

“Our Weapons: The Full Armor Of God”
Ephesians 6:10-13

February 11, 2018

SI: We’re spending 12 weeks or so looking in depth at a few verses at the end of Ephesians, chapter 6 verses 10-20.

Paul ends his letter with this passage to make the point that everything he has said about living the Christian life has a context. The context is warfare.

The Devil and demonic forces are shooting at you and trying to bring you down in all the areas and relationships where you are trying to live as a Christian.

We spent the last three weeks looking at the Devil’s schemes—his main weapons and strategies.

So now and until the end, we’re going to look the weapons we’ve been given to defend ourselves and to fight back.

INTRO: A few months ago when we were studying 1 Samuel I read a selection from Eugene Sledge’s WWII memoir, *With The Old Breed*.

Let me read you something else.

This is from the beginning of a chapter titled: “Into The Abyss”

Sledge is telling about heading into combat on Okinawa for the first time.

We boarded trucks and headed south over dusty roads. In this central portion of Okinawa we first passed many bivouacs of service troops and vast ammunition supply dumps, all covered with camouflage netting. Next we came to several artillery positions. From the piles of empty brass shell cases, we knew they had fired a lot. And from the numerous shell craters gouged into the fields of grass, we could tell that the Japanese had thrown in plenty of counterbattery fire.

At some unmarked spot, we stopped and got off the trucks. I was filled with dread. We took up a single file on the right side of a narrow coral road and began walking south. Ahead we could hear the crash and thunder of enemy mortar and artillery shells, the rattle of machine guns, and the popping of rifles. Our own artillery shells whistled southbound.

“Keep your five-pace interval,” came an order.

We did not talk. Each man was alone with his thoughts.

Shortly a column of men approached us on the other side of the road. They were the army infantry from the 106th Regiment, 27th Infantry Division that we were relieving. Their tragic expressions revealed where they had been. They were dead beat, dirty and grisly, hollow-eyed and tight-faced. I hadn’t seen such faces since Peleliu.

As they filed past us, one tall, lanky fellow caught my eye and said in a weary voice, “It’s hell up there, Marine.”

Imagine you were there. About to march into one of history’s terrible battles.

You could hear the sounds and see the sights.

At that moment your commanding officer says: Get your gear. Check your gear.

Don't you know you would do it? You'd be checking and re-checking.
You'd be asking to your comrades, fix this strap, hand me that.
That's what Paul says: Get your gear.

Put on the whole armor of God. Take up the whole armor of God. Says it twice.
As a believer you are in one of history's terrible battles.

A battle against rulers, authorities, cosmic powers of darkness and spiritual forces of evil.

When the Devil attacks believers, he can't rob us of our salvation,
he can't rob us of our status as justified and adopted sons of God through Christ.
So what's he trying to do to believers? What's his goal? Thomas Brooks says it's
to rob them of their comfort and peace, to make their life a burden and a hell unto them, to
cause them to spend their days in sorrow and mourning, in sighing and complaining, in
doubting and questioning."

He wants to make us ineffective and unproductive as Christians.

Not just because it gives him malicious pleasure, but probably as part of a bigger
strategy to keep believers from being joyful witnesses for Jesus.

Paul says our defense against the enemy is to be strong in the Lord and in the
strength of his might and to put on the whole armor of God.

With this armor he says you will be able to stand against the schemes of the Devil.

Then he lists the pieces of armor—breastplate, helmet—and so forth.

Obviously each one means something.

So before we get into this rundown of each of the pieces of armor—
what each one means and how we are to use them.

Let's look at the armor as a whole.

What is the whole armor of God?

It's Jesus Christ and all his benefits.

Putting on the whole armor of God means putting on Christ and appropriating
all the benefit and graces and privileges that come from knowing him.

It's taking in the truth about Christ and the promises of Christ and his word,
his work, his Spirit, so that it sinks down into your heart and animates and
strengthens you.

Let's explore this under three points, I'll give them to you as we go.

MP#1 You must put on God's armor, not your own.

I've pointed out for the last three weeks that the Devil's weapon is lies.

He's a liar and the father of lies.

The way his lies mostly work is that they corrupt your legitimate desires and your legitimate imaginations and responses so that they dominate you. So you become ineffective and unproductive in your Christian life.

You lose your joy and your peace.

You have to fight those lies with God's armor, not your own.

What does that mean?

Let me just give one example: Worry. Anxiety.

The Bible says that planning for the future, caring for yourself and your household, that's a good thing. Read the book of Proverbs. The ant stores up provisions.

1 Timothy 5 stresses caring for members of your own family.

Planning requires a certain bit of imagination.

You have to think about what the future might look like.

You have to think about certain contingencies and how they might be met.

There's a proper way to do that so that your trust is in the Lord.

That's why Proverbs is so helpful. Fear of the Lord beginning of wisdom.

But the Devil's lies rev up your imaginations about the future.

What if this happens? What if that happens?

And those lies are especially effective when your plan goes off the rails—when you have a big financial hit or setback, lose job.

You know how worry works. Your mind goes spinning down this whirlpool.

You come up with all sorts of scenarios, many of them ridiculous.

Worry can dominate you and turn you in on yourself and make you defeated and utterly useless as a Christian.

The Devil can't rob you of your crown, but if he can make your life full of sighing and complaining, then he's glad about that.

Now here's what I mean by your own armor.

It's trying to use common sense and will-power to overcome worry.

Think about what people often say when trying to help a friend who is worrying.

I'm sure it will all work out.

This too will pass.

Worry doesn't solve anything.

No use crying over spilt milk.

What's going to happen is going to happen.

All those things might be true, but they're no match for the Devil's lies.

He can blow right through those things.
When you're handling someone else's case, it might seem so simple for them to turn off the worry. Just quit worrying. Stop it.
But when trouble comes your way, those common sense strategies don't work.

In Hebrews 12, the writer is telling Christians how to deal with suffering and he says do not faint and do not take it lightly.

Those are the two non-Christian ways for dealing with suffering.

Either you faint, you fall to pieces. You forget your faith in God.

The Devil has you where he wants you. Joyless. Turned in on yourself. Or you take it lightly—I'm not going to let this get to me. Stiff upper lip.

That's not faith in God either. That's Stoicism.

The Devil really has you in the same place. No joy in toughing out will power.

What about guilt, a sense of guilt. What the usual human armor against guilt.

Think about the good things you've done.

You're being too hard on yourself.

You have to forgive yourself.

That armor doesn't work against the Devil's accusations.

Here's how Martyn Lloyd-Jones put it:

The enemy can defeat your mind, your reason, your arguments, your common sense, your psychology, your will-power, everything . . . We are dealing with a foe that is inferior in power only to the blessed Holy Trinity, a foe who is altogether above man in brilliance, and mind, and power.

Don't misunderstand what he's saying.

There is thinking and reasoning and argument when it comes to the armor of God.

But it's not your own thinking or your own reasoning.

Remember what Jesus said about worry in the Sermon on the Mount.

Consider the lilies of the field, consider the birds of the air.

Your heavenly Father takes care of them. Aren't you more precious?

The Lord Jesus is saying: Use your mind. Think. Consider. Reason.

But do so focusing on God's promises, on God's character, on who you are in me.

MP#2 You must put it on, it will not be put on for you.

“Put on the armor of God.” It’s a command. There’s nothing passive about it.

Get your gear. Check your gear.

You have to actively appropriate the benefits and privileges of Gospel.

You have to see who you are in Christ.

You have to live as you truly are in Christ.

Several years ago I read a testimony by a woman that moved me.

This is another war story. It’s painful.

I held back the tears and ran into the house to escape. Alone, I let the tears flow as I cried out, “God, if You don’t do something fast, I’m going to kill myself.” I was fifteen years old the day I opened my new yearbook and read the stinging words, “Voted least likely to succeed—Kate McVeigh.” I expected the best slogans to go to the popular crowd, but I didn’t expect to see my own name attached to such devastating words . . . My mother wanted to rip the words printed in my yearbook from my heart and mind as she listened to me cry into my pillow that afternoon.

High school was her Okinawa.

She then goes on to describe the mockery, the name-calling—

but mostly the Satanic lies she believed, that her worth was based on the judgments of other people. She was paralyzed and miserable.

That summer, through the influence and help of some Christians in her life she began to put on the armor of God.

For her it was through particular promises in God’s word and through the love and fellowship of a good church.

When I say you have to put on armor, doesn’t mean you are alone.

I began to realize how God’s love and favor could heal the insecurities in my life. I discovered my heavenly Father had poured His love, abundant blessing, and divine favor upon me because I had become His very own dearly beloved child.

Psalm 5:12 became the promise she clung to her last two years of high school.

For You, O Lord, will bless the righteous;

with favor You will surround him as with a shield.

Every day I continued to believe God in spite of my feelings. I refused to think or speak about myself opposite of who the Word of God said I was.

Here’s her word to struggling teenagers:

Let me encourage you to begin to see who you really are in Christ—that in Him you are more than a conqueror, deeply loved, accepted by God, and made righteous through the blood of Jesus.

Beautiful. But the point is that you have to do it.

You have to take the armor and put it on.

Just like this girl, you have to take the Good News of Jesus and consciously put it to work in your life. Even say, I'm not going to think this. Not say this. What do I mean that it will not be put on for you?

There are two passive ways Christians sometimes think they are getting the armor of God, but they really aren't.

Those two ways are formalism and emotionalism.

Formalism is when you focus on the outward forms of worship.

The Lord's Supper. Singing hymns. The Apostles Creed. Taking sermon notes.

The weekly and annual rhythms of church life.

Worship every Sunday. Christmas. Easter.

It's through form, custom, ritual, tradition that you find strength.

Emotionalism is when you focus on the inward experience of worship.

How does this song make me feel? How does this music make me feel?

How does this sermon make me feel?

How was that worship service? Did it move me? Did I feel good or not?

It's through emotion and feeling that you find strength.

Depending on your personality you're going to be drawn toward one or the other. I'm a formalist. Some of you are too. Some of you are emotionalists.

Does Christian life and faith have forms? Of course. Bible prescribes them.

Does Christian life and faith require feelings? Of course. Affections expected.

Is it wrong to have a personality that is drawn toward one or the other. No.

The problem is when you think the forms or the feelings are the same as putting on the whole armor of God. They aren't.

And in times of spiritual attack they're not going to help you much.

The young women whose testimony I just read even said, did you catch this:

Every day I continued to believe God in spite of my feelings.

That's the essence of it. It's believing God. Believing Christ.

And as we will see, it's always believing God specifically, believing specific

things he's said to you and done for you and then pushing those down into your heart so they catch on fire and animate your soul.

MP#3 You must put on the armor before the battle.

“Take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day.”

When’s the evil day?

You don’t know. Some days are ordinary. Most days are ordinary.

But sometimes there are evil days.

And if you are going to withstand, then you better have God’s armor on.

A read book of firsthand accounts by American soldiers in Vietnam.

One told how he was at a dangerous outpost and the whole time he was there he never took off his helmet or flak jacket. He even slept in them.

Because he said if you waited until heard a mortar or rocket coming in, too late.

So now is the time for you to appropriate the benefits of the Christ and the Gospel.

Now is the time to dig in and make it real.

Especially if your life is now relatively peaceful

Because if what Paul says is true, then that peace will be broken by an evil day.

Your enemy is always active. He’s very old. Bible calls that ancient serpent.

He has the luxury of setting ambushes years away.

He might realize that now, while you’re in your 30s, it’s going to be harder for him to touch you, and if he tries and you overcome, make you tougher.

But he’s seen your type before and knows if he waits until middle age, when you’ve kind of drifted and taken it easy for a decade or two, there might be a particular temptation or lie that will sweep you off your feet.

I’ve been re-listening to some old sermons by Tim Keller on this passage.

He preached them in the early 90s. I listened to them around 2000.

They are so good. I’m surprised how much I remember.

In one sermon he was talking about the concept of the evil day and putting on the armor before the evil day comes so that you stand.

He told about how in his church in Virginia, before he went to New York, there were two women who were the same age, friends.

What was uncanny was that right around the same time they both suffered the same evil attack. Their husbands left them and they had health problems.

One woman had been putting on the whole armor for years.

She had been believing and taking in and appropriating Christ’s promises.

Tim Keller said he was visiting her one day and she said:

“The worse it gets, the closer He gets, if He gets any closer I believe I will lose the ability to be unhappy.”

The other woman, who was certainly a Christian, but who had always been fitful

and inconsistent in putting on the full armor of God was crushed and in despair. She would say: “Why can’t I be like . . . ? She would name the other woman. Keller said: I encouraged her as best I could, but it’s very hard to put on armor when you’re under attack.

St. Augustine said this about Christians:

“In prosperity they make moral progress and in adversity they learn the progress they have made. When they have an abundance of material goods, they do not put their trust in them, and when those goods are taken away they get to know whether or not their material possessions have taken them captive.”

The Christian who suffers the evil of material loss and who doesn’t faint on the one hand, or try to tough it out on the other, the Christian who doesn’t lose his joy is the one who in the peaceful and prosperous times has learned

Phil 4:19 My God will supply all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus.

Heb 13:5 Never will I leave you, never will I forsake you.

Psalms 23 The Lord is my shepherd.

And even though it’s hard.

The whole armor of God enables you to take your stand.