

Ephesians 6:14b-16 "Truth, Righteousness, Gospel, And Faith"

EPH 6:14-16 "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."

Last week we did somewhat of a summary of what it means to be engaged in spiritual warfare. We know for example that once we have been enlisted into God's army, as we place our faith in Christ, it's not a matter of whether or not we will find ourselves in spiritual warfare, it's just a matter of time before we do.

It's also not a matter of whether or not God will begin to requisition this spiritual armor for us over time because, as we saw last week, the moment you place your faith in Christ as Lord and Savior you receive everything God has for you in the way of armor, including all that is mentioned here in Ephesians six.

And of course, this spiritual armor is not something we can earn any more than we earn our very salvation. It's all a gift. And so we don't have to wonder if we're doing enough to warrant receiving this armor. You couldn't possibly do enough to earn it, but Christ did. And if we're in Christ by faith then we possess all He has purchased for us through the cross.

Ephesians 1:3 ³ Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us *with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ,*

And so the encouraging thing is that our Lord never sends us out into battle without everything we need for the battle. We have everything we need in Christ. There is nothing lacking. Now, this doesn't mean that we don't have to seek the Lord and grow in this salvation, it simply means that everything is already in place.

Over time we will find that our growth in the Lord will enable us to stand firm as we appropriate this armor by faith and as we say no to "self" and yes to the will of our Commander and Chief, the Lord Jesus Christ.

As we saw last week, standing firm, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, not only includes the idea of standing on the

objective truth of God's word, it also includes walking in that truth as it is displayed to the world. To buckle or to gird yourself with this truth is to regard it as a necessary part of our defense in this world.

To say that we know the truth and yet not walk in the truth is a sure recipe for disaster when it comes to this spiritual battle every faithful Christian experiences. But unless we're willing to gird ourselves with the truth of God's word, as we obey our Lord's will, we will not be able to stand firm as Paul commands here in our text.

But part of standing firm is to realize that we stand on solid ground. This is what Paul means in the latter part of verse 14.

EPH 6:14 "Stand firm then with the breastplate of righteousness in place,..."

The question which must be raised is what is this righteousness which Paul speaks of here in our text? Some have suggested that it is the righteousness which comes from Christ, others have suggested that it is a personal righteousness which we walk in as we "live lives worthy of the calling with which we've been called."

I personally don't think it's an either/or answer. If we're talking about a true defense and a true protection from spiritual enemies then there is no amount of personal holiness that will be an adequate defense. Only the righteousness of Christ put to our account will be what we can lean on and trust in.

However, it should also be pointed out that we must live in Christ's righteousness as we practice holy lives so that through our obedience to Him His life will be seen as our only strength. And so, I believe that Paul would have us understand that both truths concerning putting on the breastplate of righteousness apply here.

We must live as people who find their redemption and righteousness in Christ alone, and we must live as we walk righteously or in a right way based on the truth of God's word and salvation in Christ. And so, in that sense we must put on the breastplate of righteousness as we put off the old man and put on the new. Paul had brought this out earlier in this letter.

EPH 4:22-24 "You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; 23 to be made new in the attitude of your minds;

24 and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness."

What Paul is saying is that the full armor of God will be effectual only as we seek to flee from self. To place self, or the old nature, in the equation is to take that armor off as far as being effectual in the battle. I've seen people who profess to be Christians who walk after the ways of this world and then wonder why they can't seem to get their lives together spiritually.

To walk righteously is a walk which not only depends on the righteousness of Christ but is humbled in the process as we live with gratitude and thanksgiving for Christ's righteousness put to our account. How can the devil get a foothold in our lives if we're constantly relying on the God and Creator of this universe who is Almighty, and obeying Him as we love Him?

This is exactly what Paul said in EPH 4:27 ..."do not give the devil a foothold. (or an opportunity)". That is in the context of walking in the flesh. There is nothing magical about this full armor of God. The armor or strength comes in walking in the Spirit as we walk away from the old man who wants to rebel against God.

This is why we don't need to fear, when the attacks come, as to whether or not we possess this full armor of God. We do. But to the degree that we are walking as the new creation that we are in Christ will often determine the success of being able to resist the temptation and attacks and be the victor and conqueror we are in Christ.

This is why James could say, Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Come near to God and he will come near to you...." (JAM 4:7-8)

The armor is found to be effective in our submitting to God. The success in the spiritual attacks are measured by our willingness to resist the devil, as we draw near to God. It's pretty difficult to live for Christ and self all at the same moment.

This is why our choices are so important and why Paul puts this section in chapter six of Ephesians in the way he does, as though we must do something to put this armor on. And yet the reality is that he is exhorting us to choose to live in the armor we already possess in Christ.

We are armed and dangerous, as far as the devil is concerned, but only as we are loving and seeking and depending on Christ by faith

continually. But we are not armed in our own strength. We are armed in the strength of God. I pointed this out last week in quoting the Psalmist.

PSA 93:1 "The LORD reigns, he is robed in majesty; the LORD is robed in majesty and is armed with strength...."

If we are clothed in Christ then we are also robed and armed in the strength of the Lord. But how else should we walk in this new life we have in Christ? Well, Paul goes on to show us in our text.

EPH 6:15 "and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace."

The NAS puts it, "and having shod your feet with the preparation of the Gospel of peace.."

Just as we saw that the breastplate of righteousness is described of God in Isa.59:17, the gospel of peace is something we find in the O.T. as well.

ISA 52:7 "How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, who proclaim peace, who bring good tidings, who proclaim salvation, who say to Zion, "Your God reigns!""

Having our feet shod or fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace is another way of describing how the gospel frees us up to love and serve the living God. It is the realization that we have partaken of the good news which is found in God alone who reigns and gives life to all who would come to Him by faith.

Part of the armor which Paul conveys here in our text has to do with walking at peace with God. There is no peace with Him outside of embracing the gospel of Jesus Christ. Prior to coming to Christ all of us were at war with God. There truly was no peace, only judgment and condemnation, to suffer the wrath of God because of our sin.

But now, we are set free from the penalty of our sin and we are set free to love and serve God for the first time in our lives. Knowing that there is therefore no condemnation for we who are in Christ Jesus takes a tremendous burden off of our shoulders. But being free and at peace with God because of this gospel means we are now given the privilege and responsibility to run with it to the tops of the mountains to declare it.

Having our feet shod or fitted suggests that we not only walk in this new freedom, but also realize that this good news is not meant to be hid under a basket. I'm always amused when celebrities, or anyone for that matter, take great pride in saying that their faith is a private matter and this is why they keep it to themselves.

That is the height of selfishness. They would deny the rest of the world from learning how to be at peace with God? The implication here is that we should be running everywhere shouting it from the housetops knowing that the gospel is the power of God unto salvation for everyone who believes.

Does this mean that we all quit our jobs and rent a tent and travel the country evangelizing? If God calls us to do so we should. But, in reality it means that we are to be the gospel. We are to show the good news in our lives as we show the world how we are at peace with God. That comes from the way we live in the Spirit, but it must also come as we give them this good news.

But how is this gospel of peace to be equated as a piece of spiritual armor fit for the battle which comes against the forces which are not flesh and blood? Well, Paul is addressing Christians who are encouraged to live their faith and also to give it away. And so, as we are about doing the work of the Kingdom of God we are being armed and protected in the battles we all face.

What we must also understand is that the more we desire to serve God the more spiritual battles we will encounter. Why? Because we're going out into the enemy's territory. There's little reason for the enemy to be that concerned with us if we're spending most of our waking moments in the barracks.

It's when we come out of the barracks and take the battle to the enemy that we will find the greatest opposition. We can take the battle to the enemy in a variety of ways. As we encourage each other in our faith; as we not only read and study the word of God but become doers of it; as we live lives worthy of the calling to which we've been called; as we give the world the greatest news they've ever heard, as we get involved in ministry of any sort.

I've seen it time and time again. A Christian decides he or she wants to serve the Lord in a particular capacity. They're all excited. They're ready to begin the work. Maybe it's getting involved in the children's ministry, or maybe it's getting involved with teaching adults or maybe it's wanting to reach to the lost.

Whatever it is, it's defined by the enemy as an affront to his ability to keep people in the dark. And before you know it, the spiritual battles begin. They may take the form of fear, or they may take the form of sickness preventing us from serving. They may take the form of financial problems which take our focus off of the work and on to our problem. It may come in the form of discouragement as we don't see the results we expect.

We can all make our own lists. And they can be quite long. But, invariably what I've seen over the years is that more Christians will leave the battle instead of pushing forward with the work God would have them pursue. And what started out as an exciting opportunity to serve Christ turns into a fizzled out dream.

The servant of God steps out in faith, the enemy attacks, and the battle ensues. But as I said last week, unless we understand that there will be a battle when we desire to serve God, and that it is essential we depend on Christ for our strength in that battle, the enemy will often times get the upper hand and we succumb. And then we just write it off as an inconvenience we didn't count on.

'Well, I thought it was a good idea to get involved in ministry, but at this time in my life I'm really too busy. I've got too many things on my plate as it is. Maybe sometime down the road I'll try it again.'

Look I'm not picking on anyone. I've said those words. So, I know what I'm talking about. But, what I've also found is that "sometime down the road" rarely comes if we're waiting for our circumstances to be perfect.

And keep in mind, it's not me or any other Christian who has enlisted you in the army of Christ. It is the Lord Jesus who has called us to Himself. He's the one who says, "follow Me." He's the one who says, "take up your cross." He's the one who says, "If you love Me, obey Me."

But as we pursue God, no matter what, then we'll find that this armor of God will be a reality. But the armor of God is always in the context of the battle. In other words, Paul is saying, that the reason you need this armor is because it is assumed you are willing to get into the fight. If we're not willing to get into the fight we don't need any armor.

But if we don't need the armor, we can hardly call ourselves soldiers of the cross. Having our feet shod for *action* is what Paul

is talking about. And by that I don't mean busy-ness. We can be busy trying to do something for the Lord and not be doing His will. I've seen people come out to church 3, 4 or even 5 days a week, and some of them are not any more prepared for the battle. They're busy, but they're not battle worthy.

They come out to fill time, or to meet friends, or to be entertained or to be able to say they're coming out to show their allegiance to the Lord. All of those things may be fine, but they're not an end in themselves. We want to meet with God's people to be encouraged and to be an encouragement. But we also want to be strengthened in our faith so that we might be found faithful serving the Lord.

As we are confronted in the battles which try to divert our attention away from our God, our temptation will be to leave the battle field and Paul understands this as well.

EPH 6:16 "In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one."

Two things ought to be mentioned here. **1)** We can expect the enemy to come against us as a soldier might come against us with flaming arrows. **2)** We have the solution to the attacks which is found in our faith in Christ.

Let me deal with the flaming arrows or missiles from the enemy first. It should be pointed out that all of this is in the context of a battle. And the implied reason for the battle is that we are out on the battle field doing the work of the Lord.

What's interesting about all of this is that sometimes Christians confuse the battle with other things going on in their lives. I've been in situations in my own life where I wasn't serving the Lord and yet there were still battles going on in my life. At the time I thought it was the enemy trying to drag me down.

It wasn't until after the fact that I discovered it wasn't the enemy at all. He didn't have a reason for shooting flaming arrows at me, if you will. I wasn't on the battle field. What it turned out to be was my loving God and Father using certain circumstances in my life to get my attention, because I needed to be on the battlefield and I needed to be prepared as I sought God.

We all know what it's like to be down and the only place to look is up. And that's usually the best place to be when God desires for us to look to Him. It's often during those times when we're the most sensitive to the leading of the Spirit. But, we can get so caught up

in our own lives that sometimes God Himself will get our attention and remind us that we belong to Him and He's personally got work for us to do.

We mentioned this passage last week, but it's worth noting again. It's found in the letter of James.

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."

There is nothing to suggest here that this is an attack from Satan. Rather, it sounds much more like an opportunity God is using to make us stronger for the battles to come as we go forward in His service. Perseverance, endurance or steadfastness are all things we need for the work God has called us to, not simply for life in general.

It certainly helps for life in general, but there is really nothing general or generic about a life in Christ if we're following Him into battle as we walk with Him for the souls of people. This doesn't mean that God won't use Satan as an instrument to strengthen us or draw us closer to God.

Even Paul realized that he needed a blessing from God to enable him to be a better soldier for Christ. How did God bless Paul in the work?

2CO 12:7 "To keep me from becoming conceited because of these surpassingly great revelations, there was given me a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me."

Do you think Satan was trying to prevent Paul from becoming conceited? I don't think so. No, it was God who loved Paul enough to put a check on Paul so that he didn't get in the way of what God was going to do through him.

Now, most of us would never see a thorn in the flesh from God, which came through the agency of a messenger of Satan, as a blessing. At first Paul didn't either as he prayed three times for God to remove this attack.

And yet, when he discovered that it was for his good and not his hurt, as it created perseverance and steadfastness in his life as a soldier for Christ, he welcomed it. And of course those famous verses are found in Paul's second letter to the Corinthians.

2CO 12:9-10 "But he [Christ] 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. 10 That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong."

Paul was not a masochist. He simply understood that if he is to go out in the battle he must be prepared with the strength of God and not be tempted to go out in his own strength. But, like Paul, we must be willing to go out in the battle despite the weakness of our flesh, the insults, the hardships, the persecutions and difficulties of life.

It's then when we can be the most effective for Christ. For when we are weak, then we are strong. When we don't rely on the flesh then we truly are able to walk in the Spirit. When we try not to lean on our own understanding then we can know the truth of God's way.

Now, the flaming arrows of the evil one give us an interesting picture. I believe part of the reason for this imagery is the way such an attack affects us. In ancient battles, when flaming arrows were employed they were not necessarily trying to hit people with them. They were trying to hit defenses made up of wood, or they were trying to hit other things which would cause chaos.

Imagine trying to wield your sword when your shield is on fire. Imagine trying to go forward into battle when the grass and brush in front of you is blazing and sending smoke and debris up into the air surrounding you and filling your lungs with a noxious cloud of heat and fumes. All of this to try and divert you away from your primary duty of engaging the enemy in battle.

In a similar way, Satan tries to divert our attention away from our responsibility to Christ. The arrows may not actually hit us. But they're hitting around us and setting things on fire.

A fire will get your attention. It will always attract a crowd. If you've ever sat around a fireplace, the flames can almost mesmerize you as you watch it blaze and consume the logs in the fireplace. But you let that contained fire spark out onto the rug and everyone is running around trying to find something to put it out.

How many times has the enemy started fires in our lives just to watch us run around like chickens with our heads cut off. These

fires consume our time and attention and talents. These fires often will cripple us as we become confused and begin to panic. They may affect our finances. They may affect our relationships with other people. They may affect our marriages. They may affect our jobs. They may affect a lot of real things in life which take our eyes off of Christ and place them on the blaze.

But you know what? More often than not, the blaze we're looking at is the blaze which is contained in the fireplace, but we see it as out of control. It's burning violently, but God has hedged it about with three walls and a fire screen. He says, 'don't panic. I'm here.'

But it's hard not to panic if our faith is weak. It's hard to trust if we don't truly believe God is able to be with us through the fire. But like with Shadrach, Meshac and Abednego, who were literally cast into the furnace, we too will find ourselves in the middle of the blaze with one who not only can calm the raging storm, but can also quench the flames.

If this aspect of our armor is not being appropriated those flaming arrows will have Satan's desired effect. This armor of faith, which Paul calls a shield, is essential to our ability to not only enter the battle field but to stay there until the enemy is set fleeing.

Faith is not some mystical magical aspect of the Christian life reserved only for the super-Christian. Faith is simply trusting the One who says, 'I'm here for you.' It is not so much the amount of faith we have, it is more the One on whom our faith is placed. That one is the Almighty and merciful God who says, 'I will go with you into the battle and because I have conquered the enemy you are more than conquerors in My Son.'

We'll pick up here next week as we continue to look at this shield of faith which is most certainly able to extinguish all the flaming missiles of the evil one.

I'll close with a passage Paul wrote to the church in Thessalonica.

1TH 5:8-11 "But 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. 9 For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. 10 He died for us so that, whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with him. 11 Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing."

I praise God that you are in fact building each other up in Christ and being built up for the battles which the enemy will bring our way. But I praise God that He is the one who goes into battle with us. Do not fear or be dismayed for the Lord our God is a great God. And He is our Savior and friend.