

## 08-22-21 St. Peter Lutheran Church, Doss, TX “Check Out Your Armor”

*Ephesians 6:10-20 Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. 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. 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. Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. 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. Pray also for me, that whenever I open my mouth, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should.*

In the military, it is called inspection. But we are not going to check bunks or locker boxes. We will only check on your equipment. In fact, you will check on your own with our help. I say ‘our’ because I will suggest some checks and it is the Holy Spirit who will help you be honest with yourself and lead you in right paths. How many of you have used Google map? Some of the written directions can be confusing and get you lost. The map you have is God’s Word. We have the heritage as Lutherans of having our authority in scripture. Because people interpret scripture differently, we have our Lutheran confessions. But even the confessions do not address some topics such as critical race theory, abortion or homosexuality. Critical race theory is addressed by the first commandment. You Shall Have No Other Gods Before Me, and that includes the state. Abortion is addressed by the fifth commandments: You shall not kill. You can argue that an unborn person is not a person but God said in the scriptures *before you were born, I knew you.* (Jeremiah 1:5) Homosexuality is directly addressed in the New Testament. (Romans 1 and letter to Jude to name two) But in all cases, we must love the sinner and reject the sin. God didn’t give us every answer, but expects us to do some homework, including prayer. He also expects us to operate out of the spiritual gifts, but the armor of God is given so that you can stand fast. You put it on because it is not enough to rely passively on God’s power. You are intentional about putting it on. There is an enemy to faith, hope and love in the world. The devil is like a lion stalking you, waiting for laziness or carelessness. Paul says: “Stand your ground. Resist evil.” Fully equipped soldiers were virtually invulnerable to enemy onslaught

unless they panicked or broke rank. As long as they ‘stood firm’ when the enemy attacked, they would prevail in the long run. Most of the equipment you have is to help you hold your position. If you are not standing firm, you are easy prey for Satan.

We start with the belt of truth since dishonesty with God or yourself sabotages all the other equipment. The truth referred to is the inner integrity and sincerity by which the Christian stands fast. The breastplate of righteousness was a major piece of armor the Roman soldier wore. It protected his vital organs. To do what is right before God is what righteousness is made up of.

Feet fitted with readiness of the Gospel of peace are the next part. The Gospel is the solid foundation on which the Christian stands in the fight against evil. My wife and I were camping in Colorado Bend State Park a few years ago. We took a guided  $\frac{3}{4}$  mile hike that was supposed to be moderate, but was very difficult even for some of the teenagers there. You had to pull yourself up a 75 - degree incline with a handrail made of steel cable. But the falls we went to were beautiful. After crawling on the rocks, the tread on one of my tennis shoes gave out and just came off the shoe. Fortunately, there was a bottom to the tennis shoe but it had no tread. As I went up the steep hill, I was at a great disadvantage with my lack of tread. The Roman legionnaire had shoes that enabled him to dig in and resist being pushed out of place.

The shield of faith when wet could snuff out the fire arrows. The purpose of the flaming arrow was not to set the soldier on fire as much as cause panic and make him break rank. When the shields are together with others of the church standing by our side, we form a wall of resistance to Satan. We are using our shield of faith against the worldly influences, temptations, tests and persecution that comes to the community of saints.

The helmet of salvation guards the soldiers head and mind. We can fall into what the book, Search for Significance, calls the performance trap which is that we have to earn our salvation or avoid the trap by accepting that Jesus has won it for us and we need to submit to him and take the form of a servant in following His example. Besides the performance trap, which is the need to meet certain standards to feel good about ourselves, living under the fear of failure, a second trap to the mind is the approval addict who lives with the fear of rejection needing to be approved by others to feel good about themselves. The third mind trap is the blame game. We fear punishment. Those who fail, we believe, are unworthy of love and deserve punishment. Christ already took our punishment on the cross. The final trap for the mind is shame. It is a hopeless condition that nothing will ever change including problems in our lives. God is about making us new. Paul wrote, *‘The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.’* With the help of the Holy Spirit, we can change.

Now, we come to the offensive weapon, the sword. The sword of the Spirit allows us to be repentant, to discern and reject false beliefs. We can be honest about our emotions and trace them back to false beliefs and consciously reject them. You replace them with the truth of God's Word. The Spirit will help you do that. We can experience increasing freedom in our lives doing so.

Finally, a soldier needs communication. Besides those around him of higher rank, he goes directly to the General in prayer. In fact, it is not a weapon but underlies all of the pieces of armor in our spiritual warfare. Let's take a look at Stewart. (Example from Search for Significance, pp 160-1) Stewart was raised in a dysfunctional family. His father, an alcoholic, was emotionally distant from his family, and disinterested in their concerns. His mother, in an effort to control her household, was manipulative and condemning. Nothing Stewart did as a child merited his father's interest or his mother's approval. The result was that Stewart felt unloved and incompetent. He responded by becoming a persistent people- pleaser, always hoping that by working a little harder, he would win his parents' approval and acceptance.

When Stewart became a Christian, he transferred his people-pleasing tendencies to his relationships with God and other believers. He joined a local church, and within a short time, became active in several of its ministry programs. Because he was responsible, conscientious, and sensitive to others, Stewart quickly became a valuable resource for assistance and advice. And he was happy to help. His role within the church gave him a special sense of significance and purpose. He felt highly esteemed by others and by God.

But as the years passed, Stewart's involvement with church activities became more demanding. Members were calling him at work and at home to attend meetings, lead studies, lend financial support, or more often, because they needed someone to listen. Wanting to gain approval from others, and striving to please God, Stewart dutifully complied to all of these demands and more. As a result, his output at work began to diminish. At home, his wife questioned whom he'd married: her or their church.

At first, Stewart reasoned that he was managing his time poorly, and compensated by cutting back on his sleep to get more done. But gradually, as the pressures around him increased, Stewart began to harbor feelings of resentment and anger toward members of his church. And, though he continued to adhere to his daily devotional schedule with God, he felt increasingly distant from Him. When his marriage became jeopardized and his boss confronted him with the possibility of losing his job, Stewart began to wonder if God really cared for him at all.

Feeling threatened and disillusioned, he finally sought the advice of a trusted friend. When this friend asked Stewart some pointed questions about his family background, he started taking an objective look at how he was raised for the first time. What he saw filled him with both pain and outrage.

In conversations with his parents over the next year, Stewart started recognizing that his hurt and anger were rooted in his fears of their rejection and perception of him as a failure. Through the help of his friend, he also began to notice patterns in his relationships with God and with others which indicated that he was basing his actions and self-worth on the beliefs that he must meet certain standards and be approved by certain others to feel good about himself.

When Stewart realized the degree to which he'd been affected by his family background, he was devastated and felt more incompetent than ever. Gradually, however, he began to understand that his new insights could be a driving force toward change in his life.

Over the next several years, as he identified false beliefs in his motivations to please and perform, he learned how to reject those beliefs and replace them with God's Word. Stewart's life slowly began to change. He started gaining a healthy sense of independence from his parents, and with it, self-respect. As a result, he began to assume responsibility for his own welfare. He resolved to put his wife and children first among his priorities, joined an athletic club, and began seeking supportive relationships. God has since used those relationships and others to convey His message of love for Stewart.

Today, Stewart is still active within his church, but he is more selective about the ways he involves himself there. Though he still desires to please others, and occasionally uses performance to measure his value, Stewart can now more easily recognize and reject false beliefs, and allow himself to feel affirmed by the truth of God's Word.

To effectively utilize affirmation as a weapon for change, remember this: Affirming the truths of the Scriptures does not mean that our natural mind will agree with what we are affirming. The Bible teaches that the natural mind is antagonistic toward God.

So then, what pieces of armor are you missing? Is any of your armor rusty from disuse? Have you seen any spiritual battlefields lately? God bless you as you take up the whole armor He provides. And remember, we are not alone. Amen