

Sermon: Truth, Righteousness & Gospel Peace
Ephesians 6:14-15

We are continuing our study through Paul's letter to the Ephesians.
And today we are considering the first three pieces of the armor of God in Ephesians 6.

Those three pieces are the belt of truth, the breastplate of righteousness and the shoes of the gospel of peace. So let us read now Ephesians 6:13-18.

Ephesians 6:13 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...

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

It's amazing how love and acceptance can change a person.
I have known many people over the years who were going through life, seemingly just fine.
And then they meet someone who loves them.
I mean really loves them.

And the person just comes alive, like a plant that hasn't been watered in ages but now has been watered.
There's more confidence. There's more joy. Laughter comes easier.
Their more secure in conversation and it seems they have a new outlook on life.
They've become sunny all of the sudden.
All of this because someone they admire loves them and accepts them.

It's amazing how love and acceptance can change a person.
As we consider the armor of God here in Ephesians 6, there is a lot of love and acceptance being communicated.

Because God has given us His armor to put on.
And when we put on the armor, we find ourselves dressed like Jesus Christ himself.

I love how Paul communicates artistically in these verses.
He could have just spoken to us theologically about truth, righteousness and the gospel of peace.
Most of the time he does just that.
But here, in these verses, Paul uses an artistic flair.
We have the belt of truth, the breastplate of righteousness and the shoes of the gospel of peace.

These three pieces, like all the pieces, communicate to us the love and acceptance we have with God.

Because he doesn't simply command us to know the truth, behave righteously and believe the gospel of peace.

Instead, he tells us to put these virtues on.
To wrap ourselves up in them. Because in Christ, we have the truth, we are righteous, and we have peace with God.

God wants us to be wrapped up in the identity he gives to.

We are loved and accepted in him.
And this should show itself in our outlook, our confidence and our own self-perception.

So let us consider these first three pieces.
You have a sermon outline and the first point there is...

I. The Belt of Truth

The belt of truth helps us to stand against the devil's attacks. But how?

Well first off, when we consider the way ancient armor worked, it makes sense to begin with the belt of truth. Because the belt helped to keep clothing out of the way during a fight.

Additionally the belt was used for holding other weapons and it was probably donned first when putting on armor.

Having a belt was essential for effectiveness in combat.

And truth is essential in spiritual combat because without it, we would certainly stumble.

We can't stand firm spiritually without the truth.

The image of a belt that Paul uses comes from Isaiah 11:5, where the Messiah puts on a **belt of righteousness and faithfulness**.

Now, if you are familiar with the other pieces of armor in Ephesians, you might say, wait a minute.

Pall calls righteousness the breastplate and faith the shield? Yet in Isaiah 11:5, the belt is one of righteousness and faithfulness.

Isn't Paul confusing the metaphor by calling the belt truth?

Not really.

First off, righteousness, faithfulness and truth are all inter-related.

Second, there were perhaps some translational issues that cause Paul to associate truth with the Messiah's belt.

But thirdly, and perhaps most importantly, we need to keep in mind that Paul is being artistic.

He wants us to see that truth plays the primary role in standing against the devil's attacks.

And so, Paul sets us free, so to speak, to consider the many ways that truth is primary in standing against the devil's attacks.

And one way that truth is primary is that it orients us. Battle can be confusing. There are numerous tales from history where soldiers became confused in the fog of war.

Sometime they fired on their own fellow soldiers.

At other times, warriors have misidentified the enemy, thinking someone is friendly when in reality they are a foe.

And so they let the enemy infiltrate their defenses.

Soldiers can also forget the reason they are fighting, causing them to lose heart and give up.

In moments like these, God's orients us. It reminds us of what really is at stake when we are up against the schemes of the devil. The devil hates God's truth and his main strategy is to use lies.

He tells us that we are far too sinful to be in the fight against him. He would like us to believe that we have already lost.

He says things like: ***Just look at the world around you, Christian. Here you are standing for truth- but very few people agree with you.***

You say: "There's only one way to be saved and that is through Christ."

Is that what you believe? How narrow is that! Wouldn't life be much easier if you didn't hold to the bible as ABSOLUTE truth?

What an arrogant position to hold!

You need to open your mind to what the culture is telling you.

And look at all the fun you are missing out on. Wouldn't it be better if you could just talk how you wanted and not have to feel accountable to God? Wouldn't you be happier if you were sexually free with zero accountability from God or other Christians?

The devil wants us to doubt God's truth and even have contempt for it. He wants us to experience it as oppressive, and bitter.

Psalms 19:7 The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul; the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple; **8** the precepts of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes; ... **10** More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and drippings of the honeycomb.

If we experience God's word as bitter, oppressive, and restrictive to our freedom, then we can know that Satan has gotten the upper hand.

And so, before it ever gets to that point, we are to strap on the belt of truth.

503 years and 1 day ago, Martin Luther nailed his 95 theses to the door of Wittenberg. He posted these theses as a means to spark a debate. Little did he know he would be sparking the reformation of the church.

Obviously he didn't feel sufficient for the task but he charged ahead through fierce opposition. And this was because he continually referenced the truth of God's word. Now Luther could be brash and proud. He would be the first to admit that. But his brashness and pride were not what drove him. He was driven by God's truth in scripture.

Before his trial at nearby Worms, Luther reportedly said:

"How can it be that so many in the church government do not see what I see in Scripture? How can it be the case that they are all wrong and I alone am right?"

Luther was filled with doubts- not about God's word but with his understanding of it.

The fog of war was thick around him and it would have been easy for him to lose his orientation.

How could it be that he was right and they were all wrong?

Yet Luther rose to the occasion.

He wrapped the belt of God's truth around him.

And his final words at the trial in worms were these:

"Unless I am convicted by Scripture and plain reason (I do not accept the authority of popes and councils because they have contradicted each other), my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and will not recant anything, for to go against conscience is neither right nor safe. Here I stand, I can do no other, so help me God. Amen."

Luther stood because he had the belt of truth fastened around him.

The belt is primary in standing against the devil.

And it is our job to lay hold of the belt by reading God's word.

But it is not enough just to lay hold of the belt. We have to put it on.

This means we need to think through the implications of God's word and apply the truth.

We have to meditate upon it.

When we read the bible, our primary motivation should not be to feel uplifted or some other comforting feeling. Bible reading is really about learning the truth in order to prepare ourselves for an attack.

And so we must grab the belt by reading God's word.

And we must go one step further.

We must fasten it on by applying it.

It's not enough just to read. We have to apply the truth.

So let me ask you, do you have the proper orientation in the fog of war?

Do you return regularly to the source of truth which is God's word?

And do you meditate on it and apply it to your life?

Putting on the belt of truth is to be our first action in standing against the devil.

The second action is to put on the breastplate of righteousness.

II. The Breastplate of Righteousness

In Isaiah 59:17, we are told that the Messiah will put on a breastplate of righteousness and a helmet of salvation and come in judgment.

This he was going to do because of his people's sin.

God alone is righteous. All his ways are good and all his judgments are just.

He wears the breastplate of righteousness in judgment ...and this is not good news for us.

At least not at first.

When Paul commands us to put on the breastplate of righteousness, we must have it clear in our minds that by nature, none of us possesses any righteousness whatsoever.

Isaiah 64:6 says:

6 We have all become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment.

The bible tells us that we all sin and fall short of the glory of God.

And therefore, by nature, none of us possesses any righteousness at all.

This is a hard lesson for us to learn.

Because we like to compare ourselves with others and sometimes look down on others.

We may never say it out loud, but our thoughts often go something like...

"Well, I may not be perfect...but at least I'm not like that."

And just fill in the blank.

It is so easy for us to look upon other people with contempt.

Those lunatics on the far left.
Or those narrow minded people on the far right.
Or those wishy-washy people in the extreme center.

Having contempt for others is a sure sign that we are self-righteous.

And all of us struggle with this to some degree or another.

Yet the bible frees us from the problem of self-righteousness by telling us that we have no righteousness whatsoever.

It's ironic, that perhaps the easiest class of people to hate is the self-righteous.

People who think they are better than others are just so easy to loath.

I have often complained about, and heard others complaining about people who think they are better than others.

People who are right in their own eyes are just intolerable to me.

Yet, with what standard am I judging them?

My own self-righteousness.

I think: "At least I'm not like those people who think they are better than other people."

Self-righteousness is an inescapable web ...until we recognize that, by nature, we have no righteousness. All our righteousness is as filthy rags.

And because we have no righteousness and because God did not want us to perish, Christ came to be righteous for us.

Christ lived a life of complete righteousness, so that by faith in him, he might give his righteousness to us.

2 Corinthians 5:21 For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

Christ took our unrighteousness upon himself at the cross and gave us his own.

This exchange of righteousness is spoken of again in Isaiah 53:5:

Isaiah 53:5 But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed.

6 All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

Christ's righteousness gives us the right to stand unflinchingly before God as his beloved children.

Yet the righteousness Christ gives us isn't just for our future in heaven.

It is what we were made to be here and now.

2 Corinthians 5:17 ...if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.

God desires that we put on Christ's righteousness in our lives in the here and now.

Ephesians 2:10 says:

10 For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

So, have come to realize that before God, you have no righteousness at all?

Have you trusted in Christ for his righteousness as a gift?

And have you put on the breastplate of a righteous life?

One of the devil's lies to God's people is that, now that you are saved, a righteous life doesn't matter.

Yet it does matter, for numerous reasons.

A righteous life pleases God and it leads to the greatest joy in our lives.

But more than that, a righteous life is what other people see.

Satan wants believers to neglect a righteous life so that we will be rendered ineffective for reaching others.

One of the most popular criticisms hurled at the church is that the church is filled with hypocrites.

Sadly, that is often an accurate statement and an unrighteous life only makes the criticism more true.

Peter writes:

1 Peter 2:24 He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. **By his wounds** you have been healed.

Putting on the breastplate of righteousness is what we were made for.

It's something we have to do everyday.

The final piece of armor that we will consider is the shoes of readiness of the Gospel of peace.

III. The Shoes of the Gospel of Peace

Paul writes in verse 15:

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

In this verse, Paul is hearkening back to Isaiah 52:7:

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."

The gospel of peace works in two directions.

First of all, it is message we receive.

The gospel is the good news that our God reigns.

In the Old Testament, this meant that the God's of the nations surrounding Israel were not in control.

The Lord was.

And their idols could never bring peace.

Only the Lord could do that.

In the New Testament, this applies to Jesus Christ.

He is Lord. Not Caesar.

And he alone can bring real peace.

He gives us the peace of a cleansed conscience and peace with God himself.

Peace is a status that we all are desperate for.

By nature we seek so many dead end pursuits which really are just idols.

For instance, we can seek peace and contentment in the idol of success... in the praise of other people.

We can seek peace in our work, hoping it will provide us with significance.

Or in being thought beautiful or attractive.

We can seek peace in wealth and security, hoping it will satisfy.

Or in relationships, hoping for the perfect mate.

Or in cleanliness and orderliness.

We can seek peace by trying to control the world around us.

Or in hobbies, sports, travel and leisure.

There are a million things we can turn into idols in order to find peace.

But none of them satisfy.

They all leave us empty, because they were never meant to satisfy.

Only God can give us peace and this is what the gospel is all about.

In the Gospel we have peace with God because of the work of Christ.

And the peace God gives isn't just the absence of hostility.

We have God's smile.

Paul tells us in Colossians 1:20, that in Christ we are reconciled to God and because of this, we have peace.

This is the Gospel that we need to hear continually.

Because we forget.

Our failures and our proneness toward idolatry tell us another story.

And so we must proclaim the gospel first to ourselves.

God is wild about you!

The Gospel of peace is something we must first proclaim to ourselves.

But the gospel of peace is also something that goes out.

It is the message that we are to live and proclaim.

Because everyone you meet is struggling with some form of idolatry in which they are trying to find peace.

Only the gospel of Jesus Christ can grant them peace. And you may be the only one in their lives who can model and communicate the gospel to them.

In Romans 10:13, Paul writes:

13 For "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." **14** How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? **15** And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!"

So find your peace in Christ through the gospel and extend it to others.

And now, transitioning to the Lord's table...

The sacrament of the Lord's supper is a proof of the peace we have with God.

His body was broken and his blood was shed for our peace with God.

In Christ we are righteous.

This is the most important truth we can take into this meal.

And so this table is for those who believe in Christ and who have been baptized into his name.

This is a family meal and all who are in Christ are in the family.

Amen.