

Our Spiritual Warfare (2)

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Preacher: Rev James Maciver

[0 : 00] Now let's turn for a short time tonight to Ephesians chapter 6. Ephesians 6, reading again at verse 10. Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might.

But 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, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.

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, stand therefore.

By way of introduction, you recall last week, we looked at three important issues in our approach to spiritual warfare. Three aspects of our approach to that warfare that are essential for us to be able to know about it properly and to carry through our engagement with those enemies that are mentioned here, these spiritual forces that are against God's people.

Remember, we referred to the need to know the nature of our enemy, and that's specified there in a number of verses. We need to know ourselves. We need to know our weakness and our need of dependence upon the strength of Christ.

[1 : 24] And we saw that from these words, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. And thirdly, we also looked at the need to actually know our resources.

Any army going to war or any navy going to war needs to know these three things. The type of enemy they're facing, the nature of the enemy, their own needs and weaknesses, but also the resources that they're able to call upon in order to engage successfully with that enemy.

And that's exactly the same, even more so in a spiritual sense, as we'll see going through this passage for a number of weeks. And tonight, I want to look at the emphasis here on our putting on the whole armor of God and the purpose for that, that you may be able to stand.

And you can see a number of times the way that it emphasizes standing and withstanding and standing against and standing up to, and then having done all, stand firm.

So that's really one of the primary emphases in relation to taking up the armor and the purpose for that, being able to stand, being able to withstand the attacks that are made by this unseen and powerful enemy, the devil and rulers and authorities, the cosmic powers in this present darkness.

[2 : 48] And the armor essentially is spiritual, of course. Although it's using this imagery of the Roman soldiers, the Roman military, the armor itself is specified as it goes on through these verses, the different parts of it show that the armor is primarily the spiritual, these great spiritual truths and realities that actually belong to God's saved people.

Where it comes to speak about the belt of truth, the breastplate of righteousness, readiness by the gospel of peace, shield of faith, helmet of salvation, the sword of the spirit, which is the word of God.

All these are great spiritual realities and entities that God's people need to use. They are the parts of the armor. The armor is comprised of these great matters that are before us in the gospel and in the word of God.

And as we can see, most of the armor is really to do with defense. As we face the enemy and engage with the enemy, whatever we use by way of positive attack or offense, as it's usually put in military terms, we need to make sure as well that we are adequately, properly covered for our defense.

That is equally important. You never find a skilled leader in a military campaign looking simply at the method of attack and the means of attack.

[4 : 14] Even if you take account of the enemy, you also have to look at your defenses. Where are you actually weak? Build up where you're weak. All those sort of things are important in spiritual terms as well.

And tonight, we want to look at the emphasis here on putting on the whole armor of God. And then secondly, looking at the way it speaks there of standing against and standing firm against our spiritual enemy.

Putting on the whole armor of God then. It says here, put on, verse 11, the whole armor of God. Verse 13 speaks there about the kind of forces we're against, 12 rather, and then 13, take up the whole armor of God.

And it's literally there in verse 11, where it says, put on the whole armor of God. It's really an imagery of clothing yourself. In other words, this is not something that's done for us, although these parts of the armor are actually achieved by Christ already and actually are God's working in his people or for his people.

But nevertheless, we are required to actually take the armor that God provides, the spiritual reality that God provides for us, these different parts. And what he's saying is, clothe yourselves with that.

[5 : 35] Put it on for yourselves. It involves decisive and conscious and personal action. And we need to do that every day.

This is not something that you actually do just once and then it follows on automatically, as it were, from there. You think of an army at war. Think of engagement with the enemy.

The soldiers go out. They put on their equipment. And when they come back and are able to take some time in the security of whatever it is they have their compound, next time they go out, they have to do the same thing again.

You have to, again, repeatedly put the armor on. Make sure your defenses are up to scratch. And it's the same for us in taking the armor, taking the whole armor of God, take up the whole armor of God, put on the whole armor of God.

Well, you do it constantly. You do it every day. Perhaps there's a sense in which you can think of each day going by and you put your armor off when you're resting at night, even though you ask the Lord to look after you through the night, through prayer.

[6 : 45] Nevertheless, the next morning, you don't actually go and say, well, I put my armor on yesterday. I did that yesterday morning. So I don't really need to repeat that just now. You do. You need to take up the whole armor of God and to do it on a constant, everyday basis.

There's no day in the Christian's life when he or she can say, I don't need the whole armor of God today. Even if you've done it yesterday, it doesn't really matter.

You still need to do it today. The war goes on all the time. And the enemy never has a day off. Satan does not lay down his arms, his stratagems, his attacks.

And because he is constantly active, we need to face that activity with constant action on our own part. But remember, as you do this, and as you realize the formidable nature of this enemy, the weakness that we have ourselves, that we need God's strength for, and the way in which we actually need daily to engage, to take up this armor deliberately, to put on this armor, whether it's by reading the word of God or contemplating what it is.

We are as righteous in Christ, the breastplate of righteousness. God willing, we'll go through all of these parts and see how they all fit together. But as we do that regularly, as we do that daily, as we put on, remember that you don't go out to battle on your own.

[8 : 15] All these words that are used, these verbs are plural verbs. We do not wrestle against flesh and blood. You take up, you plural, take up the whole armor of God that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.

You plural. Nobody goes out to a war to take on an enemy on their own. That would be absolute foolishness. And so one of the things the devil will actually try and persuade you of is that nobody else really knows your situation.

You're the one who, the only one who knows it. So really you can get little help from anybody else because you don't think anybody else has been through the warfare that you're engaged in just now.

We are in this together. And one of the beauties of being together, a prayer meeting or for Bible study or whatever like this, in worshiping God and in coming to his word is that we'll remind ourselves, I personally, you can say of yourself as well, I actually belong to a spiritual community.

In engaging with my spiritual enemy, I don't do that on my own. I have brothers and sisters in the Lord that I actually have this conflict in common with.

[9 : 31] That's really how we need to remind ourselves that as we don't go into battle on our own, so we call upon the help and the strength and the fellowship of our fellow believers.

That's such a huge feature and is so important from that point of view that we really do get to know each other as well as possible, that we don't regard anyone as redundant in any way whatsoever in the fellowship of God's people, that whatever differences there may be in what we can contribute to the overall engagement with our enemy, it's going to be regarded as valuable for the whole body that we belong to because there'll be things that others provide that you and I can't provide, different types of weaponry and skills to use them, but we're all in, we're in this, all of us in together, whether we're ministers or elders or adherents or confessing Christians, whatever it is, as we follow the Lord, as we actually engage with the devil, as we take on these spiritual forces that we need to take on, we do so together, put on the whole armor of God and then secondly, you notice not just the emphasis of putting it on and we're saying that that has to be regularly done, it's the whole armor of God.

Now we're going to go on to specify the different main parts of it and it's important for us that we realize the main parts of it and try and, as he's doing here, describe something to do with each of them, but it's also important that we don't leave any of these items out.

Take up the whole armor of God, he's saying. Every part that God has provided and they're listed for us there, these main parts of the armor, take up the whole armor of God.

If a soldier is going to go out to engage with the enemy and he's told by the commanding officer, well, go to whatever it is your equipment is, go to the storehouse there, take everything that's been provided for you for this particular engagement, sign for it, take it, that's yours.

[11 : 44] You don't find a soldier then going and saying to the quartermaster or whoever it is nowadays deals with this, you don't find them saying, well, I can do without the helmet, I can do without the body armor really today, I'm not going all that far and I'm going to be quite a distance from the enemy and so on.

Take the whole armor of God. Don't say any day of your life, I don't think I need the breastplate today. I'm not going to go very far.

I'm just going to have an easy day of it and I'll just leave the breastplate as it is. Just picking that up as an example, the breastplate, of course, is the breastplate of righteousness and it's primarily the righteousness of Jesus, the righteousness of Christ that he has purchased for us by his death on the cross, although it probably also, as we'll see, carries our own righteousness in terms of following holiness of life, a righteous life, but it's primarily the righteousness that Christ has provided that's in Christ himself, that's made ours when we receive it by faith.

And he's saying, take the whole armor of God, don't leave any part of it behind because if you leave for one day or for one hour of your life the righteousness of Jesus out of view and you don't deliberately take it up and think that that's part of your security, well, the devil's going to spot that in an instance.

He has something far more effective than infrared vision. He's able to see into your life and into mine and say, aha, that's person's relaxing in the relationship with God and they've really just left their blessed breastplate meantime.

[13 : 30] And what's the alternative to the breastplate of righteousness? Well, the alternative is your own goodness because at any time, any day that you think as a Christian, well, I know the breastplate of Jesus is important, the breastplate of righteousness is important, but he will tempt you, the devil will tempt you and say, well, you're actually a very good person.

You're actually deep down a very good person. And even if you've said that you're not, he'll still try and persuade you that, well, God has made you into a very good person and you can depend on that.

No, you can't. Your own goodness and my own goodness will not deflect any of Satan's bullets because one way or another, God will soon actually show us that actually we're not ourselves inherently good at all.

And if we try and rely on anything to do with our own goodness or our own sense of our own ability, well, Satan will soon make short work of us. Take up the whole armor of God.

So every day, just say to yourself, what am I depending on today? Am I depending on my faith? Am I depending on my goodness?

[14 : 48] Am I depending on my relationship with other Christians? Am I depending on the strength of my love? Am I depending on the fact that I've read the Bible so much over the last few hours, whatever?

That's what the devil will want to persuade you of. That's what you can depend upon. Don't take your eye for a moment of Jesus himself, the truth of God in him, the righteousness of God for us in him and everything else that's mentioned there.

Take up the whole armor of God. And then there's these words of God. Take up the whole armor of God.

He's mentioned in that twice, verse 11 and also verse 13. Take up the whole armor of God. In other words, it's the armor that God has provided.

The armor that he has manufactured for us and that he holds out for us in the gospel and makes available to us in the gospel. Take up the whole armor of God. You can face the enemy with that armor, with that whole armor.

[15 : 57] And it doesn't matter what the enemy's strategy is. It doesn't matter what strength the enemy may have. There's nothing whatsoever in your engagement with the spiritual forces of darkness that God has not taken into account by giving you his whole armor.

What is more encouraging and assuring than that? You're not going to go out into battle against these spiritual forces of darkness and realize that actually God has forgotten to give me this vital piece of equipment so I'm done for.

There's nothing like that in this provision of God. It's the whole armor of God. what he has actually chosen to give us and in Christ especially has made available to us.

For example you have the belt of truth mentioned here just like I mentioned the breastplate earlier. It's the whole armor of God. It's the truth of God that's mentioned there as the belt or the girdle of truth fastening on the belt of truth.

What does he mean by truth? That's a great question throughout the world today throughout the church today in the wider sense. What is truth and many people will say to you if you're going to regard this Bible the way it's been traditionally in a reformed sense being regarded as the word of God well that belt too tanked for me nowadays people will say you need to slacken it off.

[17 : 36] You need to accommodate more than it's in the Bible itself. You need to interpret parts of the Bible differently to the way they did during the days of the reformation and afterwards. That belt is too tight.

That's not God that's speaking is it? That's again this new enemy trying to persuade you that that truth of God as he has given it to us as he has said it in the gospel and in the Bible is in need of adjustment.

And anyway in a postmodern world or postmodern world whatever it is nowadays as usually described for us by those who are involved in these theological issues they'll say in a postmodern world postmodern world whatever there's no such thing as objective truth.

We're told that you cannot actually take a body of truth such as you find in the Bible or in the gospel and say that's it for all time. Things change we're told you have to look at truth relatively relative to your own age relative to the discoveries of science relative to the thinking of people who have progressed since the days of the apostle Paul.

And anyway take that further we're told and actually you come to the point where truth is what you make of it what suits your life what's true for you what's truth for you and for me and just live your own life seriously honestly don't disturb other people with their ideas of truth and we'll all get along just fine.

[19 : 20] These are the ideas that this armor counters this is the armor of God the belt of his truth it's the armor of God it's the truth of God it's the righteousness of God in Christ all of these things are of God now when you're in that sort of fog of human opinion all of these ideas that truth is just relative and it's just in a state of flux and you can just move from one idea of truth to another as the years go by the fog of opinion that you find there is human opinions largely even if they're theologians you need a compass whenever you're in a foggy area you need a compass compass will point you in the right direction even if you can't see much around you and the compass you need in the fog of spiritual and moral confusion of our day is the word of God the belt of truth this part of the armor that

God has given us to wear so you put on you take up you clothe yourself with this you put on the whole armor of God you do it regularly you do it daily if not more so and it's the armor of God that you're sure to be wearing not one of your own devising not one that you prefer to the one that God has provided not one that the world will provide for you instead of it not one that liberal theology will tell you is fitting enough for you make sure it's the armor of God the one that he has provided in his word and in Christ especially so that's the first thing putting on the whole armor of God then there's a purpose of this as well put on the whole armor that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil and there's the word stand used there and then you go down to verse 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 for him stand therefore but having done all there really means having actually done what you meant to do and put on this whole armor having done that having done all of that having clothed yourself with this armor then he says stand withstand you see soldiers coming to face an enemy and especially at a time when a battle is about to break out and when that enemy looks to be very formidable and well equipped then you need to really do what the apostle is saying here in a spiritual sense as well and he means by those things like well brace yourself for this be prepared for this enemy's force don't underestimate him and along with that stand your ground don't give in to him don't capitulate to him don't believe his strategy don't be taken in by what seems to be the truth even if it's contrary to what god has specified stand therefore take your stand brace yourself remember how peter put it and peter was certainly a man who knew a lot about satan's strategies especially as he came to be taught by the lord and came to be taught even through his own failures as well as we all actually do when god brings us to see our failure and our need of this very thing to be clothed with the whole armor of god in first peter chapter five peter there is saying at verse eight well he's been saying humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of god casting all your anxieties on him because he cares for you and that's an important part of the text humble yourself under the mighty hand of god in other words place yourselves willingly and deliberately under the might of god don't try and manage it on your own or even with the help of others it's under the mighty hand of god so that at the proper time he may exalt you casting all your anxieties on him because he cares for you be sober minded be watchful your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion seeking someone to devour resist him firm in your faith stand with your armor on resist him firm in your faith not in the strength of your believing but in the strength of what god has provided for you this shield of faith faith that depends upon christ and on the strength of god himself knowing it says peter says that the same kinds of sufferings are being experienced by your brothers throughout the world in other words as i said earlier he's reminding them you're not on your own in this may feel at times that you are on your own that that you're actually struggling all by yourself but peter is reminding them you're not in this on your own these same exact same experiences and battles are being experienced by your brothers and sisters throughout the world and so don't be intimidated you recall last sunday evening we again as we followed through in philippians chapter one where paul is saying this is what i want to hear of you well whether i come back and see you or not and then he went on to say in engaging with the world with your enemies he says don't in any way be frightened or

intimidated by them that i may hear this of you not frightened in anything by your opponents fighting side by side for the faith of the gospel there's no need for us to be intimidated by our enemy sometimes we feel very intimidated sometimes we we stop and think of the kind of enemy that we're facing not flesh and blood these authorities these cosmic powers and if we dwell on that too much and just look at that itself and just seek to focus on that we're going to be filled with fear we're going to come to be static and intimidated and policy you have no need to fear because god's armor is superior to anything that the devil can throw at us that doesn't mean it's going to be easy to wear it doesn't mean there are not many pains in having to wear it doesn't mean that you won't feel the weight of it sometimes as you engage in the battle but you must never think it's not effective that there's a better armor somewhere else that you can manage without some parts of it better than if you had them on it's the whole armor and having done all stand so that you may be able to withstand take therefore up the whole armor stand firm stand therefore you see four or five times therefore at least he's using the word stand or a version of it stand withstand stand stand therefore you and i have gone home tonight and we're taking from this passage that there is no need to do anything short of standing and withstanding our enemy whatever he says whatever the world will say whatever whatever others will say whatever doubts you have about yourself you will never have a doubt about the armor that God has provided for you or for us let's make it plural because that's what it is not just individuals but individualistic individuals within this whole spiritual body this army of

Christ followers because at the end of the day we're wearing a uniform aren't we we're wearing the uniform of Jesus and you think of all the regiments in our own case and let's say just in the British army and especially those of them that have a very very long history not just a long history but a very very important history in the way that they have kept to a certain standard of engagement down through the years we have a very honorable history history that these regiments want to keep alive and Christ's regiment is no different and people ordinarily in these famous regiments will actually say they're proud to wear the uniform they're proud to have been actually enlisted into this regiment whatever its name is because it's long and proud history they can look back over its achievements they have all the records of it somewhere they can go and check up on the records they can get inspiration from what's happened in the past and they know especially that the captain who is with them now has already been through the war himself and engage this enemy and overcome this enemy that's really one of the main points in revelation 12 that we mentioned there when it speaks about the devil being cast down to the earth the primary spiritual meaning of that is a cross of christ and the resurrection of christ have thoroughly defeated him he's still active he knows his time is short but he knows he's actually already a defeated enemy but he wants to make as much damage as possible before the day comes when he's cast into the pit forever remember your enemy is already a defeated enemy in the hand of christ and christ has given you the armor that he has purchased by his death and resurrection so then engaging with that enemy you can say my lord has been through this battle ahead of me and not only that but my lord is present with me now the very lord that's defeated you satan and defeated the forces of evil and of darkness is actually with his people to the end of the world to the end of the age never forget that the same lord who conquered crushed the head of satan by his death on the cross and by his resurrection from the dead that is the lord that's with you tonight that is the very same person who has promised and is true to his promise i am with you to the end of the age i am leading you constantly as you engage the enemy and at the end of the campaign the decorations are given out the medals for those who have served in this great regiment they're waiting to be dispensed by the captain himself and the day is coming friends when as paul said as he wrote to timothy in his second letter the time has come the time of my departure is at hand i have finished the course my battles are over i've kept the faith henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness which the lord the righteous judge will give me on that day and aren't you glad that he then added and not to me only but to all his people as well all those who love us appearing but waiting for that great

[31 : 42] day of the parade of the righteous when jesus will display them in the splendor of his righteousness and until that day comes his people in this world will need to keep fighting but they don't need to be despondent because they're already on the winning side and they have an armor that he has manufactured for them that is superior to anything their enemy can throw at them may god bless these thoughts on his word lord of god we thank you as we come before you as we already prayed we thank you for the way in which you are present with your people in all the engagements of their lives sometimes lord we lose sight of this we confess sometimes through our own neglect as well we allow the enemy of our soul to penetrate into our lives and to wreak a measure of havoc and destruction in our souls forgive us lord we pray for our lack of diligence help us we pray each day to take up this armor that you have given to us and to be persuaded of its effectiveness at all times and lord we ask that you would grant that protective care of us as a people help us all together as we commend this armor to each other and to the world around us help us to display to them the beauty and character of our captain so that they may see in us as well something of his beauty something of his prowess and of his skills and lord we ask that you would continue with us now and receive our worship for Jesus sake amen thank you