

What to Wear to a War

Good to see you guys this morning. If you've got your bibles, go with me to Ephesians 6. If you're new, we've been spending the entire summer working our way through the book of the bible called Ephesians. Which really, is a first-century letter that a guy named Paul wrote to a church in the city of Ephesus. In it, he covers all sorts of topics. He's talked about predestination and he's talked about parenting. He's talked about racial reconciliation and he's talked about sex. He's talked about prayer and he's talked about marriage. But now we've come to the very end of the letter—all we have left is this week's passage and a short passage next week. But before he signs off, he wants to unpack one last thing for the Ephesians that is vitally, vitally important. Let's take a look at what it is, v. 10:

*[10] Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. [11] Put on the **whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil.** [12] 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.***

Okay. So there is a lot in there. What Paul is bringing up in these verses is what Christians have historically called *spiritual warfare*. Now, if you've been around City Church for long, you know that I have a serious aversion to Christian clichés. In general, I like for them to die swift, sudden deaths and then never be heard from again. In this case though, **I think the term “spiritual warfare” is actually spot-on.** It's a great way of describing what Paul is getting at here. His point is that **there are real, personal, spiritual forces at work behind the scenes of the universe.** There is such a thing as Satan, and there are such things as demons. In Paul's language, they are the “rulers, authorities, cosmic powers, and spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.”

Now, I know almost as soon as those words leave my mouth, I just lost a lot of you. The concept of Satan and demons is often just a hard one for us to get on board with as modern Americans. Part of the reason I think it's difficult is because we've seen people *overemphasize* the role of Satan in the world. The classic caricature is always the person who gets a flat tire on their way to church and concludes “Satan must be after me!” And it's just like uhh maybe? But also isn't it possible that you just live in Knoxville and there literally is just perpetual construction on the roads, and you just ran over a nail and now you have a flat tire? Seems like that's a more likely explanation.” But I think because some of us have seen people ascribe *too many* things to Satan and demons, we sometimes are a little wary of talking about Satan and demons at all.

But I think the other reason we don't feel a need to talk about evil is because we've figured out other ways to explain away evil in our world. There's a guy named Andrew Delblanco who wrote a book called *The Death of Satan*. And the book, written from an entirely secular perspective, is all about how we, as a modern society, are losing the ability to identify and label things as “evil” in our world. Even when we see things that really are evil—school shootings, terrorism, white supremacy, and the like—we don't like to call those things “evil” because that would imply a moral judgment. Instead we use words like “extremism.” “Mental illness.” “Social maladjustment.” And those are real things. The bible does not discount the existence of things like that. It just would also claim that sometimes there's more going on *behind* those types of things too. The bible often presents things like extremism, mental illness, and evil spiritual

forces as all working together in concert with one another. When Paul says “we don’t wrestle against flesh and blood,” he’s not trying to say the things going on in the world *aren’t* caused by human or psychological forces, he’s just saying that they’re not *always only* caused by that.

But Delblanco, in this book, goes on to describe that while many people think that moving past the concept of “evil” is a *good* thing—it’s us *progressing* in society—it also might be a *dangerous* thing. Take a look at this quote, from the back cover of the book:

*My driving motive in writing this book has been the conviction that if evil, with all its insidious complexity, escapes the reach of our imagination, **it will have established dominion over us all.***

That’s a little spooky, isn’t it? That could be the last line of a horror movie trailer. But he’s got a point, right? For all of our skepticism about the presence of real, personal evil in the world, have we stopped long enough to consider that that might be one of the very “schemes” Satan is using: convincing us he’s not there in the first place? It makes me think of that famous line from the movie *The Usual Suspects*, that “the greatest trick the devil ever pulled was convincing the world he didn’t exist.” So if nothing else, from a purely logical perspective, consider this: that **in a rational, only-what-meets-the-eye society like our own, it could be that the most effective “scheme” Satan could run is to convince us that he’s not there.** Because it allows him to carry on completely undetected.

So listen—while it is certainly possible for a person to *overestimate* the activity of Satan in the world, it is also possible to *underestimate* him. And according to Paul in this passage, that would be an equally unwise—and maybe even *more fatal*—error to make. Because the bible’s *unapologetic position* is that there *is a war* going on behind the scenes. Whether we acknowledge it or not, want to think about it or not, it’s *there*. And if it’s there, we need to know what to do about it.

The point Paul makes in Ephesians 6 is simply this: **don’t find yourself sleeping through a war.** There is a *war* going on in our world, and in your life personally. So don’t float through life pretending there isn’t. Listen—if you don’t think there are spiritual forces with a *vested interest* in whether you wake up in the morning and spend time in the Scriptures, you’re being naive. If you don’t think there are spiritual forces with a *vested interest* in whether you sleep with your girlfriend or not, you’re fooling yourself. If you don’t think they have a *vested interest* in whether or not you stay angry at your spouse or your roommate—you’re playing right into their hand. **My concern is that we are standing in the middle of a war and some of us don’t even realize it.** And if we don’t *realize* it, we can’t possibly be prepared to *engage* in it.

What Paul is saying here is that we’ve got to wake up. Paul here is pushing for his own form of being woke. We’ve got to prepare adequately for the battle that we’re in. And here’s how he says we are to do that, v. 13:

*[13] 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.*

According to Paul, we are to “take up the whole armor of God.” Now, if you grew up in church, I really need you to do your best to block out the memories of cardboard, cut-out armor you made in your Sunday school class. I know it’s difficult, but for all of our sakes, I need us to try. In my class, we did a

bible drill. But because, as we'll see later, the Bible is referred to as the "sword" of the armor, we called it a "sword drill." So literally I was *dueling other kids* with the bible, and given awards based on how soundly I defeated the other kids. Christian subculture is a weird, dark place. But the point is that I want you to do your best to mentally block that out. Because what Paul's getting into here isn't really light or trivial at all. It's a lot more serious and honestly, sobering than that.

His point is simple and straightforward: **if you know you're in a war, you dress for one.** No soldier I know of waltzes out into a battlefield wearing flip flops and a bro tank. If you're going into battle, you put on armor. And **if you're a soldier, you put armor on before you even enter the battlefield.** No soldier waits until he's in the middle of the battle to put on his gear. You don't wait until shots are fired and then go "man I could really use a shield right about now—where did I put that thing?" Nope—**the way armor works is that you put it on before you ever walk out onto the battlefield.** Because you know you're going into a war.

Here's why I say that. I think a lot of people wait until everything starts hitting the fan in their life—hardship comes, persecution comes, temptation comes—and then they go "oh I better start reading my bible now." "Oh, I need to really start praying more." And there's nothing wrong with that—it's better than not doing anything *at all*—but it's also in some ways too late. You really needed the armor on *before* you walked out onto the battlefield. Spiritual armor is very difficult to put on once shots are fired. So even if you're in the room and you would say your life is going *great*—you would say there isn't really any active spiritual opposition happening that you know of—in many ways, that means this passage might be even *more* relevant for you than it is for the rest of us. Because you need to prepare for when it *does* hit.

So with that in mind, let's take a look at what Paul says you wear to a war. Let's just read everything at once and then we'll go back and unpack each thing he mentions individually. Starting in v. 14:

*[14] Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of **truth**, and having put on the breastplate of **righteousness**, [15] and, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the **gospel of peace**. [16] In all circumstances take up the shield of **faith**, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one; [17] and take the helmet of **salvation**, and the **sword of the Spirit**, which is the **word of God**...*

Okay. One thing by way of clarification before we dive into each of these. I don't think Paul wants us to view these things as all being *mutually exclusive*. This is not a checklist to complete before you start each day. For instance, I go to the gym to work out twice a week (but I'm sure you guessed that already from the everything about me). And usually, I take a gym bag with me so that I can shower and change after I work out, and head straight to work. But without fail, every single time I go to the gym, I forget *something*. Once it was a change of clothes, this past week it was shoes to change into, one time it was a towel (which is a very oddly personal thing to ask the guy in the shower stall next to you if you can borrow)—I always forget to bring *something*. And it makes me so mad everytime I do. I've literally been going to the gym now for like six months, and there's literally been maybe two times that I remember to bring everything I need. I bring that up because I think a lot of people read this passage like that. In their mind, they need all of these separate things, and something happens that day and they're like "dangit! I forgot my freaking salvation helmet! I should've known I would need that today!"

I don't think that's what Paul intends to communicate here. It may help to know that almost all of these things he mentions are direct references to the book of Isaiah. There, it describes Jesus (the Messiah) as a warrior outfitted with this type of armor. So what Paul is saying in *Ephesians* is that **by becoming a follower of Jesus, we have now been given the armor that Jesus wears**. He's given it to us now. So at the end of the day, **the "armor" we have been outfitted with is a relationship with Jesus**. And as you live into that relationship, you begin to realize more and more its practical benefits in fighting against evil. So think of this less like a checklist and more like a diamond with various facets. We've been given this relationship with Jesus, and as we turn it, we are able to see and access different aspects of it.

With that being said, let's turn the diamond for a bit and look at each facet...

Truth

It makes a lot of sense that Paul starts things off with this one. Because if you're familiar with the bible, you know that one of the most frequent descriptions of Satan is that he is a *liar*. Jesus says at one point "when (Satan) lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a *liar* and the father of *lies*."¹ And **if lying is the core of who Satan is, it would make sense that one of the most important weapons against him would be *truth***.

I once heard a pastor say that **if you don't know the Scriptures, you'll be a slave to whatever *sounds right***. I think that's spot-on, because I've seen it play out exactly like that countless times. People who don't regularly ground themselves in what's true just immediately run after whatever feels right or seems right in the moment. As a pastor, I've sat through multiple counseling sessions where someone had decided to leave their spouse for no real concrete reason other than "I know God would want me to be happy, and I'm not currently happy." And our pastoral response every time would be "okay, well where are you getting that belief from, exactly? Can you point us to where in the Scriptures you're reading that?" And the response would be, nearly always, some version of "well I just know it's true." So now we're kicking a marriage to the curb, and in many cases ripping a family and kids apart—all based on a *hunch you have* about what God might be like? When things like that happen, Satan wins. And it's not just in super serious things like that. It also happens in how we think about our jobs, our relationships, our money—you name it. If you don't know the truth, you'll be a slave to whatever *sounds right*.

So instead, Paul says we should arm ourselves with what we know to be true about God and the world. If we've done that, the lies Satan tells are a lot less appealing.

Righteousness

So there's a pastor in New York named Tim Keller. We tend to quote him a lot around here because he's kind of like the Yoda of modern Christianity. One of his most well-known quotes is that the gospel tells us we are "more sinful than we want to believe, *and* more loved than want to imagine." That in a nutshell is what it means to be a follower of Jesus—it means believing *that* about yourself. But, allow me to let you in on one of Satan's favorite tactics: **to make you believe the first half of that and forget the second**. He'll try to make you believe you are more sinful than you can want to believe, and that that's the end of your story. After sexual sin, after relational sin, after you've failed as a student, failed as a father, failed

¹ John 8:44

as an employee, Satan will use those moments to accuse you—Satan’s name literally means “accuser.” He’ll accuse you with things like “you’re a failure, you’re a screw-up, you’re a sinner.” But **what he so desperately needs is for you to buy into that narrative over and above what is true of you in Jesus.**

There’s this great song by a band called Shane & Shane—any Shane & Shane fans out there? Yeah they’re this great duo that started way back in the 90s and they’re still writing incredible music with harmonies that just make your ears melt off your face. But anyhow, they have this song called *Embracing Accusations* that talks about this very thing. And there’s a line in it that goes:

Oh the devil's singing over me, an age old song: that I am cursed and gone astray. Singing the first verse so conveniently over me, He's forgotten the refrain: Jesus saves!

The Scriptures teach us that, on our own, short of Jesus intervening, we are more sinful than we can imagine—that’s true. But for followers of Jesus, the other more important side of that coin is that **Jesus has come and made something else true of us instead. For those of us that follow Jesus, when God looks at us, he now sees Jesus’ perfection.** | And the language the bible uses to describe that idea is *righteousness*. God now sees us as righteous because of Jesus, and over time is transforming us to live more and more in sync with that reality. So Paul says, put on the breastplate of *righteousness*. **In the moments when Satan accuses, know that you stand righteous before God because of Jesus.**

Gospel of peace

Okay, I’m gonna test your long-term memory a bit. Think back to when we covered Ephesians 4 about how we treat one another. There, what specifically did Paul say can act as a *foothold*, or *stronghold* for Satan? Anybody remember? It was *anger*. Apparently, one way that Satan loves to work is by capitalizing on interpersonal conflict. He loves to take anger or bitterness that people have towards other people and use that to get his foot in the door, and do his worst.

But on the other hand, Paul says that part of what the good news of Jesus brings is *peace*. **Not just inner peace—but relational peace.** In Ephesians 2, Paul uses the word *peace* three times in one paragraph to talk about how the gospel ends hostility and anger between people. Which means for *you, follower of Jesus in the room—you have the ability to leave relationships better off than you found them. You have the ability, in any scenario where there is anger and bitterness and conflict to come and bring *peace* into that. So Paul says we should be prepared to do just that—to put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace.*

Faith

Now, unfortunately the word “faith” has been fairly diluted of meaning over the years for many of us. But at its core, it just means “trust” or “confidence.” So **faith is this confidence in God, no matter what scenario you find yourself in.** Paul says just that in this passage—“In every circumstance.” On a battlefield, when arrows are being shot at you, you don’t necessarily know the precise direction they’re coming from. In the same way, you don’t always know the precise tactics Satan is going to use or what form his attacks are going to come in. His attacks may come in the form of relational conflict, in the form of accusation, in the form of suffering—could be anything. But with faith, you don’t need to.

Faith is what you need no matter what it is. **It's the confidence to say in any scenario "I may not understand what's happening, things may not be easy—but I know who God is and I know he can be trusted."** But don't hear me wrong on this: that's not to say that faith is always pretty and pleasant. One of my pet peeves is when people act as if "faith" means never being the slightest rattled by things in your life. It looks like just grinning and quoting Romans 8:28 immediately anytime horrible things happen. If you can do that and truly mean it, props to you. But I don't think that's always what faith looks like.

In Philippians Paul's *faith* looks like him saying, no joke, that he's debating whether it'd be better to *die* than to keep experiencing the suffering he's going through. In the Psalms, David's *faith* looks like him pounding his fists into the chest of God and crying out "God, *where are you right now?*" So if you're here and you're struggling right now, here's what I'd say: **don't believe that just because you can't smile and hum a worship song through your pain, that means you don't have faith.** Sometimes faith is the confidence of knowing that even when the worst happens, God is there to cry out to. Sometimes, *that's* what faith looks like. In every season, Paul says, put on faith as a shield.

Salvation

So something helpful to know is that in the bible salvation includes your past, present *and* future. If you grew up in or around church, you probably think of salvation as the moment you go from being a non-Christian to Christian. From the bible's perspective, that's an *important* part of salvation, but only *one part* of it. **The bible makes it clear that we have been saved from the penalty of sin, we are being saved from the power of sin, and will ultimately be saved from the presence of sin.** The word "salvation" here refers to all of that.

So Paul is saying that grasping all *three* of those is crucial to navigating the battle. **One thing that Satan loves to do is convince you that your past, present, and future are all in question.** He will try and convince you that because of your past, you can never be made right with God, that God is perpetually disappointed in you, that the future is hopeless. **He will try and convince you that there's no way you can know if you were ever saved.** Into all that, 1 John speaks the following, life-giving words:

I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life.

You *can know* that you have past, present, and future salvation. And you'll *need* to know that if you're gonna have a chance against Satan's schemes. And that's why Paul says to put on the helmet of salvation. But John does say that the *way* you can know that is by knowing what he has "*written*." Which leads us to the last facet of this diamond...

Sword of the Spirit/Word of God

So as a lot of you probably know, "word of God" in the Christian worldview is a moniker for the bible. So what Paul is referring to is the truth about God found in the Scriptures. But that might make you ask, *didn't Paul already say that when he was talking about the "truth"?* Well, yes and no. You may have noticed that this is the only part of the armor that is *offensive* instead of *defensive*. The belt, the breastplate, the shield—all the others are meant to *protect against* attacks. The sword is meant to *attack*. So it would seem that here, Paul is talking not just about *knowing* the Scriptures, but *speaking* them. I

think of Jesus in the wilderness, being tempted by Satan himself. Everytime Satan tempted him, Jesus not only *knew* the truth but he *spoke it*. “You say I should test God by throwing myself down from the temple? Well, Scripture also says “don’t put God to the test.” I hear your lie and raise you the truth. **Jesus not only *knew* the truth, but he *spoke it*, out loud, at the moment of temptation—into the very face of evil.**

And that’s what we are to do too. But not just to Satan, but also to *God* in the midst of difficulty. The Scriptures are chock full of men and women of faith, in their most dire hours, praying the promises and truth of God right back to him. “God, you said this is who you are, you said this is what you would do, and so we’re coming to you and asking that you *do it*.” That is what a relationship with God looks like. Asking him, and at times *begging* him, to do what you know he’s capable of doing. And that’s exactly where Paul turns next in our passage—to prayer. Look at v. 18:

[18] praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end, keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints, [19] and also for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel, [20] for which I am an ambassador in chains, that I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak.

Paul says **part of how we stay alert, stay ready for the battle and prepare ourselves for it is through praying “at all times in the Spirit.”** Paul even details one specific need *he needs prayer for*—he sneaks a little prayer request in there. He says “in the same way that you are praying for God to do this for *you*, pray also for him to do it for me.” He knows that every bit as much as they needs access to this spiritual armor, he does too.

Now, let’s take a step back briefly before we close and try and bring it all together. As I mentioned at the beginning, Paul’s simple point is that following Jesus in many ways, is *war*. I think **part of the reason that a lot of people have such a hard time with following Jesus, and maybe even why people give up on following Jesus, is because they don’t know what to expect.** I think a lot of people expect following Jesus to be more like a counseling session, or a self-help book, or a solid pat on the back. Now, that’s not *all wrong*—hopefully as you follow Jesus you are becoming more and more spiritually and emotionally healthy. Hopefully it does help you grow personally. Hopefully it does give you encouragement. But **if what Paul is saying here is true, it is also in a war.** And if you begin to follow Jesus without expecting that, it will totally catch you off guard. It’ll knock your feet right out from under you.

But if we *do* approach it knowing that it will be a war, we also get to realize that **in Jesus, we have been given every single thing we need to stand and fight well.** Jesus’ armor belongs to us now. And outfitted with it, we can stand firm against every attack Satan attempts to launch. Maybe not immediately, maybe not right now, but in time. I was trying to think about a way to help wrap our minds around this idea. And I realize this is about to be so very random, but has anybody in the room ever bought a professional-type camera? Like a nice, Nikon or Canon brand? Okay, who in this room would say you are proficient at Excel? Like, you kinda know how to run stuff with Excel? Okay, last one: anybody own one of those cool, vintage-looking KitchenAid mixers? Okay. So, the amount of things you can do with each of those products is almost unlimited, right? Like when I bought a nice camera, I knew how to point it at stuff and push the button—I had no clue what else it could do. When I first used Excel, I thought *this sure is an elaborate program* for just making lists. When Ana told me she wanted to put a

\$350 KitchenAid on our wedding registry, I was like “that seems like a lot of money just to mix cake batter together.” But then, the longer I used those things, the more I realized how to wield the sheer unlimited power of what they could do. But that was all available to me from the very beginning—I just had to learn how to access it all over time. I possessed all of that immediately, but I would spend the following days, weeks, months, even *years* learning how to wield it all.

I think it's very similar with this “armor” Paul talks about. Maybe that seems a little cheesy to you, but it's true. By following Jesus, **you have been given access to the most incredible set of armor this world has ever seen.** Through his death and resurrection, he has given you access to everything you could possibly need to stand firm against the schemes of the one who wants to destroy you. And at the same time we will spend the rest of our lives learning how to access and live into what's already ours. So here's to learning, for the rest of our lives, how to access what is already ours in Jesus.

Let me pray for us.