

God's Armor – Eph. 6:10-18

Temptation #7

When the citizens of the small town called Ai saw the Israeli army in the distance, they knew that they and the whole Canaanite territory were at a crossroads in life. They had heard the rumors about the manner in which the Jewish people had walked away from their slavery in Egypt. They had anticipated an immediate attempt at conquest, but for some reason unknown to them, the Israeli army had delayed any attempts for decades. But now their D-day had come. The much stronger city of Jericho had already fallen. And it appeared that they were next in line.

Perhaps it was because they had heard of the strong city walls of Jericho falling. But whatever the reason, the soldiers of Ai decided to attack the Israeli army with reckless abandon. To their amazement, the Jewish soldiers turned tail and ran. As the Ai soldiers returned back to the shelter of their own city walls, they knew nothing about the sin of Achan and the judgment of God on the nation of Israel for his disobedience. They only congratulated themselves on their easy victory. This Jewish army wasn't so tough after all.

But then the Israeli soldiers formed outside their city again. They might not be so tough, but at least they're persistent, the Ai soldiers must have thought. Buoyed by their easy victory the first time, they attacked again. And as happened the first time, the Jewish soldiers turned tail and ran. We'll finish them off this time, the Ai army must have thought as they kept pursuing farther and farther from their home city.

But suddenly, the Israeli army turned back upon them. In horror, the Ai army turned to see billows of smoke arising from their city and Jewish troops closing in on them from behind. Now sandwiched between Israeli soldiers in front and behind, they were doomed to defeat. The battle was short. By the end of the day, the city of Ai was no more.

The soldiers of Ai forgot the most important rule of battle. Soldiers have to know the goal of their fighting – they have to understand exactly what they are defending. It was the duty of the Ai army to defend the city of Ai. But buoyed by their temporary successes against the Israeli army, they had left their city without any defense. The vulnerable city had then been easily taken and burned to the ground while the army was diverted and unaware of what was going on.

There are times when an army needs to attack. When there is some strategic ground to be gained, the enemy must be driven back. But there are also times when victory is achieved by just standing one's ground. When something of great value is defended successfully, this is a great victory.

In the battle against God's enemy, Paul commanded the members of the church at Ephesus to stand their ground.

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

Some people become fascinated with the devil. They want to find out all about him. They become obsessed with the spiritual world. They play with Ouija boards and try to have séances. They consult people who claim to be mediums. They seem to be enamored with spiritual power. This is a very foolish and extremely dangerous direction to take in life for it can easily give a place or foothold to the enemy in one's life.

Christians can even become fascinated with the devil. They are always referring to the devil, always rebuking the devil, always focusing on the devil.

Now there is a real enemy of all that is good and righteous. The devil is a real being who is opposed to God and all truth and righteousness. But it is not God's will that we become obsessed with him. This is what the devil wants. He has always wanted to assume the place of God in the universe. He delights in being the center of attention and even worship. But if a person obsesses over the devil, that person is like the soldiers of Ai who leave that which is most valuable unguarded.

God desires for his children to have their focus on the Lord Jesus Christ. He is our Savior. He alone is worthy of worship. The author of Hebrews encourages us to fix or fasten our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith. If we have the proper relationship with our Savior who alone has a perfect record of victory over the devil, then we will be equipped to face temptation when it comes our way. And God has given to us his truth in the inspired Bible. As believers, we have been given the priceless truth of God. God's enemy has always tried to attack that truth. When believers stand their ground and hold on to that truth, they achieve victory against the assaults of the enemy.

We have been looking at the subject of temptation these past Summer Sundays. We have already seen that temptation is any circumstance or thought or inner desire that brings us to a point of moral decision in life. A temptation can be situational. We can be tempted by some unwelcome circumstance that barges into our life. The devil can introduce such a situation into our lives in order to lure us into turning our backs on God as he did in the case of Job in the Bible. A temptation can be thoughtful. We can be tempted by a thought that springs into our minds. There is an ungodly philosophy of life that is sometimes just called "the world" in the Bible that tempts us to live as if God does not exist. We talked about this battle for the mind last week. A temptation can be lustful. We can be tempted by an inner desire that we have. These fleshly desires that try to rule in our lives can tempt us to sin against God. So we have already seen that we face temptations from the devil, the world and the flesh. Whatever the source, temptation occurs when we are brought to a

place of moral decision in our lives. We have already noted that temptation in itself is not sin. Even the sinless Lamb of God was tempted, but he never sinned. Temptation just brings us to the point of making a moral decision. If we accept the temptation into our lives and act upon it, then we sin. But if we reject the temptation and don't act upon it, our faith will grow and we will actually be stronger for having been tempted. In order to be ready for the inevitable temptation that we will all face, we must be prepared and equipped for it in advance. Happily, God has provided armor for his children so that they can be properly protected in the battle of temptation.

Now there are many questions that enter our mind when we read about the armor that God has provided. What really is this armor anyway? Obviously, the Apostle Paul is speaking in allegorical terms here. There isn't any physical armor that we can put our hands on. So the armor that he speaks of here is allegorical, it represents some other spiritual truth. We need to know what this armor is, what it represents. And how do we use this armor? How do we put it on? How do we clothe ourselves with it? These are questions that are critically important if we are to use the spiritual weaponry that God has provided for our use.

Now as I mentioned last week, I believe that each of these pieces of armor is a representation of the Living Word of God, the Lord Jesus Christ himself. Let's first of all, look at the first 3 pieces of armor this morning and see how they represent Christ and how he is our protection before we look at how we appropriate these pieces of armor for our defense.

1. The first piece of armor Paul mentions is the belt of truth that is buckled around our waist. Now this piece of armor was more than just the thin belts that we wear. This was a wide band that protected not only the waist but the hips and the thighs as well. This area is the fulcrum of strength in any body. We are told that the hip joint is the strongest joint in the entire body. If any strenuous labor or heavy lifting is to be done, this area of the body must be used.

Now the spiritual strength for the Christian life is found in the truth that God has given to us. It is our confidence in God's truth that gives us the strength needed for the Christian life. This is the reason for the command to stand firm with our waists supported by the belt of truth.

Now God has given to us his truth in 2 forms – both called the Word of God. The Bible is God's truth in written form. Inspired by God, totally inerrant in its original manuscripts, the Bible is a completely trustworthy guide for life and godliness. And we also have a revelation of God's truth in living form. The Lord Jesus Christ came to this earth with the claim that he was incarnate truth from God. *I am truth* was his claim in John 14:6. *I am the way, the truth and the life. No one is able to come to God the Father except through me.*

Now this claim was not well-received in the relativistic Roman world. The Romans worshipped many gods and goddesses. None of them claimed to be absolute truth. So Jesus was opposed and eventually killed, in part, because of his claim to be God's living absolute truth. But Christ's claim was vindicated when he rose from the dead. His followers recognized and accepted this claim of truth and it gave to them the courage and the strength to start a church that has spread throughout the world.

Now I needn't belabor the point that we live in a world where truth is under attack. There is no absolute truth, we are told. Truth is relative based upon conditions and situations. But we must realize that the very term *relative truth* is an oxymoron. It is a self-contradictory concept. If everything is relative, there can be no truth. If there is truth, then not everything is relative. Jesus Christ came claiming to be God's truth. Our belief and acceptance of that becomes our strength for daily living and for facing daily temptations. Without the belt of truth, we will be weak and vulnerable to the temptations of life.

2. The second piece of armor is the breastplate of righteousness. The breastplate protects the vital organs of the body. The heart, the lungs, the stomach, the liver and other vital organs are protected by the breastplate. If the heart or lungs or liver cease to function, we will be dead in a few moments. Perhaps this is the reason for this area being associated with our affections or emotions down through the generations. In the ancient world, the liver was spoken of as the seat of affections. In our world today, it is the heart that is usually referred to. If we want to address someone affectionately, we called her *sweetheart* not *sweetbrain*. And if we react in an extremely emotional way, our heart is affected. If we are fearful, our heart beats faster. If we are embarrassed, our face flushes with blood from the heart.

Now the enemy desires to get a grip on our emotions. He desires for us to become affectionately attached to that which is not godly. This is the reason for John telling us not to love the world. This is the reason for Paul writing that we are to set our affections on heavenly things rather than earthly things. This is the reason for Jesus Christ advising his disciples to not lay up their treasures here on this earth but to rather lay up their treasures in heaven. God is jealous for the affections of his people. The central command in all of the Bible is to love God with all of our being.

Happily, the Lord Jesus Christ is called our righteousness in the Bible. 1 Cor. 1:30 says, *Christ Jesus has become our righteousness*. Jesus Christ was made sin for us on the cross of Calvary that we might become the righteousness of God in Him. Righteousness is not just something that we are given like an overcoat to wear on a cold day. Righteousness is what we become in the Lord Jesus Christ. As we are placed in the body of Christ and as we put on the Lord Jesus Christ, we are made to be righteous. This enables us to love God. This enables us to love what God loves. This enables us to love God's word. This is our heart's protection – the breastplate of righteousness.

3. The 3rd piece of armor are the shoes of peace – *your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace.*

We live in an anxious world. There are literally tons of medications that are sold every day to people who are desperately trying to experience some peace in their lives. And there is much to be anxious about in our world. The financial world has proven to be fragile. We have enemies who are constantly trying to kill innocent victims through terrorist attacks. Our nation has gone so far in debt that we will never be able to pay it off. We have scientists telling us that global warming is going to destroy our planet. And we never know when we are going to face some personal tragedy – an illness, a death in the family, loss of work, an accident. How can anybody have peace in such a dangerous world?

In his letter to the Ephesians, the Apostle Paul wrote of the Lord Jesus Christ, *he is our peace (Eph. 2:14)*. In the midst of a world that was hopelessly lost in sin and its consequences, the Lord Jesus Christ came as God's peace ambassador called the Prince of Peace to pay the penalty for sin so that we might have peace with God and to be our peace so that we might experience the peace of God in our lives as well.

Oh, Paul, we might think. Jesus Christ being our peace might sound good in theory, but can it really work in the real world. I mean, this world is a scary place. Can we really experience peace with so much uncertainty all around us?

Well, don't forget that the same Apostle Paul who wrote about these pieces of armor also demonstrated his own use of them in the most practical ways. On one occasion, he was sitting in a Roman prison cell. He was not there because he had stolen anything or hurt anybody. He was there because some people were envious of him. We know that he couldn't have been comfortable physically because Roman prisons were not hospitable places to be in. They didn't have air conditioning or color TV's. We would think that Paul would have been filled with anger, plotting out his revenge if he would ever be released. But Paul was filled with the peace and love of God. In fact, he wrote these words to one of the churches he had planted:

⁶ Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. ⁷ And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

How could a man in such circumstances be filled with such peace? Paul had his peace shoes on – he had his feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. Paul knew the Lord Jesus Christ as his peace. He not only had the confidence of having peace with God, but he also experienced the peace of God that transcends all understanding.

Now there are 3 more pieces of armor that we plan to discuss next week, the Lord willing, but I want to conclude by answering another of the questions that we introduced at the beginning of the sermon – how do we put this armor on? If each of these pieces of armor is a figurative representation of the Lord Jesus Christ, where is the closet where we can put these pieces of armor on?

Every Christian knows how to put these pieces of armor on because he or she has already gone through a similar process once.

In Colossians 2:6, Paul writes *just as you have received Christ Jesus as Lord, so continue to live in him.*

Let me ask you this question. If you are a member of God's family, how did you receive Christ Jesus as Lord? How did you become a member of God's family?

1. First, you heard the truth of the gospel, didn't you? You recognized that you were a sinner and that Jesus Christ died for your sin upon the cross of Calvary. You realized that if you received Jesus Christ into your life, you would be born again into God's family.

2. You decided that you would act on the truth that you had heard. You prayed to receive Jesus Christ. You actually invited Jesus Christ into your life from your heart.

3. What happened? When you acted upon God's truth, God was true to his word. He saved you. You became a member of God's family. And you know in your heart that you are a Christian because you know the work of grace that has been done in your life.

Now too many Christians think that while they are saved by grace through faith, once they are a Christian, they are now on their own. It is as if God tosses them into the deep end of the pool and says *now learn to swim*. Nothing could be further from the truth. Paul says that we live the Christian life the same way that we became a Christian. The way that we become a Christian should become the pattern for how we now live the Christian life. *Just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, so continue to live in him.* We are not only saved by grace through faith, we also continue to live by grace through faith. The Christian life is the life of faith.

So let's apply this now.

1. We read in God's word the truth that we are in Christ Jesus. This is our position as a believer. Part of this blessing is that we have been clothed with the Lord Christ Jesus. We looked at the truth in Galatians 3:26,27 a couple of weeks ago. Let me remind you of it again.

GAL 3:26 You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, 27 for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.

This passage tells us that all true children of God have been clothed with Jesus Christ. So if you are a child of God this morning, you have been clothed with Jesus Christ. This is your spiritual position in Christ. You have all of the pieces of the armor in your closet.

2. But you must move to the 2nd step. You must choose to act upon this truth and receive it into your life. Just as not everyone who hears the gospel that Jesus died for their sins is a Christian because many do not act upon it, accepting the Lord Jesus Christ as their personal Savior, so it is possible and is clearly evident that not every Christian who has been clothed with the Lord Jesus Christ acts upon that truth, trusting in Jesus Christ to be their truth, their righteousness and their peace. That is the reason for Paul writing,

¹⁴ Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature.

You have to act upon God's truth. You have to put on the clothing God has provided for you. Just as you are going to be wet if you don't take the umbrella or raincoat out of the closet on a rainy day, so you are not going to have the truth of God as your strength, your affections protected by God's righteousness and God's peace ruling in your life if you don't put on the armor of God by faith. And just as prayer was essential in receiving Jesus Christ, so prayer is essential in this process as well. The armor paragraph ends with the command to *pray in the spirit*.

3. As you believe God's word to be true and act upon that truth in faith, God will be faithful to his word and you will experience the protection of God's armor in your life.

Now we are going to talk about this more next week as we look at the last 3 pieces of God's armor.