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Sermon Notes

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The Belt of Truth and Breastplate of Righteousness

Ephesians 6:14-15

Walking into the armory:

In the summer of 2014, I was with my daughter Carolyn in Belgrade, Serbia. We visited a military museum there... the best such museum I've ever seen.

What I didn't know was how two thousand years of warfare has shaped the history of Belgrade and Serbia as a whole... according to one display in the museum, since Roman times until the end of the 20th century, Belgrade and Serbia have experienced 143 wars. 143!!! So the military museum in Belgrade had an amazing arsenal of historical military displays... from the Roman legions, through the Celts, through every century of military development... like walking through an arsenal: whole suits of armor from the middle ages, bows and arrows used by the Ottoman Turks in the 14th century, swords, shields, eventually guns, cannons, WWI uniforms, gas masks, WWII artifacts including German tanks and anti-aircraft guns, right up to weapons used at the end of the 20th century in wars between Serbs and Croats...

It was a stunningly diverse and historical ARSENAL of weapons – both offensive and defensive – over two millennia of Serbian history

In Ephesians 6:10-18, Paul leads us into the ARSENAL for Christian soldiers in a different kind of warfare... SPIRITUAL warfare

I imagine that each of the citizens of Serbia who lived through any of those 143 wars KNEW there was a war going on at the time!

The overwhelming majority of Christians today are scarcely aware they are in a spiritual war.

Review: We are MOST CERTAINLY at war!! When you come to Christ, it is not true that all of our problems in this world have ended. We may certainly assert that all our problems in the NEXT WORLD... the world of ETERNITY have most certainly ended!! We are headed for an eternity in a world without death, mourning, crying, or pain!

But we have not arrived there yet!! No, not at all!!

And a new Christian may be bewildered to discover a whole array of troubles, of griefs and woes and struggles that he or she never knew before! A new Christian may be stunned to find that they are barraged by temptations and thoughts and feelings and ideas that are deeply troubling. After the initial euphoria of joy and peace that comes with conversion, they may find themselves struggling with assurance of salvation, or with whole new dark thoughts and temptations that they know are wrong. They may find deep difficulties with other people, attacks and accusations coming upon them. When they do yield to temptations, they may find a deep level of guilt and torment in their conscience such as they have never known before in their lives.

And they may wonder, "WHAT HAS HAPPENED TO ME? Why all this strife, this turmoil? For a little while, as a Christian I was happy and fulfilled. But now I wonder where all that joy and peace has gone."

Well... what has happened is that you crossed over from Satan's dark kingdom into the beautiful realm of Christ's Kingdom of light. When you were a non-Christian, you were dead in your transgressions and sins... You were continually practicing without much thought the ways of this world, following the leading of that ancient rebel, the Devil... unaware of your true status.

Jesus spoke about how he RESCUES people from Satan's dark kingdom... he likens Satan to an evil warrior, a "strong man, fully armed..."

Luke 11:21-22 "When a strong man, fully armed, guards his own house, his possessions are safe.

"His possessions are safe" = literally, his possessions are AT PEACE... paralyzed, unable to move, causing Satan no disturbance at all.

²² But when someone stronger attacks and overpowers him, he takes away the armor in which the man trusted and divides up the spoils.

Jesus is that mighty warrior, our rescuer, who overpowers Satan, strips him of his armor, and plunders him of spoils... and WE ARE THE SPOILS!

BUT that is not the end of the battle!! Satan does not give us up easily, for he thinks he can steal us back; he begins to WAGE WAR against us directly, and this is the beginning of our troubles. In the past, he could leave us undisturbed as slaves on his evil plantation, doing evil works, unaware of our true condition. But once the gospel has come and rescued us, we become TARGETS... enemies, who are now seeking to plunder him further by rescuing other captives.

So do not be surprised at the warfare, the strife, the struggle!

We are called to FIGHT... to WRESTLE:

Ephesians 6:10-12 Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. ¹¹ Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. ¹² For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.

Satan tries to deceive us into thinking that we don't have a fight at all... he can trick us into thinking that the afflictions of our lives are merely natural and not supernatural... they are the troubles common to man

So, dear brothers and sisters, WAKE UP... you are AT WAR! Satan is attacking you EVERY SINGLE DAY, and you MUST FIGHT!

You have a responsibility to BE STRONG IN THE LORD and in the MIGHT OF HIS POWER; and you must put on the full armor of God

I. Walking into the Armory

A. The Armory of God

1. Let's take a walk through the armory that God has provided for his warriors, for US
2. Not a museum of military artifacts:
 - a. Everything in the Serbian museum was OBSOLETE... surpassed by the ever developing science of military ingenuity
3. Aberdeen Proving Ground: state of the art offensive weapons and state of the art defensive armor... like reactive armor on tanks that can withstand antitank missiles... being developed and tested
 - a. American soldiers wear body armor made of synthetic materials, polymers that are light and strong, able to protect against small arms fire and small bombs and antipersonnel mines
 - b. Constant development
4. The Armory of God needs NO DEVELOPMENT... it has been effective at every stage of church history, for the power of God MAKES IT effective

Last week: three commands to wage spiritual warfare:

- 1) BE STRONG IN THE LORD AND IN HIS MIGHTY POWER**
- 2) PUT ON THE FULL ARMOR OF GOD**
- 3) STAND YOUR GROUND IN THE EVIL DAY... the day of battle**

B. The "Full Armor" of God Evaluated

1. Something crafted by God

- a. External to us... must be taken up by us
- b. Not crafted by us... not something we make, something we put on
- 2. Sufficient to meet every need... fully equipped
- 3. High quality... impenetrable, durable, beautiful
- 4. Appropriate to analyze each piece??
 - a. Is this an allegory?
 - b. Are we meant to think about each piece in great detail... or can we push details too far?

Puritan pastor William Gurnall:

Wrote *The Christian in Complete Armor*... in three volumes, published in 1655, 1658, and 1662... I have it all in one large book of well over one thousand pages

Charles Spurgeon loved it and gleaned tons of spiritual truth from it

BUT it tended to allegorize the elements of the spiritual armor and go on and on at great length about each one

See the problem of pressing details too closely:

Ephesians 6:14: "Breastplate of righteousness"

***1 Thessalonians 5:8* putting on faith and love as a breastplate**

This is not a contradiction... just proof that we are not to push too hard on the details of the armor of God

C. Something We Must Put On

1. My approach: each element must be considered carefully, biblically and prayerfully; then APPROPRIATED... PUT ON by prayer and by meditation; and perhaps renewed multiple times throughout the day and throughout the battle
2. "Each part put on with prayer..."

- a. In 1858, Presbyterian pastor George Duffield, Jr., penned the hymn “Stand Up, Stand Up for Jesus!”

Stand up, stand up for Jesus, stand in His strength alone;
 The arm of flesh will fail you, ye dare not trust your own.
Put on the Gospel armor, each piece put on with prayer;
 Where duty calls or danger, be never wanting there.

- b. The idea of “each part put on with prayer” stuck with me...

Ephesians 6:18 And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints.

- c. The idea is ALERTNESS and ALL KINDS OF PRAYER in the Spirit
- d. My concept is: take up each of these elements with scriptural meditation and understanding, and with a prayerful dependence on Christ and on the Holy Spirit, prepare for battle with Satan

D. The Nature of the Warfare

1. Satan’s work: to hurl IDEAS and corresponding FEELINGS at us, hoping they’ll land and do damage
2. He has a mysterious ACCESS to our minds, an access that we cannot describe... he cannot MAKE US do things, but he can SUGGEST ideas and actions and the corresponding FEELINGS
3. Image: walking through a “**Mall of Ideas**” with idea stores on the left and on the right; each “idea store” has aggressive salesmen
4. Their efforts correspond to TEMPTATIONS... the pull, the allure of Satan toward sin... like walking into a shop selling INCENSE
5. If we turn aside and go into their shops, we will breathe in the noxious, poisonous fumes of their enticing concepts, we will become increasingly weak, increasingly spiritually sick
 - a. We will doubt the Word of God
 - b. We will become weaker and weaker, unable to serve God

c. Our spiritual clothing and hair and whole being will begin to smell like the fumes of that shop... it will permeate our very being and pull us ever downward

d. We will feel guilty and unclean and disqualified

E. The Command: PUT ON THE FULL ARMOR of God

1. Piece by piece, carefully, prayerfully, thoughtfully

2. Aware of what each part can and must do for you

II. The Belt of Truth

A. Belt: first item; enables soldier to draw all things together to his body and hold it fast

1. Peter: “gird up the loins of your mind”... NIV “prepare your minds for action”

^{KJV} 1 Peter 1:13 Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind

2. First century garments were loose and flowing... like a tunic; to get ready for action, they had to have a BELT to tie everything up

3. The command

^{RSV} Ephesians 6:14 Stand therefore, having girded your loins with truth

a. Literally “Having girded yourself all around with truth”

b. There is no NOUN “belt of truth” but more of an action... girding your loins up with truth

c. Loins = reproductive organs; those parts of the body you treat with special modesty and cover up; so ... truth coming very close to us, even in the secret places and hidden places of our souls

Psalm 51:6 Surely you desire truth in the inner parts; you teach me wisdom in the inmost place.

B. Not the Belt of Truthfulness... as If We Need to Be Honest

1. Again... this is the armor of GOD... something GOD makes, crafts, and prepares for us; something he HANDS TO US to put on
2. It is vital for us to be truthful people; to not lie or speak falsehood

Ephesians 4:25 Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbor, for we are all members of one body.

3. But this is not what Paul is talking about here... OUR TRUTHFULNESS

C. The Truth of God = The Word of God AS A WHOLE, especially as it relates to CHRIST the Savior

1. The source of SPIRITUAL TRUTH is the Word of God

John 17:17 Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth.

2. The Word of God is PERFECT, wholly free from error
3. The perfection of the Word of God is the basis for all the spiritual fighting; understanding the truth, meditating on it, drawing it like a BELT AROUND OUR WAISTS
4. We must be HUMBLE and say apart from scripture, we know nothing, and are totally vulnerable
5. The difference between the “belt of truth” and the “sword of the Spirit” has to do with OVERARCHING TRUTH, the existence of truth vs. SPECIFIC TRUTHS that oppose specific LIES

In our “post-modern” era, spiritual truth is severely questioned; our non-Christian friends and neighbors resist the concept of absolute spiritual truth... we accept SCIENTIFIC TRUTH, what you can prove in a laboratory

Pontius Pilate speaks for post-modern sceptics when he had this exchange with Jesus:

John 18:37-38 "You are right in saying I am a king. In fact, for this reason I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me." ³⁸ ¶ "What is truth?" Pilate asked.

To put on the “belt of truth” means to draw close to ourselves the truth of God... absolute truth... immutable truth

D. The Centerpiece of the Word: The Testimony of Jesus

1. The central truth in the Bible is JESUS, the Savior from all Sin
2. Strong connection between Christ and the written Word

John 1:1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

John 1:14 The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and TRUTH.

John 1:17 For the law was given through Moses; grace and TRUTH came through Jesus Christ.

3. Jesus IS the truth

John 14:6 "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

4. Jesus as the WORD is a mighty Warrior

Revelation 19:11-15 I saw heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is called Faithful and True. With justice he judges and makes war. ¹² His eyes are like blazing fire, and on his head are many crowns. **OUT OF HIS MOUTH COMES A SHARP, DOUBLE-EDGED SWORD**

5. Nothing mightier for this spiritual battle than CHRIST, the commander of the armies of heaven, with eyes of fire speaking only the TRUTH, to destroy Satan’s Kingdom of lies

E. Satan’s Kingdom of Lies

1. The “Belt of Truth” is essential because Satan’s whole kingdom is based on lies
2. He deceived Eve at the tree of the knowledge of good and evil by his lies

- a. Questioning the Word of God: “Did God really say...?”
- b. Contradicting the Word of God: “You will not surely die...”
- c. Using the Truth of God in service to an error: “God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened and you will be like God, knowing good from evil.”

3. Jesus exposed Satan’s Kingdom of Lies plainly:

John 8:44 [Satan] was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies.

- a. Satan MURDERS SOULS by telling beautiful and convincing lies, contradicting the WORD OF GOD

4. The Word of God demolishes Satan’s lies

2 Corinthians 10:5 We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.

F. Practically: How Do We “Put on the Belt of Truth”?

- 1. First, be aware of the battle for truth... everything Satan does to tempt you and accuse you and attack you will be based on a LIE, a denial of God’s Word at some level
- 2. Be continually in God’s Word: store it up within you that you might not sin; be transformed by the renewing of your minds; be daily feeding on the truth of God’s Word, feeding on it as though your soul depended upon it, for it does
- 3. Especially feed on God’s Word as it testifies to CHRIST... meditate on passages that present Christ Jesus to your soul every day; remind yourself of His nature, His holiness, His great power, His purposes in the world
- 4. Have a sense of preparation... girding up the loins of your mind... prepared for mental action, alertness, awareness, not lethargy and dullness

^{KJV} 1 Peter 1:13 Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind

1 Peter 1:13-16 Therefore, prepare your minds for action; be self-controlled; set your hope fully on the grace to be given you when Jesus Christ is revealed. ¹⁴ As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. ¹⁵ But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; ¹⁶ for it is written: "Be holy, because I am holy."

5. Especially look to see Satan's attacks and accusations and temptations as LIES... they LYING to you about the world, or about pleasure, or about Christ, or about your soul, or about your sins, or about the future, or about work...

III. The Breastplate of Righteousness

Ephesians 6:14 Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place

A. What is a "Breastplate?"

1. A piece of armor strapped on the torso, reaching from the throat area, extending down to the loins; covered the chest and abdomen
2. Protected the vital organs from attack by sword or javelin or arrow or other weapons
3. Crafted of leather with a thick plate of polished metal, usually brass; it shone in the sun and was beautiful to look at

B. Righteousness

1. What is pure, right, corresponding to God's justice, God's nature
2. Lines up with God's standards, God's laws

Psalm 19:9 The ordinances of the LORD are sure and altogether righteous.

C. Not the Breastplate of Our Own Righteousness

1. One translation says "Breastplate of integrity"... our own uprightness

2. Again, OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS, our integrity is important, but it CANNOT be the breastplate Paul wants us to put on to face the powerful enemy, the devil
3. Satan means “accuser”... he is the accuser of the brothers, and accuses them NIGHT AND DAY before the Lord (Revelation 12:10)
4. Satan has an accurate record of all your sins, and he will utterly SHRED your own righteousness in an instant; you cannot stand against him with that as your protection; he will remember and accuse, and there’ll be nothing you can say, because the accusation will be true

Romans 3:10 As it is written: "There is no one righteous, not even one

Isaiah 64:6 All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags

5. No one in church history tried as hard to be righteous on his own as did Martin Luther
 - a. Extreme fastings; long prayers; continual confession of even the slightest mental errors; hard labors in service to others;
 - b. NOTHING could quiet his raging conscience; for he knew that his wicked heart had not been changed at all; he was filled with anger toward God and pride for his achievements and covetousness
 - c. If his righteousness could be shredded so easily, what about yours??
6. The greatest saints have had an acute awareness of how vile they still were in the sight of God

King David:

Psalm 40:12 my sins have overtaken me, and I cannot see. They are more than the hairs of my head, and my heart fails within me.

The Apostle Paul did not feel RIGHTEOUS on his own:

Romans 7:19 For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do-- this I keep on doing.

Romans 7:24 What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?

Satan has SHREDDED the personal righteousness of every hero in church history... our OWN righteousness will never protect us from Satan's attacks

7. NO... this breastplate that we put on is part of the FULL ARMOR OF GOD

- a. Crafted by God
- b. Handed to us as a gift of God
- c. Perfectly effective by the power of God...
- d. This magnificent breastplate of righteousness is a GIFT OF GOD'S GRACE

D. Christ's Imputed Righteousness: A Perfect Shield

1. The gift of imputed righteousness is central to our salvation

Romans 3:20-24 no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin. ²¹ ¶ But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. ²² This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, ²³ for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ²⁴ and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.

- a. "justification": declaration by God the Judge that you are perfectly righteous in his sight
- b. This righteousness is a perfect standing before God in reference to his LAW... as though we had been perfectly obedient to God's Law in every detail for every single moment of our lives

- c. It was won for us by the perfect obedience of Christ to the Laws of God; that perfect righteousness is given us as a gift BY FAITH

Romans 4:3 What does the Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness."

- d. Credited = imputed, THOUGHT OF BY GOD as applying to your account
- e. Taught in many places in the NT... it is our only hope!!

Philippians 3:9 not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ-- the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith.

2. How to "put on the breastplate of Christ's righteousness"
 - a. Understand that the spiritual warfare we have with Satan will be over our sinfulness and his temptations and accusations
 - b. That warfare will be fierce and powerful
 - c. Satan will allure and entice us into sin with his powerful temptations; then when we sin, he will turn and viciously accuse us before the Judgment Seat of Almighty God
 - d. In Christ, by faith alone, we are seen by God to be perfectly righteous... just as if we've never sinned in our lives
 - e. As perfectly righteous people, we can resist the temptations of Satan toward sin
 - i) We can say "I feel the power of that temptation to lust over internet pornography, or to respond in prideful rage against my spouse, or to be lazy in the service of the Lord.... But God has forgiven me of all my past sins; he has set me free from all sin; I am NO LONGER A SLAVE TO SIN!! I am now perfectly righteous in his sight.
 - ii) Say I AM RIGHTEOUS in Christ... therefore, I WILL NOT SIN.

E. Our “Feelings”

1. We should note the “breastplate” covered the internal organs
2. These organs were often said to be the seat of feelings, of emotions
 - a. The heart = seat of affections; what we LOVE and what we HATE... the heart refers to our AFFECTIONS
 - b. The bowels = seat of feelings.... KJV

KJV Philippians 1:8 For God is my record, how greatly I long after you all in the bowels of Jesus Christ.

NIV Philippians 1:8 God can testify how I long for all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus.

- c. This actually makes a lot of sense... we can FEEL FEELINGS in our organs... do you not feel it when you have to do public speaking; or you men, the first time you asked the woman who would later be your wife out on a date... were you not nervous? Did you not feel it in your GUT?
 - d. So the breastplate of righteousness covers our FEELINGS
3. The idea is that we should FEEL and DELIGHT IN the truth that we are perfectly righteous in God’s sight
4. We should FEEL and DELIGHT in righteousness itself... love holiness like Jesus does

Hebrews 1:9 You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness; therefore God, your God, has set you above your companions by anointing you with the oil of joy.

5. The more we delight in the perfect righteousness of Christ, the more impervious to Satan’s thrusts and assaults

F. Practical Guidelines: how to we “put in place” the breastplate of righteousness??

1. First, realize it already IS in place! God has declared you righteous, and nothing will ever change that!!

Romans 8:33-34 Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. ³⁴ Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died-- more than that, who was raised to life-- is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us.

- a. Even when you don't "put on the breastplate of righteousness" on a given day, you are NO LESS righteous in God's sight
- b. Nothing will ever change that status we have now in Christ
- c. No weapon Satan crafts will pierce it and kill your soul!!

Isaiah 54:17 no weapon forged against you will prevail, and you will refute every tongue that accuses you. This is the heritage of the servants of the LORD, and this is their vindication from me," declares the LORD.

- d. BUT we can still "put on the breastplate of righteousness" in our hearts and minds every day
2. Every day, thank God for your perfect righteousness, given you as a gift by faith
3. Delight in the perfection of Christ's obedience to His Father
 - a. FEEL THESE FEELINGS in your heart, in your GUT... that Jesus could say these words

John 8:29 The one who sent me is with me; he has not left me alone, for I always do what pleases him.

4. Say "Just as my Savior always did what pleased His Father, so I also want to be just like him... perfectly righteous; I want to say at the end of the day, "I always did what pleased you today."
5. FEELINGS of delight the Psalmist had for the Law of God...

Psalm 119:97 Oh, how I love your law! I meditate on it all day long.

Psalm 19:8 The precepts of the LORD are right, giving joy to the heart. The commands of the LORD are radiant, giving light to the eyes.... Sweeter than honey from a comb!!

G. Assurance of Salvation

1. Satan will attack your FEELINGS... making you FEEL as if you are not righteous
2. As I already said, he will have a CASE based on your performance
3. You must strengthen your feelings with the WORD of GOD, with the gospel's testimony that everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved
4. That God has given you the free gift of righteousness by faith... by faith in the Word of God, your feelings can follow and you will DELIGHT in your righteousness... assurance of salvation is part of putting on the breastplate of righteousness

IV. Final Appeal

A. Come to Christ!!

1. The full armor of God is only for Christians
2. You have heard of a gospel message that brings peace to the soul and righteousness before the eyes of God
3. Apart from Christ, you are still in chains in Satan's Kingdom
4. By faith in Christ alone you can be set free and fight the attacks of the devil

B. Christians: Obey this Passage

1. Be aware that you will be continually attacked while in the world
2. You should neither UNDERESTIMATE nor OVERESTIMATE the devil's power
3. "Be strong in the Lord" = realize Christ's limitless power to defeat all of Satan's attacks
4. "Put on the full armor of God" = realize your responsibility to ACT, to FIGHT
5. "Each piece put on with prayer...: