

How God Prepares Us to Stand Against the Darkness of This Age

Matthew 6:13b; Ephesians 6:10-17

From American history we read of the treatment of the guests of newspaper baron, William Randolph Hearst (1863-1951) at his famous castle in on the coast of California.

After the overwhelming ride up the switchback road to the summit, and the breath-taking view of the Pacific and the immensity of the castle, guests were taken to their rooms.

After they were fed and entertained they would return back to their rooms, only to find that clothing tailored exactly to their size, had been provided; and they were expected to wear those clothes the next day as they met and dined with Hearst himself.

Few would ever dare to offend their host by not going along with his unusual habit of choosing the outfits his guests would wear while staying at his castle.

On a far higher level, the King of the Universe has asked us to wear clothes designed just for us. These clothes are to protect us from the enemy of God and every believer. God has provided us with the most vital –protective gear we could ever imagine, and commanded us to wear it at all times.

Do we think we know better than Him, what we need?

Dare we offend Him?

So our pressing question for each of us in Christ's church today is:

Are We Getting Dressed for Christ Each Day?

What are the clothes that our Great God has laid out for us to wear?

Did you consciously put on these events today?

In Ephesians 6:10-17, we see six clear articles we are actually commanded to wear.

Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. 11 Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. 12 For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness 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. 14 Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness, 15 and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; 16 above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one. 17 And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God;

Paul describes:

The Armor of God We Are to Wear

Buckled up by the Belt of Truth (Eph. 6:14a)

Guarded by Breastplate of Righteousness (Eph. 6:14b)

Firmly Planted in the Shoes of Peace (Eph. 6:15)

Shielded by the Missile Defense of Faith (Eph. 6:16)

Surrounded by the Assuring Helmet of Salvation (Ephesians 6:17a)

Armed by the Ultimate Weapon of God's Sword (Ephesians 6:17b)

How God Prepares Us to Stand Against the Darkness

God calls each of us to stand in joy, peace, hope, and love.

Satan, the world, and our flesh call each of us to fall into anger, anxiety, fear, and selfishness.

We face the unseen but real world of kosmocrators. Spirit beings of immense powers of evil. These enemies are already defeated by Christ, but their deadly powers are only resisted by us when walking in step with the Spirit of God.

Are you walking today in step with the Spirit? You know that you are if you invite His Word (the sword of the Spirit) to richly dwell in your mind each day.

Any day the truth of God's Word is not eaten, as the defensive food for our minds, Satan's team gains ground in the war.

Are You Standing or Falling?

The most complete guide to standing and not falling into sin, discouragement, hopelessness, uselessness, and emptiness is right here before us in Ephesians 6.

The key to powerful ministry is right here.

The way God has planned for our lives to magnify the Lord and unleash His Word is right here.

There are six pieces of Roman armor to which God adds the spiritual power of prayer.

What an amazing set up God has designed for fruitful, powerful, and lasting ministry.

But everything hinges upon our conscious choices to obey what God has asked us to do.

Paul said it three times in Ephesians 6: stand, stand, and stand.

- **Stand in the abundant life** God gave us when His Spirit filled us, **or fall into the empty life** of grieving and quenching Him.
- **Stand in the life of peace** that passes understanding that Christ purchased for us, **or fall into the anxiety** of the cares of this life.
- **Stand in the life of hope** that God's all powerful attributes offer us, or fall into doubting God's goodness and questioning God's plan.

The Armor God in Which We Stand

Simply stated, standing in all that Christ offers to us was summarized by Paul in Romans

13, as “putting on Christ” (v. 14) as our “armor of light” (v.12). Here in Ephesians 6, that armor is detailed, piece by piece.

What are those six pieces of armor?

1. Buckled up by the Belt of Truth (Eph. 6:14a):

Roman soldier had a thick leather belt that held their gear in place and could cinch up their tunic for battle. Normal dress for a soldier was a large square of material with head and arm holes that draped loosely over the body. In any combat that looseness of the garment ended. No tangles were desired, and the belt held fast the cinched up tunic.

For us as believers, Truth is to hold us up, hold us in, and protect us from falling.

This belt of truth is much like the restraints we strap around us when we get into one of those dangerous, high speed twisting, turning rollercoaster rides at some amusement park.

The belt and bars that hold us are designed to keep us safe no matter how fast the car spins, twists or drops. We are held in.

Truth holds us in.

This word (aletheia) means both the content of truth, and the truthfulness of our life.

God wants both. He wants us to know the content of truth and live the integrity of truthfulness.

Truth means we have the readiness to obey; we have the integrity of commitment to truth; and we are opposed to all deception, dishonesty.

We have no loose ends of our life that dangle around us and trip us up.

We are girded, belted, and strapped in by truth.

1. Knowing the truth saves us. (Jn. 8:32; 17:3)
2. Eating the truth sanctifies us, which means it makes us useful to God. (Jn. 17:17)
3. Surrendering to the truth transforms us (Rm. 12:1-2)
4. Obeying the truth stabilizes us (2 Tim. 2:4; Heb. 12:1-2)

Our lives are to be surrounded and held together by truth we know, believe, and practice.

2. Guarded by Breastplate of Righteousness (Eph. 6:14b):

Every Roman soldier wore sleeveless armor that covered him from the neck down, past his waist, protecting his vital organs including his heart, lungs, and intestines. Made of cloth or leather sewn with pieces of animal hoofs, bones, and metal, it formed a barrier to swords, spears, and arrows.

For us as believers this righteousness is to be consciously put on.

So this is not the justifying righteousness of Christ that was imputed to us.

We can't put on what God has already imputed to us (Romans 4:5-6; 5:1).

This is also not self-righteousness that God hates and sees as filthy rags.

This is rather the constant flow of a believer's choices to obey God's Word.

When we wrap our life with righteous choices, like the soldier's armor we protect our lives from Satan's hijacking attacks. We all live around hacking so much that it is common to us.

Target got hacked.

The IRS got hacked.

The White House got hacked, and so have friends who send you a note saying that email wasn't from me.

Hacking though we can't see it or understand often how it's done, is real to us.

Do you want to be Hacked by Satan today?

Satan hacks people's minds.

Satan hacks people's emotions.

Satan hacks families, marriages, churches, and even nations.

It's real, it's all around us, and there's only one protection: the suit of armor God Almighty has laid out for us to wear.

Without protection we are easily hacked, hijacked, and compromised by Satan's realm.

Satan wants to cloud our emotions with anger, impatience, and selfish ambition.

Satan wants to confuse our thinking with error and lies.

Satan wants to desensitize us to sin, so we lose our compassion.

Satan wants enflame our natural tendencies to hide, rationalize, and blame our sins on others.

We are safe only when we have our thoughts captivated by Christ (2 Cor. 10:5), and when we set our minds on things above (Col. 3:2).

Without that righteousness by choice, we are constantly getting not lead poisoning we hear about so much lately, but the deadening mind-poisoning Satan uses to sidetrack and debilitate us each time we allow him to.

3. Firmly Planted in the Shoes of Peace (Eph. 6:15):

Rome's legions marched across the rough, jagged, treacherous paths of the ancient world with a steady cadence. Their feet were protected by specially designed war gear, strapped on reinforced sandals with built in spikes for traction and stability in hand to hand combat.

The Greek word the Spirit guided Paul to choose is *hetoimasia*, and it speaks of being ready for action. When a Roman soldier went to war he knew he was ready to march, climb, and grapple and his feet would firmly stay beneath him.

For us as believers the peace we have with God means we have nothing to fear.

- God is no longer our enemy: He is our Father and our Protector.
- God has defeated already our enemies: the devil and death.
- God surrounds us with His Presence and His peace because we trust the goodness, wisdom, power, and presence of our Almighty Father.

When we strap on those truths of our salvation we can walk confidently through life with a boldness prompted by the Spirit of God.

When our steps are guided by God; our pathway is illumined by His Spirit; and our Good Shepherd is leading and protecting us: we are firmly planted and wearing our shoes of peace.

The wicked are like the raging sea, restless and tossed, endlessly dashed upon all their rocky circumstances along the shores of life (Isaiah 57:20).

The work of God within us is His incomprehensible peace: that keeps His quietness and assurance overflowing each day of our lives (Isaiah 32:17).

4. Shielded by the Missile Defense of Faith (Eph. 6:16):

Paul defines which of the Roman shields he was talking about with the word *thureos*. This was the battle field, 30 inch wide and 60 inch high piece of wood, leather and metal that made a defensive wall that kept arrows, spears, and rocks from harming the soldiers.

Often enemies added a pitch soaked cloth, wrapped around their arrows and ignited as it was shot. Arcing at blinding speeds through the air the arrows burned fiercely.

That's why Paul called them fiery darts.

Without this shield the impact would not just deeply wound and burn the soldier, but the flaming splatters of fiercely burning pitch would light on fire anything they landed on. The Legionnaire's *thureos* battle shield could deflect or extinguish each arrow.

Often at the end of battles the Roman soldiers carrying their shields looked much like smoking porcupines as their shields smoldered, bristled with all the extinguished arrows of their enemies.

For each of us believers, every day we walk through life Satan's dark realm has well placed archers, arrows ignited and ready to shoot.

Impure thoughts are a flaming arrow that the shield of faith can extinguish.

So are the flaming darts of anger, pride, fear, despair, covetousness, jealousy, and every other well aimed fleshly temptation.

If Satan's team lands an arrow (as we saw in his attack on Eve in the Garden) the impact and splatter of his fiercely burning pitch can ignite within our minds doubts about God's goodness, distrust about God's plan, and disobedience to God's Word.

Satan wins if he can make this flaming dart start a wedge between us as believers, or between us, and our Father.

All divisions in homes, marriages, churches, and friends are tied to an unextinguished fiery dart, that found its mark.

Gossip in the church is an arrow shot by a hacked believer.

Divisive people in the church have been hijacked by Satan.

Unfaithful husbands have allowed the flaming arrow of lust to ignite sinful passions.

Rebellious children have been ignited by an unguarded spot where a fiery dart struck.

When we allow an unprotected spot, the realm of darkness dings and exploits that area by enflaming our flesh. We are responsible. Nothing is to blame but us. Disobedience no matter how small can multiply under the influence of the Evil One.

Only the shield of faith, (holding onto the truth of God and acting upon it even when it is unseen), can extinguish these flaming arrows.

Take up the shield today, because without that shield, it is impossible to please God.

Hebrews 11:6 (NKJV) But without faith *it is* impossible to please *Him*, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and *that* He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.

5. Surrounded by the Assuring Helmet of Salvation (Ephesians 6:17a):

Soldiers couldn't survive long in the dangers of war without that helmet. The waves of

enemy missiles flying, and the long battle swords swinging, would soon wound or kill them. Roman helmets were made of metal to protect and leather to cushion. Often the sides extended down for face protection. A head wound took a soldier out of battle.

For us as believers, Paul explains that again Satan's goal is to attack the secure reality of our eternal life. Our assurance of salvation, when shaken, debilitates our trust in God and sidelines us from battle. Much like the 36-48 inch long, double edged battle sword called in Greek the rhomphaia (that word is found in Rev. 1:16, 2:12, 6:8), Satan's realm is swinging the razor sharp doubled edged sword of doubt and discouragement.

Doubting God's goodness often comes when we look at our struggles with our health, finances, and relationships, and question why God isn't doing a better job at helping us. That opens the way for a flood of further doubts leading to discouragement and despair about how we could even be saved as we think of all our sins, failures, weaknesses, and struggles. As the words to that 1863 hymn entitled, In Christ Alone, reminds us:

When Satan tempts me to despair
And tells me of the guilt within,
Upward I look and see Him there
Who made an end of all my sin.
Because the sinless Savior died
My sinful soul is counted free.
For God the just is satisfied
To look on Him and pardon me.

The helmet of salvation is a firm confidence in our Heavenly Father's character and power. This helmet is not getting saved, because Paul is telling believers to put it on. The first element of salvation is defined by doctrine of justification, which is trusting in the finished work of Christ, already accomplished on the cross for us (2 Cor. 5:21). Justification ignites the second element of salvation, which is sanctification.

God wants to make each of His children useful for His plan and uses His Word and trials, under the guidance of Spirit of God to shape us more and more into likeness to Christ (1 Th. 5:23). The final element of salvation is yet future, our conformity to Christ forever is finally accomplished when we are glorified fully like Him forever as 1 John 3:2 reminds us.

So secure assurance is based on a **past event we trust** called justification, a **present work in our lives we see** called sanctification, and a **future completion we hope for** called glorification. Salvation's helmet has three aspects: past, present, and future. We know our sins are forever gone, we see our sinful ways presently being sanctified away, and we await the end of the struggles as we become like Him when we see Him as He is. We know the ultimate victory is ours.

6. Armed by the Ultimate Weapon of God's Sword (Ephesians 6:17b):

The up close war tool of the Roman soldier was not the 3-4 foot battle sword called the rhomphaia, it was the lethal, hand-to-hand sword called in Greek, machaira. Just 16-18 inches long, and always at his side, the sword of the Legionnaire was his supreme battle tool. He could deflect an attacker thrusts, and inflict precise mortal wounds. Romans were unmatched in their

skills in hand-to-hand combat.

For us as believers our sword is “of the Spirit”, a weapon originated and energized by the Spirit of God, for us to wield in spiritual warfare. No enemy can stand against the Word of God; and God's Word is the sword. When we hold firm to what God says, He cuts down all our enemies.

Like the Roman sword, this sword of the Spirit is both defensive and offensive.

In deflecting an attack it is used in a precise manner, directly meeting the attack with a specific and appropriate Word from God. Our shield of faith makes a wall of protection, but the sword goes directly at the specific attack and defeats it on the spot. Like Jesus demonstrated in His sword thrust Scriptural responses to each of the Devil's three attacks (Mt. 4:4, 7, 10), we must know and use the Word. Believers who do not know how to deflect a direct attacks with Scripture, are far more likely to be wounded, and devoured by our adversary the devil.

Our sword of the Spirit is also our chief offensive weapon against both the enemy without and the enemy within. The Word of God that defends us also transforms us from the inside out. God's Word of truth can change us from liar-hearted to truth-tellers, from greedy-hearted to givers, from bitter-hearted to tender forgivers, and from fearful-hearted to emboldened soldiers of God.

God's Word in the hands of a skilled Christian soldier can be used by the Spirit of God to turn many captives in Satan's dark prison from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive the forgiveness of all their guilty sins, and go from eternal paupers to the riches of the inheritance of Christ.

That is the amazing evangelistic power of our sword the Spirit gives us. May we use it to quell Satan's attacks, and release many captives by the power of the Gospel unto salvation for all those who believe.