

# Truth for Today

The Bible explained

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## Some Bible Lists: The Armour of God

Today we are starting a new series on "Some Bible Lists", and of course we are at the start of a new year, so this is my opportunity to wish all my listeners God's blessing for 2016. I do hope that you will experience God's grace and mercy throughout 2016. Perhaps you have already started making some lists for the new year - things you would like to do, things you would like to achieve, perhaps things you would like to do differently to what happened last year.

Now, we find various lists in the Bible, where items with a close connection to each other are brought together. One such list is the armour of God that is described to us in Ephesians 6:10-18. There we have listed out for us the different parts of the protective armour that we need, and the spiritual weapons that go with it. I'm going to start off by reading Ephesians 6:10-18. I'm reading from the New King James Version:

*"Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armour of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. Therefore take up the whole armour of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God; praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints."*

Most of us will have seen an illustration of a Roman soldier wearing his armour. It's a sight that would have been familiar to the Apostle Paul (see Philippians 1:13). The order of his list of the parts of the armour of God probably roughly corresponded to the order in which a Roman soldier would have put on the various bits of his armour. Thus, Paul starts with the girdle or belt of truth, as a foundational piece. Then he mentions the breastplate of righteousness, followed by the shoes of the preparation of the gospel of peace. After that the shield of faith is taken up, the helmet of salvation is put on, and the sword of the Spirit is taken as a weapon. What can these verses teach us today about living our Christian lives?

It's important to take note of the context of these verses. They come right near the end of the epistle to the Ephesians. Ephesians is a wonderful book of the New Testament that teaches us about our blessings in Christ. Right at the start of Ephesians, in Ephesians 1:3, we read that we have been blessed *"with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ."* Ephesians 1 and 2 expand on these wonderful blessings, and in Ephesians 3 Paul explains his knowledge of these marvellous truths. Then in Ephesians 4:1-6:20, Paul exhorts his readers to live in a way that corresponds to their blessings and the wonderful position that they are now in. Thus we have the blessings first, and, following on from that, we have the exhortation to *"walk worthy of the calling with which you were called"*, as we read in Ephesians 4:1. The armour of God must, therefore, be necessary for us if we want to walk worthy of our calling.

But why do we need armour? The verses that we read at the start, Ephesians 6:10-18, tell us that we have enemies. We read about the *"wiles of the devil"* in Ephesians 6:11, and in Ephesians 6:12 we are told about our struggle, *"not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places."* So we learn that our enemies are not people, but rather they are spiritual beings who wish to spoil and prevent our enjoyment of God's blessings. We saw in Ephesians 1:3 that God *"has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ"*. Now we see that our enemies are also said to be *"in the heavenly places."*

This helps to explain why Ephesians 6:11-14 emphasise that our main duty is to **stand**. Ephesians 6:11 tells us to *"put on the whole armour of God, that you may be able to **stand** against the wiles of the devil."* Just a bit further down, Ephesians 6:13-14 state, *"Therefore take up the whole armour of God, that you may be able to **withstand** in the evil day, and having done all, to **stand**. **Stand** therefore, having girded your waist with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness."* The illustration seems to be of someone standing his or her ground, defending his or her possessions. It's not so much the image of a conqueror taking new lands, but rather one safeguarding his or her own property.

What might this look like in practice? We can get some hints from other verses in Ephesians. For example, in Ephesians 4:14, Paul writes *“that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting.”* Now where the New King James version translates *“the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting”* we have a number of Greek words in the original text, one of which is *methodeia*, which according to dictionaries means trickery, or wiles. It is the same word that is translated as “wiles” in Ephesians 6:11: *“Put on the whole armour of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.”*

Now we can see a connection between Ephesians 4:14 and 6:11. In Ephesians 6:11, we see that we need God’s armour to stand against the wiles of the devil. In Ephesians 4:14, we see that some of these wiles are basically false teaching - *“every wind of doctrine”*, as Paul phrases it. We don’t want to be *“tossed to and fro”* by all sorts of false teaching. Things like this, bad ideas, and wrong emphases, can come in and lead us astray. If we have truly accepted the Lord Jesus as our Saviour, we can never lose our salvation, as the Lord Jesus Himself tells us in John 10:28-29. But, we can lose our reward, as Paul warned the Colossians in Colossians 2:18. Worse, we might lead other people astray. We can lose our effectiveness, our peace and our joy in the Lord, if we become entangled in the enemy’s lies and deceit. That is why we need the armour of God. Let’s look at it in more detail.

### God’s strength

Firstly, Ephesians 6:10 tells us that we are to be *“strong in the Lord”* - literally, “be strengthened in the Lord”. We rely and draw on His strength. We are not going to overcome the enemy in our own strength. We must depend on the Lord. From Ephesians 6:13 we see that the purpose is that we will be *“able to withstand in the evil day.”* This suggests that a particular occasion - *“the evil day”* - is in view. We must always be watchful, and so we need to be wearing the armour at all times, but this verse teaches us that there may be particular seasons of attack - *“the evil day.”* The same was true for the Lord Jesus Himself. Remember that after His baptism (Luke 3:21-22), He was tempted by the devil in the wilderness (Luke 3:1-13). The Lord Jesus famously overcame every temptation by using the Word of God. In Luke 4:13, we read, *“Now when the devil had ended every temptation, he departed from Him until an opportune time.”* The enemy was looking for *“an opportune time”*, which would be like *“the evil day”* of Ephesians 6:13.

### Belt of Truth

The foundation for the armour is expressed as *“having girded your waist with truth.”* First and foremost, we need to know God’s truth. It is important to emphasise that truth can be known. Pilate famously asked, *“What is truth?”* (John 18:38) Similarly, we might well hear statements such as “truth is relative”, or “there is no absolute truth”, or “that may be true for you, but not for me”. But the Lord Jesus said, *“I am ... the truth...”* (John 14:6), and when speaking about God’s Word, He said, *“Your word is truth”* (John 17:17), and when speaking of the Holy Spirit in John 16:13, He said that the *“Spirit of truth”* would guide His disciples *“into all truth.”* Thus, as I said, truth can be known. We can know it. Knowing it sets us free and strengthens us.

I enjoy writing, and so I am always interested in learning how I can improve my writing style. A little while ago I came across a book called *“Clear and Simple as the Truth”*, by Francis-Noël Thomas and Mark Turner . It’s a book about writing style, and it describes a particular style known as the “classic style”. The idea is that one writes while taking the stand that truth can be known, and that it can be accurately presented. Now as the book points out, this of course could be just a stylistic device for writing - the author who is using such a writing style may not fundamentally believe that what he or she is writing is indeed **the truth**, but by writing in such a way, a clear and helpful style can be achieved. It strikes me though, that this stand is in fact absolutely correct when applied to the Bible, God’s Word - truth can indeed be known, and it is accurately presented. If we have a firm grasp and understanding of the Bible, we will be well girded with the truth. How important it is to read, meditate and study our Bibles!

### Breastplate of Righteousness

Next we have the *“breastplate of righteousness”* (Ephesians 6:14). We learn from the epistle to the Romans that God has given us righteousness through our Lord Jesus, even though we were sinners. In Romans 3:21-22 we read, *“But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe.”* God accounts us as righteous, because of what Jesus has done for us through His death and resurrection. What a blessing! What a privilege!

If God, in His grace, has given us righteousness through the work of the Lord Jesus, then we should seek to live righteously in His strength. That is what we see in the second half of Ephesians, in Ephesians 4:1-6:20. We should *“walk worthy of our calling”*, as we saw in Ephesians 4:1, and in Ephesians 4:24 we are told to *“put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness.”* This, I think, is what corresponds to the breastplate of righteousness. You see, if as Christians we allow ourselves to act unrighteously, we are no longer well

armed against the enemy. In fact, we have a specific example in Ephesians itself - Ephesians 4:26-27: *“Be angry, and do not sin: do not let the sun go down on your wrath, nor give place to the devil.”* Here we have an example of a Christian who allows himself or herself to get angry and stay angry - and Paul says that this can *“give place to the devil.”* In this instance, you could say that the breastplate of righteousness was missing.

### Footwear

After the *“breastplate of righteousness”* we have *“[our] feet being shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace”* (Ephesians 6:15). This is not really referring to us going out to present the gospel, although of course this is something that we should do. But in our passage about the armour of God, it is really to do with our readiness or preparation. In the New King James Version, Ephesians 6:15 is translated as *“the preparation of the gospel of peace.”* This word “preparation” is related to the word translated “prepared” in 2 Timothy 2:21: *“Therefore if anyone cleanses himself from the latter, he will be a vessel for honour, sanctified and useful for the Master, prepared for every good work.”* How does this fit together? Well, the Gospel brings peace, as we see in Romans 5:1: *“Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.”* That is why it is called *“the gospel of peace”* (Ephesians 6:15). Now if we know that we have peace with God, then we can be assured that He is for us. What stability this gives! Like putting on a good pair of shoes, we won't slip or slide!

### Shield of faith

What about *“the shield of faith?”* (Ephesians 6:16). Our enjoyment of God's blessings requires our faith. The shield of faith can be used to stop and quench fiery darts. Fiery darts are like burning arrows being shot at us by a malicious enemy. They are a good picture of evil thoughts that can suddenly assail us, worrying doubts, wrong teachings, and so forth. These can be quenched if we have faith and trust in God's Word.

### Helmet of Salvation

Now we come to *“the helmet of salvation”* (Ephesians 6:17). This protects our heads, and so I suppose it is a picture of the spiritual armour needed to protect our minds and our thoughts. Knowledge of God's salvation will keep us from terrible doubts and misgivings. Let us listen to what David says in Psalm 140:7: *“O GOD the Lord, the strength of my salvation, You have covered my head in the day of battle.”* Here David likens God, the strength of his salvation, to a helmet that covered his head in the battle. The mind is an easy target for groundless fears, crippling doubts and deceitful lies. The helmet of salvation protects us.

Let's think a little more about salvation. In 2 Thessalonians 2:13, Paul says, *“But we are bound to give thanks to God always for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God from the beginning chose you for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth.”* God has chosen us for salvation! This gives great stability. We learn about our salvation in the Bible. We can see this from 2 Timothy 3:15, where Paul reminds Timothy *“that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.”*

### Sword of the Spirit

We come now to our weapon, *“the sword of the Spirit”* (Ephesians 6:17) We are not left guessing as to what this might be, because Ephesians 6:17 explains it to us clearly - it is the Word of God. It is the weapon that the Lord Jesus Himself used in His temptation (Luke 4:1-3). Now why should the Word of God be our only weapon? I think we have a clue from Ephesians 6:17 in Psalm 138:2, where David says, *“For You have magnified Your word above all Your name.”* As we read through the Bible, we see that God certainly has magnified His Word. He created the universe by His Word. James 1:18 tells us that we were born again by His Word. Hebrews 4:12 tells us that God's Word is living and powerful. We know that the gospel is revealed through God's Word. Ultimately therefore, we don't rely on clever arguments or on our own ideas. We rely on the revealed Word of God.

### Prayer

Straight after the list of the armour and the sword of the Spirit, we find prayer is mentioned: *“praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints”* (Ephesians 6:18). We are to use the sword of the Spirit, and we are to pray in the Spirit. Prayer is the means of our day-to-day and moment-by-moment fellowship with God. We can certainly pray for our own needs and help, but Ephesians 6:18 shows us that our prayers should be wider than that: *“supplication for all the saints.”* Our brothers and sisters are engaged in this spiritual warfare just as we are, and so we need to pray for each other.

Let's quickly remind ourselves of what we have learnt today. As we considered all the pieces of God's armour, we saw that we need to be sure that we know God's truth. We need to live righteously. We must understand the gospel of

peace, and trust in His salvation. Faith in God's Word, and knowledge of it so that we can use it, is crucial. Finally, let us not forget to pray!

Now, does the concept of our spiritual warfare seem daunting? Let me quote a verse in the Old Testament that I find very encouraging. Proverbs 18:10 says, *"The name of the LORD is a strong tower; the righteous run to it and are safe."* We have armour, we have a weapon, we have direct access to God through prayer, and we also have a strong tower! Ultimately, God has pledged His Name, His character on all that He does. He will never fail us. Our salvation has been secured by the work of the Lord Jesus on the cross.

I will close with the words of David in Psalm 144:1-2, *"Blessed be the LORD my Rock, who trains my hands for war, and my fingers for battle - My lovingkindness and my fortress, my high tower and my deliverer, my shield and the One in whom I take refuge."*

Let's be encouraged!

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