

Turn with me to Ephesians, Chapter 6, starting at verse 13:

“¹³ Therefore put on the full armour 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. ¹⁴ Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, ¹⁵ and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. ¹⁶ In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. ¹⁷ Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

¹⁸ 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 Lord’s people. ¹⁹ Pray also for me, that whenever I speak, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel, ²⁰ for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should.”

Stand:

One of the great heresies throughout Christian history has been what we call ‘Gnosticism.’ It’s a catch all term for the idea that the way to salvation is through secret and esoteric knowledge, things that you have to read between the lines to get.

Gnosticism is so powerful because it is so tempting. It make somebody feel special to be in the know. To be part of that inner circle that really knows what is going on.

When it comes to Spiritual Warfare, the reality that we read of last week, that our battle is not with flesh and blood, Gnosticism often creeps in. Some teachers among Christians present it as if the only way to really be Christian is to know the mysteries of the Spiritual realm. You must understand how to battle with demons and that is done using special language or practices. Some go so far as to say that the real way to be Christian is to go forth and seek out battles with demonic forces.

When we read through this passage, from last weeks text to this weeks, we might be helped to know that this is the most extensive take on our role in spiritual warfare we have in the Bible. And, as we’ll see this week, what it tells us to do *isn’t really anything that special*. Not if we’re Christians already. It’s like, live the truth, be righteous, trust God, read the Bible, pray. That’s how you do it.

Paul gave us these words so that we would be aware, yes the battle is not against flesh and blood. But also so we would be prepared, not to attack, but to defend ourselves when the attacks do come as a result of us living the truth.

So this morning, first I’m going to spend a good chunk of time just laying some groundwork on just what spirit, spiritual and demon all mean. Then, we’ll explore the armour of God.

Again, the take away will be simple, for most of us, most of the time, spiritual warfare will look like regular Christian discipleship.

Be Aware: So, What’s a Spirit Anyway?

We’ve called this series ‘living in sync with reality.’ In this text, and last week’s text, we come up upon an aspect of reality as presented by Scripture that challenges our modern western worldview, the reality of ‘spirits.’ So before we get to this text and the armour in general, I wanted to take about half the sermon to get crystal clear about a few things. Primarily, I wanted to get clear about what ‘spirit’ means and what demons or evil spirits really are.

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I know quite a few of you in this room are new to Christianity and, even though many of you have been around Christianity all your lives, you still don't quite understand what a 'spirit' is.

Ok, so Star Trek again. I promise, this will help.

In one episode of "The Next Generation" the crew of the Enterprise comes upon a hole in space and in this hole in space they meet a creature that identifies itself as Nagilum.

Data, the android Starfleet officer is baffled, because as they come upon this entity and hear from it he says the vast sensor array of the enterprise says that nothing is there. Like, their sensors that can tell the elemental structure of planets from space cannot see this thing speaking with them right then. But this thing has power, influence, and is affecting people. What gives?

In Biblical parlance, they were dealing with what technically would be called a 'spirit.' Theologian Dallas Willard defines spirit as 'unbodily personal power.'¹

Remember, in John 4:24 Jesus said that God is Spirit. And this definition of Willard's would apply readily to God.

God is 'unbodily.' God, aside from the second person of the Trinity, Jesus, does not have a physical form. When Russian astronaut Yuri Gagarin, one of the first men in space, said "I see no God up here," no ancient person would be baffled by that. Because every good Jewish boy and girl knew, God is Spirit. You can't see Him. He isn't physical. He won't show up on your sensors, Mr. Data.

God is personal. Remember our series on the book of Exodus if you were here with us, God has a personality, character. God has wants and desires, goals and plans. He is gracious and compassionate, loving, kind and just.

God is powerful. Though God does not have a body, He created bodies, matter, and energy. As such, He can affect those things and sometimes chooses to manifest Himself in ways we can perceive—fire and smoke on a mountain, a felt perception in the heart, the healing of a physical problem.

Now, in a like manner angels and demons are spiritual beings. They have no bodies, but they are persons, and they have power—though as we'll see their power is limited in comparison to God's power.

As human beings we occupy this unique place of having spirits as well. Notice, we are *not* spirits, we can't be as we have bodies. But we do *have* spirits that are somehow, and mysteriously, connected to and housed within our bodies. A full-blown exploration of this in the Bible is too long for our purposes, but the easy metaphor is that we are in some sense 'amphibious'—physical and spiritual, on earth yet sensitive to the things of heaven.

Be Aware: Demons

If that's what a spirit is, now what about a demon or evil spirit in specific?

If I say 'demon' or 'demonic' what comes to mind?

Most likely, some variation on a theme from a Hollywood horror show. Floating bodies, heads turning all the way around, that kind of thing.

¹ Dallas Willard, The Divine Conspiracy, pg. 81.

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Graciously, these images are a bit overblown. Scripture has not left us in the dark on this issue, nor has tradition or experience. So, to help, here are four simple truths about demons: they are fallen angels, their power is limited, their authority is limited, and their influence exists on a spectrum of visibility.

1. Demons are Fallen Angels

Demon makes me think: little red guy with a potbelly, horns and a pitchfork. Not altogether helpful...

The Scriptures teach that demons are fallen angels. Jude 1:6

“And the angels who did not keep their positions of authority but abandoned their proper dwelling—these he has kept in darkness, bound with everlasting chains for judgment on the great Day.”

Which, honestly, angels are probably scarier than most of our depictions of demons...I love this comic of a biblically accurate depiction of an angel. Sure, be not afraid, as if...

But as we've already learned, angels are spirits and spirits are unbodily personal power. So these images given to prophets throughout history, they are most likely so wild and outlandish because they are trying to describe something they can't really explain. Demons, likewise, are unbodily personal power.

2. Demons have Limited Power

As a young man I did a discipleship school program through Canadian Mennonite University. In one of my lectures, the teacher told a joke about demons.

How many demons does it take to control a herd of two thousand pigs?

About five thousand.

I know. Don't go to Bible scholars for comedy.

What he was talking about is the instance in Mark 5 where Jesus sends a 'legion' of demons into a herd of pigs. His point was that it took almost double the amount of demons to control the pigs.

What's at the forefront is that demons have limited power.

We talked about God being spirit, the comparison between demons and God stops there, though.

God is all powerful.

Demons have limited power—it takes five thousand to get total control over one man, or two thousand pigs. It does not mean they don't have power. Demons can affect physical things. There is at least one case of a physical ailment, a growth on a woman's back, being tied to the influence of Satan in Luke 13. We also see this in the case of the pigs being possessed by demons. But their power is limited.

God is all knowing.

Demons have limited knowledge. While sometimes they are associated with people seeing the future or knowing things they shouldn't, we have examples of them lacking knowledge. In Acts 19, some men try to cast out a demon in the name of 'the Jesus who is preached by Paul'. The demon essentially responds—look I know Paul and Jesus, but who are you?

Even Satan, we are shown, is limited in knowledge. Peter says, 'the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.' (1 Peter 5:8) He has to go looking to find people, he does not sit on a throne knowing all things.

God is present in all places at once, demons are only in a single location.

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In fact, some think that there is ample evidence that demons are not only limited to a single location, but they are territorial. When Jesus first meets the ‘Legion’ in Mark 5, the text says, “And [Legion] begged Jesus again and again not to send him out of the area.” (Mark 5:10)

Jon Tyson, a pastor and author, points out that every time the disciples go into new territory in Acts there is an encounter with demons. Every time. He calls these ‘turf wars.’² The point being, we have biblical evidence for spirits being limited to specific places.

Part of the reason for this is that Demons have limited authority.

3. Demons have Limited Authority

Power is the ability to effect change. Authority is the permission to use that power. A soldier has the power and training to take life but needs permission to do that without consequences.

The authority of demons comes from two places: from God and from us.

Yes, demons were given authority by God.

Again, scripture teaches that demons are fallen angels. Remember, in that Jude text we heard a minute ago it talks about how they did not ‘keep their positions of authority.’

So, much like humans, it seems angels were given freedom of will. When placed in positions of authority, some fell in with Satan and abused their authority and power to harm people. But as we’ve already seen, this authority, like their power, is limited—again, perhaps to territory.

Demons are given authority by us as well.

The Old Testament prohibits divination, soothsaying, witchcraft and summoning ghosts or familiar spirits.³ Why? Because, magical and modern new age thinking presents the ‘spiritual’ as just ‘energy’ or ‘force.’ Like Star Wars this force is a-moral, good and evil. It can be used and manipulated by people.

But this is not the case, these aren’t forces, but persons. Put simply, attempt to use them and they may turn and use you.

Tradition and experience of the demonic confirms this—demons entering people and controlling them comes only as the result of invitation to do so. They only do so when we give them permission, authority. This is through occult practices, divination, or any practice that attempts to manipulate supernatural forces outside of a relationship with the Holy Spirit in Jesus’ name.

4. Demonic Activity is on a Spectrum

Finally, the activity of evil spirits and demons is on what we might call a spectrum. Biblically, there is one word used for demonic activity to describe a host of different experiences, and that is the word ‘demonized.’

However, traditionally—and I think this is helpful—there’s a kind of spectrum or scale for demonic influence. Possession, Oppression, Infestation and Temptation.

On the far right, we have what is called ‘possession.’ Again, this is someone who has actively invited demonic forces in and they sometimes do what is called ‘manifesting’—i.e. speaking in another voice that’s not the persons, knowing things they shouldn’t know, being stronger than they should be.

² Jon Tyson, *Deliverance*, pg. 73.

³ See Exod. 22:18; Lev 19:26, 20:27; Deut 18:10-11.

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And yes, people from this church on a missions trip have experienced this. It's real.

The next level up is oppression. This is when evil spirits are actively opposing someone from outside that person. So, this is where it is *obviously* an evil spirit working. Jesus in the desert with the devil is probably the best example of this. We have other examples in history of Christians experiencing manifestation of evil spirits outside of them fighting with them.

Then we have infestation. This is when demonic activity is present but it's in a certain place or item. Some of us with the gift of spiritual discernment know about this, and I think many of us are sensitive, you walk into a place and it just makes you feel sick. Icky. Not just, you know, 'hauntings' and such, but like you can tell evil is there.

Finally, we have temptation. This is the primary way that the devil and his minions operate most of the time in most of our lives, tempting us to sin. Tempting us to accept good as evil and evil as good.

Why would this be the primary way?

Well, think like a strategist for a second. If the goal of the devil is to oppose God, and God's goal is to have us be with Him. Then separating us from God is what He's after. Now, if He did that in our context by having people turn into Orcs who speak the language of Mordor and demand we bow down to him, probably that would turn us more towards God than away.

But if He could, in the words of the Usual Suspects, convince us He doesn't exist. Convince us that evil isn't really evil, that it's good. Then he has won.

So, a Demon or Evil Spirit is a fallen angel with limited power and authority who opposes God's work in the world and their influence is discernable on a spectrum.

Be Aware: Discerning the Devil

Ok, so how do I know then, how do I know it's the devil or his demons?

It's important to know that Jesus doesn't blame all evil on the devil. Yes, in Luke 13 as I already said, a physical ailment is because of Satan.

But in John 9, when asked why a man is blind, Jesus responds: neither this man nor his parents sinned. Nothing about the devil.

So, discernment becomes very important. Some Christians are gifted with discernment in a special way and can tell immediately, can even see these demons. Some aren't.

One warning: sometimes you will want it to be the devil. I know that sounds weird. But I've seen it. Mental health issues get this especially, people want it to be spiritual because that's easier to deal with than therapy, medication and perhaps a lifelong journey of struggle. My encouragement is to be very careful in diagnosing demons everywhere. This is something to be discerned in community.

Be Prepared: The Armour of God

But Paul isn't just wanting us to be aware, he wants us prepared. He encourages us to *put on the full armour of God*.

The armour he outlines comes from two sources, first from images of God arming himself as a warrior in the book of Isaiah. Yes, the armour of God *literally*. And, second, from the Roman soldiers guarding him. We're told he actually lays out the armour of God in the order that a Roman soldier would dress themselves—belt, cuirass, shoes, shield, sword.

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It's like those classic scenes in the old Batman movies when Batman gears up to fight crime. Man the little boy in me loves to get to preach on this stuff.

The overwhelming note, again, on the armour of God is that the emphasis is on the defensive pieces of gear. Even a sword for a Roman soldier was primarily defensive last resort—you'd hope a spear or arrows would keep your enemies far away.

I want to very briefly describe each piece of armour and give us a 'what to do' about it.

1. The Belt of Truth

Like the Scottish soldiers of medieval times, Roman soldiers were masculine enough to be comfortable in, well, a skirt.

"It's not a skirt, it's a kilt, ya sicko!"

I mean, come on, why wouldn't you—full leg motion, breezy, breathable. These guys knew what was up.

But their underclothes were usually a long and loose-fitting shirt. The way they bound the shirt up so they wouldn't trip when they ran was they would put a belt on it.

An apt image. Live anything less than the truth and you end up tripping all over yourself. You'll also remember, coming out of John 8, that the Devil is a liar and the father of lies.

Say it with me.

The Devil is a liar.

The Devil is a liar.

So how do we put on the belt of truth?

We know the truth. We fill our minds with scriptures, daily. We become full members of Christian community.

We speak the truth. Not just the truth of God, but our words have integrity.

We live the truth. We live consistent with the ways that God has revealed to be healthy for us.

2. The Breastplate of Righteousness

Roman warfare was designed to keep the enemy far away from you. Bows and arrows, trebuchets, ditches and wooden spikes. Then, on the soldier himself, a pike to keep them at a distance, a shield to hold them back.

If they got through all that, you had a breastplate. It protected your heart, and made you look pretty muscle-y for the ladies.

A breastplate is a last line of defense. But a good one. Unlike the movies portray, if you came at a breastplate like this with a sword, you're not getting through. The breastplate also protects the one place you have the most trouble protecting on yourself.

Your back.

If there's a dagger the devil uses its shame. We may be living light and righteous now, but he can get to your back through your past sometimes, can't he?

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So how do we put on the breastplate of righteousness?

Well, in one sense, we trust in the righteousness God has given us when the Devil comes at our back. Righteousness is something God puts on us like a breastplate, it is imparted to us through what Jesus has done.

But living with integrity protects us too. As William Barclay once wrote:
*"Words are no defence against accusations, but a good life is."*⁴

For those attacks that get past our distant defenses, for false accusations and attacks on our integrity. A long obedience in the right direction is the only defense. Our life will speak where our words can no longer defend us.

3. Shoes of Readiness

Next, we have the shoes of the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace.

I once heard a story about the death marches to concentration camps from Austria to Germany. A young Jewish girl was about to be taken on a hot spring day, as she dressed herself—because she could only bring what she was wearing—her mother took her sandals off her feet and gave her good winter boots.

The path to Germany went over the mountains. Many of the other children with her lost feeling in their feet, lost their feet, fell and were left behind to die.

Good footwear is life or death, especially in warfare. Some scholars go so far as to say that Roman boots are what made Roman soldiers superior.

This may be a piece of equipment with layers of meaning.

Yes, Paul is hinting that our job is to share the good news. He has Isaiah 52:7 in mind:

*"How beautiful on the mountains
are the feet of those who bring good news,
who proclaim peace,
who bring good tidings,
who proclaim salvation,
who say to Zion,
'Your God reigns!'"*

So in one sense, Paul speaks of our readiness and willingness to go forth and do our work of sharing the gospel. We are ready to move.

But in another sense, the language could be read differently: 'feet fitted with the *readiness* that comes from the gospel of peace.'

Like the nailed soles of Roman sandals, the peace afforded to each of us by the gospel prepares us for anything. It gives us freedom of movement.

How do I put on the shoes of the readiness of the gospel of peace?

I'll admit, I'm most attracted to the second interpretation of this phrase. Both could be correct, but let's sit with that.

⁴ William Barclay, *New Daily Study Bible: Galatians and Ephesians*, pg. 211.

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If I want to resist Satan, I need peace. Peace, joy and love are good shoes on my feet. They will protect me when the road gets hard. They make me resilient.

Our hurried and anxious generation robs us of opportunities for peace. It fills our minds with bad news.

If you want to stand, you need to be clothed in the peace of the good news of Jesus.

4. The Shield of Faith

Of the pieces of armour, the shield gets the longest explanation. It is the shield to ‘extinguish the fiery darts of the enemy.’

The flaming arrow was the ultimate weapon of ancient warfare. Not only could you harm an individual, but you could spread fire throughout their ranks to destroy more.

Traditionally, these fiery darts are often equated with the temptations of the devil. When we give into temptation, we do not just hurt ourselves, we hurt others. Sin is communal.

The shield described here is a tower shield. Here it is depicted in an ancient drawing. The shield was large enough to cover the body of the wielder and usually covered in hide to make it fire retardant.

Faith, in the Biblical perspective, is not just belief, but trust. Why does trust withstand temptations?

Because temptations challenge God’s best for us. The first sin came when the serpent insinuated that what God wanted for Adam and Eve wasn’t their best.

How do we hoist the shield of faith?

A practice of reflecting on God’s faithfulness is helpful. I know, for Michelle and me, God has always been faithful in providing a home. Every time I received a call to minister in a certain place, a home opened up within walking distance of that church.

If you’ve been a Christian for a while, you probably have similar stories. Stories of how when you did the right thing, God came through. Stories of how he provided for you.

But, we don’t have to do it on our own either. These shields were important in a Roman formation called the ‘tortoise.’ Where the legion becomes an impenetrable forcefield, where the shield of your brother or sister beside you protects you and you protect them. This is the community of faith. A place where we hold each other up and protect each other. A place where we share of God’s faithfulness together.

5. The Helmet of Salvation

The Roman helmet was a massive ordeal. It was heavy and metal and would take a direct blow from an axe or heavy hammer to be crushed or damaged.

I don’t know how deep Paul went on these, but the mind seems to be the primary place of assault from Satan. It is in the life of our thoughts and temptations that we are most assailed and, as we heard from John Mark Comer in the first week on Ephesians, the Devil’s primary mode of assault is deceptive ideas.

Salvation is one of these multi-faceted words that sometimes gets pigeon-holed. For most protestants, salvation means ‘forgiveness from sins.’ Our orthodox brothers and sisters would say salvation is *healing*. Salvation also means deliverance.

Also, salvation, and this I from Darrell Johnosn, is present in all three tenses.

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We are saved. The work is finished.

We are being saved. God is here to help us to continue to live in light of his deliverance.

We will be saved. Nothing can separate us in the final estimation from God's love.

How do I put on the helmet of salvation?

Well, paradoxically, of all the pieces of armour this is the one that you don't. There is no perspective that gives any room to us saving ourselves. The most important piece of defensive equipment, the one that protects where we are most easily fatally wounded, this comes from God.

Psalm 140:7 says:

"Sovereign Lord, my strong deliverer; You shield my head in the day of battle."

Perhaps since it is the head we are dealing with, it is appropriate just to say that we must keep before our eyes, in our ears and on our mouth the knowledge of God's saving work in our lives.

Be Prepared: The Weapons of God

Up until now, nothing I have said is going to be a surprise to most Christians. This is good. As I said: for most of us most of the time, doing spiritual warfare will look like normal Christian discipleship.

Know and live the truth, know and live righteousness, trust God, and trust His salvation.

But there is a slight difference as we catch the back end of this passage, a hint at the weapons that—while held in a defensive posture—are weapons of attack.

6. The Sword of the Spirit

As I've already mentioned, Roman soldiers usually had at least one if not two pikes or javelins. The idea was to keep your enemy on the other side of your shield as long as possible. The common length of the Roman sword, the gladius, attests to this—compared to medieval European swords they were quite short.

Again, interesting that Paul doesn't mention the javelin, but the sword. Another point towards how our posture is primarily defensive—we don't go on the attack.

But when Satan gets inside those defenses, the right response is the word of God. We see this in the temptation of Jesus. In Matthew 4, each time Jesus is tempted he responds with the words of scripture.

How do we wield the sword of the Spirit?

Much like Jesus, I think having scripture memorized is important. I know some who go so far as to know the primary areas Satan tempts them—be it with drink, or lust, or greed. And they have memorized verses that directly deal with those problems: do not be filled with wine but be filled with the Spirit. Whoever looks lustfully at a woman commits adultery in their heart. The love of money is the root of all kinds of evil.

7. Prayer in the Spirit

Some are disagreed on whether prayer falls into the armour, I'm with those who say it does. In part because our Lord clarifies that prayer is an offensive weapon against the demonic—when the disciples could not cast out a certain demon and Jesus could, they asked him why they couldn't do it. He responds:

"This kind can only come out by prayer." (Mark 9:29)

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Paul distinguishes prayer as being ‘in the Spirit.’ Given what we’ve already said about ‘spirits’ and the relational way we interact, this must mean that prayer should be participation in the Spirit and, really, conversational. We should let the Spirit guide our prayers as much as He empowers them.

This prayer must be constant, diverse, and unselfish. All occasions, all kinds, and for the Lord’s people.

One note here, if you ever do find yourself in an encounter with the demonic, it is prayer that comes to forefront as well. It is in Jesus’ name and under his delegated authority that you tell the demon to leave—we see this in Acts. And perhaps this is the only place where recognition of the spiritual needs to make it’s way into our practice—praying for spiritual protection, spiritual resources and praying for evil spirits to leave.

Close: *Stand!*

So, if you came expecting a glimpse into the esoteric mysteries at the center of the spiritual realm, you’ve got it and, well, it’s probably a bit underwhelming.

But maybe it should be seen the other way.

When you live the truth, you break the bonds of oppression of the spirit of falsehood.

When you live righteousness, you break the swords of the demons.

When you trust God, you protect your brothers and sisters from the fires of hell.

When you know your salvation, you blunt the axe of the enemy.

When you read the word, you sharpen your sword.

When you pray, the demons shudder.

When you stand your ground, hell does not prevail.

So may God’s Spirit empower us to do just that, to stand our ground.