

THE ARMOR OF GOD (part 1) **Ephesians 6:10-14**

Imagine for a moment that God spoke to you through a dream and gave you a special revelation about your own future and also the future of one of your children, a precious daughter. And you knew that life was about to get very hard for both of you because of your faith in Christ. You would face persecution and imprisonment and your daughter would be greatly tempted to forsake her faith. And so you sit down one day with her and tell her these things, and the worst part of it all is when you tell them that you will never see her again. And it all came to pass, just as you said it would. Soon after your visit with her you get thrown into jail, and as you are sitting there alone in your cell you begin to think about what's happening with her and her family. So you begin to write her a letter. You begin by encouraging her, reminding her of all the blessings that she has in Jesus Christ. Then you shift gears and begin to challenge her to live out her faith day by day. And then you begin to pen your final thoughts. Perhaps the last communication that you will ever have with her. What would you say?

This is the situation that the apostle Paul finds himself in about 60 AD. The church at Ephesus was one of his children. He founded it on his second missionary journey. And it has only been a short time since he visited briefly with the elders of the Ephesian church, and he told them that they would be infiltrated by false teachers who would seek to destroy the flock. And he told them to beware of these heretics and to give much care to God's people. And then he left them, and soon after he was sitting in a Roman prison cell. And he sits down to write them a letter. He reminds them of their manifold blessings in Christ. He challenges them to live each day for Him. And then he comes to the close of his letter, and he says, "Finally, brethren. This is my conclusion; these are my last words to you. Don't miss them! Savage wolves are coming to tear you apart. So be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might!" And then he tells them how they can be strong.

Beloved, Paul's words to his beloved daughter church are just as applicable to us today. The church of Jesus Christ is still being attacked by a vicious enemy, and we must be strong in the Lord if we are to survive. So today we are going to begin to go through Paul's survival course.

Turn in your Bibles, please, to Ephesians 6:10-14. The first piece of armor the Christian soldier must put on is the belt of truth. Now, there is much imagery here. The belt was the very first piece of armor that a soldier would put on in

biblical days. The belt held up the long, cumbersome robe that soldiers sometimes wore and would also allow them to run and work. When they were in fighting uniform the belt stabilized the breastplate and held the sword. So the belt was not optional for a well-equipped soldier; it was essential.

And so it is with the belt of truth. We must put it on before we put on anything else. For if you are going to really fight effectively you must believe in what you're fighting for. If you don't you'll bail out when the fighting gets tough every time, for why risk your life for something you're not even sure is right? Furthermore, you need to know that you are fighting for a cause that will win in the end. No point in taking a dive for a lost cause to begin with. But these certainties come only with truth.

When David's brothers chided him for showing up on the battle field and asking questions about Goliath he responded by asking them, "Is there not a cause?" (1 Samuel 17:29) Well, there surely was a cause! And when David met Goliath he made the cause crystal clear. He said to Goliath in 1 Samuel 17:45, "You come to me with a sword, with a spear, and with a javelin. But I come to you in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied". You've defied the armies of the living God, David declared. Then he went on to say that that very day he was going to lift Goliath's head off his shoulders and the Philistine army would be lunch for the wild beasts and the birds. But why are you doing this, David? I quote him, "That all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel" (1 Samuel 17:46).

Beloved, David knew some truths. He knew that Goliath was mocking the name of Jehovah God. He knew that Jehovah was more powerful than any puny giant, and that Jehovah was on his side. And he knew that as long as Goliath continued his mockery that Jehovah was being disgraced among Israel and the Gentile nations as well. And because of these truths that burned in his heart David had a cause in his battle with Goliath. It was the glory of God! And likewise, we must stand on the truth when Satan and the imps of hell begin marching against us. And if we don't we'll flee from them just as surely as we would flee if a terrorist walked into the auditorium. But we stand fast because our loins are girded about with truth. And beloved, there is only once source of truth in this world, and you know what it is. It is the infallible, inerrant Word of God.

Now, the message of God's Word can basically be distilled into six statements. The Word tells us that:

1. This universe was created by a holy, all powerful, loving God Who rules and reigns from His throne in Heaven (Genesis 1:1; Psalm 93:1-2; 1 John 4:8).
2. There was a prehistoric war in the invisible spirit world when Lucifer, the anointed cherub, perfect in beauty and full of wisdom, led a rebellion against God and was cast down to the earth, and one day Lucifer will be burned up with fire (Isaiah 14:12-15; Ezekiel 28: 12, 14, 18; Revelation 12:9).
3. Lucifer, who is also called Satan, won a decisive battle in this spirit war by deceiving the first two human beings and causing them to rebel against God as he did, and they and all of their descendents came under the curse of death (Genesis 3).
4. This spirit war continues until this day in the heart of every living person, as Satan blinds men to their sin and seeks to thwart the grand purpose of God to save them and glorify His name (Romans 3:23; 2 Corinthians 4:4; 1 Peter 5:8; John 10:10).
5. All who place their faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord overcome in this spiritual war and one day will reign with God and Jesus forever and ever, and all who do not overcome will perish (1 John 5:5; Hebrews 1:8; Revelation 22:5; Jn. 3:36).
6. All who overcome, all of the saved, are soldiers in the army of God, fighting Satan and his forces to bring in God's kingdom, and are called to endure hardness and lay aside every care of this life in order to please Him Who has called them to be a soldier (2 Timothy 2:3-4).

Now, beloved, may I say to you that if you have trusted Jesus as your Savior and Lord and if you truly believe these statements and seek to live by them, then you have the highest purpose for life that is humanly possible, which is advancing God's kingdom and bringing Him glory. And not only that, you are laying up treasures that will never be corrupted or stolen, treasures in Heaven. And all of this amounts to the most blessed, fulfilled life that is possible. But it all begins as you gird yourself with the truth of God's Word.

But I don't want you to just take my word for it. Let us go to the Source, the One Who originally spoke it, our Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus prayed to His Father the night before He was crucified, "Sanctify them through Your Word. Your Word it Truth" (John 17:17). The word "sanctify" means to set apart and to grow in Christlikeness. And Jesus said that we are sanctified through His Word. And Jesus also said in John 8:32, "And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free". Free from what? Free from the schemes of the devil. Free from the defeat of the devil. Free because of truths like, "Resist the devil and he will

flee from you” (James 4:7), and, “I can do all things through Christ Who strengthens me” (Philippians 4:13). Beloved, these are for you! Claim them!

Well, beloved, in light of these promises, it should not be surprising, should it, that one of Satan’s major strategies is to make the Word of God a minimal part of a Christian’s life. But not only in a Christian’s life, but in the life of those who are not saved, for there is no salvation apart from the Word. Romans 10:17 says, “Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God”.

I want to take some time at this point to give you a brief history of the influence of the Word of God in America and Satan’s fight against the Word. For anyone who takes the time to do the research, it is clear that our founding fathers believed the Bible to be a precious, supernatural book. We hear the humanists of our day say that our founding fathers were mostly secularists or deists and who believed that religion should be left out of government. But a study done a few years ago by two professors at the University of Houston discovered otherwise. They examined around 15,000 documents written by our founding fathers and deemed influential in the birth of our nation, and found that 34% of them came either directly or indirectly from the Bible. The next most quoted source was Frenchman Charles Montesquieu with only 8.3%.

But that’s just the tip of the iceberg. On September 11, 1777 the Continental Congress approved the outlay of \$300,000 to buy Bibles, which were then distributed throughout the thirteen colonies. Think about that for a moment. We were immersed in the Revolutionary War, and federal funds had to be tight. But our congress thought it important enough to take \$300,000 that could have been used for guns, ammunition and supplies and buy Bibles with it. And these same men were also the founders of the American Bible Society and the Philadelphia Bible Society. Listen to just a few quotes from some of the patriots of this era and others on their view of Scripture:

“I have examined all religions, and the result is that the Bible is the best book in the world” – John Adams, 2nd president

“The Bible...is a book worth more than all the other books that were ever printed” – Patrick Henry, ratifier of Constitution

“By conveying the Bible to people...we certainly do them a most interesting act of kindness”. John Jay, 1st chief justice of Supreme Court

“..may the associated distribution of the Bible proceed and prosper till the Lord shall have made ‘bare His holy arm in the eyes of all the nations..’” – John Quincy Adams, 6th president

“In regard to this great book I have but to say it is the best gift God has given to men”. - Abraham Lincoln

"It is necessary for the welfare of the nation that **men's lives be based on the principles of the Bible**. No man, educated or uneducated, can afford to be ignorant of the Bible." - Theodore Roosevelt - (1858-1919) 26th President of the United States

“There are a good many problems before the American people today, and before me as president, but I expect to find the solution to those problems just in the proportion that I am faithful in the study of the Word of God”. – Woodrow Wilson, 28th president

But let me point out one more thing that does not specifically speak of the Bible but is still directly related to it. In a ruling in 1892 the Supreme Court actually declared the United States to be a Christian nation. That’s quite a statement, but what makes it so much more significant is that in 1931 and in 1952 the court reaffirmed it, and sixty years is not all that long ago. And beloved, all you have to do is go to Google to find tons more testimonies just like these.

All of this data led Ken Woodward to write an article in *Newsweek* Magazine a number of years ago entitled, How the Bible Made America, and in it he say, “Now historians are discovering that the Bible, perhaps even more than the Constitution, is our founding document”. I find that amazing, that such a pro-Christian statement would be published in such a blatantly secular magazine such as *Newsweek*. But those are the facts, and to *Newsweek*’s credit they did not ignore them.

But my goodness, how far, far we’ve fallen from the facts in the last half century!! Now we are a country that does anything but honor and revere God’s Word. The devil’s attack on the Bible burst forth in all of its ugliness when in 1963 the Supreme Court, the same court that affirmed we were a Christian nation eleven years earlier banned Bible reading in our public schools. Now do you suppose that there was a reaction from Almighty God for that? Well, you be the judge. But it is interesting that from 1927 until 1962 the SAT scores of our students never declined more than two years in a row. It was an upward curve for 35 years. But in 1962, the year prayer was banned and the year before the ban of the Bible, the curve on SAT scores turned south and SAT scores declined

for 18 straight years. And test scores of our Jr. and Sr. high students in subjects such as math, science, chemistry, and biology since then are way down the list of industrialized nations.

But let's move on to the area of morality. Since 1962 America has become the world leader in juvenile homicide, pornography, divorce, abortion, teenage pregnancies, and illegal drug use. You would think that the politicians and educators would wake up and realize what is happening, don't you? But our leaders are the blind leading the blind. They cannot deny that America is a moral mess, but here is their thinking on the solution. They believe that you can instill the morals of the Bible into children and youth without them ever knowing that the morals came from the Bible. They believe that we can reduce teen pregnancy and prostitution without a teen ever hearing, "God says, 'You shall not commit adultery'". They believe that we can eliminate petty theft and million dollar embezzlement without every hearing, "God says, 'You shall not steal'".

But there is only one problem with that. You can never divorce morality from truth. Never. If you tell a young person, "Don't commit adultery" and they ask you why and you say, "Because it's wrong", what are they going to say? "Says who?" And if you say, "Well, it's just wrong" they are going to say, "Well, that's your opinion, but mine says it's right". And they've got you, brother, because without a moral standard everything is relative, and they're opinion is just as good as yours. But if you say, "Because God says adultery is wrong", they have no argument.

Let me give you an example of this twisted logic. Most of us remember the tragedy that occurred at Columbine High School in 1999, when 13 students and teachers were gunned down by two teenage boys. You would think that after such a nightmare that school officials would welcome any overture of consolation and hope. But not so. After the smoke had cleared 2100 painted tiles were laid on the hallway of the school as a memorial. That was great, but later officials ordered that 90 of them to be removed because they contained offensive messages like "God is Love" and "Jesus wept on April 20, 1999". Friends, we've tossed God out of our public life just like they did in the days of the Judges. We've been studying in Sunday School about the wickedness of Israel in those days, and the sad conclusion of the whole book is found in its last verse, Judges 21:25: "In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes". That's what we've done in America. We've thrown out God's plan for us and God has said, "OK, I'll let you do it your own way". And we are imploding day by day.

But beloved, it is easy for us to look up and curse the darkness, isn't it? It's easy to throw stones at Washington and castigate the ACLU and the atheists. But what about us? And even more personal, what about ME? How much do I love the Word, how much do I read the Word? Psalm 119 is the longest chapter in the Bible, containing 176 verses, and all but about five verses have something to say about God's Word. But as you read you see certain themes that appear again and again. Twice David writes that he will keep God's law with his whole heart. Four times David prays, "Revive me according to Your Word". Nine times David says that he delights in the law of the Lord. And ten times David said, "I love Your law". Verse 127 says, "Therefore I love Your commandments above gold; yes, above fine gold". We know that the Bible says that David was a man after God's own heart (1 Samuel 13:14). He had a passion for God! And his passion is reflected in his passion for God's Word.

Where is your passion this morning? Is it Jesus? Beloved, if it is, then you will find yourself running to meet Him in His Word. But if it is not Jesus, you'll be running somewhere else. Our Sunday School teachers met yesterday morning in order for us to equip ourselves to better serve you in the coming church year. And in one of our sessions we heard about a passion that many have that takes priority over the Word of God every day. It was in a poem called "The 23rd Channel".

The TV is my shepherd, I shall not want
 It makes me lie down on the sofa,
 It leads me away from the Scripture,
 It destroys my soul
 It leads me in the path of sex and violence for the sponsor's sake
 Yea, though I walk in the shade of my Christian responsibilities,
 There will be no interruption, for the TV is with me.
 Its cable and remote control, they comfort me.
 It prepares a commercial before in the presence of my worldliness
 It anoints my head with humanism. My coveting runs over.
 Surely laziness and ignorance shall follow me all the days of my life
 And I shall dwell in the house, watching TV, forever.

Is the TV your passion? Or could it be the internet? You say, "No, that's not my passion over God's Word!" Well, which one gets most of your time? Oh, beloved, no one but the Holy Spirit can give us a hunger for God's Word, but every day we can cry out as David cried, "Lord, unite my heart to fear Your name", and by His grace He will give us that hunger.