

How to Be Spiritually Strong Series

The Weapon of Truth (Eph. 6:13-14)

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At A Glance:

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These sermon study notes are designed to be a tool used after listening to the sermon. This resource is a guide to help deepen understanding regarding the Scriptures and ideas presented in the sermon. Those who use these study notes are encouraged to look up, read through, and think about Scripture references in this guide. There is more information in these notes than what is presented in the sermon. These study notes are designed to be used as an independent study tool to help the formation of Biblical convictions, character, and conduct.

The Weapon of Truth

I. Introduction

A. Illustration: Football and the Missing Footwear

1. I cannot think of this passage of Scripture without also thinking of an experience I had in college. I still remember the sinking feeling in my stomach. For away football games, each player was given a large bag in which to place all his equipment. We were going to play Martin Luther College in New Ulm, MN. It wasn't that far away; in fact it was our closest away game. I didn't mind the short ride.
2. Upon arrival, we were to retrieve our bags, which had been stored under the bus. Each bag had the player's jersey number on it. Once in the locker room, I would always take all my equipment out of my bag and set it up in the locker so everything was easily accessible before going out to the field for initial warm ups.
3. As I was taking my equipment out of my bag, I noticed a problem. Something was missing. I only had one shoe! At first, I thought perhaps the other cleat was hiding under my shoulder pads or something like that. In a hurry, I quickly removed everything out of my bag to be absolutely certain I wasn't missing it. The shoe wasn't there. In all four years of college football, this was the only time I missed a piece of equipment. I was very careful overall. My heart sank and I panicked. I realized I couldn't play a football game while missing one shoe.
4. I ended up telling my coach, who then sent one of the other coaches out to find a store and buy me a new pair of cleats. Thankfully, the coach returned in plenty of time so I was able to have two shoes to play in the game.

B. In some cases, missing something is significant. If one small item isn't in place, it ruins everything else. This is true in the Christian life, as the apostle Paul is going to emphasize. Being spiritually strong requires a person to put on ALL the armor of God in its fullness. No item can be missing. At least, not without significant consequence. If any piece of divine armor is missing, we make ourselves vulnerable to the enemy.

C. The apostle Paul moves from the command to continuously be strengthened by God through the power of the Holy Spirit to telling us how this can be done in Ephesians 6:13-14, ¹³Therefore, take up the full armor of God, so that you will be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm. ¹⁴ Stand firm therefore, HAVING GIRDED YOUR LOINS WITH TRUTH, and HAVING PUT ON THE BREASTPLATE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS," (Eph. 6:13-14).

II. Use All Our Spiritual Weapons

A. Spiritual health requires a balanced approach to the Christian life. While every disciple will naturally be stronger in some areas and weaker in others, each of us has the need to approach the Christian life holistically. We can be like a person who only lifts weights but never does cardio, eats in unhealthy ways, has poor sleep habits, and never stretches. If a person wants an overall healthy lifestyle, they must care for all areas of their physical health. When all areas are cared for, the individual puts themselves in the best position for overall health. The same is true with the soul, which is why Paul commands, "take up the full armor of God" (v. 13). Notice the

all-important term: FULL.¹ Each piece of the disciples' spiritual armor matters. Spiritual strength requires all the equipment provided by God. Nothing should be missed.

- B. It would be unhealthy for a disciple to only dive deep into one particular piece of armor while neglecting others, or for a person to equip themselves with most of the armor but miss one piece. Just one missing piece of spiritual armor can leave us vulnerable to the enemy. Disciples are encouraged here to use all the resources God has provided for their spiritual strength and benefit. All these spiritual resources should be used together at the same time.
- C. Following the example of Jesus, we want to be equipped to do what God wants us to do (Lk. 4:17-21). Just as the Holy Spirit empowered Jesus to carry out His life and ministry, so too disciples should use the resources of God to be strengthened in the Holy Spirit so they can live the kind of life God wants from them (Eph. 1:4, 4:1) and carry out the specific actions God has prepared for them (Eph. 2:10). To do this faithfully, disciples need each piece of spiritual armor on this list.
- D. The third command in this portion of Scripture, starting in verse 10, is, "Stand firm" (v. 14).² The disciple should remain steadfast in their pursuit of and obedience to God. Essentially this command means, "You can do it!"³ This command is fulfilled by putting on the spiritual armor. The command depends on having put on the spiritual armor. If a person isn't strengthening themselves regularly in the Holy Spirit by using these resources provided by God, they will not be able to fulfill this command, but the disciple has the capability to do it.⁴ Although this command is listed in front of the spiritual armor, the spiritual armor is necessarily prior to the fulfillment of the command.⁵ In this command, God is telling His church, like Gandalf in *The Hobbit: An Unexpected Journey*, "Take up arms! Fight!".
- E. The Christian life involves a constant resistance to and fight against the enemy ("⁹ But resist him, firm in *your* faith, knowing that the same experiences of suffering are being accomplished by your brethren who are in the world. ¹⁰ After you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen *and* establish you." 1 Pet. 5:9-10).⁶ Following Jesus requires us to take up spiritual arms. We fight and resist. The life of discipleship is a life of spiritual struggle. Spiritual battle is inherent to and a natural part of following Jesus—not contrary to it.
- F. Feeling pressure and a pull to move away from God and what He wants is normal for all Christians, even the most spiritually mature ones. Don't fall prey to the misunderstanding that falsely assumes "good Christians" don't feel the pull of temptation anymore. Even Jesus, the most spiritually mature and strongest human being who ever lived, confronted a time when His personal desire was contrary to the Father's plan (Mk. 14:36). While Jesus never sinned, He was

¹ We will see later that Paul does not provide an exhaustive list in this passage, but it appears this list is balanced enough to provide spiritual strength to disciples in their various life contexts.

² The command to "take up the full armor of God" (v. 13) is a repeat of the second command "Put on the full armor of God" from verse 11.

³ S. M. Baugh, *Ephesians: Evangelical Exegetical Commentary*, ed. Wayne H. House, Hall W. Harris III, and Andrew W. Pitts, Evangelical Exegetical Commentary (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2015), 548.

⁴ Hebrews 10:38

⁵ Glenn Graham, *An Exegetical Summary of Ephesians*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, TX: SIL International, 2008), 555.

⁶ William Gurnall and John Campbell, *The Christian in Complete Armour* (London: Thomas Tegg, 1845), 196.

still tempted in all ways that we are (Heb. 4:15).⁷ The Christian life is a spiritual battle from beginning to end. This doesn't mean we have to barely scrape by to merely survive our entire Christian life, but it does mean we need to live in a spiritually wise and cautious way because sin can creep up on us at any time. Disciples resist the enemy and sin throughout their entire life. If people think they will reach a point in their own personal growth where they will no longer feel the pull of rebellion and no longer feel the weight of sin that seeks to entangle them (Heb. 12:1), they will be disappointed. They have a false expectation about what the Christian life is. The Christian life's goal is not to reach the point of easy and smooth sailing without temptation or a pull to disobey God. There may be seasons of this from time to time, but this is not the normal pattern.

III. The Weapon of Truth

- A. As we begin to look at this passage, it is necessary to clear up some common points of misunderstanding. Paul is using the imagery of the Roman soldier in his day and his equipment. An important part of understanding this passage is knowing how far Paul wanted us to take this imagery. Some think Paul is telling us about the order in which the Roman soldier would get dressed. Those who interpret this passage in this way think truth lays the foundation for all that follows. Some make references to the role of spiritual weapons considering the function of physical armor being referred to. For example, they would say that truth holds all the other weapons in their proper position because that is the role the belt played in Roman armor. How far to take the military imagery is not an easy question to answer, although it seems some people take it too far considering Paul's other instances of mentioning spiritual armor (1 Thess. 5:8). The breastplate in 1 Thessalonians represents faith and love, not righteousness. This suggests we use caution and ought not take the armor imagery farther than Paul meant to use it. Paul didn't use the same spiritual weapons for the same pieces of armor, and he also didn't provide the same list of spiritual weapons. The list of spiritual weapons in this passage is probably not an exhaustive list. These are important points to keep in mind so we can more accurately understand Paul's meaning. The focus of this passage should not be on the imagery used, but the substance of the spiritual realities being pointed to for spiritual strength.
- B. The first weapon which makes disciples spiritually strong is, "having girded your loins with truth" (v. 13).⁸ Paul is referring to the belt of the Roman soldier. He may also be indicating the idiom of being prepared (Lk. 12:35, 1 Pet. 1:13)—girding oneself was a way of saying "be ready" or "get prepared." Paul could be telling the disciples to do their spiritual stretching so they will be ready for vigorous spiritual activity. It is interesting to note that there is an assumption the military equipment is already put on. Notice how the wording is "having girded your loins," in

⁷ This does need to be qualified, however. While Jesus faced the temptations we face as human beings, Jesus didn't face them IN THE SAME WAY we do. Jesus did not have a corrupted and broken human nature as we do. In this, Jesus was different from us. However, not having a sinful nature doesn't guarantee success either since Adam and Eve sinned in the same condition. Jesus didn't sin because His divine nature is more righteous than our human nature.

⁸ According to Paul, both of the first two pieces of armor are part of the new person God creates us to be, "in righteousness and holiness of the truth" (Eph. 4:24) and part of the fruit of being a child of Light (Eph. 5:9).

the past tense.⁹ It is an action done by the disciple/soldier's own actions that has already been completed.¹⁰ Paul has already stated that the disciples in Ephesus who are part of the church have embraced the truth found in Jesus (Eph. 4:21) and the gospel (Eph. 1:13).¹¹ These disciples are already in the truth; now they need to "wrap themselves" with truth as a means of spiritual strength and protection.

C. What spiritual principle is Paul talking about here regarding truth? Truth can refer to an intellectual capacity in which disciples have the ability to know and understand what is true because they have been enabled to do so by God (objective notion of truth). But truth can also refer to the subjective application of truth in terms of behavior—living in the truth. While there is discussion on this point, the best alternative is that Paul is referring to both elements of truth at the same time, which is why he left the idea of truth general and vague.¹² Throughout the rest of Ephesians, Paul uses the idea of truth both ways.

D. Another passage written by Paul on spiritual warfare that may help us understand Paul's meaning of using truth as a spiritual weapon is:

³ For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, ⁴ for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses. ⁵ *We are* destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and *we are* taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ, ⁶ and we are ready to punish all disobedience, whenever your obedience is complete. (2 Cor. 10:3-6)

E. Notice how Paul uses both the objective and subjective elements of truth. However, he primarily points to and emphasizes the intellectual component of truth, as the disciples' spiritual weapons are effective (having the capacity and skill) in destroying any way of thinking that is "against the knowledge of God" (2 Cor. 10:5). The intellectual component of truth is emphasized to a much larger degree than living in the truth. Concerning intellectual truth, Paul highlights the fact that truth can 1) destroy even the deepest entrenched and protected intellectual fortresses in a culture or a person's mind that stand against the knowledge of God (v. 4), 2) refute wrong conclusions that are arrived at by consideration or reasoning (v. 5),¹³ 3) defeat any ideas or knowledge that are in competition with the knowledge of God (v. 5) and 4) overcome every single thought that goes against God and His truth by making it obedient to God (v. 5). We get a glimpse of how this works in the temptation of Jesus in Matthew 4:1-11. Jesus used the word of God to counter Satan's offers, temptations, and deceptions. The lies were confronted with truth.

⁹ Francis Foulkes, [Ephesians: An Introduction and Commentary](#), vol. 10, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1989), 179.

¹⁰ Glenn Graham, [An Exegetical Summary of Ephesians](#), 2nd ed. (Dallas, TX: SIL International, 2008), 554.

¹¹ S. M. Baugh, [Ephesians: Evangelical Exegetical Commentary](#), ed. Wayne H. House, Hall W. Harris III, and Andrew W. Pitts, Evangelical Exegetical Commentary (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2015), 550.

¹² Grant R. Osborne, [Ephesians: Verse by Verse](#), Osborne New Testament Commentaries (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2017), 229, William Gurnall and John Campbell, [The Christian in Complete Armour](#) (London: Thomas Tegg, 1845), 207.

¹³ Logos 10 Bible Study Software Exegetical Guide on 2 Corinthians 10:5

- F. Even though Paul puts a greater emphasis on the objective nature of truth in the life of the mind, he also speaks of living in the truth as well when he mentions that he is “ready to punish all disobedience whenever your obedience is complete” (v. 6). An intellectual adherence to the truth will naturally lead to living in line with the truth—obedience and morality. Righteous and holy living is connected to the spiritual weapon of truth. The individual subjectively submits to truth in their behavior, which is also a part of spiritual warfare. Knowing the truth and living the truth are both connected in an inseparable way. Both elements of truth are in Paul’s mind when he considers truth applied to spiritual warfare.
- G. As we jump back to Ephesians, we see the same pattern in Paul’s thinking. Paul uses truth to refer both to the intellectual pursuit of truth and living a moral lifestyle in harmony with what is true. Paul prays for the Ephesian church to have wisdom and insight concerning the will of God (Eph. 1:8-9) and receive an attitude of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Jesus, which leads to enlightenment (Eph. 1:17-18). He expects mature disciples to have a true knowledge of Jesus and doctrine, which they then speak to others as they confront incorrect teachings and doctrines (Eph. 4:13-15). In addition, Paul also emphasizes living according to the truth of God. Disciples are encouraged to live like Jesus instead of their former life as those who don’t know God (Eph. 4:17-24). Disciples are told to speak truth instead of lies because they belong to Jesus (Eph. 4:25). They are to develop the virtue of truthfulness as they learn how to please God (Eph. 5:9-10). Both the objective and subjective aspects of truth are clearly seen in the rest of Ephesians, which helps us understand what Paul means in his general and vague reference to the weapon of truth.
- H. As believers buckle on this piece of armor, they will be strengthened by God’s truth revealed in the gospel, and as a consequence, they will display the characteristics of Jesus in their attitudes, language, and behavior.¹⁴ All truth, not just gospel truth, will strengthen the Christian in their soul. While the primary emphasis of truth is to be found in the Bible, the Bible is not the only source of truth. True knowledge of the world can also lead to a better understanding of God (Rm. 1:20). Knowing truth and acting on it is a source of spiritual strength and protection that God provides His people through the Holy Spirit. As William Gurnall wrote in what is considered one of the best studies on this passage, “if the understanding be clear in its apprehensions of truth, and the will sincere, vigorous, and fixed in its purposes, for that which is holy and good, then he is a strong Christian.”¹⁵ The more truth a person knows and carries out, the stronger they will be spiritually. The more ignorant a person is concerning what is true, or they regularly fail to act according to what is known to be true, the weaker and more vulnerable they will be (Eph. 4:14).¹⁶ This is just the way spiritual strength works, and it can’t be avoided. Therefore, anything that helps us better identify and understand truth can be a source of spiritual strength.
- I. Every disciple has the responsibility of developing and adopting the attitude of having a love for truth. There isn’t a single spiritually strong disciple for whom this will not be the case. Paul says

¹⁴ Peter O’Brien, [The Letter to the Ephesians](#) (Grand Rapids, MI, Eerdmans Publishing Co. 1999), 474.

¹⁵ William Gurnall and John Campbell, [The Christian in Complete Armour](#) (London: Thomas Tegg, 1845), 208.

¹⁶ James 1:5-8, 22-25

those who love God will also have a love for truth, which protects us from false spiritual claims and teachers (2 Thess. 2:9-12). Disciples will not be deceived or harmed from following mistaken spiritual paths because they love the truth, and because they love the truth, they pursue the truth to know the truth. Proverbs says the people of God pursue wisdom and a knowledge of God as much as money and riches (Pr. 2:2-6). Knowledge is pleasant to the soul of those who love truth (Pr. 2:10). How could a love of knowledge and understanding be fostered in your heart? This could start with learning about something you are already passionate about. Experiencing the fun, excitement, and benefits of learning truth can cause a love for truth to grow. Learn the truth about something that will make your life easier in order to understand the benefits of wisdom. Pay attention to the harm caused to the lives of others when truth is ignored or neglected. Build a desire for truth in your own heart. Is this you? Are knowledge, wisdom, insight, and understanding pleasant to your soul? Do you have a love for the truth? Are you interested in becoming knowledgeable about the things of God?

IV. How to Gird Yourself in Truth

- A. Now that we understand what the first spiritual weapon is, we can begin learning how to pursue and use this weapon. What does it look like to “gird yourself in truth” as a spiritual resource? Broadly speaking, anything that helps us know, understand, and live according to truth can be a means of gaining spiritual strength. While there is a long list of ways to saturate your life with truth, here are a few ideas and suggestions for how to do this. Each person will need to find ways to grow and live in truth that works for them.
- B. Most foundational in the weapon of truth will be developing a true knowledge of Jesus. Learning about, reading, and studying the life records of Jesus is where the search for truth begins. Jesus said He is the embodiment of truth itself (Jn. 14:6). If we want to know truth and live in it, we need Jesus to help us see things as they are. Everyone who is on the side of truth listens to Jesus (Jn. 18:37). A person could spend a year or two continually reading through the gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John). The life of Jesus could be read again and again. Another person could read books on different aspects of the life of Jesus, such as the chronological order of events, His character, how He handled conflict, His discipleship techniques, the claims He made about Himself, His self-understanding, etc. Many different books have been written on a variety of topics related to the life of Jesus. Find ways to continually learn about Jesus.
- C. Second, disciples can use truth as a spiritual weapon by learning how to recognize and shape our thinking around truth.¹⁷ Followers of Jesus should be careful to make sure what they think is aligned with what is true. Having a desire and passion for accurate and true beliefs, opinions, views, ideas, and doctrines is important for Christians. Jesus both commanded good judgments (Jn. 7:21-24) and condemned bad ones (Mt. 7:3-5). The goal is for the thoughts of the disciple to be the same as the thoughts of God (Jn. 8:16). Jesus models mature thinking. The resources of logic and philosophy are extremely helpful here (Isa. 1:18). Knowing how to think well and being able to identify mistakes in thinking are the building blocks of identifying truth. This

¹⁷ William Gurnall and John Campbell, [*The Christian in Complete Armour*](#) (London: Thomas Tegg, 1845), 208.

suggestion is probably scary for many. Every person doesn't need to become a philosopher or theologian. However, knowing the basics of correct thinking can go a long way. A person learning just ten of the most common thinking mistakes (called fallacies) could clear up a lot of confusion and help them eliminate much misinformation. The most basic rules of correct thinking can be added to go even further. Every person who is alive uses their thoughts to discern and learn truth, even those that are dismissive of logic and deeper thinking. We are doing this anyway, so we might as well learn how to do it well. It doesn't have to be as complicated or complex as some may think. Not only that, but we are also commanded by God to do it (1 Cor. 14:20).

- D. Third, spend time in the Bible. Create space in your life for it. Set aside specific amounts of time to have contact with the Word of God. A disciple will never be spiritually strong if he spends little to no time with God's primary spiritual resource. Regular contact with the word of God, with mental focus, will change the way people think, and it will renew their minds so that they will approach life from the perspective of truth. Thoughtful reading of the Bible is necessary to grow in and use the weapon of truth. A verse of the day will not accomplish this; neither will a short devotional. These approaches are better than nothing, but there are also more effective ways to interact with the Word of God. As a disciple has contact with the Bible, he will seek to understand the way the world is through it.
- E. Fourth, learn the practice of Biblical meditation (Ps. 119:97). Start by reading the book by David Saxton titled *God's Battle Plan for the Mind: The Puritan Practice of Biblical Meditation*. Once familiar with the strategies of Christian meditation, use them. Add meditation to your regular spiritual habits. The more time is spent in Biblical meditation, the more a person will put truth on as a belt and the more they will live in truth, both in the mind and in their behavior. If a person takes the content of this book seriously and practices it, their lives will be transformed.
- F. Lastly, in terms of living in the truth, live faithfully in an immovable way. Commit to doing what you know God wants you to do and don't get lazy, distracted, weary, or pressured to do otherwise. Take a stand for what you know is true when you are put in situations when this is required. Speak truth, even when it is difficult or unwanted. If other people are confused about what is true or living contrary to what is true, disciples should not be. A willingness to suffer for the truth may be necessary. Don't go along with the crowd if the crowd is not following truth. Stand against power when power is not aligned with truth. As Rod Dreher outlines in his book *Live Not by Lies: A Manual for Christian Dissidents*, followers of Jesus should live this way.

V. Conclusion

- A. Being well grounded and established in truth, especially the truth contained in God's Word, will provide both spiritual strength and protection. As servants of God, we are to live "in the word of truth, in the power of God; by the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and the left" (2 Cor. 6:7).
- B. Let's develop a love for the truth that makes knowledge sweet to our soul. Seek wisdom more than wealth. Love God with our minds. All of this is good for us.

VII. Questions for Further Thought

- A. When has a knowledge of the truth made a positive impact on your life?
- B. Why did Jesus rebuke and reject the religious leaders in Matthew 16:1-4? What truth did Jesus expect them to know?
- C. How can a person come to a knowledge of what is true when they come across so many different opinions and perspectives every day?
- D. What nonintellectual causes lead people to resist and reject the truth?
- E. If a disciple wanted to gird themselves in the truth, what would they do?