



Sermon – June 14, 2020
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Verses Covered This Week

Ephesians 6:14

Ephesians 1:13

Ephesians 4:21

Romans 5:17

Now as you grab your seat let's grab our Bibles. We're going to be back in Ephesians chapter 6. Ephesians 6:14 this morning as we continue this study on the full armor of God. And if this is your first Sunday back after the Coronavirus shutdown, we want to welcome you back. And if you're a first time guest that hasn't been here before, I want to welcome you home. We're glad you're here. We've got a gift for you out at the welcome desk that we'd love to give to you after the service.

And we're going to dive back into this passage where, let's think about what's been happening the last few weeks. We've been thinking about the motivation for our battle. The fact that we face a dangerous enemy who has a dangerous plan. We live in a dangerous time. But now we're going to shift our attention from our motivation for spiritual warfare to the method of our spiritual warfare. What it looks like to fight the good fight of the faith that Paul is calling us to by working through each of these pieces of armor. We're going to see the first two of those this morning. If you'll look back at Ephesians 6:14, here's what Paul says to us.

¹⁴*Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness,*

I just got back from a road trip out to West Texas. A little town most of you've never heard of called Bronte that's halfway between Abilene and San Angelo. I didn't know it existed the first half of my life. But then I met a girl and we married and she had family that grew up out there. And so Bronte has become a part of our life. And through that marriage I've been grafted into the family. That's the first place I spent Christmas away from my family. That's the first place I drove a tractor on a farm. That's the first place I sat in the deer blind. And as I went back there this weekend, I saw pictures on the wall, not just of her family, but of me and of our boys. We are not united together through that marriage union, grafted into a family that we were not previously a part of. Someone in me who once was a stranger to that family has now been made

a son who's been grafted in with all the responsibilities and benefits that comes with being a part of the family. And what Paul has been doing in the book of Ephesians is showing us what it looks like to be in the family of God. What those responsibilities are. What those benefits look like. And that has everything to do with how we study this full armor of God. Because the main thing that we need to capture as we begin to work our way through each of these pieces of the armor is that what Paul is showing us is that these things are first true about Jesus before they are true about us. He is going to show us these different dimensions of that spiritual armor and each of them finds their fulfillment in Christ. Each one of them their culmination comes in Him. And it's only because we've been united to Him by faith. It's only because we are not part of the family that these benefits accrue to us. So what's true of Him is now true of us through salvation. And that is exactly what Paul is calling our attention to as we look back at verse 14. And what we're going to notice this morning in this text is that Paul is calling us to fight the good fight of the faith by putting on the gospel of truth and putting on the righteousness of Christ.

So let's look back there in the text. In the first half of the verse we're going to see the first big idea here that Paul says to stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth. You see the way this phrase starts with the word therefore. There is a connection here between what Paul's already said and what he's saying now. Between the reason for our battle that he's been laying out in verses 10 to 13 and now the responsibilities in the battle that he's laying out as he puts on this full armor. And he speaks there again using this central phrase to stand. This is the third time we've seen it now in the text. But it's coming with the most force here. It's a command now. Paul is calling us towards a relentless resistance to the schemes of the devil. And if we're going to do that, he's going to walk us through how to stand by armoring up in Christ through our faith union with him. And we notice the way that that begins there by speaking of having fastened on this belt of truth. That that sense of fastening, that locking, that connection that was there is what Paul is drawing our attention to. But it's interesting. If you were to look back in the original language here, he doesn't actually use the word belt. More literally, what he is saying is, the common phrase back in that time period, to gird up your loins. To secure yourself for the sake of battle. And so he's speaking there of fastening that belt of truth. Now what comes into your mind when you think of a belt? Maybe it's that, that baseball belt you put on before each game. May it's that belt your dad left sitting on the refrigerator to remind you you needed to obey your mom. Maybe it's that belt that your favorite WWE champion hoisted up when he one WrestleMania. Or maybe it's that belt you slip on every day when you're headed to work. We all have different pictures when it comes to belts. But what Paul has in mind here when he's speaking of fastening the belt of truth, is the belt of a Roman soldier. And this was a belt that was worn under the armor. The purpose of it was in order to secure their tunic, in order to hold their sword in place, they would fasten that on there. They would cinch it tight in order for them to have secret strength in the middle of the battle. You couldn't see it, but it was essential to their success. It encompassed everything about them and held them secure in the midst of the conflict. And when he speaks here of putting on the belt of truth, that's the picture that Paul is giving us. That the truth of the gospel is the secret strength that we need to fight the good fight of the faith. It is what holds us secure. It is to encompass our lives as believers. Now we've heard the phrase, tighten your belts. We get that idea. In fact, during Coronavirus some of you are thinking not about tightening the belt, but loosening it if we're being honest. But the whole principle of tightening your belt is one in which you know an important moment is coming; of adversity, of danger, of difficulty. And you are seeking to secure things, to hold

them in place in the midst of the trial that you are facing. And when Paul speaks here of fastening the belt of truth, that's precisely the picture that he lays out.

So here we are. If this is the first piece of the armor that Paul was calling us to, then what we need to be doing this morning is asking the same question that Pilate asked of Jesus when he put Him on trial. What is truth? We don't have to wonder what Paul has in mind here. In fact, we see the word truth in the concept truth used several times in the book of Ephesians. So hold your spot right here in your Bible, but slide back a page or two to Ephesians chapter 1. And I want you to see one way that Paul uses truth in Ephesians. In Ephesians 1:13 notice what he says.

¹³In Him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in Him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit.

So notice what he does. He speaks of the word of truth and right after that uses the phrase the gospel of salvation. For Paul those are interchangeable. They're the same idea expressed in two different ways. The word of truth is the gospel of Jesus Christ. But turn with me over now to chapter 4 in verse 21. You're going to see him use things in a very similar way here. Paul says in chapter 4, in verse 21 of Ephesians, he says this:

²¹assuming that you have heard about Him and were taught in Him, as the truth is in Jesus,

You catch that? The truth is in Jesus. So he's saying here, the gospel truth is his focus and the reason for that is because the truth is in Jesus. Or to put it even more precisely, if you remember when Thomas is speaking to Jesus in John chapter 14, Jesus responds to him and he says this, "I am the way, the truth, and the life." Jesus, Himself, makes the claim that He is the truth. And if we want to understand what it means to put on the belt of truth, what Paul has in mind here is not truth is some abstract set of ideas, but truth is a person and His name is Jesus. That's the picture that he's driving at here. That Jesus is the foundation of fidelity that gives us the picture of truth that God is calling us to. And so what we need to wrestle with now is what happens when we embrace the truth? Well what we know is that Jesus says elsewhere in John chapter 8 that you shall know the truth and the truth shall do what? It will set you free. It will provide deliverance from your enemies. And we know that to be the case in the battle of life that we face that when we put on the belt of truth, it helps us to fight the good fight of the faith in two key ways. And one is fighting deception and the other is fostering discernment.

So when I was in school here, I had a friend of mine who had been dating a girl for a long time, their anniversary was coming up, and he knew he needed to get her a gift. So he thought, "What should I get her?" He wasn't sure, but he knew women like candles. So he decided to go to the store and go candle shopping. And so he makes his way over to the candle aisle and he's checking out, he's just trying to slip in and slip out as quickly as he can. Except for while he's there, the store clerk comes up and asks him if he needs any help. Well the truth is he did need help but he didn't want it. And the reason he didn't want it is because this friend of mine has no sense of smell. And he knew when she asked for help, she was going to give him some scents to check out and he was faced with the dilemma. Do I be honest with her and tell her, "Hey, I can't smell. I've got a medical condition. No, really, I can't smell." And spend that extra two or three minutes he didn't want to waste trying to convince her? Or Would it just be easier to

pretend as if he could smell and to play along with it so that he didn't have to deal with the awkward conversation? Well he picked door number two and decided to just fake it 'til he makes it. And so she said, "Oh, I think you'd like this one." She hands him a red candle and he, with the lid off, and he's supposed to take a big smell so he does that. He's looking for the label to see if he can figure out what it is so he can pretend like he knows what he's talking about. But he realizes as he's pulling it up to his nose that the labels are on the bottom and they're not easy to see. And so he'd take that big sniff and then as he was pulling it down, he's kind of flip it over just long enough to see, "Oh, cherry blossom special. That's a real fruity scent. I like that." Then she'd hand him the green one and it would have an evergreen smell to it. Until finally he made that selection. And what was behind all that is that he wanted to cultivate an image for her out of convenience rather than create an identity that was rooted in conviction. And what I mean by that, it was easier for him to pretend as if he was something else, than to be transparent about who he truly was. Every one of us faces that same challenge, don't we? That we can be bought into this process of cultivating an image of how others perceive us. What we think they want from us. What we want to project out to them rather than being transparent. Rather than being vulnerable. Rather than being authentic about who we truly are and the challenges we're facing. And maybe that shows up on your Facebook feed when you post all the good things but ignore the bad. Or maybe that shows up when you walk in here to church this morning and an old friend you haven't seen for months during Coronavirus asks you how you are and your answer is that you're doing fine when you're actually dying inside. That pull towards cultivating an image can be a temptation in each one of us. And Paul was giving us a warning here. That ought not be that way for the Christian. That instead we should put on the belt of truth because truth helps us fight temptation. If you remember last week we talked about the ways of the devil when we realize that he works both in temptation and in accusation. He seeks to lead us astray in deception and one of the reasons Paul starts with the belt of truth is because the truth is the pathway to lasting victory over temptation. The way we resist satan's lies in our lives is by replacing them with the reality of the gospel. It helps us to stand firm in the midst of challenges. So we put on the belt of truth because Jesus sets us free from the lies that we may be prone to believe.

Now a couple months ago as we were getting settled in here, our family had moved down from Nashville and we'd been driving a minivan for years, but our boys are finally big enough that we could shed the minivan life and move over to an SUV. So we put it up for sale online and we found somebody to purchase it. And so we agreed to meet up at a gas station in Bryan at one point to make the transaction. We brought the paperwork, they brought the money. And I found myself in the middle of this transaction with this realization. Here's the new pastor in town holding thousands of dollars of cash in the back of a gas station doing a transaction with somebody he's never met. And I thought, if somebody rolls up on here, they might wonder what's actually going on. But in that moment, one of the things that we did, not knowing these people and not knowing how trustworthy they might be, is we brought with us one of those pens that you might see in a convenient store or a retail store where you can mark the bill and immediately see if it's the real thing or not. There's an instant ability to discern whether it is legitimate or counterfeit. And so we marked those bills to make sure that the money that we were receiving was authentic. We could discern immediately truth from falsehood in that moment. And when Paul is speaking here of putting on the belt of truth, he's not just calling us to fight deception, he's calling us to foster discernment. That we want to understand who God is, the way He's designed the world, the way the gospel is at work so that we can be people that

walk in wisdom. So that that truth can embody the way that we see the world. And that's particularly challenging in the cultural moment we live in right now, isn't it? Where so many of us are separated into our individual tribes of particular beliefs and passions. We get information and news from our preferred sources that fuel our preferred narrative. And we are experiencing oftentimes the same thing from different vantage points. Perhaps that's shown up most acutely here in the Brazos Valley over the last couple weeks in the controversy that's emerged about what to do with the Sul Ross statue on campus. And so I'm sure in a room filled like this there are some of you that can't even imagine the idea of taking that statue down. You think to yourself, "This was a good leader. And yeah, he might have done some bad things, but he saved this university. He saved Prairie View A&M. He's so integral. If they take him down, where do things stop?" But then on the other side of things, there's those of you that for you this isn't a hard decision. Yes, it should come down. He was a bad leader bound up in bad things. And certainly he had some great accomplishments to save the university. But that doesn't replace the fact of what he was involved in. And we can't commemorate what we can't celebrate. And if we can't start here, where can we begin?" And I don't know where you're at this morning. But what Paul is showing us when he's talking about picking up the belt of truth and walking as people of discernment is the importance of understanding things from other people's perspectives.

So last week I talked a little bit about golf, my friend getting caught in the fire ants, and I'm going to talk about golf again. And I'm worried if I do this two weeks in a row you're going to think I'm a golfer. And I'm not that great at golf. But it fits here. If you've been watching golf on television like it's back on this weekend, you'll see as they come to the green they'll line up their putt. And before they putt it, they'll crouch down behind their ball, they'll look at the path, they'll think about the angle from their vantage point of where they're about to strike the ball. But for the good golfers like them who are at the professional level, before they make that putt, they don't just stand and look at it from their vantage point. What do they do? They walk all the way around the other side of the ball and they look at it from the opposite perspective. They look at it from another view. And by looking at it both from their vantage point and the opposite vantage point, it allows them to see the path more clearly. It enables them to have a better chance at getting things right in the moment. And isn't that exactly what we are called to do as Christians? To be the type of people who have hearts for discernment that want to understand different perspectives. To see how things might be perceived differently than them. In a sense, what Paul is showing us here is as we take up the belt of truth, he's showing us that we need to put ourselves in other people's shoes if we want to understand other people's views. That truth allows us to fight temptation, but it also enables us to foster discernment. So Paul calls us here to take up the full armor of God first by putting on the belt of truth.

But I want you to notice the way that he continues on in verse 14 with the second piece of the armor. If you look back there, in the middle of verse 14, we see the second one. He says,

Having put on the breastplate of righteousness,

So Paul first discussed the truth of the gospel and now he's going to discuss the righteousness of Christ. And he speaks there using the word, having put on. It's the same verb in the original language that we saw back in verse 11; to take up, to put on, to clothe yourself in this. And the breastplate in that time period, let me describe it for you. When the soldier was preparing to

enter into the battle, that breastplate that would cover their chest was lined on the interior with leather. And then it was overlaid with metal that would provide protection to the vital organs to prevent a deathblow being struck against them by the enemy. So when Paul speaks here of righteousness as a breastplate for us, it is speaking there of how the righteousness that we have through our faith in Christ protects us from the deathblow that satan seeks to bring through sin and death. But this isn't the only place we see the imagery of a breastplate used in the Bible. In fact, last week, we talked about, if you want to make another round of notes in your notes as you're taking them, Isaiah 59:17 speaks of God as a divine warrior who puts on righteousness as a breastplate. Or you can look elsewhere in the writings of Paul in 1 Thessalonians 5:8. He talks about putting on the breastplate of faith and love. The idea here is being embodied by the gospel. Embracing the realities that are now true for us in Christ. One of which he speaks of here is the righteousness of Christ. To help us understand that, if you'll hold your place here in Ephesians. I want you to slide back to the book of Romans to chapter 5. And I want us to see the way that Paul speaks of righteousness there because it will illuminate how it is that we are to understand this concept of the breastplate of righteousness. Notice with me in Romans 5 in verse 17, here's what Paul's doing. He's making this contrast between the sin of Adam and the righteousness of Christ. The failures of the first Adam and the victories of the second Adam, Jesus. And he has this to say towards the end of the chapter in verse 17.

¹⁷For if, because of one man's trespass, death reigned through that one man, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ.

Do you see the contrast there? He speaks first of Adam, who in the garden with Eve is led into temptation. He eats of forbidden fruit. He turns his back on God and through that sin, it leads to an unrighteousness that brings about death. And that death is not just true for Adam and Eve. It is true for every one of us apart from Christ throughout human history. But notice the way that Paul contrasts it there. He says, "Yes, the one man brings death, but what happens through the new man, through the second Adam, through Jesus Christ, Himself?" Look back. He says there that through that one man that they will receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness. That righteousness comes to us as a gift. Not of our own doing. Not of our own merits. Because we know the Scripture teaches that all of us have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. None of us have reached the standard of righteousness that He demands. And yet, what did He do? He sent His own Son to take on flesh to fulfill the law at every level, to go to the cross to die on our behalf, to raise, be raised from the grave so that He can show that He has power to overcome sin, and He is seated now at the right hand of the Father reigning as the righteous king of the universe and inviting every one of us to receive that free gift.

As Cami and I have gotten our family settled here in Bryan/College Station, we've had a lot of things to change. And so we had to make our trip over to the DMV and get a new Texas license plate and I'm glad to report it was a great experience. You made an online appointment. We were in and out in 20 minutes. When has that ever happened at the DMV? In contrast, the tax office was a different experience. And look, I have nothing against them, I'm sure they're overwhelmed with demand, they're probably shorthanded because they can't have as many workers; this is no knock on them. But Cami went up there to change one of our car titles and spent, I think, north of 3 hours there. And they notified you. If you want to do this transfer or title, you've got to have these materials, these documents, these things to validate who you are

and your ownership. And every T must be dotted, every I must be crossed or else you are not going to be able to complete the transaction and you will be turned away. And as she was waiting in line, about two hours in she noticed a man storm out of the tax office furious. And he started venting about his experience in there. He had everything he needed to complete the transaction until they got to one of the last pages. And because his grandfather, who lives in Waco, was also on the title of the vehicle, he had to have that grandfather's signature and he didn't have it. He spent two hours waiting and was sent away to have to travel to Waco and back to get it to start the whole process again. Why? Because they had established a standard that he had failed to meet and so he was not able to complete the transaction that he intended.

When the Bible speaks of our need for righteous standing before God, it is giving us a similar picture. That God has established His law as the standard by which He evaluates our standing before Him. And if we fail to uphold the law and even one space, if there's the spiritual equivalent of one signature missing, we cannot stand before God. It doesn't matter how good you get it in every other area of your life. Even one sin is enough to separate us from His righteousness and we stand condemned. But God made a way for us. And that's what Paul is speaking of here. When he talks about putting on the breastplate of righteousness, he's speaking of embracing the righteousness that we have in Christ. That even though our sin made us like filthy rags before God, we have now been made new. We have now been made clean. We have been now made sons and daughters of the living King. That is the picture that we have there. And if that's true for you this morning, it changes everything about the way you live. Because if we are committed to putting on the righteousness of Christ in our lives, then what that's going to do is to remind us of several realities. One of which is that for those of you that know Jesus, there is now no condemnation for you in Christ Jesus. That when the accusations of the enemy come, when the shame of sin grips your heart, when the guilt of failure comes into your life, the gospel is a reminder that you are righteous before God because of your faith union with Jesus and your sin doesn't determine your identity, your Savior determines your identity. There's no condemnation. But even more than that, there is an assurance of salvation. So whether you've just come to know Jesus or you prayed a prayer when you were 6 years old, or you've seen the roller coaster of your life and wondered, "Is this really enough for me that I believe in Jesus?" If the enemy brings doubts into your heart, you should do what one of my friends liked to talk about and to doubt your doubts. Because the breastplate of righteousness is enough to protect you from the accusations and the judgment that the enemy seeks to bring against you. But it's even more than that. That when we recognize the righteousness of Christ serves as a breastplate protecting our spiritual lives, what it enables us to do is to find deliverance from the guilt that so often grips us. I know there are some of you that are perfectionists out there. You try to get everything right and you don't live up to your own standard, then that guilt wracks you. Well what this reality reminds us of is that if we have been set free from the judgement of God through the righteousness of Jesus, how much more does that mean we've been set free from the judgment of ourselves that we often heap upon ourselves in our darkest moments? There is no guilt, there is not condemnation, there is no doubt for the believer who has experienced the saving grace of God in Jesus Christ. His righteousness is as if it's a breastplate protecting your spiritual lives so that you can go off into battle. But let's be clear about this. When Paul speaks here of taking up the breastplate of righteousness, he's not just talking about our disposition before God, but our position before others. That in other words, it's not just about who it is that we are before God in Christ, but how we live with those around us. That he's not just focused only on our assurance, but our actions. Not just on our character, but our conduct. Not just

before our standing before God, but our standing before men. That we are called to live out the righteousness that we have experienced in Jesus. To pursue the holiness that is now ours in Jesus Christ. There is a picture that Paul is giving us here of the soldier of Christ going out into the battle full of action and advancing against even the attempted deathblows of the enemy. Because we have been set free through the blood of Jesus.

Now one of the things I love about this church is our commitment to serving those with special needs. It's an amazing ministry that is such an impact on those in the Brazos Valley. One of the exciting things that our staff just found out a week or two ago that I'm happy to share with you this morning is that our church has been selected to be a host site for the Tim Tebow Foundation event called A Night to Shine in February. It's an amazing opportunity. If you haven't heard about it before, A Night to Shine is a chance to bring together teenagers with special needs to give them the prom experience that they would never have. And so come February, the Friday before Valentine's Day, the FLC will be converted to a place that will give them a night to remember. Where they can have that experience that they wouldn't have had otherwise. And those students will come in and they'll be wearing their clothes, but they'll be transformed into a new look. We'll give them a prom dress or clothes that will be fit for that evening. The women will have their hair and makeup done. They will, in a sense, have a moment where they are transformed to be kings and queens for an evening. To have the experience that they would have never had apart from this. And when we think about what Paul is reminding us, of how God is at work in the gospel, it's a bit like that Night to Shine. That through the righteousness of Christ, what God does is He takes those of us who are clothed in filthy rags who are clothed in the judgement of our sin, and he reminds us that one day those filthy rags will be gone and will be replaced in robes of glory as we spend eternity with our King Jesus in heaven. But in that time between the times, we have already been set free from the judgment and the filth of our sin and we are awaiting for that day when we will stand in robes of glory before our Father. And in the meantime, we are called to take up the full armor of God, to put on that as our uniform as we fight the good fight of the faith. And so the call of the gospel to each one of us this morning is not to reign as kings and queens for an evening, but for all of eternity. By fighting the good fight of the faith by putting on the truth of the gospel and putting on the righteousness of Christ.

Let's close in a word of prayer.

Lord, every one of us faces doubts in our hearts. We face questions about if You're really there. We face questions about Your goodness. We face uncertainties in the days ahead about how we will live our lives, Lord. And I pray that Your belt of truth would surround us, that it would encompass us, that it would give us that secret strength to persevere as we fight temptation and as we foster discernment. That we can reflect the gospel truth that you have allowed us to experience through the light of Jesus. Lord we pray that You would give us a fresh vision for the righteousness that we have now experienced in Christ through that saving relationship we have in Him, Lord, the way that You have set us free from guilt and shame and judgment and all the accusations of the enemy. And I pray in this time, Lord, if there are any in the room that have not experienced the freedom they can have through the righteousness of Christ, I pray that You do that this morning. And we ask it in His name. Amen.