

Brace For Impact Part 3

This is the third sermon in this series of messages I've titled Brace For Impact. Just as the passengers of US Airways Flight 1549 were instructed to "brace for impact" by their captain as they prepared for an emergency landing in the Hudson river, we have been warned by the Holy Spirit to brace for impact. Through the writings of the apostle Paul, the Holy Spirit has warned us to prepare for the onslaught and attacks of the enemy of our soul. The devil wants nothing less than to destroy us using any and every means available to him and the forces of hell.

I've told you in the past two sermons that the devil wants to destroy you because God loves you so much. The devil wants to interrupt and frustrate the good plans of a gracious God. Last Sunday we pointed out some of the schemes of the enemy and the tactics he uses to defeat God's people. He is the accuser, the tempter, the deceiver, the seducer, the devourer. He intends to do more than wound us, he wants to totally devour us. He is looking for every opportunity to catch you with your guard down, with your resistance lowered, with your discernment weakened in order to knock you off your feet and devour you. That's why we prepare/brace for impact.

It would be overwhelming if we had to stand against this spiritual enemy alone, in our own strength and power. Too many have tried that and have failed. But as we've already pointed out in the previous messages, we are standing in the strength of the Lord and in his mighty power. Paul prays in Ephesians 1:18 that we would know this great power that is at work in our behalf. It is the same power that raised Christ from the dead and seated him in the heavenly places with all authority given to him. This is the power that has made us alive with Christ and has raised us up with Christ and has seated us in heavenly places in Christ. This also is the power in which we take our stand against the enemy of God and the enemy of our soul, the devil.

God has given to every follower of Christ the power to take a stand against the forces of hell. One of the ways that power operates is through the spiritual armor and weapons Paul describes in Ephesians 6. If we will avail ourselves of these weapons, this armor, we can stand in the power and might of Christ and be victorious over the enemy.

Many of you are familiar with the armor of God that Paul describes for us in

Ephesians. It occurred to me as I studied this that too often I've become so focused upon trying to understand and explain the various pieces of the armor that I think I've missed part of the truth that Paul was trying to get across to us. For Paul this illustration was understood by everyone who read or heard his letter. There were Roman soldiers wearing this armor or uniform all around them. They immediately had a frame of reference for this illustration. We don't and we have to try to recreate that image. I remember the pieces of the armor by singing a song that Dean and Mary Brown wrote ("...the belt of truth buckled round our waist and the breastplate of righteousness in its place, our feet are walking in the shoes of the gospel of peace, our helmets are his saving grace and above all we take the shield of faith and a mighty sword, the word, and we stand.")

What I want us to see and hear and understand today is that God has equipped us with these seven spiritual resources to use in taking a stand against every tactic and scheme of the devil. These things – truth, righteousness, the gospel, faith, salvation, the word of God, prayer. These seven things, while not a comprehensive list, but these seven things will make a difference in whether you stand or fall when evil confronts you and tries to devour you. Let's look at these pieces of our spiritual armor, these weapons or resources that have been given to us to enable us to stand against the enemy. Turn with me to **Ephesians 6:13-18** and let's read this passage.

Truth. Paul refers to this as the belt of truth buckled around our waist. There are a couple of aspects of truth that are necessary if we are going to stand against the enemy.

First is our knowledge of the truth of the gospel, The Truth of God that has been delivered to us. Paul refers to the gospel as "the word of truth..." in Ephesians 1:13. If we are going to stand against the devil, we must know the truth as revealed in God's word. Remember last week I told you the devil is a deceiver and can even come masquerading as an angel of light. He tries to distort God's word, God's truth, and deceive us. Do you know God's truth? Have you read and studied the bible so you have a general understanding of the great doctrines of the Christian faith? It is in knowing the truth that we are able to make right choices, redeemed choices, choices that honor God and his word. It is in knowing God's truth that we discover who God is

and who we are as Children of God.

There is a second aspect of truth that enables us to stand against the enemy. The first is the truth of God revealed to us in his word. The second is the weapon of truth as a virtue that must be lived out in our life. The first refers to a body of doctrinal truth. In the second I am referring to truth as a part of our character. Truthfulness. Integrity. Moral honesty and character. As believers and followers of Christ we are people of The Truth and consequently we must be truthful people. The devil can't trip us up if we always speak the truth and live in truthful ways. Paul tells us in Ephesians 4:25 that all of us as Christ followers "...must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbor." Lying and deceitfulness have no place in the life of a believer. If you have been lying and deceiving others, stop – ask for forgiveness– make it right and start telling the truth. You cannot stand against the devil and his schemes if you don't know the truth, speak the truth and live truthfully.

Righteousness. The second part of our armor is righteousness. Paul describes it as the breastplate of righteousness, the part of the armor that covers the heart and the torso. As with truth, there appear to be two aspects of righteousness that are essential to our spiritual warfare.

The first is what we call imputed righteousness. This refers to our standing with God. You see the bible says "there is no one righteous, not even one." Romans 3:10. We've all sinned and gone our own way. We've all fallen short of God's standard of righteousness. But the bible tells us that the righteousness of God has been placed in our account through our faith in Christ as our Savior, Redeemer and Lord. Paul said in Romans 3, **"But now a righteousness from God, apart from the Law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe."** Romans 3:21-22.

Through faith in the cleansing, saving work of Christ on the cross, our sins were placed upon him and his righteousness was placed upon us. We are now in right standing with God through our faith in Christ. Our sins have been forgiven, our debt has been paid and we are now made alive in Christ, free from fear, guilt, shame, condemnation and sin. Our standing in Christ is a powerful weapon against sin and Satan.

But there is another dimension to this piece of armor. While he cleanses us from our sin and imputes to us his righteousness, placing us in right standing with God, that right standing also places a responsibility upon us to live and act as one who stands before God. Paul spoke of this responsibility earlier in Ephesians when he said we were to put off the old way of life and “**...put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.**” **Ephesians 4:24.**

This is how we prepare and brace for impact. This is how we stand against the schemes of the devil. We do it by turning away from the practices and habits and places and environments and values of sin and unrighteousness and instead we purpose to live a holy life, clean and pure in body, mind, spirit, in behavior, in conversation, in action. **We were made righteous through Christ in order to live a righteous and holy life in Christ.** If we aren't living a life of personal holiness we are going to be easy prey for the devil. He will pick you off in the early rounds.

Jesus said of the devil, “**The prince of this world is coming. He has no hold on me...**” **John 14:30.** There was nothing in Jesus that the devil could grab hold of. He couldn't get a stronghold on him. Are you living a truthful life? Are you living a life of personal holiness? Are you living a life that is pleasing to God and obedient to his word? If you aren't, the devil will be able to grab hold of you and defeat you. Don't give him a stronghold. Put on the full armor of God.

The Gospel of peace. Paul describes this as the footwear a soldier needed in order to stand against the enemy. A good foot soldier put a lot of miles on his feet and a lot of wear on his shoes. He was ready to travel whenever he was commanded to march. Paul tells us that part of our stand against the enemy will be in our willingness to take the good news wherever the Lord leads us and to be ready to share that good news with everyone we meet. It points to our obedience, our readiness to go wherever he tells us to go and to do whatever he tells us to do.

Peter speaks of that preparedness when he tells us, “**Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have.**” **1 Peter 3:15.** How does this help us take a stand against the enemy's tactics? That hope, that witness and testimony is so real – you keep it at the forefront of your life, and it strengthens you in your stand against the enemy. You realize the importance

and the power of your witness, your testimony in the lives of others. Stop and ask yourself, “How will this effect my witness? How will others interpret my actions? What effect will my actions or my words have upon my testimony to these people? If I care about them and the influence my actions will have on others, I won’t do this.”

Remember that Revelation says, **“They overcame him [the devil] by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony...” Revelation 12:11.** Your testimony, that is your faithful and consistent life of obedience to Christ and his word is a powerful part of the armor of God that enables you to stand against the enemy.

Faith. Paul speaks next of taking up the “shield of faith by which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one.” Paul here is referring not to “the faith”, meaning the Christian faith or the doctrines of Christianity, but rather a personal faith in God – the confident assurance that God and his promises are trustworthy.

When the devil begins to shoot these fiery darts of attack at you, faith in God, faith that he is with you, that he will be your defender and protector, that he will strengthen you and go before you, faith that his power is stronger than anything the devil can throw at you, faith that God will cause all things to work together for our good and for his glory – that is the faith that extinguishes the fiery arrows.

The devil wants you to doubt, but Paul says “take up the shield of faith.” The devil wants to produce fear in you, but Paul says, “take up the shield of faith.” The devil wants to discourage you and cause you to give up, but Paul says, “take up the shield of faith.” The devil wants to cripple you with despair and hopelessness, but Paul says, “take up the shield of faith.” The devil wants to tempt you to compromise and sin but Paul says, “take up the shield of faith.” The devil wants to seduce you and deceive you, but Paul says, “take up the shield of faith.” The devil wants to accuse you and stop you from moving forward in God, but Paul says, “take up the shield of faith.” Do you hear me today? Take up the shield of faith. It’s there. The bible says God has given to each of us a measure of faith. You’ve got a shield of faith. You can build up your faith, but you’ve already got some faith. You’ve got enough to start. Take up the shield of faith. Begin to use it. Don’t just give up and give in to the devil. When the evil days come, take up the shield of faith. Raise it up and you can extinguish the fiery arrows of the devil.

Throughout the letter of Ephesians Paul has stressed the role of faith in accessing the power of God. Remember we pointed out in the first message that the people of Ephesus were used to sorcerers and magicians and their brand of powers. (Acts 19:18-20). They were used to people accessing power through incantations or wearing amulets or chanting certain words. Paul tells the believers however that the power God was not something that was accessed through magical rites or rituals but through simple faith and trust in God. The power you need to stand against the devil is accessed through your faith in God and his presence at work in your life. Take up the shield of faith and stand!

Salvation. Paul refers to the helmet of salvation. We need to know that we have been saved and we need to know what that means for us. Twice Paul explains to us in Ephesians 2 that we have been saved by grace through faith. Then he makes clear what that means to us spiritually – that we have been made alive with Christ (v5); we have been raised up with Christ (v6) and we have been seated with him in the heavenly realms (v6).

Paul wants us to know this because when the devil comes at us, to attack us, we need to know who we are in Christ, what our position is. We aren't hopeless victims, helpless against his attack. If Jesus has been raised up and is seated in heavenly realms above all powers and authorities and if we have been raised up and seated with Christ, then we can exercise his delegated authority and stand against the forces of hell. "I'm saved by grace. I have been made alive with Christ and raised up with Christ. Devil, you don't have control over me or my choices. I rebuke you by the power and authority of the risen Christ. Leave me alone." Know who you are as a redeemed child of God so you can resist the influence and attacks of the enemy.

The Sword of the Spirit/God's Word. Paul refers to God's word as the sword of the Spirit. Many scholars have pointed out that the sword of the Spirit is actually the only offensive weapon mentioned. All the rest are essentially part of a defensive stand against the enemy's attack. It is essential that we know the word of God in order to withstand the attacks of the enemy. Recall when Jesus was tempted by the devil in the wilderness he fought off the enemy's attack by quoting Scripture. The word of God is our weapon to be used against the attack of the enemy.

Now let me say a word about this. Paul is not talking about using the word of God like it is some magical book of incantations – you quote the right verses and you have what you want, quote some other verses and the devil has to do what you tell him. That was the very thing Paul had exposed in Ephesus – trying to control the gods by rituals and incantations and magic arts. That’s not what Paul is referring to. Paul is talking about reading and studying the bible, understanding and possessing the word of God to such an extent that we can apply it to any and every situation we face.

When Jesus was tempted, the devil quoted Scripture to him. It’s not enough to speak the word. The devil spoke the word, but he was applying the Scriptures inappropriately and taking them out of context. Jesus responded to the devil by quoting Scripture, but Jesus applied the Scriptures appropriately. He had an understanding of what those Scriptures actually referred to and knew them in their proper biblical context. The devil can’t deceive you if you study the bible and know God’s word. He can’t lure you into sin if you know God’s word and you know how to apply it and live it. The Psalmist asked, **“How can a young man keep his way pure? By living according to your word... I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you.” Psalm 119:9-11.** Knowing God’s word, hiding it in your heart and getting it into your spirit is essential in being able to withstand the attacks of the enemy. Get it in your heart and mind and spirit and understanding and then you can speak God’s word.

Notice too that when Paul speaks of God’s word, he calls it the sword of the Spirit. The word of God, proclaimed in the power of the Holy Spirit is a weapon that the enemy cannot defeat. It is with the shield of faith in one hand and the word of God in the other that we not only take our stand but we can move offensively against the gates of hell, proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ, the good news that sets the prisoners free.

Prayer. Paul ties all of this together with one final piece of our armor and our arsenal. Prayer. Paul writes, **“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 saints.” Ephesians 6:18**

Here is how we arm ourselves for the battle – Prayer. Pray. Be alert and keep on praying. Be aware of the devil’s schemes and tactics and keep on praying. Brace

for impact and pray and keep on praying. Paul expected us to pray, individually and collectively. Pray for all the saints – pray for one another. It is part of how we will stand against the enemy, as we pray for each other.

James Boice tells us that “Roman soldiers had two kinds of shields. There was a small round shield that he would use in hand to hand combat when it was important for him to be able to maneuver easily, and there was a large oblong shield that he would use when advancing into battle with other soldiers. This second shield, the one Paul refers to here, was about four or four and a half feet long and about two feet wide and covered the soldier’s body completely. So when the soldiers advanced in rows, as the Romans did, the enemy was faced with a solid wall of shields – row upon row of them. These advancing columns of a Roman army were called phalanxes and they were the terror of Rome’s foes....Paul is saying that our faith should be like that. It should do three things: 1) it should cover us so that not a portion is exposed, 2) it should link up with the faith of others to create a solid wall of defense and 3) because it covers our entire person and links up with the faith of our fellow soldiers, it should be able to strike down whatever fiery arrows the enemy hurls at us.”

Imagine what we can do when we link our faith with the faith of others. Braced for impact we take up our shield, lift our swords and engage the enemy and we will not be defeated. We will no longer succumb to the enemy’s tactics or his attacks. We are more than conquerors as we stand strong in the Lord and in his mighty power.

Put on the whole armor of God. Lift your shield and your sword. Stand shoulder to shoulder - faith to faith- alert, watching, praying for one another. Together in faith and together in victory we will stand and not fall!