

Belt of Truth

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[0 : 00] Well, go with me, if you will, to Ephesians chapter 6. Ephesians chapter 6.

We are continuing our study of what the Apostle Paul refers to as the whole armor of God. This is Ephesians 6, starting with verse 10.

Paul writes, Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might. Put on the whole armor of God that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil.

For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.

Therefore, take up the whole armor of God that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm. Stand, therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace.

[1 : 10] In all circumstances, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one, and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, praying at all times in the Spirit with all prayer and supplication.

So, as Roger showed us last week, we as Christians are engaged in spiritual warfare, and the primary enemy is the devil himself.

Peter says, So, the first thing for us to recognize is that the devil is, in fact, real.

And second, we need to realize that he is our adversary. He is our enemy. And his purpose is to destroy. Peter says he seeks someone to devour.

Now, in the context of 1 Peter 5, where he said that the devil is like a roaring lion, Peter indicates that he uses persecution to devour us.

[2 : 22] He goes on to write, In other words, the devil was using men to physically persecute the church.

But you'll notice that neither Peter nor Paul tells anyone to fight back against their persecutors. Instead, Peter tells us to resist the devil, standing firm in our faith.

Paul says, Stand against the schemes of the devil, for we do not wrestle against flesh and blood. This is vital insight.

As the early Christians were suffering physical violence, in many cases, the apostles reminded them that their fight wasn't really against their persecutors. Their fight was against the devil, against these evil forces working against them, who, you know, as far as the devil goes, Paul said, had blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ.

So the apostles were really echoing Jesus in this case. Those suffering Christians may have thought at times, you know, we need to take up arms against our enemies before they destroy us.

[3 : 41] We need to fight back. But like Jesus, Peter and Paul say, No, put your sword away. For all who take the sword will perish by the sword.

We do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. Peter says, Be firm in your faith.

Because that's really what's at stake here. Let's just set aside your physical well-being for a moment. This is spiritual warfare. This is about your heart and soul.

And you'll notice that more often than not, the devil's purpose is not to necessarily physically devour.

More often than not, he's described as a deceiver. The God of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers. According to Revelation 20, when Satan is given liberty, he does what?

[4 : 44] He comes out to deceive the nations. We just finished a study of James. In the book of James, James addresses professing Christians who are wildly inconsistent in their behaviors, which James describes as a matter of double-mindedness.

Yes, their behaviors were inconsistent, but this is largely because their minds were inconsistent. More than once, he warns them against deceiving themselves.

Then in chapter 4, you'll remember, he says, resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded.

Do you see what was happening? Well, we might reverse what he said. He could have said, you are double-minded because you are not resisting the devil. Your thinking is warped because you are not doing anything to resist the devil's influence over your mind.

Jesus said, the devil is a liar and the father of lies. That's John 8, 44. As Roger pointed out last week, the devil has proven himself a liar from the very beginning.

[6 : 00] In the Garden of Eden, he twisted God's words. God said, you may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, you shall not eat.

But the devil comes along and says to Eve, did God actually say, you shall not eat of any tree in the garden? Technically, no, that's not what he said.

God said, you can eat of every tree except one. But the devil gives his words a subtle change. He quotes God as saying, you shall not eat of any tree.

So he plants this little seed in Eve's mind that makes her see God not as the gracious, abundant giver he was, but more strict, as though he's withholding goodness from them.

You see that? And you come to see that influence on Eve when she says, we may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, but God said, you shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it.

[7 : 17] Well, technically, God didn't say anything about touching it. And I can't help but wonder if maybe in Eve's mind, God very quickly went from an abundant giver to kind of a strict oppressor.

I can't help but wonder whether the devil's twisting of God's words prompted her to shift her perspective of God just a little bit. Well, this is what the devil does.

He wants nothing more than for us to believe lies. Specifically, he wants us to believe lies about God. He wants us to doubt God. He wants us to doubt God's promises.

He wants us to doubt God's word. Do you remember when Jesus tried to tell his disciples that he needed to go to Jerusalem and suffer? Peter wouldn't hear of it.

He effectively denied the need for Christ's death and resurrection. And now someone might argue that Peter's heart was in the right place. Yes, he was just concerned for Jesus. But Jesus said, Get behind me, Satan.

[8 : 23] For you are not setting your things, your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man. Later, Jesus would say to Peter, Satan demanded to have you that he may sift you like wheat.

But I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail. What did the devil want? What did he hope to accomplish by sifting Peter like wheat?

Well, he wanted Peter's faith to fail. He wanted to fuel Peter's doubts and his misunderstandings. He wanted to devour Peter by deceiving him.

This is what the devil does. So it shouldn't be too surprising that when Paul tells us to put on the whole armor of God that we may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil, he tells us first to put on the belt of truth.

The truth is positively vital when the devil is inundating us with lies. Earlier this week, I was thinking about this and I thought, what are some of the common yet subtle lies people believe about God?

[9 : 36] And there are many. And I actually started to make a list, but I'll just give you one example for the sake of time. Here's one we hear quite often. It's become very popular today.

God is love, so he accepts you no matter what. Do you see how subtle that is? Yes, God is love, but he is also holy.

He is also just, which can be seen very, very clearly on the cross. He is love, so he sent his son to save us, but he is also holy and just, which is why he poured out his wrath on Jesus.

He didn't merely sweep our sins under the rug saying, you know, I realize that you've sinned against me, but I accept you no matter what. No, a holy and just God can't do that.

But because he is love, he sent his own son to suffer the punishment in our place. Genesis 3 says, the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the Lord God had made.

[10:51] I believe the KJV uses the word subtle. He's more subtle. Here in Ephesians 6, Paul refers to the schemes of the devil. He's cunning.

He's tricky. He has, if you will, an intentional and intelligent plan for deceiving people. In other words, he knows what he's doing. He knows how to be subtle and consequently effective. It's hard to convince people of an obvious lie, but if he takes a bunch of truth and, you know, it just sprinkles in the lies. The lies become that much harder to detect.

And yet, poison is poison. It'll have a detrimental effect over time, one way or the other. We should remember something Paul told the Corinthians. In 2 Corinthians chapter 11, he said, Satan disguises himself as an angel of light.

The last thing he would do is parade around in a red suit with horns and a pitchfork. We'd see him coming from a mile away. No, he's too crafty for that.

[12:01] So, how are we to defend ourselves against the devil's relentless attacks since he is so clever and so subtle and so disguised?

Well, Paul tells us here, take up the whole armor of God that you may be able to withstand in the evil day and having done all to stand firm. And the first piece of armor we are to put on is the belt of truth.

Now, the phrase here might be literally translated into girding your waist with truth. In biblical times, a soldier would wear a long tunic under his armor.

But a long tunic could cause a couple of potential problems. First, the more loose clothing a soldier has exposed, the more material his enemy has available to grab onto him, to yank him with it.

Keep in mind that soldiers during this time are fighting in hand-to-hand combat. They're not shooting rifles from across a field, as crazy as that was. They're certainly not firing missiles from miles and miles away.

[13:06] So, loose clothing's a problem. That gives their enemy something to grab onto, something to catch. And the second problem with a long tunic is that it restricts your leg's mobility.

You can't move your legs very well. One can't easily run, for instance, if his tunic falls below his knees. So, men had two options.

They could pull the bottom of the tunic up and tie it underneath them, kind of like a diaper. And by the way, you can actually watch demonstrations of this on YouTube.

Or, they could use some kind of belt to tuck the ends of the tunic and keep it in place. And typically, that is going to be the first step a soldier would take when preparing himself for battle.

Before putting anything else on, he would get that tunic pulled up and tucked into his belt. belt.

Now, I know a belt doesn't feel like the most critical piece of armor, but it is.

[14:13] Perhaps nothing better represents a soldier's readiness for battle than girding his waist. It's a seemingly small step, but it demonstrates that he is, in fact, prepared for battle.

And maybe an illustration would help. You probably know of the rock band Van Halen. Well, for years, people thought David Lee Roth, the lead singer of Van Halen, was kind of a diva, and he probably was.

But, whenever Van Halen went to a new venue to play, David Lee Roth would always request a huge bowl of M&Ms; Only, he wanted all of the brown M&Ms; taken out.

Now, everyone knows that the brown ones really don't taste any different than the others. Maybe you would argue that, but regardless, everyone just assumed that he was making this request to, I don't know, mess with people.

They thought he was, I don't know, David Lee Roth. He can get away with this, right? But as it happens, he was testing the venue's attention to detail.

[15:19] So, Van Halen used a lot of pyrotechnics, a lot of fire, a lot of dangerous things, a lot of moving parts when they would play a show. So, when Roth walked into his room, if he was to see a bowl full of M&Ms; and the brown ones were still there, he knew to send his guys out to the stage and double-check everything because they were not paying attention to details.

So, he just wanted to keep people safe during the show. So, a soldier, he may put on his helmet, he may grab his sword, but if his commanding officer looks down and sees his tunic, you know, flapping in the wind, hanging below his knees, he would know that soldier is not ready for battle.

He may look the part, but he's not, he's not truly ready. He's not prepared. If the guy has to run for any reason, he's done. If he gets too close to the enemy, he might get yanked down from behind. If his waist wasn't girded, if he's not wearing his belt, he's not ready. As they say, the devil is in the details. Do you remember when the Israelites were preparing for their exodus out of Egypt? They painted lamb's blood over the doorposts and then they sat down for their first Passover meal well, in Exodus 12, God said to them, in this manner you shall eat it with your belt fastened, your sandals on your feet and your staff in your hand and you shall eat it in haste.

[16:55] It is the Lord's Passover. Well, why did they need their belts fastened? For most of us, that's the time to unloosen the belt, to sit down and eat. Well, they needed to be ready, to leave in a moment's notice.

When Pharaoh said, get out of here, there would be no time to waste. They needed to be ready to run out that door so that tunic needed to be hiked up above their knees so they could move.

So there is definitely a sense in which the belt or the girded waist represents readiness. It says, I'm prepared for action. I'm ready to go. In the case of Christians engaged in spiritual warfare, it says, I'm ready for the fight.

I'm prepared to stand against the schemes of the devil. I'm prepared to resist his subtle efforts to deceive me and shake my faith and cause me doubts.

So that's the basic idea behind the belt. Now, some commentators will also point out that the belt used by Roman soldiers in particular carried their swords as well.

[18:02] So if Paul is thinking here about Roman armor, he might be alluding to some connection between the belt of truth and the sword of the spirit, which is the word of God.

And I think that's a distinct possibility. After all, there is a clear connection between truth and the word of God. However, we could find connections between all of the various parts of this armor, which is kind of the point.

Every part of this armor is indispensable. We need every piece working together. Truth, righteousness, peace, faith, salvation, the word of God, all of it. Think of it this way.

While we are making an effort to study and examine each individual piece of God's armor, we need to remember that Paul says put on the whole armor of God.

We don't want to miss the forest for the trees. Paul is offering an illustration here. This is not systematic theology, if you will. It's not as though Paul is saying, okay, your first step as a Christian is to put on truth.

[19:14] Now, once you've done that, you'll have a place for your sword. But don't slide your sword into place just yet because, no, Paul is just using a simple illustration to convey how important it is to have all of these things in spiritual battle.

So, we don't want to get too carried away in our attempts to understand the illustration. We want to understand the point of the illustration. The most important thing in this text, in verse 14, is not the belt.

It's the word truth. Truth. What does Paul mean by truth? Well, this word can have two distinct meanings. First, it can refer to something that is true.

In other words, it's not a lie, it's not a falsehood, it's a true statement. For example, Jesus said, in truth, I tell you. I'm not lying to you, I'm not being dishonest.

This is an honest and correct statement. And this is a word that is often used in connection with divine truth. That is, the word of God or even the gospel of Jesus Christ.

[20:24] The apostle John said, grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. grace and truth. But this word can also refer to sincerity. For example, Paul says in 1 Corinthians 5.8, let us therefore celebrate the festival not with the old leaven, the leaven of malice and evil, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.

Paul uses two very similar words in that verse. He's talking about honesty and integrity. Don't be hypocritical. Don't be double-minded. Be honest. Be sincere. Be people of integrity.

Be faithful. Well, in what way is Paul using this word here in Ephesians 6.14? Is he saying we need to equip ourselves by knowing what is true or by being people of integrity?

Is he talking more about content or character? character. Well, I would argue it's both. But character could very well be his emphasis here.

And I say that because both the gospel and the word of God are mentioned as separate pieces of armor. Again, there's a connection between every piece of this armor, but I think we have to

assume Paul's emphasis is at least slightly different with each one.

[21 : 47] And in this case, the belt just might suggest that he's talking about attitude or character as much as anything. As we saw in our study of the book of James, spiritual warfare requires integrity.

We are to be people of integrity. Even so, let's take a moment to assume both meanings. Beginning with the idea that the truth in this case is the truth of God.

It's what God has said. It's what the Bible says. It's correct doctrine and theology. So I've often heard it said that when federal agents are training to detect counterfeit money, they don't study counterfeit money.

Instead, they study real U.S. dollars. They have to become intimately familiar with every possible detail on the dollar bill. And it's because once they know every detail of the real thing, then any deviation they see, which there will no doubt be a variety of them along the way, any deviation they see will become obvious to them.

In other words, they know the truth and they know it well and they can easily spot the lies. That's the idea. The deviations won't match the truth that they've become so familiar with.

[23 : 08] So, if demonic forces are on this unrelenting mission to deceive us and to weaken our faith, what are we supposed to do to defend ourselves against it? Well, we need to know the truth.

We need to have learned it well. We need to have studied it, meditated on it, and allowed it to permeate into the depths of our hearts and minds as thoroughly as possible.

And we need to make this a consistent habit. As Paul says in Romans 12, do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind.

If the God of this world is throwing lies at us day after day after day, it stands to reason we should be studying the truth day after day after day.

Here's what one author has written. Those best prepared for spiritual war wrap their souls in God's truth through various habits and patterns personally and corporately, through reading and rereading and study and meditation and memorization and discussion.

[24 : 21] They click on content that strengthens their bearings and their delight in truth rather than error. We all wrap our souls in something.

Is it truth or error? And as we practice choosing truth daily, reading truth, clicking truth, meditating on truth, talking truth, then we become ready to discern truth from error, counterfeits and half-truths. So like those federal agents studying the dollar, the better we know the real thing, the better equipped we are to spot the fakes. We'll know the lies when we hear them.

Whether they come to us from someone in conversation or while we're listening to a podcast or reading a book or through our own intrusive thoughts, we'll know the lies when we hear them, assuming we know the truth and we know it well.

We'll know when we hear something that contradicts it. In Jude's short epistle, he writes, Beloved, although I was very eager to write to you about our common salvation, I found it necessary to write appealing to you to contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints.

[25 : 37] For certain people have crept in unnoticed who long ago were designated for this condemnation, ungodly people who pervert the grace of our God into sensuality and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ.

Now when he says contend for the faith, by faith he means this body of truth regarding Jesus Christ that has been given to us through Christ and then the apostles.

And he says there are people who want to pervert this truth. You know, they want to turn it. They want to manipulate it. They want to change it into something else that better serves their own purpose.

Namely, their sensuality, their pursuit of pleasure. And Jude says they are very subtle about it. He says they have crept in unnoticed.

They didn't announce their arrival. They didn't announce their intentions, of course. They slipped in. Undetected. They are just like their father the devil in that way.

[26 : 44] In fact, Jude goes on to talk about the demons who left their proper dwelling. And what does Jude want these early Christians to do as he writes to them? Well, he says contend for the faith.

Struggle for the truth. Earnestly defend it. Of course, knowing the truth is implied in this, right? Can't contend for something you don't know.

You have to know the truth in order to struggle for it, to defend it. Especially in the face of all of these competing ideas and doctrines. And perhaps the best example of this is Jesus himself. In fact, let me read from Matthew chapter 4 at length when the devil attacks Christ. Notice how he responds.

Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. And after fasting 40 days and 40 nights, he was hungry. And the tempter came and said to him, if you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.

[27 : 55] But he answered, it is written, man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God. Then the devil took him up to the holy city and set him on the pinnacle of the temple and said to him, if you are the Son of God, throw yourself down, for it is written, he will command his angels concerning you and on their hands they will bear you up lest you strike your foot against a stone.

Jesus said to him, again, it is written, you shall not put the Lord your God to the test. Again, the devil took him up to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory and he said to him, all these things I will give you if you will fall down and worship me. Then Jesus said to him, be gone, Satan, for it is written, you shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve. Then the devil left and behold, angels came and were ministering to him. Now I want you to notice a few things here. First, regarding the devil, you'll notice he attacks Jesus at his weakest point. Jesus is severely hungry and the devil comes along and says, hey, why don't you just break your fast?

Turn these stones into bread. second, we see the devil here using scripture to tempt Jesus.

[29 : 28] Jesus responds to the first temptation with, it is written. And the devil turns around and he offers a second temptation saying, it is written.

As I said before, he's not prone to attack us with obvious lies. His lies, I guess you could say he uses truth kind of like a Trojan horse.

The lies are hidden somewhere. It's just not obvious. Third, and this is really the point, Jesus responds to each temptation with the truth.

Specifically, he responds with the truth of God's word. He quotes Old Testament scripture. Even in his humanity, the Lord's mind was so saturated with the Bible that the devil's lies and temptations do not influence him.

Immediately, he knows something is amiss when he hears it because he knows the truth so well. Along these lines, listen to what Paul writes in 2 Timothy 3.

[30 : 40] He says, evil people and imposters will go on from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived. But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed knowing from whom you have learned it and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.

What does he mean by the sacred writings? Well, he continues, all scripture, all scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction and for training in righteousness that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

So as people are deceiving and being deceived, Paul says the best defense is the divine God-breathed truth of scripture.

Continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed. Now, that's the most obvious way the word truth is used. It refers to the truth of the Bible.

But let's briefly consider truth as truthfulness. In other words, Paul could be referring to the integrity of one's character. As we learn from the book of James, it's one thing to know the truth, it's another to faithfully, consistently obey the truth.

[32 : 10] Now, the primary reason I think Paul just might have character in mind here, or at least in part, is because he seems to be borrowing from the Old Testament as he puts together this armor of God.

In other words, these various pieces of armor appear to come from different parts of the Old Testament. As for the belt of truth, it seems highly likely that Paul is alluding to Isaiah chapter 11 and verse 5.

So, in Isaiah 11, God, through Isaiah, is speaking to the disobedient, unfaithful people of Judah, and he warns them that there will be consequences for their sins.

But, he also foretells the coming Messiah who will save his people from their sins. So, there's good news mixed in with the bad news.

And in Isaiah 11, he says of the coming Savior, verse 5, righteousness shall be the belt of his waist, and faithfulness the belt of his loins.

[33 : 16] Now, obviously, the first thing we notice is that the Messiah is said to wear a belt. Isaiah calls it a belt of righteousness and faithfulness. But the belt's not the only connection this has to Ephesians 6.

You see, when the Old Testament was later translated into Greek, that is, a time prior to Christ and his apostles, the word faithfulness here was translated into the same word Paul uses in Ephesians 6.14.

So, faithfulness and truth are interchangeable. Isaiah 11.5 could have been translated, righteousness shall be the belt of his waist, and truth the belt of his loins.

And Ephesians 6.14 could have been translated as, stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of faithfulness. Now, the word faithfulness conveys a slightly different meaning, doesn't it?

Gives you a slightly different picture of this. Truth makes us think of content, such as the content of the Bible. It's the substance of what we believe. Faithfulness, however, says something about character.

[34 : 31] Faithfulness implies knowing the truth and listening to the truth and actually practicing the truth. It implies the integrity of someone who wholeheartedly commits to the truth, to obeying the truth.

And that's certainly, certainly what we have in Christ Jesus. Without fail, he wore the belt of truth or the belt of faithfulness.

The book of Hebrews says we do not, excuse me, have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.

John says, you know that he appeared in order to take away sins and in him there is no sin. And because he remained faithful, perfectly obedient to the truth from the beginning of his life all the way to the end, Paul says, for our sake, God made him to be sin who knew no sin so that we might become the righteousness of God.

So there are two thoughts I want to leave you with. The first is that preparing ourselves to stand against the schemes of the devil requires more than merely knowing the truth.

[35 : 59] Yes, we need to be intimately familiar with it, renewing our minds daily, but girding our waists with truth likely means that we are also striving to be faithful to the truth.

Mere head knowledge will not suffice. Brothers, be doers of the word, not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. Second, as Paul points us back to the Old Testament, within this armor of God, he is pointing us to Christ himself.

When he says, put on the whole armor of God, he could have very well said, put on Christ. Now the reason I make this point is that we might get the impression that Paul is telling us to pick up this armor, put it on, fight the battle, as though we're doing it alone.

In fact, I was talking with a gentleman this past week and he had a lot to say about spiritual warfare. He said, the devil just keeps trying to get me, but I won't let him.

I've been beating him back every time. And he says this with kind of a proud grin on his face and at one point I interjected. I said, don't you mean by God's grace you beat the devil? And he said, oh yeah, yeah, God gave me the weapons, that's for sure.

[37 : 21] I think he does more than that. Paul says, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might.

You'll notice this is God's armor. It's not our armor. This is God's armor. We are successful against Satan only by God's strength.

We don't stand a chance apart from Christ. We would not have this armor if Christ had not girded his own waist with truth, died in our place and risen from the grave.

We'd be as helpless against the devil as the unbelieving world, blind and deceived with no hope at all. So as we look to this armor for help, let's remember that we're ultimately looking to Christ.

Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we thank you as we conclude this study this morning for this armor that you have guaranteed us through Christ.

[38 : 31] We thank you first of all that we have grace and truth through your Son. We thank you for his sinless life, for the righteousness he fulfilled throughout his days on this earth.

we thank you for his atoning sacrifice and we thank you for his resurrection. Because now we can stand against the schemes of the devil through Christ and the armor that he is providing that he is providing us daily.

Lord, may we seek your strength. May we look to you and to your Son daily as we fight these battles. we are in a real spiritual warfare.

We hear lies all of the time and it shakes our faith, it causes us doubts, it makes us question the truth and I pray that you would help us by your grace.

Give us insight, give us wisdom, give us courage, give us strength, equip us with the truth and all of the various pieces of armor that we need to stand against the schemes of the devil.

[39 : 45] We ask this in Christ's name. Amen.