

Spiritual Attacks and the Armor of God

SCOTT HOEZEE

How do Christians face opposition? What should be our posture? In recent years in North America, there has been a lot of talk of a form of militant, muscular, and masculine Christianity that has arisen. Many see this version of the gospel, and the macho Jesus that often gets preached as part of it, as a corruption of the true gospel. We are called instead to humility, to Christlike gentleness, to the bearing of the fruit of the Spirit that include goodness and peace. Well, in Ephesians 6, the Apostle Paul writes some advice that could sound like it describes a militant form of faith, but today on *Groundwork*, we will dig into that passage to see what Paul is really saying. Stay tuned.

DARRELL DELANEY

Welcome to *Groundwork*, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Darrell Delaney.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And I am Scott Hoezee; and Darrell, this is now the final and sixth episode in our six-part series that largely followed the sequence of the six chapters of Paul's letter to the Ephesians. We are coming to the bottom line...we are coming to the very, very end of the letter...the bottom line of Christians living in Ephesus; and as we will see, Darrell, Paul's words to these people are from long ago and far away, but I think they are aimed straight at us in the Church today, too.

DARRELL DELANEY

I think that it is important to understand, Scott, that whenever there are last words, they are going to be very important words; and they pretty much capstone a lot of the things that Paul is saying. I am also looking forward to seeing the ancient truth that comes from that time to this time, so that we can learn what God has for us today.

SCOTT HOEZEE

So, let's go and dig right in to Ephesians 6 at the 10th verse. Paul writes: Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. ¹¹Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. ¹²For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. ¹⁴Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. ¹⁴Stand firm, then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, ¹⁵and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. ¹⁶In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish 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.

DARRELL DELANEY

Oh, I love these verses. I love that everything is neatly designed and actually stacked in an order. Even the evil...the evil actually is stacked in an order as well. The devil is not like running around disorganized, but actually, there are rulers, authorities and powers in this situation that is organized; but then, in history, we have this theology called *Christus Victor*, where it is about Christ winning...it is about victory...it is about

overcoming the enemy; and we have seen that go in corrupt ways in our day. In our past, we have seen people take this too far, and it is unfortunate that they misinterpreted what this verse means.

SCOTT HOEZEE

It looks like this is a militant form of Christianity...of discipleship...and it is a relatively rare use of military imagery. Paul uses a lot of imagery. He often uses imagery from the world of athletics, right? He compares the Christian life to a race, like you have got to be a marathon runner; you have to be in good shape. Sometimes he uses the imagery of waking and sleeping; in fact, I think earlier in Ephesians it was: ^{5:14}Wake up, O sleeper. Most famously, in Corinthians in particular, he used the image of the body—the Church is like a human body with different parts; but here is an occasion where he talks about basically the attire that was worn by a Roman soldier in the army in Paul's day.

DARRELL DELANEY

And Paul often uses images to share a gospel truth. I think he took a page from Jesus there. When Jesus does parables, he always uses natural things to explain spiritual things.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DARRELL DELANEY

And in the last episode, we talked about how Christ and the Church was imaged by the marriage between the husband and the wife; and so, Paul is always going to try to use whatever he can...anything but the kitchen sink to make sure that you understand what the spiritual truth is in these verses.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And what is interesting, Darrell, is for us today, we don't usually have a lot of experience, except maybe museums, of seeing somebody in full armor; but certainly, the Ephesians saw Roman soldiers every day. They probably, you know...throughout the Roman Empire, they saw soldiers outfitted in this stuff. So, this would have been familiar. In the next segment of this program, we are going to tick through all...what...six or seven of the very specific pieces of equipment armor; but for this segment, let's take a step back and note something that is very important: Paul is describing this armament in terms of defense. This isn't offense; the posture here is defensive one.

DARRELL DELANEY

So, when you wear this armament that Paul is talking about, it really is about withstanding attacks. It is not about going and doing this attacking yourself. So, because you are going to be attacked, you are going to need some armor. If you go out there without armor, you are going to be badly hurt. So, Paul is using the image to let us understand that these are the things that we need to do to defend and withstand the attacks.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And you know, Paul says that our enemies are not flesh and blood, but these powers and authorities and principalities. That does not mean that the devil doesn't work through people sometimes. So, it is not as though we aren't literally going to be attacked by other people. What you just said, Darrell, is very important: this outfit...this armor that Paul is describing...is defensive not offensive. We wear it so that we won't be defeated, but we don't wear it to attack other people; and indeed, you know, sometimes, Darrell, in the history of the Church...and now we could think specifically about the Crusades in the Middle Ages...when the Church really did take a militant stance on the offense, and they went forth to slaughter Muslims and Jews, the Crusades were a disaster for the Church. It has never worked when the Church has tried to act like a military army; but we are supposed to protect ourselves; and again, look at the verbs that Paul uses here. How often does he say: You have to stand...stand firm...stand your ground. After you have stood, you can endure everything. You extinguish flaming arrows shot at you; you don't throw arrows at other people. So, it is very much indeed a defensive posture.

DARRELL DELANEY

It is important to understand that God likes to use people, and the devil is a copycat, so he tries to use people in ways that are harmful and evil. So, sometimes we will have disagreements with people, or whatever, but Paul is not giving justification for a revolutionary war or anything like that. He has never really been talking about how to do this in a way to overthrow governments or fight in this way. So, when Christians try to emulate what history has done in the secular world, then it has never been good for the Church.

SCOTT HOEZEE

No, it has never been Christlike; and again, all of this is following on all of Paul's talk about mutual submission that we looked at in the previous program. So, you know, we are supposed to be about service, not going on the attack.

You know, when I was a kid, I used to really like singing that old hymn: *Onward, Christian Soldiers*. I don't like it so much now anymore, just because of how it has been used, but in that hymn, it says: Onward, Christian soldiers marching as to war; but Paul isn't talking about marching here. We are standing...

DARRELL DELANEY

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

We are standing our ground...we are standing firm...we are standing up for the truth; and so, despite the military imagery of armor here, we aren't supposed to be marching as to war. We are supposed to be witnessing to the gospel, even in how we withstand the attacks of the evil one...

DARRELL DELANEY

Exactly.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And in just a moment, we are going to tick through the specifics of this outfit—this armor; and we will see how each one contributes to exactly that: witnessing to the gospel. So, stay tuned.

Segment 2

DARRELL DELANEY

I am Darrell Delaney, with Scott Hoezee, and you are listening to *Groundwork*.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And Darrell, we are in Ephesians 6, near the very end of this letter, and we have just suggested that when Paul talks about putting on the armor of God, it is meant to be completely *defensive* in nature. This is what protects us from being attacked spiritually, or what keeps us safe when we are attacked spiritually, but it isn't what we put on so we can go on the attack. I think, Darrell, if we start going through the individual pieces of armor that Paul singles out, I think we will see how this works.

DARRELL DELANEY

I think it is important to note that we will be attacked...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DARRELL DELANEY

And not normally by people, but by spiritual opposition in different ways. It is not if we get attacked, it is not if you are having a bad day, or whatever; it is actually we will be attacked. So, it is important for us to understand these different parts of the armor.

SCOTT HOEZEE

So, first the belt of truth: buckle this around your waist, Paul says. Now, Darrell, today we mostly think of belts as things that hold your pants up and that is relatively important, as you can sometimes find in airport security lines when they make you take off your belt and you have to hang onto those pants, but that is not really the kind of belt Paul is talking about.

DARRELL DELANEY

This belt establishes truth. This is the belt of truth. So, when we are wearing this belt, it is actually the idea that we are to be in service of God's truth. So, truthfulness, being honest, walking in integrity, those kinds of things are actually what this belt symbolizes; and as Christians, we ought to live in the truth, because Christ himself is the truth. He is the way, the truth and the life.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; so again, think more of the belt that police officers wear. This is what they clip their radio on, their gun, their Taser, their handcuffs...

DARRELL DELANEY

A utility belt!

SCOTT HOEZEE

It's a utility belt; yes, like Batman. It is that kind of belt; but by being the belt of truth, as you just said, Darrell, it means whatever we carry with us has got to be in service of the truth; and you know, when you are attacked by somebody, one thing that we are tempted with, and we see this on social media today, is that you could lie about your opponent, you could twist their words, quote only half of what they said so you misrepresent them. Paul says: Look, it doesn't matter if people are lying about you; you cannot lie back. You have to be in service of the truth. So, put on the belt of truth. Next up, Darrell, is the breastplate of righteousness.

DARRELL DELANEY

So, you know a breastplate is designed to protect the vital organs: the heart, the lungs, the liver...these...you cannot live without these...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DARRELL DELANEY

If you do have a situation where you have those seriously injured, you could either die or you need to have them transplanted as soon as possible. So, when someone throws something at your breastplate that is in place, then it will bounce off and you will be protected. Your heart will be protected, your lungs will be protected; and I feel like the understanding of what "breastplate of righteousness" is, it goes deeper than just the physical protection. It also goes into deeper things.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly; it is like a bulletproof vest. You know, sometimes when the President of the United States throws out the opening pitch at the World Series or the beginning of the baseball season, he is exposed. So, the Secret Service makes him wear a bulletproof vest underneath his shirt, just because then if somebody shoots at you...

DARRELL DELANEY

How do you know that?

SCOTT HOEZEE

How do I know? I don't know, but I have seen it...because that protects them. If somebody shoots a bullet, it is not going to hit their heart; it is going to bounce off; and that, for believers, is righteousness itself, Paul says. Righteousness...well, what is righteousness? Well, it is the gift we get from Jesus, right? We get credited with Jesus' righteousness, which means we are holy, like Jesus is holy. You know, Paul and Peter at different times say: Look, you should live such a good life that even if people try to accuse you of stuff, it will be false...it will bounce right off. Don't give them anything to accuse you of. Live such a good life of righteousness that you cannot even be open to criticism; and if they do criticize you, that is because they are lying, and that is going to bounce off, too.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes, I have this saying, Scott, that truth and righteousness prevail. So, even if you lose the argument, or people blame you and accuse you; if you are walking in truth and righteousness, I think God vindicates that; and those accusations, whether they are written online or if they are spoken about you in secret, they will bounce off of you because God is covering you with his righteousness and his justification. You don't even need to defend yourself. It is his breastplate that he has given to you...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; very good.

DARRELL DELANEY

So you can be protected.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Excellent; I like that. Truth will out, the Brits like to say. So, we've got a belt; we've got a breastplate; and third, there is some sort of footwear—some sort of boots that come from the gospel of peace—of shalom. So again, these boots, as we said earlier, these boots aren't meant for marching, right? You know, there is that old song, you know: these boots were made for walking, and they are going to walk all over you. These boots are not made for walking; these boots are meant to locate you in shalom. This is what grounds us. You need to be a peaceable person even when attacked.

DARRELL DELANEY

The boots are for standing; because we started this verse talking about standing our ground...standing firm during opposition; and so, these boots will literally anchor us; but then, beautiful are the feet of those who bring the gospel of good news, as well, right?

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly; again, we are transparent to the gospel in this ensemble here. Fourth...so, belt, breastplate, some boots or footwear; and now, fourth...similar to the breastplate, we have a shield, and the shield, Paul says, is faith.

DARRELL DELANEY

So, faith is your belief in God, no matter what kind of accusations come to you. So, the shield definitely is supposed to quench flaming darts from the enemy...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DARRELL DELANEY

The enemy is the accuser and the liar who is always trying to throw something at us that is not true. He is the father of lies—his native tongue is lying—but when you hold up your shield of faith, you actually believe in who Christ is and what he has done for you, and your righteousness, your salvation, does not come from your work, but it comes from the finished work of Christ, and when you believe in him, he can quench those darts

for you.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly; faith is God's first gift of grace that enables us to receive all the other gifts, and it will protect us like a shield, Paul says.

Fifth, the helmet of salvation...what protects our heads...our minds...is salvation; another gift of grace, Darrell.

DARRELL DELANEY

The Bible says in Corinthians that we have the mind of Christ; so, we are in constant changing from our old mind to our new mind, but we also need to protect that mind with the salvation that comes with it, and that is really powerful to see that we can protect that as another vital organ.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And now, sixth; and finally, this is the only weapon, Darrell, that is mentioned in the ensemble, and it is a sword, but it is a particular kind of sword: It is the Word of God.

DARRELL DELANEY

The sword of the Spirit. This is the one that is used to cut through your thoughts, your attitudes, the one that is sharper than any two-edged sword. It discerns your motives, it discerns your values, and this sword is the only offensive weapon that makes sure that we fight just like Jesus fought when he was tempted in the garden. He didn't fight with his fists, he fought with the scriptures. So, we need to go in God's Word and we need to equip ourselves with that to strengthen our faith and trust in God, believing the Bible promises that he gives us.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; we usually think of a sword as cutting things down. You mentioned the garden. You know, when Peter cut the high priest servant's ear off, and Jesus said: Don't do that. That is not the gospel way. The sword of the Spirit is the Word of God. So, usually we think of all weapons as *destructive*, and they are, right? In this world, weapons are *destructive*. Here is the one sword that is *constructive*.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

This sword builds up because it is in service of the truth; it is in service of the gospel; it is in service of cutting through falsehoods so people can see the truth. That is how we wield the sword. We don't cut down other people, we try to build them up with the good news of the gospel.

So, that is a rundown of this armor of God, but as we close out this series on Ephesians, Paul has one last plea, and we will get to that in just a moment.

Segment 3

DARRELL DELANEY

Welcome to *Groundwork*, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Darrell Delaney.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And I am Scott Hoezee; and Darrell, let's dive right back into Ephesians 6, starting at verse 18.

DARRELL DELANEY

And it says: And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord's people. ¹⁹Pray also for me, that whenever I speak, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel, ²⁰for which I am an

ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should.

SCOTT HOEZEE

So, we are getting to the...this is basically the last part of Ephesians...the whole letter; and we come to prayer. I love it, Darrell. I mean, he basically says pray all the time and pray about everything. I mean, Paul doesn't put any limits. He doesn't say pray about spiritual things. He says all kinds of prayers and requests. Anything you want to pray about, the sky is the limit.

DARRELL DELANEY

I think, Scott, I know that you said in the last segment that the sword is the only offensive weapon, but I think that prayer is often a forgotten weapon...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly.

DARRELL DELANEY

In this whole armor piece, because he wouldn't ask you to use it on all occasions if it wasn't. It could be offensive, it could be defensive, but in any occasion, we are supposed to communicate to God and allow God to communicate to us; and I mean, Jesus gave us a prayer—the Lord's Prayer: Give us this day our daily bread. That is part of what we are supposed to be communicating to God. We pray for sick people, we pray for healthy people, we pray when times are up and when times are down.

SCOTT HOEZEE

We pray for the persecuted that they can stand strong with that very armor of God, and we pray for those who aren't persecuted that they don't get complacent, right? We pray for, as you just said, spiritual things: Your kingdom come; and earthly things: Daily bread.

You know, as I breathe, I pray, an old hymn says. That is Paul's idea; but Darrell, it is interesting; Paul has a more personal request, too.

DARRELL DELANEY

While you are praying, everyone, for all the things, pray for me. Pray that I proclaim the gospel good news fearlessly, as I should; and when Paul says: By the way, pray for me. I don't think it is just something that he wants them to do with some piety or some spiritual light. I think he really has some deep need that he wants them to lift up to the Lord.

SCOTT HOEZEE

I don't know about you, Darrell, but if I ask somebody to pray for me, and if I then get specific and say: And pray about this, it is probably because this is something I am struggling with...

DARRELL DELANEY

Oh, yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Or something where I feel weak, or some area where I have given into sin too often; and so, I say, you know: Pray for me. Pray that I...whatever, right? But it has to come from my feeling like I need the prayer, because I am maybe struggling to tempted to struggle in exactly this area.

DARRELL DELANEY

So, Paul has no illusion about who he is, except the fact that when we read about Paul, we think he is a super hero.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DARRELL DELANEY

We think he has super powers, but he is human; he has been beaten, he has been flogged, he has been jailed, he has been abused for the sake of Christ; and also in Acts 9, God says this is the one who is going to suffer much for my name's sake; and Paul remembers that and he says: That could be intimidating, because I don't love beatings; I don't look forward to be jailed; so, he is needing...this is a true prayer request for Paul.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And I like what you said there, Darrell, because indeed, we tend to think that all the apostles, Paul, Peter, James, John, the lot, were super brave. You know, once the Holy Spirit at Pentecost came on them, no problem. They just preached. That is not true; and we know they struggled. I mean, I think in a series on Acts a while back, we saw that Peter had been told to accept all the Gentiles and not make them Jews first, and he followed that until he was in the presence of some Jews, and he held back, and he kind of reverted; and Paul calls him on it. He said: You know better than that.

DARRELL DELANEY

That is after Pentecost.

SCOTT HOEZEE

That is after Pentecost...well after Pentecost, right? So, Paul is human, and he knows that he can get scared. He can be intimidated, and so, this should be encouraging for us because sometimes when I feel shy about witnessing or standing up for something, I think: If only I had the faith of Paul. Not true. Paul needed prayers, too. So, I think this is encouraging for all of us who are also human and are tempted to pull back a little bit out of fear.

DARRELL DELANEY

I think the second thing it means is that fear and hesitancy don't have to have the last word. You are going to feel fear. You are going to feel pressure. I know every preacher who has ever preached have this trepidation that says: Okay, God; don't send me up there to preach if you don't give me a word to preach; and Paul is telling everybody: Put this armor on, but he knows he needs to also put the armor on as a model, as an example. He depends on God and asks for support, and so should we.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly; and you know...you talk about preachers...we are both preachers; and there is a sense in which it doesn't really matter how long you have been doing it. There is this...not hesitation...but a little thing in the pit of your stomach whenever you get into the pulpit...

DARRELL DELANEY

Every time.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Every time...

DARRELL DELANEY

Every time.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Not only just because you want to get it right, but because you know the stakes are so high; and preaching takes a lot out of you. I mean, a lot of people are amazed at how tired I report I am after I preach. It is like it is not just physical...

DARRELL DELANEY

Exactly.

SCOTT HOEZEE

There is a spiritual thing going on there. I am not looking for sympathy, but it is true that we all need courage; we all need the grace that comes because we all do face opposition. I mean, people in our congregations might disagree with the sermon, there are spiritual powers that don't want us to preach...

DARRELL DELANEY

Exactly.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And every time, we have to rely on the Spirit to overcome that fear, trepidation, hesitancy, shyness, whatever it might be.

DARRELL DELANEY

You just named a lot of those reasons why we need to put our full armor of God on. That full armor will keep us safe. It will help us to withstand all these oppositions that come to us, whether natural or spiritual; but it also explains why we need to pray for one another, so that the mystery of the gospel that God has proclaimed may continue; because Paul needed to continue to proclaim it; we need that prayer so we can continue to proclaim it; and we do all of this under the benediction of God, don't we?

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly, yes; a benediction is exactly how Paul ends this letter. In Ephesians 6:23, 24, and we will end our series with this same one: ²³Peace to the brothers and sisters, and love with faith from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. ²⁴Grace to all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with an undying love. Amen.

DARRELL DELANEY

Thanks for listening and digging deeply into scripture with *Groundwork*. We are your hosts, Darrell Delaney with Scott Hoezee, and we hope you will join us again next time as we continue to dig deeply into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives.

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SCOTT HOEZEE

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