

# The Message

Note: No sermon is quite the same when you read it. You miss the inflections, the understanding that you gain in the hearing. Nevertheless, the words are shared with you here.

August 29, 2010

Scripture: Ephesians 6:10-18

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## THE PROTECTION

As I was working on the sermon, I had lunch with our son Ricky. "Hey, Mom," Ricky asked, "what is the sermon about?"

"It's about the armor of God."

"Well, you should be familiar with it."

"You should be, too. I prayed it over you enough!"

"Mom, that's my point. Every prayer you pray has some element of that in it!"

Yes, every one of my prayers has some element of the "armor" because spiritual warfare is real. Although spiritual warfare is real, I don't want you to think there is a demon behind every bush. The truth is we are in a battle, but it's not with each other. Our battle is against the unseen. It's a spiritual battle that relies on the strength of the Lord. And this strength is supplied to us chiefly through prayer.

In my youth, there was a very popular saying. Whenever someone misbehaved, he would say, "The devil made me do it." However, we must realize that our own flesh causes much of our problems.

We need the protection, the armor of God, not only as individuals but also as the church. As we step out and start a new church campus and new ministries, it's important as a community we pray for protection. Hence, today we are looking at the full armor of God. While each piece is tailor-made for us, we must put on all of the armor.

In Andrew Lloyd Weber's musical *The Phantom of the Opera*, a young chorus girl, Christine, receives voice training from a mysterious musician she calls the "Angel of Music." On his deathbed, Christine's father had promised to send someone to complete her musical training. As the plot thickens, we find that her peculiar mentor is really a demented man who wants to carry her away into a bizarre underworld beneath the opera house. What the girl thinks is a supernatural agent sent by her

beloved father is really a madman who wants to possess her for his own ends. The "Angel of Music" is evil masquerading as good.

As believers in Christ, we face an evil one who masquerades as good. One of Satan's key strategies is to look like someone who is good. In 2 Corinthians, Paul writes: "Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light" (11:14). The Greek word translated as "transforms" means "to change appearance, masquerade, or disguise oneself."

When Paul wrote this letter to the church in Ephesus, he was in a Roman prison, more than likely chained to a Roman soldier. Being the consummate teacher, Paul uses what he is around him from which to teach. He sees this Roman soldier standing before him with his armor. If the armor is not on the guard, it stands over in a corner. Paul sees something physical and parallels it to the spiritual.

He thinks about the unseen forces that oppose believers, and having the soldier before him, Paul relates the Christian battle in military fashion. Just as a soldier puts on armor to fight his enemy so do Christians prepare for battle in the spiritual realm. And each battle begins with the belt. "Stand firm then, with the belt of truth around your waist" (Eph. 6:14).

In any conflict, truth is often the first casualty. The first thing Satan wants to do is mount a campaign of disinformation and propaganda to distort the truth. In Genesis, Satan succeeds in tempting Eve. He says, "Did God really say that? Surely not. I think he meant something else." (Please note: Eve always is blamed for introducing sin into the Garden of Eden. However, Adam was with her. He was just as sinful, if not more so, for not speaking up.)

Most of a Roman soldier's armor was very ornate and decorative...with the exception of the belt. Now if you are describing a man's clothing, would you begin with the belt? Unless the belt is one decorated with a big buckle such as one worn by a rodeo star, you hardly see the thing. However, our belt seems insignificant until you take it off. Then you discover its significance. Take it off and your pants might fall down! If you don't have your belt on, you might spend most of your time, trying to keep your pants pulled up. You don't feel very confident and certainly won't make any fast moves.

In comparison, the Roman soldier's loin belt held his armor and clothing together. In the New American and King James versions, the word used is "girded," which means to pull it all in. The belt was the place for the shield to rest, the sword to hang, and the breastplate to be secure.

In the same way, we need to wrap ourselves in God's objective truth. Truth enables us to confront evil in us as well as in the world. We need to pay attention not only to the truth out there also conform to the truth in us lest we compromise our integrity

and deny we have a problem. Wearing the belt of truth means that we're honest with ourselves and we speak truth to the world. But the truth can pinch sometimes...so we let the belt out just a bit for comfort's sake. Nevertheless, the truth cannot be compromised for comfort's sake. We need to seek the uncompromising truth. Remember: The belt of truth holds everything together.

In verse 14, Paul mentions another piece of the armor—"the breastplate of righteousness." A breastplate protects the vital organs. Comparatively, our righteousness aids us in doing the right thing.

Let's be honest. There are times when we are all tempted. In a wave of emotion, temptation comes. For instance, if you are an alcoholic, a drink might tempt you. If you're far from home, an illicit romance might tempt you. The breastplate of righteousness reminds us to do the right thing—no matter what. Righteousness from God is holistic. It affects every facet of life.

Next, we are instructed to have "our feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace" (Eph. 6:15). The shoes of a Roman soldier were not ordinary shoes. These are killer shoes with extremely dangerous spikes that were one or more inches long. Think of them as the original football cleats and the spikes were nails! If the soldiers were involved in active combat, the spikes could have been close to three inches long and very sharp. Therefore, these spiked heels would have been tightly bound to a soldier's feet.

So, why does Paul compare these spiked "heels" with peace? You can't have confidence in battle if you don't have good footing. Peace gives us a foundation so secure that we can step out in confident faith without being moved by what we see or what we hear.

You will keep in perfect peace him whose mind is steadfast because he trusts in you. Trust in the LORD forever, for the LORD is the Rock eternal. (Isaiah 26:3-4 NIV)

When we have peace with God, we're on firm footing spiritually and we can fight with confidence. God's prevailing and conquering peace will dominate your life. Regardless of how hard the enemy or the daily affairs of life hit you, this prevailing and conquering peace will hold you in place.

"In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one" (Eph. 6:16). The Roman soldier owned two types of shields. One was for public parades and ceremonies; the other for battle. The shields used in battle were large and shaped like a door. In battle, the soldiers would place their shields together and form a solid defense. Steven Pressfield, author of *Gates of Fire*, describes the value of a shield to an army.

If you lose your helmet or breastplate, we will forgive you. But if you lose your shield, we will strip you of your citizenship. The reason is

that with the helmet or breastplate you protect your life, but with the shield you protect the line.

As Western Christians, we personalize the Gospel so much, we neglect the community. Faith isn't merely a matter of my individual salvation, but of the salvation of the community. Soldiers know that. They know that they can't win without their fellow soldiers protecting their blind side.

Not only does faith protect me but also it shields my fellow believers. Unfortunately, faith can be harder for adults to see. Our neighbors might be completely unaware of our faith. And nothing erodes our neighbors' faith than when we are unfaithful.

Did you know there is an arrow in the Fed Ex logo? Do you see it? [On the screen, the FedEx logo is shown. Between the letters e and x, an arrow can be seen in the white portion.]

How many of you can see it? It took me a couple of minutes to see it. I was told that children can see it easily, but adults have a harder time. Adults can't see it because they only look at the surface—at what they expect to see. But children who can't yet read and have no expectations can see it clearly.

Isn't this a lot like our faith? It's right there in front of us, but some see it and others do not. If you don't see the arrow, all you need is for someone to point it out to you. Then, every time you see a FedEx truck with its logo on the side, you'll see the arrow. Similarly, our mission is to hold people up so they can see Jesus—to show them what they cannot see for themselves.

The enemy throws arrows our way, but our shield extinguishes them. What we show our neighbor is the shield up close. Our neighbor might not see where the arrows have gone in unless he looks closely at it. That arrow was the time I walked away from gossip. That arrow was the time I stood up for my co-worker. That one was the time I didn't take those drugs. Do you get it? Our relationship is not just with Christ—it's also with those around us.

By faith, we know that nothing the enemy fires at us—earthly distresses, condemning accusations, fearful threats shouted at us over the walls of faith—nothing can tear down our collective protection. In *The Believer's New Life*, Andrew Murray writes: "In ourselves we can achieve nothing, but in Christ we are more than conquerors. By faith, we stand in him, righteous before God. And in him we are strong against our enemies."

Another part of our battle gear is that we wear "the helmet of salvation" (Eph. 6:17). No soldier would consider going into battle without head protection. We don't even let our kids ride bikes anymore without helmets. Why? Because a blow to the head can be fatal.

Our salvation gives us the ultimate protection. You cannot deal with evil in your life until you have the assurance of your salvation. When we have been reconciled to God by his grace, forgiven of our sins, and live under God's leadership and protection, we can confront evil in our lives. With the helmet of salvation firmly in place, we will be completely surrounded by the unquestionable truth of all that is ours in Jesus.

We've been speaking mainly about defensive measures. However in verse 17, Paul writes of an offensive measure, "the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God." We're not in this fight alone. The more we know what the Bible says, the more God can use it to give us the specific word we need for a particular situation. When we go to war against evil, we need to carry the Word of God in our hearts and minds. And the Holy Spirit helps us to apply that word to our circumstances. Understand that the Word of God is not to be used against people or used to beat them over the head with it. It is a weapon to use against the enemy and the enemy is not flesh and blood!

When I rededicated my life to Christ, the first sermon I remember was on the armor of God. For years, as I brought my children to school, I would use that time in the car to pray the "armor" over them. When our daughter was in the second or third grade, she had a friend that stayed with us for a week because her parents were out of town. So, as I prayed over Ricky and Chrissie, I also prayed over our young guest.

Several weeks later, as I dropped our daughter off for a play date, the mother of our young guest runs out and says, "I just want to thank you for reminding me of my need to get back into church." I had no idea about what she was talking. My puzzled look prompted her to continue: "Ever since our daughter stayed with you, she has been spouting off about the 'belt of truth, the shield of faith, and the helmet of something.' I asked what she was doing and she said Ms. Lynda prayed that every morning."

God can use the Sword of the Word of God even when we don't have it completely right...because God knows our heart. The devil is well able to declare, "It is written..." When we plant the Word in our hearts and renew our minds with that Word, we will be able to discern the lies and mind games that the devil will try to use against us.

Father, enable us in grace to put on the whole armor of God, to wield the Sword of the Spirit, in the Spirit, for the glory of God. Amen.