

The Belt of Truth

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[0 : 01] Let's turn now to the letter to the Ephesians and chapter 6 and we'll begin reading again at verse 13. Ephesians 6 at verse 13 Therefore take up the whole armour of God that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all to stand firm.

Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth. Especially these words, stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth.

I took a study previously just a couple of weeks ago from verses 10 to 12 and saw how that was a directive from God with regard to our being strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might.

That is his directive to us. And to provide for us against that directive or command or instruction, he has actually provided for us this armour that we are to take up.

And you recall last time we saw that we are to take it up, that we are not to actually be without it at any time, but that it's a specific activity on a daily basis that we clothe ourselves with the armour that God actually provides for us in the way in which he provides it for us.

[1 : 21] And we'll see some of the armour that we'll see some of the armour that we'll see some of the armour.

He's using that as an image for us to give us an idea of the spiritual armour that God has provided for his people. And that we are just like the Roman soldier was kitted out in order to be ready for service.

So too the Lord's armour, so too the Lord's people are given this armour specifically for being able to withstand against the schemes of the devil. We saw last time we had schemes, these wiles if you like, that's part of the mechanism by which the devil operates against us, that he is that crafty, wily, ingenious enemy that finds so many different ways by which to bring us his attacks.

Well he's beginning here by telling us about this belt of truth. It's interesting that the picture of the Roman soldier lends itself so well to a description of spiritual armour.

Because just as you find the parts of the Roman soldier's armour tied together or connected together in different ways, so too you find the connections between the spiritual armour as they're mentioned there.

[3 : 06] For example, he talks about the breastplate of righteousness and he talks about the shield of faith. And when you go to the teaching of scripture elsewhere, you can see that there's a very close and firm connection between faith and righteousness.

That we come to have righteousness as an armour through faith in Christ. You don't take up the breastplate of righteousness without having the faith that must accompany it.

There is no righteousness for us, in ourselves, in any other way, but through faith in Christ. We are justified by faith through the grace of God.

So there are these connections that will come out. We're going to just run through the different parts of the armour over two or three weeks and just see some of the detail about them that we can actually find useful in our context.

And that's one of the things that we actually have to take account of, the context in which we ourselves actually are set. So, let's look at this first piece, the belt of truth.

[4 : 15] Now, the Roman belt is a large, heavy leather belt. And it wasn't just a belt like you find nowadays. A belt, quite often nowadays, although it has a practical purpose, but very often it's a kind of fashion accessory as well, isn't it?

Because, well, you'll find some young folks and whatever belt they're wearing doesn't seem to hold their trousers up very well because they're almost down by their knees. It's part of the fashion image, isn't it?

But the belt of the Roman soldier is a heavy leather belt. It was a heavy leather belt. And one of the main purposes of it was to hold the tunic that he wore under the armour, to hold the folds of the tunic together so that they wouldn't be loose.

You can just imagine a Roman soldier trying to set out in conflict or to face an enemy without having his garments, his tunic, all tightly kept under control.

He wouldn't actually be free. And he wouldn't have a mind that was free if his garments were getting in the way. He would maybe snag his sword on it. Or he perhaps could even trip up on it if the garments were long enough.

[5 : 27] All kinds of things that could happen with loose garments that would actually unfit him for the service of being a soldier, to carry out the duties of being a soldier.

And Paul has taken account of that in the way that he's put it here, the belt of truth. Because as the Roman soldier, the belt actually also gave some measure of protection because it was a very thick leather belt.

But the primary purpose of it was to really hold all this together by way of just so that it wouldn't then snag on something or become a problem. So it is the same with our Christian belt, this belt of truth.

And the first thing we have to ask is what does he mean by the truth in this context? What is the of truth? Because some commentators would say that the belt of truth really means our sincerity, our own truthfulness, our honesty, our integrity.

And that in order to be a good soldier of Christ, to be effective against the devil, you've got to maintain that integrity. You've got to keep to your honesty, to your sincerity, to your clarity of soul, in other words, that you must retain that in order to be an effective soldier.

[6 : 47] And that, of course, is something that is required. But it really doesn't seem to fit the context here because it's much more, it seems, to do with the truth as the truth of God which we take up and then use ourselves.

The truth of God as he has revealed it to us, and that means the truth of God as it has come to be set out for us in the scriptures, in the Bible, in the word of God.

It's that truth, because ultimately, of course, God himself is truth. Everything that you know as the truth, every aspect of the truth, every element of the truth, actually derives from God who is truth.

That's the ultimate truth. God himself is the truth in the highest sense. But he has given us this revelation of himself, of ourselves, of the world in which we live, of our sin, of redemption, of Jesus Christ, because as it's put there in chapter 4, it is the truth as it is in Jesus.

Verse 21, assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus. The whole of this Bible is the truth revealed to us, but it's the truth as it is in Jesus.

[8 : 14] And that means that God's truth, in its written form as it's come to us, is what we particularly think of as we have to take up this belt and gird on the belt.

In other words, it's this truth of God that keeps everything else in our practice, whether it's the helmet of salvation, or it also speaks about the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

That doesn't mean that this belt of truth is different, essentially, to the sword of the Spirit. Putting it in like that, the sword of the Spirit, really takes us to the way that we are to use the truth and wield the truth, the word of God.

And it's interesting that part of the function of the belt for the Roman soldier was to actually hold the sword or the sheath that the scabbard, the sword would be in, was tied to the belt.

And maybe even that's significant in Paul's view, because he's talking about the belt of truth, but also the sword of the Spirit, the word of God. And so that the truth of God, as the word of God reveals it to us, is this first element, first part of the armor.

[9 : 28] In other words, what we think of this Bible, what this Bible is to us, what this word of God is to us, is absolutely vital, absolutely crucial, for our being armed against the devil's wiles.

And as we'll see, one of the things that the devil's wiles will always try and bring about, is that you somehow or other give up something of your view of the Bible as the word of God.

That there is some part of what we understand the Bible to be, that you're going to give up. That it's not really authoritative, finally, for example, or something like that.

You will always find that the truth, and the truth as it is in its written form to us, will always be prominent in the devil's attack. That's why we have to wear the truth as a belt, to hold everything else in place.

Now it's interesting, that that's the first item, that the apostle lists. And he hasn't put these parts of the armor, in sort of random fashion.

[10 : 36] He hasn't just mentioned them any old way. He's beginning very deliberately with the belt of truth. Because as the belt held the Roman soldiers' garments tightly, without being loose and getting in the way, it's the truth of God, that for us holds everything else together.

How do you know what righteousness is? How do you know what sin is? How do you know what God is like? How do you know how we come to have eternal life? How do you know the necessity of being born again?

Because it is all revealed in the truth of God. You see, you don't begin by asking yourself, now what's righteousness?

And how can I define righteousness, without going to the Bible? The fact is, you can't, well you can, but it's not going to be the righteousness, that God himself requires. It's not going to be what God himself has designed.

It will not have the maker's label on it, if we make up our own minds as to what it is. So that's the first piece that's mentioned.

[11 : 41] It's the first piece, if you like, that you put on. And that's when you're really ready for action. When you put on the belt of truth. When the Roman soldier had the belt of truth on, even before the other parts were added, he felt at that stage that he was confident that none of his garments would get in the way he could get on with putting on the rest of the armour, and off he goes.

When you put on the belt of truth, you're ready for action. Yes, there are other parts of the armour, but you know that the belt of truth, if you think of the truth of God, as it's revealed to us in the scripture, that's what equips us.

And that's what makes us ready for serving our Lord. It's interesting that the Bible uses this kind of description to gird up the garments, to gird up our loins, as the old AV put it, to gird up our loins.

That's the same thing as gathering up the loose garments. Elijah did it as he ran before Ahab's chariot. That's what you find the practice to have been.

People girding up their loins, taking up the loose folds of the garment, tying them tightly, and then they're able to run. And you remember, that's how the Lord specified the people of Israel were to be as they waited in Egypt on that famous, awesome night of the Passover.

[13 : 15] They were safe inside their homes as long as the blood was on the doorpost and on the lintel of the door. The blood of the sacrificial lamb, the blood of the Passover lamb. The angel of death was not going to come near them, but they had to eat of the Passover lamb with their loins girded and their staff in their hands.

They had to actually eat of it ready for action, ready to follow the Lord, ready to go out from there and to be his people and to act under his leadership.

That's the imagery they had. They had to be ready for action. Nothing must get in the way of their journey from Egypt and on their way to the promised land. That's girding the loins up for action.

Peter says something very similar in his first epistle, there in the first chapter, in verse 13, having spoken about the salvation that God had brought into being for us and how they were meantime suffering through various trials.

Therefore, he says, preparing your minds for action. Now, that's really the ESV way of putting the same phrase, girding up the loins of your mind.

[14 : 28] As if the mind is comprised of all of these loose garments, these different parts of the mind, if you like, and you gird up the loins of your mind. You prepare your mind for action is what it means, but it actually is by the truth of God that you actually get ready to serve your Lord.

Then you're ready for action. So, in regard to that, there are two things about the Bible, briefly, that we want to emphasize tonight.

We're only just covering some of the main points, obviously, in this without going into to any great extent. But it follows from what we've said that the truth of God as revealed in the Bible to us must actually, we must actually then take with us two things about this truth, about this Bible, that fit into our wearing it as the belt of truth.

First of all, the authority of the Bible. The authority of God's truth. And how vital that is for us constantly to take with us because it's constantly under attack.

The authority of the Bible is not an authority along with other sources of authority. It is the only authority. It's the only rule of life and faith and manners.

[15 : 52] That is how we have to hold on to the Bible as God's authoritative revelation, declaration, declaration of his truth to us. You see, down through the years, and particularly nowadays as well, you have ideas that there are other sources of authority.

And we sometimes even speak ourselves about our confession of faith as our subordinate standard. And in a sense, there's nothing wrong with that as long as you say that in the right way.

But strictly speaking, there's no such thing really as a subordinate standard. There is only a standard, the standard, the word of God, the scriptures, the truth of God.

Whatever else has been put together, wonderful documents though they are, and useful though they are, and magnificent in every way, and essential in many respects, confessions, catechisms, creedal declarations of church councils, they don't have the same level of authority and standard as the scriptures.

Scripture is the only authority that does not make mistakes.

[17 : 15] You cannot say that of a church council, however famous it is in history. You can't say that of any particular church in itself and what it teaches.

Our authority is the authority of scripture, and the authority of scripture is not derived from what the church thinks of it. Or what the church actually announces in regard to its interpretation of it.

The authority of scripture is in itself. It is itself the word of God. And you can see what happens when a church loses sight of that.

You end up being like the Roman soldier taking off the belt or not tying it tightly. The garments are all loose. He gets into a state of confusion if he has to face the enemy.

He can't find his sword that's somewhere amongst his garments. The church that loses sight of the authority of scripture, the final authority of scripture, the exclusive authority of scripture, is very soon in confusion.

[18 : 26] You don't know what doctrines to believe and what not to believe. You don't know the order of importance of the doctrines that a church needs to actually live by and announce in its declarations in preaching from the word of God.

We have seen just in this last week or two the Church of Scotland not singling them out any particular reason but the Church of Scotland or a committee or board of that church actually officially along with humanists approaching parliament jointly with humanists.

Humanists don't believe in God. They want religion out of everything in society and there is a church that officially is a national church basing its teachings on the Bible supposedly and there it is in union with an organisation that avowedly is against scripture and wants to get rid of it.

Well, are we surprised? Of course we're not surprised. Surprised. That's no surprise at all. Because the moment you move away from the authority of scripture there's no telling where you're going to end.

If it is just human invented doctrines if it is just human understanding or a human manipulation of what the word of God says if you take the Bible as being not actually the word of God though it may have been thought of at one time as such that's what you end up with.

[20 : 16] The problem in our society the problem in such churches the problem in such thinking is not what they think of the world or what they think of humanists or what they think of the state or what they think of government it's what they think of the Bible.

And we are saying that to people like yourselves of course who already know that the Bible is the word of God but it's no accident that the apostle is saying this to God's people in Ephesus watch yourselves use the armor that God has given you and put on this belt of truth and maintain it as God has given it to you.

don't try and adapt it to your own shape because contrary to what you think the Roman belt obviously to hold the garments in place had to be put on pretty tightly and if you're a fairly stout Roman soldier as many of them I'm sure would have been it wouldn't have been all that easy perhaps to have a leather belt that tightly around a waist if it was a fairly ample proportion but the important thing is the waist has to actually fit the belt not the belt fit the waist as far as the truth of God is concerned you don't actually think of taking this belt of the truth and then as you put it on you shape it to your own ideas you actually put it on but you make sure that it actually fits in with what you think it ought to say or what you think nowadays it ought to say what the apostle is saying is you take yourself and you take your mind and you take your conscience and you take your will and you bring it under the control of the word you bring it into the shape of the truth it's the truth that shapes us not us shaping the truth that's where things have gone so badly wrong over many years now because instead of the truth of God shaping people's opinions and people's conclusions what's happened is that people are shaping the truth for themselves as they see it and you end up with confusion with a shambles with immorality with all of these things that mark our society the problem is not so much with people in society the problem is with the church with the church that has abandoned the Bible as the truth of God as the belt of truth if you go back to chapter 4 as we read it's interesting there how Paul uses similar language but he's speaking there about the unity that God has given to his people then he moves on to the ministries that he mentions there that he gave the apostles verse 11 the different types of teaching if you like the apostles in his own day the prophets the evangelists the pastors or shepherds and teachers what is all that for?

it's to equip the saints that's the whole people of God for the work of ministry for building up the body of Christ but he then comes to the negative side in verse 14 so that we may no longer be children he says yes it's for building ourselves up building ourselves up in love but it's also for this so that we will not be children that's to say infants in spiritual understanding anymore tossed around to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine by human cunning by craftiness in deceitful schemes and he goes on to say rather speaking the truth in love you see that's important it's not just saying speaking in love that we build each other up as the people of God or through the ministry of the word that people are built up so that they build themselves up by speaking in love what he's saying is speaking the truth in love the truth of God we are to grow up in every way unto him who is the head even

Christ and that's verse 21 we mention assuming that you have heard about him as the truth is in Jesus so the cunningness is mentioned there as well the cunning and deceitful schemes just anticipating what he was going to say in chapter 6 because we build one another up by speaking the truth in love and as we do so we are also thereby defended against the craftiness the deceit of the enemy who is lying in wait so as to take us aside and to toss us around like somebody just in the middle of a storm from wave to wave so that we don't anymore be children but rather that from spiritual infants we grow and become mature in Christ that's what he's saying to us and that's why the devil always has a primary go at our view of the bible our view of the truth because if he can actually open up a crack there then really as we said already there's no no telling where it's going to end because if you don't hold to the bible as god's infallible inspired word and god's authoritative word there's no reason why you should believe what you believe about the righteousness of christ tomorrow even though you believe it today we believe what we believe about christ about god about the trinity about sin about righteousness about faith about the need to be born again about sanctification about the holy spirit about heaven about hell we believe them why because we believe that this is god's word that tells us it and unless we start there we really can end up not believing anything else they are all grounded in built upon the doctrine of scripture in our use and understanding of them it's interesting isn't it that there are two areas in the bible where you see the devil's attack on the truth as it was being held first of all in the garden of eden when he came to eve in the form of the serpent one of the things that he said was has god indeed said has god indeed said in other words he is putting a thought in eve's mind maybe god wasn't really telling you the truth and if he was telling you the truth he didn't give you the whole truth and it immediately sows a seed of doubt or of haziness he leaves mind that's the point of the attack the truth and the truthfulness of god and if you go to jesus and his temptation in the wilderness by the devil having fasted these forty days his first point of attack was of course if you are the son of god command these stones to be made bread and jesus defended himself and attacked the devil by using what he used the truth of god the word of god it is written but you see the devil is crafty and he said to himself well i didn't manage anything with that approach so i'll try another one i'll actually specify what the word of god says about casting yourself into the care of god cast yourself down from this pinnacle of the temple

[29 : 01] for it is written he will give his angels charge over you lest you dash your fruit against a stone see the different tack he's attacking the word of god still but he's using it against jesus in trying to get him to put himself outside of trusting in the father he left out some significant words that's what he always does it looks absolutely right it looks genuine but what he's missed out is as important as what he's put in for it is written he will give his angels charge over you in all his ways that's what was written in deuteronomy and the devil left out these words and jesus would not have been in the ways of god had he given place to the devil's word and followed his directive now that's how we will come to you and to me as well changing the tack but always trying to get your mind to actually doubt what the bible is trying to get your mind to just crack a little bit as far as you're holding on to this truth of god as revealed in the scripture and the authority of scripture the final authority of scripture the word of god as it is given to us as it is in jesus the truth as it is in jesus so there's the authority of the so important in the context in which you and

I am placed today and secondly there's the clarity of the bible because that's one of the other things that you'll find people who really don't want to hold to the obvious meaning of the bible there are parts of the bible of course that we find difficult to interpret it's difficult to go through the book of the revelation and say about every passage I know exactly what that refers to none of us can do that but there isn't a single doctrine in the bible that's necessary for you to know for your salvation that is in any way in doubt not one the plain meaning of scripture on such things as sin the law of god the death of christ the resurrection of christ the work of the holy spirit the need to be born again and so on all of these things that come into what are really fundamental doctrines they are all clearly and cogently specified in the word of god it's just a way out of accepting the plain meaning and bending your mind and your will to it to say of any such things well it's not all that clear in scripture and it's the same we have to say with certain things like ethics as well human behavior the bible is perfectly clear about marriage the bible is perfectly clear about the sanctity of life the bible is perfectly clear about how we must treat the poor and treat other human beings the bible is perfectly clear on so many ethical issues that people nowadays would have you believe well it's just a bit of a fudge we're not really sure and if it seems to say something clearly well yes that's how it seemed to

Paul but it's not like that for us nowadays the word of God is the word of God God is God the God who knew every generation of the world before the word was ever written the God who gave a word to his people that's sufficient for every age God doesn't need church councils to tell people that his word is no longer relevant and they come up with a different meaning to it that is not of God it's of the schemes of the devil so put on he says the whole armor of God that you may be able to withstand in the evil day the day of temptation and having done all stand firm stand therefore having fastened on the belt of truth don't let your belt slip don't slacken it don't adjust it leave it as

God gave it to you and you'll be safe and you'll be effective and you will grow into a powerful Christian when your loins are girded up under the truth of God let's pray our gracious God we give thanks that you have given us your truth in the scriptures designed to be for our need and for our good we bless you oh Lord that your word contains everything we need to know for our salvation and for our service of you we pray for that continued help and grace of your spirit not only that we might increase in our understanding of your word but that we may also hold fast to it being so that it is indeed the very word of God that it is a word that is relevant for our age and for ourselves in it a word that is always authoritative with the authority of

God himself and with a finality that human beings may not touch we give thanks Lord for that and for assuring in order to inform ourselves and to be girded up against the schemes of the devil accept our prayers hear us we pray and forgive us our sin for Christ's sake Amen