

Putting on the Armor of God

Ephesians 6:10 Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might.

¹¹ Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil.

¹² For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.

¹³ Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm.

¹⁴ Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness,

¹⁵ and, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace.

¹⁶ In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one;

¹⁷ and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God,

¹⁸ praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end, keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints,

¹⁹ and also for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel,

²⁰ for which I am an ambassador in chains, that I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak.

²¹ So that you also may know how I am and what I am doing, Tychicus the beloved brother and faithful minister in the Lord will tell you everything.

²² I have sent him to you for this very purpose, that you may know how we are, and that he may encourage your hearts.

²³ Peace be to the brothers, and love with faith, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

²⁴ Grace be with all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with love incorruptible."

"To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: 'The words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand, who walks among the seven golden lampstands.

² "I know your **works**, your **toil** and your **patient endurance**, and how you **cannot bear with those who are evil**, but have tested those who call themselves apostles and are not, and found them to be false.

³ I know you are enduring patiently and bearing up for my name's sake, and you have not grown weary.

⁴ But I have this against you, that you have **abandoned the love you had at first**.

⁵ Remember therefore from where you have fallen; **repent**, and **do the works** you did at first. If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent.

⁶ Yet this you have: you hate the works of the **Nicolaitans**, which I also hate.

⁷ He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who conquers I will grant to eat of the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God."

(Eph 6:10-24; Revelation 2:1-7)

Balaam in Ephesus?

Ancient metropolises in the Roman Empire had all the excitement and **trappings** of our first-world cities today. You could read the latest book at the library or catch a play

in the theater after dinner. You could attend a sporting event or workout at the equivalent of 24-Hour Fitness at the outdoor gymnasium. You could mingle with the elite socialites at the bath houses or attend a religious festival to raise your celebrity socialite credit score. Not much has changed in 2,000 years.

Each activity appealed through its own allure to the civilized man. Every endeavor came with its own **trappings** that could lock both body and soul up in a cage of moral ambivalence or degeneracy. The person **not well equipped to fight** it could easily succumb to the *lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, or the pride of life* as the Apostle John himself put it, writing most likely from Ephesus (**1Jn 2:16**).¹

Ephesus, the Beloved City, had all this and more. We've seen how impactful **spirituality** was on this city. This was due in no small part to the supercharged religious atmosphere that surrounded Artemis and her temple cult. From the belief that her image fell down out of heaven from Zeus (**Acts 19:35**), to the itinerant Jewish exorcists who made a good living in the city casting out demons (**13-16**), to the remarkable miracles wrought by God through the Apostles

¹ “Whether one thinks in terms of apostolic authorship or of a Johannine school, the most likely provenance [of 1 John] is Ephesus.” D. A. Carson and Douglas J. Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, Second Edition (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005), 675.

here (19:12), to the 50,000 days wages worth of magic books burnt by the converted Christians (Acts 19:18-19), to the outrage sparked when turning to Christ began having a negative impact on the idol-shrines of Artemis (24), you could not get away from the paganism if you tried. And as one of the great hubs of industry and entertainment and spirituality and religious devotion in the Empire, it also attracted its fair share of hucksters and charlatans.

Into this, a group called the Nicolaitans asserted their influence upon this and other cities in Asia Minor, populations all ripe for their cultic teachings. We learn about them twice in the NT. They were at Pergamum, “where Satan’s throne is” (Rev 2:13). This throne probably refers to the Altar of Zeus, a 115x110 ft. staired platform that reminds you of a half-built Parthenon, which was taken by the Germans prior to WWI and now sits in a Berlin Museum. The church at Pergamum had “some who hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans” (15).

These teachings seem to be connected directly to Jezebel and to Balaam, “who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel, so that they might eat food sacrificed to idols and practice sexual immorality” (14; cf. Num

25:1; 31:16; Rev 2:20). It was an antinomian spirit that decided to make peace with the world's religious system and its gods by indulging the flesh while still trying to claim the name of Christ.

We do not know much about this cult, and what we do know is not certain. However, one of the earliest accounts comes from Irenaeus (student of Polycarp the student of the Apostle John). He tells us that “The Nicolaitans are the followers of that Nicolas who was one of the seven first ordained to the diaconate by the apostles. They lead lives of unrestrained indulgence” (Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 1.26.3). I want to emphasize something just under the surface here. The early church in Acts 6 was increasing in number and the needs of the people were not being met (Acts 6:1). So, the twelve Apostles summoned the other disciples and commanded them to “pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty” of deacon (Acts 6:2-3). All were pleased at the suggestion, and so they chose Stephen and Philip, whom we know about from Luke's writing. They also chose five men whom you probably do not remember

their names at all, including “Nicolaus, a proselyte of Antioch” (5). It is this Nicolaus that Irenaeus says became the founder of this sect called the Nicolaitans, a cult!

If he has his story right, then one of the first church officers in history was at one time so outwardly convincing of his profession of Christ, both his doctrine and his actions, that he had even the Twelve Apostles fooled. But at some point, he stopped fighting the good fight, he refused to put the armor or God on, his outward profession became perverted, and he began leading astray hosts of Christians with a most ancient pagan heresy. Oh, how this all fits right in with the excitements and trappings of the big city.

The letter of Ephesians and the book of Acts are not the only things we know about Ephesus from the Scripture. The Apostle John takes out his sword and speaks directly to them in a short letter in Revelation. In that letter, he identifies them as the Christians who have stood firm against this evil sect. “You hate the works of the Nicolaitans, which [Christ] also hates” (Rev 2:6). He tells them that Christ knows their works, their toil, their patient endurance, and how they cannot bear with those who are evil (referring to these Nicolaitans who apparently “call themselves apostles and are not;” Rev 2:2).

This is what you might expect from a group of Christians who had received such a magnificent letter as the one **Paul** had written to them decades earlier. Even more, it is what you would expect of a church that not only had Paul stayed at for two years (**Acts 19:10**), but **Priscilla and Aquilla** made their permanent home (**Acts 18:18, 21**), **Luke and Mary** were apparently buried in, **Timothy** was the pastor of (**1Ti 1:3**), and **John** seems to have spent his last years teaching and writing from here. All the celebrity of *The Gospel Coalition* or *Together for the Gospel* has nothing on Ephesus.

Nevertheless, even as they stood firm against religious heresy, and even though they had such a pedigree of saints in their midst, the church at Ephesus was “**prone to wander, Lord I feel it.**” John tells them that Christ has this against them. “**You have abandoned the love you had at first**” (**Rev 2:4**). It’s sort of like they **put their belt and helmet on but forgot their breastplate and didn’t guard their hearts**. They left their first love. And so Jesus tells them to “**repent, and do the works you did at first**” (**Rev 2:5**). If they will not, he will come and remove his lampstand from its place.

If it can happen to a people like this, it can happen to anyone. Even us, who fight the same enemy. If Balaam has anything to say about it, this spirit is truly an ancient foe.

Corporately, the church must be alert to the schemes of the devil, ever vigilant to fight the fight of Faith with all the instruments of war that God has given us to use. Again, if it can happen to someone who was among the very first seven put in charge of the churches as an officer by the Twelve Apostles themselves, it can happen to any **one** of us too. For those evil powers that so tempted and attracted Nicolaus to subvert Christian doctrine are the same cosmic powers over this present darkness who still have authority of some kind as spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.

As we finish out Ephesians, we are going to return to the armor, those six implements of war that Christ himself donned time and again in the OT and in his incarnation. We are going to look more at what it means to “**put these things on**” (**Eph 6:11**). Then, as we conclude, I want to show you how the end of the letter is, in my opinion, Paul actually entering into this very warfare with the Ephesians in such a way that this is no mere ending you have to tack on to a letter to be cordial, but that becomes the practical outworking that you are to emulate if you hope to fight the good fight, as Paul told Timothy who was living at Ephesus (**1Ti 6:12**).

Returning to the Armor

Truth Around Your Waist

A good place to start is how **all six instruments are inter-related**. The weapons of war only make sense when they are **worn together**. What warrior puts on a helmet and goes out to battle without a sword? Who dons his breastplate and helmet only for forget his shoes in a battle he knows will be fought on rough ground? In the same way, truth and righteousness and peace and faith and salvation and the Word of God only make sense together.

Perhaps you are tempted to think that one is unimportant. This could be because you are already neglecting it. It could also be that if you are someone who squawks loudly about the importance of one over the others that you may very well be playing a game of smoke and mirrors in hopes that people do not see that you aren't actually wearing it. All are important and all are important to wear together. But **how do we wear them**? I want to explore this a little more than we did last time.

The first piece of armor is **truth**. How do you put on truth? We can think of it in two different ways. **First**, you

love and believe in the idea of truth. This is truth as it is applied objectively, outside of you. You come to realize that God created the universe to work in certain ways. Natural laws show you that if you jump off a bridge, you will plummet to the water below. In the same way, there are also moral truths. We call these moral absolutes, things which are always right and always wrong. It is always wrong to torture little babies for fun. The point is, as you grow in your detection of these things, it becomes important to you. You are putting it on.

As we saw last time, we are living in [a culture](#) that is obsessing over the outright denial of moral absolutes, and in a way I don't think any of us could have predicted even a couple of years ago. This is spilling over to denials of objective truth in the natural world (two biological sexes existing or a round earth come to mind). As a Christian, you must desire truth. You must desire to know it. You must love it when you hear it. You must desire to live by it. That's how you put truth on.

Unfortunately, many churches these days are not helping the saints here. Warren Wiersbe tells a story. It strikes me because of the origins of the Nicolaitan heresy:

One Sunday afternoon, I visited a man who had been a deacon in a local church, but was at that time involved in a false cult. We sat at the table with open Bibles, and I tried to show him the truth of God's Word, but it seemed his mind was blinded by lies. "How did you happen to turn away from a Bible-preaching church and get involved in this belief?" I asked, and his reply stunned me.

"Preacher, I blame the church. I didn't know anything about the Bible, and they didn't teach me much more. I wanted to study the Bible, but nobody told me how. Then they made me a deacon, and I wasn't ready for it. It was too much for me. I heard this man preaching the Bible over the radio and it sounded as if he knew something. I started reading his magazine and studying his books, and now I'm convinced he's right."²

The lack of teaching of even the [essentials](#) in many churches has reached epidemic proportions. People want to put truth on, but they don't know where to find it or what it looks like. Thankfully, like the Ephesians in Revelation, truth is something that you have available. It matters to our church, and it is therefore within your grasp to put on. But you have to put it on. No one else can do that for you. You have to

² [Warren W. Wiersbe](#), *Be Rich: Gaining the Things That Money Can't Buy*, NT Commentary: Ephesians (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 1979, 2009), 180-81.

want it. If you do, you will be prepared for the battle of minds that is now in full assault by the powers of the air and darkness for the minds and souls of our generation.

But there is more than one way of thinking about truth. Not merely objective truth, but think of **truth that is applied to your own person *subjectively***. Not subjective *truth*, but the *application* of truth to your person. This is the way that more than one Reformer took it. James Fergusson writes of Paul's meaning, "Not the truth of doctrine, which is included under the sword of the Spirit, the Word of God; but sincerity, being a true person."³ Calvin is the same, "The purity of the gospel ought to cleanse us from all dishonesty and hypocrisy."

In this way, how would you put on truth? You **refuse to live a life of double standards** or double-mindedness. Both your ethics and the doctrine are integrated, whole, sound, one, aligned. You want to behave as you should. When you are like this, when there is no duplicity or hypocrisy in your life, then you are able to fight any battle, because you know that the enemy cannot use your duplicity against you.

³ James Fergusson (1621-1667), *A Brief Exposition of the Epistles of Paul to the Galatians and Ephesians* (London: Printed for the Company of Stationers, 1659), Commentary on Eph 6:14.

Being prepared with truth is pictured in an especially vivid way by Peter who tells you, “Gird up the loins (*osphus*) of your mind” (1Pe 1:13).⁴ “Loins” and “mind” are a kind of mixing of metaphors, because they are not in the same place on your physical body. So what would one have to do with the other? Grasp this and you will understand why truth is a belt.

One would think that truth should probably be a helmet, since it deals with the mind. Peter is actually referencing the mind, so that thought is correct. Yet, the belt covers the loins region of the body. According to the dictionary, the loins are “the parts of the body between the hips and the lower ribs, especially regarded as the seat of physical strength and generative power.” A contemporary of Calvin said, “As the loins are where the special power and strength of the body lay, we are to gird up with a girdle, lest the soldier in fighting should fall and miscarry. In this way, the mind must be made steady and fast, with the truth of God, lest the devil lay us along the more easily, and slay us the

⁴ Many modern translations say things like “prepare your minds for action,” and thus do not even translate the word “loins.” This misses the warfare imagery that clearly ties in with Ephesians 6:14.

sooner, when he finds us doubtful, wavering, and inconstant.”⁵

That’s the connection between loins and minds. It is a picture of a warrior preparing himself for battle. By girding his loins, he is actually thinking rationally, with his mind. But what does it mean to gird your loins? This is an antiquated phrase and we don’t really do it anymore. Someone writes,

Back in the days of the ancient Near East, both men and women wore flowing tunics. Around the tunic, they’d wear a belt or girdle. While tunics were comfortable and breezy, the hem of the tunic would often get in the way when a man was fighting or performing hard labor. So when ancient Hebrew men had to battle the Philistines, the men would lift the hem of their tunic up and tuck it into their girdle or tie it in a knot to keep it off the ground. The effect basically created a pair of shorts that provided more freedom of movement. Thus to tell someone to “gird up their loins” was to tell them to get ready for hard work or battle. It was the ancient way of saying “man up!”⁶

⁵ Niels Hemmingsen (1513-1600) on Eph 6:14. Language and spelling updated.

⁶ AoM Team, “How to Gird Up Your Loins: An Illustrated Guide,” *AoM* (Oct 15, 2018), <https://www.artofmanliness.com/articles/how-to-gird-up-your-loins-an-illustrated-guide/>.

How seriously do you take the need for truth in this world, in this church, in your own mind? How prepared are you with it to fight the battle against the devil? This armor fits the loins that you may be prepared for immediate action. It takes your mind to do it. As Peter immediately said, “... be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ” (1Pe 1:13). Stop wavering. Stop fighting with your skirt down. Pick up truth, tuck in in, and go to battle. Be sharp and cunning and on your game so that you may be ready to give an answer and so that the truth would penetrate to all areas of your life that you might be a man or woman or child of Christ who lives in accord with truth.

Righteousness Guarding Your Heart

I have said that these the equipment is all integrated to be a whole. As Fergusson said, the first way of looking at truth is related to the sword, to which we will come in due measure. This second way of looking at truth is directly related to the second piece of armor: **righteousness**. If truth can be seen as living a life cleansed of dishonesty and hypocrisy, then righteousness is the full expression of this.

Righteousness can also be viewed from **two perspectives**. You can live righteously or you can be counted as righteous. A verse that connects the two is, “**For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God**” (2Co 5:21). This is a truth that needs to penetrate your mind. Christ “**knowing no sin**” means that he was perfectly righteous. Everything he did was sinless, in total honor and glory to the Father. That he was made “**to be sin**” means that some kind of a transfer is going on. He took on something he was not. God considered him as having sin, so that he was “**numbered with the transgressors**” (Isa 53:12; Luke 22:37). Why? So that we might become the righteousness of God.

This righteousness of God must be parallel. He did not have sin, but he was numbered as a sinner, legally. In the same way, no one is righteousness, no not one (Rom 3:10; Ps 14:1-3). Yet, we are counted as righteous for his sake (Rom 4:3-11; James 2:23; Gen 15:6). This is a legal standing, something the court of heaven recognizes because of Christ when you trust in him by faith to credit this to you.

Yet, it is also a reality that is even now being worked out as we are sanctified or set apart as holy. Becoming the righteousness of God means that God is transforming our minds

and hearts so that we actually love to do his commands. Essentially, it is the working out of the man of Psalm 119 in each Christian. *Lord, I love your law, I meditate on it day and night. It is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.*

Notice that this particular piece of armor **covers the heart**. Righteousness guards the heart. How so? Living righteously means that the new man is taking over for that deceitful heart that no one can know. It is not full of deceit any longer, because that heart of stone has been turned into a **heart of flesh**. Living righteously means that your hands that were quick to sin, your eyes that were quick to lust, your feet that were quick to shed blood, your tongue that was quick to strike poison are guarded because your heart is soft.

People who live unrighteously are **hard like stone**. I have seen many people who are hard to personal righteousness, even while they are quick to dispense with the need for those around them to be more righteous. Again, hypocrisy is seen close by. When your heart is hardened by sin and you feel no sense or remorse or godly sorrow, then your heart is unguarded. It is ripe for the arrows or the devil to pierce. **“I will praise you with an upright heart, when I learn your righteous rules ... With my whole heart I seek you; let me**

not wander from your commandments! I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you” (Ps 119:7, 10-11).

Are you soft towards God’s commandments? Are you humble in the face of the rebukes of others? What kind of a heart do you have towards the poor, the needy, the widow, the orphan? How is any of that manifesting in your life? Recall in these things, especially, the last three chapters of Ephesians and how it has all been focusing on how you are to behave in righteousness especially in the church and towards your families. You’ve heard those commands. So, “Strap it together by iron rings and insert the hooks in their place. One protected by such a breastplate of righteousness will not be like a vulnerable stag that receives the arrow in his liver. He will not lapse into rage or lust. Rather he will be protected, having a clean heart, having God as the fashioner of his breastplate, since he fashions the whole armor for every one of the saints.” (Jerome, *Epistle to the Ephesians* 3.6.14).

Gospel at Your Feet

The girding up of your loins means you are ready to [go somewhere](#). That's what you use feet for. So, truth is related to the third piece of armor in that way. We are looking here at the [gospel of peace](#). Yet, the gospel is precisely the only thing that allows a person to have any kind of righteousness as a status or as a reality. Thus, it is also related to the breast-plate. This is the interconnectedness of the armor.

Gospel is good news. This is the proclamation that God came to earth as a man, that Jesus Christ is that God-man, that he did all that was necessary to undertake for your salvation, and that, especially, he has made peace between man and God. Again, this is truth and it is the truth about his righteousness.

Curiously, in one respect, the [opposite of peace is war](#). Yet, this is all about the armor of God that you use *in war*. That's the irony of the armor. This is not your typical armor! The gospel of peace teaches you a truth. This truth is that the war is no longer between God and man. That was how this all started, when Adam and Eve essentially made war on God in the Garden of Eden. After that, the long history of our race has been one revolt against the King after another.

The gospel teaches you that when all other men make war against God, **Jesus, the Prince of Peace (Isa 9:6) came to make peace** between God and you. This, he has done **as God**, for only God could bring peace with God when God is the one offended. This he has done **as man**, for it is man who has been waging this war against God.

The gospel of peace tells you that your war-crimes that deserve death have been satisfied in Christ's death. The only man undeserving of any death has died. And he was counted among the transgressors, so that in his death, God might be satisfied that there was one who could stand in the gap.

As a point of comparison, recall how last time, we saw how this armor came from Isaiah. In the passage of Isaiah where we find the closest parallel, where the Divine Warrior has the breastplate of righteousness and the helmet of salvation, he also has on **“garments of vengeance”** and has **“wrapped himself in fury”** (RSV) as a cloak.

Paul makes no mention of these as part of the Christian's armor, and for good reason. **“The Ephesians are called to don God's characteristics of righteousness and salvation, but**

not to clothe themselves in vengeance or fury.”⁷ “‘Vengeance is mine,’ says the LORD” (Dt 32:35; Rom 12:19; Heb 10:30). But it does not belong to us. This is more of the irony of our armor of warfare! Christians do not wage war in the same way as the world does.

It is **not your job to deal out death in judgment**. You don’t know enough to do it in **truth**. You couldn’t possibly do it **righteously**. You couldn’t make it end in **peace**. In short, you would have to abandon all the other pieces of the armor just to take up this cloak. This isn’t a comment on government’s role in being God’s sword against evil (Rom 13:1-4). It is a note on personal relationships—husbands and wives, children and parents, bosses and co-workers, and so on. We are not to retaliate in turn, but to turn the other cheek. Why? Because God has brought peace and now is the time of reconciliation between God and men.

To have the gospel of peace as the sandals of your feet means that you are equipped with this knowledge. Sometimes I have to run to my own mind or heart with the message. God is not at war with me if I am in Christ. Sometimes, I need others to run to me, for I have put off too much of

⁷ Holly J. Carey, “An Armored Household: Isaiah 59 as the Key to Ephesians 5:21-6:9 and 6:10-17,” *Journal of Biblical and Theological Studies* 3.2 (2018): 266.

my other armor to even tell myself the truth. The church, the preaching of the word, the sacraments, and fellowship with one another all serve to reinforce this, for we all together have put on the shoes, come to our place of divine appointment, and are hearing the gospel now so that we can speak it to one another when we are in our moments of greatest need of good news.

Sometimes, we have to be prepared to tell it to others. I'm going to save this point for the end, because Paul himself actually exemplifies it as a perfect illustration at the end of the letter.

Faith Protecting Your Body

Shields are used to protect whatever is most exposed to a particular attack. If my breastplate has a puncture, I place the shield over my heart. If my helmet has cracked in two, the shield can protect my head. I suppose even if my feet cannot run swiftly enough, like Legolas in the Two Towers movie, I can use my shield as quick transportation down the stairs so I can quickly attack the enemy. The point is, the shield goes where the other armor is most needy.

Your shield is **faith**. Faith is being sure of what you hope for and certain of what you do not see. What is that? It is the **promises of comfort and peace** in the gospel. Faith believes the gospel. It is the **truth** of God in Christ. It is the fact that I really been given a righteous status and am being made holy through the Spirit. You put on faith by going to whatever other part of your body is weak and trusting that God is true, that God's righteousness belongs to you, that you are at peace with him, that you have salvation in Christ that is not going to be taken away, and that the Word of God will never leave you nor forsake you.

All of these things come *by faith*. This is therefore something only a Christian picks up. But by looking to Christ, you who have never had faith can pick it up and the Lord desires that you do this now. Faith is the instrument that receives truth, that is reckoned as righteous. Through faith we are saved. By faith we believe and receive the Word of God. For this is why Christ died.

Without faith, everyone else is exposed. When you are tempted to put down any of your armor, God has given you this shield that keeps those fiery darts from burning down all things around you. You pick up that shield by turning once and again to the Lord Jesus Christ and to him alone.

Salvation in Your Head

Again, the fifth piece of armor is completely integrated with the rest. Like truth, this one fits to the **mind. Salvation.** You put it on like a helmet to guard your thoughts. What does this mean? It means that you have to come to accept that when God tells you the truth of the gospel of peace that you are declared righteous in his sight by faith, that he saves you. You believe him. It means that when he tells you the truth about his law and how it is good for you to be righteous, you believe him.

The point of this is **defensive**, to protect your head when it goes to strange places that does not believe it could be true. “God couldn’t possibly save someone like me, I’m much to bad.” “God would never consider the likes of me, I’m far to pathetic.” “I’m nothing in this world, no one cares about me, certainly not God.” Those thoughts come in especially when we take off the belt of truth or the breastplate of righteousness. The more we sin, the more such thoughts attack us. That’s natural.

What isn't natural is salvation and the grace of God comes with it. That's not natural, but it is true. It isn't deserved; it is grace. And this grace is something that comes quite apart from you, be it your works or your will. It is the power of God to save you and it is the power of God to keep you and preserve you to the end, for why—as we have heard several times in Ephesians—would he choose you only to unchoose you? What could possibly pluck you out of his hand? Only the helmet of salvation protecting your thoughts as it is accompanied by the truth can protect you from the thoughts that go astray and lead you into a valley of despair.

The Word at Your Right Hand

The last armor is the only **full-time weapon** you can wield. We have seen some attach this weapon to objective truth. As such, they see it connected directly to God's holy word to us in **Scripture**. You wield the sword as you, like Christ in the wilderness, speak biblical truth to the devil. This is not some form of magic as if just saying a verse will make the devil flee automatically. Rather, it is comprehending, apprehending, and then using the Scripture to speak

truth and righteousness and peace to yourself and others struggling with spiritual warfare. In this, you must remember that this sword is the power of the **Holy Spirit**; it isn't some kind of charm or spell. It is the Spirit who makes the word powerful to cut like a knife and smash strongholds like a hammer. Sometimes he will cause the devil to flee. And sometimes he will lead you into further testing to purify your faith with fire. But through it all, knowing and using God's word is the chief weapon you have to fight by the power of the Spirit within you.

But again, there is more than one way to take this. To put on this armor is to recognize that it is not you who actually wields the sword at all. For if the sword is the Word of God (the second way to take "word")—that is the Logos, Christ himself, then he is the one who speaks the truth from his mouth and staves off the foes in your life. To think this way is to think utterly biblically, from Genesis to Revelation. Always, it is Christ who fights and uses the sword to protect his own. Always it is Christ who recuses and saves, who makes peace, who declares righteous, who gives truth to a world in lies. This is the point of Christ as the Divine Warrior in the letter of Ephesians. This is why you must also "put on Christ" (**Rom 13:14**; **Gal 3:27**) at all times, always

looking to him to protect you. Apart from him, you can do nothing.

The Energy of Prayer

Putting on the armor moment by moment isn't easy, but it is possible. It doesn't keep you from being attacked, nor does it keep you from falling completely when you are. For you are still weak and full of sin in this world. And that is precisely the reason why you need the armor in the first place.

As we conclude Ephesians, I want to take you through the rest of the ending of this letter. I want to help you see that Paul ends it only in such a way that you can see **the equipping of the armor take place before your eyes**. Without having concluded the sentence containing the last part of the armor, he says, “... **praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication**” (Eph 6:18). Given that this comes on the heels of the sword of the Spirit, you should **attach prayer to the sword**. Someone writes, “**Prayer is the energy that enables the Christian soldier to wear the armor**

and wield the sword.”⁸ Again, prayer is not magic incantations. It is speaking to God through the Spirit who intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express (**Rom 8:26**). It is conversation, dialogue, person-to-person interaction.

You are to “pray at all times.” This is the same as when he told the Thessalonians, “Pray without ceasing” (**1Th 5:17**). Your every breath is to be a prayer to God, knowing that he knows all you do and say; thus you stay in communion with him throughout the day. **Marius Victorinus** said, “Let your deep affections enter into your praying. The inner spirit, that is, the inner man, is making his prayer with intense desire. He is praying all the time, so that even when he is not praying aloud he is still praying in the spirit” (*Epistle to the Ephesians 2.6.18*).

This includes praying for one another with “supplication for all the saints” (**18**). To do this, you need to know the needs of your fellow brothers and sisters. You need to know how they are struggling and what they need prayer for. Amazingly, at this very moment, Paul asks them to wield this armor for him. In other words, he is going to use himself as the first person they can take up the armor to help. He

⁸ Wiersbe, 182.

says, “Pray also for me” (Eph 6:19). If prayer is taking up the sword, then he has asked them to take up the sword for himself.

Why? This goes back to the gospel of peace. A moment ago, I said that sometimes we have to be prepared to tell the gospel to others. That is what Paul is doing at this very moment in Rome. He is reminding them of this, as he has done before in the letter. “Pray also for me that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel ... that I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak” (Eph 6:19-20). He is asking them to use their sword so that he might use his sandals.

Then, not coincidentally, he reminds them that Paul is a prisoner of this war—quite literally. “For which I am an ambassador in chains” (20). He is not yet a causality of this war, but he is in prison as the powers try to keep him from making any more headway into their territory. That Gates of Hell are angry, but they cannot prevail over the church. Nevertheless, they can inflict injury of body and mind.

Why might Paul be asking for boldness? Do you think him superhuman? Did he have no weaknesses with regard to evangelism? Paul, the great Apostle of God who wrote this very letter, stands in need of prayer for boldness. Was his

tenacity waning? Was his zeal setting? Was he tempted to keep quiet? All we know is that he needed the prayers of these people to uphold in through what seems to have been his own time of testing and trial. In this way, the end of his letter *is actively engaging the Ephesians in the war*. For them to pray is for them to take up the armor and begin to fight! They may have wanted to know how to put on the armor. He is now making them do it, whether they realize it or not.

Encouraging One Another

He does one more thing in this regard. He promises to *send them “Tychicus [a man who appears 5 times in the NT] the beloved brother and faithful minister in the Lord” (21)*.⁹ Why? They obviously knew him. But they needed to know that how Paul was doing (21). This goes to what I said about

⁹ The authorship of Ephesians has been questioned by many scholars. While I think there are some interesting reasons that Paul may not have penned the letter, there is no reason to think he was not its supervisor and director. To this point, it is interesting that *Theodoret* said long ago, “*The letter to the Ephesians was written from Rome by the hand of Tychius*” (*Epistle to the Ephesians* 6.24). We know that Paul employed letter writers from the end of Galatians which says Paul wrote the end of it in his own handwriting (Gal 6:11), meaning that at other places and other letters, he did not. Thus, the letter could have all the theology of Paul, could have even the name of Paul in its formal address, and yet it could be written to a large degree by with the mind and conceptions of Tychius, thus giving it a different flavor from Paul’s other letters. I think this also explains Hebrews, which I believe was written by Luke (following the thesis of David Allen), the close companion and fellow missionary with Paul.

being better able to pray for someone. You have to know how they are doing.

But Paul also wanted to **encourage their hearts (22)**. Sending them encouragement is now Paul, through Tychicus, **equipping the Ephesians with their armor**. In his stead, Tychicus would help these Christians persevere; he would remind them of all they have been taught fresh, new, and in person. So Paul is literally putting it on them at the end of the letter, doing all he can to help them fight this battle.

All that is left, then, is to send his own greeting of **peace** and **love** and **faith** from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ (23), with the promise that all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with love incorruptible will indeed have that grace given (24). This is even more empowering, for it is a final reminder of all the truth they need to put on the armor of God. For it is the message that the Triune God who began the letter as the Divine Warrior, will see that all is accomplished for his people through Christ.

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