

Mystery & Clarity//“Fortified by the Gospel”//Ephesians 6:10–20

How many of y’all have had your wisdom teeth removed? Last thing they told me in the pre-op consultation was to not eat or drink anything 12 hours before the surgery... somehow I missed that or selectively forgot it (probably more of the latter)... so they asked me when I came in if I had anything to eat or drink that morning and in that moment for whatever reason I lost all sense of mind and said... “Sure, but not much.” At which point they informed that they weren’t going to be able to put me to sleep to do the surgery...” I was like, “What? You can’t... what?” Wait... can I change my answer? I thought you meant, did you eat last week? Of course I haven’t eaten today, because you guys told me not to... And of course, they didn’t buy it... and I had to stay awake... anybody else have that happen? If you’re going to have that surgery awake, you’re going to have to put your man pants on... and it was one of the top 3 most wretched experiences of my life... you could hear it cracking; hand all on my face...

Last instructions are important... and if they’re coming from somebody who knows what they are taking about you should probably pay attention to them. So it is really important to notice that Paul *ends* this whole letter to the Ephesians by talking to them about spiritual warfare... these are his last instructions.

Now, for the Ephesians, this was already a very relevant issue—Ephesus was a very spiritualistic city; there was lots of occult activity... Plus, everybody in the church knew the story about the demon beating the pants off the sons of Sceva and nobody wanted that to happen to them... So they would have all set up and paid attention

when Paul started talking about the spiritual armor. Nobody wanted to walk through town and have a demon beat them naked.

Now, I know that it’s a little different for us... a lot of you don’t believe you have ever actually encountered a demon... and many in our culture don’t even believe in them... But I would say you most certainly have encountered demons. And frequently. They just appear today a little more subtly than they did back then. After all, **What Satan is after is not your recognition but your destruction.** To quote **Tony Campolo**, he’s the one...

“...appearing in movies telling us that romantic love and sexual pleasure are the keys to fulfillment; he’s the one behind an economic system that teaches us that money is the key to success and happiness; he’s the one who sits in the psychologist’s chair offering ultimate hope in life apart from God; he works in and through governments that coddle people into thinking that government help is the answer; he’s the one teaching from our pulpits that life is about you, that God wants to make you rich, that hell is not for real, and that the standards of the Bible are for a different time and place.”

He’s the one who whispers to you that it is a ridiculous idea to believe in him. He’s not after your recognition but your destruction.

“But J.D.,” you say, “that’s kind of begging the question!” How do you know that demons are actually real? Well, for (1), **Jesus believed in them...** His entire ministry was built on warfare against the demonic, and I feel like He would know... and (2) **I believe there’s really no other plausible explanation** for the intensity of some of the evil in the world.

Whether you believe in him or not, there is an enemy whose names are Satan, the deceiver, and Abaddon, the destroyer, whose sole goal is to convince us to join him in rebellion against God so we can accompany him to hell.

So what Paul says to us about the spiritual armor is as relevant to us as it was to them, and I beg you to pay serious attention to what I'm about to teach you.

And here's the big point from last week, and it's very important: ***In giving the spiritual armor Paul is not introducing some new theme he hasn't covered yet in Ephesians***—you know, some “oh yeah, I almost forgot to mention this” kind of auxiliary strategy, special-ops training for the Christian life.

No, each of the pieces of spiritual armor is simply a way of applying the Gospel (the Gospel that he's been teaching for 6 chapters through Ephesians) to a different part of your life.

The Gospel is the power of God in your life and the way God reverses the corruption of sin and repels the power of Satan from you. The Gospel is the antidote that keeps death from corroding your life and the force field that keeps Satan from manipulating it (that was for you Star Trekkies). So Paul is urging the Ephesians to take the things he taught them about God and cover every part of them with it...

Write this down: The way we keep the corrupting influence of the enemy out of our lives is by establishing every part of our life—our hopes, our dreams, our failures, our worries, our fears, our relationships, our pleasures, our disappointments—on the Gospel.

The flip side of this is that whatever part of you is not established in the Gospel—whether that is your marriage, your job, your dreams, whatever—whatever part is not saturated in the Gospel is subject to manipulation of the enemy against you.

Remember: *We asked the question, “Can a Christian be demon-possessed?”* And I explained that that comes from a bad English translation... the word “demon-possessed” is not actually in the Bible.

The biblical word is “demonized.” Whatever part of you is not saturated in the Gospel can be demonized.

- If you're a Christian, the core of who you are cannot be completely taken over by demon, because Jesus lives there... but whatever part of you is not dominated by Jesus and saturated in the Gospel can be used against you...
- For example, in **Ephesians 4:27** Paul said that Satan can use the unresolved anger in your, a Christian's, life to destroy your relationships and you;
- We know that Satan used **Peter's fear** to move him to betray Jesus; and...
- Satan used **King David's pride** to trick him into counting the armies of Israel which God had forbidden.
- In none of those cases could you say, “Well, the devil made me do it;” because the devil took what was already inside of you; but what he did was take it and blow it up...

So, Paul says, saturate yourself with this Gospel that I'm teaching you and it will be the armor of God against Satan! **To be saturated with the Gospel (the mind of Christ) is to be filled with the Spirit and thus resistant to the attacks of Satan.**

So Paul gives them 2 commands: ***Vs. 10, “Be strong in the Lord, and in the strength of His might. And...***

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

Let's look at both of those briefly.

Here's the 1st one: *Vs. 10, “Be strong in the Lord, and in the strength of His might”*

- We all want to engage in the battles in life from a position of strength...
 - For example, when you **think about the future**, we want to have a thick 401K and a good job so we are

strong financially; if you're a **student**, when you think about your future you feel better if you are "strong in talent"; if you're needing **to make a decision**, you want to be strong in your ability to figure out the right decision and make it; if you are trying to **raise kids**, you want to be strong in your abilities to guide and shape them. Make sense.

- What the Gospel teaches you is counter-intuitive, because it teaches you not to be strong in yourself, but to be strong in *the Lord*... to let Him be your strength and power and security in every area. The Gospel is the opposite of being strong in yourself.
 - **A great example of this in the Bible Paul uses often is Abraham.** God told Abraham that he was going to make his descendants number in the millions. The problem with this is that when God told him that, Abraham didn't have any kids, and he was 90, and his wife is 75. Even the miracles of modern medicine are not going to fix that problem. Those goofy commercials that picture a couple of older people sitting in 2 bathtubs overlooking the Rocky Mountains never feature a 90 year old.
 - So, because he was weak physically he had to be strong in God.
- He's called the father of faith, because that's what it means to have faith in God. To stand, where you are weak, covered in God's strength. And you won't do that, unless you are convinced of your own weakness.
 - This starts with our righteousness; what makes us acceptable to God. Because we are sinners, the only way we could ever be good enough to stand before God is for God to give us His righteousness as a gift.
 - The good news it is offered freely to everyone; the bad news is most people will never receive it because they don't really think they need it. They are strong in their own sense of righteousness; they think they are good enough (they know they're not perfect, but definitely

good enough to earn God's favor) and that sense of "strength" keeps them from receiving the gift God offers.

- But, however, when you are weak in your righteousness, you'll helplessly look to God to be strong in His righteousness.
- It's the same with every other dimension of your life:
 - You are worried about your family, about your kids turning out right; about your marriage... do you feel weak in that? Congratulations... you are eligible for God's strength.
 - Maybe you have a huge decision in front of you... not sure what to do... in other words, do you feel weak to make the decision? Then trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean... be strong not in your abilities, but in your confidence in Him!
 - Are you worried about financially being stable in the future? You can do 1 of 2 things: you can look at the future through the lens of your own strength; (how much job security; the size of your 401K); or you can be strong in your confidence in God to take care of you in the future;
- **You cannot be strong in yourself and strong in God.** And it is only where you sense your weakness that you will be strong in God.
 - Very important truth about Jesus' life: *All of Jesus' miracles started with a problem*... all of them. Jesus didn't go around pulling rabbits out of hats or catching bullets in his teeth... all of Jesus' miracles started with a problem.
 - If you have a problem, good news: you are a candidate for a miracle. Bad news: "no problem, no miracle." The only ones of you that are eligible for mighty displays of God's power are those of you that are weak, with problems... if you don't have any problems, at the end when we do a prayer time...

- So, question: **where do you feel strong right now?** That's where you're the weakest because that's where you are least likely to depend on God's power; and you are no match for Satan.
- Where do you feel the weakest right now? **That's an invitation to trust God.**
- That's where you can be the strongest, b/c you can be strong in confidence in God.
- Those who look to themselves for strength will quickly find it in short supply; those who are mighty in their confidence in God will find that His willingness to help and His power to do so are a deep, deep well that never runs dry.
 - **Isaiah 40:31** says that even the youngest men (the strongest, best athletes) will grow weary and stumble, but those who wait upon the Lord will renew their strength, they will mount up with wings like eagles... they will run, and not be weary, they walk and not faint.

Now, look at the next command: ¹¹ **Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil.**

- Again, this is not a brand new command. This is how you apply vs. 10. Putting on the armor is how you become "strong in the Lord."

"Take up (vs. 13)... the belt of truth"

- We all have a way to determine what is right. For some of you, it is popular opinion; what everyone else thinks. You're the kind of person that finds yourself weakening when everyone around (in work, family, school) disagrees with you.
- For others of you, it's your instincts. You don't care what everyone else thinks, you just know what's right, at least for you.
- Paul is saying the only way for you to escape the deception of the enemy is to let the word of God interpret reality for you.
 - Satan will bombard you constantly with lies. From the very beginning Satan's strategy has been to get people to discard the word of God. His 1st question was "Has God really said this...?" He'll try to make you do 1 of 2 things:

- **doubt** God's word;
 - or, if he can't make you do that, **neglect** it.
- That's what I fear for so many... Not that you doubt the word of God, you just don't know it...
 - I don't know any other way to say it... and you're not teaching your kids to know it, either.
 - We take this very seriously here (we offer AWANAs... little goofy b/c kids get dressed up in these paramilitary vests)... but here's why we do it...
 - **There's a deceiver**... and I want my children fortified in the Word of God. For most of us, a public school gets our kids 8 hours a day... compare that to the amount of time we are exposing our children to the ways of God.
- **I know that most of you believe the Bible is important**... I do... here's how I know: say, **Richard Dawkins**, the world's most famous atheist, stood on stage in here and said, "I will give you 3 million dollars, on 1 condition: You can never again touch the word of God. You can't ever read it... or hear it; and you can't ever teach it to your children. 3 million... at that point your whole life is set, right... anybody take him up on it? No! It's so valuable to you that you wouldn't take any amount of money for it... so does it make sense the lazy way you study it, learn it, and teach it to your kids?"
- The most important dimension of the belt of truth... is the truth about Jesus. Jesus said, "I am the truth." To know me is to know truth; to not know me is to be totally deceived about life. Paul repeated that in Eph 4:21; he said the "truth is in a person Jesus."

In Jesus you see the truth about yourself: that we were created for God, and that's why nothing in the world can ever satisfy us... because we were created to know Him and love Him.

In the cross of Jesus we see that we are sinners who have separated ourselves from God and stood condemned; and in the cross of Jesus

you see the truth about God: that He loved us so much that he took that punishment for us.

When you see those 3 truths: that you were created for God; that you stand separated from God by our own choice and stand condemned, and that God loves us anyway, your life changes.

- **My favorite moment in this series (what I remember 10 yrs from now): “I’ve been bad.”** The truth is in Jesus.

“Take up... the breastplate of righteousness”

- Means 2 things, I think.
- 1st: You don’t allow Satan any room to mess with you. God’s righteousness has saturated and fortified your life. Think about it... the breastplate covers your vital organs... God’s righteousness becomes a part of your central circulation... some people are weirded out by that word, “righteousness.” Think of it’s opposite: wrongousness... righteousness means you think rightly, god-like, in every area.
 - Satan uses uncovered parts of your life to attack you... bad habits you have; a lack of self-control; areas of pride; bad relationships. Whatever is uncovered in your life, he uses to attack you. You let God have control of every part of you.
- 2nd thing it means is that you begin to feel like God feels as you look at the world; you heart begins to beat with righteousness.
 - I learned something this week: “Breastplate of righteousness” was on OT image for someone God used to bring justice. When someone put on the breastplate of righteousness, they were about to do God’s work. **Isaiah 59:15–17** talks about a time when there was a lot of injustice in the world. **“Then the LORD saw it, and it displeased Him that *there was* no justice.** ¹⁶ He saw that *there was* no man to stand up for the

afflicted... ¹⁷ So He put on righteousness as a breastplate, And a helmet of salvation on His head...”

- When you put on the breastplate of righteousness, you begin to feel what God feels when he sees injustice. This is how God sends you out into the world to engage in warfare.
- You see the sex trade; poverty... can’t I do something about that? Is it really right to go on living like life is about me when so many suffer?
- When God called me to the mission field... **Train tracks.** Many of us think about our lives as if there wasn’t a lost world... We talk about finding God’s will. God’s will is to see injustice stopped and people saved.

“As shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the Gospel of peace.”

- Readiness means you understand God’s purposes in the world and are ready to extend them. You understand that God has pronounced peace to all peoples everywhere in the world by paying for the sins of every single person in the world.
 - So I look at over a billion Muslims who think if they observe the 5 pillars of Islam vigorously that God will take them to heaven... there’s a famous image given in the *hadith* almost every Muslim knows... where on the last day it says you have to carry the burden of sin across a tightrope; more sins you have, more likely you are to fall into hell... your heart hears that and you think, “Someone has to tell them... “*He took my sins and my sorrows, and He made them His very own; He bore my burden to Calvary, and suffered and died alone.*”
 - ...or I see millions of Buddhists who think that every cycle of life they are paying for the sins of their previous life. And I want to say... “There was already one who lived a perfect life and then died a sacrificial death.”

- I understand what God is doing, and my feet are ready to go, looking for opportunities.
- What Paul also means here when he says, “Having the shoes of readiness of the Gospel of peace” is that Christians are very quick to forgive... because forgiving breaks the power of the enemy.
 - I read a book about the genocide in Rwanda... the Hutus massacred over 800,000 Tutsis... the Tutsi pastor who wrote this book said that the only way to overcome the work of Satan is to forgive. Even before
 - There was a story of one woman (in South Africa) who had watched this one soldier burn her husband and son... when this soldier stood in court with this woman and confessed his crime the judge looked at her and asked her what she wanted... this elderly woman said that God forgave this man and she forgave them... and to prove to him that the forgiveness was real, she wanted to embrace him, and she wanted him to come to her ghetto twice a month and spend the day with her, so that could be a mother to him and give him some of the love that she still had to give.¹
 - Many of you deal with the works of Satan in your marriage much less worse... one of your most powerful tools to break his power is to forgive.

“Above all, taking the shield of faith, by which we extinguish the fiery darts of the wicked one”

- Fiery darts are the lies... the doubts Satan throws at us about God. For example, He tells you,
 - “This situation you’re in is out of control—nothing but darkness and misery ahead”;
 - Or, “that’s it. Your divorce means that you’ve messed up too much to come back and have a significant life;”

¹ paraphrase - Philip Yancey, Rumors, Ch13 - “Practicing the Existence of God” p 224.

- Or, “Your future will be full of failure, just like your past has been.”
- “Because of the mistakes you’ve made, God is constantly looking for ways to get even with you.”
- Those lies are extinguished by faith... faith in the God revealed in the Gospel.
- There’s this phrase in Ephesians I’ve really been enamored with (you know that because I’ve repeated it): Paul really wants them to get: “The length and height and breadth and depth of God’s love.”
 - Confidence in *that* extinguishes every dart of our enemy.
- Before we move to the next one, let me ask you to consider: Where are you most likely not to believe God?
 - About his forgiveness of your past?
 - About his provision over your future?
 - Money...
 - If you’re single...
 - About his guidance of you in the present? (college students)
 - About a situation in your family, marriage?
- One other thing: shield of faith... Roman soldiers used to have this tactic when they were barraged by fiery darts... you’ve seen gladiator... reason #838 to be in a small group. My faith helps you; yours helps me.

“Take up... the helmet of salvation”

- ***Feel like I’m being repetitive here, but so is Paul*** (deal with it) let the knowledge of your salvation dominate your thinking.
- You see all of life through the Gospel. This kind of sums up all of them... I’ll come back to it at the very end.

“The Sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God”

- We take the word of God and we speak it into people’s lives...
- It is the Word of God that creates faith.

- He calls it a sword... A life-giving sword... (I know that sounds like a contradiction, but think of it like a **scalpel**.)
 - **Which, again, means if it's going to do you and anyone else any good, you have to know it...**
 - A scalpel can be a life-saving instrument, as long as the person using it knows where to cut.
 - If I got something wrong with my heart, I don't want **my doctor** saying, "Well, we don't really know what's wrong, so we're just going to cut you open and start rooting around in there slicing stuff up and cutting stuff out until you get better."
 - **Let me ask you a question, just to consider:** *Do you think spiritual problems/dysfunctions are less important, less significant than physical ones? Is physical sickness worse than spiritual sickness? Would you ever take your kid to someone whom you know slept through medical school and didn't really understand medicine? No. Why would you take the Word of God less seriously?*
 - Pastor: that's what you are there for! I can't be there to apply the word in all the places you need it... after you and your spouse have a fight... and you are laying down on your pillow... There I am, kind of squatting down there beside your bed... "Let's talk about what you did wrong."
 - I can't do it for your kids: We at the church get your kid 40 hours; you get 3000. You have to do it.
 - Would you ever take your kids to a doctor who studied the human body as lazily as you study the Word?
 - This is: Reason #839 why to be in a small group. Small group will help you learn more about how the Word applies to real life situations and will put a group of people around you who will help you do it...
- Prayer is how we release the healing power of God into the world.
- Important qualification: "*In the Spirit...*" This doesn't mean you pray in some trance.
 - Like **Heroes...** when they paint the future, their eyes are white... you pray in the Spirit, wake up 8 hours late with no idea what you prayed for because you did so in a language you didn't understand.
- Not what Paul is talking about here... He already told you what "filled with the Spirit" means... (Eph 3:17) When you are filled with the knowledge of God's love...
- Prayer in the Spirit, prayer full of confidence in God's love, is how God releases power into our world to overcome the enemy...
 - Jesus miracles in the Bible were often done in response to people who had the audacity to presume upon how gracious and how powerful He was.
 - Story: 'Little puppies'
 - **Jesus' power is released by people who are confident in His power and His willingness to use it for our salvation.**
 - **Ask... ask, ask.** Pray full of confidence in God's goodness and His love. Prayer moves the hand that heals the world.
- Listen: Prayer is the place where we most exemplify "being strong in the Lord" rather than being strong in ourselves. In fact, I'd be so bold to say that **prayerlessness is proof either of extreme arrogance (I don't need God) or unbelief (I don't really think He'll help).**
- So, if you are prayerless, you are either extremely arrogant or unbelieving. So... those of you who don't have an active prayer life... (by that I mean you don't devote a significant time each day to it, multiple times)... which is it? Stand you down... you pray 1x a week for 5 minutes... arrogant or unbelieving... which is it?

Finally, **"Praying at all times in the Spirit..."**

- “If you are not praying, then you are quietly confident that time, money, and talent are all you need in life.” Paul Miller, *A Praying Life*, 49)
- Those who are strong in the Lord and not in themselves will find them praying, as Paul says, in all places at all times, instinctively.

Let the Gospel dominate your thinking. Every morning put it on...

The question at the end of Ephesians... do you know Jesus? He is the only way to salvation.

- Here is the Gospel: You have sold yourself into sin. You are rightfully and eternally condemned because of it. But because God loves you He did for you what you could not do for yourself... and so Jesus came to earth to receive the consequences of your sin and offers healing, forgiveness and salvation to all who will simply receive it as a gift.
- Have you ever done that? you can do it today...
- Say, “Jesus, I know I’m a sinner and I need your salvation... so I surrender my life to you right now.”

Bonus:

The Gospel prayer

- **“Father, there is nothing I can do today that would make you love me more; nothing I did yesterday makes you love me less.”**
- **“Father, you are all I need for everlasting joy”**
 - That affects my identity... “Your identity is what the most important person in your life thinks about you.”

Is that God? If it is, you’ll be free from low self-esteem or a sense of guilt...

- **“Father, as you have been to me, so I will be to others.”**
- **“Father, everything the Gospel tells me about your intentions is true.”**