere rejecter of the truth...
 - but when the Spirit transforms you, you are characteristically a truth receiver in sincerity.
 - Boasting is not appropriate...
 - Instead you should give thanks that God the Spirit has opened your eyes to the truth by changing your rebellious heart.

TRANS> Okay, then, you see that when Eph 6:14 admonishes you to be sure that you have girded yourself with truth,

- it is a call to sincerity—to being true and genuine...
 - But let's look a little closer at what it means to be girded with truth...

- Girding was something people did in Bible times when they set to work or went into battle...
 - They had to tie up the loose, flowing garments they wore in those days so they would not get in the way...
 - They sort of tied everything together...
 - You can see how this relates to sincerity...
- B. To gird yourself with truth is to bind everything together...
1. It is to have a single-mindedness about you—a commitment to one thing.
 - a. It is the idea that is brought out in Psalm 86:11 where the Psalmist asks the Lord to “Unite my heart to fear your name.”
 - The idea is that everything within is united or brought together for the Lord...
 - that we would not have a divided heart... pulling is in all different directions...
 - partly ready to follow the Lord and partly ready to go after something else.
 - b. Jesus spoke about the difficulty of having two masters...
 - For example,
 - of having a commitment to riches so that your heart is partly inclined to them and partly inclined to serve the Lord...
 - or of having a commitment to the respect of man so that you are torn within—
 - wanting to serve Christ, but wanting to hold on to praise from others.
 - or the one who wants to have peace to such an extent that he is torn when following Christ will disrupt his peace...
 - Such a person has a divided heart instead of a united heart.
 2. This sincerity is what you are to start out with as a Christian—it is foundational...
 - a. As soon as you begin to follow Christ,
 - You need to see that you are fully committed to His honour,
 - fully committed to following His way
 - fully committed to His truth...
 - fully committed to His person...

- Some people come into the church because they find acceptance...
 - or because they like the music or the intellectual stimulation...
 - or because they like the morals...
- But none of those things are really the reason...
 - We come rather to be reconciled to God and to go forth for Him.
 - The other desires must not be made to compete with our commitment to the Lord...
- b. When you boil it down it is really the first commandment...
 - You are to have no other God's before the Lord...
 - Your whole heart is to be oriented toward Him and His praise...
 - You are to see that you are here for Him!
 - There is to be no competition.
- c. It is also the greatest commandment...
 - You are to love Him with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength.
 - This is what it is to be sincere.
 - Everything in you united to your God...
 - All your affections girded up to Christ...

TRANS> That is what it means to be girded with truth.

II. Why is it important to gird yourself with truth?

- **I mean, how does sincerity protect you when you engage in battle?**
- Well there are two ways I want to look at...
- A. First, the belt of truth protects you because it binds everything together...
 1. Without it, you have all these loose and misplaced affections flapping around all over the place—
 - Perhaps you have resentment toward the Lord—
 - things you are displeased with Him about that you have never settled—perhaps the trials He has given you to bear for Him...
 - Or perhaps you have some lust that you have never subdued—
 - some lust that comes your heart still goes out after—
 - for immorality, for drunkenness, for covetousness, for popularity, for peace and security...

- If you do not have the belt of sincerity,
 - You have all these things flapping around with nothing to reign them all in...
 - Everything is not bound up together so that you can freely run for Christ...
 - Without this belt, there is always something to trip over.
2. Let me ask you, who is going to be more likely to stand in the evil day?
- (You remember what the evil day is—the day when Satan and his army launches as an attack—
 - The day when temptation and trials come upon you with all their force...)
 - So I ask you, who is more likely to stand in the evil day?
 - The one who is half-hearted in his commitment to Christ or the one who is fully devoted to Him?
 - What will happen if you are still entertaining and nursing your sinful lusts when you are enticed?
 - What will happen if you craving riches and following Christ is going to bring loss or even poverty?
 - What will you do if you have resentment about your sufferings and you are afflicted with greater sufferings?
 - What will you do if the real reason you came to church was because you found love and acceptance and division comes?
 - I tell you, a person like that will turn back when temptation comes flooding in...
 - He will be overcome...
 - He will stumble because his heart and soul is not united to serve the Lord.
 - King Saul is a classic example of one who had a divided heart...
 - He could never fully give himself to the Lord...
 - He also kept back a part for himself and it is that part that made him stumble and fall.
3. Now you can see what the Scripture is getting at when it speaks of truth and sincerity preserving you...
- For example, in Proverbs 20:28, it says,
 - “Mercy and truth preserve the king.”

- A king's throne will be lost if his heart is divided—
 - If his decisions are based on expediency instead of on pleasing the Lord.
- Psalm 61:7 says the same thing...
 - In Psalm 61:6, it says:
 - “You will prolong the king’s life, His years as many generations, He shall abide before God forever,”
 - And then verse 7 pleads:
 - “Oh prepare mercy and truth, which may preserve Him.”
 - It is a request for a sincere heart toward God that will keep him from error.
- Apply this to church leadership...
 - What happens if the leaders decide to refrain from disciplining a man because he provides half of the church’s income?
 - Those leaders show that they are not true to the Lord...
 - They are more concerned about money than they are about pleasing the Lord.
 - They do not have sincerity to preserve them.

TRANS> Oh brothers and sisters, you see how much you need sincerity to keep you standing in the battle for the Lord!

- Without it, you will stumble around all over the place...
 - But this is not the only way the belt of truth will sustain you...
 - There is a second way it keeps you in the battle...

B. Sincerity is important for protection secondly because it stirs up the Lord to defend you!

1. In other words, it is not just the natural effects of sincerity—if I might call it that...
 - But it is also that sincerity causes the Lord to turn to your defense...
 - a. This is brought out very clearly in Psalm 145.
 - In Psalm 145:18-20, it says:
 - Psalm 145:18-20: “The LORD *is* near to all who call upon Him, To all who call upon Him in truth. He will fulfill the desire of those who fear Him; He also will hear their cry and save them. The LORD preserves all who love Him, But all the wicked He will destroy.”

- Did you hear that?
 - The Lord is near to all who call upon Him in truth—in sincerity!
 - Those who are earnest about following Him and about walking in His way.
 - b. There is no better protection than this!
 - To have the Lord’s favour and protection when you go into the battle—
 - to have Him near you!
 - this is what you need if you are going to stand!
 - And He will be near to you if you are sincere toward Him—
 - if you mean business with Him—
 - if you are going forth to honour Him...
2. If you are going forth with a divided heart and purpose, you can have no assurance of His aid!
- a. Nothing is more offensive to the Lord than a half-hearted, luke-warm Christian who has never really decided that he is in it for the Lord...
 - 1) Some of you covenant children—you can dabble around, but I tell you that Christ will spit you out of His mouth!
 - He would rather have you as a sworn enemy than a dabbler!
 - As Joshua and Elijah both said,
 - “Choose you this day whom you will serve!”
 - Christianity is not for dabblers!
 - All you will do is bring God’s wrath upon your head.
 - 2) And you adults, it is the same for you!
 - What will it be?
 - Are you going to live for the glory of God?
 - Are you going to accept the trials He sends as opportunities to serve Him—are you going to glory in your tribulations for Him?
 - Are you going to lay aside those sinful lusts and passions that you keep holding on to and that keep on tripping you up?
 - b. I tell you if you are not willing to “put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry.”
 - you have no reason to expect God’s grace when the day of evil comes.

- Hear the dreadful words that the Lord pronounced against Asa the King when his heart was not loyal:
 - 2 Chron 16:9” For the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show Himself strong on behalf of those whose heart is loyal to Him. In this you have done foolishly; therefore from now on you shall have wars.
 - You desperately need God’s help and protection,
 - but if you are not sincere toward Him, you need not expect it.
 - Why should He help you if you are not devoted to Him in truth—if you are just playing games?
- c. But having said that, I want to say something to those who have tender consciences...
- The truth is, none of us are perfectly sincere as long as we are in this world...
 - none but Christ who is our righteousness...
 - so I am not talking about perfect sincerity...
 - 1 John 1:8 even goes so far as to say that the one who claims that he is without sin is the hypocrite...
 - It says, ““If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.”
 - As long as you are in this world, we are not talking about perfection when we speak of sincerity,
 - but we are talking about the sincere pursuit of God’s will.
 - So I am not insisting on a perfect sincerity, but what we might call an evangelical sincerity... or a gospel sincerity...
 - It is a sincerity that causes you to be disturbed by the corruption you find in you...
 - It is a sincerity that refuses to make peace with sin—to have a truce, but continues to labour to put it to death...
 - A sincerity that desires to do good, but finds that evil is still present with you.
 - It is a sincerity that comes to Christ and earnestly pleads for mercy and grace to deliver you from this body of death...
 - from the corruption that remains in you.
 - That is the sincerity that gains the Lord’s favour...

- That is the sincerity you are to be sure you have because without it you will not be able to stand.
- It is an essential piece of armour for the Christian.

TRANS> I hope you have this sincerity—I hope you are girded with truth...

- And if you are, I have some counsel that should be of great interest to you...
 - And this is my third point...

III. How can you be sure that you are girded with truth? How can you maintain this sincerity?

A. First of all, you must examine yourself...

- You must search out those unsubdued beliefs and affections and attitudes that are not bound up in single-hearted sincerity...

1. You need to have a teachable spirit...

- There are those who are insincere about the truth—
 - and the reason (as I pointed out before) is because they do not really want to know the truth.
- Such persons are confused and unable to embrace the truth primarily because they do not like the truth and its implications.
 - Because a doctrine does not make sense to them or because it does not please them,
 - they are not open to even consider it...
 - It is no wonder that such persons will become confused and full of doubts and uncertainty.
- But not only do you need to be teachable about what you believe...
 - You also need to be teachable about what you love and how you live... always ready to correct and receive the truth.

2. You will do well to pray the prayer given to you in the Psalms,

- Psalm 139:23-24: Search me, O God, and know my heart; Try me, and know my anxieties; And see if there is any wicked way in me, And lead me in the way everlasting.
 - That is the prayer of the sincere—the person who wants to know the truth...
 - The person who wants to live in the truth...
 - The person who is sincere.

3. And then when the Lord exposes those sinful ways, those affections and attitudes that are not bound up in devotion to Him,
 - It is for you to pray the prayer our Lord taught us...
 - “Forgive us our debts and we forgive our debtors, and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.”
 - You must turn from those selfish attitudes that cause you to resent your trials—
 - You must turn from those fears and those anxieties that keep you from whole-hearted devotion to Him—bind them up with sincerity...
 - And you must embrace those duties or those doctrines that do not please you...

TRANS> Remember that the only reason you exist is for the glory of God.

- As long as you hang on to all these other purposes and desires,
 - you are not free to serve Him...
 - You will keep on tripping over them until you bind them up in the belt of sincerity.
- But you need a heart for this, don't you?
 - Well that brings me to my second piece of counsel for you to help you to be sincere...

B. Consider the Lord Jesus and what He has done for you!

1. Here is this wonderful Saviour who saw your wickedness—
 - and O how loathsome it was to His pure and holy eyes!
 - Yet, for your sake, He came to this earth in order that He might bear your sin!
 - He came to be cursed for all that wrong you have done and all that wrong with which you are associated as a part of this fallen human race...
 - And He **was** cursed and by His grace, you have been forgiven!
 - And now He earnestly yearns for you to enter into joyful fellowship with him and with His Father...
 - to live as God's child in purity and holiness!
 - He is so dedicated to what is good concerning you!
 - There is no love like this love—we cannot even begin to fully comprehend it!

2. But I am telling you that you need to consider Him and what He has done...
 - and after you have considered it,
 - you need to consider it again and again!
 - a. And then you need to ask yourself,
 - What else is there that is worthy of my devotion?
 - What else is there for my heart to be centered around but this wonderful Saviour who bleed for me?
 - b. What possible reason do I have to hold on to some stray affections and attitudes and beliefs that only water down my service and devotion to Christ?
 - What kind of response is that to the One who wholly gave Himself for me when I am but the creature?
 - and a highly offending creature at that?
 - What is to be gained by holding on to my own selfish desires when I could be devoted to Him?

Conclusion

Oh brothers and sisters,

- There is nothing else to do but to give yourself wholly to Him!
- See then, that you have girded yourself with truth!
- Nothing else will do!