

“The Armor of God”

Ephesians 6:10-18a

First Presbyterian Church, Corpus Christi, TX
Rev. Charles S. Blackshear • September 9, 2018

One day the Archangel Michael sees Satan sitting on a rock crying. Most of the time they're at war with each other and Michael's never seen Satan like this. So he walks over and asks what's wrong. Satan replies, "Everyone keeps blaming me for things I didn't do!"

This morning we're talking about a topic that's often hard to discuss. There are some Christians who have decided that Satan doesn't exist. They say there's no such thing as the Devil. In fact, they tend to deny the existence of anything supernatural. If it can't be observed, it doesn't exist. On the other hand, there are Christians who seem to see Satan at work behind everything that goes wrong or everything they do wrong. "The devil made me do it." So how do we navigate between these two positions? One group underestimates the reality of Satan, the other group overestimates his power.

Because we believe the Bible is the inspired Word of God, we must take seriously the idea of Satan. Immediately after Jesus was baptized he was led by the Holy Spirit into the wilderness for forty days where He was tempted by the devil. Jesus himself spoke many times about the reality of Satan. So to try to dismiss this idea we have to ignore large portions of clear teaching in the Bible. But it can also be too easy to blame the devil for our own sin and failures or for that matter for anything that doesn't go the way we wanted. We need to recognize that Satan is an enemy of God, and a powerful one at that, but not equal with God.

Over the last couple of weeks we talked about the secret to a happy life, which Paul tells us is treating other people the way we want Jesus to treat us. He uses words like obey and submit. To you and me those sound like words of weakness. But remember that God told Paul, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." So after talking about submitting to one another Paul says, "be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his

might." The idea here is that when we put aside our own strength by putting others ahead of ourselves, we discover God's strength, which is the only thing that will allow us to withstand the attacks or 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." Rulers, authorities, powers, and spiritual forces of evil are all ways of referring to the same thing, the evil schemes or methods of Satan. When he was tempting Jesus, Luke 4 tells us "the devil took him up and showed him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time, and said to him, "To you I will give all this authority and their glory, for it has been delivered to me, and I give it to whom I will. If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours.'" Of course he couldn't give those things to Jesus because Jesus already had them.

But that shows us some of the schemes that Satan uses against believers. Recognizing those schemes can help you defend against them. So what are some of the methods Satan uses? First, as we just heard in the temptation of Jesus, Satan uses *deception*. Lies. In the Garden of Eden he tells Eve that if she eats the forbidden fruit she will not die but that she will be like God. What are some of the lies that he tells us? He might whisper that you're not good enough. That your sin, something in your past, disqualifies you, that God can't love *you*. Or he might tell you that you deserve better – better pay, a better car, a better spouse.

Another weapon our enemy uses is *discouragement*. We get tired of the fight and just want to give up. Serving Christ is hard work and serving other people like our spouse or children or parents or employers opens us up to disappointment. If you have days when you just want to give up, that may be Satan trying to get you to stop caring. One of the big weapons is *temptation*. Mae West famously

said, “Don’t tempt me. I can resist anything but temptation.” You could be tempted by money or food or sex or power or spending or alcohol or gossip. Did I leave anybody out? The devil can’t make you give in to temptation but he can sure provide it.

There are two other schemes the devil uses that I want to point out. One is *distraction*. Satan is basically lazy. He doesn’t need to go to all the effort of deceiving you or discouraging you or tempting you if all he needs to do is distract you from following and serving Jesus. This one is so subtle we hardly notice at all. In fact we usually pay for the distraction by the television or the internet or our cell phones or all kinds of other things. The last one I want to mention is *success*. When we are successful in anything our natural response is, “look what I did,” rather than “look what God did through me.” We then begin to believe that we can rely on our own abilities or position or money rather than depending on God.

So how do we defend against these attacks of the devil? By having the correct equipment. Verse 11 says, “Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil.” Notice that it’s GOD’s armor, not ours. When we put it on we are putting on God’s strength.

First we are to fasten on the belt of *truth*. It’s interesting to me that Paul starts with the belt. My belt is usually the last thing I put on. And when you’re thinking about armor, belts are neither defensive nor offensive. I think a great way to understand what he means, though, is probably like the belt a police officer or soldier wears. The belt holds all kinds of other important items. The policeman’s belt holds his gun, his handcuffs, his radio, and a number of other things that are critical for the job. Paul says that truth is like that. Truth is the key to all the other pieces of armor. What truth is he referring to? Certainly God’s eternal truths revealed in the Scriptures – Jesus said in John 8, “You will know the truth and the truth will set you free.” Knowing the truth leads to living the truth. Our lives become reflections of God’s

truth. But most important is that Jesus IS the truth. In John 14:6 Jesus said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”

That leads us to the second piece of armor, the breastplate of *righteousness*. Think of this like a bulletproof vest protecting your vital organs. The righteousness is Christ’s righteousness. You and I have no righteousness of our own. As Paul says in Romans, “no one is righteous, not one,” and “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” But Jesus was without sin. When we come to Christ he takes our sin and covers us with His righteousness.

The third thing mentioned are the shoes that are “the readiness given by the gospel of *peace*.” When our kids were young they would always take their shoes off in the car when we travelled. Sometimes even if we were just going across town. When it was time to get out of the car we had to wait while they put their shoes back on. So one of the things we started doing was telling them to get their shoes on about 10 minutes before we stopped. That way they would be ready. The idea here I think is to be ready to be a peacemaker. It’s like having your shoes on ahead of time. God’s in the business of reconciling people, bringing peace. That means WE are to be in the business of reconciling people and bringing peace. And a big part of that is being ready with our shoes on.

Fourth, “In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one.” The image Paul uses is of the large shield that the Roman soldier carried into battle. It was large enough to cover most of the soldier’s battle and it was covered in leather so that the flaming arrows would sink in and be extinguished. That’s how faith works in our lives. Faith is not just belief, it’s belief plus trust. Faith means believing God’s word and trusting that He will protect us. One of the important ways Roman soldiers used their shields was in a group. Together, with their shields side-by-side, the whole unit was able to move forward against the enemy.

Faith works the same way. Faith works best alongside other believers in the church.

Fifth is the helmet of *salvation*. A helmet protects your head, which includes your mind. I think Paul is pointing us back to Ephesians 1 where he tells us that God chose us in Jesus before the foundation of the world. The helmet of salvation protects our mind from the doubts that Satan can plant in our brain. You don't ever have to doubt whether you said the right prayer or did the right thing to be saved. God does the saving.

Sixth is the sword of the *Spirit*, which is the word of God. To use this sword takes practice. Lots and lots of practice. That means reading the Bible, studying what it means,

discussing it with others, meditating on it, and putting it into practice. Remember, too, that this is part of God's armor. The sword is for defense, not offense.

Finally, the only item that could be considered an offensive weapon – *prayer*. Paul says to pray at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. Prayer is the most effective weapon against the schemes of the devil and yet it's the one that we least use. Here's the thing, prayer is the key that unlocks God's armor and prayer utilizes all the other pieces of armor. Prayer is how we put on the full armor of God instead of merely carrying it.

Amen.