

The Christian Life (25): Sanctification (Part 10)

Having considered the topics of mortification and temptation, we want to continue the theme of spiritual warfare and the subject of the armor of God. This morning we will consider the first of six pieces of armor: the belt of truth.

What is this armor? First, by armor is meant Christ. We read of 'putting on the Lord Jesus' (Rom.13:14), where Christ is set forth under the notion of armor (Isa.11:1-5; 59:16-17). Second, the graces of Christ, these are armor. Hence we are told to 'put on the new man' (Eph.4:24), which is made up of all the several graces, as its parts and members.¹

I. The Armor of God: The Belt of Truth

1. *What is it?* "Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth" (Eph.6:14). Christians have understood "truth" as objective truth or subjective truth. By objective truth is meant the truth of Scripture, "sanctify them in truth: Your word is truth" (Jn.17:17); "the sum of Your word is truth" (Ps.119:16). By subjective truth is meant truthfulness or sincerity, "You desire truth in the innermost being" (Ps.51:6); "let us therefore celebrate the feast with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth" (1Cor.5:8). Thus the question becomes, What does Paul mean by saying, "Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth"? "Some by truth mean *truth of doctrine*; others have it *truth of heart, sincerity*. Those I think right that comprise both for both indeed are required to make the girdle complete" (Gurnall).² "The truth here does not mean truth of doctrine, as the Word of God is again referred to, nor even sincerity in the sense of truthfulness, but the truth subjectively apprehended, that is, the knowledge and belief of the truth."³ "The belt is formed of truth, not objective truth, but of subjective truth—truthfulness. It is not simply integrity or sincerity, but the assured conviction that you believe, and that it is God's truth you believe" (Eadie).⁴ This is how John uses the term "truth" throughout his epistles. "He who says, I know Him, and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him" (1Jn.2:4). "The Elder, to the elect lady and her children, whom I love in truth, and not only I, but also all those who have known the truth, because of the truth which abides in us and will be with us forever" (2Jn.1:1-12). "For I rejoice greatly when brethren came and testified of the truth that is in you, just as you walk in the truth. I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth" (3Jn.1:3-4). In all of these examples, John speaks of the truth indwelling and abiding in us. This refers to the truth of Scripture believed and embraced in the heart with sincerity. Thus believing the truth doesn't render it truth, but putting on truth as a belt is believing that truth sincerely or truthfully.

By the belt of truth is meant truth subjectively considered; that is, the knowledge and belief of the truth. This is the first and indispensable qualification for a Christian soldier. To enter on its spiritual conflict ignorant or doubting, would be to enter battle blind and lame. As the girdle gives strength and freedom of action, and therefore confidence, so does the truth when spiritually apprehended and believed. Let not any one imagine that he is prepared to withstand the assaults of the powers of darkness, if his mind is stored with his own theories, or with the speculations of other men. Nothing but the truth of God, clearly understood and cordially embraced, will enable him to keep his feet for a moment, before these celestial potentates. Reason, tradition, speculative conviction,

¹ William Gurnall, *The Christian in Complete Armor*, 1:45

² William Gurnall, *The Christian in Complete Armor*, 1:291

³ The Pulpit Commentary, *Ephesians*, 268

⁴ John Eadie, *A Commentary on the Greek Text of Paul's Letter to the Ephesians*, 467

dead orthodoxy, are a girdle of spider-webs. They give way at the first onset. Truth alone, as abiding in the mind in the form of divine knowledge, can give strength or confidence even in the ordinary conflicts of the Christian life, much more in any really "evil day."⁵

I interpret the word "truth" in this context to mean a belief in, and a knowledge of, the "truth as it is in Christ Jesus." It is the objective truth, which I possess in a subjective manner. It means a mastery of the truth, but it also means being mastered by the truth. I am held by the truth. This is the thing that binds me and holds me together and puts me on my feet and gives me vigor and strength and power. Or, to express it more particularly, it means that I do not merely look at the Bible intellectually and study it as if it were, say, the Works of Shakespeare, but rather that its truth gets hold of me and governs my whole attitude to the world, the flesh, and the devil, and to everything that happens. I have girded myself with it. 'Gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end for the grace which shall be brought unto you', as Peter says.⁶

2. *Why is it important?* "Belts are often worn purely for adornment, and for the sake of appearance: but that was not at all in the mind of the Apostle. He assures us that this girdle is an absolutely essential part of the equipment; and it is therefore the first thing we have to put on" (MLJ).⁷ "Usually made of leather, the soldier's belt belonged rather to his underwear than his armor. It gathered his tunic together and also held his sword. Yet it was essential. It ensured that he was unimpeded when marching" (Stott).⁸ The belt of truth is influential to the whole man. It impacts and influences the soul (mind, heart, and will). "Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth" (Jn.17:17). The belt is truth embraced and experienced in the soul. To have our loins girded with truth means our thinking, feeling, and desiring are all subject to the truth of God. It's to have our minds, hearts, and wills governed and regulated by truth.

(1) The belt provides alertness. To "gird the loins" (or waist)" refers to a common ancient practice. Both Jews and Gentiles wore an outer tunic which went down to the feet. When it was time to perform some activity, he would tuck this garment into his belt (he would gird his loins). Thus, the phrase "to gird your loins" became synonymous with being ready, alert, or prepared for war. "Let your loins be girded about, and your lights burning" (Lk.12:35). "Be ready for action. That is the first step always. Never be caught, He says, in a condition in which you are not ready for action. That is another way of saying, 'Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth.' The first thing we have to make sure of is that we are ready for action and prepared for any possibility that may come" (MLJ).⁹ Those who have girded their loins with truth, are ready and prepared for battle. "The girdle gave the soldier a sense of security. He was ready, he was keyed up, he was alert, he was toned up for action and felt that everything was in order and in position" (MLJ).¹⁰

(2) The belt provides confidence. The belt is foundational to all else. For the first century Roman soldier, his belt was essential because it held together the other pieces of armor. If he didn't tighten his belt, nothing else would matter. The belt was essential to all else. "The belt is foundational. The soldier cannot hope to do anything without it and there would indeed be nothing but confusion if he did not start with

⁵ Charles Hodge, *Ephesians*, 282-283

⁶ Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Ephesians*, 7:189

⁷ Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Ephesians*, 7:184

⁸ John Stott, *The Message of Ephesians*, 277

⁹ Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Ephesians*, 7:185

¹⁰ Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Ephesians*, 7:185

it and make sure of it" (MLJ).¹¹ To possess truth within provides confidence that God is with you. This provides strength and motivation to the soul. "You are of God, little children, and have overcome them, because He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world" (1Jn.4:4). It provides joy and peace to the soul. "For our boasting is this: the testimony of our conscience that we conducted ourselves in the world in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom but by the grace of God, and more abundantly toward you" (2Cor.1:12). "This will give us courage in the day of sore trial, and comfort in the very agonies of death. 'And Hezekiah turned his face towards the wall, and prayed unto the Lord, and said, Remember now, O Lord, I pray, how I have walked before You in truth and with a loyal heart, and have done what is good in Your sight'" (Manton).¹²

(3) The belt provides freedom. "If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (Jn.8:31-32). Knowing the truth (or possessing it in the heart) gives liberation and freedom. Knowing the truth keeps us from becoming hindered by that "sin which so easily ensnares us" and allows us to "run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith" (Heb.12:1). "Without the belt to keep everything in place, the soldier could be hindered in battle. The belt enabled the soldier to fight unencumbered. With his belt in place, he was prepared and ready for action. The belt of truth was foundational" (Hamilton).¹³

When a man was sitting down and relaxed he took off his girdle; but the moment he wanted to become active he gathered his garments together and fixed them in position by a girdle. He did so because otherwise these flowing garments would have been a hindrance to him. He would constantly be stepping on them; he would be stumbling when trying to handle the sword, or when he held up his shield. So the first thing the soldier always did when he was getting ready to meet the enemy, was to gather all his clothing together and fix it firmly in position by means of this tight band or belt which then held all his clothing in position. And the very putting on of the girdle in and of itself braces one up and freed one for action.¹⁴

3. *How is it put on?* Fundamentally, to put on the belt of truth is to believe the truth. It's to possess the truth in the heart. To have it tied or girt around our spiritual waist. A truthful and sincere embrace of the truth is the Christian's belt or girdle. "We must resolve to be men and women who deliberately and self-consciously take up God's truth and bind it around our lives, 'Having girded your waist with truth'" (Hamilton).¹⁵ It's the loving reception of the truth of God that creates and begets truthfulness and sincerity in the heart. "Christian sincerity of heart is informed and shaped by the truth and authority of God's written Word. Under the ministry of the Holy Spirit, the power and authority of God's truth is transformative. It produces the family likeness in our lives as we are conformed to our Lord Jesus Christ (Rom.8:29), which is seen in heart integrity. Without inward integrity of heart, our lives are a shame. The armor of God will not hang upon lives where there is an absence of heart integrity" (Hamilton).¹⁶ Thus, having our loins girt with truth means we must "cling to the truth, know the truth, love the truth, and live the truth" (Beeke).¹⁷

¹¹ Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Ephesians*, 7:185

¹² Thomas Maton, *Works*, 18:97

¹³ Ian Hamilton, *Ephesians*, 266

¹⁴ Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Ephesians*, 7:184

¹⁵ Ian Hamilton, *Ephesians*, 269

¹⁶ Ian Hamilton, *Ephesians*, 268

¹⁷ Joel Beeke, *Striving Against Satan*, 45

Truth is the first thing we put on. Without it we are completely lost. It means that we have a settled conviction with regard to the truth; it means that there are no uncertainties, no doubts. It means also that there must be no lack of clarity. There is no hope, Paul says, unless you put this on first. And that means nothing less than that we should know whom we have believed, and we should know what we believe. The girdle is truth – looked on, understood, appropriated, and in such a manner that it governs the whole of my outlook in every respect. Only in this way, says the Apostle, can you possibly fight a successful warfare against the enemy.¹⁸

"Since Satan comes as a serpent in the persons of false teachers, and by them labors to put a cheat on us and deceive us with error for truth; to defend us against this design, it is necessary that we be girt with truth in our understanding—that we have an established judgment in the truths of Christ" (Gurnall).¹⁹ "Loins girt with truth are a symbol of the Christian binding to himself the Christian faith revealed in the Bible. The Bible is our objective standard of truth and our final authority for doctrine and life. The Bible speaks of loins of the mind rather than loins of the heart (1Pet.1:13) because, before truth can get to the heart, it must pass through the mind. So if you would fend off Satan, you must first fill your mind with truth" (Beeke).²⁰ "While error, like a thief, comes in at the window, yet truth, like the true owner of the house, delights to enter at the right door of the understanding from thence into the conscience, and so passes into the will and affections" (Gurnall).²¹

It should be the care of every Christian to get an established judgment in the truth. The Bereans are highly commended for the inquiry they made into the Scripture, to satisfy their judgments concerning the doctrine Paul preached. They did not believe hand over head, but their faith was the result of a judgment upon diligent search, convinced by Scripture evidence (Acts 17:11). It is said there that they 'searched the Scriptures daily whether these things were so.' They carried the preacher's doctrine to the written word, and compared it with that; and mark, 'therefore many of them believed' (v12). As they did not believe before, so they durst not but believe now.²²

In closing I want to suggest seven ways we can gird our loins with truth, the first five of which are taken from William Gurnall's *The Christian in Complete Armor*.²³ (1) Let your aim be sincere in embracing truths. "A false naughty heart and an unsound judgment, like ice and water, are produced mutually by one another. The reason of the fickleness of some men's judgments proceeds from the guile of their hearts. A stable mind and a double heart seldom meet" (Gurnall).²⁴ "Now the purpose of our charge is love from a pure heart, from a good conscience, and from sincere faith, from which some, having strayed, have turned aside to idle talk" (1Tim.1:5-6). "Such people never aimed at the power of holiness in receiving truth, that by it they might advance in their love, faith, and other graces" (Gurnall).²⁵

(2) Attend on the ministry of the word. "One great end of its appointment is to establish us in the truth: 'He gave some pastors and teachers for the perfecting of the saints' (Eph.4:11-12), and mark, 'that we

¹⁸ Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Ephesians*, 7:189

¹⁹ William Gurnall, *The Christian in Complete Armor*, 1:293

²⁰ Joel Beeke, *Striving Against Satan*, 44

²¹ William Gurnall, *The Christian in Complete Armor*, 1:294

²² William Gurnall, *The Christian in Complete Armor*, 1:293

²³ William Gurnall, *The Christian in Complete Armor*, 1:300-304

²⁴ William Gurnall, *The Christian in Complete Armor*, 1:300

²⁵ William Gurnall, *The Christian in Complete Armor*, 1:300

henceforth be no more children tossed to and fro' (v14). He that runs from his guide will soon be out of his way" (Gurnall).²⁶ As the church is "the pillar and ground of the truth" (1Tim.3:15), it's within her walls where truth is learned. Thus ministers are given to "feed the flock with knowledge and understanding" (Jer.3:15).

(3) Beware of curiosity. "He is half gone into error that vainly covets novelties, and listens after every new-fangled opinion. We read of 'itching ears,' (2Tim.4:3). This itch commonly ends in a scab of error. Those who gladly hear false teachers will soon become their disciples. Many indulge themselves so far in their curiosity of conversing with every sect and opinion, that at least they turn sceptics, and can settle upon nothing as truth. O take heed that you, who will now hear anything, come not in the end that you will believe nothing" (Gurnall).²⁷

(4) Humbly beg that the Spirit of truth would lead you into a true knowledge of truth. "No travelers lose their way sooner than they who think they know it so well that they need not ask it. And no professors are in danger of being drawn from the truth, so much as they who lean to their own understandings, and acknowledge not God in their way, by consulting with Him daily" (Gurnall).²⁸ "Show me Your ways, O LORD; teach me Your paths. Let me in Your truth and teach me, for You are the God of my salvation; on Your I wait all the day" (Ps.25:4-5; Ps.43:3).

(5) Rest not till you feel the efficacy of every truth you hold in your judgment, upon your heart. "One faculty helps another. The more clear truth is in the understanding the more abiding in the memory. And the more operative truth is on the will, the more fixed in the judgment. Let a thin be never so excellent, yet, if a man make little or no use thereof, it is little worth to him, and may easily be got from him" (Gurnall).²⁹ "Truth in the mind is not sufficient. We must also possess knowledge of the truth in the heart, our inmost being. If we are going to fight the devil successfully, not only must we master the truth, but the truth must master us" (Beeke)³⁰ "Let not mercy and truth forsake you; bind them around your neck, write them on the tablet of your heart, and so find favor and high esteem in the sight of God and man" (Prov.3:3).

(6) Labor to walk practically and daily in the truth. "For I rejoiced greatly when brethren came and testified of the truth that is in you, just as you walk in the truth. I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth" (2Jn.1:3-4). Only those who have the truth in them can sincerely walk in the truth. "And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates (Deut.6:6-9). The Hebrew word translated "frontlets" literally means "to bind" and is to be understood figuratively and not literally. The word is to be within our hearts (v6), and upon our hands (v8a) and mind (v8b).

(7) Meditate much upon the transcendent excellency of truth. "The eye affects the heart; this is the window at which love enters. There never has been any who had a spiritual eye to see truth in her native beauty, but had a heart to love it. This was the way David's heart was ravished with the love of the word

²⁶ William Gurnall, *The Christian in Complete Armor*, 1:301

²⁷ William Gurnall, *The Christian in Complete Armor*, 1:302

²⁸ William Gurnall, *The Christian in Complete Armor*, 1:302

²⁹ William Gurnall, *The Christian in Complete Armor*, 1:303

³⁰ Joel Beeke, *Striving Against Satan*, 44-45

of truth: 'O how I love thy law, it is my meditation all the day' (Ps.119:96). While his thoughts were on it, his love was drawn to it" (Gurnall).³¹

Truth is *pure*; this made David love it (Ps.119:14). It is not only pure, but makes the soul pure and holy that embraces it. 'Sanctify them through thy truth, thy word is truth' (Jn.17:17). Is the pure water that God washes foul souls clean with. 'I will sprinkle clean water upon you and you shall be clean from all your filthiness' (Ezek.36:25). Truth is *sure* and has a firm bottom (Ps.19:7). We may lay the whole weight of our souls upon it and yet it will not crack under us. Cleave to truth and it will stick to you. It will go with you to prison, banishment, yea, to the stake. Truth is *free*, and makes the soul free that cleaves to us. 'The truth shall make you free' (Jn.8:32). In a word, truth is *victorious*. It is great and shall prevail at last. It is the great counsel of God and though many fine plots and devices are found in the hearts of men—which show what they would o—yet the counsel of the Lord shall stand. All their eggs are addled when they have set longest on them. Alas! They lack power to hatch what their malice sits brooding on. Sometimes, I confess, the enemies to truth get the militia of this lower world into their hands, and then truth seems to go to the ground, and those that witness to it are even slain; yet though the witnesses may lie dead in the streets, and truth sit disconsolate by them; but within a while they are walking and truth triumphing again.

Who loves not to be on the winning side? Choose truth for your side, and you have it. News may come that truth is sick, but never that it is dead. No, it is error that is short lived. 'A lying tongue is but for a moment;' but truth's age runs parallel with God's eternity. It shall live to see their heads laid in the dust and to walk over their graves that were so busy to make one for her. Live, did I say! Yea, reign in peace with those who now are willing to suffer with and for it. And would you not, Christian, be one among that goodly train of victors, who shall attend on Christ's triumphant chariot into the heavenly city, there to take the crown, and sit down in your throne with those that have kept the field, when Christ and His truth were militant here on earth? Thus, would you but in your thoughts wipe away the tears and blood which now cover the face of suffering truth, and present it to your eye as it shall look in glory, you could not but cleave to it with a love 'stronger than death.'³²

³¹ William Gurnall, *The Christian in Complete Armor*, 1:314

³² William Gurnall, *The Christian in Complete Armor*, 1:315-316