

Put on the Whole Armor

The evangelical Christian faith is distinctive in many ways; however, almost every religion in the world shares this conviction: the world is messed up! Different religions diagnose the mess differently, and only the proper diagnosis will render the proper treatment, but we all see the problem. So it is with the Apostle Paul. God's grand idea is to unite the universe at the feet of Jesus (Ephesians 1:10), but the devil's strategy is to divide and destroy.

As Paul concludes his beautiful letter, displaying the handy work of God and the call to live a life commensurate with our calling, he summons us to a military engagement. Paul encourages us to take on the whole armor, what could be translated "the panoply" of God. Ultimately, what Paul is suggesting is that we take up the power of God Himself. We see this particularly in Isaiah 59:17, where Isaiah, speaking of the Lord, says, "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." Paul is saying that the panoply of God is, in one sense, God Himself.

Ephesians 6: 10-13

10 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.

Let us first of all notice:

I. Our fight is inescapable (vs. 11a)

Certainly we must distinguish between physical problems (sometimes we just need rest), emotional problems (sometimes our addictions and deep-seated patterns need therapy and/or medication) and spiritual issues. Here Paul is particularly speaking about the spiritual aspect of our being and he teaches us that we must *actively* "put on the whole armor of God." Paul, for example, near the end of his life, put it this way: "I have fought the good fight..." This cannot be avoided, if we are in Christ. The only two positions in which any human being lives today is either as an ensnared prisoner of the evil one (2 Timothy 2:26) or as one engaged in spiritual warfare. In Paul's day, the tactic of pagan worship was to seek to manipulate the many gods (demons); in our day, the common strategy is to pretend there is no devil. This is the worst of all strategies and the one Satan would love for us to adopt.

II. Our enemy is formidable (vs. 11b, 12)

Our first hint of the craftiness of our enemy is found in verse 11 where Paul says, "against the schemes of the devil." Paul, who spent his entire Christian experience fighting the devil, says in 2 Corinthians 2:11, "we are not ignorant of his designs." He also said in the same letter, "for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light" (2 Corinthians 11:14). Satan, we are told in Genesis 3:1, is the craftiest of all of God's creatures. We need to be ready for him! In Revelation 12, we also learn that he is very angry, because he knows his time here is short. His goal, Peter teaches us, is to devour us (1 Peter 5:8). Satan's typical strategies for deceiving and destroying us are 1) distortions of the truth (see John 8:44; 2 Corinthians 4:4; 2 Corinthians 11:3), 2) discouragement through self-condemnation, despair, or feelings of abandonment and 3) an imperceptible gradual decline of our spirits (see Paul's warning in Ephesians 4:27). Ultimately, Paul says, we need to be able to stand in the evil day. That is, when the worst onslaught of evil comes our way, we must be prepared to engage our enemy. As we come to verse 13, we see that:

III. Our triumph is inevitable (vs. 13)

One can't help but notice that the Apostle Paul tells us in verse 13 that by taking up the whole armor of God, we will be able to withstand the onslaught of the evil one and to stand firm. What a promise! We are guaranteed a triumphant conclusion to our engagement with our archenemy. In 2 Timothy 4: 7-8 Paul puts it this way, "I have fought the fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that Day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved His appearing." Paul is saying that he knew that at the end of his fight, he would receive the crown, and, furthermore, he says he knows that we too, who love Christ's future appearing, will wear that crown as well. There is no calling more noble than to fight in the army of God with the full assurance that He shall crown us with His glorious crown.

Discussion Questions

1. What is the armor of God?
2. Why must believers in Jesus take it up?
3. Why does Paul emphasize that we must put on the whole armor of God? How do believers sometimes attempt to put on only part of the armor?
4. Describe a situation in which you observed the "schemes" of the evil one. Why does he often work this way?
5. How can we best prepare for "the evil day?" (vs. 13)

Going Deeper

1. How has the devil most often attacked you and weakened you?
2. What piece of God's armor do you especially need to take up and use?