

Moments *for* You

Volume 67, Number 1

Theme: God's Armor

Take up the

SHIELD OF FAITH,

with
which you can
extinguish all the
flaming darts of the
evil one.

Ephesians 6:16

SPIRITUAL WARFARE

I am deeply convinced that we can only understand life when we see it as the Bible sees it. That is why the word of God was given to open our eyes to God's perspective on life and reality. The world we see all around us—the world of entertainment and nightly news and instant information on the internet, and political infighting and social upheaval—that is a world of illusion. Though we usually call it “the real world,” it is a facade that is destined to fade away. What God calls reality is something that exists beyond the flimsy walls of this world, and it is far more real and lasting than our so-called “real world.”

We may not want to hear what the Bible has to say to us. We may think the Bible's diagnosis of our condition is too harsh, or its prescription for our healing is too difficult—but if we reject its truth, we only succeed in deceiving ourselves.

In Ephesians 6, the apostle Paul tells us that life is a struggle, a life-and-death conflict between two opposing forces:

“Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. 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. 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” (Ephesians 6:10–13).

If we try to ignore the conflict, if we do not firmly choose the right side and take up our armor and our weapons for the battle, we will inevitably find ourselves jarred and shaken by spiritual reality. We may even become casualties of a battle we thought we could wish away.

Our conflict is not against flesh and blood. Spiritual warfare is not a political struggle, a social struggle, an economic struggle, or even a religious theological-doctrinal struggle. While modern sociology, psychology, and political science stand baffled and frustrated in the face of the world's evil and darkness, the apostle Paul gives us the insight and illumination of God's word. The world, he says, is in the grip of what he calls “rulers ... authorities ... powers.” These rulers and powers of this dark world are headed by the devil.

“Well,” you say, “this is all very depressing. I would rather not think about it.” I don't like to think about it either, but I have discovered that you cannot wish the truth away. There is only one realistic approach to this struggle, and that is to be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. That is the way of escape, and there is no other.

God has issued to each of us a bugle call to intelligent combat. It is a call to us to be men and women of God, to fight the good fight, to stand fast in the faith, to be strong in the Lord in the midst of this dark and evil world. Those who ignore this call and the battle that rages around them are doomed to be casualties.

We must learn how to overcome the devil—not by flesh and blood, not by joining committees, not by political

action, not by taking up clubs or assault weapons and attacking a human enemy. No, Paul says the weapons of our warfare are not physical weapons. Rather, our weapons are mighty, through God, unto the pulling down of strongholds and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ (2 Corinthians 10:3–5). That is the path to victory!

As the world grows darker, the truth of Jesus Christ burns brighter. And the brightest truth of all is this: He has already won the war in which we fight. The war was over the moment He declared from the cross: “It is finished!” We do not have to charge against the enemy. We merely have to stand our ground. As the days grow darker and more evil, we will not be moved! We have put on the armor of God, we have planted our feet. Though the enemy is attacking, we are not afraid, for the battle has already been won.

Stand firm, my friend! Stand your ground! Ours is the victory in Christ!
—Condensed from *Spiritual Warfare* by Ray Stedman

MEET YOUR ENEMY

It is commonplace in our day to doubt the existence of the devil. Many who believe in God do not believe in the devil at all. When people say, “The devil made me do it,” they mean it jokingly. When someone says, “Oh, you devil,” it’s meant as a kind of compliment. And if someone means to seriously bring the devil into a polite discussion, the response is likely to be, “You’re not serious, are you?”

Satan’s greatest triumph may be in causing people not to take him seriously. *If people don’t believe you exist, they won’t try to stop you.* We rarely hear Satan talked about or preached about. And as a result, we are igno-

rant of his strategy, his power, his vast army, and his infernal plans.

It is amazing how much the Bible says about the devil. He appears the first time in Genesis 3 and the last time in Revelation 20. Among his many titles, he is called Satan, the devil, the serpent, the deceiver, the evil one, and the accuser of the brethren. Every New Testament writer mentions him. Jesus encountered him at the beginning and end of His ministry and spoke often of him.

There is much we do not know but this much is certain. *The devil is a real being.* In the beginning he was an angel of God. Lifted up with pride, he attempted to overthrow the Lord himself. Being cast out of Heaven, one-third of the angels followed him. Those fallen angels we call demons.

SATAN DOESN’T FIGHT FAIR

He uses anything and everything that he can to bring us down. This is part of what Paul meant when he spoke about “the schemes of the devil” in Ephesians 6:11. The word “schemes” might also be translated as “traps” or “tricks” or “tactics.”

He is a liar, a deceiver, a diabolical “angel of light” who comes to you in a thousand guises, tempting you to disobey the Lord. And he’s a lot smarter than you are. He knows your weak points better than you do. And he can attack you any time of the day or night.

When we face temptations, we may be sure that the evil one has us in his cross-hairs. *That’s exactly the moment when we need the message of Ephesians 6:14–18.* This text tells us how we should fight back against the devil. No believer is safe who faces Satan in his own strength. No believer is more secure than he who goes into battle wearing the whole armor of God.

My final word to you is this. Paul tells us to put on the whole armor of God. He does not say, “Put on your own armor” because that’s a good way to get clobbered in the head. *It is God’s armor, not ours. Everything Christians need we already have in Jesus Christ.*

He fights with us and through us and for us so that we are not left alone on the battlefield. We must still go into battle, but God provides the armor. He gives us whatever we need, whenever we need it, so that no believer ever need be defeated by the devil.

Stand and fight, child of God. The Lord is on your side.

—Ray Pritchard, condensed

GOD’S ARMOR

According to the Bible, life is not a picnic but a *battle*, an armed struggle against a powerful adversary. To engage in that battle properly, we need a spiritual makeover in which our flimsy, inadequate natural attire is replaced by suitable armor and weaponry. So Paul concludes his magnificent letter to the Ephesians with a final charge to be prepared to engage with the battle of life in the right way, dressed in the armor of God.

Each of the pieces of armor has a rich background in the Old Testament, where they describe God’s armor—the armor that God Himself wears to rescue His people.

BREASTPLATE AND HELMET

The most obvious examples are “the breastplate of righteousness” and “the helmet of salvation” (Ephesians 6:14,17), both of which are drawn directly from Isaiah 59:17. There the prophet says of God, “He put on righteousness as a breastplate, and a helmet of salvation on His head.” In the preceding chapters, Isaiah describes God’s promise

to deal with the physical enemies of His people, especially Babylon. But now the prophet describes the divine warrior coming to deal with the far greater and more dangerous enemy of their souls: sin.

God’s people have no righteousness of their own to bring; their best righteousness, apart from divine help, is nothing more than filthy garments (Isaiah 64:6). If the Lord were to deal with His people according to their own deeds, there would be nothing to anticipate but fearful judgment. But Isaiah declares that the divine warrior would come as their Redeemer to bring them salvation.

READY FEET

Similarly, I believe that Paul’s image of “feet readied with the gospel of peace” (Ephesians 6:15, my translation) does not stem from observing Roman sandals; rather, the picture draws directly on Isaiah 52:7: “How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, who publishes peace, who brings good news of happiness, who publishes salvation.” Ephesians 6 and Isaiah 52 (together with Nahum 1) are the only passages in the Bible where the words *feet*, *good news*, and *peace* occur together.

Isaiah imagines the watchmen bursting into joyful song on the walls of Jerusalem (Isaiah 52:8). Those who had long strained their eyes with fearful anticipation of an approaching enemy now herald good news of deliverance to the beleaguered citizens of Zion. Paul applies this same image to our privilege of hastening to share the gospel of peace with believers and unbelievers alike.

BELT OF TRUTH

The belt of truth can also be found in Isaiah. God’s people, Israel, had turned their back on the light and

chosen to live in darkness, spurning the Lord's revelation. Yet God promised He would send a messianic figure from the line of David to deliver them. This coming King would wear righteousness as a belt around His waist and "faithfulness" as a belt around His loins (Isaiah 11:5).

The Greek translation of the Old Testament uses the same Greek word (*aletheia*) for *faithfulness* in Isaiah 11 that Paul uses in Ephesians 6, where our English versions translate it as *truth*. This messianic King will save His people and bring in the final blessing of peace—a peace that extends throughout creation (Isaiah 11:6–9). The toxic effects of the fall, brought about by the first Adam listening to Satan's lies, would be reversed by Jesus, the second Adam and heir of the line of David, whose foundational qualities are truth and faithfulness.

SWORD OF THE SPIRIT

The sword of the Spirit, the word of God, is drawn from Isaiah 49:2. There the promised servant of the Lord says, "[The Lord] made my mouth like a sharp sword." In other words, the Lord was preparing His servant to come as a warrior with sharp words of judgment. In the original context, the servant was Israel, who was supposed to be God's faithful servant, equipped by Him to bring light to the Gentiles. Yet in Isaiah's time, there was much that needed to be judged and condemned in Israel and Judah themselves. They were not fit to be the Lord's servant, so He had to send His servant to bring light to them as well as to the Gentiles.

This promised servant is Jesus Himself. Yet even though Jesus could have entered this world with sharp words of judgment, condemning all those who fall short of perfect righteousness, in His first coming He

came to seek and to save the lost, both those from Israel and from the nations (Luke 19:10). In His second coming, Jesus will return as a warrior riding out on a white horse with a sharp sword coming from His mouth with which to judge all nations (Revelation 19:11–16).

SHIELD OF FAITH

The Old Testament background for the phrase *shield of faith* also clarifies an ambiguity in Paul's imagery. When he says, "Take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one" (Ephesians 6:16), Paul is not saying that faith in itself has remarkable defensive power against Satan. Rather, he is saying that faith protects us from Satan's attacks because faith takes hold of the power and protection of God Himself.

Throughout the Old Testament, it is God, not faith, that is repeatedly described as our shield. In Genesis 15:1 the Lord tells Abraham, "I am your shield." Proverbs 30:5 says, "[God] is a shield to those who take refuge in Him." God is our hiding place in the day of difficulty; His faithfulness will keep us safe when we are being shot at by arrows, flaming or otherwise (Psalm 91:4–5). Faith becomes our shield because it is the means by which we flee to God for refuge.

CHRIST THE WARRIOR

The Old Testament background challenges the common view that the armor of God is primarily a set of disciplines we must perform to measure up as Christians. It is certainly true that God's armor describes essential qualities for us to pursue passionately if we are to stand firm under Satan's assault. Yet the armor is first and foremost God's armor rather than ours. Through the gospel, the divine warrior gives us His equipment, which He

triumphantly wore first in our place in His definitive struggle against the forces of evil.

Jesus Christ is *the* triumphant warrior over Satan, death, and sin through His faithfulness and righteousness, and His victory is now credited to us as if it were our own. Because He stood firm in His battle, we Christians—weak, fearful, and unprepared as we so often are—also will ultimately stand. By faith, His righteousness becomes ours, and in Christ we have a shield of refuge in God, who will never leave us nor forsake us.

This is the good news that we have been given the privilege of heralding far and wide throughout the world, as well as preaching to our own hearts on a daily basis. The armor of God speaks mercy and grace to broken sinners, and a salvation that the combined forces of Hell itself can never steal from us, as we rest in Him.

—Adapted from *The Whole Armor of God* by Iain Duguid

GOD'S PROTECTION

Jesus is on a mission to rescue captive souls from a strong enemy (Luke 19:10; Mark 3:23–27). Through His crucifixion and resurrection, Jesus delivered a mortal wound to our formidable foe (Colossians 2:15; 1 John 3:8). He now calls sinners to flee from Satan's captivity, and align with His everlasting kingdom (Acts 17:30). He commissions His church to join Him in taking the gospel to the ends of the earth (Matthew 28:18–20). This means that, when we follow Jesus, we follow Him into a war zone.

Though Satan has been decisively defeated, and his future is doomed, he lives for the present. He still schemes (2 Corinthians 2:11), stalks (1 Peter 5:8), deceives (Revelation 12:9),

ensnares (2 Timothy 2:26), hinders (1 Thessalonians 2:18), harasses (2 Corinthians 12:7), and attacks us with fiery darts of temptation (Ephesians 6:16). We wage war against his dark forces, but not with physical artillery (2 Corinthians 10:3–4). Rather, we are commanded to “be strong in the Lord and ... put on the whole armor of God” (Ephesians 6:10–11). When we come to the battle, we do not fight alone. We fight in the strength of our Lord.

On the wall of my childhood Sunday school classroom hung a poster of a Roman soldier's armor. It explained that God's armor corresponded to what those first-century soldiers wore. While there are similarities, Paul desires our imaginations to be captured by something far greater than a Roman soldier. He wants us to see our warrior God, who powerfully fights “against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places” (Ephesians 6:12). The focus of spiritual warfare isn't Satan or an imaginary Roman soldier; it's our Savior.

Too often, spiritual warfare is seen as an individual believer's call to put on armor and fight demonic forces alone, as if this is a test to prove his faith. This couldn't be further from the truth. Spiritual warfare is about God's people joining their Lord in His warfare. He equips (Ephesians 4:7–16) and empowers us (1 Corinthians 12:11) to accompany Him into enemy territory and further His kingdom purposes (Matthew 28:20).

At times, we fail to put on the armor. We get busy with our own pursuits, and when the struggle sneaks up on us, we try to fight in our own strength. We step out from under our Lord's strength and are overcome by temptation. We lie instead of speaking truth. We harbor bitter-

ness instead of forgiving. We slander instead of pursuing peace. We justify sin instead of repenting of it. We indulge our lust instead of loving God.

When these fiery darts strike us, we are left wounded and wearied. We grieve the Spirit (Ephesians 4:30) and lose our joy. Our spiritual strength is sapped, desire for prayer dissipates, singing is silenced, shame is stoked, fellowship is avoided, and our taste for temptation increases.

When this happens, we must not lose heart, but rather cry to our warrior God, our great Savior, who leaves none of His fellow soldiers behind. He will not allow us to be snatched from His grasp (John 10:28). Rather, He will throw us over His shoulder, and take us to green pastures and still waters, where He will restore our souls (Psalm 23:1–3). In Him we are strengthened to go back into battle, knowing that our warrior God “will soon crush Satan under your feet” (Romans 16:20).

—Garrett Kell, condensed

JESUS IS THE ARMOR OF GOD

JESUS is the **truth** and the standard by which all things hold together (John 14:6).

JESUS is the **righteousness**, humanity’s only hope before God for acquittal of sin (2 Corinthians 5:21). He protects us from the wages of sin: death (Romans 6:23).

JESUS is the **gospel of peace**, who from Heaven ventured to earth to reconcile humanity to God by absorbing the hostility of sin that once divided the two (Ephesians 2:14).

JESUS is the object of our **faith**, which gives us highest defense of our acquittal before God. Our faith is not measured by how much faith we

exert, but *in whom* we place our faith (1 John 5:10–12).

JESUS is **salvation**, the only way to God (Acts 4:12), in whom our entire worldview is conceived, by whom we understand reality, and from whom we receive every life application.

JESUS is the **Word of God** (John 1:1), the Word literally made flesh (John 1:14), the exact imprint of God’s nature (Hebrews 1:3), the message incarnated for our behalf, to see, hear, feel, and know, and whose message is “sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow” (Hebrews 4:12).

Jesus is the armor of God. In Him, we have the strongest defense against the enemy: right standing before God. In Him, we have the best mediator, strongest leader, and most powerful judge. In Him, we have peace with God. In Him, we have the word of God, the standard of truth, despite the relative and changing world. We fight Satan and temptation well when we trust in and relish in who Jesus is and what He has done for us. When we taste the sweetness of Him, we will find sin increasingly more bitter.

Paul says the armor is from God for a reason. Jesus is *from God*, to be our *armor of God*, for the purpose of our being effective ambassadors *for God*.

So, then, “put on” Jesus Christ. (See Romans 13:12–14; Galatians 3:27; Ephesians 4:24; Colossians 3:9–14; 1 Corinthians 15:50–54; 1 Thessalonians 5:8.)

—Austin Gentry, condensed

You will never fight against sin and win until you first make a General out of the One who has fought sin and won.

GIRDLED BY TRUTH

“Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth” (Ephesians 6:14).

What’s the first item that He instructs us to wear? The belt of truth. When you think that Satan is a liar, the liar from the beginning, the liar in the garden, and the liar every day in your Christian life, you better believe that you need the belt of truth! Truth holds everything, all the other parts of the armor, together for the child of God. If you think about it, the belt holds the sword up. Christian, there’s no point in you using the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, if your life is not bound up with the truth of God. It’s not only necessary for us to *hold* the truth of God, but we must also be *held by* the truth of God—it must hold us, bind us, support us!

If truth doesn’t bind us, do you know what will happen? The rest of our armor will fall to pieces, and we will give ground to the devil. Our duty is to put on the whole armor of God and stand our ground.

There’s an old rabbinical tradition that says Satan the accuser had to shut his mouth on the day of atonement. What a thought! For the Christian, our day of atonement started at Calvary, and if we’re in Christ it hasn’t stopped yet and it’s never going to. You may hear your accuser every day of your life, but we can listen instead to the voice of our Savior. When Satan has thrown everything against us, we can still stand because if God is for us who can stand against us? What a wonderful Savior He is, isn’t He?

—David Legge, adapted

PRAY ON THE ARMOR

“Put on” the armor of God with this prayer based on Paul’s exhorta-

tion in Ephesians 6:10–18.

EQUIP ME, LORD:

- **With the belt of truth** (v. 14). May Your truth rule in my heart and be in my mind and on my lips today.
- **With the breastplate of righteousness** (v. 14). Apart from You there is no righteousness, but through Jesus I have been “born again” and made righteous in Your sight. May I live as a righteous person.
- **With feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace** (v. 15). May I reflect the gospel in my words and actions, that through me, with my every encounter, others may be drawn one step closer to You.
- **With the shield of faith** (v. 16). May I take You at Your word concerning promises about the present and future—promises of everlasting love, abundant life, and so much more.
- **With the helmet of salvation** (v. 17). Remind me that nothing can separate me from Your love and that I’ve been saved by grace. In Your grace, help me to say “no” to all ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live a self-controlled, upright, and godly life (Titus 2:12,13).
- **And with the sword of the Spirit, the word of God** (v. 17). May Your Holy Spirit reign in my life and bring to my mind Bible verses to be in my heart and on my lips. May I be filled with the Spirit and ready with Scripture as You were, Jesus, when the devil tempted You.
- **Finally, keep me in an attitude of prayer** (v. 18). Remind me to “pray at all times in the Spirit.” Cause me to be alert and always praying for the saints; to be joyful and to give thanks in everything (see 1 Thesalonians 5:16–18).

—From navigators.org