

June 23, 2013

Romans 12:1-2 / III John 1-13 / Ephesians 6:13-14
The Weapons of our Warfare (#2) -- The Belt of Truth and the
Breastplate of Righteousness

Before I get into today's message, I need to clarify two quick things in relation to last week's message (lest I be misunderstood).

1st) I need to clarify that I am not anti-science. Nor do I reject the western scientific view in regard to many things in this world. I am thankful for many of the advances brought about by science.

My point last week was that the Western scientific view of the universe / which often overtly denies (and sometimes in a hostile fashion) the existence of what it cannot measure by machines or experiments or the five human senses -- such as faith, or the existence of God, or the source of evil, or the existence of spirits, angels and even the miraculous, excludes itself from being a reliable authority on spiritual and invisible issues.

Randy said to me on Tuesday: *"I know what you meant because I know you. But others who don't know you as well may not have."* He's right.

It's one of the problems with being so limited on time when one preaches! It limits your ability to cover all the many points of distinction in what you mean.

And **2ndly)** I need to say I am NOT one who, "sees a demon behind every stone." There is a sense (biblically speaking) in which all evil can be traced back to Satanic origin. But that does NOT mean that every ailment or strange behavior or odd phenomenon or spiritual difficulty or catastrophic event is the direct work of Satan, demons or spirits (as some have or would suggest).

In seminary I knew a young lady who heard voices. She thought it was Satan. But when her psychiatrist prescribed a certain medication, the voices went away entirely -- most likely an indication that it was a psychological ailment or chemical imbalance and not demonic.

I would never advocate going back to the day when every form of mental illness was attributed to demons or Satan. Although we don't want to go to the other extreme of denying the possibility when the evidence points us in that direction.

Everyone understand what I mean? I have always been one for balance and believing that truth most often resides somewhere between the extremes. And therefore, to admit the reality of satanic influences does not require that we go back to the Middle Ages.

And before I get into the 2 pieces of armor mentioned in today's text, I **FIRST** want to remind you that Paul -- by using military imagery and speaking of our need to wear armor -- is telling us that evil is NOT passive. It doesn't simply exist. It assaults and goes on the offensive! That's why we need armor.

As Paul says elsewhere, "***Satan roams around like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour.***" The same is implied here in Eph. 6:16, where "***the evil one***" is said to shoot, "***flaming arrows.***" That is, he attacks!

It's Paul's way of trying to convince us that "evil" is personal and scheming. As I mentioned last week, one commentator says the phrase, "the devil's schemes" carries with it (in the context) the idea of: "Strategizing with tactical shrewdness and ingenious deception."

That is, he plans with military precision, launching intelligent, crafty, diabolical, well-coordinated, well-calculated, precisely-timed attacks.

And they usually come when we are least prepared. For Satan is wise enough NOT to attack when we are ready or well-prepared. You don't launch an attack against an enemy when he is fully prepared. You do so when he least expects it or is least ready to repel it -- when he is weak or when he thinks he is strong.

Gordon MacDonald was pastoring of one of the largest and most successful churches in New England and had just written a book called, "Magnificent Marriage," when Satan attacked. He was riding high on his success when he fell into a year and a half long affair. And speaking about it later he gave this insight: "**An unguarded strength is a double weakness.**" Satan knows our most vulnerable times are the times we are weak and exhausted, or think we are strong and thus let our guard down.

And those attacks are almost always aimed at believers. And what does he aim to do through them? Cause guilt, and fear, or a sense of condemnation. His GOAL is to injure or wound us spiritually. He would love nothing more than to get us to turn tail and run from the battle, go AWOL, abandon our brothers and sisters when they need us most, wear us down, get us to stop resisting sin, or get us to dishonor or deny Christ.

His attacks are aimed at seeking to immobilize us, discourage us in our spiritual walk, or dishearten us in life by robbing us of our confidence and joy in Jesus. Their purpose is to get us to feel like we're useless, a lost cause, a basket case, a burden or a liability to the Kingdom of God. Anything to get us to give up on Jesus or make us think that Jesus has given up on us.

If you've wrestled intensely with any of those things, or found yourself struggling just to stay the course and keep on fighting the fight, I can pretty confidently say you've been under Satan's attack.

And the surest remedy for such attacks is to be dressed in the "armor" that Paul speaks of here.

And before we look at each piece, let me say very clearly: We will always be more susceptible to being wounded if we fail to wear ALL the pieces of armor Paul mentions in this passage. A soldier has certain armor (or protective gear) and certain weapons he MUST wear or carry into battle, because without them he disadvantages himself, or sets himself up for being wounded, captured or killed.

Leave out even one piece, and we leave some vital organ vulnerable or we go into the fight without a necessary weapon. That's why Paul's admonition to us is stated clearly and stated twice (in v. 11 and again in v. 13): "***Put on the FULL armor of God.***" Not just SOME of it, and not even MOST of it, but ALL of it! We will never be fully ready for battle if even one piece is missing! That's why Paul says it TWICE: "***Put on the FULL armor of God.***"

And we must wear it all the time, since with Satan we never know when the attack will come. The wise Puritan pastor, William Gurnall makes a point of this when he says: "***In heaven we shall appear not in armor, but in robes of glory. Yet here [these pieces of armor] are to be worn night and day. We must walk, work and sleep in them, or else we are not true soldiers of Christ. In this armor we are to stand and watch and never relax our vigilance, for the saints sleeping time is Satan's tempting time. Every fly,***" he says, "***dares venture to creep on a sleeping lion.***"

SAMSON had his hair cut by Delilah while he slept. DAVID stole king Saul's spear while Saul slept. NOAH was abused by his sons while in a drunken sleep. He's right. Night is often the time of temptation. And therefore, to take the armor off at that time is to expose us -- vulnerable and unprotected -- to, "the devils schemes."

Then **SECOND**, we come to what these pieces of armor are intended to do -- a purpose stated 4 times between vv. 10 & 14! Paul says we are to ***"put on the FULL armor of God"*** -- ***"so that we can take our STAND against the devils schemes"*** (v. 11). And again v. 13a, ***"So that when the day of evil comes, we will be able to STAND our ground"*** / V. 13.b says: ***"And after we have done everything (and it means "to withstand his attack"), to STAND."***

And he says it again in v. 14: ***"STAND firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, and the breastplate of righteousness in place..."*** (v. 14).

It couldn't be any clearer! The purpose of putting on the full armor of God is to enable us to ***STAND FIRM*** while the attack is going on and to ***BE LEFT STANDING*** after the attack is over.

The goal, according to Paul, is simply to stand firm, and remain standing, ***"when the day of evil comes."*** Not the last day, but any day that Satan, or any of his minions, launch an attack against us.

We are not out there to win, or defeat Satan. down (in the sense that he would cease to be an adversary of the church). It is simply to be able to withstand his attacks, and stand our ground, without losing any territory to him in the process.

Hoehner is right when he says: ***"Paul exhorts believers to put on the full armor of God in order that they might be able...to stand defensively against the satanic hosts. This is NOT about victory or defeat. It is about holding fast to territory already won by Christ."***

He's right. God does not call us to defeat Satan -- as if we could somehow remove him from the picture entirely. No! That's not our job! Christ did mortally wound him on the cross, and when Christ returns He

will defeat him completely casting him forever (as a completely vanquished foe) -- ***"into the lake of burning sulfur to be tormented day and night forever and ever."***

But until that day, all God calls us to do is use the armor He gives and stand our ground" or "fend off his attacks," refusing to give up any of the ground that Christ has already won for us.

Which brings us to our **THIRD** point -- the actual pieces of armor, both of which are defensive in nature. Both are meant to protect and NOT be used to attack. They are to keep us alive, or keep us from being wounded, they are NOT given to us to kill or wound the enemy.

And what are they? The **FIRST** piece of armor is the belt of truth which buckles around the waist. Although I must point out that the word "belt" is not found in the Greek, for the literal rendering of the verse would be: ***"Stand firm then, having girded your waist with truth."*** The word "girded" means, "to bind, secure, or tie something around the waist."

What was it? More of a girdle, or apron of leather studded with metal, than a "belt" -- at least as we would envision one today.

As Harold Hoehner notes: ***"The [Roman military or battle] girdle was a breech-like "apron... made of several loose sewn thongs of leather [sometimes studded with metal] for protecting the thighs."***

And unlike the pictures you see, they probably went all around to the back, to cover the buttocks and hamstring muscles in the backside of the thighs. That's why the KJV translated it, ***"having your loins girded with the truth."***

The "loins," according to the dictionary, is the area of the body which begins just under the ribs (or right about at the top of the hips) and goes down to the upper half of the thighs.

It would include the area below where the average person would wear a belt. And thus, "to hit one in the loins," would be, "to hit them below the belt" -- in the private area, which a "loin cloth" covered.

Hoehner continues: "***It was also used to fasten articles of clothing, or tuck in the skirts of a robe for greater freedom of movement.***"

And John Stott adds: "***It also held his sword [and] ensured he was unimpeded in marching.***" In many ways (as those who use chainsaws know) it served the same type of function as modern chainsaw chaps. It protected against injury or wounds to the upper leg or thigh.

So how does this piece of armor relate to truth, and thus protect us spiritually from Satan's attacks? First it must be noted that Paul does not say, "the truth." The definite article is missing.

So what does "truth" include?

- 1.) It would surely include the full body of Christian truth, doctrine and dogma.
- 2.) It would include the Gospel.
- 3.) It would include Christ, who is said to be and embody, "the truth"
- 4.) It would probably include, "truth in the inner parts" (Ps. 51:6) -- honest sincerity, true earnestness or being real (as some might interpret Jesus words: "The Father seeks those who will worship Him in spirit and truth.")
- 5.) It would go beyond all that to include all that is objectively true.

LISTEN: When I fail to maintain a good grasp on reality (that is, all that is true in the world around me) or fail to have a good grasp on biblical truth or sound doctrine... / When my understanding of who Christ is, is far from who He really is, or when I'm lying to God, myself and others about who I am and what I can do and what I'm capable of or tempta-

tions I'm struggling with... / When I'm pretending to be someone I'm not and am acting the role of a hypocrite -- I make myself vulnerable to attack and prone to being injured, disabled or spiritually wounded.

The person who gets hit in the hip with a sword, because they didn't put on that leather and metal studded girdle, belt or apron, will likely walk with a limp -- if they are able to continue walking at all.

As Gurnall points out: "***The loins are the chief seat of bodily strength [and mobility]. Of the "behemoth" (possibly the hippo or the elephant) Job 40:16 says, "What strength he has in his loins." The loins are to the body what the keel is to a ship.***"

We lunge, dodge, twist, duck, spin, sprint forward to attack, jump back to avoid a blow, turn quickly to elude a spear or sword, by the strength and agility provided by our loins. And thus, FOOLISH and VULNERABLE is the one who enters the fray of battle without, "his loins girded with the belt of truth."

And then **LAST**, we come to the other piece of protective armor no one should ever go into battle without -- the breastplate of righteousness -- or its closest modern day equivalent, the bullet proof vest. A piece of armor Paul probably would have referenced if he were writing this letter in our day).

It's the piece of armor which protects all the vital organs the stomach, the intestines, and the liver -- but primarily, the heart.

And what is the "breastplate of righteousness"? There are two possibilities. The legal righteousness demanded by the law, or Christ's righteousness, credited or imputed to the sinner's stead by faith.

As for it being legal righteousness, I don't believe it is so. For the righteousness the law demands must be perfect, perpetual, and personal obedience to all God's commands -- a perfect obedience that comes from the heart -- encompassing every affection, all of their attitudes, and all their actions, all the time!

If that were to be the "righteousness" we needed to enable us to stand against Satan's scheme's, we would be defeated before we even started -- for no one can provide such a righteousness.

That's why Christ had to come in the first place! Because no one could keep the law as God required. No one could ever be justified by observing the law. No matter how good our personal obedience seems to us, it is always severely lacking and stained throughout by the sin that dwells within us.

Not only that, Paul says we are to put on the full armor of GOD! This is armor He provides, not armor we provide! The "**breastplate of righteousness**" is NOT our personal obedience, but the flawless obedience of Jesus, credited to us as a gift, by faith.

It's the "**righteousness that comes FROM GOD**" (Rom. 1:17 / 3:21-22 / 4:5...) as a gift to faith and not only covers my unrighteousness, but also protects me against the accusations of Satan, which constantly seek to condemn me for my sin and cause me to lose heart.

That's Paul's point. Satan's aim to wound the heart! And the only defense against it is "the breastplate (or bulletproof vest) of Christ's righteousness."

Why? Because His righteousness is a perfect righteousness! It's an unchanging righteousness! It's a strong, granite-like, rock-solid, impervious, impenetrable righteousness, beyond the ability of Satan to accuse, or find fault with, or point out any lack!

And that's the whole point! A Roman breastplate could be pierced! And it's no wonder! It was made by man! But not so with the breastplate of Christ's righteousness! It's the eternal, unchanging, flawless and holy, personal obedience of Jesus!

So, when I am clothed with it my heart is always safe from attack. God does for me what I could never do for myself. He, "guards my heart, the well-spring of my life." He does it!

So when Satan sees MY sins, and tries to condemn ME by heaping guilt upon MY conscience in an attempt to dishearten me, and discourage me, and get me to loathe myself for all the times I blow it, I stand firm and fight off all his attacks, not with the breastplate of MY own feeble, filthy rags righteousness, but with the bulletproof vest of Christ's flawless righteousness!

When he tries to get me to look at ME, and points out the flaws in ME, I simply point him to the breastplate of Christ's righteousness that covers me, and invite him to shoot at it all he wants! That's where confidence in the battle to protect the heart comes from -- the fact that the armor we use against Satan comes from GOD!

If we foolishly choose to trust in our own righteousness instead of the righteousness of Jesus -- we cannot help but end up wounded, injured, and made useless for the fight. For when Satan attacks your heart, there's only one sure defense -- Jesus blood and righteousness.

Trust in it -- **ALWAYS and ONLY IT** -- and you WILL stand!