

Godly Protection

Ephesians 6:10-20

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It's a tough battle.
The enemy is ruthless.
You can't see him - not too often, at least.
Just occasional glimpses.
But make no mistake - this enemy is out with a take no prisoners approach.
Total destruction of the opposition - that's his goal.
Create as much chaos as possible.

I'm not speaking of the rogue forces of terrorism.
Nor the old forces of Communism.

Actually - it's not any human force at all.
But if you are a Christ follower, make no mistake.
The enemy is real - and **you** are the target.
If you are striving to live out an authentic apprenticeship to Jesus Christ, this enemy is determined
to take you down,
and along with you, everything that the one to whom you are loyal stands for.

The battle is real, it is tough, it is for keeps, and it will be until one side or the other is completely annihilated.

Which is why you'll find phrases like this sent to young Christ-followers:
"Fight the good fight of the faith" (1 Tim 6:12)
"Endure hardship with us like a good soldier of Jesus Christ" (2 Timothy 2:3).

It'll be tough going, a fight.
Be ready.

So we get the words of Ephesians 6.
After a marvelous letter that covers many contours of Christian living, the Spirit says to the Church, through the pen of St. Paul -
"Finally, be strong in the Lord..."
"Put on the whole armor of God,
so that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil."

We're called to live our lives as spiritual apprentices to Jesus not with primary dependence on academic brilliance, or sociologically appropriate strategies, or physical endurance.
But in the deeper mystery of the reality of God's power.

Because the battle is spiritual.
Because the enemy is spirit -- not physical.

The enemy is the devil - the one unveiled in Revelation 12 as a dragon; fought against by the archangel Michael and his angel troops.
The enemy is the Devil-Dragon who has been, says Revelation 12, thrown down out of the heavenly realms onto the earth; where he thrashes about seeking to cause as much

chaos as he can; and
says Revelation 12
wages war with God's children - with all Christ followers.

Be aware of that, believers.
And keep the focus.
Keep the focus, remembering that, as a gathering of spiritual apprentices
We are not **against** the world
We are not **opposed** to people who live throughout our city.
Indeed -
"Our struggle is not against enemies of blood and flesh..."

What we are **against** are the dark spirit forces of hell.
What we are **against** is Satan's twisting and corrupting of God's good plan for Creation and for humanity.

And those forces are ones that we could never resist or overcome on our own.
We can never conquer hell in human strength.
As Paul writes in 2 Cor 10:3-4:
We are human, but we don't wage war with human plans and methods. We use God's mighty weapons, not mere worldly weapons, to knock down the Devil's strongholds.

And that's why, early on in another church season, we're taking time to do an inventory of the weapons that God has provided for us in order that we may survive;
yes, not only **survive** but also **thrive** in the task that God has prepared for us.



Ephesians was written by St. Paul when he was a prisoner.
And he probably was sitting under the watch of a Roman soldier while the Holy Spirit inspired him to pen the letter.
A soldier looking something like this.
Not exactly what we're accustomed to seeing today.

That is more like this. But while the look is different, there is actually a surprising amount of similarity between the equipment used. Equipment that ensures their survival and maximizes their effectiveness as fighters for the cause.



Let's review the items:
Verse 14 - **fasten the Belt of Truth.**
Belts did the same thing for Roman soldiers as they do today - they keep things up that should be up, so that they don't trip over them; and they provide a place to hang weapons.

Truth.

Without it, stuff falls all over the place, and we'll end up tripping and falling.

Truth.

Not *"true to me, but not for you."*

Just plain true - as true as the truth that the Ottawa River is sending 2000 cubic meters of water/second towards the Atlantic Ocean.

It is real.

You can count on it.

Truth.

Centering on the One who said of himself:

"I am the Way, the TRUTH, and the life.

No one comes to God the Father, except through me." (Jn 14:6)

The reality of Jesus as Son of God and Saviour keeps everything pulled together. The physical reality that he is risen from the dead and reigning in Heaven.

Without the TRUTH of him, we'll get tripped up, and stuff will fall apart and get lost. That is absolutely CORE to our lives!!

Inventory item #2: ***"Put on the breastplate of righteousness."***

Today we'd say, "Make sure you're wearing your body armor."

It protects the vital core area of the body.

What's our spiritual body armor?

It is called ***Righteousness***.

And it covers the heart; it covers the gut.

Today we tend to think of the heart as the seat of emotions.

People in Bible days didn't. The heart for them was the seat of the will; it was where conviction and conscience bubbled from.

Emotions, they believed, came from the gut - which is where we get the saying today, *"a gut emotion"* or *"gut wrenching"*

Body armour, the breastplate, covered both.

Our will and our emotions are covered with righteousness;

with the righteousness that God himself provides through Jesus Christ.

The devil tries to weaken our resolve, and tries to make us feel discouraged about following Christ with all sorts of accusations.

That we'll never get it right, anyway, so why bother.

That God can never forgive that regrettable action.... you know the one....

"I'm a sinner. I'm a failure -

- Why should Almighty God be listening to little, insignificant me?"

And if we listen to that we end up in a giant pity party.

Or we end up beating ourselves up - or beating on fellow believers.

Or trying hard -- *uber* hard, too hard -- to try and demonstrate to ourselves and our neighbors and maybe even God himself that yes, we ARE all right.

So we protect our will and our emotions with the righteousness proclaimed by Romans 8:1
"Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."

My right-ness, my purity in the eyes of God comes
fully
and only
through Jesus.

The same Jesus who is Saviour of the World, and who will
one day
turn on its head all the corrupting and twisting and destroying, chaotic work of the
dark forces of Hell.

He is Righteousness Himself.
He will, one day, make all creation RIGHT.

All our convictions, all our determination - matters of the heart
And all of what we feel about ourselves - matters of the gut
find their protection when we surround them in Jesus.

Next item - v.15, the **shoes of peace**.

Ancient Roman soldiers had special footwear with strong spikes driven through the sole to give them traction - easy movement and good grip in battle.

Soldiers today also wear strong footwear that allows them to run and climb and move without slipping - moving forward in their task.

For believers in Jesus that traction for our lives is found in **PEACE**.

Romans 10:15b quotes the prophet Isaiah (ch.52) saying, *"How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!"*

Good news of **peace**

We do not have a message that is designed to divide or conquer or bring war.

It is the message of peace.

Peace - which is the ancient word "**shalom**"

that is

wholeness

fully right and together

the way God designed it to be in the first place.

That's our message.

That's what we get up and get out and get going to bring -

Life in the way God designed it to be in the first place.

We live and move as a community of peace.
Peace is what gives traction to our lives.
We are about the business of building up what Satan seeks to destroy and maim and fragment

The fourth item is, v.16, the **shield of faith**
Shields in Paul's day were generally painted with symbols of Rome.
They showed to whom the soldier belonged, to whom they were loyal.
And they would find cover behind that shield from projectiles meant to knock them off balance or harm them or kill them.

We hold high a shield painted with the cross.
We hold high our faith in Jesus of the cross.
And without that faith we would be knocked off balance,
or harmed
or worse.

That is, we stand behind Jesus.
We trust him fully.
We are utterly loyal to Him.

We hold on tight in trust that Jesus is praying for us in heaven right now.
that Jesus sends us whatever we need
that He will not allow us to become overwhelmed
that in Him our eternal destiny is secure
that the service we offer, in His name, will never be in vain.

Will that faith be tested?
Oh, yes!!
Gossip tests it.
Unwanted health reports test it.
Getting into a family quarrel tests it.
Challenges at work challenges it.

And in those times we have to hang on extra tight to the FAITH that we belong to Christ,
and our lives - every minute, every day, into eternity -
our lives are in his hand.

As my mentor at Seminary said to Sharon and I when we had to bury our son, "*Hang onto your faith in Christ like you've never hung onto it before. It's all we have.*"
Dr. Plantinga was right.

And then there is the **helmet of salvation**.

Any blow to the head is fatal.

If we survive, we'll never think straight again.

Ask anyone who has suffered an aquired brain injury and they'll tell you.

The helmet of salvation - keeping our thinking clear and straight.

Protecting the truth that, as Romans 8 puts it, we are heirs of God, and co-heirs with Christ.

That we are saved.

That our eternity is safe.

That we *belong to the family of God as His children and that NO ONE can snatch that reality from us.*

That "saved-ness" is our life.

It is the fundamental beginning of Christ-following living.

We wrap our mind in that and never take it off.

And then the only offensive weapon in the whole armour - the **Sword of the Spirit**.

When the devil challenges, we lay hold of the Word of God, just as Jesus took hold of God's Words to counter Satan's temptation in the wilderness.

Keep your sword sharp, believers.

And keep it handy.

Let me ask - how much of it do you know?

By heart?

Don't tell me you can't.

You can repeat most of the lyrics of your favorite band, can't you?

I sit next door at Dick's, and find my mind singing along with all the stuff that was retro when I was in high school. The words stuck. So if my mind can do it with the music of Elvis, surely it has space for the truth of God's Word!

Yours, too!

How much time do you give to reading it, learning it, browsing it?

So that, when the Devil attacks, you'll be ready.

Not only with citing proof texts, but also with turning attention away from him.

One of the best ways to counter temptation, or feelings of defeat, is to focus on God and begin spending time in praise and worship. To ignore the devil entirely.

And the best way to do that is through Scripture themes that describe God in His glory. Or speaking actual words of Scripture to God - like those in the Psalms. Or sing them. That's why I **SO** appreciate songs that put the text of scripture to music.

Find 'em.

Learn 'em.

Sing 'em!

Contrary to what many may suggest, faith is not about whatever I happen to believe and feel to be right. It is not about my personal beliefs.

It is about GOD'S Word.

Taking it up.

Owning it.

So, there it is:

Truth.

Rightness

Wholeness.

Faith.

Salvation.

God's Word.

The central elements that keep us alive, and keep us active in Christ's service.

And then, once we've taken them up we get to work.

By....

Did you notice how?

We..... PRAY.

Ah yes, back to the beginning.

Remember?

Our battle is NOT against flesh and blood.

So Kingdom advance begins and is grounded by not some physical work.

But by the spiritual work, the key work

of

prayer.

So.... last question of the morning -

Do an audit of your Christian life.

How prominent is prayer and a prayerful attitude?

There it, fellow apprentices of Jesus.

All what we need to be protected, to not only stay alive spiritually, but to remain healthy and active.

So that we may pray.

And work. For Christ's sake.