

“God’s Armor/Our Armor” A sermon by Lee Ireland
Cathedral City Community Presbyterian Church
August 26, 2018, Fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost
Ephesians 6:10-20

Let us pray together: Open our eyes to see your Spirit in our life. Open our hearts to receive the blessings you send each day. Guide us with your wisdom so that through us Christ may walk on the earth once again. Amen.

These verses are probably quite familiar to many of you. I know that they are familiar to me. As a matter of fact, I start practically every day with a prayer to put the armor of God on both Linda and me. Perhaps some of you do the same.

When you hear these verses, the distinct military flavor is apparent. Paul is talking about putting on armor. But whose armor? Practically every source I studied on this text referred to Roman military attire. Helmets, breast plates, shields, swords - what the Roman soldier wore and carried. A surface reading of the scripture makes you think about Christians being ready for a battle in military garb – ready to slay the forces of evil.

This imagery has been appealing to Christians in the past – unfortunately. Jews, Muslims and Eastern Orthodox Christians were the target of medieval Christians. These groups were slaughtered because they were viewed as the forces of evil. When the Reformation occurred, many of the reformers, Calvin included, approved of the states’ right to execute those who the church perceived as enemies of God, including Turks, Jews, Christian heretics and witches. Many were burned at the stake.

This idea of killing infidels is not popular in most of the Christian world today. Most of us think it terrible that the Middle East religious fanatics kill those who don’t agree with them. But from what I just said, you can see that Christians don’t exactly have clean hands.

We’d like to think that we’ve moved beyond killing those who are evil in our view of the world. Most of us pray for peace, pray for our enemy, and turn the other cheek – or at least I hope we do. However, today, we may not kill with sword. Many assassinate others with words of hate. Let’s pray for peace and understanding!

You may have remembered that I asked the question earlier, ‘but whose armor?’ Paul may have named the pieces of armor a Roman soldier wore in his day, but did you notice in verse 13 Paul say to ‘**take up the whole armor of God**’? Armor of God? What is God’s armor? With these few words, Paul is saying he’s not talking about us putting on physical armor as the Roman soldiers wore but putting on the spiritual armor of God.

To better understand this, let’s look at the Old Testament book of Isaiah as it describes God and God’s armor. Isaiah 11:4-5, **Righteousness shall be the belt around his waist, and faithfulness the belt around his loins.** And Isaiah 59:17, **He put on righteousness like a breastplate, and a helmet of salvation on his head.**

Though Paul, at one time, may have been taken literally about putting on battle armor to fight evil in the world, the context of these verses is putting on God’s armor – putting on spiritual armor. Think about this: when we put on the armor of God we are armored by and with God.

The belt of truth: God’s truth, the truth of the Gospel. The breastplate of righteousness, we live as God has shown us how to live through the life of Jesus Christ. Shoes for our feet to proclaim the good news of peace and the saving death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Christ-followers are all about staying alert, standing firm and proclaiming the gospel of peace. Shield of faith to withstand the attacks on our faith. The helmet of salvation protects the mind with the knowledge that we have been saved for life eternal by

the resurrection of Jesus Christ. As it says in Romans, we have been transformed by the renewing of our minds. And finally, the sword of the spirit, which is the word of God. Jesus was tempted by Satan, the evil one in the wilderness. How did Jesus respond – with scripture. The more we study the scripture, the better we are able to keep on track when the devil tempts us.

Note that Paul says, stand firm. Paul uses these words to tell all of us that the key to self-defense, as we would say using modern words, is to travel with a buddy. There is strength in numbers. For the individual to keep the faith, the shield of faith, then he or she needs the whole community of Christ-followers for mutual support, instruction, and accountability. This is why we have a church. There is strength in numbers as we worship and work together, care for each other, and pray for our friends when they are under attack from the evil one.

God's armor. God is our armor in this life. God gives us, the whole community, this armor. Fostering intimacy with God by studying the scripture and praying is the means for each of us to put on the armor that God has given us.

Let's look briefly at prayer since Paul address it in today's scripture. Paul says: **Pray in the Spirit at all times in every prayer and supplication.** We are to pray in the Spirit. Pray in the Spirit is not some kind of special prayer. It's just regular, everyday prayer. Or it may be desperate prayer for something troubling you. Praying in the Spirit is all prayer, for all prayer involves the Holy Spirit. We have a full prayer life because of the Spirit. The spirit is active even when you may not be praying. You may remember that Paul says in Romans that when we do not know what to pray for, the Spirit prays for us. Praying is one of the means for each of us to put on the armor that God makes available to us.

Why do we put on the armor of God? Because God is in the business of reclaiming the world from, as Paul puts it, **the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil.** Forces that are seemingly in control of the world today. God redeemed the Israelites in the Exodus. God's plan for redeeming the world continues through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. And continues today through the church, the Body of Christ. As the Body of Christ, the Church, we bear the armor of God. We are God's presence in and for the world. We are helping God reclaim the world for God's self.

And how are we God's presence in the world today. How can we help God reclaim the world? Paul states that quite plainly. **To that end keep alert and always persevere in supplication for all the saints. Pray also for me, so that when I speak, a message may be given to me to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it boldly, as I must speak.**

It's not new military weapons or armor, better education, new technology, wealth, etc. that help God reclaim the world, but, doing as Paul did – declaring the mystery of the gospel boldly.

This week, ask yourself, "When was the last time I declared the gospel boldly?" I hope the answer is not, "It's been a while." But if it is, this week put on God's armor and share your faith with someone you don't know. I'd like to hear from you about your experience.