



Adult Sunday School Lesson Summary for May 31, 2009

Released on Wednesday, May 27, 2009

"Equipped for New Life"

Lesson Text: Ephesians 6:10–18

Background Scripture: Ephesians 6:10–18

Devotional Reading: Luke 11:14–23

Ephesians 6:10–18

10 Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might.

11 Put on the whole armor of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.

12 For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.

13 Wherefore take unto you the whole armor of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.

14 Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness;

15 And your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace;

16 Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked.

17 And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God:

18 Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints.

LESSON AIMS:

Facts: to learn about the different parts of God's armor that we need to experience new life in Jesus.

Principle: to show that when we put on the whole armor of God, we will be fully equipped to experience new life in Christ.

Application: to make sure students understand what the armor of God is and are motivated to make full use of it.

INTRODUCTION:

One of the most popular spectator sports of the twenty-first century is American-style football. Although it is somewhat obscure outside the United States and Canada, this is one of the highest revenue-generating sports on the planet. High school football teams have rabid fans. The fans of football teams of major universities are no less passionate. The "identity" of a large city can be tied to its professional football franchise.

At its core, football is a type of mock warfare. Points are scored by pushing the battle line into the opponent's end zone. Brutal, hand-to-hand combat occurs *in the trenches*, the line of scrimmage. The key player, the quarterback, is often referred to as the *field general* who directs his *troops*. Players with experience are *veterans*. A long pass is called *a bomb*.

As the game of football has developed, there have been many improvements in equipment. A fully dressed football player wears many items to protect himself from the physical pounding of the game. All players wear helmets with face masks. Each player wears a custom mouth guard to protect his teeth. Very prominent are the pads that allow players to use their shoulders like battering rams. Some players wear flak jackets to protect their ribs. Football pants are equipped with hip pads, thigh pads, and knee pads to guard those body parts. Some players even use shoes with steel toes to protect their feet.

While there are many injuries in football, this system of body armor is amazingly effective, given the speed of the game and the intensity of the hits. We can imagine how quickly a person wearing only a soccer player's gear would be injured on the full-contact football field.

When we look at a depiction of a Roman soldier of Paul's day, the soldier may appear to us to have used strange equipment. But he was armed and armored using the finest equipment available at the time. If his armor kept him from becoming a casualty, he could fight the next battle too. The apostle Paul never served in the Roman army. But he had seen Roman soldiers up close on more than one occasion.

Paul knew that there was a far more consequential war being waged outside the realm of earthly armies. Paul understood and taught that all believers would be called upon to engage in warfare against spiritual powers that would seek to destroy their faith. Our commander does not send us into battle unarmored. God has provided spiritual armor for each believer.

LESSON BACKGROUND:

Time: A. D. 60

Place: from Rome

In writing Ephesians, Paul revealed a special concern for spiritual realities. He was acutely aware that there is a spiritual realm, unseen to us, where important things take place that affect us. Paul referred to this realm as the "heavenly places."

This realm is the source of our spiritual blessings (Ephesians 1:3). Yet this realm is also the habitation of "principalities and powers," meaning the evil spiritual forces that seek to enslave humanity (Ephesians 3:10). The New Testament teaches that all spiritual powers eventually will be brought to submission (1 Corinthians 15:24; Philippians 2:10; 1 Peter 3:22), but that time has not yet come (Hebrews 2:8).

There are two extremes to be avoided when considering the nature of the spiritual realm or the spirit world. *Animism*, on the one hand, is the belief that almost everything in nature has a spirit associated with it. In this belief, there is a river god, a tree god, a monkey god, a mountain god, a storm god, etc. In this worldview, life is a matter of tiptoeing through the spheres of these little gods, pleasing and appeasing each as necessary.

On the other end of the spectrum, *secular materialism* is based on the idea that there are no spiritual realities at all. In this worldview, gods and angels are no different from elves and leprechauns. At the end of the day, if there is no tooth fairy, then there are no gods, either. This view of life believes that there are no hidden spiritual powers, good or bad, and humans are called to make their way boldly in a godless world.

Paul taught neither the chaotic and fearful world of the animists nor the lonely and even scarier world of the materialists. He personally had experienced the spiritual world in dramatic, convincing ways (see 2 Corinthians 12:1-4). Yet he understood that this realm was not a playground for competing deities of varying powers. Paul knew that there is one God. The spiritual world is delineated between those forces aligned with God and those forces in rebellion against God.

We do not understand why the all-powerful God continues to allow these evil spiritual forces to exist (nor did Paul). However, for as long as the spiritual realm is populated with these rebellious powers, they will seek to bring men and woman under their thrall as co-rebels against God.

This, then, is cosmic warfare of the most deadly type. Paul knew that Christians must constantly be on guard against spiritual attacks, for their hearts and minds are the battleground. Paul also knew that God had not left believers without defenses. Such is the focus of this week's lesson.

THE WARFARE DESCRIBED (Ephesians 6:10-13)

1. What is the source of the Christian's strength in spiritual warfare? (Ephesians 6:10-11)

With the words "finally, my brethren," Paul gave final instructions to his readers. He recognized that they would daily experience spiritual conflict. Yet he was confident that they could win, and he taught them how this could occur.

Paul urged them to be strengthened in the Lord. The strength to overcome must always be His, not ours. It must be in the power of God's might, for His arm, possessing infinite raw might, is stretched out and ready to help (cf. Acts 13:17). This power raised Christ from the dead to sit at His right hand (Eph. 1:19-23) and raised us from spiritual death to sit with Him (2:1-6). It can also deliver us from satanic attacks if we rely on it by faith.

One of the biggest reasons for our failure to overcome sin is that we try to do so in our own fleshly strength. Either we underestimate the power of our enemy or we overestimate our natural moral abilities. Either way, we do not claim God's spiritual strength in our time of need, and we fall into sin. It is essential that we recognize our frailty and go to Him for the resources we need for victory.

Paul restated the command figuratively: "Put on the whole armour of God" (Eph. 6:11) admonishes us to dress ourselves in the protective *armor* provided by *God*. The emphasis is on using the entirety of our gear, for none of it is optional. Paul's purpose for this is clear: to allow us to withstand the devil's attacks.

The Greek word translated *wiles* is the term from which we get our English word *methods*. One commentator noted that the most dangerous thing about Satan is his inconsistency. Satan will attack any weakness when least expected. (Ironically, we may say that he is very consistent in this regard!) His craftiness and trickery are a constant threat. We can neither predict nor anticipate these assaults, and thus we must be fully protected and on guard in order to resist him.

2. Why did Paul most likely use military illustrations in this passage?

As suggested in the introduction, Paul apparently used military figures of speech because he saw so much of the military during his Roman imprisonment. Paul drew his illustrations from the Roman army. Being chained to soldiers in Rome, he had ample opportunity to observe their armor and weaponry and to ask them questions about fighting. He incorporated all this into his portrayal of a Christian's spiritual warfare.

Here Paul developed military metaphors more fully than in any other section of Scripture. His reference to the panoply of God stresses the fact that the complete armor is essential for complete protection. To win, a Christian must use every resource God provides.

3. What is the nature of the spiritual enemies we have to face? (v. 12)

We need God's strength not only because of our weakness but also because of the nature of the enemy. Paul called our primary enemy "the devil," a title that emphasizes Satan's slanderous activities. The devil attacks us with his "wiles," a term that speaks of schemes, craft, and trickery. Satan never fights pitched battles in which we know what to expect. His attacks are subtle, deceitful, underhanded, and unexpected.

Satan's playbook is full of evil schemes, or "devices" (2 Cor. 2:11), to use against us. He tries to lead us astray through pride, doubt, discouragement, divisiveness, bad advice, moral lapses, and much more. No wonder we need divine strength!

In spiritual warfare we contend not only with Satan but also with his armies of demons (Eph. 6:12). They are not "flesh and blood"—We sometimes are prone to think that the fight for righteousness, goodness, and holiness is a test of human wills and different philosophies. It is true that our fallen world produces some unimaginably evil and depraved human beings. But Paul knows that this is but an outcome produced by the spiritual warfare that is constantly being waged. Men and women (*flesh and blood*) are not our ultimate enemies. They are the fallen children of God. Our true adversaries are *rulers of the darkness* and *spiritual wickedness in high places*. This is not a cryptic reference to world governments or conspiracy theories. It is a description of very real evil spiritual beings who are in league with Satan.

Though wicked, these beings inhabit celestial realms—not God's heaven but some celestial domain that is not in the physical realm. From there, unseen to us, they work to impede the work of God, as they did in keeping an angel from reaching Daniel (Dan. 10:12-13, 20-21). Jesus encountered these powers during His ministry, and they sensed in Him a mortal threat (cf. Mark 1:23-24; 5:6-10).

4. Why is the full armor essential in our preparation for battle? (v. 13)

In Ephesians 6:13, Paul states, "wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God." "Wherefore" means "on account of this." On account of the nature of the foe, the full armor is essential. Through it we can "withstand in the evil day."

The *evil day* that Paul foresees is not necessarily a time of apocalyptic distress for all humanity. It is, rather, the day that each believer faces, the day when faith itself is sorely tested. It is the day when our trials wear us down, and we are tempted to forsake our Savior for the life of sin and despair. This day may be repeated many times in our lives.

Paul's image here is of a soldier who is still standing when the battle is done. If the fight is over and we are standing, then we are not casualties. We have not been thrown down and dominated in the spiritual wrestling match. As Paul says elsewhere, we are victors in the battle, "more than conquerors" (Romans 8:37).

This survival will not be from our own resources, but from the protective *whole armor* provided by God for our safety. God does not save us one day only to lose us later. He wants us to be safe, even on the most evil of days.

It is a spiritual battle for which we need divine strength. Our enemies are spirits who are powerful world rulers under Satan's leadership. We therefore need to use *all* the resources God provides.

THE RESOURCES DESCRIBED (Ephesians 6:14-18)

5. Why is truth likened to a soldier's belt? Why is it essential in Christian warfare? (v. 14a)

Paul names the qualities we need for spiritual victory, likening each to a part of the soldier's equipment. We are first told to stand firm, "having your loins girt about with truth." The *loins* is the area from waist to knees. This area is lightly armored for the Roman soldier so that he can maintain his maneuverability.

For the soldier, the girding of the loins signified readiness for action. To "gird up one's loins" is a common expression in Paul's day that means "prepare for a fight" (see 1 Peter 1:13). The soldier had to fasten up his garments to keep his legs free. The belt was worn for this purpose and was tightened to the ready position when the battle was about to begin.

Undermining or twisting the *truth* is one of Satan's favorite strategies (example: Matthew 4:1-11). Honesty before God and men is essential for us to be free to fight. Nothing hinders our warfare more than entanglements like a hidden sin, a guilty conscience, an act of deceit, an un-confessed lie, or an unyielded life. Satan uses such things to drag us down and defeat us repeatedly.

Yet truth can be an impenetrable defense. If we always tell the truth, we will not be caught in a tangle of our own lies. Lies—whether ones we tell or false philosophies we accept—bog us down. Truth keeps us mobile and active because relying on God's truth means that the devil won't be able to draw us into his quagmire of deceit.

6. How does righteousness accomplish what a breastplate does? (v. 14b)

The Roman *breastplate* was made of leather covered with bronze. It was "muscled" to make the warrior look strong and fearsome. This armor protected only the front of the soldier, for he was expected to face the battle. There was no protection for the back, no armor for the one who turns and runs.

Protection of the torso is critical, for this part of the body houses many vital organs. If a spear or arrow is not deflected by the breastplate, death can follow quickly. Righteous behavior is a protection from attacks on one's personal integrity. When a believer falls publicly, the entire church is damaged and its witness is compromised. This is why Paul calls for leaders who are "blameless" (Titus 1:6, 7) and have a "good report" in the community (1 Timothy 3:7).

Ultimately, our righteousness is brought about through the atoning sacrifice of Christ. But our daily manifestation of this through right living is a protection against

being ensnared in hidden sins and hypocrisy (compare Isaiah 59:17; 1 Thessalonians 5:8).

A Christian who has allowed sin to interfere with this practical righteousness has a vulnerable spot in his breastplate. Satan will find it and attack it. We must keep it repaired by self-examination and confession of sin (1 John 1:9).

7. How does the gospel of peace prepare us for battle? (v. 15)

People of New Testament times normally wore lightweight sandals. But when the soldier went into battle, he prepared his feet by wearing thick-soled sandals with hobnails. This was extremely important, for he had to have a firm footing no matter where he met the enemy. The equipped Christian also uses appropriate footwear—"the preparation of the gospel of peace." This may be interpreted two ways. First, it could mean we should be prepared to propagate the gospel of peace (Isa. 52:7). Second, it could mean that we are prepared for battle *by* the gospel of peace. This second view seems better, since our context emphasizes protection.

How, then, does the gospel prepare us for battle? Paul repeatedly speaks of our conduct as "walking." We are to walk in good works, worthy of our calling (4:1) in love (5:2), and in wisdom (v. 15). This contrasts with the sinful ways in which we once walked (2:2; 4:17). What has made this difference in our walk is the gospel of peace (2:11-18). It has provided "shoes" for protection in spiritual conflict.

8. What kind of shield did Paul speak of? How is faith like it? (v. 16)

The *shield* is the most important defensive implement in the Roman soldier's armor. Roman soldiers used two kinds of shields: a small oval one and a large oblong one. The shield in our text is the large one, about thirty inches wide and four feet high. The Greek word for it means "door," for that is what it resembled. "Above all" literally means "over all," referring to the overall protection it gave in addition to the other armor. Sometimes Romans advanced behind a solid wall of these shields.

The Christian's shield is faith—absolute trust that God will perform what He has promised. As faith has saved us, so it also provides complete protection in spiritual conflict.

The Old Testament often pictures God as a shield for the faithful (example: Genesis 15:1; Psalm 28:7; Proverbs 30:5). Thus Paul's analogy of a *shield of faith* is an apt one. When Satan is waging an all-out assault upon us, we may have no resources left except our faith. We can absorb tremendous hits if we believe that God loves us, that Christ died for us, and that our future in Heaven is secure. Satan's greatest tool is doubt. Our most effective defense is faith.

The shield of faith is needed "to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked" (Eph. 6:16). Roman soldiers often encountered fiery missiles that had been dipped in pitch and ignited; the shield stopped them before they reached the body. By faith we can remain unharmed by Satan's destructive temptations.

9. What is the purpose of the helmet in the armor? How is the Christian protected spiritually by "the helmet of salvation" (v. 17)?

The Roman soldier's *helmet* served as both a protective device and an identifier. It was designed to protect the head and neck, particularly from blows that come from hand-to-hand combat. Most helmets had a head-covering bowl, an extended neck guard, side flashings to protect the cheeks and ears, and (sometimes) a metal face mask. Some helmets also held a large, colorful crest on the top, undoubtedly the most eye-catching part of the soldier's dress.

The helmet was not normally worn by the soldier unless battle was pending. No prudent Roman soldier neglected to don his helmet as he prepared for warfare, for a

blow to the unprotected head was likely to be fatal. Likewise, our *salvation* is that which protects us from the threat of eternal death. Salvation is God's gracious gift, and we are foolish to neglect it (see Hebrews 2:3).

The helmet was protection for the head and was made either of leather reinforced with metal or entirely of metal. The Christian's helmet is "salvation." Putting on this helmet refers not to initially receiving salvation, for Paul's readers were already believers. It is, rather, the assurance of salvation that protects the Christian's mind.

Just as a soldier would not venture into battle with his head unprotected, we must not do so without being certain of God's salvation (deliverance) in our conflict. Harboring doubts while facing the foe is a sure recipe for defeat.

10. What is the Christian's one offensive weapon, and how is it used? (v. 17b)

The final part of Paul's "whole armor" is the only offensive weapon in the list: *the sword of the Spirit* (compare Hebrews 4:12). Roman soldiers had two kinds of swords, one long and one short. Paul here refers to the short sword, which was effective in close combat. The Christian's weapon is "the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God." God's Word is the Spirit's sword in two senses: (1) He produced this sword through inspiration; and (2) now indwelling us, He enables us to wield it in battle.

All the preceding pieces of equipment were defensive and protective. But the Word of God is an offensive weapon—one that can defeat Satan and drive him from the field. He has no defense against God's applied Word. Therefore, we must always have it ready and be skillful in its use.

When do we stage a counterattack against the devil? We do so whenever we proclaim *the Word of God*, when we communicate the truths of the Bible. We bring light to the darkness, and our active resistance to Satan causes him to flee (James 4:7).

The spiritual battle is not a matter of holding our position. It is our assault on the strongholds of Satan (see 2 Corinthians 10:4). To make this assault requires an offensive weapon.

11. What does good swordsmanship look like in a spiritual sense?

Soldiers do not win wars by remaining strictly on defense. Using a sword merely to parry the attacks of an opponent will not win the battle. Soldiers must go on the offense to defeat the enemy and cause him to flee. James tells us that if we submit to God, the devil will flee from us (see James 4:7). We submit to God by developing skill in handling our sword—the Word of God.

Jesus used this sword to send the devil packing during the temptation in the wilderness (Matthew 4:1–11). During that battle, the devil attempted to use the Word of God for his own purposes. But Jesus' greater skill won the day. This is a valuable lesson for us: we must develop good skills in using this sword (compare 2 Timothy 2:15). Like most weapons, improper use of this sword can end up hurting us. Many of us have firsthand knowledge of individuals whose spiritual wounds were self-inflicted due to their own faulty use and application of the Word (compare Acts 19:13–16).

We should recall as well that this piece of spiritual equipment is a sword, not a club. Its use is to penetrate a person's innermost being, to lead him or her to repent (Hebrews 4:12). It is not a club we use to beat people over the head.

12. What role does prayer play in spiritual warfare? How does Paul describe its use? (v. 18)

Prayer could be considered a second offensive weapon. But it is also defensive, and Paul did not liken it to any weapon. We should therefore consider it the overall

attitude in which the equipment is used. We should note Paul's repetition of "always" and "all" in this verse. We should pray at all times.

In this life, spiritual battles are relentless. But God gives the resources for continuous victory. Spiritual warfare is not waged in the streets or on the high seas. Rather, it is fought in the hearts and minds of men and women. This is why *prayer* is so important in this context. We will win the battle through prayer. This includes both prayers for ourselves and our prayers *for all the saints*. By *saints*, Paul means our fellow believers, our Christian brothers and sisters in battle. We will win these battles if we pray with *perseverance*, with the dogged persistence that will not accept defeat.

PRACTICAL POINTS

- 1.** The Christian must rely on God's power (Ephesians 6:10).
- 2.** The Christian must prepare to lean on God's strength to overcome the evil one (v. 11).
- 3.** To be victorious in spiritual battle requires spiritual weapons and spiritual wisdom (vs. 12-13).
- 4.** Unlike the people of this world, who often sink to lying and cheating, the Christian wins his battles by guarding the truth and practicing righteousness (v. 14).
- 5.** A steadfast faith enables one to stand firm and be at peace in the midst of any battle (vs. 15-16).
- 6.** If a person forgets the Word of God and prayer, he will most likely forfeit the battle (vs. 17-18).

CONCLUSION:

In real warfare, soldiers have long recognized the value of protective body armor. Although this can be expensive, military strategists know that shielding a soldier from the enemy's attack allows that soldier to fight another day. No army has ever had an inexhaustible supply of troops, so wise commanders always have sought to protect the ones they had.

The truth is that many churches are littered with spiritual casualties. This problem is traceable to a failure to put on the full armor of God. We have let the cares of our materialistic world grow strong and choke us (Mark 4:19). We have not equipped ourselves with the many spiritual resources that God has provided for our protection. The first step to spiritual victory is to recognize the dangerous reality of the battle: Satan is real, and he wants to destroy us. The second step is to unite with other believers in resistance to Satan's methods and tricks. An army must fight as a team. "An army of one" is a contradiction in terms.

The third step is to attack our adversary with the truths of the gospel, with the love of the fellowship, with our prayers for the saints. May we be vigilant and bold in this battle!

PRAYER:

God, our shield and protector, You are our rock, our strong tower, our mighty fortress. You are our armory. It is You who have provided all the equipment we need to prevail.

May we be wary of Satan and his schemes. But help us keep that wariness from becoming fear. We gain this victory when we focus on You and the power of Your strength. We pray these things through the mighty name of Jesus, amen.

THOUGHT TO REMEMBER:

God provides all the spiritual armor we need.

ANTICIPATING NEXT WEEK'S LESSON:

Next week's lesson is "**Hearing Requires Listening**" and recounts the events that led to God's call of Moses. Study Exodus 3:1-12.

LESSON SUMMARIZED BY:

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