

Sermon: The Whole Armor of God
Ephesians 6:10-17

We are nearing the end of Paul's letter to the Ephesians.
And it is remarkable how Paul closes out this letter.
We might think that Paul would end his letter with farewells and less-significant closing details.
This is how he often ends his letters.
But here in Ephesians, towards the close, Paul instructs us on how we should deal with spiritual attacks from the demonic realm.
Over the past 3 Sundays, we have considered what we are up against.
In Ephesians 6:12, Paul writes:

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.

The devil is a very powerful and real adversary and we are not to take him lightly.
We are called to stand against the "schemes of the devil."

But how are we to do this?
Certainly it is important to know that we have an enemy.
Yet it's not enough to just know the enemy is out there.
We have to prepare for his attacks.

And in Ephesians 6:13- and following, Paul shows us how we are to defend ourselves against the devil.
We are to put on the whole armor of God.

So let us read God's word from Ephesians 6:10-17

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,

This is God's word.
The grass withers and the flower fades but the word of our God stands forever.

In American football, there is a saying:
A great offense sells tickets.
But a great defense wins championships.

There's nothing like watching a team that has a great defense.
I remember back when I used to watch basketball, how the Detroit Pistons of the early 2000's had a great defense.

No matter how great their opponent's offense was, the Detroit defense would shut them down.
The Detroit defense contested every move their opponents made.
In the sport of Soccer, or what the world calls football, great defense is what, I believe made the German national team of 2014 so great.
They were just so systematic. It was extremely difficult to score on them.
Now while I would love to go on and on about my favorite defensive teams in all kinds of sports, I think you get the picture.

Great defense is an overlooked strategy for gaining the victory.
And in the verses that we have before us, it is important to note that Paul is calling us to play great defense.
Except we are not playing.
The stakes are as high as ever because the enemy who stands opposed to us is the devil.
His aim is to destroy the work of God and to separate people from God eternally.

And so, Paul's would have us focus on our defense.
You have a sermon outline printed in your bulletin.
And the first point there is...

I. Stand

In verses 10-14, Paul commands us to stand 4 different times and in 4 different ways.
In verse 11, he tells us to **stand against** the schemes of the devil.
In verse 13, he tells us to **withstand** in the evil day.
Later in verse 13, he commands us to **stand firm**.
Finally in verse 14, he tells us to **stand therefore**.

So four times we are told to stand against, withstand, stand firm and to stand therefore.
In these verses Paul wants us to be defensive minded for the coming attack.

Defense is a neglected focus in the Christian life.
The offensive focus of the Christian life is what normally consumes our energies.
going into all the earth and taking ground for the kingdom is often our focus.

Yet the Christian life is also defensive.
Because our enemy is not passive.
He has an offense too and he runs his offense with great creativity, skill and effectiveness.

And against his attacks we are called to stand firm.
Standing firm however is not to be confused with complacency
Most of us struggle with complacency in some form or fashion.

There's something in all of us that wishes we could have a maintenance free Christian lives.
Where we could build ourselves up and stay strong forever.
Yet that is not how the Christian life works.
We have to be vigilant to stand firm.
Because if we don't, we will fall into all manner of sin.

And perhaps the worst of these sins- one that leads to all sorts of other failures is a spiritual dullness.

This is the spiritual equivalent of being physically out of shape.
It doesn't take long to get out of physical shape.
It doesn't matter how fit you used to be years ago, without constant care, we get out of shape.
The same thing happens spiritually.
Complacency is a real temptation and it's easy for us to tell ourselves that we are standing firm, when in reality, we are just spiritually complacent.
Trust me, I know because I have often been there.

Prayer becomes perfunctory. Something done mainly at meals or in worship.
Bible reading is given little effort or is left off altogether.
And attention to serving others for the sake of Christ falls off.

Spiritual complacency is the opposite of standing firm. And just like we cannot have physical fitness without actively pursuing it, we also cannot have spiritual fitness without actively pursuing it.

So let me ask you, Have you grown spiritually complacent?
Spiritual complacency does not so much look like actively disagreeing with God's word.
Instead it looks a lot more like passively agreeing with the world around us.
Just being conformed to the pattern of the world in our thoughts and actions.
It looks like no longer being distinct as a Christian, but instead being just like everyone else.
Pursuing a good life.
Just trying to make it through the day and the work week.
Hoping for better days ahead.

When we are spiritually complacent, we have lost the realization that life is a battle and that spiritually we are under constant attack.

So, have you grown spiritually complacent?
If we are spiritually complacent, it must mean that the devil has gotten the upper hand with us.
And we need to realize this and focus our minds on standing firm.

Now Paul does not simply direct us to stand firm. He teaches how we are to do so and this is by putting on the whole armor of God.
This brings us to our second point which is...

II. Put on the Whole Armor of God

Twice in 4 verses, Paul commands us to put on the whole armor of God.
And this means a few things.
First, it means that simply being a Christian isn't sufficient for standing against the devil.
We have to be intentional about putting on the armor.
Without the armor, we won't be able to stand.

There is a weird pride that can come with being a Christian.
You may have experienced this in your own life, where you foolishly believe that you are sufficient to face whatever comes your way.
Sometimes we believe that, because we have been born again and believe the right things about Christ, that we can handle whatever comes at us.

That we are sufficient to meet adversity because we are Christian.
Yet this is a mark of immaturity when we think this way.

Because the bible tells us that apart from actively abiding in Christ, we are nothing.

Jesus said in John 15:

5 I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.

Therefore, to be strong in the Lord means being thoroughly convinced that without him we are nothing.

If we don't actively abide in and depend upon Christ, we are nothing.
And likewise, if we don't put on the whole armor of God, we will not be able to stand firm.

So, the command to put on the whole armor of God tells us that, just because we are converted does not mean that we will automatically be able to stand against the devils attacks.
We have to put on the whole armor of God.

Second, I want us to see that the armor has many pieces.

It is the "whole armor of God."

There is: 1. The belt of truth,
2. the breastplate of righteousness,
3. the shoes of the gospel of peace,
4. the shield of faith,
5. the helmet of salvation and
6. the sword of the spirit which is the word of God.

We have to put on each piece and leave none of it off.

In the weeks to come we will consider all the pieces of armor.

But for now I want us to notice that it is the "whole armor of God." Not just one piece.
And that all the pieces work together.

The third things I want us to notice about the "Armor of God" is that it is God's armor.
It specifically, it's is Christ's.

In Isaiah 11:5 we are told that the coming messiah would wear a belt.
Here it is not the belt of truth but rather of righteousness and faithfulness.

Isaiah 11:5 says:

Isaiah 11:5 Righteousness shall be the belt of his waist, and faithfulness the belt of his loins.

In Isaiah 59:17, we are told that...

17 He put on **righteousness as a breastplate**, and a **helmet of salvation** on his head;

Isaiah 52:7 talks about the feet of the gospel or the good news.

Isaiah 52:7 How beautiful upon the mountains are **the feet of him who brings good news** who publishes **peace**, who brings **good news** of happiness, who publishes salvation, who says to Zion, "Your God reigns."

Jesus has the beautiful feet of the gospel of peace.

Paul adds the shoes part in Ephesians ☺.
In Genesis 15, God tells Abraham the He will be Abraham's **shield**.
And finally, in Isaiah 49:2, we have reference to the sword of the Spirit which is the word of God.
Isaiah 49:2 says: **2 He made my mouth like a sharp sword**;

The armor of God is God's armor.
And it was originally fitted for Jesus Christ.
Jesus wore the armor perfectly and with it he was able to withstand all of the attacks from his enemy the devil.

Now, because the armor was originally fitted for Jesus, one thing we will notice about it is that it is not custom fitted for us.
The armor does not conform to our image.
Rather we need to be conformed to the image of Christ in order to wear it properly.

And this has great implications.
I want you to imagine that the armor of God is physically before you.
Because Christ has already worn it in battle for many years, what we would first notice is that it has been well used.
It's still in great condition. But the shield has dents in it from the arrows of the evil one.
And the helmet has been banged around from combat.
The breast plate has dents in it as well from the blows Christ sustained in battle.
The fabric or leather on the inside padded parts of the breastplate has sweat stains.
The leather on the shoes is worn and scuffed.
On the belt, one of the holes is particularly worn and stretched.
And the sword has scratches on it.

Make no mistake. It's razor sharp but you notice that it has been sharpened hundreds of times because it has been wielded relentlessly.

All of the armor is in great shape but it has been well used because it is Christ's armor.
And he never backed down from the fight.

Yet as you put the armor on, you notice that it doesn't fit perfectly.
This is not because the armor is imperfect. We are.
And for the armor to fit perfectly, we have to be perfectly conformed to the image of Christ.

The armor does not conform to us.
Rather, we have to be conformed to Christ for it to fit.

Now, before we talk about being fitted for the armor, I want us to **consider the honor** that it is for us to be offered God's armor.
This must mean that we share in some way in His important fight.
And we should be struck with the honor it is to offered Christ's armor.

Secondly, we need to remember that **Christ did the heaviest fighting and that he secured the ultimate victory**.
Christ is ever our captain and he is our champion.
When we face the attacks of the evil one, we do so as soldiers under Christ's command.
And he has already wone the most important battle which was for our eternal salvation.

His cross and resurrection are his victory.
His victory did not depend upon us.
Yet we are included now in the fight for his saving purposes.

Thirdly, we need **realize just how necessary it is for us put God's armor on**.

Again, the armor does not conform to us. We need to be conformed to Christ for it to fit.
And this means that we need God's spirit working in us to convince us of our desperate need of His armor.

Often, God shows us our need to put on His armor through our own repeated sin and failure.
We need to be sufficiently humbled.
We need to be convinced of our inability to stand against the temptations of the flesh and the devil.
We must be driven to utter dependence upon God.

This is Christ lived.
He was the most humble man who ever lived.
He was absolutely dependent upon God.
He relied upon God's word at all times and he depended upon God's spirit for strength.
This is why he prayed so much.

Christ never failed because he was perfectly humble and perfectly dependent upon God.
And the reason the armor of God does not fit us well and the reason we keep putting it aside is because we are not humble and dependent like Christ.

To put on the armor of God is really just a vivid metaphor for humbly depending upon the Lord.

By nature, we as Christians believe that our sanctification is our decision.
We believe that holiness is something that we choose to do.
Yet have you ever noticed how bad a job you are doing at being holy?
If you are like me, you are constantly reminded of your inability to live as Jesus lived.

Nothing brings this home to me more than sermon preparation.
Every time I start to prepare a sermon or any Bible study for that matter, I have to first deal with the fact that I am woefully unfit for the task.
And this isn't just because I struggle to form clear ideas.
There is so much in me that is un-Christlike.

I am such an unimpressive Christian.
And yet I do the same job that Jesus did.
He was a preacher and so am I.
So how am I to be made fit to preach?
What right have I to be a preacher of the Gospel?

The fact is, I have no right.
I am so unworthy and therefore, every time I prepare a sermon or a bible study, I have to come crawling back to the throne of grace.
I have to renounce all of my illusions of self-adequacy and self-dependence.
I have to repent for all of the sin that I have spoken, done or has been on my mind.
And I have to trust God for his grace.
All I have is his grace.

And that's all any of us has before God.

We can only appeal to God's grace because we have no worthiness in us.
We must be convinced of just how weak, small and sinful we are in order for the gospel to be sweet and beneficial to us.

We need to be humbled.
And in this humiliation, we become like Christ.
Christ was always at the end of himself.
He was always perfectly humble and dependent upon God.

And our repeated sin and failure helps to convince us of how much we continually need him.

The Spirit of God does not immediately influence us to stand strong- **not immediately** are the key words.
The Spirit of God **first** convinces us of our own utter weakness and sinfulness.
And then, when we are humbled and at the end of ourselves, we find ourselves more conformed to the image of Christ than before.

And in this Spirit inspired humility, we find all the pieces of God's armor fitting so much better.

In Philippians 2:13, Paul commanded us to...
work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.

It is God who works in us both to will, that is to desire, and work, that is to do, his good pleasure.

And so the only way we are ever going to live a life of holiness, where we withstand the attacks of the enemy, is by having God working in us.
And the way God often brings us to desire his will is by convincing us of our own sinfulness.
Our habitual failure teaches us to depend upon Christ.

Do you ever get sick of yourself?
I do all the time.

Often when I go on longer runs, because my mind is more free, I think back to past events and encounters with people.
And because of my verbose and opinionated nature, it doesn't take long for me to remember back to times when I said something really dumb...or selfish...or arrogant... or mean.

It could have been twenty years or 2 days ago.
Doesn't matter. I still feel the shame of having sinned and hurt other people, and defaming the name of Christ and myself in the process.
I beat myself up constantly- I call myself names and I just get sick of myself.

Now to be sure, there is a great deal of self-righteousness in this self-loathing.
But there is also a good side to this conviction of genuine sin.

Because these past sins remind me that I am not as smart or cute or funny or loving as I wish I was.
Instead, I genuinely am screwed up.
And the God of the bible is the God of the genuinely screwed up.

Look how strong Peter thought he was.
He was going to die for Jesus!
But then Jesus said, No you won't Peter.
As a matter of fact, Peter, Satan has demanded to sift you like wheat.

But I have prayed for you Peter.
The only thing that stands between you and Satan tearing you apart is me.

Jesus reminded Peter that he was nothing.
And this lesson came home to Peter when he denied Christ three times.

God uses our daily, habitual, constant sinfulness to draw us to himself daily, habitually and constantly.
The guilt, pain and shame we feel over our sin is meant to drive us not just to loath ourselves but to go one step further and love and adore Christ.

We are so screwed up, only God can save us.
Only Christ would love us. And the good news of the gospel is...He does!

If your conviction of sin only drives you to despair and self-hatred, then you are still mired in self-righteousness.
It's just failed self-righteousness.
But if the guilt, pain and shame of your sin drives you through self-loathing to loving and appreciating Christ, then you are walking by the spirit.

From the Westminster Confession of Faith, 5.5

The most wise, righteous, and gracious God doth oftentimes leave, for a season, his own children to manifold temptations, and the corruption of their own hearts, to chastise them for their former sins, or to discover unto them the hidden strength of corruption and deceitfulness of their hearts, that they may be humbled; and, to raise them to a more close and constant dependence for their support upon himself, and to make them more watchful against all future occasions of sin, and for sundry other just and holy ends.

In order to truly and consistently take up the armor of God, we have to first be convinced of how much we need it.
And God often convinces us of our need through many sins and failures.
These sins and failures are meant to bring us to humility and dependence upon God.
This humility and dependence is the work of God in us through His Spirit.

And as we are humble and dependent, we are conformed to the image of Christ and in that frame, the armor of God fits us perfectly.

So let me ask you:
How are you dealing with your sin and failure?
Do you see yourself a constantly sinful and deeply screwed up?

Or do you think you are pretty good?
Do you think you are a successful strong Christian?

This is a very dangerous condition.
It's called self-righteousness.

There is no such thing as a strong, successful Christian.

There are only dependent ones.

Remember, the command is to be strong in the Lord and the strength of HIS might.

Yet if you do see yourself as constantly sinful and deeply screwed up?
Does this awareness of sin drive you to loath yourself and nothing more?
Or does this keen awareness of your sin drive you to loath yourself and cling to Christ?

Does your awareness of your wretchedness inspire you to adore God for His grace in the Gospel?

You see, there has to be a heart change.
There has to be a brokenness.
We have to see through our failure to the Cross.
We have to be thanking God that there is such a thing as the cross.

Without this brokenness and faith, we'll only be convinced that we need to try harder.
Or we will just hate ourselves and be depressed.

Philippians 2:13, Paul commanded us to...
work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.

Galatians 5:1 For freedom Christ has set us free

Christ's desire is to humble us and fit us for his armor.
And so when you feel the guilt of your sin, let it drive you through self-loathing to appreciation of Christ all the more.
He is the God of grace who was offered freely for your sin.
By his blood, you have been perfectly cleansed.
And as you have been brought to the end of yourself, you are made fit to wear his armor.

Amen.