

Put on the Whole Armor of God

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. 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. 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.

Ephesians 6:10-13

In our study of the nature of spiritual warfare from verses 10-13, we have so far studied the nature and devices of our cosmic foe, the posture and stance that we are to maintain against him, and the disposition that we are to hold. As we now conclude our five-part walk through these verses, we will be addressing Paul's command for us to be armed against the demonic hordes arrayed against us. As we have noted, because verses 14-20 present the individual components of the armor of God, this sermon also serves as an introduction to the coming weeks of our study.

In the overall structure of our text, the command to put on the armor of God comes after the command to be strong and before the command to stand firm. Strength and courage are required, after all, to take up armor and march into battle, and both strength and armor are necessary for being able to stand in the midst of battle. Strength and courage give us physical and mental fortitude, while the armor provides the tools and protection needed for the fight. Each of these three commands are bound to one another (much like the individual components of the armor, as we will see). Strength and valor to stand only go so far if we are unarmed. Armor is only bulky and annoying if we are wearing it while sitting beside a fireplace, drinking hot chocolate. Instead, because all of life is a war between the kingdom of God and the domain of darkness, we must constantly stand firm, be strong, and be dressed in the whole armor of God.

As we study this command, we will address the apostle's wording as it is given. First, we will see what it means to put on and take up the armor of God. Second, we will address why Paul emphasizes our need for the *whole* armor. Finally, we study what this armor being *of God* means.

PUT IT ON & TAKE IT UP

In verses 11 and 13, we find two similarly structured commands: *put on the whole armor of God* and *take up the whole armor of God*. I do not believe there is much significance in distinguishing between the *putting on* and *taking up*. Perhaps Paul uses both verbs because, while you *put on* a belt, a breastplate, and shoes, you *take up* a shield and sword. His language moving forward seems to indicate this: "put on the breastplate of righteousness" (v. 14), "put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace" (v. 15), and "take up the shield of faith" (v. 16).

What then does it mean to put on and take up the whole armor of God? We should begin by remembering that we have seen the command to *put on* before. Back in chapter 4, after Paul

commanded us to no longer walk as the Gentiles do and describing the ignorant futility in which they still walk, he commanded us to

to put off your old self, 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. (vv. 22-24)

We noted that Paul is comparing our daily need to conform to Christ with our daily need to put on our clothing. Yes, we are raised to life, from death, in Christ; however, until we are fully glorified in the presence of our Lord, we must continue to put on our new self each day as we pursue “the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.”

And this is not a command that Paul only gave to the Ephesians. In Colossians 3:10, Paul said to “put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator.” He then described the process further in verses 12-14, saying:

Put on then, as God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.

In Romans 13:14, he cuts to the very heart of the matter, saying, “put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.” Likewise, in Galatians 3:27, he said, “For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.”

To be conformed into the image of God means putting on Christ, walking in imitation of Him. Just as we put on our clothing at the start of each day, so must be put on Christ, which means walking in the same fruits of the Spirit that we are so evident in Jesus. We must take off our old ways of living and follow after our Lord.

In our present text, the apostle is using this same imagery, but he is expanding it a bit further. He does this by envisioning our new clothing in Christ, not as new robe or shirt, but as battle armor. “The one who conquers will be clothed thus in white garments” (Revelation 3:5), yet the white garments come after the battle is over. First, we must conquer in this life. But even here, our Lord has not left us to our own strength; He gives us, through the Holy Spirit, the same power of God which raised Him from the dead. And He has not left us unarmed. Although we are spiritually seated in Christ with the Father, we physically are on the frontlines of war against the cosmic powers of this present darkness. The day is evil around us, and our very hearts long to embrace the lies of our enemy. We are secure in Christ, but we are not yet safe. Safety does not come, at least fully, in this life. Therefore, putting on our new self means putting on the armor of God so that we may be able to wage war, not just against the spiritual forces of evil in heavenly places, but also against the old self still within us.

THE WHOLE ARMOR

Now that we know that we must daily put on the armor of God, what is this armor, and why does Paul emphasize twice that we must put on the whole of it? As we have already alluded to, to put on

the armor of God is the same as putting on the new self and putting on Christ. Pay attention, after all, to the pieces that make up the armor of God: a belt of *truth*, a breastplate of *righteousness*, shoes that are *the readiness given by the gospel of peace*, a shield of *faith*, a helmet of *salvation*, and the sword of the Spirit, *which is the word of God*. If we strip the elements of their metaphor, they do not appear very warlike: truth, righteousness, gospel, faith, salvation, and Scripture. Indeed, with prayer ungirding them all, these seem to simply be basic tenets of our Christian faith.

And that is precisely the point. Paul using warfare imagery to describe these fundamental aspects of being a follower of Christ in order to help us understand the cosmological significance of our everyday actions. For instances, we know that we should be in the Word daily... but we also know that we should drink eight glasses of water each day. Will we do either? Maybe; maybe not. Our knowledge of and time in the Scriptures, like drinking enough water, is often sadly relegated to the *should* category of activities, rather than the *must* section. However, imagine for a moment that your doctor performed a brain scan and found an aneurism in your brain that would burst if you did not drink an adequate amount of water every day. Drinking water would almost instantly move from being a *should* to being a *must*. Iain Duguid captures this same principle with reading God's Word, noting that: "We sometimes turn our study of the Bible into an academic exercise, as if we were reading to get an A on a test rather than to equip our souls for mortal combat."¹ If we truly understood that scale of our need for God's Word, we would not struggle to force ourselves to open the Bible; we would, instead, cling to it like a soldier clings to his sword in the middle of battle. Just as Eleazar's hand still clung to his sword after warring against the Philistines, may we each cross into the life everlasting with our hand unable to let go of God's Word.

This, then, is the nature of the armor of God: Paul is presenting these basic elements of the faith as being matters of life and death. Yet before we spend the coming weeks describing each piece of God's armor, we must firmly establish that the *whole* armor is required. As we noted above that standing against Satan unarmed is worthless, so too must we realize that we cannot ignore any piece of this armor. We are not fit for battle unless we are dressed fully.

But how is this so? Let us think through for a moment how they relate and are dependent upon one another. Faith is essential. It is the shield by which we defend ourselves against the attacks of Satan. However, the generic brand of faith is not sufficient. Faith in Allah, Vishnu, or self is not a shield given to us by the one, true God but rather a dart from Satan laced with delirium-inducing poison. Faith, instead, must be grounded in truth. Yet truth cannot stand on its own either; instead, truth is grounded in what God has revealed in the Scriptures. Likewise, salvation is not genuine unless established upon and within the righteousness of Christ and evidenced by our faith in His righteousness and the fruit of our own pursuit of imitating His righteousness. Similarly, the gospel only makes us ready to shout its mighty message from the mountains whenever we taste personally its salvation and believe in its truth by faith.

As you can see, each piece is dependent upon the other pieces. To walk into combat with our enemy without the whole armor is foolish and deadly. Grasping Scripture with two hands and rushing without a shield, bareheaded, bare-chest, and barefoot into battle may appear to be noble and valiant,

¹ Iain M. Duguid, *The Whole Armor of God*, 33.

yet it is by that very recklessness that Satan has formed cults of Christianity, which use the very Scriptures against Christ and His church. Or, if we run into battle with only zealous passion for preaching the gospel as shoes for feet, we will sooner or later run into error and find ourselves declaring another gospel. Or, if we have the foolishness of only wearing the helmet of salvation, we may very likely find ourselves among those to whom Christ declares in the end, “I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness” (Matthew 7:23).

We are not called to take up Scripture alone, faith alone, salvation alone, or any of the others. We must, instead, put on and take up the *whole* armor of God.

WHOSE ARMOR IS IT?

Finally, we arrive at the final phrase, *armor of God*. All who were raised in church like me are likely to have been familiar with this phrase from an early age. Yet until I began this study, I always held onto an unspoken and unrealized assumption that the word *of* meant *supplied by*. Thus, I viewed this as my armor which God has graciously granted to me. But that is not *entirely* accurate. This armor has been given to us, that much is quite true. However, it is not our armor; it is God’s armor. It is the armor *belonging to* God. We know this because Paul is not the first biblical author to write about the armor of God. Consider the following passages from Isaiah:

Righteousness shall be the belt of his waist, and faithfulness the belt of his loins. -
Isaiah 11:5

He made my mouth like a sharp sword; in the shadow of his hand he hid me; he made me a polished arrow; in his quiver he hid me away. - Isaiah 49:2

How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, who publishes peace, who brings good news of happiness, who publishes salvation, who says to Zion, "Your God reigns." - Isaiah 52:7

He put on righteousness as a breastplate, and a helmet of salvation on his head; he put on garments of vengeance for clothing, and wrapped himself in zeal as a cloak. -
Isaiah 59:17

In the context of these passages, Isaiah is describing God as a warrior ready to fight on behalf of His people. The verses from Isaiah 11 and 52 are also describing God’s Servant, who appears throughout the book. This Servant is in chapter 11 called “the root of Jesse” (v. 10), meaning that He would be of the lineage of David. In chapter 9, His birth is prophesied, and He is “called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace” (v. 6). In chapters 52-53, He is killed in His innocence in order to bear “the sin of many” (53:12). In chapter 59, He is the Redeemer who “will come to Zion, to those in Jacob who turn from transgression” (v. 20). Who is this Servant of God, who is also called Mighty God and who comes to the redemption of God’s people wearing God’s own armor?

We find the answer in Luke 4:16-21:

And [Jesus] came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up. And as was his custom, he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and he stood up to read. And

the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written,

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me
to proclaim good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives
and recovering of sight to the blind,
to set at liberty those who are oppressed,
to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”

And he rolled up the scroll and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. And he began to say to them, “Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.” (ESV)

Jesus is the Servant, the root of Jesse, the Son of David. Arming Himself with righteousness as a breastplate and salvation as a helmet, He submitted Himself to the cross. “But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed” (53:5). Although “there was no deceit in his mouth” (53:9), “the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all” (53:6). He absorbed the wrath of God without any mixture of mercy in our place. The Righteous One was slaughtered in the place of traitors and blasphemers against the Almighty Creator.

Yet His death was also victory. As Paul wrote to the Colossians, God “disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them” in Christ through the cross (2:14-15). He did this by silencing Satan as our accuser. With “the record of debt that stood against us” being nailed to the cross (Colossians 2:14), the Accuser’s accusations have been stripped from him, and he has been cast down. Conquering death, Christ ascended to the Father as our Mediator and faithful High Priest, robbing the Accuser of any case against us that he might have brought before God. Thus, Jesus sits in victory after fighting the decisive battle against sin and Satan.

What God clothes us with is nothing less than his own armor, the same armor that Christ has already worn on our behalf in his lifelong struggle with the mortal enemy of our souls, Satan himself. Unlike armchair generals who watch the fighting from a safe distance, Jesus has himself worn the armor and won the victory. You are called to wear the armor of God not because that’s what Jesus would do if he found himself in a similar situation; you are called to wear God’s armor because that is what Jesus has already done, wearing God’s armor all the way to the cross. He stood firm against Satan’s schemes through his earthly life and ministry.²

Much more than David with Saul’s armor, the armor of God should be far too great and mighty for us to put on and take up. Thankfully, our strength is found “in the Lord and in the strength of his might” (v. 10). We are not called to put on and take up the whole armor of God on our own. We can do so only in Christ. Indeed, the armor of God might be rightly seen as one of the multitudes of spiritual blessings that we have received in Christ. It is a refraction of the multi-colored wisdom of

² Ibid. 17.

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God found within the mystery of the gospel. The armor, after all, was not only worn by Christ; it is Christ. As we stated at the beginning, we hopefully see more fully: to put on the armor of God is to put on Christ. Jesus is truth. Jesus is righteousness. Jesus is the gospel. Jesus is true faith. Jesus is salvation. Jesus is the Word of God, who became flesh and dwelt among us.

Brothers and sisters, put on the whole of Christ, and let us conquer through the might of the Conqueror.