

The Armor of God

Books of Ezra and Nehemiah

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Please turn with me in your Bibles to the sixth chapter of Ephesians, Ephesians 6. We are continuing our study of the book of Nehemiah, then we're in Ephesians. Remember that as we were in Nehemiah 4, we saw that extraordinary account of the lives of the people of God as they rebuild Jerusalem, they rebuild the city walls. That's what they're called to do and the rebuilding of the walls necessitates that they be willing to fight; that we titled a couple of messages "The Sword and the Trowel." Though the word "trowel" doesn't occur in the English text, the idea is the tool, the tool of building like a trowel, and the sword, and that in verse 17 of Nehemiah 4 we see that they were with one hand they were building and with one hand they held a weapon. So there was the sense of a sword and the trowel were necessary implements for the people as they built the walls of Jerusalem, rebuilt the walls of Jerusalem, and so that we are called in the same way to build one another, Jerusalem now fulfilled in our day in the people of God and that as we build the church, we are building the new Jerusalem that will come down as a bride adorned for her husband. In Revelation 21, the new Jerusalem is the church of the living God and so as we build one another up in the faith, we build ourselves up in our holy faith, we build others up in the faith, we reach unbelievers, we're building Jerusalem and if we're going to be doing that, we're gonna have to also be ready to fight. And so we then went to a series of messages from that, we said we build, we fight, drawing on that last week, that title from the motto of the Seabees, the US Navy Construction Battalion, construction battalion, CB, and so if we build we have to be willing to fight. We build, we fight, that's who we're called to be.

Today the title of the message is "The Armor of God," just more straightforward from Ephesians 6, because as we looked at this, we saw there's a real parallel between Nehemiah and what he's trying to do and the book of Ephesians, and that Ephesians we saw and I'm not gonna review that except for just a couple of sentences, we did this last week, but we're called to build up the spiritual temple in Ephesians 2 which means building up, the metaphor changes slightly, to building up the body of Christ in Ephesians 4, and then that's carried on, as we do, you must be ready to stand against the attacks of the enemy, Ephesians 6. So we fight because we build. We build, we fight.

So that's what we saw last time, so today we're looking at the armor of God. The title of the message is "The Armor of God," and Ephesians 6:10-18. So we'll read the text

together. I'm reading from the New American Standard Bible. There's pew Bibles in the seats in front of you if you'd like to read along in the New American Standard if you have a different translation. Ephesians 6:10,

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,

Let's go to the Lord in prayer.

Our Father, how grateful we are for Your word. We're thankful, Lord, that in Your word we find everything that is necessary for life and godliness, that all Scripture is God-breathed and profitable to equip us, to fully equip us to live lives that are pleasing to You, fully equip us for every good work You call us to do. We come this morning thankful for Your word and thankful for the promise of the Holy Spirit to illuminate and to enlighten our eyes that we can see and behold wonderful things from Your word. And we pray that today You would do that, that You would help us to see and to understand and You would grant repentance and faith that we would rest in Christ. We pray for every believer here to grow in their sense of trust in the sufficiency of Jesus, grow in their consequent repentance and turning from sin. We pray for every unbeliever that's here that today might be the day that they truly give themselves to Christ and find in Him the answer to every longing of their soul. We pray this in Jesus' wonderful name. Amen.

So the armor of God. The armor of God. We are to take up the armor of God because we are in a fight. The New Testament uses this metaphor a number of different places, 1 Thessalonians 5 talks about taking up the armor of God; Romans 13 talks about taking up the armor of God; and here in Ephesians 6 you have a full description of the armor of God. Ted read from 1 Peter 5 earlier that says we have a spiritual adversary, the devil, therefore we're to be prepared for action; we're to be sober and vigilant. And so spiritual warfare is a reality and we talked about the fact that spiritual warfare, though, in previous messages, is primarily waged in the mind and so I want to remind you of just a couple of quick review of three points that we looked at previously.

Why are we at war? Well, we're at war because to be a child of God, to be born again, to be taken as we read earlier from as Jesus said, "How can you plunder the strong man's house unless you first bind the strong man?" What he said is, "I am," as Jesus was binding demons and casting out demons, he was taking souls from Satan's kingdom and he said, "What I'm doing is I'm binding the strong man, I'm binding Satan who had his whole house in order, all people under his dominion, his kingdom because of sin." And Jesus comes in and he is plundering his house and he says, "If I'm plundering his house, you know that I am mighty enough to bind the strong man." This spiritual warfare is happening. Well, once we become believers, we're now taken from the kingdom of darkness, translated to the kingdom of God's Son, Colossians 1:13, now we are the sworn enemies. Even more, I mean, Satan hates every human being on the face of the earth, born again and not. He hates all people. Why? Because they're in the image of God. He hates God and he hates those who bear the image of God but he has an especially deep hatred for those who have been born again and are now being conformed into the true image of God by becoming more and more like Christ. And so to be a Christian is to be at war. Why do we fight? Because if you know Jesus, you are at war. War has been declared.

Whom do we fight? The Scripture we just read tells us our struggle is not with flesh and blood. It's not people. It's not unbelievers. It's not people who disagree with us about particular values, particular truths. They're not our enemy. Our struggle, our wrestling is not with human beings. Our wrestling is with spiritual powers. He's so emphatic in the way he says it. Look how he just layers phrase upon phrase. Our struggle is not with 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. It is a spiritual war that we are waging and so those who may appear to be our enemies, those who may attack us because of our beliefs, I mean, you articulate the Gospel, you articulate the teachings of God's word in kindness to someone, and they often take that and turn that. Today the phrase coined "hate speech," well, that's hate speech. No, if I'm speaking the truth, I'm not hating anyone. I'm speaking the truth to serve this person and to help them be delivered from the darkness that they're in, the bondage that they're in. It's actually love speech but they call it hate speech. But it doesn't matter, that person who's saying that is not the enemy. Even though they may be thinking we're their enemy, they are not our enemy. It's very important to remember that. We're fighting against the spirit who has them in bondage and therefore we're actually on a rescue mission. We should have the same compassion that a first responder has when he's going out to rescue someone in peril.

So whom are we fighting. Satan. We could add to that the world and the flesh. The world system, not the world people. The world system of thinking. The world in Scripture when it talks about "love not the world neither the things that are in the world," John says in 1 John, "for the one who loves the world, if anyone loves the world the love of the Father is not in him," he's not talking about unbelievers because we're supposed to love the world in that sense because "God so loved the world that He gave his only begotten Son." You see, so the world, the word "world" can be used as every word can be used in different ways, different meanings. There's different semantic range with every word. But when

we say the world as our enemy, what we're talking about is the world the way the Bible speaks of it in 1 John 2. Love not the world, what is that? That is the system of values and beliefs and thinking that animates the world around us. It's the way the world thinks, what the world values, what the world believes about God and about man that are unbiblical and incorrect and actually destructive.

So you know, we battle against spiritual forces by having to deal also with this predominant thinking that you're inundated with every day, we're inundated every day with unbiblical, ungodly thinking in the world and so you're standing against that. You need the armor of God to stand against that and then the flesh, the world, the flesh, and the devil is the way the Bible describes our enemies. The devil works through the world, he works through the flesh. The flesh is our unredeemed human nature. After we're born again, we're given a new heart, we're given a new soul, but our bodies are still corrupt and decaying and will not be renewed until Jesus returns, and so the body has still the remnants of sin in it, indwelling sin. And so we deal with, you know, the struggle between the new nature and the old and so the world, the flesh and the devil.

Whom do we fight? Why do we fight? Well, by being a Christian we are at war. Whom do we fight? Satan, the world and the flesh. Where do we fight? The place that spiritual warfare is waged is not in some kind of mystical ideas, it's in the mind. It's for thoughts. You see, Satan is a liar and the way he kills is he lies and so the way you fight spiritually is with the truth. You proclaim the truth. You believe the truth, you proclaim the truth. That is spiritual warfare biblically and we see it even here as we look at the armor of God because taking up the armor of God really is talking about just really grounding yourself in the basic truths of the Gospel, in who you are in Christ. It's really who you are in union with Christ, that's what the armor of God is all about.

So let's make a couple of preliminary points before we get into the outline. We're gonna, the outline's basically we're going to follow each piece of armor but I want to make a couple of preliminary observations before we get into the outline.

The first preliminary observation is we're to take up the whole armor. The emphasis is strong there twice or the full armor, the New American Standard says in verse 11, "Put on the full armor of God." Verse 13, "Therefore, take up the full armor of God." Some of the other translations say, "whole armor." The idea is all the armor. Actually, interesting, just side note, just so when you see, we sang, those hymns we sang today were very much in line with this passage as you saw as Ted told us it was gonna be. The word "panoply" which basically means "a whole set" in English, but it actually comes from the Greek for whole armor. In Greek, the phrase "panoply" is actually a transliteration of the Greek word. "Pan" means "all." "Opla" means "weapon."

So all the weapons, whole armor, the panoply. We put on the panoply of God and the emphasis is clear. Twice he says, "the whole armor." Not part of it. No, all of it. You must put on all of it. Imagine being a Roman soldier and you're being called into battle and you think, "You know, I don't think I'm gonna wear my helmet today. I just don't feel like that. Where is it? I can't find it. No big deal, let's just go fight. Can't find my shield.

That's alright." No, if I'm going into battle, I want all my armor and you, Christian, are going into battle, you must do it with all your armor.

The second preliminary observation is not just whole armor or full armor but it's the armor of God. Both times he speaks of armor, he says "the armor of God." Verse 11, "Put on the full armor of God." Verse 13, "take up the full armor of God." It is God's armor. The armor belongs to God and comes from God and it's really how we understand "be strong in the Lord and the strength of His might." It's all connected. We are strong in the Lord in the strength of his might because we're putting on the armor that God gives us. It's not human armor. It is divinely powerful armor. It's the armor of God and it's the armor that Jesus Christ himself, in a sense, has forged for us.

I mentioned this before, let me just give you some verses that you can look up later and we're not going to take time to turn to them right now, but I think Paul has in mind these Old Testament verses related to each of the pieces of armor and most of the verses are from Isaiah. Isaiah 11:5 you find the belt of faithfulness and faithfulness there could be translated truth, belt of truth, Isaiah 11:5. In Isaiah 59:17, you find the breastplate of righteousness. In Isaiah 59:17, you also find the helmet of salvation. In Isaiah 49:2, you find the sword coming out of the mouth of the servant of the Lord, the sword of the Spirit. Isaiah 52:7, you find the shoes and Gospel and peace. Feet, Gospel and peace right together in the same way you have here. And then I would add Genesis 15:1 to verse 6, the shield of faith. These are Old Testament concepts that Paul is tying to his own and his readers' common knowledge about the armor of the Roman soldier.

It was likely Paul spent a lot of his time, we know he did, chained to Roman soldiers and so they're on either side at times, sometimes on both sides, sometimes on one, he was chained to a Roman soldier and there's the guy with the full armor. He was very familiar with the armor of God and he knew that those to who he wrote in Ephesus were familiar with the armor of God because Ephesus was a Roman colony. It was a part of the Roman colony of Asia and so they had Roman soldiers there maintaining order all around them, and so they saw the helmet, the breastplate, they saw their shoes, they understood, they saw their shield. And so these were very familiar things and so he says basically, "Listen, this metaphor is so helpful to understand how we are to prepare ourselves for battle, how we are to prepare ourselves for building," remember because as we build, we have to fight, and if we're building, we must be prepared to fight.

And so now with that in mind, we'll move to the outline. We're gonna, Lord willing, cover three pieces of armor this morning and the first is take up the belt of truth. The first point: take up the belt of truth. Take up the belt of truth. Now let's think about this just for a moment, think about what it means to build and why you have to fight as you build. Okay, to build people up in the faith, in faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, to build people up in their relationship to God is a fight. It's a building that you need to be ready to fight.

Now this can have basically three different ways you can think about this. You're building the city of Jerusalem, the spiritual city of Jerusalem when you are building your own soul, you're pursuing holiness in your own life. When you are reading your Bible,

you're praying, you're meditating, you're reflecting on sin in your life and you're trying to put it off, you're trying to walk in increased holiness, you're learning, you're studying about these things, you're building. You're building this part of the city, okay?

Another way that you are building and you should expect as you build that you will experience spiritual warfare because Satan does not want you to have success in building, you see? He's just like those he animated in Nehemiah's day, Sanballat and Tobiah, who wanted to stop the work on the city of Jerusalem and they were determined to stop the work because they were doing the bidding of their father, the devil, who wants to stop the work of God. And so when you're building yourself, you're going to have to be taking up the armor of God as you do it.

That one last point, another preliminary observation I forgot to make preliminary but just make a note, this is a third preliminary observation. Interesting that in the tenses of verbs in the original, there's one present tense verb in this whole passage and it is "be strong in the Lord." Now Greek present is different than English present. English present and past is all about time. You know, present time, past time, future time. That's how we look at tense, right? In Greek it's slightly different. Time is a part of it but a bigger component of tense is actually not the time of the action but the kind of action that's described, and the Greek present pictures ongoing continuous action so that to be strong in the Lord means to be being strong, continue being strong in the Lord, continually be strong in the Lord. What's interesting is that every other verb is in the aorist and the aorist tense is normally a past tense but, like I said, it's not so much about time as kind. The aorist tense is not continuous ongoing action, it is punctiliar action. It's action at a point in time. It's decisive and it emphasizes the decisive sort of determination to take the action. And so he's basically saying, "Be being strong in the Lord by regularly at intervals, at moments when you realize you're in battle, take up the armor of God. Decisively take it up and then you will be being strong. When you realize, take it up and put it on."

And so anyway, this is, with that said now take up the belt of truth. I'm sorry, I didn't finish what I was talking about a minute ago. So you're building when you're building yourself. You're building when you're building another believer. When you are going to talk to somebody that you think maybe has a problem or you just have a disagreement and you're talking to your spouse, you're talking to your child, or you're talking to your friend if they're in Christ and you go in to talk to them and to try to work out something out and suddenly you're having an edifying conversation. We should always be wanting to speak those things which are edifying to our brothers and sisters, right? And so when you're doing that, maybe you're helping confront and expose an area of real weakness and concern and sin in their life, when you're doing that and you're doing it in love, you are building the city of God.

So helping one another is building, so when you do that, know that we build, we fight. You have to be ready to fight. You've got to take up the armor of God as you go about building because Satan does not want that to happen. He doesn't want there to be reconciliation of a relationship where there's been sin. He doesn't want there to be coming together in a way that's really gonna bring about transparent sharing, and now sharing the

load together to help one another to follow Jesus. Satan hates that. He doesn't want that to happen so you must take up the armor when you're doing that. And so don't be surprised when there is a battle.

You know, I think too often we act like, I do this, I forget I'm at war. I mean, I think it's natural, it's basically part of our wiring because we are created, this is a helpful realization, mankind was created for a perfect world. We were created for a world that where things work. We were created for a world where people are in harmony. And so, now sin has wrecked everything, it's wrecked us, but there's still that remnant of a sense of which we know things ought to be different and this is one of the reasons why we want things just to go well. We think it should. I mean, we think when we plant a seed and we till the ground, we plant a seed, and we water it, it should grow. We plant grass, grass should grow. Well, what happens? We've got weeds. Isn't it amazing how easy it is to grow weeds? You don't even have to try. But man, to grow the grass, that is work.

So you want everything to go well, that's normal, there's nothing wrong with that. There's really nothing inherently sinful at all about wanting things to go well. I mean, I joke sometimes that I don't know what it is but when I'm driving, I just want every light to be green every time I pull up to it. What's it really matter? I mean, especially if I'm not running late or anything, what's it matter? But I just want that because it just feels like that's the way it ought to be and, man, you know, I'll sometimes count how many lights I've gotten in a row. "That's seven in a row. Unbelievable. Let's get number eight. Oh no." Then you watch out for running lights when you get too into that, right, running a red light, and then you might see a blue light.

We want things to go well so when we go to have a conversation with someone to try to build them up in the Lord, we just kind of expect that it's gonna be easy but we live in a fallen world where nothing grows easily anymore. And not only does it not grow easily but we are opposed as we're trying to do it. Think about if you're trying to like, you know, maybe you're working on your yard and you're trying to plant bushes but somebody's attacking you the whole time you're doing it. That is reality. That's what's happening. You're trying to do stuff that's difficult enough, as it were, and yet in addition to that you have an enemy who is attacking you, actively trying to stop the work.

This is why we must be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. That's what we talked about last week. The strength of his might, that's resurrection power. Ephesians 6:10 hearkens back to Ephesians 1:19, that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened to understand what is the hope of his calling, what is the surpassing greatness of his power toward us who believe which is in accordance with the strength of the working of his might when he raised Jesus Christ from the dead and seated him at the right hand of God. So we have all power that is necessary. It's available if you put on the armor of God. So we have to understand this is what we have. Every day we sign up for this, I mean, we signed up for it. There's no choice. There's no other way out. We are in a war until Jesus comes back or until we die and go home to be with him and so that is our calling.

So you're doing that when you're building when you talk, when you're talking to yourself, as it were, right? You're counseling yourself with the word of God, "Lord, help me work on this." You're doing, you're building when you're talking to another believer to edify them. You're also building when you're talking to an unbeliever and you're hoping that that conversation is gonna be a Gospel conversation and you're trying to see that this person could come from darkness into light by the power of Christ and the power of his Spirit and the power of his word. But when you're doing that, it's easier to think of those as spiritual warfare but all of those are spiritual warfare, but even then we can sort of expect things to go too well. Like, we just, you know, the fact that I care about this person and I'm trying to be kind to them, that should automatically open them up and they should see me as a nice guy and want to hear what I have to say. That's just really dumb. I think like that and I have to be reminded. Wait a minute, what was I thinking? It's like you turn into Pollyanna all of a sudden, you know?

Anyway, so no matter which way you're building, individually, in yourself, to another believer, or talking to an unbeliever, you're building, you're also fighting. Now with that in mind, take up the belt of truth. Take up the belt of truth. First of all, as we look at this we're gonna talk about the importance of each piece of armor from a practical standpoint and why Paul chooses it. Put on the belt. The New American Standard translates this literally as "having girded your loins." That's what it says in the Greek, "having girded your loins with truth." But to gird your loins is essentially the same way as relates to us as putting on a belt. Now this was especially important because these people lived at a time when men wore long flowing robes. This was the common clothing of the day and if you had a long flowing robe on and you want to go on a long walk or you want to get to work or you need to fight, the first thing you must do is gird up your loins. That is, put a belt on and gather that material in so that you don't trip and fall down because there's no way to go on a long journey or to do physical work that needs to be, you're moving around for, or certainly not to fight with a robe that is not girded, that's not belted. So the point of this is that don't be tripped up. Put on the belt so that you're not tripped up as you go into battle. I mean, imagine that, the other army is coming against you and you fall down right as they get to you. That's not a good scene.

So begin by putting on the belt of truth. This really would be the first piece of armor that a soldier would put on in that day. Don't be tripped up. To be tripped up would be to be rendered completely ineffective for the battle. But he says put on, take up the belt of truth. The belt is the belt of truth. I think what's going on here is he's basically saying that what you must start with is a commitment to the word of God and I would say in a phrase that taking the belt of truth, girding your loins with truth in a phrase is to be absolutely submitted to the word of God; to make a commitment at the very beginning as you move into a situation dealing with yourself, dealing with others, that I'm going to be absolutely submitted to the word of God. I'm going to submit my thinking to the word of God.

This idea of even the connection between the girding of the loins and the mind is made clear in 1 Peter 1:13 where Peter there writes, "Gird up your loins. Prepare your minds for action, girding up the loins of your mind." That's the wording, gird up the loins of your mind. So it's about thinking. So the idea is with the truth, truth is, where is truth?

The word of God is truth, John 17:17, "Sanctify them in thy truth, thy word is truth." And so to keep from being tripped up as you move into battle as people are coming against you, you need to have your loins girded with truth, the belt of truth on.

A. W. Pink writes about this. He says that to take up the belt of truth is to have your mind disciplined to submit completely to the word of God. To have your mind, it's a disciplined mind is what he's talking about. It's that you are, you're bringing your mind into submission. You're disciplining your mind. He goes on to write the opposite of this, the opposite of a mind that is, that the belt of truth is not on, the opposite of that is where the thoughts are allowed to run loose and wild. That's how Pink says it. The thoughts of the mind are allowed to run loose and wild.

If you have that kind of a mind going into battle, you are going to be tripped up even as the battle begins. You will make no progress. You will be rendered completely ineffective. Thankfully in Christ you cannot be killed because you belong to Jesus. I mean, you could be physically killed but you cannot be spiritually taken out. You're in him forever. But you can be rendered completely incapacitated, completely ineffectual if you don't have this commitment to the word of truth. In fact, that language that Pink uses where thoughts are allowed to run loose and wild recalls to mind a passage we looked at last week, 2 Corinthians 10:3-5, when Paul says there the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but are mighty through God, the pulling down of strongholds. Then he says our objective is to bring every thought captive. Think about that, every thought captive to the obedience of Christ. You see, our thoughts want to run and go but the disciplined mind, the mind that has the belt of truth is bringing every thought captive to the obedience of Christ. Nothing's running loose and wild.

It really begins with a fundamental commitment to be submitted to the word of God. I mean, absolute submission to the word of God. It's so important. I've said this a number of times but I'm gonna say it again because it's just so important that we have this built in in our wiring. In Genesis 1 and 2, what you see when God makes man, the first thing he does is speak to man. The first thing he does is speak to him and what does he do? He tells man who he is, why he's here, and what his place in the world is. The implications of that are staggering if you really think about it. This is before sin entered the world. Before man had sinned, man was, he was perfect. I mean, we can't imagine what it was like to not be born as sinners as we all were. His thinking is clear. It's right. He's made the way that God made him to be. He has a disposition to love God and to follow God. Amazing. That's what he was like. In that pristine and perfect state – listen to this – in that pristine and perfect state man was dependent, dependent upon the word of God. Man was made, as Paul Tripp says, to be a revelation receiver. We were not made to be independent thinkers. We were made to be dependent. Even in perfection man needed God to tell him who he was and why he was here and what he was to do. He needed the word of God.

You see this so beautifully in the life and ministry of Jesus Christ, when God becomes man and enters time and space and he lives, he lays aside the prerogatives of deity. He doesn't stop being God, not for a moment. He's holding the universe and the planets in their orbits, but the man, Christ Jesus, he doesn't use his prerogatives of deity to make

living as a human any easier. No, he lives as true human, true man of true man and you see this beautifully in the temptation of Jesus, the first temptation of Jesus in Matthew 4. What does Satan tempt Jesus? Remember he's been fasting for 40 days and Satan says, "Hey, if You are the Son of God," Satan knows he's the Son of God but that liar says, "If You are the Son of God, turn these stones into bread. Prove it." Jesus had the power in his deity to do that and Satan's saying basically, "Don't live as man dependent upon the Father, which is the mission You've come to do." Because even the miracles Jesus did, he did by the power of the Holy Spirit even though he's God. You see this clearly, you read Luke's Gospel, it makes a lot out of this, how the Spirit, he came in the power of the Spirit. So Satan is saying, "Use Your own power, Your own prerogatives, exercise them to show who You are." And Jesus says this, "Turn these stones into bread." Jesus was hungry; after fasting for 40 days, the body gets hungry again after all that time but not craving anything. When the body gets hungry again, it's basically meaning eat or die. You're about to die if you don't eat. In that moment Satan says, "Turn these stones into bread." And Jesus says this, "Man shall not live by bread alone but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God." He says, "It is written man shall not live by bread alone but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God." He is demonstrating that commitment even as he says it. He's not just telling you and me to do that, he was living it. He's living as man and he says, "Listen, I don't live merely by bread. No, man lives by the word of God." That's what I need more than I need my bread. I need the word of God. Jesus, perfect, sinless, still living as a sinless man, dependent upon the word of God.

So the message is if that's true of man before sin, how much more true is that of us today? How could we think we could go a moment without the word of God informing and teaching us? What appalling arrogance. What appalling stupidity and I say that as one who has been stupid and still struggles with that. It's just insanity because sin has totally distorted our ability to even think right. We judge for ourselves what we should never judge for ourselves. That's what happened when the knowledge of good and evil in Genesis 3, when man sinned essentially what man did and this is what Eve did, she let her thoughts run loose and wild at the instigation of the serpent. The serpent said, "Has God said you should not eat from any tree of the garden?" When God had said, "Eat from every tree of the garden except one and eat freely from all the trees but don't eat from that tree." So she followed the thinking of the serpent. She didn't submit to the word of God. She did not remember who God was and really submit to it. She, then, after he makes a second statement, then she evaluates for herself. She looked at the tree and saw that the tree was good for food and she considered that it was desirable to make one wise. It was a delight to the eyes. You see how she's deciding for herself? She takes from the fruit of the tree, she eats, and she dies spiritually at that instant. Her husband eats and he dies and God's word was true, "In the day you eat of it, you will surely die," and they died in the most profound way imaginable. They were separated from life. God is light, God is life, and to be separated from him is death. Their physical death followed some 900 years later. They started to die physically but spiritually they were dead all because she made a commitment to think independently. And Adam did the same. But we are made to be submitted to the word of God.

This means that, like say you're working on something yourself and this is like talking about your own character. You know, you read something in Scripture and it shows you the ugliness, it shows me the ugliness of my soul, my heart, "Look what's wrong in me." And the Scripture has a way of being very painful. Hebrews 4:12 says, "The word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword. It pierces to dividing joints and marrow, soul and spirit, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intentions of the heart." That's not a pleasant experience, going under the knife of God's word, and when it probes and when it finds areas that need to be dealt with, when it finds and discerns intentions of the heart that need to be repented of, it takes grace to then allow the Lord to do his work, to stay under the knife. It takes a heart commitment of submission to the word of God. It takes faith that says, "You know. I don't know."

I mean, one of the things that's just true is you have to come to a place as a Christian where you understand that it's really your opinion, my opinion just doesn't matter when it comes to God's word. It doesn't. I don't have to like it to believe it and, listen, the fact that I don't like it is a critique of me. Something fundamentally is wrong with me if I saw it correctly, if I'm reading it correctly and I saw it correctly, I would love it and think it's the most wonderful thing in the world because God is true and let every man be found a liar. He is true. He is right. His word, all of it is God-breathed. It is perfect and it's only reasonable that I should start to suspect. How ridiculous of me to critique God.

This happened to me when I was in seminary and I was dealing with an issue related to election, something that the Bible teaches in a lot of places that Christians are elect, chosen by God, and I was kind of chafing at that. I was at a seminary where the professors all believed that. I'd gone there because they were the only seminary, or one of the few seminaries at that time in the late 1980s that believed the Bible was the inerrant word of God. All the Southern Baptist seminaries were really truly heretical at that time. Praise God they're in a great place comparatively. But I go to this seminary and they're teaching that and I'm reasoning through it and you're supposed to go to the Scripture and ask honest questions, be truthful to God, "Lord, I don't understand this. This doesn't seem fair. It doesn't make sense to me." I was reading Romans 5 and I remember thinking that the argument Paul's making in Romans 5 is this, that the way God's, he's explaining how justification by faith works and essentially it's this, God declares you righteous in his sight forever by imputing the righteousness of Christ to you, that is, crediting what Jesus Christ did, his perfect record of righteousness. He always did what God wanted him to do every moment of every day for more than 30 years. He was a perfect human being and he has a perfect record of righteousness and Paul's making the argument in Romans 5:12-21, this is how God credits righteousness to you, by faith. You believe and you get, through Jesus' act, his decisive act of life of righteousness and his atoning death, you become righteous. He took your sins, he gives you his righteousness and what he does is, he says it's the same way that we were credited with Adam's sin. This is the argument. When Adam sinned, all men were condemned, all men were judged guilty in Adam's sin, and that's why all of us are born under sin, a sin nature.

Now if you're hearing that for the first time, you're probably thinking the same thing I was thinking when I was reading this and working through the text. I remember this

thought came across my mind, "Lord, that is not fair." And I think it's fine, I mean, I think you should ask God these kind of things all the time when you're reading the Scriptures. "Lord, if I'm understanding this correctly, I don't understand this. I don't really like this. Help me understand." At that time I said, "That is not fair." And another thought went across my mind, I think it was from the Holy Spirit and this was the thought, "Who are you to say what is fair or not? Who am I?" And I remember stopping and thinking, I was born in 1964, this is like 1988, I'm 24 years old. I was born in Georgia. You know, I went 12 years of school, went to college, now I'm in seminary, boy, I sure know a lot. What do I know? What do I know of the mysteries of the universe? What do the greatest minds that have ever lived know of the intricate mysteries of the universe? If we add up all the human knowledge that we have, I mean, you think about this, I love how everybody's talking about science, science, science all the time. Hey, I'm for the science. I want to know what the science is saying about wear a mask, don't wear a mask, all that stuff. I'm interested in listening to what they have to say. It's always a red flag if they say one thing, then they say the other, then they say the other, then they say the other. You know, coffee is bad for you. No, coffee is good for you. Eat margarine. No, eat butter. You know, whatever, right? Well, the whole thing is scientists though they're trying and we appreciate what they're doing, I mean, this is important. It's vital to humanity. It's part of our nature to want to know but you have to have some humility.

I remember hearing years ago someone said if you have a science book and it's more than 10 years old, you can throw it in the garbage. Why is that? Because science is continually studying and refining and coming to understand things and often coming to understand that what they believed 10 years ago is really not true at all. More data is gathered and it's not bad. We keep refining our understanding. If that's true, then how much do you or I know about things of eternal significance? Why would I place my eternal destiny on my own shoulders to say, "You know, it just doesn't sound right to me. That's just not fair." Is that not the height of arrogance and insanity for me to put myself as the arbiter of what is right?

Now if there was no other hope, we would, and this is why people are just hopeless, what are we doing if we all know nothing, this is what leads to nihilism. But what the message of Christianity is, that God is not silent, he has spoken, he has given us in the 66 books of the Bible a perfect revelation of his character, his plan, his purposes, his view of who we are and why we're here, his view of what our problems are, what we need. He's given us everything necessary for life and godliness. All Scripture, 2 Timothy 3:16, is God-breathed. That means, it means literally the word "graphe" is the word for "Scripture" and graphe we get the English word "graphic." It means "that which is written on the page." It's not the thoughts of the human authors that were inspired. No, Paul is saying in 2 Timothy 3:16 that all that which was written on the page is inspired, literally in the Greek breathed out by God. Now God used human authors who were writing with human personalities, dealing with real interesting, different circumstances and yet he's superintending it all by the power of his Spirit so that what comes out on the page is perfect, and the proof of that is if you have an open heart and you read your Bible, you will see the beauty and complexity and richness and unity of a book written by more than 40 different people. Think about this, the book's written by more than 40 different people,

unique among all the holy books in the world. Nothing like it, 40 different people, over 1,500 years starting in 1400 BC, ending by 100 AD, 1,500 years on three different continents in three different languages, Greek, Hebrew, Aramaic, and yet there is one clear discernible message, one perfect message that holds together. You go to Nehemiah reading about rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem in 445 BC and yet it resonates with what Paul says in Ephesians 6 because the author of Scripture is not, it's a human book, yes. Paul wrote. Nehemiah wrote. Yes, but it is the author, the true author of Scripture is God himself and every word of it is perfect and so we have a perfect record.

People try to tear it down. They say it's not right about this geographical detail, this historical reality. Just give them time. It's just like science, their views will end up on the ash heap of history. Time after time these examples like this. No, Sodom and Gomorrah were not where the Scripture says they were down below the Dead Sea. Sure enough, they find out something along the way, exactly where the Bible says they are is where they were. There was no guy named Tiglath-Pileser in Assyria. They say that. It's all made up. It's just a book of mythology until they find an inscription from Assyria with that name on it. There was no Pontius Pilate. I could go on and on and on. Every word of Scripture is perfect. Now if that's the case, why would I not submit my thinking and my life to it?

You know, Augustine actually he said it and then Anselm said it. Anselm had a phrase, "Faith seeking understanding." This doesn't mean blind faith. Our faith is not a blind faith. Our faith is a reasonable faith. It's the only reasonable faith. It takes much more blind faith to believe that all this universe came out of nothing. That's blind faith. That it evolved. When we see evolution is always a downward movement, we observe that. Yeah, becoming more specific but dogs that are bred never have the information, they're losing information all the way. It's the word of God that is true. Anselm said, "Faith seeking understanding," and Augustine before him had said, "I believe that I may understand." Now this comes in at this point and I think this is what it means to gird your loins with truth, to take up the belt of truth is to say, "I believe that I may understand." When I come to the word of God and I find things that are troubling and difficult for me personally, I don't want to obey this particular command, I don't know that it's true, it doesn't resonate with who I am, putting on the belt of truth means to submit to the word of God, and so it really means to have a disposition that is ready to place one's self under the word of God.

When that is there, that's faith seeking understanding and faith seeking understanding and you see this illustrated in the Psalms, the psalmists, I love how much realism is in the Bible. You read the Bible, I mean, it just deals honestly. The heroes of Scripture are not prettied up and air-brushed. I mean, Jesus didn't need any air-brushing, he's perfect, but every other hero of Scripture is not air-brushed. You see the flaws all over the place when you read. David. Abraham. Moses. But in the Psalms one of the things that you see is how they wrestle and struggle with the reality of their lives. You see them saying things like, "How long, O Lord? How long are You gonna leave me like this? Why have You forgotten me? Why have You forsaken me?" Now theoretically and theologically we know God has not forsaken them and he has not forgotten them but here they are out of

their experience expressing that and what that tells you is God, the God of glory who's made everything, sustaining everything, is a God who is so intensely gracious and so kind that he invites you to come to him with the true doubts and struggles of your heart but you go to him, faith seeking understanding, "I know that You are. I know that You are good. I know that You have spoken. I'm having trouble making sense out of this. Help me." And if you have that heart and you're willing to trust what he says in his word, you will come to understand, you will come to know enough from his word to stabilize you and to strengthen you.

So when you're trying to build, what happens is you start to have a conversation with someone and stuff comes at you, sometimes in your own mind, sometimes from them. Think about like talking to an unbeliever. There's all kind of ways that this can happen. They bring something up that you don't know, an objection, you know, there are a lot of folks who are really skilled at this. They have things that they've been researching and talking about and these are the ways you can just basically, you know, defeat unlearned Christians and so they say stuff to you. Well, listen, the belt of truth means you're not going to be unsettled by that. It doesn't mean you're not gonna listen to it. I mean, "I'm going to genuinely investigate what you have to say. If I think this person really wants to have a real dialog and they have a question, if I don't know I'm gonna go and I'm gonna, hey, I'm gonna try to go back and do some research on that, but I can tell you this, I'm confident that God's word is going to be vindicated. But I respect your question and your concern and I will get back to you on that. Let's make a time we can talk about that."

But there are all kinds of things. Let me give you an example. This can happen as you're reading your Bible and you're working on your own and it can trip you up. It can trip you up so that now you're no longer building. Do you see what happens? The attack comes and you're no longer building. I'll give you an example. I'm gonna pick kind of a hard one too. You're talking to someone or maybe you're just reading your Bible and you read into Joshua or you're talking to someone and they say, "Hey, what about the genocide in Joshua? Why did God command the Israelites when they went into Canaan to kill all of the people in the land including children, including the animals?" Now if you and I are honest, that is initially troubling, right? But what's your disposition of heart? Is your disposition of heart to stand in judgment on God or is your disposition of heart to have faith seeking understanding? Are you willing to go to the Lord and say, "Lord, I don't understand this but please help me," and to put shoes to that by reading your Bible more, by finding some biblical people who've responded to this question.

I remember when I first really wrestled with that myself, thinking about, "You know, what is that? What's going on?" And there's a sense in which we have to remember that at some level there's some things we're never going to fully understand. Faith seeking understanding doesn't mean you're going to understand as much as you want to but you'll understand enough. But let me try to help us deal with it since I raised that issue, I'm not gonna leave it and move on to the next point. Why did God do that? What does the Scripture say about that? How are we to understand that? You know, a couple of things I'll mention to you. I'm gonna give you some references and you can read them. Genesis 15 and one of the things is the ways of God, there is a perfection and a glory that

completely transcends our ability to anticipate how he would act. He says, "My way," this is Isaiah 55:8-9 add that in. You know, "My ways are not your ways. My thoughts are not your thoughts. As high as the heavens are above the earth," the Lord says, "so are My ways above your ways and My thoughts above your thoughts." Good to remember that.

Okay, back to Genesis 15. God has promised Abraham he's gonna make him a great nation and he's gonna give him the land of Canaan. He called him from Ur of the Chaldees and he said, "Go to the land I show you. I'm gonna give it to you and your descendants after you for an inheritance." This is the land of Canaan. When Abraham goes, he says he's gonna have a son. Ten years later he's got no son. He started out with that promise at age 75. Now at that time they were living to be about 140-150 so it's a little different than 75 today, being told you're gonna have a son. His wife was 65, Sarai. So it would be more like he was, you know, 45 or 42, 43. They'd been trying to have kids all these years. His wife's 35 and they've been trying to have kids for the last 15 years. No kids. This is kind of how it started out, okay? If you do the numbers, this is roughly accurate on the age because Abraham dies at over 150.

Alright, so but now he got that promise at 75, now he's 85. It's been 10 years and he's like, "Lord," the Lord shows up again. God doesn't see him every day, we just have record of him speaking to him occasionally. God comes to him and he says, "Abraham, I'm a shield to you and your very great Lord." And Abraham basically turns the conversation quickly, "Lord, I don't have an heir. I don't have a son. Can I remind You of that? You promised me this land and a son." And God says to him, "Look at the stars. If you could count them, so shall your descendants be." In verse 15:6 says, "And Abraham believed the Lord and it was credited to him as righteousness." He believed God's promise and God credited to him his righteousness and Abraham wants to know how he can know this and the Lord makes a covenant with him, cuts a covenant with him. He uses something that was common in that day to bind people together in a relationship. They would cut animals and separate the animals. They'd kill the animal, cut him in half, like, you know, cutting a cow and tearing it in half and separating the parts, or cutting a sheep the same way, separating the parts. This was a solemn covenant ceremony. Both parties would march through the pieces of animal reciting promises and essentially the message was, "If I don't keep my promise, let me be as these animals."

Well, in that day the Lord is the only one who passes through the pieces. He passes through twice. And so he's basically saying and he doesn't let Abraham pass through the pieces. Abraham is unconscious and he sees this in a dream as he's watching, a vision, but he doesn't pass through the pieces. The Lord's basically saying, "If I don't keep the covenant," God's saying this, "If I don't keep the covenant, let Me be as these pieces. And Abraham, when you don't keep the covenant, let Me be as these pieces." It's a picture of the cross. "I'm going to be faithful to My covenant but you're not going to be faithful and let the curse of your failure to keep the covenant fall upon Me." A beautiful picture of salvation.

He goes on, though, after that, the Lord speaks to him and says to him, "Know for certain that your descendants will be slaves for 400 years in a land," I forgot, he doesn't tell him

Egypt, "in another place." Slaves for 400 years, know for certain. "And because the wickedness of the Amorite is not yet complete," the wickedness of the Amorite is not yet complete. The phrase Amorite, the word Amorite is a general word for the peoples of Canaan that Abram's living in as a stranger. He doesn't have the land. He's not possessing it but he's living in it as a stranger, as an alien. He's pitching his tent in various places in the land. He spends his whole life that way. Isaac spends his whole life that way. Jacob spends most of his life that way until they go down into Egypt and then after Jacob dies, the people of Israel become slaves for 400 years. But God was telling Abraham it was going to happen way before it happened.

Now there's so many questions here. One question: why are you doing that, Lord? Why are you going to make my descendants? Now we don't have Abraham asking that. He was actually having a vision so actually you don't talk in a vision, you just have the vision, right? But I would have wanted to ask, "What's up with that? Why are You doing that, 400 years of slavery?" Well, the ways of God are not our ways and, you know, the essential answer to this, why God put them in slavery for 400 years was so that he could deliver them through the exodus and show the greatness, the surpassing greatness of his power because the exodus is a type of salvation. Christ our Passover Lamb has been sacrificed, 1 Corinthians 5:7. The same way the Passover lamb and the blood over the doorposts saved the people of Israel from the death angel while the Egyptians, the firstborn of every house died, and that delivered them from slavery. That is a picture of salvation.

So one of the reasons God did it was to show the glory of salvation. Now he put people through 400 years of slavery for that. What kind of God are we serving? You see how that raises questions, doesn't it? But if you have faith seeking understanding you will come to understand that the Lord was working in the hearts of people who would seek him all along the way. He was working in the hearts of people like Moses' mother who by faith had the baby and didn't turn him over to the Egyptians like she was supposed to. He was working saving people all along because our God is abounding in lovingkindness.

So that was going on. Now back to what the people in Canaan, the Amorite. The wickedness of the Amorite is not yet complete so I'm gonna send you into slavery, your people into slavery for 400 years because the wickedness of the Amorite is not yet complete. What he's saying is God's patience with the people of Canaan was so great that he was willing to allow his people to be enslaved. Now he had a double purpose. He had all these wonderful purposes and this is true of everything that happens in your life, all things work together for good to those who are called according to God's purpose, who love God and are called according to his purpose. What is his purpose? To make us like Christ which is the very best thing in the world, to be more like Jesus. That is life. And so everything, God is working everything in every direction for his purpose so he is in sending them into slavery, preparing a beautiful portrait of salvation and working among them even as they go through the difficulties.

What is it that makes you long for eternity? Is it not the difficulties in life? If everything, if I hit every green light for the rest of my life and everything happened exactly how I

wanted it, if everything happened from the time you're born exactly like you wanted until the day you die, you know where you're gonna wake up? In hell because you will have no understanding of your need of salvation. So God graciously allows affliction to come. Once sin separated us from God, God allows this to happen, and so he was working even in the people of Israel to cultivate their hearts for him. I think the Bible would give us that data as well.

Okay, but 400 years. I'm willing to put them there 400 years. The wickedness of the Amorite is not yet complete. Implication: when he takes them out of Egypt, the wickedness of the Amorite is complete. It is full. It is at its zenith. It is at a point like Sodom was in Genesis 18. Again, another tough passage but when you think about things from God's perspective it changes everything. Remember the story of Abraham and Sodom three chapters after the chapter we were just talking about, Genesis 15. Abraham is visited by the Lord and the Lord tells him, "I need to tell you what I'm gonna do to Sodom." And Abraham intercedes for Sodom. God's showing how he works through an intercessor to avert wrath. But remember the people, he said, "If there are 100 people that are righteous, will You spare them? 50? Yes. 40? Yes. 30? Yes. 20? Yes. 10? Yes, I'll spare them if there are 10 righteous." But there weren't 10 righteous, there was only Lot, his wife and two daughters that God spared out of Sodom.

You remember what happened when the angels went down? The angels go down, God's showing, condescending to us to show how he investigates before he does anything. He sends his angels in to Sodom to see if the report he's heard is accurate. God doesn't need that. He's condescending to show us what he's like. He's someone who never acts without full knowledge. So the angels go down, they warn Lot it's time to go. Remember the house is surrounded by the men of the village who have come to rape these men, they perceive as men. They want to have a terrible wicked act that they're all going to perform on these two men illustrating how wicked and these people were so given over to their lust that they're continually doing evil all the time. It was a world unimaginable. Bestiality was a part of it. You see that when you read Leviticus. Don't do the things the people in the land do. They had given themselves so completely to evil that there was no, nothing good or human.

So what we're seeing is God was using his people to bring about the same kind of judgment as was on Sodom. It's still not an easy thing to take but if you think about it from God's perspective and you have faith seeking understanding, you find that his ways are right and he's a God who saves people. Anyone who will look to him at any time when the judgment is coming and you see this as you read Joshua, you find the Lord showing grace to people like Rahab the harlot, a whole new tribe of people called the Gibeonites, when people humble themselves and turn to God, God saves them. There's no, it's not racial at all. There is no racial issue going on in that because the Lord was saving Egyptians, he was saving people out of Jericho, he was saving people after place after place after place. The issue is spiritual and religious, will you bow the knee to the one true God? And if you will, he will show mercy.

So faith seeking understanding says when I come to something I don't, it doesn't mean I immediately just blindly believe it but I have a disposition to submit my thinking to God's and if you have that disposition, you will, the Lord will show you. This is what it says in actually James 1:3 when he says, or verse 2, verse 3, "If any man lacks wisdom, let him ask of God who gives to all men, but let him not ask in an unbelieving way." If you ask God to give you wisdom, he will show you but you have to have a heart that's submitted to him and willing to do what he says and willing to honor him for what he says.

So girding up our loins with truth is being submitted to the word of God and when you move in to talk with someone, when they bring something up, you see how that can trip you up but if your heart is, "Hey, you know, I never thought about that and I can see how that seems unsettling. I understand that. It's really difficult, it's radical but let me, let's talk about that some more." And then just gently, winsomely hold forth the word of life with confidence that this really is, this is the word of God and the God who is revealed in this book though there are things at times that are troubling, his holy wrath is really a good thing. Why would we want to live in a world where no one punished people that really do heinous evil? Would we want that? Of course not. Our God is good and the most glorious expression of his goodness is in that the wrath, the greatest – listen to this – as bad as you might think the wrath was on Sodom, as bad as you think the wrath was on the people of Canaan, it pales in comparison to the wrath poured out upon Jesus Christ at Calvary. God himself fulfilled the promise that he gave to Abraham when he passed through the pieces alone. When Jesus died on the cross for our sins, he who knew no sin became sin for us that we might become the righteousness of God in him, and as he hung on the cross, God poured out his righteous fury upon our sins in the sin-bearer. Jesus laid down his life. What kind of love, what kind of God would do that? A God of infinite grace and love and compassion but a God who must be sought the way he, along the path he has ordained. There's only one way to be right with God. There's no other name given among men by which we must be saved but the name of Jesus and if you come to Jesus, all of your sins are wiped away. He puts them in the deepest ocean. He remembers them no more. Though our sins are as scarlet, he makes them white as snow.

Let's go to the Lord in prayer.

Our Father, we thank You for who You are. We thank You for the perfection of Your holy word. Father, we confess we are people who tend to unbelief. We know that sin by its nature tends to doubt Your goodness and tends to doubt the integrity of Your word and so we're wired to not trust You. In our old nature, we still wrestle with that. Help us, Lord. Help us to see the beauty of who You are. Help us to see the beauty and perfection of Your word and help us to submit our lives to it and then, Lord, as we have that commitment, help us to be strong in the Lord as we move to help others and to help ourselves and to help unbelievers come to know You. Lord, do great things. Drive back darkness. Use us to continue, Lord Jesus, by Your great power binding Satan and rescuing people and bringing them into the glorious kingdom of love that You have inaugurated. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.