

Several years ago, on my first or second Good Friday on staff, I was working in the Hub downstairs and encountered a young man I will never forget. The service was about to start when I noticed a guy making a bee line towards me. He was staring at me, moving with determination, and clearly on his way to talk to me. As he approached, I said “hello”. He said “Hi. I need to get saved and want to get baptized.” I instantly had two thoughts. One, I wish they were all this easy! Two, what a great privilege to walk with people as they enter into a saving relationship with Jesus. I asked him a few questions and he told me he had grown up going to church but was far away in his adult life. It was now time for him to get right with God. So I presented the Gospel to him, he agreed, and I got him upstairs to the service so he could hear what Jesus did to pay for his sins. We ended the conversation agreeing I’d follow up by phone midweek.

That Wednesday, I called the guy and, upon identifying myself, I could tell my call was not welcome. “No thanks. I’ve changed my mind.” I reminded him about his desire to get right with God. He said he no longer cared about that because he had returned to his wicken group. Ah ha. I told him I would be praying for him. He told me not to bother because he had a priestess praying for him. Feeling like I was in a tug-of-war, I told him I would still pray for him. He proceeded to scream at me, say lots of words I can’t repeat in church, and hung up.

It was, and still is, one of the most jarring moments of my ministry. I felt like I was in the middle of a battle for this guy’s soul. And the truth is...I was. He clearly was torn between the Lord and an evil, demonic belief system, and he was getting batted about as he went back and forth. That guy showed up a couple weeks later, apologized for what he said to me, and then prayed to receive Christ. But that was the last time I’ve ever seen him. My guess is the battle was not over.

You may not have ever had the same experience as that guy, but you too are in a battle. If you’ve trusted in Christ, it’s not a battle for your soul. That now belongs to him for eternity. But it is a battle for your life and impact, and the stakes are very high. The moment you said yes to Jesus is the moment you were drafted into a war that has raged since before time began. On one side is God and his people. On the other side is an enemy who hates God, hates you, and works tirelessly to destroy God’s plans and take us out. It is a battle we have no choice to be a part of but, thankfully, it is a battle God equips us for so we can stand firm when the attacks come.

This morning we begin a series in Ephesians 6 on the Armor of God. We are going to look at these God-given spiritual resources, given for a spiritual battle, that come from the spoils of war already won through a cross and empty tomb.

This series is not a random selection but the next part of our focus on our lives in Christ. We began the year in Colossians/*Enough*, looking at the full life found in the supreme and sufficient Christ. Psalm 32/*Weight Lifting* showed how the discipline of confession restores our fellowship with God and allows him to set us back on the path of the full life. In *Overcome*, we looked at all Jesus won to make this full life possible. And now we move to *Stand Firm* to see we have an enemy who wants to keep you from walking in that victorious full life and the resources God gives us to withstand his attacks. My prayer is that you would take God at his word, use the resources he’s provided, and walk in the victory he’s already won.

[Ephesians 6:10-13] ¹⁰ Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. ¹¹ Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. ¹² 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. ¹³ 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.

Paul concludes his letter with “finally”. He has laid out the Gospel and shown how to practically live it out. But he knows there is an enemy who doesn’t want us to do that. So he describes the enemy and the warfare they now find themselves in. So, by way of introduction, I want to give you some rules of engagement that will apply to all we’ll discuss.

Spiritual warfare is real and you are in it.

I know spiritual warfare can seem a bit far-fetched...evil beings floating around and trying to get us to misstep. But you know who didn’t question it? Jesus. Peter. John. Paul. The Ephesians. Read Acts 19 this week. Ephesus was full of demonic activity and they were on the lookout for it. Paul’s instruction, though, at the end of chapter 6 isn’t limited to one city. It applies to everyone the first five and a half chapters address, and that is all believers. If you have been saved by Jesus, you have stepped on the battlefield, and you now have a target on your back. It’s like if you go to college in College Station or Austin. You immediately step into...a rivalry with the other group. When you join God’s team, you join a war.

And we must take it seriously because Satan takes it seriously. Scripture is clear that Satan was an angel who rebelled against God because he wanted to be God and got thrown out of heaven because of it. Satan was so committed to his cause that he was willing to sacrifice perfection with God to see it through. And he’s still that committed. **Satan is going to use everything at his disposal to compromise the people of God from living the full life in God and advancing the Kingdom of God in this dark world.** How is he going to do it?

Our enemy is crafty, powerful, and organized.

One of the principles of warfare is to know thy enemy. And while Scripture doesn’t give us a ton to go on, what it does tell us is more than enough to understand the devil’s character, motives, and tactics.

Who is the devil?

Devil - accuser

Satan - adversary

Matthew 4:3 - tempter

John 8:44 – murderer, liar, father of lies

1 Peter 5:8 – prowling lion seeking someone to devour

Genesis 3:1, Revelation 12:9 – serpent

2 Corinthians 11:13-15 – angel of light (disguise)

Ephesians 2:2 – prince of the power of the air

John 12:31/2 Corinthians 4:4 – ruler/god of this world

That is who we are up against. He is a lying murderer who hates God and hates you. And he's really good at what he does. Paul refers to the devil's schemes by using *methodeias*, where we get "methods". The devil is no dummy. He is strategic, using intel he has on you, and customizing the attack where it will hurt you most. In this series, would you consider where Satan is most likely to attack you?

Priscilla Shirer suggests we ask two key questions to determine that: **1) In what ways do I pose the biggest threat to the enemy and his purposes?** This is easy for us to identify if you know your God-given purpose. He wants to stop you from doing that. Without fail, as Martha and I prepare to teach our pre-marriage class, we get impatient, "blamey", and argue with each other more than normal. Additionally, and this just happened last week, Satan accuses us that we have nothing to offer. Who are we to teach on this stuff? He suggests we are not qualified. And of course he does that because he knows what joy is found in a godly marriage and what a witness a godly marriage is to the world. He wants to stop our work, and he wants to do the same to you. What is your God-given purpose? What does God want you to contribute to this world for his Kingdom? Prepare to be attacked there to keep you from doing it.

2) What are my flesh's tendencies, innate passions, and weaknesses? Where are you likely to sin? Satan knows how you have tried to satisfy your flesh in the past: food, sex outside of marriage, pornography, materialism, alcohol and drugs. He knows if your family tree is full of addiction. He knows you struggle to forgive others. He knows you think the good life is found in ever-expanding consumption and abundance, achievement through an exhausting and unsustainable pace, or hours upon hours of screen time. And when he gets you to act on any of that, he's going to take you out because you'll be too distracted or encumbered with sin to live out what God has for you. What are most susceptible to sin? Pray for awareness.

He's also organized. He does not work alone. A third of the angels were cast out with him, and they are now a spiritual mafia that roam the spiritual realm as rulers, authorities, powers, spiritual forces of evil, gathering intel, doing his bidding, trying to take you out. We would all do well to respect him, but we don't have to fear because...

We win with God's power or lose with our own.

If you try to do battle on your own, just try really hard to be a good Christian, you'll lose. Satan is wiser, craftier, and more powerful than you. Thankfully, we don't have to do it alone. Let's try a word association game. I'll say a word, you say the opposite. Hot/Cold. Light/Dark.

God...yeah, we want to say, "the devil", but we'd be wrong. God has no equal. The devil is a created being, a fallen angel, and even though he thinks he's in charge, he is only allowed to do what he does by the will of God. He is not omnipotent, omniscient, or omnipresent like God is. And so, in battle, if God is on your side, you win!

[1 John 4:4] The one who is in you [Jesus], is greater than the one [Satan] who is in the world".

God has given everything we need to withstand his attacks and press on, and something we have to understand is that we do not battle *for* victory but *from* victory. This war has already been won. Jesus has overcome.

[Colossians 2:15] ¹⁵ He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him.

You are already on the winning team and we live into that victory by putting on the armor Jesus has provided for us. And when we do that, we can stand firm. God does not tell us to attack, take ground, advance. He tells us to remain steadfast. **[SLIDE: Pic of Beefeater]** It's like those British Royal Guards, the Beefeaters, whose job is apparently to stand still. You see videos of people harassing them and they just stand firm. It's the same with us. Satan will harass us. But God gives us all we need to stand firm and continue in the life he's called us to.

[Ephesians 6:14a-b] ¹⁴ Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth.

Paul is likely writing this letter from prison and is constantly surrounded by Roman soldiers. Most think he is using their armor as the illustration here, and it's what you see in the animation of our bumper video. Paul starts with the belt because that's the first piece of armor the Roman soldiers started with. The belt was more than a thin piece of leather used as a fashion statement. It was like a girdle that supported their core, think the belts the UPS drivers wear, and organized and supported all the other pieces of armor. When the belt was right, all the other pieces worked as they should, and the soldier had freedom of movement.

For the believer, we too are to start with our belt. Paul says literally "Gird your loins with the truth." The truth supports our core and organizes and informs all the other pieces of armor we'll look at. Truth is the integrating force in our lives, and when the believer's life is informed and controlled by truth, he'll be equipped to stand firm. **Truth is so foundational because Satan is a lying liar whose primary weapon is deception...untruth.** He tells lies about one of three things: God, you, the world. If he can get us to believe, internalize, and act on something that isn't true, he takes us out.

He started that way and has continued since. Look at Genesis 3. Adam and Eve are living in perfection, unity with God and one another. God has one rule. Eat from any tree but this one. And here comes the devil. What does he do? He twists his words. "Did he really say?" He impugns the character of God by saying God is holding out and they are missing out. "God knows you will become like him." In other words, he's not enough, and neither are you. And then he says the world in which they know good and evil is better than the one God has created and prescribed. And they bite...literally!

He's doing the same thing today. First, he's getting a lot of us to ask if there even is absolute truth. "Your truth", the idea that truth is relative and based on people's feelings, is an idea disintegrating our world. We've even gotten to the place where people are asking "What is a woman?" That's a question that hadn't been asked for thousands and thousands and thousands of years, but now it is, and it's based on feelings. No absolute truth means God is not the definer of it, his Word is one set of ideas of equal value to many, and you have no solid ground to stand on because truth changes as feelings, ideas, and culture changes.

This whole deconstruction phase is about truth. It's ok if you have doubts and it's great if you ask questions. This is a safe and right place to do that. But too much deconstruction is a

dissatisfaction of God's revealed truth ("Did God really say...?"). We don't like what it says about God, us, or the world, so Satan convinces us to trade it in for a "truth" we or the culture would much prefer. And when that happens, we become useless to God and move far away from the life he has for us.

That's why we start with truth. Jesus said he is the Truth and the truth will set us free. When we put on the belt of truth we put on Christ and live in the freedom of that. And as we make our way through the rest of the armor – our righteousness, the gospel of peace, faith, salvation, and God's Word – we'll see how the devil is going to feed you a lie about it and entice you to move on it, but the truth will allow you to stand firm.

Ask: "What is true in this moment?"

Imagine if Adam and Eve had paused for a second to ask this question. What would be different? What will be different for us if we pause and ask it? Is what I'm thinking and about to act on true about God, me, or the world? When you find yourself feeling accused or accusing someone else in your heart, what is true? When you believe you have nothing to offer, what is true? Am I being honest with myself, God, and others about what is going on in my life and how I am living? Am I honest about my sin? Am I believing anything that isn't consistent with God's character or Word? Am I believing anything about myself that Jesus disagrees with? Am I tempted to look for affirmation, fulfillment, or identity from something other than God? When you do sin, what is true now? The more we know and recognize the truth the more we can live out our salvation, align our life to it, combat Satan's lies, protect and restore relationships, make the right choice, and live with integrity.

So welcome to the battle. You were already in it. He has already won it, and he will give you everything you need to walk in that victory. Let us put on the armor he has provided so we can stand firm.