

"UNLOCKING OUR SPIRITUAL BANK ACCOUNT"
PART 15: EPHESIANS 6:10-24

We finally made it to the end of Ephesians. Yes! This passage that we are going to be looking at today is probably the best-known part of the book. It talks about putting on the whole armor of God. We Christians need to protect ourselves because we have an enemy. Actually, the Bible says that we have several enemies. For starters, the book of James says, "You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is [hatred] with God? Therefore, whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God" (James 4:4). So, our first enemy is the world. [By "world"] I am referring to the anti-God, anti-Christ world order, human reasoning, [and] our ever-changing social paradigms. Like it or not, we live in a fallen world that is filled with opposition toward God. Any surprises? Have you been watching the news lately? There is a lot of that, right?

Enemy #2 is what Paul mentions in Galatians -- "For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do" (Galatians 5:17). So, our second enemy is the flesh. By "flesh" we are not talking about our skin. We are speaking of that bent toward sin that all fallen human beings possess.

And now there is a third enemy and we talked about that at the end of our lesson last time. Peter warns us to "be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour" (1 Peter 5:8). So, our third enemy is the devil. Dwight Pentecost wrote a book which I have in my library entitled, "Your Adversary the Devil." In that book he says this (I thought it was really good): "Our adversary is so cleverly and subtly camouflaged many do not even recognize his existence." Then he goes on to say, "Though he is unseen, he is powerful and formidable."

So, those are our three adversaries we engage against – the world, the flesh and the devil. If we are going to be in this war against these three enemies, we need to be properly armed, don't we? Every good soldier knows that they must be fully and properly equipped for the battle at hand and that they must have a plan of action.

That is my little introduction to this part of Ephesians. We are going to start beginning in Chapter 6 and v 10.

READ Ephesians 6:10-11

So, Paul's final word to the church at Ephesus is one of encouragement. "Be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might." Our confidence is NOT in ourselves. It is in the Lord. We know from earlier in Ephesians that Jesus is sovereign, that He is "far above all rule and authority." We know that God "put all things under His feet and gave Him as head over all things to the church" (Ephesians 1:21-22). Jesus is our Commander in Chief. He is our Lord. So then, Christian brothers and sisters, stand strong. Stand firm in HIM, in the strength of HIS might and HIS authority!

V 11 reminds us that we are at war against a real enemy, the devil. Like [Dwight] Pentecost said, he is strong and he is relentless. Because of this we are told to put on the whole armor of God. By the way, just so you know, Satan is not alone. He has a whole army of demons fighting with him.

READ Ephesians 6:12

These rulers, these authorities, and cosmic powers are spiritual forces of evil. Here, in this verse, we learn something about the battlefield, where this spiritual war is taking place. Our battle is not against flesh and blood. The physical world is what we can see with our physical eyes and reach out and touch. But that's not where the warfare is taking place. It may seem like it (from our perspective), but it is not. It is happening in what Paul refers to as "the heavenly places." The "heavenly places" mentioned here is NOT heaven as we think about it. Rather, it is in a broader sense

the spiritual realm. We are involved in spiritual warfare. Some theologians have referred to this as the "invisible war." I actually have a book by that title, *The Invisible War*, which talks about spiritual warfare.

READ Ephesians 6:13

Since we are engaged in a battle, it is imperative that we take up the whole armor of God in order to stand against our enemy or enemies. Paul adds the phrase, "in the evil day." What does he mean by that? Well, we are in a state of war, all the time, every day, while we are living here on this old earth. However, there are certain times when the enemy will attack us. Usually, his attacks are surprise attacks. That is the nature of war. The enemy does not give us a heads up when he is going to prepare an attack. That is just not the way it works. In war we are in an adverse environment constantly, 24/7. But the enemy attacks sporadically and when we least expect it. Therefore, Paul says, "take up the whole armor of God." We need to be ready at all times because we do not know when the attack is going to come.

READ Ephesians 6:14-15

Paul obviously is using the imagery of a Roman soldier, something that he and his First Century audience would have been quite familiar with. This soldier here [picture of a fully-armed Roman soldier in PowerPoint slide] is dressed for battle. He is prepared at all times for an attack.

Belt of truth... that is the first thing Paul mentions. Truth is God's view. It is God's absolute standard. It is fixed. It does not change. Truth is more than merely the facts. We can have the facts and yet interpret them wrongly. Truth gets to the heart of the issue – it is how God sees things. In John 8:32 Jesus tells His disciples, "You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." When are we set free? When we KNOW the truth. This is essential for us as we fight our battle. One thing we know about our enemy the devil (the Bible says this) is that he is a liar. Just ask old Adam and Eve. Satan is a master of deception. He twists things. He tries to confuse us, to sidetrack us, [and] to get us to do anything other than what

God wants. BUT when we know the truth, we can counter whatever Satan is attempting to do and we can move forward knowing and doing God's will. Knowing God's truth, His absolute standard, we can confidently do the right thing. Knowing the truth leads to right action on our part.

And that takes us then to the breastplate of righteousness. This refers to, not our own righteousness, but the righteousness of Christ (see 1 Corinthians 1:30, Philippians 3:9). Paul has spent a lot of time in Ephesians talking about practical matters like how we are to behave as believers. Back in Chapter 4 he said, "put off your old self (an action), which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness" (Ephesians 4:22-24). So, that is what Paul has told us to do [regarding] our behavior. Jesus, of course, is our model. It is not like we have to figure it out. We just model what Jesus did.

V 15 talks about the proper footwear of a soldier – the shoes of readiness that have been provided for us by the gospel of peace. Peace in the midst of war? Huh! What an interesting concept. How do we know that we are on the right track and that we are doing the right thing? How do we know that we are actually doing God's will? We will have peace, right? God's peace will flood our soul and assure us that everything will work out for His glory -- ultimately.

These first three pieces of armor that Paul has talked about in these verses here – truth, righteousness and peace – we are instructed to "put on." We are at war. We wear these all the time. We put them on. Truth, righteousness and peace are our lifestyle, if you will, 24/7. But, there are going to be times (what Paul refers to as the "evil day"), when we are going to come under attack by our enemy. He is going to assault us. And so, the next three pieces of armor are ones we are told to "take up." We are going to talk about these next.

But before we do, I want to show you a [picture of what spiritual warfare looks like in real life]. Paul has been talking about a Roman soldier. But when we go to battle in the spiritual realm, this is what it looks like. On our knees. In the quietness of our own heart. Often burdened. Talking to God. That is what the battle actually looks like for us.

READ Ephesians 6:16-17

Let me stop right there. These are the things we are going to take up [in preparation] for the attacks by our enemy, [anticipating that] they will come.

Shield of faith... Faith extinguishes the flaming darts, the fiery arrows of the enemy. Faith is action based on the knowledge, the truth that we have that God has been telling us. It is an action on our part based on what God has told us. Hebrews 11, you are all familiar with that, the Faith Chapter. The writer lists all those Old Testament heroes of the faith, right? And then he describes the action they did that made them men and women of faith. They did something that showed that they had faith. Faith is action. So, if we know the truth and if we are living out the truth, daily by right behavior, and if we have peace knowing we are in God's will (all the things he has talked about up to this point), then when the enemy assaults us, and he will, we can step out in faith with full confidence in God.

Helmet of salvation... A helmet protects the head. That is where our mind is, our brain, our thinking, our reasoning. Here Paul specifically deals with our thoughts. And he talks about it being a helmet of salvation. He is talking about our thoughts about our own salvation. We are saved, right? Praise God! That changes everything for us. Therefore, because we are saved, we should constantly think about, meditate upon, ponder, remind ourselves who we are in Christ. [This has been] a major theme in Ephesians. As saved people, we have a new position in Christ. We are children of The King! Our lives and our way of thinking need to reflect THAT.

I was thinking about a good analogy to give you. It is a silly TV show that Robin and I like to watch -- The Beverly Hillbillies. It is funny because you have this family, the Clampetts. And they have struck it rich. But they are products of the way that they were raised. They could live completely differently than they do, better than before. But they haven't yet fully learned how to do that. And that is what makes the show so funny. [You have these backwoods hillbillies] living among all these rich people in Beverly Hills. We all know how rich the Clampetts are. But the Clampetts do not know how to live like rich people. They have lived as hillbillies their whole lives. They are stuck in their old dirt-poor hillbilly mindset. And so, I kind of look at it this way – like Jed, Jethro, Ellie Mae and Granny, we Christians are rich. We are children of the King. But far too often we do not live like it. We are stuck in our old mindsets. Even though we have been saved for a long time, we are just kind of stuck with the mindset of the world. We are living like paupers spiritually. And we do not have to be!

Sword of the spirit... This is the only offensive weapon that we need. Paul makes it clear what the sword of the spirit is. He says it here, "which is the word of God." The Greek word used for "word" in this verse is *Ramah*, which is something that has been declared by God. Clear instructions, commands. Remember we are at war (the analogy Paul has been using of the soldier) and so, we fight based on the authority of God's word to us. They are God's marching orders, His commands to us.

So, the armor we put on or take up is not belts, breastplates, shoes, shields, helmets or swords – those are just word pictures. They are just analogies. The armor, the resources that we have been given, that we have been instructed to use in our spiritual warfare, are truth and righteousness and peace and faith, realizing our position in Christ and the authority of God's word.

Everything we need to be successful in the Christian life and to defeat our enemy is available to us. It is up to US to arm ourselves and to use them. V 18...

READ Ephesians 6:18-20

"Praying at all times in the Spirit..." That is where spiritual warfare takes place, in our prayer closet. We pray for each other. That is why [our class] has a prayer list. We certainly pray for ourselves and our families. Paul says, "pray for me as well." Prayer is the means by which we communicate with our Commander in Chief. Prayer is a vital resource in the Christian life.

In v 20 Paul is reminding the Ephesian believers that while he is writing this letter, he is a prisoner in Rome. He refers to himself, not as a prisoner, but "an ambassador in chains." I thought that was interesting. We studied the book of Acts. At the very end [of the book] Paul is in Rome and he has a ministry there in Rome as he is waiting for his meeting with the [Roman] emperor [regarding] the charge [brought] against him. So, what is Paul doing at the end of the book of Acts while he is waiting, while he is being held as a prisoner under house arrest? What is Paul doing? He is ministering to this whole group of soldiers and to the [many] people who come to see him, and preaching the gospel. It is interesting how God works. There were probably many soldiers and many in that house that got saved because of Paul. So, that is what he is doing. He has this active ministry there in prison and that is where the book of Acts leaves him. Of course, we know he goes on from there. But while he is writing this letter (Ephesians), that is what he is praying for. That this ministry I have in Rome will be effective, that I can reach people for Christ.

Acts 28:31 says, "proclaiming the kingdom of God... with all boldness and without hindrance." And that is what Paul is doing. And now he is going to close out the book of Ephesians. These are the last verses in the book.

READ Ephesians 6:21-22

Most scholars believe that this letter to the Ephesians was hand-delivered by this guy here, Tychicus. He was one of their own. He was in Rome helping Paul out, one of many who ministered alongside Paul, even

while he was in prison. So, what Paul is saying here is this: as Tychicus, who they know, gives the believers an update on Paul (giving them this letter and answering questions they have, updating them on Paul's condition and ministry in Rome) – that should encourage them.

Then Paul closes with these words...

READ Ephesians 6:23-24

He prays love, peace, and grace upon the dear saints of Ephesus. We have talked a lot about spiritual warfare in this lesson, but I want to close by focusing on the Christian concept of PEACE. I want to leave you with this thought...

[In class I showed a picture of a violent thunderstorm taking place]

Amid the chaos of life we have an assurance, a calm spirit that God is in charge and everything will be OK. In the middle of the storms of life – we hear the howling wind, we see and feel the driving rain on us, the flashes of lightning, we hear the claps of thunder off in the distance and close by – in the middle of all this chaos, there is a bird resting safely protected by the rock. This is a great picture of us, isn't it? In the midst of life's chaos.

We know that currently we are in a battle. It is called life. But we have read the book and we know how it ends. We know how the story ends, don't we? In the end we win the war! Isn't that good news? We win! But for now, but for today, we are Christian soldiers engaged in a battle. So, my dear brother and sisters, fight the good fight, finish the course, and keep the faith.

And that is Ephesians. May God bless the reading and study of His holy word.

[One class member quoted 1 Peter 5:7-10 out of The Living Bible: "Let Him have all your worries and cares, for He is always thinking about you and watching everything that concerns you. Be careful—watch out for attacks from Satan, your great enemy. He prowls around like a hungry,

roaring lion, looking for some victim to tear apart. Stand firm when he attacks. Trust the Lord; and remember that other Christians all around the world are going through these sufferings too. After you have suffered a little while, our God, who is full of kindness through Christ, will give you His eternal glory. He personally will come and pick you up, and set you firmly in place, and make you stronger than ever.”]