

Wheelersburg Baptist Church 2/16/03 Brad Brandt

Ephesians 6:16-17 "How to Survive in Spiritual Warfare"—part 3**

Main Idea: According to Ephesians 6:14-17, survival in spiritual warfare requires two things.

I. We need to know something about our spiritual armor.

A. We have what we need.

1. God's armor involves a person (10).
2. God's armor involves a purpose (11-13).
3. God's armor involves parts (14-17).
4. God's armor involves prayer and perseverance (18).

B. We need what we have.

II. We need to do something with our spiritual armor.

- A. We must wear the belt of truth (14a).
- B. We must wear the breastplate of righteousness (14b).
- C. We must wear the gospel of peace boots (15).
- D. We must raise the faith shield (16).
- E. We must take the helmet of salvation (17a).

1. A Christian is someone who has been saved.
2. A strong Christian is someone who thinks like a saved person.

F. We must take the sword of the Spirit (17b).

1. The sword is our only offensive weapon.
2. The sword is God's Word.
3. The sword is effective only if we fill our minds with God's Word.

Application: To benefit from God's armor...

1. You must be in Christ.
2. You must know what you have.
3. You must claim what you have every day.

Do you like to be on the winning team when you play a game? My hunch is you do. It's amazing what grown adults will do when they play a game. A few years ago at a men's retreat I laughed as I watched the sacrifices men were making to win a children's card game called "Spoons." Dignified men were diving on the floor to capture the precious table spoon. Why such action? They didn't want to lose the game.

Most people don't enjoy losing whether it's a game of Monopoly, a Band competition, or a getting the job you bid for at work. When we do something we like to win.

Now answer this. If we do have such a strong desire to succeed, why do many church-goers live frustrated and confused Christian lives? Why do so many of us seem unable to experience victory in Monday through Saturday Christian living?

Here are some possible answers. One, there may be a fundamental problem. The frustration may indicate a lack of a genuine relationship with the Savior. Some who claim to be Christians are not "in Christ." Two, there may be a lack of knowledge. Some who have been Christians for a long time have never learned that God has given them the equipment they need to succeed, namely spiritual armor. They have it. It's theirs. But it's still in the box, so to speak, in the closet, unopened. Three, the frustration could be due to a lack of appropriation. They're not using what they have.

Here's my challenge. I want to learn what I have in Christ. And I want you to learn what you have in Christ.

That's why we are taking great care to investigate Ephesians 6.

The truth is this. You can live on the winning side! Victory can be yours! Christ won the victory. Satan's doom is sure. We are in Him. But to experience daily victory over the evil one we need to live with a *warfare mentality*.

What does that mean, and how do we do it? As I mentioned last time, survival in spiritual warfare requires two things, according to Ephesians 6:14-17.

I. We need to know something about our spiritual armor.

We began to discover the truth about our spiritual armor two weeks ago. Since the armor is a package deal, it's vital that we take a quick review of what we've already seen before we break new ground. If we want to survive in spiritual warfare here's the first of two big ideas we must know.

A. We have what we need. God has not left us deficient. In a moment we'll be looking at the various pieces of armor, but to appreciate our spiritual protection we keep in mind the big picture. There are four things we need to know about God's armor, as spelled out in Ephesians 6.

1. *God's armor involves a person (10)*. Notice verse 10, "Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power." Our strength is found where? In the *Lord*. The armor is Christ. The armor is complete.

Twice in this section Paul exhorts us to, "Put on the full armor of God." This is not some mechanical exercise, nor should it be reduced to some mystical chant. It's highly personal for it involves a person, namely Jesus Christ. To put on the armor is to put on Christ. To put on the armor is to choose to depend on Christ for the battle.

2. *God's armor involves a purpose (11-13)*. "Put on the full armor of God so that [here's the purpose] you can take your stand against the devil's schemes." We need God's armor so we can stand against a powerful enemy.

What makes standing so difficult? It's the character and capacity of our opponent. Verses 12-13, "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. ¹³ Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand."

There's the purpose again. We need the armor so we can *stand*. Paul elaborates in 2 Corinthians 10:4, "The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds."

3. *God's armor involves parts (14-17)*. What are they? Paul mentions six pieces of armor in verses 14-17: a belt, a breastplate, some boots, a shield, a helmet, and a sword. The armor is a unit, but it involves variety. Specific pieces of armor protect specific parts of the soldier's body.

4. *God's armor involves prayer and perseverance (18)*. We see the need for prayer at the beginning of verse 18 and the need for perseverance at the end, "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."

So to put it simply, when it comes to spiritual armor, here's big idea #1. We have all we need. We can't overemphasize this. We won't stand in the battle until we grasp the truth that we have what we need, not in ourselves, but in Christ. Now big idea #2...

B. We need what we have. We have what we need, but we need what we have. That means we must appropriate all the armor. More specifically, we must appropriate all the armor all the time.

Perhaps you're thinking, "Are you saying that it takes effort to stand in spiritual warfare?" Yes, that's exactly what I am saying. We cannot be passive. We must expend energy to utilize the provision of Christ. Before a soldier goes into battle, what does he do? He trains. It's no different for soldiers of Christ.

Lanny Bassham, Olympic gold-medallist in small-bore rifle competition, tells what concentration does for his marksmanship: "Our sport is controlled non-movement. We are shooting from 50 meters--over half a football field--at a bull's eye three-quarters the size of a dime. If the angle of error at the point of the barrel is more than .005 of a millimeter (that is five one-thousandths), you drop into the next circle and lose a point. So we have to learn how to make everything stop. I stop my breathing. I stop my digestion by not eating for 12 hours before the competition. I train by running to keep my pulse around 60, so I have a full second between beats--I have gotten it lower, but found that the stroke-volume increased so much that each beat really jolted me. You do all of this and you have the technical control. But you have to have some years of experience in reading conditions: the wind, the mirage. Then you have the other 80% of the problems--the mind.

Know this, Christian soldier. We have what we need, and we need what we have. Spiritual survival starts right here. We need to know something about our spiritual armor. Next...

II. We need to do something with our spiritual armor.

Let's quickly review what we need to do with the first four pieces, as we saw last time, and then we'll examine the rest.

A. We must wear the belt of truth (14a). "Stand firm then with the belt of truth buckled around your waist."

The soldier put on his belt first. Actually it was an undergarment, and not a piece of armor. Yet it was essential. He wrapped the belt around his waist in order to draw up his tunic and keep it from dangling down to his feet. He couldn't go to battle if his garment was loose fitting.

What is our belt as Christians? Our belt is truth. Jesus said, "I am the way, the *truth*, and the life." The Christian life begins when we admit that Jesus is the truth, but putting on the belt of truth goes a step further. To put on truth is to allow the life of Christ to be seen through us. It involves a resolve to walk in integrity, as Jesus did. Truth must characterize our daily living. Every day I must affirm that I will practice the truth.

B. We must wear the breastplate of righteousness (14b). Remember, the breastplate for the Roman soldier was a molded metal chest plate that covered the entire torso, from the neck to the top of the thighs, on both his front and back.

What is our breastplate? Paul says it is "righteousness." What is righteousness? It's not *what*, but *who*? Christ is our righteousness (1 Cor 1:30). To put on the breastplate of righteousness is to put on Christ. It's to acknowledge that our right standing before God is based on what Christ did at the cross, not on what we do. To put on the breastplate of righteousness is to allow Christ's righteous life to be lived through you, to acknowledge that He is your substitute, your Savior.

C. We must wear the gospel of peace boots (15). A soldier needs good shoes. The Roman soldier wore a battle boot, a leather sandal with hob nails on the bottom, tied up with leather straps around the ankles and shins.

What do our feet do for us? They take us places. What are we to take with us wherever we go? The gospel, the good news that produces peace between men and God, the gospel of peace. We need the gospel, yes,

we Christians need it. We need to put it on daily by reviewing the amazing story of what Christ did for us. It will protect us. It will also prepare us for our mission of reaching lost people who need peace with God.

In verse 16 Paul states that "in addition to all this," that is, in addition to putting on the first three pieces of armor, we need to do something else.

D. We must raise the faith shield (16). The soldier's shield was large, usually about 4' by 2'. It was a big, thick plank of wood. It was covered on the outside with metal and even leather at times. The metal would deflect arrows, while the leather would extinguish the fiery pitch on the arrows.

What is our shield? God's Word says it's "faith."

How does a person become a Christian? Is it by being baptized or going through confirmation classes? No. We are saved *by faith* (Eph 2:8-9). "For by grace are you saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, so no one can boast."

But the faith mentioned in Ephesians 6:16 is not saving faith as much as *living faith*. Granted, the Christian life begins by faith, but it must also be lived day by day the same way, by faith.

Why do you need a shield of faith? Verse 16 again [in the KJV], "Above all, taking the shield of faith, with which ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked."

Satan and his hosts hurl *darts* at us. The word is graphic. It can be translated as an arrow, a bolt, or even a missile. Do you realize the severity of the battle that is raging around you? Do you understand the subtlety of the darts of the Evil One?

The Bible has much to say about Satan. His name appears 49 times in the Bible (not counting the appearances of his other titles). Let's look at a few to see his tactics:

▷ 1 Chronicles 21:1 says Satan duped David into sinning, "Satan rose up against Israel and incited David to take a census of Israel."

▷ Satan inflicted Job. Job 1:6-7 says, "One day the angels came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan also came with them. The LORD said to Satan, "Where have you come from?" Satan answered the LORD, "From roaming through the earth and going back and forth in it."

▷ Luke 22:31 indicates that Satan wanted to destroy Peter. "Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift you as wheat." Thankfully, Jesus said in verse 32, "But I have prayed for you, that your faith fail not."

▷ Satan manipulated the believers Ananias and Saphira, according to Acts 5:3, "Then Peter said, "Ananias, how is it that Satan has so filled your heart that you have lied to the Holy Spirit and have kept for yourself some of the money you received for the land?"

▷ 1 Thessalonians 2:18 indicates that Satan tries to hinder ministers of the gospel. "For we wanted to come to you—certainly I, Paul, did, again and again—but Satan stopped us."

There's no question about it. Satan is powerful. His attack is vicious. But we can stand. How? By raising the faith shield. Satan's doom is sure.

▷ Revelation 12:7-9 tells us something very important about Satan. "And there was war in heaven. Michael and his angels fought against the dragon, and the dragon and his angels fought back. ^{78?} But *he was not strong enough*, and they lost their place in heaven. ^{79?} The great dragon was hurled down—that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray. He was hurled to the earth, and his

angels with him."

Don't miss those words. *He was not strong enough.* We can't compete with him, but Satan is no match for our God. That's why John said in 1 John 5:4, "This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith."

Have you been living by faith or by sight? Faith is being confident of what you cannot see, according to Hebrews 11:1. When we have the shield of faith in place we will live with a different perspective.

Joe Stowell offers this insight in *Through the Fire*: "I think of David Livingstone, the pioneer missionary to Africa, who walked over 29,000 miles. His wife died early in their ministry and he faced stiff opposition from his Scottish brethren. He ministered half blind. His kind of perseverance spurs me on. As I run, I remember the words in his diary: 'Send me anywhere, only go with me. Lay any burden on me, only sustain me. Sever me from any tie but the tie that binds me to Your service and to Your heart.'" There's a man who had the shield of faith in place.

David Livingstone once said, "People talk of the sacrifice I have made in spending so much of my life in Africa. Can that be called a sacrifice which is simply acknowledging a great debt we owe to our God, which we can never repay? Is that a sacrifice which brings its own reward in healthful activity, the consciousness of doing good, peace of mind, and a bright hope of a glorious destiny? It is emphatically no sacrifice. Rather it is a privilege. Anxiety, sickness, suffering, danger, foregoing the common conveniences of this life--these may make us pause, and cause the spirit to waver, and the soul to sink; but let this only be for a moment. All these are nothing compared with the glory which shall later be revealed in and through us. I never made a sacrifice. Of this we ought not to talk, when we remember the great sacrifice which He made who left His Father's throne on high to give Himself for us."

How could David Livingstone do such great things for God? Was it because he had access to resources that we don't. No. We have the same armor he did. But he used his. Are you?

Put on the full armor of God. Put on the belt of truth, the breastplate of righteousness, the gospel of peace boots, and the faith shield. Are we ready for battle yet? Not quite.

E. We must take the helmet of salvation (17a). The word "take" is in the imperative. It's a command and the tense (aorist) indicates we are to take this piece of armor, put it on, and leave it on.

Put on your helmet, Paul says. The Roman soldier's helmet was made of a tough metal-like bronze or iron. It was obviously heavy. The inside was lined with sponge or felt to make it bearable to wear. Nothing short of a blow from an axe or hammer could penetrate the helmet.

Why does a soldier need a helmet? Obviously, to protect his *head*. Why do you need a helmet? For the same reason, to protect your head, your mind.

This is key. Perhaps the most vulnerable target a Christian has is his or her mind. Satan knows that. And he attacks your mind with all the ammunition he can muster.

How can we protect our minds? Paul says we must put on the helmet of salvation. We see this image elsewhere in the Scriptures. It's in Isaiah 59:17, "He put on righteousness as his breastplate, and the helmet of salvation on his head; he put on the garments of vengeance and wrapped himself in zeal as in a cloak." Paul also referred to the helmet in 1 Thessalonians 5:8, "But since we belong to the day, let us be self-controlled, putting on faith and love as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet."

What exactly does Paul mean in our text when he says to "put on the helmet of salvation?" Is he telling us to "get saved"? No. He's talking to Christians. He's writing to people who are already in God's army, who already have access to God's armor.

The Bible is very clear about this...

1. *A Christian is someone who has been saved.* A saved person is one who has admitted he was lost as a sinner and condemned to suffer God's wrath. A saved person is one who accepted the teaching of the Bible that Jesus Christ lived and died in our place, taking God's wrath for us. A saved person is one who has placed his full confidence and trust in Jesus Christ. That's a saved person.

What then does it mean to put on the helmet of salvation? Simply this. A saved person needs to learn to think like a saved person! In fact, a strong Christian is someone who does just that...

2. *A strong Christian is someone who thinks like a saved person.* Don't miss this. Christians think differently than non-Christians. Let me restate that. Christians who are successful in overcoming the evil one think differently. They think differently about their goals in life, about money, and about entertainment. Their desires are different. Their ambitions are different.

Paul put it this way in Philippians 4:8, "Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—*think about such things.*"

It's true. Christians are supposed to think differently than non-Christians. And strong Christians do.

Listen. When you put on the helmet of salvation, what you're doing is this. You are making a decision that you are going to think differently than you used to, by God's help. You're choosing to think like a saved person.

You are living in a pagan world, and so am I. We are being bombarded continually with vile, godless thoughts. We need to put on the helmet of salvation and choose to think like a saved person.

I'll be frank. It burdens me the kinds of things I see many Christians taking into their minds. Take entertainment, for example. Just because the world says a movie is entertaining is no reason for us to watch it. Dads and moms, when you see an unwholesome movie coming on the television, do you talk with your kids about it? Do you tell them, "We are Christians. The Bible says we think differently. Jesus expects us to be pure."

The same goes for the music we listen to. A helmet is designed to keep deadly things out (like arrows). Young people, are you careful about what you take into your mind? I urge you to be discerning about the music you listen to.

A few years ago I read an editorial in the newspaper. Lewis Grizzard (I seldom agreed with his crass sense of humor but this time he hit the nail on the head) remarked about the horrendous effects of the violent lyrics in contemporary music, "One generation ago young people listened to their music, and some ended up getting pregnant. They listen to the music that's around now and end up getting killed."

Young people, do you want to be pure and victorious? Then memorize and live this verse, Psalm 119:9, 11 "How shall a young man keep his way pure? Your word have I hid in my heart that I might not sin against you."

Do you think like a Christian? Would Jesus Christ think the thoughts you think in a day's time? Listen. We need to be aggressive with our minds. Put on the helmet of salvation.

One final piece of armor...

F. We must take the sword of the Spirit (17b). "Take...the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God." What's involved in this action? I'll make three observations.

1. *The sword is our only offensive weapon.* A Roman soldier had two swords. One was the large broadsword which was more than 3' long. It was double-edged and heavy, and took both hands to use. That's not the word Paul uses in verse 17. The one he has in mind here is the short-sword (6 to 18 inches). It was like a dagger. The soldier carried it in his sheath. He used it for hand to hand combat. By the way, Peter used this kind of sword to cut off the soldier's ear (Matt 26:51).

What is the Christian's sword? Paul says clearly, "which is the Word of God."

2. *The sword is God's Word.* Hebrews 4:12 tells us, "For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart."

Listen. As we preach the Word, we are invading enemy territory. Right now, the sword of the Spirit is at work, releasing Satan's victims from the clutches of his wicked grasp.

God's Word is our sword. But its value is not just for preaching on Sunday. God's Word is sufficient, authoritative, and powerful for living. 2 Timothy 3:16-17 says, "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be *thoroughly equipped for every good work.*" The Word is the tool God uses to deliver us from personal sin according to Psalm 119:133, "Direct my footsteps according to your word; let no sin rule over me." It's also the key to standing when persecution hits according to Revelation 12:11, "They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death."

So the Word of God is the Spirit's Sword. It's what God uses to defend us, defeat the attacking enemy, and deliver others who need help. But know this...

3. *The sword is effective only if we fill our minds with God's Word.* Which raises a problem. Most of us don't know the Word as well as we should.

Leroy Eims tells the following story, "One spring our family was driving from Fort Lauderdale to Tampa, Florida. As far as the eye could see, orange trees were loaded with fruit. When we stopped for breakfast, I ordered orange juice with my eggs. "I'm sorry," the waitress said. "I can't bring you orange juice. Our machine is broken." At first I was dumbfounded. We were surrounded by millions of oranges, and I knew they had oranges in the kitchen--orange slices garnished our plates. What was the problem? No juice? Hardly. We were surrounded by thousands of gallons of juice. The problem was they had become dependent on a machine to get it. Christians are sometimes like that. They may be surrounded by Bibles in their homes, but if something should happen to the Sunday morning preaching service, they would have no nourishment for their souls. The problem is not a lack of spiritual food--but that many Christians haven't grown enough to know how to get it for themselves."

What would have happened if the soldiers in Desert Storm had paid the same attention to the commands of General Swartzkoff as we do to our Commander, Jesus Christ? Can you imagine a soldier saying, "I really didn't hear what the general said. I think he said the enemy was to the north (or was it south?). And I think he said the enemy was using swords (or was it poisonous gas?). Oh, it won't matter."

Wrong! A soldier is expected to know the orders of his commander. A soldier is expected to know the strength and strategy of his enemy. A soldier is expected to prepare himself with the necessary equipment for battle.

Fellow soldiers of Christ, if Satan's strategy is to attack our minds, and it is, we're in real trouble if our minds

are empty. Specifically, if you don't have God's Word stored away, you are prey for Satan's deadly darts.

A few years ago cult researcher Walter Martin commented on a common tragedy. It's his observation that a 90-day-wonder from Jehovah's Witnesses can take apart the typical Christian in 30 minutes. Why? We don't know the Word like we should. We can't defend ourselves.

Make it personal. Do you know what verses from God's Word to use in order to defend yourself against discouragement, or to overcome the temptation of lust, or to deal with anger? We have what we need, but we need what we have.

I'm very concerned about the Sunday morning Christian. That's the person who comes to church because he knows it's the "right thing to do," but the Word isn't his daily food.

Perhaps you're searching. That's why you've been coming to church on Sunday mornings. You probably feel good when you hear God's Word. You leave pumped up, filled with hope. But then you leave and the Bible stays on the shelf and you don't receive one ounce of spiritual nourishment for the next six days, only Satan's darts. You don't use the shield of faith that could protect your mind. And Satan is having a hey-day with you. By Thursday you are overwhelmed with feelings of doubt and discouragement. You begin thinking, "Where are you God? What's wrong? Why doesn't Christianity work?"

Know this. The problem is not with Christianity. The problem is that you are neglecting what you need. God offers you all the equipment necessary to be on the winning side in life.

The question is, what are you doing with the armor God has provided for you?

Application: To benefit from God's armor...

1. *You must be in Christ.* You must know Jesus Christ as your Savior and Lord.
2. *You must know what you have.* For starters, let me offer this practical homework. Memorize the six pieces of armor in Ephesians 6, and put them on daily. Pray it on. Think about what you have in Christ. Saturate your mind with God's Word.
3. *You must claim what you have every day.* Consistency is key. Claim it daily.