

### **The Armor of God**

<sup>10</sup> Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. <sup>11</sup> Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. <sup>12</sup> For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. <sup>13</sup> 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. <sup>14</sup> Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, <sup>15</sup> and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. <sup>16</sup> In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. <sup>17</sup> Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

<sup>18</sup> And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord's people.

This is the Word of the Lord.

Beloved people of God,

We've all been very much attuned—I suspect—to the war in Ukraine. It's just plain awful—unjust and destructive, devastating people's lives and livelihoods, their families, homes, businesses, their communities, friendships, their world as they've known it. Their lives will never be the same. But as powerful as the Russian army is, I've been impressed with the strength of the Ukrainian army and the people as a whole who are mounting a super strong resistance. They are doing their utmost to stand their ground.

### **Standing Strong**

The Apostle Paul concludes his letter to his beloved friends in the Church of Ephesus saying, "Stand strong!" But, of course, he makes clear that he's **not** talking about resistance to human governments or worldly powers. He's talking about a spiritual battle.

Standing strong in the Lord is Paul's introduction to putting on the Armour of God. To all the Christians in Ephesus and to us today, Paul gives the battle cry, "Stand strong in the Lord and his mighty power."

We are familiar with this sort of battle cry. The coach gives his team a pep talk during the intermission and ends with, "Now, let's go get 'em, team!" The

teammates all put their hands into the circle, raise them up and thrust them down as they shout, "Go team!" As Paul ends his love letter to the church, he calls them to know who the real enemy is and where our real strength comes from and his "Go team" chant is instead, "Stand strong, team!" Our calling is to stand strong in the Lord as we live for him. He will help us face the opposition and he's given us resources to help us stand. Just as a firefighter puts on his protective clothing and the hockey player puts on his specially designed equipment, God says, "Here's some resources you need to put on as you get out there. This will help you stand strong in the faith."

Today we want to look at the first piece of armour he gives us.

## **The Belt**

The first piece of armour the Apostle Paul mentions as being important for the Christian is "the belt of truth."

*Eph 6:14a Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist*

You get the sense from those words that this belt is going to help you stand firm. It's going to strengthen you to face the opposition.

It was International Women's Day this past Wednesday and someone posted a little video clip of this 140-pound woman, Chloe Brennan, lifting 733 pounds of Dinnie Stones. That's amazing! A 140-pound woman lifting 733 pounds. But notice that she's wearing a belt. A special weightlifting belt. You'll see most weightlifters wearing a belt like that. You sometimes see people who work at places like Rona or Home Depot wearing a similar belt. These belts are for protection. They keep your back and stomach straighter and tighter so that you don't injure yourself. They make you stronger in the sense that you can better handle the repeated strain on your body.

The first piece of armour that the Roman soldier put on was his belt. The belt served a number of important functions. First, like the weightlifter, the belt helped to keep the soldier's back straight for him to exert the most strength and avoid injuries. Second, these men did not wear pants, so the belt didn't keep their pants from falling down. They wore long shirts or robes, something more akin to a dress. But to maneuver quickly and smoothly in battle, the long ends of their cloak had to be moved out of the way, lest it trip them up or get tangled. So, they "girded up their loins", as is sometimes said. They tucked the loose ends of their clothes into their belt so they could move swiftly and unhindered. Third, their belt held up the breastplate and also held all their important tools, including their sword. But you'll also notice on some pictures of the Roman armour that, fourthly, the belt has a part hanging down at the front and sometimes at the back as well. Every man who has ever been hit in the groin knows what that protection is for. In hockey, you wear a jock to protect the privates from pucks. These hanging panels on the

Roman armour served that purpose. A soldier could quickly be immobilized with a hit to the groin and this belt helped to ensure that didn't happen.

So the belt was the first piece of armour. It gave some protection as well as holding other pieces of armour that would give added protection and defense in battle.

## **The Belt of Truth**

Now how does that translate to the belt of truth for the Christian? Well, the belt of the soldier is the first piece of armour to be put on. That in itself tells us about the priority of truth. A good defense against the devil's schemes, as Paul calls them, is having a good foundation in the truth.

I once heard about a bank that was trying to teach its tellers how to detect counterfeit money. So they set up two groups. The first group was given real money to study—look at it, feel it. And they were also given counterfeit money to do the same things with—look at it and feel it. The second group was given only real money. No counterfeit. Only real money to work with and handle. When the trial period was over, the bank conducted a test to see which group had better counterfeit detection skill. Guess which group won? What do you think? It might surprise you that the group that handled only real money was much better at detecting the counterfeit bills that passed through their hands.

Now translate that into the area of truth. The Apostle Paul is saying that if we know the truth that will be our first line of defense against the devil's schemes and lies. You see, Satan is the deceiver, the counterfeiter par excellence. But he never deceives us with boldface lies. We'd catch on to those rather quickly if we've been around the truth long enough. No, Satan is most likely to use lies that contain an element of truth. One or two counterfeit bills in the middle of a large stack of real ones. Maybe he'll try to cast some doubt about what the truth really is. Just think about how he deceived Eve and Adam. He didn't say, "Oh, you don't have to believe what God said." Instead, he asked, "Did God really say you can't eat from the trees in the garden?" He twisted God's words just enough to create an opening of doubt and then he pounced. Peter says that the devil prowls around like a roaring lion. He's looking for a chance to deceive you and get you to doubt the truth so he can get you to abandon it and your faith in God.

So it's important to know the truth well. The money illustration helps us see as individuals, as parents and as church the importance of knowing and teaching truth. You don't need so much to teach lies. Learn truth and the lies will become apparent to the truth-infused heart and mind. This is why Paul says in Romans 12:1, "be transformed by the renewing of your mind!" Then we'll be able to stand firm on the truth. It will be our first area of defense against the devil's schemes.

## The Truth

So what is the truth? We know it's important to start with truth and to take it seriously. But what is truth?

Our society has been deceived by Satan. Truth is considered relative or even non-existent. There is no absolute truth. There's nothing that's true for everyone. Rather, what do we hear in many conversations today? Tell me your truth! Speak your truth. This is my truth. What's yours?

In our culture, truth is whatever you decide it is. It's yours to define. This has been the slow but steady work of the Deceiver over the past few hundred years to get people to give up on absolute truth. It's just like his words to Eve, "Did God really say...?" That's what the relativism of our world wants us to confess. Truth is whatever you say it is. It's got nothing to do with God. If your truth works for you, that's good. If you believe something to be true, you live your truth. The one caveat you might hear is, "As long as it doesn't hurt anyone, you do you!"

This deception has led to all kinds of lies in our society surrounding ethics and sexuality. We are told to trust our own feelings. We are called old-fashioned or out of step when we confess that God made us either female or male. We are told we are cruel to think that people shouldn't freely express whatever they desire their sexual identity to be. In fact, sexual identity is one's whole identity in our world. And people even say that God made them this way.

But, dear friends, you can rest assured that God's intent is not to be cruel to you. Ever. So when he gives us truths that are difficult to live out, we can trust him to be interested in our well-being—both now and for eternity. God's truth for our life is to protect us, like armour for the soldier.

Maybe think of it like a fence. We don't open the back door of our homes and tell our little children to go outside and play. We only do that if we have a good fence to ensure that our little ones will not wander into traffic or get into something that could hurt them or fall into the hands of a stranger. The fence is a good thing for them. It's there because we love them. And when God's word gives us truth to live by, it's the same. It's for our good, to protect us from the devil's schemes which will ultimately hurt us.

The relativism of our world means we can't be certain that 2 plus 2 is always 4. It's whatever you want it to be. Now, of course, no one says that with respect to mathematics. But they are saying things like that when it comes to ethics. That's what relative truth is. It's not absolute. Therefore, it's not trustworthy. You can't depend on it to be correct, right, safe or good for you, now and always. At best, your truth might seem good for you in a specific time, but if it no longer feels right for you, then you can discard it and build your life around something new that you

call your truth. But without our creator's blueprint and insight into how we should live, we are shooting in the dark with no certainty. God's truth alone can give us certainty and security. God knows how we are created to live, and he has redeemed us to enjoy life by his design. To that end, he gives us truthful instruction.

So, yes, God's truth is his declared, revealed and inspired word which we call The Bible. In the words of the psalmist,

*Ps 119:105 God's word is a lamp unto my feet and light unto my path.*

The Christian can live by the truth that God reveals to us in the Bible. His word is light in our sin-darkened world and minds. God's truth will always steer us straight. It will always help us understand how to live and to detect deception and lies that are all around us.

But central to buckling on the belt of truth is—you guessed it, boys and girls—Jesus! We need faith in Jesus, who is the Way, the Truth and the Life. We won't trust the Bible as the truth to live by if we don't first trust that Jesus has redeemed us from our sin. If we don't know how much he loves us—so much that he gave his life for us!—then we won't desire to live by the Bible's direction.

That rings true if you read the whole book of Ephesians. And let me just encourage you to think about doing that. Well, don't just think about it. Let me encourage you to do it. Read it beginning to end once a week during Lent. It'll help you truly understand how these pieces of the armour of God here at the end of the book actually flow from everything that comes before it.

Paul really hunkers down on salvation by grace alone early in the book. He wants the Ephesians to know that we are not saved by good works. The Greek and Roman gods of the day were thought to serve people or protect them from harm only if you did what the gods wanted. You had to please the gods to win their favour and then they might protect you. Paul is saying just the opposite. This is the radical nature of the gospel. It is by grace you are saved. You can't earn God's favour and his protection. You receive it freely through faith in Jesus whose sacrificial love for us has gifted us with God's favour.

The tools like the belt of truth are not things we have to wear or else God will turn his back on us. We have his promise of protection by grace alone. Because of Jesus, God will never forsake us. Jesus was forsaken that we might never be forsaken. So the armour he gives us is to help us enjoy the fullest blessings of Christian life here on earth that Jesus has won for us.

That gets us to the buckle.

## **The Buckle**

Paul tells us to buckle on that belt. Don't just drag it along with you. Don't sling it over your shoulder in case you need it some time in the future. No, buckle that thing on snugly. Gird up your loins now! The battle against deception and lies is always on. Jesus has given us comfort in knowing we belong securely to him. We are adopted and given the security of being God's children. But Satan doesn't want people—especially Christians—to trust God's ways. He knows that if we truly live by his word, we'll more and more know that God is never going to steer us wrong.

So the choice is ours to really embrace the truth and buckle it on so that it's like a part of us. Every choice we make in life gets filtered through God's truth and helps us live to the fullest, something Jesus has earned for us and that he wants us to enjoy. You see, the enjoyment of life in Christ the Truth comes by knowing the word of truth so that it sets us free from the lies.

## **The Body**

Finally, we need to help one another see the lies and stand on the truth.

Obviously, a belt is buckled around the body. And we don't always pick up the intent of the Greek language in which the Bible was written when we read our English translations. But when Paul says, "put on the whole armour," he's not talking to each individual person only. It's a plural; it's, "hey Church, you all need to put on the armour" and together you can help one another enjoy life in Christ to the fullest. Together you can walk in the truth, defended by the belt. Encouraging each other to live in the truth is the role of the church.

Some of you are older like I am! You might remember a Johnny Cash song in which he sings, "What is truth?" It goes like this:

The old man turned off the radio  
Said, "Where did all of the old songs go  
Kids sure play funny music these days  
They play it in the strangest ways"  
Said, "it looks to me like they've all gone wild  
It was peaceful back when I was a child"  
Well, man, could it be that the girls and boys  
Are trying to be heard above your noise?  
And the lonely voice of youth cries, "What is truth?"

A little boy of three sittin' on the floor  
Looks up and says, "Daddy, what is war?"  
"Son, that's when people fight and die"  
The little boy of three says "Daddy, why?"  
A young man of seventeen in Sunday school

Being taught the golden rule  
And by the time another year has gone around  
It may be his turn to lay his life down  
Can you blame the voice of youth for asking  
"What is truth?"

A young man sittin' on the witness stand  
The man with the book says "Raise your hand"  
"Repeat after me, I solemnly swear"  
The man looked down at his long hair  
And although the young man solemnly swore  
Nobody seems to hear anymore  
And it didn't really matter if the truth was there  
It was the cut of his clothes and the length of his hair  
And the lonely voice of youth cries  
"What is truth?"

The young girl dancing to the latest beat  
Has found new ways to move her feet  
The young man speaking in the city square  
Is trying to tell somebody that he cares  
Yeah, the ones that you're calling wild  
Are going to be the leaders in a little while  
This old world's wakin' to a new born day  
And I solemnly swear that it'll be their way  
You better help the voice of youth find  
"What is truth?"

I never really understood what that song was saying until this week. It's reminding us adults to stop looking at the exterior of our youth... their clothes, their hair, their music. And don't dismiss their questions. No, help them know the truth **now** because they will grow up and become leaders one day. And they'll need God's truth to be their guide. Hopefully, they'll have learned from their parents and their church—the body of Christ—that there is only one way to live in this world. The truth of Jesus will be their guide.

They need to experience that our dependence of God's truth comes out of love. We can speak the truth but if we have not love, to quote 1 Corinthians 13, we're just a bunch of noisy gongs. Jesus' love for us results in a burning love for him and deep desire to trust his truth to guide us. Hopefully we're all part of some sort of small group of fellow believers that can lovingly help us discern God's truth in all the details of our lives. Together—young and old—we lovingly help one another trust in Jesus as the Truth and to live by his revealed truth.

If we do that, we'll be okay, no matter what the onslaught of the devil throws at us, no matter what lies our society believes and promotes. We can stand and we will stand because the belt of Truth—Jesus and his Word—is buckled on to defend us. Thanks be to God for all his goodness in giving us the belt of truth.