

Ephesians 6:14a "What is This Armor?"

A number of years ago a movie by the name of "Red Dawn" hit the theaters. It was a story about the Soviet Union and Cuba invading this country as their armies parachuted into a small rural town out west. All of this was done by complete surprise.

The opening scene was a school teacher instructing his high-school class on history when out of the corner of their eyes some of the students saw soldiers dropping in and around the school. They began to wonder at what in the world was going on as they all moved to the windows. The teacher ran outside to demand to know the meaning of this when suddenly the soldiers opened fire and killed him.

Chaos ensued. All of the students and teachers were running around dodging bullets and trying to get away from the school. One group of kids made it to a truck and drove out of town to warn others. In the mean time everyone at the school and the town had been taken prisoner and were being held by an enemy no one would have thought could pull off such an attack.

It took everyone by complete surprise. No one was looking for an attack and all but a few succumbed. The rest of the movie centered on the kids who made it to the mountains and later came down to fight for their town and the freedom of their country.

But you know, many Christians are like the people in that town. They were all aware that they had an enemy in the Soviet Union and Communist Cuba, but who would have thought that such a bold attack would actually take place on American soil.

Most Christians are aware that we have an enemy in Satan and that "our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms."

The problem is that more times than not many Christians are not prepared for the attacks. And in fact, many times they don't even know what the attacks look like since our preconceived ideas of warfare don't include the enemy dropping from the Western skies of the United States, nor using the Church itself as a staging platform for wreaking havoc within the Body of Christ and the individuals within the body.

There's the tendency to think that as long as I'm connected to the Church I'm safe from attacks and the enemy will leave me alone. Many would never expect that the Church itself is housing enemy agents who have infiltrated and are scheming against unsuspecting people who believe that only truth could come from such an institution which Christ Himself established.

Therein lies the battle, and therein lies the challenge for all of us to know what this war is all about and how we must be equipped to deal with it on an individual basis and on a collective basis. It's not enough to say, I've got my armor on and not be concerned with everyone else's armor. If we're all in the same army for Christ we need to be encouraging each other to be prepared.

And this is why Paul could say, "therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand." (EPH 6:13)

Remember, Paul is not just exhorting individuals here, he is talking to the entire church collectively to be prepared for battle. It is when the body of Christ is moving like one strong and unified organism that the enemy fears us the most. It is when each individual part is working within the context of the whole that strongholds can be broken down and people are liberated from their captor.

This doesn't mean that the fingers of the church, in the individuals of that church, are not reaching out to the world. But unless those individuals are connected and encouraging each other toward love and good deeds, then you've only got a feeble attempt to extend the kingdom of God. An army works best when it works together with a common cause. And each soldier of Jesus Christ works best when we're all involved in the same battles, moving forward together.

Now, I realize that when we usually talk about spiritual warfare we have a tendency to put it in the context of what the enemy is trying to do with me. How is he attacking me and my family? How is he trying to thwart my efforts in being a witness for Christ? How is he trying to discourage me when I desire to be used of God?

These are all legitimate ways of seeing the enemy work against us. But unless we see the bigger battlefield we will never get past the one-on-one hand-to-hand conflict which is going on and we will be consumed with what the enemy is doing to individuals only. Now

if you happen to be that individual who's being attacked it's a pretty big deal.

But this is where the tactics of the enemy and the full armor of God comes into play as the rest of the body rallies around those individuals being attacked and helps them see the bigger picture, not only in their own lives but in the life of that individual church in which they find themselves.

As we look at the full armor of God in our text we want to always keep in mind that we are not in this battle alone and Satan's ultimate plan is not to pick on individuals. His ultimate plan is to disrupt entire local churches through individuals as he tries to discredit Christ Jesus.

Let me illustrate how this works. On a battle field where real guns and bullets are being used the objective of the enemy is to destroy entire armies, but they do it as they destroy individuals. There are a variety of ways to disrupt an entire army.

1) Destroy communications. This is a major tactical plan. When you destroy the ability of an army to communicate to other members, chaos ensues and they quit moving forward. In the spiritual realm of the Church when the free flow of truth is hampered, as falsehood enters in, the ability of the church to fight effectively is thwarted.

Falsehood and bad doctrine will keep the army of Christ from understanding its role and its objective, together with its understanding of where its resources come from, which in our case, is the Lord Jesus Christ. If you can convince an army that it does not have the ability to call for help or reinforcements or supplies as you surround it, then it will shortly consider surrender.

In a similar way, if the enemy can convince us that God doesn't hear our prayers, and if He does He's not interested in answering them, because you aren't worthy, then it's only a matter of time before you succumb and become ineffective in the battle for the souls of people.

2) A second way of disrupting an army is to inflict as many casualties as possible without necessarily killing everyone. This can be done as you lay land mines and booby-traps. When a soldier is wounded in battle that one soldier effectively removes one to two other soldiers as they come to his aid and remove him from the battlefield.

The more wounded casualties you can inflict the more people you take away from shooting at you. Theoretically, if you wound 10 you remove 20 or more. If you wound 50 you remove 100 more and so on, until the fighting force either retreats or is captured due to an inability to press the battle.

In a spiritual sense this happens in the church on a continual basis. And this is where we usually associate the individual being picked on by the enemy as if that is his main concern. It's not. He tries to inflict pain and suffering in his attacks so that others will be forced to assist the one who's hurt.

The danger here is that if the individual being attacked is not utilizing the full armor of God he will remain a casualty and it will affect the rest of the body from moving forward in the work, because they are more concerned with the spiritual health of that individual, as they should be.

But, as all members are appropriating the armor of God by faith, which they already possess, the attacks do not have to cripple the army from going forward with the work our Lord has given us. Yes, we take care of the wounded, yes we bind each other up, but as each is trusting Christ the healing process is speeded up and they are able to get back in the battle being stronger for it.

This is what James speaks of in JAM 1:2-4 "Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, 3 because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. 4 Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything."

Seasoned soldiers are the most effective soldiers. There is no way you can become seasoned unless you are tested in real battle. Paul had a very interesting perspective on the battle which was given to Him by God Himself. Here's what he says in his letter to the Romans.

ROM 8:17-18 "Now if we are children, then we are heirs -heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory. 18 I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us."

Here Paul is trying to put this present battle into an eternal perspective. He's not denying the real hardships which can come from spiritual warfare, he's simply trying to help us see with

spiritual eyes. In fact, in the same chapter to the letter to the Romans Paul says this.

ROM 8:35-37 "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? 36 As it is written: "For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered." (Psalm 44:22) 37 No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us."

Here Paul is saying that even in the midst of spiritual warfare, and the hardships which go along with it, our status as victors and conquerors in Christ never changes, precisely because the One who has called us to be His soldier, His ambassador, His witness, loves us and is always there for us, even when we travel through the valley of the shadow of death.

This is precisely why Paul could say in 2CO 12:9 "But he [Jesus] said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me."

Do you think Paul was excited about having a thorn in his flesh? I don't think so. But he was content to know that Jesus Christ was there to use Paul to glorify the Lord through that situation and that Paul would be a stronger soldier for the Lord because of it. Paul was always looking for ways to be a better equipped soldier for Christ and so should we.

Now, I know that some will say, 'I just want to go about my business without all the hassles of warfare and struggle.' And I would be the first to throw my hat into the ring with that thought. But we need to realize, we don't belong to ourselves. We were bought at a price and we serve a new Master and Lord who loves us so much that He gave His life for us.

We need to stand and we need to keep this spiritual battle and warfare in perspective as we realize that the God who gave us life is personally equipping us to be effective soldiers in His campaign to reach the lost with the gospel of Jesus Christ. Peter put it very well.

1PE 1:3-9 "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, 4 and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade -kept in

heaven for you, 5 who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time. 6 In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. 7 These have come so that your faith - of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire - may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed. 8 Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, 9 for you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls."

With this backdrop we come to our text and discover how our loving Lord is providing us with all the tools we need to contend earnestly for the faith as well as moving forward with the gospel, as we fight the good fight and not give an inch to the enemy who prowls around like a roaring lion seeking someone to devour.

EPH 6:14-18 "Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, 15 and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. 16 In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. 17 Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. 18 And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints."

We will not get to all aspects of this armor this morning. Rather we will begin to look at what Paul is trying to convey in a general way and then we'll look at the specifics of each piece of armor.

Whenever most bible teachers come to this portion of the text the first thing that is usually mentioned is the connection between the spiritual armor and the physical armor that was worn in that day by soldiers. The physical armor in this case is referred to as a metaphor. A metaphor is simply a figure of speech which is used to help us get a grasp of an idea without suggesting that the example is literal in its meaning.

For example, a metaphor could be used of our Lord Jesus as He says, "I am the bread of life." Here the metaphor is describing how Jesus is the One who not only gives us eternal life, but He is the One who sustains us in this life as we feed on Him in a spiritual sense, by faith.

The Roman Catholic church has missed the metaphor and made it into a literal teaching where the bread literally turns into Body of Jesus Christ in the Mass. This is known as transubstantiation.

Another metaphor of our Lord could be found in the hymn written by Martin Luther back in the 16th century; "A mighty fortress is our God." We know that God is not made up of bricks and mortar like a fortress is. Rather it helps us grasp an image of strength and protection which is found in our God.

And so using figures of speech, like a metaphor, is a legitimate approach to helping us understand a truth about our God. However, what I've found over the years is that we can spend so much time looking at the metaphor we lose sight of what the real teaching about our God is. We become so enamored with each piece of armor and how it was used by ancient soldiers that we relegate our spiritual weapons to mere means of attaining a physical goal.

Since Paul uses this metaphor from verses 10-17 we are going to look at it, but it's worth noting that even if Paul didn't use such a figure of speech in describing such gifts from God we could still see clearly what we possess in Christ and how to use it.

We could break these verses down in this way, (minus the figure of speech), starting in verse 13...

"Therefore take up God, that you may be able to resist in the day of evil, and having done everything, to stand firm.

Verse 14... Stand firm therefore, having put on truth, and having put on righteousness,

Verse 15... and the gospel of peace;

Verse 16... In addition to all take up faith with which you will be able to deal with the evil one.

Verse 17... And take salvation and the word of God."

Here, when we strip the metaphor out we see what it is God wants us to concentrate on. But because the Holy Spirit has given us a connection to things in life we are familiar with, as He describes truth, righteousness, the gospel of peace, faith, together with our salvation and the word of God, we must blend it all in a way where we come away learning of this armor and how we must utilize it as we consider this metaphor.

The first metaphor is the armor of God we see in verse 13. When we talk about armor we have a mental picture of what that is. As we come to verse 14 Paul begins to show us the pieces of this armor.

More often than not most bible commentators assume that the armor Paul is talking about here is the armor a Roman soldier wore into battle. This may be partially true since Paul lived in a day where the Romans ruled the world through their army. But, we don't want to miss something here that the word of God has already spoken of.

You see, this armor is also found in the Old Testament. When Isaiah confessed that Israel had sinned against the Lord and that no truth or justice was found in her gates, we see how the Lord Himself came to defend the helpless.

ISA 59:17 "He put on righteousness as his breastplate, and the helmet of salvation on his head; he put on the garments of vengeance and wrapped himself in zeal as in a cloak."

Isaiah describes our God also in this way in ISA 11:5
"Righteousness will be his belt and faithfulness the sash around his waist."

Here we see the metaphor of armor being used of our God. And this, by the way, is a connection which should not be lost on us who have placed our faith in Christ. Just as our God is seen in His armor, we, being in Him, share in that strength and power to go out to do His work.

The psalmist gives an overview using a similar metaphor in PSA 93:1 "The LORD reigns, he is robed in majesty; the LORD is robed in majesty and is armed with strength."

If God is robed in strength and we are clothed with Christ, then it stands to reason that we too are robed in His strength, His armor if you will. Job speaks of this same thing and yet he uses a little different metaphor from that of armor for battle. He speaks rather of being clothed himself.

JOB 29:14 "I put on righteousness as my clothing; justice was my robe and my turban."

Paul uses both metaphors of clothing and armor in ROM 13:12,14
"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***. 14 ***clothe***

yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature. (Or the flesh)

The same truths are being taught, but just with a little different perspective, as being covered with clothing paints one picture, while putting armor paints another. But the same elements of God's truth, righteousness, justice, faith and so forth are things which come from God and are instructive and are meant to be used by His people as they submit to Him.

And these things which He gives will be effective because He is the One who gives them as He Himself is the embodiment of them all. Shall we look at verse 14?

EPH 6:14 "Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place,..."

Let's talk first of what it is that God wants us to put on and then the imagery used as to how that works. We are to stand firm in truth and righteousness. The truth and righteousness being referred to here are in the context of what we have been called to do earlier in this letter.

EPH 5:1-2 "Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children 2 and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God."

What Paul is saying is to show your faith to be alive. Show your love to be real. Show your salvation to be in Christ. And so as we stand firm in the truth, we must show the truth to be working in our lives.

The truth referred to here in verse 14 is not meant to be understood as the "divine truth objectively revealed [as] the word of God." (C. Hodge) In fact, we know this because Paul will deal specifically with the objective truth of God's word in verse 17 as he calls it the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

This doesn't mean that the objective word of God doesn't play a role here. It simply means that the objective word of God will enable us to walk in that truth in every area of life. In other words, the objective word of God will affect every area of our lives causing us to live righteously in the righteousness of Christ.

I mean, if these metaphors mean anything then they must be used in a way that teaches us something of what we put on. To be girded means to take something and wrap ourselves in it so that it

will enable us to go forward into battle. The term "to gird" means to tie something around our waists, like a girdle which holds something in.

In the ancient world people would gird themselves as they wore long flowing clothing. If they needed to do some task that required them to move about freely they would gird themselves in a way where they tie up this loose fitting garment as they pulled it up between their legs and wrapped it around their waists.

In the context of a soldier however, this would not be the case. They didn't go into battle with long flowing robes. Rather, they would gird themselves with a "leather-like apron [or girdle] tied around their waist to protect the lower abdomen." (Klyne Snodgrass)

This metaphor of girding the truth is to teach that the truth we possess *inside* our spirits shows on the *outside* by what we do for God's glory. We wrap it around ourselves in a way where it shows, but it is also indicative that it is something which is effective precisely because it is an armor which God puts on us.

So, in that sense, the objective truth is seen working itself in our outward lives as we put it on and walk in it by faith.

As believers in Christ, not only do we need to know the truth, we need to be truthful, which is essentially what Paul is saying here. He has already spoken of this in EPH 4:15 "Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ."

EPH 4:25 "Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbor, for we are all members of one body."

If the world is going to believe the objective truth of God's word, which speaks of the salvation we have in Christ alone, then we must show ourselves to be walking in that truth, truthfully. We must gird ourselves or wrap ourselves in it in a way where it is one of the first things people see. It's like what Paul said in COL 3:16 "Let the word of Christ *dwelt in you richly*..."

If they can trust us as one's walking in the truth they are more likely to accept the objective truth of God's word from us. We'll pick up here next week as we continue to look at the amazing armor God has given us so that we can do battle for Him and honor Him in the process.

Just keep this in mind. You already have all the armor you're ever going to get or need. It is the armor of God which we saw in ISA 59:17 "He put on righteousness as his breastplate, and the helmet of salvation on his head; he put on the garments of vengeance and wrapped himself in zeal as in a cloak."

God provides such armor to His children in Christ, who are soldiers of the cross, because the spiritual war we are in is not an option. We're not to be surprised by it, nor are we to be a casualty in it.

I couldn't think of a better suit of armor to wear than that which our Lord is already wearing and now giving to us to walk in. Armor that allows us to walk in love, just as Christ loved us and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma.

Paul summed it up well when he wrote to Timothy and gave him these words that should be taken by us as well. "... set an example for the believers in speech, in life, in love, in faith and in purity. (1TI 4:12)

Gird yourselves with the truth and allow Jesus Christ to be the way, the truth, and the life in your life in everything you do to His honor and glory.