



Sermon – June 28, 2020  
Phillip Bethancourt

**Verses Covered This Week**

*Ephesians 6:17*

*Ephesians 2:4 – 5*

*Hebrews 4:12*

And as you grab your seat, let's grab our Bible. We're going to be in Ephesians 6 continuing our study in the full armor of God. And it's so good to have you with us. If this is your first time as a guest with us, welcome home. We're glad you're here. Or if you're just now coming back after we've been away for several weeks, we're glad to have you back with us this morning. We're turning our attention back to the full armor of God. We are going to finish up our look at these different pieces of armor today by turning our attention now to Ephesians 6 and beginning in verse 17. If you'll follow along with me. Here's what Paul has to say to us this morning.

[<sup>17</sup>take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God,](#)

It started off as a normal day for Sergeant Bryan McQueen stationed out in Afghanistan. He was getting ready for whatever he was going to be doing the rest of the day. And as he got dressed, he had that same type of frustration he often did when he had days on the base. Where all he wanted to do was put on a ball cap and relax but he knew he had to get in his full gear including his helmet because that was protocol. Even in a safe place like the base. And so he got dressed that day, he headed out to meet with his unit who were heading towards another part of the base and it turned out that that day wasn't just a normal day after all for them. Because little did Bryan know that in moments later as they were traversing across the base, there would be an insider attack that took place on their property. You see, two insurgents had disguised themselves as Afghan military police and they had fallen in with their ranks and at just the right moment, they took their weapons and opened fire on Bryan and the rest of his unit. There were people who died and were injured as a result of that. And Bryan was struck by one of those bullets from behind. In fact, it hit him right in the back of the head. He was thrown to the ground. He said later on that it was so powerful it felt as if a horse was kicking him in the back of the head. But he didn't die from it. In fact, he was barely injured. And the reason for that was because he wasn't wearing his ball cap when that struck him. He was wearing this military grade helmet, one that had been newly issued just a few years' prior to that, made of dense Kevlar that when that bullet struck it, absorbed the blow from an enemy attack and allowed him

to live. That helmet, in a sense, was his salvation. And when we come to our text this morning and we see Paul speaking here of taking up that helmet of salvation, he's reminding us of the victory that we have through the blood of Jesus Christ. About the way that that salvation is placed upon our head, not just as a helmet of salvation, but in a sense as a crown of glory. Where we have been raised with Christ to walk in newness of life and to experience victory over the attacks of our relentless enemy.

And as we turn our time in this text and we look at verse 17, what we're going to notice is that as Paul walks us through these last two pieces of the armor, he's going to call us to do two specific things. And I want you to notice the first one with me there at the start of verse 17 where we see Paul calling us to depend on the salvation of God. So look back at how he says it there. He says, take the helmet of salvation. In the original language, that word take is a command. It's the first command we see in the text since the one back in verse 14 that frames up the full armor about standing firm. And now he gives us another command to take. You know exactly what he has in mind here because as you walked into church this morning, if you're here with us in person, you passed right by one of those dispensers of hand sanitizer and it's a similar kind of concept. Where you take of it. You welcome it gladly. You receive it for the purpose of protection that it's intended to provide. And when Paul speaks here of taking the helmet of salvation, that's the idea. And he's talking there about this helmet. Remember he's walking through with us the images that he would have seen on Roman soldiers dressed in their military attire. And one of the things that they would wear would be these helmets. And they would be upon their head. They would be made of thick metal. They would be lined on the inside for both comfort and protection. Some of them had extensions that went along the cheeks in order to provide better coverage for the face. And the whole purpose of the helmet in the midst of a battle was intended to protect you from a death blow from your enemy. Because if they were able to successfully strike your head, then they were likely to be able to defeat you. And when Paul speaks there of taking up the helmet of salvation, part of what he has in mind there is this helmet that the Roman soldiers would wear. But we also remember from prior weeks that he's not just picking up on imagery from Roman soldiers. He's picking up imagery from throughout the Bible. And so we won't turn back there because we've already looked at it in weeks past, but in Isaiah 59:17 we see where Paul gets this language from where the prophet is writing about God as a divine warrior who wears righteousness as a breastplate and 59:17 tells us he also wears a helmet of salvation. Or maybe if you look over in 1 Thessalonians 5:8, if we were to turn there, you would see how Paul talks about taking up the helmet of the hope of salvation. These are the pictures that Paul is giving us here. That we are to take up this helmet of salvation. What does he have in mind by that? What is the picture that he's giving us? He is talking about the way that in the cross and resurrection of Christ, God has accomplished salvation for us. And now through our faith union with Him and by the power of the Spirit, we can take what He has accomplished and apply it to our own hearts so that we can be made new. That is the image of salvation. And just so that we are clear for what exactly Paul has in mind for salvation in the book of Ephesians, turn back a page or two in your Bible to Ephesians chapter 2. Because we're going to see Paul spell out even more clearly what he has in mind in verse 4 about the nature of God's salvation in our life. Here's what it says in verses 4 and 5.

<sup>4</sup>But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which He love us, <sup>5</sup>even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ – by grace you have been saved –

You see, Paul's speaking there of salvation, this rescue mission that we see painted throughout the Bible that God rescues us from our sin by grace, it tells us. And Paul is establishing this contrast there, isn't he in verses 4 and 5 of chapter 2. Between death and life that he tells us we are dead in our sins, that the wages of that sin is death. We deserve the judgment that God is going to bring upon us. We walk in the way of death apart from Christ. And yet what does God do? He sends His only Son to die and be raised on our behalf so that He can be made alive. You see that in verse 5? That we are made alive together with Him. That Jesus experiences the salvation that He now makes available to all of us through His defeat of the grave. Salvation is true of Him and only because it's true of Him can it now be true of us through our connection with Him by faith. He says, "We have been made alive together with Christ." And if we have found God in salvation, that salvation covers us in the midst of spiritual battle just as a helmet for the soldier of Christ.

A couple weeks ago before this Saharan dust cloud came upon us and dropped the temperatures a little bit, we were hitting record highs already this early in the summer. And I just have to tell you, my Tennessee truck battery wasn't ready for Texas heat. And so I drove it out to watch our boys play Little League at Harvey Little League and when I got in the car to come up here for a church meeting not long after that, the truck wouldn't start. So Cami had to pull up her car next to me, we pulled out the jumper cables, and got it just enough juice to make it over here to the church. And you know how that works, the jumpers get it going, but the battery was still dead and so it was only going to last so long. It wasn't until the next day when Curtis and the facilities team helped me to take out what was dead in my car and bring it back to life. To replace that dead battery and to bring about a new one that could allow that truck to operate in the way that it was originally intended. And when Paul speaks here of being raised to newness of life, of being dead in our sins, and now made alive, this picture of the helmet of salvation is that in the gospel, God does just that. He takes what is dead and He brings it back to life. We can spend our lives searching for the jumper cables to give us jolts of life in the way that God's designed us. But unless we are made new, unless there is a heart transplant, then that salvation will never be in our lives and never transform us in the way that God's intended. And that wasn't just an idea to Paul. He had experienced that himself. I mean, think back to the book of Acts that we read about how Paul is, as he describes himself, the chief of sinners. He is a persecutor of the church and yet what does God do? He appears to him in Christ on the road to Damascus and everything changes. God rips out a heart of stone and He replaces it with a heart of flesh. He takes blind eyes and He opens them to be able to see. He takes this one who was dead in his sins and He makes him alive in Christ. And that reminds us of this reality this morning, whether you're watching here in person or you're gathered with us online, the Bible is crystal clear. There are only two types of people in the world. Those who are dead and those who are alive. And the difference between those two is the answer to the question, have you put on the helmet of salvation? And if you haven't yet experienced that today, we would love to share with you what it looks like to turn away from your sin and to turn to Christ in the salvation that Paul is speaking of here. Because Paul knows that the entire Scripture is telling a story of salvation. From the very beginning when God makes Adam and Eve and they rebel against Him through their sin, they take a forbidden fruit. Right in the aftermath of that, God makes a promise of one day He will raise up a deliverer who will crush the head of the serpent and the entire Old Testament is building with longing and expectation that God will bring about a new Exodus. Just as He set His people free from the dominion of Pharaoh and brought them into a

promised land, so one day a Messiah will come who will defeat sin fully and finally and make a way for us to experience that eternal promised land. And that is the picture of salvation that Paul is speaking of here when he talks about putting on the helmet of salvation. And isn't it fitting that he speaks about salvation and its connection to our heads or to our minds. This helmet of salvation because so often doesn't the spiritual battle that we encounter on a daily basis take place in our thought life? Think about the way your thoughts come after you every day. Sometimes from the moment you wake up that doubt, that disappointment, that despair, that discouragement, that deception is already assaulting you. You can't even get your mind working before your mind is working against you. And the helmet of salvation enables us to stand firm no matter what challenges we face, what difficulties we encounter in the thought life of our own mind. Whether it is a pride that tells us we are better than everyone else, or a pity that tells us we could never be as good as anyone else, and everything in between. The helmet of salvation is the key to finding victory in our thought life. So often the Scripture tells us to take our thoughts captive to Christ. And yet if we're being honest, our thoughts often take us captive to them.

You know, in our culture over the last few weeks we've seen protests play out all around the country. And one of the most unique developments has been out in Seattle where for a several week period, the protests there grew and developed to a point where a police precinct abandoned the precinct and some of the protesters established what they called an autonomous zone in Seattle. Have you heard about this? So they've claimed several city blocks and they kind of fenced them in and claimed that once you entered those barricades, you're leaving America and you're entering into this autonomous zone where there's no rules. There's no police. There's no regulations. Well fast forward just a few weeks later and here we are. There's been several shootings that have happened there. The city of Seattle is actively trying to figure out how do we unwind this. But as I've seen that play out, what dawned on me this week is that I often have a tendency to do the exact same thing in my own heart and thought life. I'm ready to give God everything about me. You can have it all, Lord, I want to follow You. And yet there are often these times where I carve out these autonomous zones in my own heart. You can have everything else, but you can't have this. This anxiety that is gripping me, I'm going to hold on to it as tightly as it's holding on to me. And I'm not going to give that over to You. Or this lust that nobody else can see, these desires for others that I know I'm wanting to satisfy with forbidden fruit has taken root in my heart and I protect them rather than crucify them. And the way that Paul is calling us to respond to that is by putting on the helmet of salvation. To remember that we have been set free and to go to war against these thoughts so often take root in our hearts. To stand firm against them so that we might walk in a manner worthy of the gospel. Putting those sins to death knowing that we need to kill sin before it kills us. Paul is speaking here first about how we must depend on the salvation of God. But I want you to notice the way that the text goes on in the second half of this verse.

The second big idea that we see here is that we need to deploy the word of God. Do you see it back there at the second half of the verse? In verse 17 he says this:

<sup>17</sup>.....take the sword of the Spirit which is the word of God

So what does Paul do? He shifts his attention from the ways of God and salvation now to the word of God in Scripture. He talks about the sword of the Spirit. And many scholars as they study through this text will point out to you that of all the pieces of the armor that Paul has

spoken of here, this is the first and only offensive weapon. This is what we are called to wage war with and to go to battle with. And this sword that he speaks of here is a Roman soldier's sword. The Roman soldier would have two different types of swords that they might deploy in different battle circumstances. This one was the short sword. It was about two feet in length. It was often curved at the end and its primary function was to be used in close, hand-to-hand, close quarter combat. When you were in direct confrontation with the enemy, this was your most effective weapon to guarantee victory against their attacks. And Paul is speaking there of taking up the sword of the Spirit. It is what the Spirit of God wields in our hearts in order to enable us to find victory. The Spirit of God wields the word of God so that we might experience the victory of God. And he tells us what that sword of the Spirit is; the word of God. And think about the way that the word shows up all throughout the Bible. From the very beginning, God speaks the world into existence through a word in Genesis chapter 1. And we see right after that in Genesis 3, that there is a war of words that plays out between God who gives instructions to Adam and Eve and then to the serpent who seeks to lead them astray through words. And God delivers His people from their sin. He promises a future deliverance through a Messiah who will crush the head of the serpent. And as we go through the Old Testament, over and over again God speaks to His people through His word. He gives them a word from Mt. Sinai in the ten commandments. He gives them the law through His word. He sends them prophets who speak the word of God to the people of God. And each step of the way this is building towards the coming of the Promised One. The coming of a Messiah. And as we show up in the New Testament, we see that Messiah talked about in the start of John 1. In what way? In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God. In other words, the word of God is not just a voice from God, the word of God is the son of God, Jesus, Himself. And then what we find is that God gives the church His Scripture as both a word from Christ and a word about Christ. As we wait in expectation for the return of our victorious King who'll have a sword coming from His mouth as He comes to make all things new and all things right. And I want you to notice, if you'll hold your spot here in Ephesians 6, and turn over to the book of Hebrews chapter 4. I want you to see the way that the author of Hebrews speaks about this word of God. Because what you're going to find is that in Hebrews 4:12, he uses very similar language to what we find here when Paul speaks about taking the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. Look with me at Hebrews 4:12. Here's what it says.

<sup>12</sup>For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and Spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

Do you see the way that he speaks there of the word as a sword in the same way that Paul does? Well one of the big challenges that the American military has faced over the past few years as we've waged a war on terror, especially in the Middle East, is when they discover a high value asset that they need to take out, how do you do that in a way that minimizes the risk of collateral damage to civilians and others. The common way to do it previously is you would fly a drone and you would shoot a missile down that would take out that enemy, but it also might affect others that they didn't intend to around it. And so what the military has been able to do is develop a new weapon called the R9X. The R9X is also deployed from a drone, but instead of carrying an explosive payload, it instead doesn't have a missile that explodes when it is fired down. Let's imagine there's a convoy and it knows that the lead is in the lead car and it needs to take him out in the passenger seat. It is laser targeted and right as it's preparing to strike its

target, from that missile emerge six double-edged sword blades. And as it is about to strike the target, it pierces through it in order to make direct micro-targeted contact and to take out that enemy combatant while reducing the risk of collateral damage to those around them. And when the author of Hebrews is speaking here of the way that the word of God functions as a double-edged sword that divides joints and marrow that reveals the intentions and desires of the heart, that's the way God is reminding us that the sword of the Spirit is designed to work in our own lives. That God is in the business of relentlessly targeting the sin in our life and rooting it out and destroying it. He is targeting the lies that we so often believe and reminding us of the truth that is revealed for us in the gospel. When Paul speaks here of the sword of the Spirit being the word of God, that should change the way that we understand how the word of God functions in our lives in several ways. The first one is that if we really believe that the word of God is the sword of the Spirit for God's victory in our life, then what it's going to do is transform how we assess Scripture in our theology. In other words, the way that we see the Bible, this isn't just a book. It isn't just 66 books put together, written by man. This is God's word. It is true. It is trustworthy. It is sufficient. It is perfect. It is without error. I remember my grandparents finished out their lives here as part of this church. But before they lived here in College Station, they were longtime members at a church in Austin. And they called a new pastor just like me. I'm two months in this week to this new role. And I can imagine this moment, my grandmother was in charge of the women's missionary union and wanted to host the new pastor for lunch so he could meet a lot of the ladies and they could meet him. She was speaking with him before the lunch began and asked the pastor, "How would you like me to introduce you?" So he told her a little bit about himself and his family and his background. But he said to her, "If you don't know what to say about me, just make sure everybody knows I believe in the inerrancy of the Bible. So she gets up there, the lunch begins, she begins to introduce him, talk about his family, his background, and then she says, "Pastor wants you to know the most important thing about him is that he believes in the inaccuracy of the Bible." And the whole room loses it just like you did. Because she totally misspoke, mistaking inerrancy for inaccuracy. And as I begin my time with you, Central family, I want you to know that for as long as God calls me to be your pastor, we will be a church committed to the inerrancy of the Bible. We will stand on God's truth regardless of what the culture has to say. In fact, this week was the five-year anniversary of the Obergefell decision that legalized same-sex marriage. And it doesn't matter where the culture goes, we know that God has designed the marriage and family to work in a way that reflects the design of Christ in the church between one man and one woman. And we will not waiver because we understand that the word of God is the sword of the Spirit that helps us to stand even in a culture that is against us.

But it does more than just that. It doesn't just shape how we understand the Scripture in our theology. I also want you to notice how if we see the word of God as the sword of the Spirit, it transforms how we address the Scripture in our preaching and teaching. So what you're going to notice when you spend time at this church, whether you've been here for decades or days, is that we are a church that's committed to studying God's word. Every Sunday when we get up here and open the word of God in preaching, you're going to hear an expositional sermon where God's word drives the message. Where His truth shapes the teaching. And you're not just going to find that in a Sunday morning whether you're here in person or online, you're going to see that in your life groups. Where we're opening the word of God together. Our Zeal groups for our students. Our gospel project groups for our children. In every aspect of our ministry, we are a word-centered church committed to the truths of the gospel. And part of the reason for that is

because we want to equip each one of you to handle the sword of the Spirit yourself. To rightly wield it in the battle. To know what it looks like to study it and to know it and to be known by it. To hide these truths in our hearts so that we might be able to stand even in the biggest battles that we face. But if we also believe that the word of God is the sword of the Spirit, it's also going to change the way that we apply the Scripture in the midst of our temptations. So think with me for a minute about Matthew chapter 4. Do you remember what happened there? Jesus is baptized and then He goes out into the wilderness for this 40-day window where there's no food. And at the end of that, the enemy comes to Him and the devil seeks to tempt Him. First he tempts Him towards self-provision by trying to convince Him to turn stones into bread. Then he tempts Him next towards self-protection, to take Him up on top of the temple and have Him throw Himself down knowing that the angels will protect Him. Then he tempts Him finally with self-preservation. That he says, "If you'll just bow down to me, I will give You all the kingdoms of the world." And at each point, at each moment of deception, in each way that satan seeks to lead Him astray, do you remember how Jesus responds? He responds to the seduction of the serpent by stonewalling it with the sword of the Spirit. He takes the word of God and resists the enemy of God. He stands against the temptation by standing on the truths of the Bible. He points back to Deuteronomy 6 and Deuteronomy 8; man will not live by bread alone but by every word that comes from the mouth of God. And in that moment, we see Jesus succeeding where Israel failed. They had been out in the wilderness. They had been tempted by the evil one. And they had fallen short of that. And yet Jesus stands firm. He resists the pull of the evil one and He gives us a model to follow by the power of the Spirit. That when the temptations of life come, we are called to take up the sword of the Spirit and stand in defense, to stand in resistance, to keep fighting the good fight of the faith.

Bryan McQueen survived that day. He was, he survived and was able to go back into the battlefield. That wouldn't have happened in wars past. World War I, World War II, he probably would have lost his life that day. But things were different for him because he was better protected. But soldiers in our day and age aren't just better protected, they're also better prepared. A study was done after World War I and World War II and they looked at what percentage of front-line soldiers actually fired their weapon in the midst of the battle. These guys are right across from the enemy where the battle is strongest. How many of them shot their weapon? How many of them actually engaged in the fight? And you might be surprised at the answer. The researchers discovered that in World War I and World War II only 15 to 20% of frontline soldiers actually fired their weapons in the midst of the battle. That's it. And so when the military recognized this, they began to reevaluate how they train, how they deploy, how they send out their soldiers so that they would be more likely to engage. And so by the time the Korean War came along, they raised that level to 55%. By the time Vietnam came along, it was 90%. And to a day and age like now, with men like Bryan McQueen, every one of them is properly trained to be deployed to use their weapon in the midst of the warfare they've called us to. And what we recognize this morning in Ephesians 6, when Paul is speaking here of depending on the salvation of God, and deploying the word of God, he is calling us off the sidelines and into the frontlines of the battle that we might stand firm by the power of the gospel. So let's stand in that gospel this morning as we go to the Lord in a word of prayer.

Father, we know that we face a relentless enemy. One who seeks our destruction, our discouragement, our dismay, our disloyalty to You, and I pray now this morning, Father, if there are those here or watching online that are dead in their sins, Lord. They have never experienced

You in a saving way, God, would You do it now? Would You set them free from their sins? Would You show them what it looks like to trust in Christ as their Lord and Savior? And if there are those of us who have been on the sidelines, Lord, not wielding the sword of Your Spirit in the battle, Lord, where our hearts are not hiding Your Scripture, but we're hiding from You away from Your Scripture. Lord, I pray that there will be conviction of that reality in our lives and transformation, Lord, that we might find deliverance from the temptations of the evil one and the ability to stand firm and to speak forward Your truth regardless of the cost in a culture that shifts around us. Lord we know that we need You to do exactly that. And so we ask You to strengthen us for the battle ahead and we ask this in Christ's name. Amen.