

"The Armor of God"

Text: Ephesians 6:10-20

May God bless each of you with the sure knowledge and comfort that Jesus Christ is your Savior who, having paid the full penalty for our sins, has made you an heir of eternal life in heaven. Amen.

Dear Fellow Christians, what a grand thing is offered to us in our text for this morning. It is no less than the ability to stand against all of the attacks of Satan, and, in the end, to stand victorious on Judgment Day! Who would not want such a thing? Who would not crave such a power from Almighty God? And yet we are in the area of *sanctification* here, and in this area there is much confusion. Sanctification, you will remember, is used in God's Word in both a broad and narrow sense. It is broadly defined as the activity of the Holy Spirit whereby he brings us to faith and keeps us in the faith. Sanctification is also used in a narrow sense, where it means "to set aside for holy purposes."

It can be something of a challenge to keep this all straight. Some simple questions will bear that out. Is it *God the Holy Spirit* who keeps us in the faith once we have been converted (brought to faith), or are *we* expected to keep ourselves in the faith? Is it God who fights for us against the forces of evil in this world, or does God offer us an assortment of weapons and expect *us* to fight? Just why is the subject of this sermon (The Armor of God) so important, and what happens if I omit, loosen, nor replace a piece or two?

Through the power of our text for this morning our God wants to give us several gifts – including an unbeatable defense against evil and a greater understanding of the vital part of the Christian life and struggle known as sanctification. Our text is found in the Sixth Chapter of the Book of Ephesians, beginning with the 10th Verse:

^{ESV} **Ephesians 6:10-20** *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. ¹⁴ Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, ¹⁵ and, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace. ¹⁶ In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one; ¹⁷ and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, ¹⁸ praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints, ¹⁹ and also for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel, ²⁰ for which I am an ambassador in chains, that I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak.*

These are God's Words, given by God, to you, to hear and to study. Valuing God's Word above all else, we pray, **"Sanctify us by your truth, O Lord. Your Word is truth."** Amen.

What Christian hasn't heard the words of our text before, perhaps many times? And yet who can say with any confidence that he needs no reminder of what God is telling us here? Again we ask: Do *we* fight, or does *God* fight? Do *we* fight *through* God? Does *God* fight *through* us? Do we have to put on this **"armor of God"** repeatedly, or only once? Does the Holy Spirit put this armor on for us, or do we put it on ourselves? A careful study of these words from our God will clear up these and many other question, and in so doing bless us with the kind of peace and confidence that he wants us to have.

The first thing that might surprise us in our study of this text has to do with putting on this armor of God. How often are we supposed to put this armor on? Once? Once each week on Sunday? Every day of our lives? Many Christians believe that we have to put on God's armor every day of our lives. Yet the Bible (including our text) doesn't say that. In fact if you follow that idea (that we have to put on this armor again and again) through to its logical conclusion, we are all in big trouble. More on that later.

In the original language of the New Testament (Greek) there is a verb form to use when you mean an ongoing action - something that is, or should be, done again and again. That form was not used here by the Holy Spirit when he told us to **"put on the whole armor of God."** He did not, therefore, say, *"Continue to put on the armor..."* Nor did he say, *"Put on the armor again and again..."* He said simply, **"Put on the whole armor of God."** Already one of our questions is answered. This armor of God is not something that we need to put on time after time, day after day. This armor never comes off.

It is hard to put your finger on it, but you can sense a different spirit when certain church bodies speak of putting on the armor of God. It is almost as if they believe in magical spells and incantations - good luck charms to ward off the evil spirits. They speak of *"praying on the armor of God"* and *"praying a hedge of protection around themselves and their families."* Where is this in the Bible? Some point to the Book of Job, where Satan accuses God of placing a protective "hedge" around Job. Man, however, did not "pray" this into existence. It was Satan's description of God's protection of Job. Job was not responsible for the protection, God was. Was it, after all, Job's fault that this hedge was removed? Did Job forget to *"pray it in"* one day only to have Satan take advantage of the breach? Obviously not. It was God who removed his special protection from Job and allowed Satan to test him. God had his reasons.

The best question to ask those who claim the need ritualistically to put on the full armor of God each day is this: *"Did you put on the armor of God yesterday? Then who took it off so that you must put it back on today?"* We repent of our sins and ask God for forgiveness each day of our lives because we sin each day of our lives. We ask God for strength and guidance each day because we know that each new day will bring new struggles and temptations. But this armor of God is different. It has to be different, for several of the components that make up the armor of God are the basic elements of Christianity: the gospel, faith, salvation, and the Word of God. These things the Christian never takes off, never sets aside without setting aside his very Christianity. How fitful would be the sleep of any Child of God if he imagined that each night he had to take off and set aside the very things that make up his Christian faith, or that these vital Christian elements somehow slipped away from him while he slept. He could hope only to somehow survive the night and to live long enough in the morning to again "pray on" his Christianity.

This is instead a rather typical example of mankind trying once again, consciously or not, to take some credit for that which we ourselves could never accomplish. Faith does not come and go with human effort; or else we would indeed lose our faith the moment we relax into sleep each night. Jesus has promised the child of God peace. How could anyone have peace if he had to live with the terror of believing that he slept unprotected from the influence and power of the devil? The true peace of Jesus Christ is based on something outside of ourselves. That peace rests on Jesus, the Rock. It is on Jesus, the Sinless One, that we rest our hope for salvation. When I am awake or when I sleep a dreamless sleep, still and always I believe that Jesus has paid for my sins. It is this faith, this peace, that will **"guard our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus"** - even as we sleep. As Jesus lived without ever once sinning, so now God the Father sees every faithful Christian as altogether holy and without sin. Nothing is left to condemn the true child of God, for all sin (the only thing that could condemn us) was carried by Jesus to the cross. We are forgiven.

The fact is then that we do not have to put on this armor of God each day, since the Christian never takes the armor off. But what then are we to understand from all of this? Do we have some kind of maintenance-free faith, guaranteed to need nothing for the life expectancy of the Christian? Yes and no. There is nothing wrong with the armor itself, but we have a very dangerous habit of neglecting or "loosening" various pieces of the armor from time to time. The belt of truth, for example, tends to feel a bit tight to some. (Remember that when our text talks about **"the belt of truth"** it is talking about *doctrine*— true teaching as opposed to false teaching.) Though this is a vital piece of our armor, it often makes some Christians uncomfortable. *"Maybe just loosen the belt of truth a notch or two when things like close communion, God's roles for men and women, or God's unchanging standards of right and wrong make us uncomfortable."* Be reminded this morning that a religion of our own making could never bring more souls to Christ. We will never be safe if we are not doctrinally sound. Nor can Christ be truly magnified as Lord and Savior when we fail in the very commission he gave us to **"...teach (the nations) all things that he has commanded us."** All of this is the result of loosening the belt of truth.

What else do we routinely find cumbersome in connection with this armor of God. Usually it is the **"breastplate of righteousness."** Whenever our chests swell with our own importance, our own pride and self-absorption, then the **"breastplate of righteousness"** mentioned in our text begins to feel restricting and cumbersome. This breastplate is, of course, *Christ's* righteousness. Our old sinful flesh tries to persuade us to replace that breastplate with the breastplate of *our own* righteousness — *"I am right with God because of my own actions."* The problem, of course, is that our own personal righteousness stops none of the devil's attacks, for who can stand on his own merits when Satan accuses us of sin? On the other

hand, when he accuses us of sin and we are wearing the breastplate of *Christ's* righteousness, then we can have no fear. Satan's charges can never penetrate the fact that Jesus was completely righteous, and has credited that righteousness to us. We need constant reminders of just who has done what for whom.

We also occasionally find the **"helmet of salvation"** too tight and uncomfortably restricting. This invariably happens when we fill our heads with human wisdom, knowledge, and ideology. We imagine things that just aren't true, or lose focus on that one thing needful. That which truly protects our very thoughts is the fact that Jesus Christ is the one who secured our salvation for us. From first to last it is a gift, freely given by grace.

Now while it is true that we do have the terrible power to loosen the armor of God, and even to remove or replace pieces thereof, what we quickly find is that loosening or discarding even one piece of the full armor of God leaves us vulnerable, which in turn can lead to eternal disaster. Note that our text repeatedly talked of putting on *the whole* armor, never just a part.

Note also these two unique aspects in our text concerning putting on the full armor of God. First, our text tells us to **"be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might."** Another translation might be, **"Let the Lord and his mighty power make you strong."** It is the armor **of God** that we are told to put on. That is, in fact, the very first point our text makes. The power to defeat the forces of evil that are against us, as well as the weapons to be used in that fight, come only from God. And yet our text makes another equally important point when it tells us to **"put on the armor."** Why would our text tell us to put on the armor if we played no part in the battle that rages against all Christians? Our text says that it is **"our struggle...against...the spiritual forces of evil..."** With the weapons and power of God we will be invincible. However, these weapons are utterly useless if they are not *our* weapons; if we fail to use them as our only defense in the struggle of Life and death that will rage as long as we are on this sinful earth. This does not mean that we keep ourselves in the faith, or that we are capable of such a thing. It does mean that God has given us precious gifts and expects us to use them in the terrible struggle we all must endure.

So then, once and for all time, you have been given the full armor of God. Never take it off. Don't try to make it more comfortable or improve it. Cling tightly to every word of the Bible as true and necessary, and know that that **"belt of truth"** will function as God intended. Be covered with the breastplate of righteousness – which is confidence in Jesus' perfect life and innocent death for your sins – and know that nothing will be able to trouble your heart. Let your walk be protected by the peace which comes through the gospel, the comfort in knowing that your sins are forgiven. Find protection from the attacks of Satan behind the shield of faith - the confidence that all who believe in Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins *will be saved*. Satan's accusations and

temptations cannot penetrate that promise of God. Protect your head, your thoughts, with the helmet of salvation – focusing on your heavenly goal rather than on the distractions of your earthly pilgrimage. And, finally, take in your hand your one offensive weapon, the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God. It is that Word of God alone that can advance the Kingdom of God into the hearts and lives of those around you. Truly, with these we will **"be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm"** – stand not because we are good and worthy, but because Jesus Christ, our Champion, has won the battle for us, and through his power has preserved us in this saving faith. Amen.

Scripture Readings

ESV **Deuteronomy 4:1-2,6-9** "And now, O Israel, listen to the statutes and the rules that I am teaching you, and do them, that you may live, and go in and take possession of the land that the LORD, the God of your fathers, is giving you. ² You shall not add to the word that I command you, nor take from it, that you may keep the commandments of the LORD your God that I command you... ⁶ Keep them and do them, for that will be your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples, who, when they hear all these statutes, will say, 'Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.' ⁷ For what great nation is there that has a god so near to it as the LORD our God is to us, whenever we call upon him? ⁸ And what great nation is there, that has statutes and rules so righteous as all this law that I set before you today? ⁹ ¶ "Only take care, and keep your soul diligently, lest you forget the things that your eyes have seen, and lest they depart from your heart all the days of your life. Make them known to your children and your children's children.

ESV **Mark 7:5-13** And the Pharisees and the scribes asked him, "Why do your disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders, but eat with defiled hands?" ⁶ And he said to them, "Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written, "'This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; ⁷ in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.' ⁸ You leave the commandment of God and hold to the tradition of men." ⁹ And he said to them, "You have a fine way of rejecting the commandment of God in order to establish your tradition! ¹⁰ For Moses said, 'Honor your father and your mother'; and, 'Whoever reviles father or mother must surely die.' ¹¹ But you say, 'If a man tells his father or his mother, "Whatever you would have gained from me is Corban"' (that is, given to God)-- ¹² then you no longer permit him to do anything for his father or mother, ¹³ thus making void the word of God by your tradition that you have handed down. And many such things you do."

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The 15th Sunday after Pentecost – September 2, 2018

The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

The Opening Hymn – 472 (Red Hymnal)

"Rise, Ye Children of Salvation"

The Order of Service – Supplement page 12ff. (Brown Hymnal)

The Scripture Lessons: (Printed on the back page of this bulletin)

The Old Testament Lesson: (Deuteronomy 4:1-2, 6-9) We are here reminded that obedience to God's Commandments is always pleasing to our God. Why would we need to be reminded of such things?

Interestingly enough, those of us who know and believe that we are saved by grace through faith can expect to be targeted by Satan. The devil would love for us to imagine that disobedience is now acceptable to God, since we are saved by faith in Jesus. Surely the new man in us longs to walk in harmony with God's will – recognizing that everything that we say or do is a reflection of Jesus Christ – our witness to the world of the reason for the hope that is in us.

The Psalm of the Day – Psalm 51 (Supplement Page 31)

The New Testament Lesson: (Mark 7:5-13) Today, as in the days when Jesus walked this earth, men imagine that they can justify their disobedience by spinning it as virtuous. In other words, they justify breaking God's rules by claiming to obey a different, higher set of standards – as in: God says, "Don't murder," but I support "a woman's right to choose to do just that." This reading gives an example of how the godless were doing the same thing in Jesus day. Jesus condemned it. Man doesn't get to define virtue. God has already done that.

The Confession of Faith -

The Apostolic Creed – page 15. (Brown Hymnal)

The Pre-Sermon Hymn – 361 (Red Hymnal)

"O Jesus King Most Wonderful"

The Sermon – Text: Ephesians 6:10-20 (Printed on the back of this bulletin)

"The Armor of God"

The Offertory – (Supplement page 16 insert)

The Post-Sermon Hymn - 235 (Stanzas 1-4) (Red Hymnal)

"O Holy Spirit Enter In"

The Prayers of the Day followed by the Lord's Prayer

The Benediction

The Closing Hymn - 235 (Stanzas 7-8) (Red Hymnal)

"O Holy Spirit Enter In"

Silent Prayer

Welcome! - We warmly welcome any visitors who might be with us this morning and invite you to join us every Sunday at this time. St. Paul is a congregation in fellowship with the Church of the Lutheran Confession (CLC) – a conservative Lutheran synod with churches and missions throughout the United States, as well as Canada, India, and Africa. We are glad you are here. Thank you for letting us share the Word of God with you. Please record your visit in our Guest Book, and come again!

Attendance – Sunday (38) Average (41)

This Week at St. Paul:

Today	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service
	-11:00 a.m.	– Fellowship Hour
Wednesday	-6:00 p.m.	– Confirmation Class
	-7:00 p.m.	– Midweek Bible Study
Next Sunday	-9:00 a.m.	– Sunday School and Bible Class
	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service w/Holy Communion
	-11:15 a.m.	– Fellowship Hour

CLC News – CLC News – Pastor James Naumann has returned the call to Trinity of Spokane, WA. Daily Chapel Talks at Immanuel, which have been available for several years on the ILC website, are now also available as podcasts. If you would like to have these fine devotions sent to your device of preference, please see Pastor Roehl for information on how to receive them automatically.

September Preview – We return to our normal (non-summer) schedule next week. The following is a list of start-dates for the various classes and events coming in September:

September 5	First Confirmation Class
September 5	First Mid-Week Bible Study
September 9	Sunday School and Bible Class resume
September 11-13	WCPC in Watertown, SD
September 17-20	CLC Board Meetings in Eau Claire
September 23	Church Council meeting

Confirmation Parents Meeting – The families of this year's Confirmation Students are asked to meet briefly with the Pastor during the fellowship hour this morning.