

The Gift of God's Armour: Part 1

Neil Foster

Ephesians 6:10-20

Acts 19:8-20 (NIV)

8 Paul entered the synagogue and spoke boldly there for three months, arguing persuasively about the kingdom of God. 9 But some of them became obstinate; they refused to believe and publicly maligned the Way. So Paul left them. He took the disciples with him and had discussions daily in the lecture hall of Tyrannus. 10 This went on for two years, so that all the Jews and Greeks who lived in the province of Asia heard the word of the Lord.

11 God did extraordinary miracles through Paul, 12 so that even handkerchiefs and aprons that had touched him were taken to the sick, and their illnesses were cured and the evil spirits left them.

13 Some Jews who went around driving out evil spirits tried to invoke the name of the Lord Jesus over those who were demon-possessed. They would say, "In the name of the Jesus whom Paul preaches, I command you to come out." 14 Seven sons of Sceva, a Jewish chief priest, were doing this. 15 One day the evil spirit answered them, "Jesus I know, and Paul I know about, but who are you?" 16 Then the man who had the evil spirit jumped on them and overpowered them all. He gave them such a beating that they ran out of the house naked and bleeding.

17 When this became known to the Jews and Greeks living in Ephesus, they were all seized with fear, and the name of the Lord Jesus was held in high honor. 18 Many of those who believed now came and openly confessed what they had done. 19 A number who had practiced sorcery brought their scrolls together and burned them publicly. When they calculated the value of the scrolls, the total came to fifty thousand drachmas. 20 In this way the word of the Lord spread widely and grew in power.

Ephesians 6:10-20 (NIV)

¹⁰ Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power.

¹¹ Put on the full armour of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. ¹² 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. ¹³ Therefore put on the full armour 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.

¹⁴ Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, ¹⁵ and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. ¹⁶ In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. ¹⁷ Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

¹⁸ 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. ¹⁹ Pray also for me, that whenever I speak, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel, ²⁰ for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should.

Introduction

- Today is Oct 31!
- The danger of Halloween- trivialising an important truth about a spiritual battle
- The Bible tells us we are in a war!

Background

- The church in Ephesus- see Acts 19 passage
- Ephesus- major port city in Asia Minor (Turkey), 3rd largest in Roman empire
- Highly "spiritual" city- magicians, worship of goddess Artemis (Diana)

- NB the famous 6 “Ephesian Letters”- magical spells of legend- note that Paul by contrast, perhaps, refers to 6 items of armour
- In the earlier part of Ephesians, Paul stresses the cosmic victory of Jesus over all other spiritual forces!
 - o God's power is shown in his immeasurable might working in the raising of Jesus from death itself! (1:20)
 - o Jesus has now been raised to God's “right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things”! (1:20-22)
 - o Eph 2 Paul reminds them that they used to be in slavery to “the prince of the power of the air”, to Satan the ruler of demons- but now in his mercy God has set his people free, made them alive with Christ, seated us next to him where we can no longer fear any demonic power.
 - o Later in ch 3 v 10 he says that God did all these things “so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places”.
 - o now we have this new life, we are to “put on” (4:24) the new self, “created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness”.
 - o We are to “give no opportunity to the devil” (4:27) by being angry with each other- for the devil would love to tear apart God's new community.
 - o Instead, we are to “be imitators of God” (5:1).
- The passage here, Eph 6:10-20, can be analysed in three parts.
 - o First, “be strong and stand firm”, vv 10-13, where Paul introduces his theme.
 - o Second, the six pieces of God's armour are set out in vv 14-17;
 - o Thirdly, we see the undergirding final element of prayer, in vv 18-20.

Be strong and stand firm

- We see from the very fact that we are offered armour, that a battle is involved!
- The battle has ultimately been won (**now**, we can be sure of victory); but we are **not yet** there, and so we will face Satan's opposition on the way
 - o Eg see in *1 Peter 5:8*, “your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour”.
- We need to stand against the “schemes” of the devil
 - o See *Genesis 3:1*, in disguise as a serpent: “Now the serpent was more **crafty** than any other beast of the field that the LORD God had made”
 - o in Eph 4:14, Paul warns the believers about being caught up “by the trickery of people, by craftiness in a strategy of deception”
 - o so it seems that inspiring false teaching is one of Satan's schemes
 - see eg Acts 20 to the Ephesian elders:
 - Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood.²⁹ I know that after I leave, **savage wolves will come in** among you and will not spare the flock.³⁰ Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them.³¹ So be on your guard!
 - *1 Tim 4:1* Paul later says that certain false teachers (in Ephesus!) are those who “depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons”
 - o How can we withstand Satan's cunning? With the armour God gives!

The Gift of the Armour

- Note that it is armour, not a static “panic room”- so while we are protected, we know it is meant to be used in middle of an active battle!

- It is not something we invent or make for ourselves- it is the gift of God's wonderful grace!
 - o this is the letter where Paul told us, in 2:4-5, that our rescue comes purely from "God, being rich in mercy", who "made us alive together with Christ- by **grace** you have been saved". God in his loving kindness gives us the gift of this armour to keep us safe in battle
- The origins of the armour metaphors can be found, it seems, in the Old Testament, and especially in Isaiah

Isaiah 11:1-5

A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse;
 from his roots a Branch will bear fruit.
 2 The Spirit of the Lord will rest on him—
 the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding,
 the Spirit of counsel and of might,
 the Spirit of the knowledge and fear of the Lord—
 3 and he will delight in the fear of the Lord.
 He will not judge by what he sees with his eyes,
 or decide by what he hears with his ears;
 4 but with righteousness he will judge the needy,
 with justice he will give decisions for the poor of the earth.
 He will strike the earth with the **rod of his mouth**;
 with the breath of his lips he will slay the wicked.
 5 **Righteousness will be his belt**
and faithfulness the sash around his waist.

Isaiah 52:7

How beautiful on the mountains
 are the **feet of those who bring good news**,
 who proclaim **peace**,
 who bring good tidings,
 who proclaim salvation,
 who say to Zion,
 "Your God reigns!"

Isaiah 59:15-17

Truth is nowhere to be found,
 and whoever shuns evil becomes a prey.
 The Lord looked and was displeased
 that there was no justice.
 16 He saw that there was no one,
 he was appalled that there was no one to intervene;
 so his own arm achieved salvation for him,
 and his own righteousness sustained him.
 17 He put on **righteousness as his breastplate**,
 and the **helmet of salvation on his head**;
 he put on the **garments of vengeance**
 and **wrapped himself** in zeal as in a cloak.

- God and his Messiah are spoken of as being clothed in armour in the Old Testament, and then the believer in Ephesians 6 gets to wear similar armour in his or her battle!
- earlier in Ephesians, in 4:24, Paul says to the believers:

put on the new self, created to be **like God** in true righteousness and holiness

- the pattern: item of armour + "virtue"; but we won't stress the details of the item, the most important things are the "virtues"

The first piece: The Belt of Truth

- Literally the text here simply refers to “strapping around your waist in truth”
- Truth here *could* be “truth-telling” (eg Eph 4:25); but I think the more common use of the word in Ephesians is for the objective “truth of the gospel”, the saving message of Jesus
- This is important because one of the main things we learn about Satan is that he is a liar!
 - o in Genesis 3, when he first appeared in shrewdness and cunning to Adam and Eve, one of the first things he did was to lie about God’s purposes: when told that God had decreed death for eating the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, his response was a blatant denial: “You will not surely die!”
 - o John 8:44: He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for **there is no truth in him**. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is **a liar and the father of lies**
 - o 2 Cor 11:3: I am afraid that just as Eve was deceived by the **serpent’s cunning**, your minds may somehow be led astray from your sincere and pure devotion to Christ
- So to defeat him we wrap ourselves with truth! Eg Eph 1:13 “the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation”
- How does that work?
 - o In Acts 20 we see Paul explains that he was involved in “preaching” the whole word of God, teaching house to house, and warning about false teachers
 - o So we too: Go to your church regularly, and listen to the sermons, seeking to take it all in. Take notes! Read the passage before and after. Read the Bible, and good books about the Bible, for yourself. As Paul went “house to house”, go to a small group where you can learn even more from God’s word and be encouraged in the truth by others. And “keep guard”, watch out for those who would bring in error
- An example of “keeping guard”- look out for false teachers, such as those who seem to be coming to Melbourne next month in the “Awakening Australia” conference, who seem to believe that all gospel preaching must have signs and wonders and healing
 - o See a very good analysis of this by a friend of mine from Victoria, a Baptist pastor named Murray Campbell.¹
- So- wrap ourselves in God’s word, so Satan doesn’t deceive us, and warn others about his deceptions where we can
- Next time: the other five pieces of armour, and the weapon of prayer!

¹ See Murray’s latest blog post at <https://murraycampbell.net/2018/10/25/concerns-with-awakening-australia-remain/> .