

Living Our Faith

Ephesians 6:11 – 24

by Rev. Bruce Silver

This is the third week of my sermon series on our faith. In the first week I talked about what it means to really take ownership of our faith. I talked about the fact that if we really want to own our faith then we need to turn everything over to Jesus. Last week I talked about growing up in our faith. I suggested we do this through unity, taking a personal role in the well being of the church, and making sure that the church helps us to grow up in our faith. Today I want to turn our attention to the reality of a believer living their life for Jesus. What does it take to actually live our faith? What kinds of things do we need to prepare for as we live? How can we combat the problems that surely will arise in the life of a believer? These are the questions that I want to address today.

There are actions that we are to do if we are to actively live out our faith. From this morning's passage we learn that we are to "put on" the armor of God. That's the first thing that we need to do. We need to put on the armor that God has given us because we are in for a battle. Last week I mentioned that one of the reasons we were losing people in leadership positions for our VBS was because Satan knew that big things were going to happen. I truly believe that he hates to see us succeed and will do things mess us up and discourage us. Yet, those who are ready as this passage says will be able to stand up against the attacks of Satan and not be knocked down.

The amazing thing is that Paul uses the imperative when describing the need for Christians to arm themselves with the full armor of God. As I suggested last week, when the imperative is used what follows is not a suggestion but rather a command that we are expected to follow. As I suggested last week, when the imperative is used what follows is not a suggestion but rather a command that we are expected to follow. You might have noticed that we are called to put on God's armor, not our own. God knows how to dress us for battle, we do not. It is our obligation to follow what God would have us do.

I want to briefly look at the pieces that make up the armor so that we might better be equipped to live out our faith. First comes the belt of truth. Paul might have been intimately aware of the order and way in which Roman soldiers would have gotten their armor ready since he had spent so much time imprisoned by them. He understood that the belt was the thing which all of the rest of the armor was built upon. It is for this reason that Paul says we are to begin our preparation by wrapping ourselves in the belt of truth. As we live our lives this is the foundation of all of our defense against Satan. Satan uses lies and half-truths to deceive people. Jesus used the truth of God's love for humanity to reconcile humanity to God.

Let me give you an example of how important truth is. When I was first ordained in Illinois the pastor at our church gave a sermon in which he made reference to his mother's pineapple upside down cake. He described in great detail what a delight this cake was and how his mother made it as a special treat. A few months later the pastor's parents came out from Boston to visit and one of my friends went up to her and asked her for her recipe since her son had made the cake sound so good. As you might have guessed, much to her dismay the pastor's mother said that she had never made a pineapple upside down cake in her life. My friend was crushed that the preacher would lie like that in his sermon. She never really trusted anything out of the pulpit again. God calls us to start living our faith by wrapping ourselves with the belt of truth.

Next we are called to put on the breastplate of righteousness. This guards our vital organs and ultimately saves our lives. This righteousness that we are to cloth ourselves with has a two-fold meaning. The first is that we are to take the righteousness of Jesus that is imputed upon us in our conversion and wear it proudly. The second meaning is that we are to live righteous lives. We are to continue on the path of sanctification living a life "worthy of the call." This cannot be accomplished on our own but only through the power of the Holy Spirit living within us. Once we have started with the truth we are ready to cover ourselves with righteousness. This is the righteousness that allows us to remind Satan that we are indeed sure of our salvation and he can no longer question our conversion experience.

Once we have put on the breastplate of righteousness we are told to put on the shoes of the Gospel of peace. It is funny how different commentators viewed this piece of armor. They all said that these shoes help us stand our ground and provide traction against backsliding. Where they differ though is over just what this means. It might mean the peace we have from knowing the truth of the gospel. It might mean that we stand firm as we share the good news of the gospel. It might also mean that we can stand firm knowing that we have God covering our back. I think it's more like a combination of the three. We can stand firm because God has given us peace. We are also called to share that peace with others. And ultimately, if we are to take seriously the call for unity from last week's message we are to be a people who usher in peace among believers and those in the world.

Once we put on the belt, breastplate and shoes we are called to pick up the shield of faith. The shield was large, usually about four feet by two feet, made of wood, and covered with tough leather. As the soldier held it before him, it protected him from spears, arrows, and "fiery darts." The edges of these shields were so constructed that an entire line of soldiers could interlock shields and march into the enemy like a solid wall. This suggests that we Christians are not in the battle alone. The "faith" mentioned here is not saving faith, but rather living faith, a trust in the promises and the power of God. Faith is a defensive weapon which protects us from Satan's fiery darts. In Paul's day, arrows, dipped in some

inflammable substance and ignited, were shot at the enemy. Satan shoots “fiery darts” at our hearts and minds: lies, blasphemous thoughts, hateful thoughts about others, doubts, and burning desires for sin. If we do not by faith quench these darts, they will light a fire within and we will disobey God. We never know when Satan will shoot a dart at us, so we must always walk by faith and use the shield of faith. This is not a piece of armor that we wear which hangs passively on us but rather, is a piece of armor that we make an effort to pick up and use in our lives to defend ourselves from Satan.

Paul finishes the list of defensive items by telling us to take up the helmet of salvation. I think that it is no coincidence that Paul ties our salvation to our heads. Christians are called to be thinkers. We are to be lifelong learners who use our intellect. Satan wants to attack the mind, the way he defeated Eve. The helmet refers to the mind controlled by God. It is too bad that many Christians have the idea that the intellect is not important, when in reality it plays a vital role in Christian growth, service, and victory. When God controls the mind, Satan cannot lead the believer astray. The Christian who studies his Bible and learns the meaning of Bible doctrines is not going to be led astray too easily. We need to be “taught by Him as the truth is in Jesus,” as Paul says in Ephesians 4:21. We are to “grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” as we learn in 2 Peter 3:18. Wherever Paul ministered, he taught the new converts the truths of the Word of God, and this helmet protected them from Satan’s lies.

Paul finishes with our only offensive weapon that we have against Satan and his attacks. We can take the offensive with the sword of the Spirit. Paul reminds us that this sword is in reality the Word of the Lord. It is the Spirit inspired, God breathed word that are contained in scripture. We are to know it. We are to read it. We are to hear it spoken by others. When we begin to fill our lives with the knowledge of God we can begin to take the offensive against Satan. Isn’t that what Jesus did when he was tempted in the wilderness? He quoted scripture at Satan every time that Satan gave him an easy out. As we are continually growing in our wisdom and knowledge we will be better able to defend ourselves and even take the initiative in driving Satan back. We can, through the power of the Holy Spirit, begin to win the battle for God.

What does it take to actually live our faith? We need to stand firm in God. What kinds of things do we need to prepare for as we live? We need to clothe ourselves with the full armor of God and remember to not lean on our own understanding. How can we combat the problems that surely will arise in the life of a believer? We are to go into battle against Satan and use all the tools that we have at our disposal: the belt of truth, the breastplate of righteousness, the shoes of the gospel of peace, the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God. As we do these things we will be able to say we are living our faith. May God clothe us all so richly. AMEN.