

# Photos of the Faith – Armor of God

## *Ephesians 6:10-20*

### Introduction

As I prepared for this sermon, I came across this quote from J. C. Ryle, an Anglican bishop at the end of the 1800s. I found it to be kind of disturbing:

The saddest symptom about many so-called Christians is the utter absence of anything like conflict and fight in their Christianity. (J. C. Ryle)

He went on to talk about how some Christ go through the motions of attending religious services each week, but he added:

But of the great spiritual warfare,--its watchings and strugglings, its agonies and anxieties, its battles and contests,--of all this they appear to know nothing at all. (J. C. Ryle)

Such Christians, he surmised, might have come to Christ under what he called "a false sales pitch." Perhaps, he said, they were told, "Jesus will solve your problems. He will give you peace and joy. He will give you a happy family life. Come to Jesus and enjoy all of these blessings and more. He promises you abundant life." And so they signed up for what they thought would be a wonderful life of peace and happiness.

All of those claims are true, but they're only half of the picture.

- Jesus did promise to give us abundant life (John 10:10). But He also said that He was sending us out as sheep in the midst of wolves (Matthew 10:16).
- Jesus promised peace, but in the same breath He said that in this world we would have tribulation (John 16:33).
- He assured us of His love, but He went on to say that the world would hate and persecute us (John 15:12-13, 18-21)

Here in Ephesians, right before today's text, Paul has just shown us how the a Spirit-filled home is a glorious picture of the loving relationship between Christ and the church (5:18-33). And now he moves into describing that same Christian life as nothing less than hand-to-hand combat.

One of the essential truths of the Scripture is this:

When you became a Christian, you were drafted into God's army.

And every day, you are engaged in a battle with an unseen spiritual enemy. If you don't grasp this, when those trials come, you will think that something is wrong and you will wonder why God has allowed this to happen.

So the apostle Paul closes his letter to the Ephesians with this great section on the Christian's warfare.

And with this sermon we conclude our seven part sermon series titled "Photos of the Faith." Each week we have highlighted a photo from the assigned lectionary readings, focusing specifically on the reading in Ephesians. These photos were intended to help us remember what our journey of faith should be like:

- Week 1: A plumb line
- Week 2: A brick
- Week 3: A measuring cup
- Week 4: The number 1
- Week 5: A bottle of perfume
- Last week: Music notes

Today the picture is the armor of God. You probably guessed that already. Here's our verse:

Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. (Ephesians 6:11)

It is an interesting ending photo. Of all the images throughout this book, the image you probably knew best before the series began was this one. And it comes at the very end.

- There are only four more verses in this entire book of Ephesians
- Those are all farewell comments. The heading in my Bible is "Final Greetings."

Don't miss this! Paul has presented teachings on how to pray, how to use your spiritual gifts, the unity of the Body of Christ, relationships within the family, how salvation happens, how the Gentiles fit in the God's plan ... and much more.

- When that is all said and done, Paul says "Put on the full armor of God."
- Why? Why is this at the end and not at the beginning?

I think the answer is actually pretty simple. He identifies the "why" by repeating the word "stand." Let me show you what I mean.

### **#1: STAND AGAINST (v. 11)**

Look at verse 11 one more time:

Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. (Ephesians 6:11)

In my studies for this sermon, I came across this powerful statement:

You are up against more than you can handle on your own!

For most of us life is pretty much the same. We know what to expect and we have figured out how to cope with the normal stuff we face every day. Life is pretty predictable.

- When I come home for supper, my wife will generally ask me “How was your day?” My response often goes like this: “It was a Tuesday.”

There is a danger in that sort of routine. After a while, we forget what we are up against. And lest we forget, Paul reminds us:

For 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. (Ephesians 6:12)

You and I are up against invisible spiritual forces every moment of every day. Most days we aren't aware of it ... and those might be the most dangerous days of them all, because that silent enemy continues his work.

So put on the full armor of God, so that you can stand against the devil's schemes. And put it on so that you can ...

## **#2: STAND YOUR GROUND (v. 13)**

I direct you to verse 13:

Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground ... (Ephesians 6:13)

When you go to the beach next time, try standing in the edge of the water – right to the spot where the waves wash in and out over your feet. Try standing your ground in that spot. You know what happens, right? The waves wash away the ground you on which you are standing.

- Every good TV western has at least one episode involving someone stuck in quicksand. The ground gives way, and there they are ... unable to stand their ground.

At the end of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus talks about the importance of standing on solid ground. Many of us have an appreciation for how the Bible paraphrase called “The Message” bluntly communicates the truth of Scripture. Here is how that story reads:

(Jesus speaking) These words I speak to you are not incidental additions to your life, homeowner improvements to your standard of living. They are foundational words, words to build a life on. If you work these words into your life, you are like a smart carpenter who built his house on solid rock. Rain poured down, the river flooded, a tornado hit—but nothing moved that house. It was firmly fixed to the rock.

But if you just use my words in Bible studies and don't work them into your life, you are like a stupid carpenter who built his house on the sandy beach. When a storm rolled in and the waves came up, it collapsed like a house of cards. (Matthew 7:24-27, The Message)

The solid rock – the solid ground is the truth of the Gospel. So with our lives anchored on that solid ground and protected by the full armor of God, when those storms come and those waves roll in, we are able to stand out ground. We don't get knocked down by those troubling times of life.

On Christ the solid rock I stand ... All other ground is sinking sand.

And then Paul concludes with this:

### **#3: STAND FIRM (v. 14)**

Verse 14:

Stand firm then ... (Ephesians 6:14)

The first two points were intentional actions Paul calls on us to take. Standing firm is different. It is a consequence of putting on that armor. When we are properly equipped, we have no reason to retreat!

- Around our waist is wrapped the belt of truth – our lives are encircled not by popular opinion or current political correctness issues. We are wrapped securely in what the Scriptures teach and only in that.
- Our vital organs are protected with the breastplate of righteousness. Like a catcher's chest protector, none of those incoming missiles can penetrate our hearts. When you are clothed in righteousness, the accusations of this world bounce off.
- On our feet we wear the sandals of readiness. We are eager to share the good news of Jesus with the world around us with those who have never heard.
- There is the shield of our faith. The Roman shield described here covered the entire body – head to toe. That is what goes before us. It is out front, handling every fiery dart of the devil.
- Our heads are covered with the helmet of salvation, reminding us that we have been forgiven and that because of the blood of Jesus no matter what happens we are safe and secure in him. Our thoughts are guided by Him, and fear has no place in there.
- At our side is the sword – God's Word. It is the weapon we carry with us. We never try to win an argument based on our own logic. We simply say "What does God's Word say" and we live according to that.

But the greatest weapon of them all is our ability to pray – to talk with God about anything anytime anywhere. In spiritual warfare, you need a spiritual weapon. And so we pray.

### **APPLICATION**

Several years ago, I watched a PBS Special that covered the events leading up to the "Battle of the Bulge" during WWII. It was the autumn of 1944 and Germany had been beaten back behind its borders. The Nazi war machine was in tatters and the repeated

bombing raids of the Allies all but assured that Hitler's forces would never rise again. Around the perimeter of Germany's borders, the Allies spread a thin line of forces. One person observed that Allied forces were so scattered that a man could slip between its lines without being observed.

All across Europe, there was celebration. Parties, dances, speeches all rejoicing in Germany's defeat. The war was effectively over. The only problem was (pause) somebody forgot to tell Germany.

Even as his forces were being shattered and driven back Hitler was devising a plan for one last onslaught. Underground factories churned out more weapons, armament and ammunition. More of Germany's young and old men were conscripted and trained for war. And as Europe rejoiced, Hitler planned.

His goal was not to drive back the Allies into the sea, as much as it was to divide the British to the North and Americans to the South, so demoralizing them that they would sue for peace on his terms.

In the days that followed hundreds if not thousands of men died because somebody forgot that the enemy still lived and that the war was NOT (completely) over.

We are still in a battle, and we will be until Jesus comes back. Never forget that! Every morning make sure you are dressed and ready.

Amen.