**The Second-Hand Armor of God**

I suspect there are few people in the Western world \*\*who aren’t familiar with Star Wars—the epic space adventure movies that have entertained us since 1977. Continuing to build on this success, in 2019 Disney decided to create a new live-action Star Wars series called \*\*“The Mandalorian”, which follows a lone gunfighter’s adventures after the fall of the Empire.

This nearly silent Mandalorian warrior strikes quite in image, and the first thing you notice is his \*\*iconic armor. Made of a mysterious indestructible metal, the suit is one of the main keys to his success in battle. It’s hundreds of years old and forged by artisans who learned the secret formula from their ancestors of centuries gone by.

The Mandalorian never removes this armor.

\*\*In the end of Ephesians, Paul gives us his iconic armor image by describing the full armor of God. We read in Ephesians 6:10-18a:

*Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the 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.\*\* 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. Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace.\*\* In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one; and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. Ephesians 6:10-18a*

\*\*The belt, the breastplate, the shield, the boots and of course the sword have made their way into Christian imagery for centuries, from dynamic art to cheesy plastic costumes. This is our tradition as Christians, to suit up in this armor—millennia old—not just when the armor is needed, but, like the Mandalorian, as a way of life.

There’s been plenty of misuse of this Armor of God passage in the Bible. We’ve been too fast to interpret this as “us versus them” when we think of people outside of the faith. At worst, people have committed violent acts claiming they are in the Lord’s army and doing his will. Think of those who blow up abortion clinics claiming they are doing God’s work.

\*\*How do we approach this passage from Paul responsibly? How does it resonate with us in a digital age where wars are fought by drones? What does it mean to wear God’s armor not as a part of battle, but rather, like the Mandalorian, as a part of daily life?

Let’s look at three realities about the armor of God that we can pick up from Paul’s famous passage.

**\*\*Armor Reality #1: It’s not who you think**

Let’s read Ephesians 6, starting in verse 11

*\*\*Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the 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.\*\* 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. (**Ephesians 6:11-13 ESV**)*

In Paul’s day and all through Jesus’ life, the question was always when would Israel be restored to power? They had been perpetually conquered and persecuted. \*\* Their latest ruler, Rome, was the superpower of the ancient world. They believed the Messiah would be the conquering king who would drive Rome out. Paul speaks to that sentiment here.

He reminds them the problems are further upstream, so to speak. This is an evil much deeper and older (and smarter) than Rome. \*\* Dark spiritual forces are at work—Satan and all that comes with him. This evil is worse than tyranny because it’s the reason tyranny exists.

So instead of the fight against your neighbors, Paul is talking about who the real enemy is. Satan’s campaign to destroy humanity in subtle, insidious ways is not a military battle but a centuries-long war.

The weapons Paul recommends—truth, righteousness, salvation, peace—are the way to true victory. The worldly weapons of power, intrigue and violence are no match for the strength of God’s armor. They will fall away and burn themselves out, but the metal (and mettle) of the kingdom is indestructible.

In our own time, we fall into our own “flesh and blood” distractions from which the true enemy attacks us. As the age of faith passes from much of the world’s culture, we Christians find ourselves with a lot less influence. We panic. We fixate on a political candidate to either hate or venerate as a savior. We judge celebrities harshly, wagging our heads as if they are the only thing going wrong in the world. Or we get angry and react with Islamophobia, homophobia and other bigotry rather than showing love, even to those we disagree with.

As we fixate on the flesh and blood in front of us, we lose sight of the bigger picture—standing firm in God’s power while he builds his kingdom through us. This brings us to reality number two.

**\*\*Armor Reality #2: It’s primarily defensive**

Let’s read verses 13 – 17 of Ephesians 6.

*\*\*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. Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace. \*\*In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one; and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. (Ephesians 6:13-17 ESV)*

Growing up in Sunday School in the last few decades, you may have heard the song \*\*“I’m in the Lord’s Army.” Going through various military images, the song crescendos with “I’m in the Lord’s Army! Yes sir!” The song itself, like every other Sunday kids’ tune, is as harmless as it is tedious, but it can point to an unhelpful sentiment.

We begin to see ourselves as aggressive and anti-, as if we are the “all the way good” guys against the “all the way bad” guys. The reality, vividly woven from Genesis to Revelation, is that we’re all equally “lost guys” who need help. Author Donald Miller put it well:

\*\* “Jesus taught that we are all bad and He is good, and He wants to rescue us because there is a war going on and we are hostages in that war.”

So the armor that Paul gives us is primarily DEFENSIVE—it’s mainly about standing firm and remaining standing through the onslaught of whatever our REAL enemy comes up with. Let’s look at each piece of armor:

**\*\*The Belt of Truth**

The gospel never claims to give us only an exciting new perspective or a dynamic three-step scheme—it claims to give us the truth with a capital T. The gospel is the bedrock truth about the universe that holds it all together; Jesus is the quantum equation that sums it all up.

Not only do “church realities” of theology and religious practice make sense in the gospel, but ALL realities—science, history, art, music, psychology and astrophysics—come together in the truth of Jesus. This belt of truth holds everything together, and when we are assailed by temptations to sin or despair, holding on to THAT truth keeps us from falling apart.

Again, is this a command from Paul to go pick fights and squabbles? Is Paul telling us to beat people over the head with this truth until they acquiesce? No. Absolutely, we will stand for truth when necessary, but this is not a call to come out with an angry, judgmental voice—which is really just a vent for our own rage—and call it God’s work.

A belt does what it does, holds things in place, holds things together.

**\*\*The Breastplate of Righteousness**

The word righteousness encompasses more than just virtue or ethics, although those things are important. It also speaks to the historical reality of God putting the world to “rights” – reforming and reconciling and one day completing the process. God vindicated Jesus through the resurrection, set all to “rights” even though Jesus was burdened with all our sin, and he put US to rights as well within him.

This Christian status of “being in the right” before God is the breastplate we need to have firmly in place. The devil’s assaults are rarely the kind of theatrics we might see in a movie like The Exorcist. He’s much more likely to whisper garbage to you like “You aren’t good enough” or “You won’t make it” or “You aren’t loved, so numb yourself with this work/sex/drug/entertainment addiction.” One of his main weapons is to remind us of our insignificance.

The breastplate we need in place is that we are loved, accepted, and set to rights before God in Christ. We are part of the legacy and family of salvation that began with Israel and will one day end when Jesus returns.

**\*\*Shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace**

Again, this refers to standing firm. The “peace that passes understanding” that we have access to as God’s children gives us strength to stand ready through battle. When you’re at peace, you are prepared. Much of martial arts and other kinds of hand-to-hand combat is about stance, having your feet in the right place, and everything else follows.

**\*\*Shield of Faith**

The “flaming darts” of the enemy take all shapes and forms—everything from the temptation to despair, to slip into entangling sin or simply to be so distracted by life that we never grow. Standing against these things is not a matter of putting out every last arrow that comes your way—that will drive you mad, and while you might extinguish one, you are liable to get hit by twenty more.

Your faith in Jesus and loyalty to him is what stands against all of these at once. We don’t try to match arrow-for-arrow in battle—we take shelter behind the shield that will deflect them all.

**\*\*Helmet of Salvation**

Keeping the reality of our completed salvation close to us gives us protection. Knowing that the main battle—for our own souls—is completed and WON gives us strength to face whatever other skirmish comes our way.

It’s interesting how close the helmet is to the brain. We are continually charged with keeping our minds on things above, taking every thought captive, setting our focus on the realities of the gospel. This is our helmet, which we should always keep in place to protect our minds, and by proxy, our hearts and everything else.

Our last piece of armor, the only offensive weapon, brings us to our final armor reality.

**\*\*Armor Reality #3: It’s second hand**

This armor reality sounds completely strange until we consider the source material for Paul’s famous arsenal. Look at these verses in Isaiah:

*\*\*Righteousness shall be the belt of his waist, and faithfulness the belt of his loins. (Isaiah 11:5 ESV)*

*He made my mouth like a sharp sword; in the shadow of his hand he hid me; he made me a polished arrow; in his quiver he hid me away. (Isaiah 49: 2 ESV)*

*\*\*He put on righteousness as a breastplate, and a helmet of salvation on his head. (Isaiah 59:17 ESV)*

All of these images, obviously echoed in Paul’s words, most likely describe the coming Messiah. Throughout the OId Testament, this shadowy figure of promise appears, described in superhuman terms, and brings together God’s plan that everything is leading to.

\*\*So, in one sense, all this armor belonged and belongs to Jesus first. He is the Messiah figure described in Isaiah, wearing this armor and bringing forth God’s epic plan of salvation. We can wear this armor only because he wears it first.

**\*\* The Sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God**

Here we get to the only piece of offensive weaponry. The Sword of the Spirit is wielded by Christ; we can only put our hand on it. This does not refer to Scripture when it says “Word of God.” Although this phrase is commonly understood to be Scripture in our time, the Scripture itself wasn’t complete yet when Paul wrote these words; the New Testament hadn’t been completed.

Paul is most likely referring to the “word” in the sense of the gospel word in which God accomplishes his work in us. In short, the “word” here is the GOSPEL ITSELF.

Paul refers to this in the previous chapter, verses 25-26:

*\*\*…as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word. (Ephesians 5:25-26 ESV)*

God’s word, in this sense of God’s gospel action, is the sword that slices into the darkness of the world, cleanses hearts and changes lives. If you’ve been on the receiving end of this blade, you know it can be very invasive, cutting out old habits and mindsets and trimming the spiritual fat we all gather over time.

\*\*Jesus can use us in the process, wielding us for his purpose as we sharpen each other through encouragement and coaching. He also uses the circumstances of our lives and the truths of the gospel to grow us, transform us and change the world.

Again, we aren’t given an “us versus them,” aggressive image here, but the image of God’s holy work being done in us and through us. We can wear this hand-me-down armor only because it was and is worn by Christ. As we are “in him” we are in his armor as well.

\*\* Let’s review the realities of the armor of God:

It’s not who you think

It’s primarily defensive

It’s second hand

These are the realities of the armor of God—the counter-intuitive, three-dimensional, second-hand armor of God which is stronger and older than anything the Mandalorian might put on. Our stance is not aggressively chasing down every last enemy we may think arises but rather holding firm and letting the darts of the true enemy extinguish themselves. Our strength is not in our ingenuity and strategy, but in the faithful, EVERYDAY holding of truth in our hearts and minds. Our power is not our own, because the armor is not exclusively worn by us. God’s armor was and IS worn by Jesus Christ, our Savior. In him we stand.

\*\*Closing Prayer

Loving Father, Jesus, Holy Spirit, thank you for this message today. Thanks for reminding us of our true enemy, Satan, who cannot stand against you. He is a conquered foe.

Thanks for reminding us that your armor is primarily defensive, that with it we can stand firm against Satan’s attacks.

And thanks for reminding us, heavenly Father, that your armor is second-hand. Jesus has and is wearing the armor first, bringing forth your epic plan of salvation. How incredible it is that you have offered this armor to us as well, inviting us to put it on so we can stand firm in the spiritual battles we find ourselves in. In his holy name we pray, amen.