

Donning Your Spiritual Armor

Winning the Real Battle

**Ephesians 6:10-20
October 27, 2002
Bethany Church**

A few years ago, a shopper, entering a store, spotted a woman sitting in her car with her hands clasping the back of her head.. When the shopper later emerged and saw that this woman was motionless and had not moved her hands from behind her head, she approached the car, knocked on the window and asked, *“Lady, do you need help?”* *“Please call 911!”* came the answer. *“What’s wrong?”* asked the shopper. *“I’ve been shot in the head, and I can’t move my hands because they are holding my brains in place.”* Only a few more moments transpired before the first emergency crews arrived. As they began to examine the frightened woman, they discovered that she had indeed been shot... with biscuit dough. Warm sunshine caused a lid on a roll of biscuit dough to pop off, and the woman’s head had been pasted. The sound along with the blow to the head made her think she was shot, and she mistook the dough for her brains. So there she was, paralyzed with fear, holding the dough in place, believing she was dying.

This woman’s experience may be comical, but it also can be useful. How frequently do we misinterpret reality and suffer needlessly? We’re often oblivious to the real battle with our spiritual enemy. The Bible teaches that daily we are at war, not so much with one another, but with spiritual beings who oppose God and who oppose our

partnership with God. Their first aim is to erode our confidence in the power and truth of God's love for us. We've spent four Sundays educating our eyes so we could see and fight this battle. This is the second of three Sundays where we consider three basic strategies in spiritual warfare. We are examining three "major do's" for *Winning the Real Battle*.

Last week we examined strategy #1. The first major "do" is to embrace your spiritual team. God calls none of us to live and work as loners. God designed every one of us to live and grow in positive, spiritual friendships. No baby is dropped on to this planet alone. God designed us to live in families where we care for one another and watch each others' backs. In the Old Testament, God constantly called believers together in celebrations, observances and a distinctive way of life. In the New Testament, believers met daily as friends in their homes and served in teams ministering to their neighborhoods and communities. They did so because soldiers, who battle alone, get picked off. That's also true of Christians. Many challenges degenerate into messes because we try to handle things alone. Unless you are in a group where you are known, encouraged and prayed with, you suffer spiritual isolation. You are in danger. You're ripe for defeat, even though God has called you to win. You need to develop a spiritual partnership with some people. Today we look at a second "major do." We examine a second strategy that prepares you to expose and foil the schemes of your enemy.

Four times in the New Testament we are told that we need to adorn ourselves with spiritual armor. In Romans the Apostle Paul writes:

The night is nearly over, the day is almost here. So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light. (Romans 13:12)

To the believers in Thessalonica, he writes:

Since we belong to the day, let us be self-controlled, putting on faith and love as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet. (1 Thessalonians 5:8)

In Ephesians 6 Paul twice exhorts Christians to put on the *full armor of God*. He's saying, "*Get it all on! Otherwise you're vulnerable.*" For Paul the full armor includes six things: a belt, a breastplate, boots, a shield, a helmet and a sword.

The concept of spiritual armor does not begin with the Apostle Paul, however. Isaiah gives us a picture of such armor hundreds of years before Christ. In Isaiah 59:17, the prophet sees God coming among the Israelites to redeem them from their destructive deception. God dressed himself with armor in order to fight and win the real battle that engulfs his people. God donned a breastplate of righteousness, a helmet of salvation, garments of vengeance and a cloak of zeal. God dressed himself to deliver His people from the sins that destroy them. We fully saw that armor in the life of Jesus as he came as Israel's redeemer. In Jesus God dressed himself in armor that was impervious to deception, and in Jesus he wrapped himself in zeal so that even a cross would not stand in the way of every good promise being fulfilled.

Paul sees that prophecy being fulfilled not only in the ministry of Jesus, but also in the ministry of us believers. He exhorts us to dress ourselves in the same armor that Jesus wore, the armor of Isaiah's prophecy, the armor of God. When Paul tells the Roman Christians to put on the armor of light, he continues, "*Clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus.*" What Paul is actually telling us is that we need to choose the perspective of Christ in all things. We must choose to think as Christ did. We must choose our grist for thinking; we must choose daily what things will guide our mental processing of life and thus our decision-making. We dress for battle when we choose to embrace Christ's

attitudes and perspective. The armor of God is the “chosen” attitudes and perspectives of God.

Let’s consider the six pieces of armor that Paul lifts up to the Ephesians. First, there is the **belt**. The soldier’s belt was very important. It carried two functions: it kept his garment in and carried his weapons. The belt prevented the soldier from being hindered by his clothes. Without a belt, the soldier would find himself fighting his own clothes as well as his enemy. The belt prevented that. Second, the belt equipped the soldier to fight by keeping his weapons near his hands. Paul identified this belt with truth. Without God’s truth, we’ll be fighting our own attitudes and not just temptation. Without God’s truth, nothing helpful is within our grasp. We have no constructive response. Paul called us to choose truth. We choose it first by submitting our attitudes and actions to Jesus because he is the truth. If we don’t submit everything to his judgment, we’ll be defensive and dishonest about our behavior and attitudes. We’ll find ourselves excusing behavior, defending attitudes, and purposely blind to how we actually affect both others and ourselves. Choose daily then to submit every attitude and action, every comment of yours and others, to Christ for discernment. Be prepared to admit sin and wrongdoing. Second, we choose truth by embracing Jesus and his authorized words. We do this by reading and heeding the Hebrew Scripture that Jesus honored and the New Testament that Jesus authorized. In Scripture God tells us that He loves us. We accept that. God says Christ died for our sins. We accept that, and remember that. God promises that if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us of our sins. We trust that and let go of the guilt. Every attitude hinges on our acknowledgment and acceptance of God’s word as truth. Will you tell God today, “*You said it, so I’ll believe*

it and act accordingly!”? You’ve got to first cinch and buckle the belt of truth if you want to overcome Satan’s deceiving work in your life. Get honest, submit your attitudes and actions to Christ, and trust God’s word.

The second piece of armor is the **breastplate**. In Ephesians it is called the breastplate of righteousness. The breastplate protects the heart and lungs. Both these organs are vital to life. Paul told the Thessalonians to use faith and love as their breastplate. Faith and love are pivotal in a relationship. Spiritual life begins with faith in God’s love for us. Without faith in God’s love, there can be no partnership with God. When you trust that God treats you with love and unmerited favor, you draw close to Him. As that confidence erodes, you stray. The breastplate of righteousness simply is the choice to believe that God always has and always will do right by you. That’s the attitude Jesus chose, and that attitude will protect your heart.

The third item we are to use is a pair of **boots**. One time some years ago, I was climbing the hills of the Mississippi River valley above Winona. My daughter Debbie was on my back in a child carrier and I was wearing flat bottom sneakers. That was not a good choice. I slipped, fell and mostly scared rather than injured my toddler. What I wore was inappropriate for the terrain. The terrain of life requires more than sandals or sneakers. There are steep inclines and menacing rocks. Paul wants us to dress with boots that are constructed not from canvas, rubber or leather but from the gospel of peace. We are not to wear Nike or Reebok. We are to put on *readiness*. In other words, in every situation we are to realize we are ambassadors of God’s redemption. If you are pummeled by someone’s hatred, you are there for their redemption. If you are rocked by accident or illness, you are on that ground to minister healing in some way. Daily remind

yourself that you are divinely given and carrying a message of peace and redemption so that you are ready at any moment to make a difference. Dress yourself with *readiness*.

Paul tells us to equip ourselves with three more things: a **shield**, a **helmet** and a **sword**. When you start taking fire, recall Christ's love and promises. Let that be your touchstone as you deal with the conflicts. Take up hope as the helmet that protects your mind. Recall that you are awaiting the complete unfolding of God's salvation. Total victory is coming soon! Pick up the Scriptures as a sword, realizing its message cuts through the lies. The Bible skewers discouragement and exposes falsehood. Each day as you open and systematically read Scripture, mark the truths God reveals to you, so you can come back to them. You are building an arsenal for battle as you read Scripture.

Finally, recognize that in life you are involved in a spiritual and winnable battle. Realize you have allies and a God who is pulling for you. The battle can get intense and difficult, but God has a team for you and armor so that you will overcome. Embrace that team and choose each day to dress your thinking with God's steel-like perspective, and you will win.