

This next passage reminds me of my daughter. When she spoke of needing clothes, she didn't say that she needed a top, pants, or shoes. She said, "I need an outfit," though it was usually plural, outfits. And when she saw one she liked she would say, "I'd look good in that." Paul today talks of our Christian outfit. Listen!

Ephesians 6:10-20

¹⁰Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his power. ¹¹Put on the whole armor of God, so that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. ¹²For our struggle is not against enemies of blood and flesh, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. ¹³Therefore take up the whole armor of God, so that you may be able to withstand on that evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm. ¹⁴Stand therefore, and fasten the belt of truth around your waist, and put on the breastplate of righteousness. ¹⁵As shoes for your feet put on whatever will make you ready to proclaim the gospel of peace. ¹⁶With all of these, take the shield of faith, with which you will be able to quench all the flaming arrows of the evil one. ¹⁷Take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. ¹⁸Pray in the Spirit at all times in every prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert and always persevere in supplication for all the saints. ¹⁹Pray also for me, so that when I speak, a message may be given to me to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel, ²⁰for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it boldly, as I must speak.

The Word of God.

The Word of Life.

Our strength comes from God. This goes against the feeling that if we are strong, it is our accomplishment. If we are weak, it is either totally our fault or someone else's.

God is the source of our strength. Not only that, but God gives us what we need for the major struggles of our lives. However, we have to take hold of it and put it on. Without God's help, we cannot face and overcome our challenges. So, God gives us what we need.

We are given the whole armor of God. When we put it on it may change our identity. It's like little kids playing dress-up. I can see little girls dressing as great princesses or mighty warriors, or maybe a combo of both. It's like scouts putting on their uniform; it says who they are. I also remember sparkle events, as we called them. They were special events where people dressed up in their finest duds, and they sparkled.

And so, it is with putting on the whole armor of God. We are transformed like a superhero changing from the secret identity into the hero.

And without carrying the metaphor too far, we need what God provides to resist temptation and those things that come from the evil one. I know for many moderns, things like the devil or the evil one feels superstitious and a part of a less sophisticated past.

I don't believe I can change your mind, but I hope to challenge you to think about it. There have been many terrible atrocities in history. But I think of the holocaust, American Chattel Slavery, and widespread sex trafficking. Indeed, there are more, but these evils are prime examples.

The evil unleashed by them still reverberates today. This evil is far more than a bunch of human beings acting evil. It is a powerful personal force loose in the world that seeks to destroy life as God intends it to be lived. It transforms individual acts of sin into monumental evil.

I personally think that loose in the world is an evil force seeking to thwart God's will. But thank you, Jesus, as Peter Mayer sings, "God is loose in the world." And God gives us the armor we need to go into battle with the evil one who seduces millions. The evil one will not be satisfied until the power of evil captures all of our souls.

But even if you just believe in an impersonal evil force and not the evil one, what God offers us is a way to overcome the forces that confront us. These forces range from political entities to temptations to abandon our true self and give in to those forces that oppose God's intent for creation.

The armor we are offered is based on Roman soldiers' armor and contrasts it to the metaphorical armor God's saints are offered. And in the long run, what is offered to us can overcome those forces and powers that threaten our spirits.

So, what are we offered?

As if this couldn't be any timelier, the first thing we need is the belt of truth. The term fake news springs up all too often. Truth has become something I like and agree with, and untruth is something I don't like and disagree with. As "The X Files" reminded us, "The truth is out there and we are to seek it." But we have substituted a line from an old Buffalo Springfield song for truth:

A thousand people in the street (Ooh ooh ooh)

Singing songs and they carrying signs (Ooh ooh ooh)

Mostly say, "Hooray for our side" (Ooh ooh ooh)

(Interestingly this was not about a great social protest but the closing of a local hotspot.)

But fake news does contain an important aspect of truth-passion. It is declared with passion. Most of what passes for truth often is only half-truth. It does have the passion that is essential for speaking the truth. Still, it neglects discernment that takes effort and is more than parroting what our favorite talking head says we should think. The evil one spews lies with such passion that we are

tempted to accept them as truth without using the gift of discernment. We are to be passionate about truth and discern what truth is.

One clue, anything that ridicules other people, baits with hatred, or is mean-spirited, opposes God's truth and is beneath us.

Then we need a breastplate of righteousness, which involves living the way God wants us to live. And the best way to put it is God sees us righteous when we trust God enough to align our heart with God's standards.

I heard a quote from Brene Brown the other day that said, "Gratitude is a practice." It is not a one-and-done. So is righteousness or right living. As Mason Parks put it, if we stay ready, we don't have to get ready. Living God's way keeps us ready to oppose what confronts us, so we don't have to get ready when a crisis comes.

That's why the Bills practice and hold preseason games, so they will be ready when the time comes and not have to guess what's going on. Each day we must put into practice our trust in God. How we live, based on that trust, prepares us for the time when a crisis comes. When it comes, we are ready as we have been in training

On our feet, we wear whatever will help us to proclaim the gospel of peace. I have found shoes that I can depend on. Although it was a struggle to find them after my first hip replacement, I discovered that I couldn't really wear unsupportive shoes anymore.

But I found the shoes I needed after several tries. They were very supportive, and now they are all I wear. They are SAS loafers. They fit, and they support me. Indeed, not only do they help daily, but I couldn't hit the golf course without them.

They help me do what I need to do. The spiritual shoes we are to put on help us proclaim the gospel of peace and tell people God loves them and is for them, not against them. We need to find what fits and supports us, and enables us to be peacemakers in our world. God gives us the support we need to carry out proclaiming and living God's love for all.

How do we proclaim the gospel of peace? I think we trust in the support God gives us to go into all situations, even those difficult and hostile ones and see our antagonists as folks God loves. That doesn't mean we don't have to resist and restrain them at times, but we do it out of love. We do have to keep them from doing more harm to themselves or others. But our motivating force is compassion for the victims and repentance and reparations for the perpetrators.

I will admit I am not really good with this. It is an area I need to work on, though I don't very often find myself in hostile situations. But concern for the perpetrators I sometimes forget.

Another piece of our armor is the shield of faith. Faith is essentially trusting God. The greatest enemy of faith is not doubt. Doubt is an element of faith that shows just how important is what we

trust to be true. I heard the other day the enemy of faith is certainty. I didn't get it at first and I am still trying it out, but the opposite of faith is certainty.

Let me break it down this way.

Faith trusts God to be with us in our journey and struggles.

Certainty claims that we have what we need for our journey and struggles in and of ourselves. Faith in biblical terms goes way beyond self-assurance and belief. Belief is an act of the human will affirming dogmas or a timeless truth. Belief is important but secondary to faith.

Faith is our trust in God that allows us to say, "I don't know what will happen, but I will go with God in the direction God is calling me." It sounds cliché-ish, and it may be, but faith says, "I don't know what the future holds, but I know who holds the future."

Our last piece of defensive equipment is a helmet of salvation, which is the object of faith. Our ultimate trust in the words of our Brief Confession of Faith declares that in life and death, we belong to God. God claims us as precious children because that's why God created us, and despite everything, it is what God chooses to do. God is love, and that love overflows to cover everyone. The salvation God wills is not just for some but for everyone.

This means it is personal. It is what God wills for the individual but it is so much more than that. It is what God wills for creation. This calls us to work not only to allow God to bring our spirits home, but also work for the reconciliation of creation. We must focus on personal salvation but also social justice as the whole gospel of salvation. One without the other is false religion.

So far, we have explored the defensive armor we need to live faithful lives.

God also knows we must go on the offensive so we are given a sword. But unlike the Roman battle sword, an instrument of death, this sword is the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God and it brings life. Unlike the battle sword, this sword is a sword of life and love, not death and destruction. It is the sword of the gospel, which is God's love for all creation revealed in Jesus Christ.

It is an offensive weapon for people of faith. It is what we carry into battle against those forces that oppose God's intent for creation. It does not ensure that there is an immediate victory but this sword is the assurance that, come what may, God will be victorious. God's way will overcome the powers of death, and God's love and justice are the most potent weapons in the arsenal of God's people. They will be the means that all the earth is restored to its intended purpose.

We are to use this sword as the context of our prayers. It is not enough just to oppose evil and work for justice and love, but we must undergird this vital work with prayer. This prayer and work bring life in the face of the forces of evil that bring death and destructions to us, soul and body.

This sword is the last piece of our outfit, and boy do we look good in it!

Every day we dress up for God and put on the whole armor of God. Not only do we dress for the struggles of faith but each day is a sparkle event when we go into the world adorned as God's people.