

Our Spiritual Warfare (3) - The Belt of Truth

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[0 : 00] Well, let's turn again this evening to Ephesians in chapter 6. Tonight we're going to look at the beginning of verse 13, taking up that first part of the armor that's mentioned there.

But let's read again from verse 10 just to take up the run of the truth as it comes from there. 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, having fastened on the belt of truth.

These words in verse 14, I think I said verse 13. It's verse 14, the first part of it there. Now, you recall we've already seen from verse 10 how Paul leads into speaking about the different parts of the armor and how he has taken us to, first of all, get to know the enemy that we're facing.

[1 : 23] And then something of what we need to think about ourselves, our weakness, our need of being strong in the Lord and in the power of his might. And then last time we saw how we need to take up the whole armor of God and how all the parts of it, as they go together, nevertheless make up a complete package for us.

And how we saw also that that is something that we need to think about doing or do, in fact, do every day, because the taking it up yesterday is not going to be the same for us today.

We're meeting with different circumstances, though it's always the same enemy, of course. Now, he's giving us here the parts of the armor, and it's a fairly comprehensive list of the parts, just following, again, the imagery of the Roman soldier, although there are other aspects of our spiritual warfare and our spiritual protection that are not necessarily specifically mentioned.

He's dealing with the main parts, the main components of our defenses against these powers that range against us. And they are all connected in different ways, in specific ways.

As we'll go through them, we'll see some of these connections, God willing, in studies to come. But, for example, we can see how, for example, the breastplate that he mentions in verse 14 is tied up very closely with the shield of faith.

[2 : 49] When you think about the breastplate being righteousness and the shield being faith, there is obviously a great connection, a close connection, as Paul deals with it many, many times in his writings, between faith in Christ and the righteousness of Christ being imputed to us and being righteous in Christ.

So there are these very obvious connections between the different parts of the armor that we'll take up as they come along. But tonight we're looking at this first piece of armor, therefore, take up this stand, therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth.

Now, the Roman belt, the soldier's belt, I'm sure you've read about the different aspects of the armor in any case. But just as a reminder, the Roman soldier had a very strong belt made of heavy leather.

And it was really more than just what you'd call a belt, like you have a belt nowadays. It was a much bigger and wider covering than that.

That's why in the older translations, it's translated as girdle, which would be something coming down towards the thighs and actually wound round the middle as well.

[4 : 08] And the main use, while it was certainly a measure of protection, it was certainly made of such heavy leather as would protect those parts.

But the main purpose of the belt or the girdle was to actually hold together and hold tightly the tunic that was worn underneath by the soldier.

Because the last thing you would want in battle, going into battle, was this tunic that they wore to become in any way loose and so hamper you in your movement or even trip you up.

The tunic had to be kept tight, all the different folds of it, and the belt, the girdle right round the waist was the means by which the garments, the tunic, were actually held tightly.

You may remember the old authorized version translation, which is a very good one. It occurs a number of times in the Bible. For example, 1 Peter 1, verse 13, which speaks about girding up the loins of your mind.

[5 : 10] And that's the imagery that Peter has there is exactly the same as here. Girding up the loins, really the middle parts of the body, but that's just an imagery for the clothes that had to be girded up if you actually wanted to run quickly in those days because the clothes were long and flowing mostly.

Obviously, you'd have to just take a hold of them and gird them up. Just hold them tightly. Elijah in the Old Testament is spoken about us having run before Ahab and girded up his loins so that he could run once the rain had started coming.

And it's the same idea that you find here with regard to the belt. It was for girding up the loins and take up this fastening on this girdle of truth so that you actually had everything that could hamper you by way of loose flowing garments kept tightly tucked in or in place.

And as well as that, it gave the protection. And when you actually bring that and put it into a perspective in a Christian, in a spiritual sense, well, you have the same idea as, for example, you have there in 1 Peter 1, verse 13.

Here is the belt of truth. That's what he's calling it here. Put on, fasten on the belt of truth. So he's actually representing the truth as something.

[6 : 41] When you put it on, it holds everything else in place. It's there so that nothing will actually get in the way of your advance or your defense against your enemy.

How important that is. We'll see in a minute when we come to the wearing of the belt. But what does he mean by the belt of truth? What does he mean by truth? Well, he means more than just our being honest, our being truthful in the sense of not telling lies.

The truth that he's mentioning here that he's referring to is God's truth. It's truth as revealed in Jesus Christ, but truth also in its written form as we have it in our Bibles.

So what he's saying is put on this belt of truth. Make sure that this is how you're trying to keep everything else in place. Because unless we put on the belt of God's truth, something's going to be loose.

Something's going to be lacking. We're not going to be adequately defended against the assaults of this powerful enemy, Satan and these cosmic forces.

[7 : 49] And that truth in its written form is here in the scripture, as we say. And when we come to think about the Bible, we're very familiar with it, obviously. But sometimes we perhaps go to the question, what does this passage mean?

The first thing we have to ask about the Bible is, what is the Bible? Before you ask anything about what it means, you actually have to ask the question, what is it?

Because that's one of the standard things that Satan uses against God's people is to try and inject doubt into their minds about what the Bible is, not just about anything it says or different ways in which you can understand it or even translate it.

What you always have to remember is this is God's truth. This is God's truth written, revealed to us by God himself and over the period of centuries, put finally into its written form as we have it.

Obviously, we don't have time to go into all the details of that just now, but it's so important that you ask that question first. And indeed, in your witness, in dealing personally with people who don't believe the Bible and you're trying to perhaps bring them to consider what the Bible says, it doesn't necessarily mean that the first thing you do is, well, the Bible says.

[9 : 13] Because very often, what they'll say to you in return is, well, I don't accept the Bible anyway. So the ground on which you start, your apologetic or your witness, your testimony, your attempt to evangelize people, one of the first starting places is, what is the Bible?

Let's discuss what the Bible is before you discuss with them what it says. Because unless they accept that this Bible is, in fact, different to any other book, at least that, and preferably they accept

it as a divine word, then you're not going to get very far with persuading them of what it says. So you begin with, what is this book? It is the word of God. It is the truth of God in its written form. And then from there, you move to thinking of the Bible and what it says. What exactly does the Bible say? And most often, you'll find that it's not very difficult just to work out what it says. There are passages that are somewhat difficult and complex, but most of the time, and certainly for all the major doctrines of the Bible, it's very plainly written for us. What it says is very obvious. And again, that's one of the ways in which Satan will try and influence your mind and take you away from a conviction as to what the Bible actually says. [10:38] That's the way that the fall took place when you came into the Garden of Eden in the form of a sentence. One of the main prong of his attack was, has God really said?

Is it really true that God is saying this? Is it really true that God is saying that Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life, and that no one comes to the Father but by him? Is that really what it says? Yes, that is what it says. Is it really true when it says that not everyone will be saved, that there's a hell to be avoided and a heaven to be gained? Yes, that is what it says. So you move from what the Bible is in your conviction that it's God's word to what the Bible says to actually be precise about the statements it makes. That, of course, is where we rely upon in English or Gaelic, whatever language it is, translating from the original languages of Hebrew in the Old Testament, Greek in the New. [11:36] You rely on a reliable translation. That doesn't mean that there's any one translation that you choose and just neglect or reject all the others. If it's a reliable translation, usually the kind you have in ESV or in the authorized version, which is a literal translation following pretty much the way the original language set things out, then that's an accurate literal translation of the word of God in our own language.

That's how you come to what it says. So what is it? It's God's word. What does it say? Look at somewhere. We look at it in an accurate way as far as possible. And then you move from there to what does it mean? What is the meaning of that? That's where study of the Bible, preaching the gospel, being under the preaching of the word, and all the other study that goes along with that in your fellowship. That's where it all comes together. Here is God's word. Here is what it says. And therefore, here is what it means. And therefore, I take it to myself. You take it to yourself and you set it out before you as your guide through life. And that's really the first thing that you think about the Bible. The Christian's belt of truth is God's truth. It's truth revealed in Jesus Christ, the way, the truth, and the life.

[13:03] But that's also, we know in written form in the Bible, how thankful we are tonight. We've got our Bible. How thankful we are. We have God's truth in written form in our own language. That we have a history of insisting upon the fact that the Bible is God's word to us. and that we convey that to the generation that we live in, convinced that as it was given to us to believe that, so we're seeking to pass that on to those who are following us. So that's the first piece of the armor, this girdle, this belt of truth. But wearing the belt, he's saying here, put it on, having fastened on the belt of truth. Then he goes on to speak about standing and putting on the other parts. And there are three words I want to mention just in terms of our wearing this belt of truth so that we can look at the practicalities, the necessities of how we go about wearing it, how we go about taking it and putting it on and wearing it.

Well, the first word is priority. The second word is authority. And the third word is clarity. These three are important in how we actually use our Bibles and put on this belt of truth. [14:31] First is priority. You see, it's the first piece of armor to be mentioned and that's really important. That's deliberate on the part of the apostle. We mentioned at the beginning, this is the part that keeps the flowing garments under control.

It keeps them tightly bound. It keeps you from tripping yourself up. It keeps you from all of these things if you're a soldier from being loose and hampering your movement. And when you think of it spiritually, that's exactly how it must be for us. This is the first piece of armor that you have to put on because the truth of God has to keep everything else in place. Unless you put on the truth of God first, then something's going to be wrong somewhere. If you begin somewhere else and you put the truth of God in a secondary sense on, then that's going to

be a problem.

And that's one of the big problems that you find even amongst people in the Christian church that they're not giving priority to the Bible itself. For your understanding of, for example, the person of Jesus himself, for your understanding of righteousness, how you come to be accepted with God, you have to actually take all of that from the scriptures.

[15:46] See, I could be today preaching quite orthodoxly on the way in which we come to be justified. We're justified by faith in Jesus Christ.

Standard, reformation, doctrine, central doctrine, foundational doctrine, important doctrine. And I could be here for a whole period just preaching on justification by faith in a way that's perfectly in accord with what the Bible says.

But if I don't believe that this Bible is God's word, I could change my view of justification because I'm not convinced that the Bible is foundational to it.

And so you need to understand that unless we are committed to the Bible itself being unchangeably the truth of God and the other doctrines that we have following on from that such as the breastplate of righteousness, the gospel of peace, the shield of faith, all of these arise out of the Bible's teaching.

But unless we hold firmly and constantly to the Bible being God's word, unless we put that on first and keep that on to keep everything else in place, we're very much in danger then of having other doctrines take over or we change our view of righteousness or of faith or whatever because it's not controlled by the Bible itself.

[17:17] In other words, when you put on this girdle, this belt of truth, what you're really doing is essentially letting that control your thinking, letting that control your view, your outlook, whether it's about yourself, about the world, about where you're placed, about your work, about your neighbors, about the church, everything stems from your view of the Bible.

That's really the source for you because this is the truth of God and that's why we put it on first. The rest then is put on afterwards.

So, you're then ready for action. that's what it's saying. Having fastened on the belt of truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness and so on and taking up the shield of faith, praying at all times, then you're able to stand.

That's the priority. Not just know your Bible but know what your Bible is and hold on to the view that that is the source of all your information about who you are, about who God is, about what salvation is and tonight that's what we're thankful for that we have that view of this book that down through the generations in our past has come to be so central to our progress in life and as a church and as individuals.

Sadly, we're in a day when this nation no longer recognizes the validity or the priority of the Bible. That's why it hurts us so much that when you listen to the speeches of the politicians and leaders of our day, leaders of the parties for example with party broadcasts just now, how empty they are of the veins of truth.

[19:17] Even if they're very sincere about what they believe and I'm sure they are very sincere about how they present this to us, how they're very sincere about the way they feel the country has to go forward and recover from the COVID pandemic and everything else.

What we're really longing to hear is where is the Bible? Where is God's truth? What place do you give to the truth of God? Why are you not saying more about it?

So please remember to those who are tonight standing on the truth and our members of Parliament or members of the Scottish Parliament or the Welsh Assembly or the Northern Ireland or whatever they are.

They're having a very difficult time of it because there are so few people support them in their view that the Bible is central to human life not just to the Christian life or individual life but to community life to national life if we really are going to make progress.

So all of these politicians we have to bear them up before God and I have to hold my hands up and acknowledge and confess that I don't do it as often as I should myself specifically just to dwell and spend time over praying for people who I know are Christians in politics of whatever party they are as they're God's people they are seeking to present the truth of God as best they can in an exceedingly difficult environment but that's why the belt of truth is so incredibly important and that's why we have to give it priority privately personally congregationally nationally and that's what we pray will happen in days to come that we will hear leaders for a change coming to say I believe what

I find in the Bible and I believe that it's applicable to national life to national security to national prosperity to national morality to people's way of life it's a priority for us secondly it's also authoritative it's not just priority but authority and all of this is in Britain into the text of course and I'm taking as you well know matters that belong to this topic elsewhere in the Bible the Bible is a priority but it's also the authority that we have in fact it's the final authority that we actually have in terms of our knowledge of God and of ourselves because the Bible's authority is final authority authority and that's why the reformers and you'll find it built into our great confession of faith and the catechisms you'll find it built into that that this is the final authority not church councils not the Pope not Kirk sessions not the church itself but the word of God it's the final authority it's the supreme authority as God has given it to us to be our girdle our belt of truth and you know when the church loses sight of that and I'm talking here about the church in the widest sense you understand that the visible church as you see let's just confine it to our own land it's the same throughout the world but when the church loses its conviction that this

[22 : 50] Bible is in fact God's word with its final authority then the garments are loosened aren't they you'll find that lots of things happen that actually hamper the progress of the gospel the progress of conversions if you like of holiness of life all of these things that are dependent in their own way on the truth of God and on the holding to the truth of God and are presenting it in our lives it's no surprise at all that you have so much in our day of a mix between the Bible and humanism and even forms of atheism or atheistic philosophy all built together into what's called an ideology or an outlook or a world view where does the Bible fit into all of that well it doesn't at all you cannot fit the God's final authority alongside of any other source of so-called authority whatever other book it is whatever religion it is that's why you end up with this this mix that really will not take anyone very far in terms of a relationship with God or a progress as a people you see when you contrast you go back to chapter 4 that we read there really dealing with the topic of unity but you notice where the truth is actually included in that verses 11 to 15 especially where he gave some apostles some prophets some evangelists the pastors and teachers to equip the saints for the work of ministry for building up the body of Christ now the work of ministry there is not not only the preaching of the gospel or ministry in terms of ministers the work of ministry here is the ministry of the whole body to one another but also to those outside the church to those that we witness to ministry for the work of the ministry for building up the body of Christ until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the son of God and so on so that we be no longer children tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine by human cunning by craftiness in deceitful schemes almost the same language as chapter six then what does he say rather speaking the truth in love we are to grow up in every way unto him who is the head even Christ speaking the truth in love how does the body of Christ grow how do

God's people grow and make progress together as a fellowship of God's people or in their relation to the world and witness to the world and to the gospel speaking the truth in love the truth at the heart of their speaking at the heart of their fellowship one with another at the heart of their relationships at the heart of their outlook as they look out on the world speaking the truth in love that's that's how we grow up unto him so that the body of Christ ourselves as believers will increasingly become more and more mature spiritually until God himself will bring that to completion in glory speaking the truth in love and it's how we offset the cunning and the craftiness with which the enemies of the truth lie in wait to deceive same language as in chapter 6 here and the devil of course is always these forces are always aiming at the truth aiming at the truth itself getting us to doubt what it says as

I've said earlier and as we found in Eden itself has God said well you remember the devil came to Jesus as well just at the outset of his ministry there he was in the desert being tempted by Satan and three times especially if I had mentioned in Matthew and Luke especially the three main prongs of his attack and when Jesus replied it is written and I haven't got time to go into that but that's itself such an important element that Jesus himself in his incarnate life on earth as a servant actually went to the truth of God for his support when the devil said it has written and Jesus said when Jesus said it is written he was quoting from the book of Deuteronomy coming to the word of God speaking the truth but then of course you'll find that the devil actually came around also to say it is written he uses the word of God itself in a manipulative way you have to be aware of that I have to be aware of that and one of the quotations he took from the book of Psalms he actually missed out some words when he was tempting Jesus to cast himself down off the pinnacle of the

temple for he says it is written he shall give you he shall give his angels charge to hold you up lest you dash your foot against the stone and it seems very significant that he missed out in all your ways because if Jesus had cast himself down in listening to the to the devil's words and giving in to that temptation he'd be taking himself out of the ways of the servant of God that he was then in his relation to God that's always what Satan is aiming at to doubt the word of God just as you find in Eden and in Christ's temptation so there's priority there's authority the authority of the word of God itself the supreme authority God himself speaking in it and there's thirdly clarity there is no major doctrine of our salvation no major doctrine of the

Christian faith that's left in the shadows in the Bible that doesn't mean that every aspect of these doctrines is easy to understand right through to the final details but if we ask the question how can I come to be right with God what must I do to be saved the answer is always clear believe in the Lord Jesus Christ put your faith in Christ and you will be accounted righteous by God in relation to that faith and every other doctrine that's necessary for us to know righteousness of Christ himself the atoning death of Jesus the acceptance of that by God the Father the resurrection of Jesus physically from the dead the ascension of Jesus then to glory the return of Christ on the day of judgment it's all there it's all there authoritatively set down but also with clarity so that you need not be in any doubt as to what this is about what this says even if there are aspects of it in the detail that pass our understanding we always have the clarity that God has given about himself about sin about salvation about heaven about hell about being born again about faith in Christ and it follows through into such areas of our lives as personal ethics holiness of life marriage sanctity of life how we deal with the poor all of these things they're maybe not at all foundational to salvation but they're important truths and they're spoken of as they're revealed with clarity in our

[31 : 04] Bibles and put on the breast put on the belt of truth and that's why we try and teach our children and try and keep to ourselves and those that begin newly to follow the Lord especially if they've not been used to being brought up in a Christian environment we always try and get them to see the importance of beginning the day with the truth of God and ending it too possibly but certainly beginning the day with the truth of God just reading from the Bible and carrying that then putting that on carrying it with you into each day that's why we value the work of camps for example because one of the things we've always tried to do with our church camps is teach the children the importance of their morning quiet time spending time just reading the Bible asking God to help them to understand it's putting on the belt of truth the girdle of truth so that every day we come to meet our situations having already put on the belt of truth to hold everything else in place if the devil will not persuade you to disuse the Bible he will certainly try to persuade you to misuse it but both aspects of his attempts are part of the way he comes to attack the truth he'll want you to just disuse it put it aside no longer use it and if he can't persuade you to do that well he'll try and persuade you to misuse it to actually present it in a way that's different to what it says or to come to doubt it so friends it is one of our greatest privileges to know what this Bible is it's one of our greatest privilege to have the freedom to put it on every day this belt of truth it is an indispensable benefit to us to have the truth of

God applied to our lives as our lives go on and moment we start neglecting that we're in trouble we're giving the devil an opening in the armor and we know very well he'll not take long to find it and use it may God bless these thoughts on us let's pray Lord our God we once again give thanks that you have convinced us of this word this Bible that we hold in our possession that we find oh Lord so very dear to us we give thanks that you have persuaded us that it is your word that you continue to speak to us through it that you bring your people to know you through it that you use it in our conversion and our coming to be born again through the word of God and we thank you that you continue to use it for the upbuilding of your people for our progress and life and holiness we ask your blessing Lord to follow what we have thought upon this evening together we pray that we may further come to experience the benefit and the advantage the indispensable necessity of having your word put on each day so that we may be defended adequately against the wiles of the devil and so continue to bless this truth to us as a people as a congregation bring about oh Lord we pray by your blessing as has already been prayed for

Lord this evening a change in thinking about people a change in the way in which we find throughout our land so many people abandoning and rejecting the truth of the Bible Lord return we pray to us in your great mercy that conviction that your word is true that you sanctify your people through your truth and your word is truth hear us we pray for Jesus sake amen■■■ gouvernement

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