

**Sermon preached by Dr. Neil Smith at Faith Evangelical Presbyterian Church,  
Kingstowne, Virginia, on Sunday, August 9, 2015**

**WEAPONS FOR SPIRITUAL WARFARE (2)**

**Ephesians 6:10-18**

I want to begin today with something I should have said last Sunday but did not – which is simply this: Thank you. Muchas gracias. Merci beaucoup. Danke schoen. Thank you all so much for all your prayers on my behalf, for all of your kindnesses to Mary Sue and me in the way of meals, cards, and other expressions of your love. I am – we are – blessed and truly grateful.

This new knee has been more of an ordeal than I anticipated. I knew it would be hard. My recovery and rehab are actually going quite well – praise the Lord! But it is a long-term project. Somehow I thought I would be able to do more by now than I am able to do. I hope I don't sound like a wimp in saying this. The truth is that it is going to be a while before I am able to get back to full-time and full-speed in the work of being your pastor.

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**THE ENEMY WE FACE**

Last Sunday, I hope you recall, as we began to look at this passage of Scripture together, we zeroed in on the enemy we face in the spiritual warfare that is inescapably part of our lives as followers of the Lord Jesus Christ in this world. That mortal enemy is the devil – Satan, our adversary and accuser – whose ultimate objective is to overthrow God and the kingdom of God and the people of God in order to establish himself as “God” and “Lord.” He is real. He is powerful – but not all-powerful. He is as wicked as wicked can be. He is crafty, a master of deception and trickery. And he is finite. Which is to say he is not God's equal. And he never will be. He will never prevail in his quest to dethrone God and to rule over all things. “His doom,” as Luther wrote, “is sure.” In the words of another hymnwriter: “Though the wrong seems oft so strong” – which it does and it is – “God is the Ruler yet” (M. Babcock). And He forever shall be.

But “still our ancient foe doth seek to work us woe.” And we must take him seriously in order to stand against his wicked schemes, to stand our ground in the day of evil, and, having done all we can do, to remain standing (Ephesians 6:11-13).

**WHERE OUR STRENGTH COMES FROM**

Here is the reality: We are in a war. A war against hostile spiritual forces, led by the devil, that will do all they can to thwart God's plan for His people and for this world. This necessarily means that the Christian life – your life as a Christian and mine – is an ongoing, lifelong struggle against evil. And we do not have what it takes on our own to take on and defeat these spiritual powers. In order to be victorious, we must, as Paul exhorts in verse 10,

“be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might.” We must rely on the Lord and the strength and power He gives.

Remember what Paul says in Philippians 4:13: “I can do all things through Him who gives me strength.” He does not say: “I can do all things in my own strength.” No. Our strength to fight the battles of this life, our strength to fight against our spiritual foes, must come from God Himself, or we are doomed to defeat.

Psalm 121 begins:

I lift up my eyes to the hills –  
 where does my help (strength) come from?  
 My help (strength) comes from the LORD,  
 the Maker of heaven and earth.  
 (Psalm 121:1-2)

Where does our help come from? Where does our strength come from? Not from the hills. Not from the highest, most majestic mountains. But from their Maker. From the Lord who made all things. Our help, our strength, does not come from our own innate abilities. No. It comes from the Lord. It *must* come from the Lord or it will never be enough.

But if it *is* from the Lord, if your hope and help and strength come from Him, you can be assured that Satan and his forces of evil will not finally prevail against you. You can count on that.

### **THE WHOLE ARMOR OF GOD**

So, what must you and I do to prevail against the devil? We must “be strong in the Lord” and we must “put on the whole armor – the *panoplia* – of God” (6:10, 11, 13). This Greek word, *panoplia*, refers to the complete equipment of a fully-armed soldier, including weapons and shields and all protective gear from head to foot.

It is important – essential, even – to have the proper gear when you’re playing different sports. A helmet and pads are essential equipment for a football player. A catcher in baseball needs a helmet, mask, chest protector, shin protectors, and a catcher’s mitt to play the position properly. A goalie in hockey needs a mask and pads, as well as those huge gloves and a stick. You can play soccer without shin guards, but it is not a good idea. Some gear is for your protection, or for defensive purposes. Some is to be used on offense. Like a baseball bat. Or a tennis racket.

Just like in sports, to be successful in war, including spiritual warfare against the enemy of our souls you’ve got to have the right equipment. You’ve got to have the weapons you need.

As a nation, we do not ever want to send the men and women of our military forces into harm’s way without providing them with all the resources they will need to take on and defeat

the enemy. In the realm of spiritual warfare against the devil and his forces of evil, God will never allow us to come under attack without giving us the armor or the weaponry we need. It will never happen. But here is the thing: You and I must put the armor on. We must avail ourselves of the armor God has provided and use what He has given us. If we don't, we invite the enemy to walk all over us. Which is not good.

To stand firm, then, to be victorious in this war against the spiritual forces of evil that threaten to undo us, we must have a thorough working knowledge of the equipment, the armor, the weapons God has given us and how to use it. Beginning in verse 14, Paul identifies six pieces of equipment that make up the armor of God.

### **THE BELT OF TRUTH**

First, there is the *belt of truth* buckled around the soldier's waist. The function of the belt was not, as in our day, to keep the soldier's pants from falling down, since Roman soldiers back in the day didn't wear pants. They wore long, flowing tunics. The belt around the waist gathered the soldier's tunic together so he could move more freely. The belt is also where the soldier kept his sword. If he was not wearing his belt, or if his belt wasn't buckled tightly around his waist, the soldier wasn't ready for action.

What is the belt we are to wear around our waists as we engage the forces of evil in spiritual warfare? It is the belt of *truth*. The truth of the gospel is an indispensable component of the armor of God. The truth of the gospel prepares and sustains us in doing battle with the devil. The truth of the gospel – the truth of God's Word – dispels the lies of the devil and sets our hearts free to serve Christ. If the truth of the gospel – the reality of our sinfulness, our total inability to save ourselves, the saving work of Christ on our behalf, and the sovereignty and sufficiency of His grace – if these gospel truths are not at the center of our lives, we're in deep, deep trouble.

Some biblical scholars believe Paul may not be referring here to the truth of the gospel, but to truth as a character trait, in the sense of integrity or trustworthiness. Without question, there is no place for deceit or hypocrisy in the life of a Christian. There is no room for them at all. To resort to such things, says John Stott, is to play the devil's game, and we will not be able to beat him at his own game. The devil would love nothing better than to have us stoop to his tactics, in the belief that the end always justifies the means. But we know better than that.

So, which is it, the truth of the gospel or truthfulness as a character trait? Maybe it is best to see it not as an either-or but as a both-and, because, as William Gurnall wrote, "one will not do without the other."

### **THE BREASTPLATE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS**

Second, says Paul, there is the *breastplate of righteousness*. The breastplate is the piece of armor that covered the body from neck to waist, and was known as the heart protector.

What has God given us to protect our hearts against spiritual attack? The breastplate of righteousness, which refers to the imputed righteousness of Christ, the righteousness credited to us on account of the suffering and death of Jesus for us. Clothed in the righteousness of Christ, we stand before God not guilty and condemned but justified and accepted. The assurance of this righteousness – that is, the assurance of being in a right relationship with God through the saving work of Christ – is an impenetrable breastplate to protect us against the accusations and slanderous attacks of Satan.

Our heart protection, therefore, is not found in any works or merit of our own, but in what Jesus Christ has done for us and in us. What we must do is to make sure we put this breastplate on and wear it at all times, 24/7, so Satan cannot wound us there.

### **THE SHOES OF THE GOSPEL OF PEACE**

The *boots* of the soldier are next in Paul's list. These boots or shoes symbolize *the gospel of peace* that God has entrusted to us, the gospel that has brought us peace, which we are now commissioned to share with others. In Ephesians 2, where Paul talks about the saving work of Christ and its implications for us, he says in verse 14 that Christ Himself is our peace. Through Him we have peace with God, if we have peace with God. And through Him, we can have peace with one another.

Like a good pair of boots, the gospel of peace gives us more footing to engage the devil in spiritual battle. Why? Because the gospel tells us where and with whom our salvation lies. And the boots of the gospel enable us to keep going in hard times, whether the spiritual terrain is rough and rocky or swampy, and whether the weather at the point of attack is scorchingly hot or bitterly cold. The gospel protects us against spiritual frostbite or cuts or blisters or burns or infection.

With these boots on, the Christian soldier is ready at a moment's notice to share the gospel with anyone who needs to hear it. Paul must have had in mind what the Scripture says in Isaiah 52:7:

How beautiful on the mountains  
are the feet of those who bring good news,  
who proclaim peace,  
who bring good tidings and announce salvation ...

With our boots on, we are ready for action in the service of the gospel. As Peter tells us in 1 Peter 3:15:

In your hearts set apart Christ as Lord.  
Always be prepared to give an answer  
to everyone who asks you to give the reason  
for the hope you have (in Him).

Have you done this? Have you set apart Christ as Lord in your heart? Are you prepared to share the hope of the gospel with others? Do you have your boots on?

### **THE SHIELD OF FAITH**

Next is the *shield of faith*, with which we can not only deflect the devil's darts but even extinguish the flaming arrows he fires at us. What are those flaming arrows? They are the arrows of doubt and discouragement, of accusation and false guilt over sins already forgiven, and of anxiety and fear.

The shield of faith keeps us safe from the enemy's arrows. The faith that shields us from attack is faith in Christ, in His sufficiency and Lordship, and a settled, unshakable confidence in the promises of God. But the shield of faith will protect you only if you use it. You have to exercise your faith. You have to put your faith to work. Psalm 18:30 says that God Himself is a shield for all who take refuge in Him. It is by faith that we run to God for refuge.

Do you have your shield with you today? Don't go anywhere without it.

### **THE HELMET OF SALVATION**

Fifth, says Paul, we are to put on the *helmet of salvation*. A Roman soldier's helmet was usually made of bronze or iron. Nothing short of an axe or hammer could pierce it. The helmet was a symbol of power, and the saving power of Christ protects us against the enemy of our souls. Knowing that you have been redeemed, knowing that you belong to Christ and that He will never let you fall away from Him, will protect you from the wiles and schemes of the devil, who desires to rob you of your hope and joy in Christ.

### **THE SWORD OF THE SPIRIT**

Sixth, Paul instructs us to use the *sword of the Spirit*, which is the Word of God. The sword of God's Word – the Bible – is the most powerful weapon at our disposal. It can be used for both defensive and offensive purposes, both to defend against the lies and attacks of Satan, and to attack the strongholds of Satan in the world.

The Word of God – the Bible – is, as it says in Hebrews 4:12, "living and active and sharper than a double-edged sword ... (which ) judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart."

God's Word is still the sword of the Spirit today. God still uses the Bible and its message to cut through the defenses people put up. He uses the Word to prick consciences, to convict of sin, to stab unbelievers spiritually awake. He gives us His Word so that we can use it in resisting temptation (just as Jesus did when tempted in the desert by the devil), to know and believe the truth, to lead godly lives, and to share the gospel with others. It is by hiding God's Word in our hearts that we are equipped to say "no" to sin (Psalm 119:11).

It should be intuitively obvious, though, that the sword of the Spirit will be of little or no benefit in your life if you don't use it. A recent Lifeway Research survey found that only 45

percent of those who regularly attend church (which is far fewer, of course, than the number who profess to be Christians) read the Bible more than once a week. More than 40 percent of regular church attenders read the Bible occasionally, maybe once or twice a month. Nearly one in five churchgoers say they never read the Bible – about the same number who read it every day.

My sisters and brothers, this cannot be good. I don't know which category of Bible readers each of you is in, but I tell you that the Bible will not serve God's intended purpose for it in your life if you do not regularly read it, digest it, embrace it, and faithfully apply its message to your life. Got that?

### **PRAY IN THE SPIRIT**

Lastly, after all these things, in verse 18, Paul calls us to “pray in the Spirit on all occasions.” While it is technically not a part of our spiritual armor, prayer is nonetheless a powerful weapon available to us. God means for it to pervade all of our spiritual warfare and our entire life in Christ.

### **CONCLUSION**

Do you know and understand the equipment God has given you?

Have you put on the full armor of God?

Do you have it on today?

If not, what are you waiting for?

If you need some help figuring out how to put it on, come and talk with me or one of the elders.

You and I are in a war. A spiritual war. Against a formidable enemy. But God – I love the sound of those two words used together – “but God” has given us the equipment we need to wage this war. He has given us all the spiritual resources we need to stand firm in the faith and to defeat the devil.

Our enemy the devil cannot stand. He will not stand. In the end, he cannot and will not prevail against the people of God equipped with the armor of God doing battle in the power of God for the glory of God. Don't ever forget that.

Lord, let it be so, here in us, now and always, to the glory of Your name. Amen.