

Ephesians Bible Study

Lesson 23 Notes / Ephesians 6:10-17

Standing Firm in the Armor of God

Introduction:

In our passage for today, Paul begins to wrap up his letter to the church at Ephesus by making some final comments that must not be missed. In the previous chapters he had written extensively on the great purposes of God in salvation, firmly establishing the believer's new identity in Christ (chapters 1-3) and the quality of life that should follow in response to God's grace (chapters 4-6). Standards for the believer's personal life, fellowship within the church, and life at home and the workplace were addressed, along with heart attitudes and behaviors believers should seek to cultivate as they relate to the lost. Consequently, as the apostle moves into his final comments, he makes clear that he still has something of great importance on his mind regarding the Christian's daily conduct. In short, he knew that he needed to remind believers that a life of faithfulness simply cannot be lived without fighting a spiritual battle. Paul was experiencing this first hand, as he wrote from prison and stated plainly that he was ***"an ambassador in chains (Eph. 6:20)***. While, it is obvious that the apostle did desire to produce some alarm in his readers about the intense nature of the battle they were facing, he did not want them to be dismayed. He simply was trying to stir up their awareness and sense of caution and inspire them to walk in the power of the Holy Spirit. Practically speaking, this meant he needed to teach them about the armor of God and instruct them on how to tap into the strength of the Lord that he had already written so much about (Eph. 1:19-22, 2:6, 3:16-21). His ultimate goal was that the body of Christ would stand firm in representing Christ and resisting the devil.

The believer's conflict

In verses 10-12 we read, ***"Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might, put on the whole armor of God that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, and authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places."*** In using the word finally, Paul shows he is transitioning to his final comments and preparing to conclude his letter. He then proceeds to command his readers to ***"be strong"*** which translated in the Greek means, ***"be strengthened continuously."*** By saying it this way the apostle is making clear that this strengthening is a way of life, not a one-time event. Following this, he then directs them to the source of their empowerment, ***"the Lord,"*** who as John 15:1-5 makes clear is the only means by which the believer is empowered to live faithfully. While it is sobering for the Christian to recognize he has no power in himself to remain faithful, it is immensely encouraging to recognize there is limitless power in the person of Jesus Christ. Through their union with Him, believers are not only assured of their full and final sanctification, but also instructed that they have been given all they need for life and godliness

(2 Peter 1:3). This is expressed through the gift of divine power or as the passage states, ***“the strength of His might”*** a phrase that echoes Paul’s prayer in chapter 1. In 1:19 the apostle had prayed for the church to know and experience ***“the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of His great might that He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places.”*** This very power is again what he is referencing as he talks about the armor of God, but the difference is that he is just going into more detail with practical terms. First though, he reminds them they must choose to actually ***“put on the whole armor of God.”*** As MacArthur writes concerning the original Greek word for put on, *“Enduo carries the idea of once and for all permanence. The full armor of God is not something to be put on and taken off occasionally but is something to be put on permanently. It is not a uniform to wear only while playing a game and then remove when the game is over. The armor of God is to be the Christian’s lifelong companion. It provides believers with divine power from ‘Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to make you stand in the presence of His glory blameless with great joy’” (Jude 24).*

Next, Paul mentions the key idea of the passage- the reason why believers must always wear the *full* armor of God. It is so that they will be able ***“to stand against the schemes of the devil.”*** Paul uses the word stand (or withstand) four times in these verses strongly emphasizing that what God is looking for in the believer is a heart that is unwilling to compromise. As Moule puts it, *“the present picture is not of a march or an assault but of the holding of the fortress of the soul and of the church for the Heavenly King.”* It is made clear by the passage that attacks from the enemy are a regular part of the believer’s journey, and because of this the temptation to compromise is immense. Yet, as the resources of God are employed, the believer finds the power to maintain his integrity and witness for the Lord. Of course, there will be a fight because the devil is real, and his tactics are deceptive and strategic. Paul had already alluded to this in 4:14 when he was discussing the need for believers to grow so that they could have the discernment to reject ***“the craftiness in deceitful schemes.”*** This highlights the point that our enemy works in a myriad of ways and the foundational tactic he uses is deception. As we learn in John 8:44, Satan is the father of lies, and all throughout Scripture we see him using every possible means to oppose God and lead people astray from the Lord and His truth.

Sadly, it has become rather common in our modern day to hear of people who reject the notion that Satan even exists. Even among professing Christians the belief that a real and personal devil still ***“prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour” (1 Peter 5:8)*** has become rather unpopular. As Foulkes wisely puts it, *“The thought of a personal devil, though found in every part of the New Testament (Matt. 4:1-11, James 4:7, 1 Peter 5:8-9, 1 John 5:18) does not commend itself in all quarters today. Still less does the idea of the principalities and powers of evil and spiritual rulers of this present darkness (vs12). But we should be slow to reject the biblical terms in which the spiritual life and its conflicts are spoken of and realize rather that our vastly increased knowledge of the physical universe has not necessarily*

increased and may in fact have dulled our sense of the spiritual. We should be hesitant to regard ourselves as wiser than the apostles and our incarnate Lord concerning the unseen world.”

Going further, Paul elaborates on the battle waging upon us when he says, **“For we do wrestle against flesh and blood.”** Here he is alluding to the fact that our battle is of a personal nature and yet not primarily against human beings, or the corrupt world we live in, as bad as those may seem. While the enemy often uses human instruments to carry out his schemes, (think of Judas Iscariot, Nero, Hitler, leaders of cults, proponents of abortion, etc.) the real enemy behind all evil is Satan himself, and the demonic workers he has at his disposal. These workers are described by Paul as **“rulers...authorities...cosmic powers over this present darkness...and spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.”** By listing these Paul mostly wants to communicate that there is an evil, yet highly organized supernatural empire, where demons operate with varying degrees of authority. Yet as MacArthur says, *“Paul’s purpose, however, is not to explain the details of the demonic hierarchy but to give some idea of its sophistication and power. We are pitted against and incredibly evil and potent enemy. But our need is not to specifically recognize every feature of our adversary but to turn to God, who is our powerful and trustworthy source of protection and victory.”*

The believer’s armor

After describing the nature of the conflict the believer faces, Paul then moves into a description of the armor to put on. He says, **“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.”** By using the word therefore Paul is reminding them that because their spiritual foes are such a foreboding threat, they simply *must* utilize their God given resources if they want to remain faithful. It is interesting that he uses the phrase **“in the evil day,”** again (see 5:16), reminding believers of something they tend to forget- *“Every day since the Fall has actually been an evil day for mankind, and every day will continue to be evil until the usurper and his forces are thrown forever into the bottomless pit.”* (MacArthur) While sobering, this truth should not cause the believer to despair for while Satan may seem to be winning the war now, the reality is that his power is entirely limited and can only go as far as God allows. Nevertheless, all believers have the tendency to underestimate the power of the flesh, as well as their enemy, and grow complacent because of residual pride in their hearts. Paul knew all of this, and that is likely why he continued to plead with his readers to do all they possibly could to stand firm.

The belt of truth

Next, Paul says, **“Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth.”** Here he emphasizes again the reason for wearing the armor (standing), and then begins to unpack the description of the armor itself. The first part he commands the believer to wear is the **“belt of truth.”** In many translations the term belt, is translated girdle, which coincides with the common biblical concept of girding. Foulkes explaining this says, *“The metaphor of girding is often used in the Bible because it describes a preparatory action necessary for a person with the*

flowing garments of those days before work could be done, a race run, or a battle fought (Luke 12:35, I Peter 1:13)." The idea Paul is getting at here is that before anything else can be worn, the believer must undergird himself, "tying up the loose ends as it were," with truth- in this context meaning sincerity in one's relationship with Christ, or as Psalm 51:6 says, **"truth in the inward being."** Paul had referenced this idea previously in 5:9 when he had written, **"for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true,"** and made clear that the genuine believer has no need to fear the penetrating nature of the light when his life is free of hypocrisy. Even when he sins, he knows he has **"an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous," (I John 2:1)** and therefore has the freedom to be honest about his struggles and failures, having been set free from his previous bondage to fear. At a most basic level you could say that Paul is exhorting the believers to be rid of hypocrisy and truly devoted to the Lordship of Christ. MacArthur adds to this by saying, *"I believe that being girded with truth primarily has to do with self-discipline and total commitment. It is the committed Christian, just as it is the committed soldier and committed athlete, who is prepared. Winning in war and in sports is often said to be a direct result of desire that leads to careful preparation and maximum effort. It is the army or the team who wants most to win who is most likely to do so-even against great odds...To be content with mediocrity, lethargy, indifference, and half heartedness is to fail to be armored with the belt of the God's truth and to leave oneself exposed to Satan's schemes."* This mindset was expressed eloquently by the great evangelist, George Mueller when he said, *"There was a day when I died; died to self, my opinions, preferences, tastes, and will; died to the world; its approval or censure; died to the approval or blame even of my brethren or friends; and since then I have studied only to show myself approved unto God."* This is the heart Paul is after when he says, **"put on the belt of truth."**

The breastplate of righteousness

After emphasizing the belt of truth Paul directs them by saying, **"and having put on the breastplate of righteousness."** Here he references the description of the divine warrior in Isaiah 59:17 which says, **"He put on righteousness as a breastplate,"** (here referring to Christ), which ultimately describes the quality of life that Jesus lived, that was characterized by holiness. For the believer who has been given the imputed righteousness of their Lord, there is an inevitable manifestation of that righteousness in his life and character. As was referenced earlier, Paul had already proclaimed in 5:19 the nature of the fruit that flows out of the one who walks in the light, and righteousness was the second quality he had mentioned. Going further Foulkes comments, *"to neglect what we know to be righteous action is to leave a gaping hole in our armor."* This lines up with all of Scripture and was particularly emphasized by the apostle John. (I John 1:4, John 14-15) Obedience to the revealed Word of God is inextricably linked to joy, and joy is inextricably linked to the supply of God's strength. (Neh. 8:10) The believer who is disobedient and fleshly, unwilling to confront his sin and forsake it, has forfeited the relational joy and peace with Christ that protects him from the **"schemes of the devil."** He has also put himself in the position to become a stumbling block to others, for as Sheldon Vanauken says in his book *A Severe Mercy*, *"The best argument for Christianity is Christians;*

their joy, their certainty, their completeness. But the strongest argument against Christianity is also Christians- when they are somber and joyless, when they are self-righteous and smug in complacent consecration, when they are narrow and repressive, then Christianity dies a thousand deaths.” These sobering realities underscore why Paul so adamantly commanded believers to put on righteousness as a breastplate, the vital piece of armor that protects the body from fatal blows.

Feet readied with the gospel of peace

Thirdly, Paul describes the shoes of the one armed with the strength of the Lord when he says, ***“and as shoes for your feet having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace.”*** Here the apostle’s mind turns toward the important matter of the type of shoes the effective warrior wears, likely thinking of the varied terrains soldiers encounter. A soldier’s shoes are vitally important because his very life could be on them. *“As he marches on rough, hot roads, climbs over jagged rocks, tramples over thorns, and wades through streambeds of jagged stones, his feet need much needed protection. A soldier whose feet are blistered, cut, or swollen cannot fight well and often is not even able to stand up- a perilous situation in battle. He cannot very well handle his sword or shield and cannot advance rapidly or retreat.”* (MacArthur) This paints a masterful picture of the centrality of the gospel in the believer’s armor. In this context it seems that what Paul is getting at is that the good news about Jesus Christ- why he came, what he did, who he is, how he has rescued us etc. is what provides the foundational footing of the believer. This echoes Paul’s other metaphors about Christ being the one and only foundation of the church (I Cor 3:11, I Peter 2:6-7) and the hope found in Him as ***“the sure and steadfast anchor of the soul”*** (Heb. 6:19:20). As Calvin said, *“The whole gospel is contained in Christ,”* and the moment we lose sight of this vital truth is the moment we become vulnerable. By fixing our gaze on the risen Lord and being ready to share the good news about him at any moment (I Peter 3:15), we are readied with the gospel of peace.

The shield of faith

Related to the sure footing of the gospel Paul says, ***“In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one.”*** Here he speaks of the soldier’s shield, the piece of armor that in ancient times could be as large as a door which consequently was able to cover much of the body. This echoes his words in I Thess. 5:8 that say, ***“But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation.”*** In both contexts it seems that what the apostle is referring to is that full trust and reliance on God must characterize the believer’s life if he wants to be effective. As Matthew Henry says, *“Faith is all in all in an hour of temptation...The devil is the wicked one. Violent temptations, by which the soul is set on fire of hell, are darts Satan shoots at us. Also, hard thoughts of God, and as to ourselves. Faith, applying the Word of God and the grace of Christ, quenches the darts of temptation.”* Believers who have walked with Christ for any length of time know that the flaming darts of Satan can come in many different forms. *“People’s tongues, the shafts of impurity, selfishness, doubt,*

fear, disappointment... are planned by the enemy to burn and destroy. The apostle knew that only faith's reliance on God could quench and deflect such weapons when they were hurled at the Christian." (Foulkes)

The helmet of salvation

Next, the apostle says, **"and take the helmet of salvation."** Obviously linked with the other pieces of armor, here the apostle again references the divine warrior in Isaiah 59:17 (Christ) who is Himself the source of eternal salvation. As believers fortify their minds with the truth that God has graciously granted them the gift of salvation, a sure hope despite the attacks of the enemy, they are empowered to stand firm. For the Christian, the soul's ultimate deliverance from sin is a certain reality, and their eternal salvation is secure because it is grounded in the promises of God. As Romans 11:29 makes clear, **"the gifts and calling of God are irrevocable."** Of course, for many believers, assurance of salvation can be quite illusive for a wide variety of reasons. Yet nevertheless great hope is found in James 4:8 which states, **"Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God, and He will draw near to you."** As believers pursue truly knowing Christ and being grounded in the promises of His Word, they will find their faith strengthened to lay hold of a deep and steady assurance of their salvation, (II Peter 1:5-11) the helmet which will protect them from attacks of the enemy.

The sword of the Spirit

Lastly, Paul references the final piece of armor to wear, the only weapon mentioned, **"the sword of the Spirit which is the word of God."** In Scripture, particularly in the Old Testament speech is often referred to as a sword. *"The words of the wicked are said to wound as a sword (Ps. 57:4, 64:3). God's own word is also as a sword in His hand, a sword that lays bare, separating the false from the true (Heb. 4:12), bringing judgment (Is. 11:4, Hos. 6:5) but also bringing salvation. His Word can thus be wielded by His messengers in the lives of others (Is. 49:2) but here the thought is of the word of God as a defensive weapon for the person who holds it." (Foulkes)* The sword is said to be **"of the Spirit"** indicating that it is given by the Holy Spirit to the believer, who by faith uses it to fight his temptations, just as Christ did in his wilderness temptations with Satan. Rightly used truth was his automatic reaction to the lies the enemy hurled at him, providing believers with the ultimate example for resisting **"the schemes of the devil." (Matt. 4:1-10).** Matthew Henry says it this way, *"To the Christian armed for defense in the battle, the apostle recommends only one weapon of attack; but it is enough, the sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God. It subdues and mortifies evil desires and blasphemous thoughts as they rise within; and answers unbelief and error as they assault from without. A single text, well understood, and rightly applied at once destroys a temptation or an objection and subdues the most formidable adversary."* In a day and age when attacks on the inspired Word of God seem to be at every turn, even in Christian circles, it is critical for believers to be deeply persuaded that the Bible can be trusted. Yet going further, they must train themselves to fight their battles with the Word, knowing that without it they are unable to resist temptation.

Conclusion

As one reflects on the resources of God provided in the spiritual armor, it is humbling to recognize how vulnerable we are to Satan's attacks, and yet how empowered we are to resist sin. Paul knew this first hand and simply wanted believers to learn to tap into the power that was theirs in Christ, knowing ultimately that their relationship with him is what would enable them to stand firm. This relationship, grounded solely in the grace of God, was what the apostle consistently returned to when he wanted to stir up his readers resolve to walk worthy of the Gospel. He knew that as believers reflected on the deep truths of their salvation, they would find the most compelling reasons to persevere, even the midst of trials. In II Thessalonians 2:13-15 Paul speaks of all of this when he says, ***"But we ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers beloved by the Lord, because God chose you as the first fruits to be saved, through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth. To this he called you through our gospel, so that you may obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. So then, brothers, stand firm and hold to the traditions that you were taught by us, either by our spoken word or by our letter."*** May we each be in awe of the fact that we are God's beloved, equipped to stand firm, as a testimony for our Lord.

1. ESV Study Bible
2. Francis Foulkes, Tyndale New Testament Commentary on Ephesians
3. Gospel Quotes- The Gospel Coalition
4. John MacArthur, The New Testament Commentary, Ephesians
5. John MacArthur, Ephesians: Our Immeasurable Blessings in Christ
6. Parallel Commentary on the New Testament: Charles Spurgeon, John Wesley, and Matthew Henry
7. Sheldon Vanauken, A Severe Mercy: A Story of Faith, Tragedy, and Triumph