
THE PANOPLY OF GOD

Ephesians 6:10-13

In case you hadn't noticed, the Olympics started this weekend! There is a great deal of pomp and circumstance that comes with the games, and a whole lot of scuttlebutt that surrounds the hosting city. The accommodations, the venues, swimming in a gross river, demonstrations sabotage, and the like. Another aspect of the games and of pretty much all sporting events is ritual. This can range from the manner in which a team and or player trains for their sport, which can be seen as discipline, to all of the "habits" that teams and individuals follow leading up to their events. My grandson decided to not wash his baseball uniform after a certain win this season because he thought it would help them win (he didn't seem to notice that his mother had washed it anyway). Many athletes will wear the same articles of clothing, they may enter the venue a particular way, they may carry an item to sleep with. Some will have an item that they carry in a pocket, or stash close by, they listen to the same song or play list. All of this is done to create the right environment for winning, to appease the "powers that be". AKA a good luck charm. Paul has smashed this notion for us, as we will see in our passage for today, Eph 6:10-13.

^{6:10} Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. ¹¹ Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. ¹² For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. ¹³ Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm.

"Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might". Paul is letting us know that this is his last exhortation in the letter. He has given a list of several exhortations and statements of truth throughout the whole letter. His "finally" is not the typical statement of concluding remarks. It is to let us know that what he is about to say is in addition to all that has been said. However, there is an element of summarization of what has come before, as we will see. Remember that this letter would have been read as a whole, not in bits and pieces.

Paul is challenging us to rely on the strength that comes from the Godhead. Paul's words; "be strong", in the Greek, are demonstrating the source of the strength. (it is in the passive voice which stresses the fact that the strength comes from an outside source, not from us).

Text

My nature is to read this a bit more like “buck up buddy, you’ve got this!” Putting the emphasis on MY strength and abilities.

And yet, when we look back in the letter, we can see Paul’s focus about where this power comes from.

In chapter ^{2:8} For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, ⁹ not a result of works, so that no one may boast.

Chapter ^{3:7} Of this gospel I was made a minister according to the gift of God's grace, which was given me by the working of his power.

See how Paul prays for the Ephesians

*^{3:14} For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, ¹⁵ from whom every family^d in heaven and on earth is named, ¹⁶ that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, ¹⁷ so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, ¹⁸ may have strength to comprehend with **all the saints** what is the breadth and length and height and depth, ¹⁹ and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.*

*²⁰ Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, ²¹ to him be glory **in the church** and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.*

The whole book has focused on our union with Christ, our unity as a body and maintaining the unity of the spirit. Submission to each other is a theme. There is nothing individualistic in the whole letter, so what makes me think this part is individualistic?

Some of it is training: “Pull yourself up by your bootstraps!” Who here has bootstraps, or has ever used them or seen them? But we sure know the phrase. In doing a little research, all I could find regarding bootstraps is that they are the loops in a boot to help you pull them on. So, the notion of one pulling oneself up by your bootstraps is preposterous, and yet it is a phrase most know as meaning; “I do it myself!” Just like a 3-year-old. Speaking of 3-year-olds, the way the armor is taught in children’s lessons is very literal, and very individualistic, and this approach has often been reinforced through sermons. So, there is nothing more preposterous

than taking an idea that is preposterous and teaching it to young children!

But just in case you’re sold on the individualistic concept here’s an idea!



Text

Text

Text

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Pic



What a great smile!

I might view this verse as individualistic, you might view this as individualistic, but what about the Ephesians?

Remember they were ensconced in the realm of witchcraft and magic, using incantation and rituals to ward off danger and to set themselves up for success. They would have had amulets or good luck charms everywhere, because there were lots of dangers to avoid and gods to appease.

Stop and think for a moment. What are your rituals? What are your amulets or good luck charms. What evil are you hoping to ward off?

Paul is reminding/instructing them regarding the reality that their strength comes from their union with Christ, not from any carved images, mythological people or creatures, or incantations, relics or amulets.

Paul takes it further by adding "in his mighty strength" This is repetition, likely for emphasis. We have available the unlimited strength of God. So why do I want to do it on my own?

Paul's emphasis on our strength coming from God, sets us up for what's coming in the next sentence...

Text

¹¹ Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil.

Smarty
Word

Whose armor? This is not a bring your own armor party! It is God's armor. The translation for "whole armor" could have been **panoply**. (SMARTY WORD) That's basically what it is in the Greek.

Slide with definitions:

SMARTY WORD

Panoply= a full suit or armor,
a splendid striking array,
something forming a protective coating.

Slide with
Definitions

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Pic



Here are some artist's renditions of what the Roman and Greek Panoply might have looked like. The first 3 are Roman and the 4th is Greek

So, something like this would likely have been in the minds of the Ephesians, and likely, something similar in our minds as well.

Although, at this point in the letter, Paul is zeroing in on whose armor it is and where the power comes from. And it's because of me! And maybe some of you. We easily forget that we serve the Almighty God of the Universe who has conquered death and therefore I/We need reminding.

And why do we need this armor? To stand against the schemes of the devil. Here we get the stand part of the series - Sit, Walk, Stand.

What's interesting is that Paul, once again, is mixing metaphors. The word for stand is the same word referring to the sport of wrestling. If you are familiar with the Greek sport of wrestling from that time period, you know that the wrestlers were not wearing armor. They were not wearing anything- special! So why does Paul introduce this metaphor?

(I wonder if there is any connection to the lack of clothing for a wrestler in contrast to the Panoply of God?)

Paul may have had several reasons. One might be the fact that wrestling was a huge part of Greek and Roman cultures and had been for hundreds of years. There were many wrestling gymnasiums across the land. It may have been their version of Planet Fitness or 24-Hour fitness. Or a traveling team sport! None the less, boys were instructed in the sport from a young age. The sport was extremely popular in the many games that were held, including the Olympics. The form of the athletic body was revered. And there was a strong mythological and even magical connection to the sport of wrestling. Some wore amulets (good luck charms) around their ankles to help them win. And most of the games were in honor of a Greek or Roman god. (Ephesus was a city that had been ruled by many different empires over the centuries and had borrowed from most of them)

It was common for the best soldiers to have been trained in wrestling as well. This form of wrestling was seen as a method of self-defense, in contrast to modern wrestling which is primarily a sport, or a spectacle, depending on the channel.

There are some differences between the freestyle wrestling that takes place in schools and colleges of our day and Greek and even Roman wrestling. The Greek wrestling of the day was mostly done with the upper body and was quite brutal, sometimes resulting in death. There is some similarity to Greco-Roman wrestling of today. Therefore, the idea of standing becomes important. It is both a reference to one's strong physical stance that would make it difficult to move a person and in reference to the offensive moves that were made from a standing position.

Unfortunately for you all, I was a wrestler – I know this is no surprise when you see this physique! Thus, this excursus on wrestling!

Because of this, I understand this picture of standing. In my wrestling training, and even as I watch my grandchildren learn to wrestle there is an emphasis on the wrestling stance. One natural benefit that I was given is legs like tree trunks, so my stance came pretty naturally. I was not blowing over in the wind. But I was also not just standing there, I had to move and my legs

played an important part of most every move I made. Lest this begin to sound too individualistic, I wrestled with a team. We practiced together, we ate together, we cut weight together, we traveled together, encouraged each other and cheered louder than the crowd for each other, and often helped each other off the mat and to the locker room. The camaraderie I experienced as a wrestler was at a much deeper level than any other team sport I participated in.

Paul uses the word WE. Once my eyes were opened to the corporate aspect of the body, I can't unsee it. All of this letter is addressed to the church, not to individuals. We cannot do this alone.

As one famous preacher once said:

"The truth is we are inter-dependent citizens of a better kingdom that will last forever. It is a kingdom where none of us is independent and on our own. In this kingdom ruled by a King who emptied himself and took on the form of a mere slave that he might elevate us to adoption as sons, none of us has to go it alone. Wherever we work, wherever we live, whatever energy we have, whatever resources have been entrusted to us are used in this kingdom for the glory of our King and for our good" J.T. Richards

We are standing against the schemes of the devil. This is not an enemy that we take on alone. Paul goes on to say that

Text

12 *we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.*

The devil is not flesh and blood – so if we are fighting flesh and blood, we are in the wrong battle!

The rulers

The authorities

The cosmic powers

This present darkness

The spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.

It seems like Paul is addressing aspects of Greek and Roman mythology from the earth to the heavens. It's not the actual rulers or authorities we are fighting, it is the negative spiritual influence behind them. The cosmic powers would have spoken directly to the mythologies about the powers that planets had. And we know that darkness is a picture of evil and

something from which we have been rescued, yet there is still darkness out there. The spiritual forces in heavenly places. This is in reference to the spiritual war that has been going on since the fall of Lucifer. It is not something that we see, for the most part. But it is there. We see its effects, we at time, feel its presence. Here's how contemporary commentator Constantine R. Campbell describes it.

Quote

"The implications of Paul's claim in 6:12 are far reaching. First, he blows apart any sense of a functionally Christian materialistic worldview in which God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit exist (along with some angels, perhaps), but otherwise the universe consists of what can be seen, touched and experienced. On the contrary, there is an entire spiritual realm that is unseen yet potent. There are malevolent spiritual forces that occupy that realm even while they interact and engage with ours. Second, the existence and activity of these malevolent spiritual forces underscores the spiritual nature of the Christian life. Whatever struggles believers may face, and whatever their physical, this-worldly attributes, there is a spiritual dimension at work within them. Third, this means that believers must be prepared for such spiritual warfare with spiritual armor. The tools of this-world engagement that deal with flesh and blood are not sufficient for the struggle.

Finally, our knowledge of the rules, authorities, cosmic powers and spiritual forces is limited to their existence and activity. We do not know precisely what they are nor what they do. It is therefore pointless to speculate in any detail about how these malevolent forces interact with us. There is no point trying to find "a demon under every rock." All we need to know is that they exist and they act. Believers must therefore be prepared for their opposition and aggression however it may manifest." Constantine R. Campbell

Paul has already told us in chapter one that Jesus is over this entire realm and He has welcomed us into his realm.

Text

¹⁹ and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might ²⁰ that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, ²¹ far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. ²² And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, ²³ which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.

^{2:1} And you were dead in the trespasses and sins ² in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— ³ among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body[a] and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like

the rest of mankind.[b] ⁴ But[c] God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, ⁵ even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— ⁶ and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, ⁷ so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.

Remember that the Ephesians would have read this in one sitting, so these words would have been fresh in their minds as Paul is instructing them about the nature of our enemies. They likely would be remembering that Jesus has conquered this entire demonic realm. It is the basis of the truth that enables us to take advantage of the panoply of God!

Text

¹³ Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm.

Paul repeats himself. Once again, because of me! I need the repetition. He wants us to know how important this message is. We serve the savior who conquered death and rules over all, yet he rules with malevolent forces still present, until that day when all things are made completely new. Therefore, He is calling us to serve with him, not as individuals, but as the church, the body of Christ. We will face many assaults by the enemies and so we need to be prepared.

What does this preparation look like? It looks like the whole letter, it looks like sitting in our understanding of who we are in Jesus Christ – we have been brought out of the darkness and into the light, we have been raised to new life and are seated with Christ in the heavenly places. Because of this, we are to walk the talk. We are to walk in a manner worthy of one who is in heavenly places. This walk can only happen when we put on the new self, and it includes being submissive to each other. This leads us to standing. The panoply of God cannot be put on if we are sitting down. Standing is our posture as soldiers of Jesus. He has called us to sit in the truth of God in Christ, to walk in the Spirit and He makes us (the whole Church) immovable. He has promised us that the gates of Hell cannot stand against his Church. Think of it, we are standing against the gates of Hell, because of Jesus. The Victory is already won, but the enemy doesn't believe it. That is why we must be vigilant in our preparation. What does this mean for you and for me today and tomorrow and the next day?

First: Believe what God says about you is true.

You were chosen before the foundations of the world were laid. You have been adopted as Sons of God, recipients of His inheritance. You are redeemed, forgiven. The riches of God have been lavished on you. You are united with Christ, sitting with him at the right hand of God. Once dead, now alive in Christ. Not dependent on anything we have done. You are His workmanship created for good works. You have the surname of God, you have the power of his spirit living within you. You are filled with the fullness of God!

Second: Live out what you know to be true.

Notice, I did not say, what you feel to be true. Our feelings will bely us, but the Truth of God is unchangeable. We live this out by walking in a manner worthy of this truth. How? ²with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, ³eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. Utilize the gift you are and the gifts you've been given. Don't act like children who lack discernment. Utilize your gifts so that the body grows in love. Don't walk in darkness – Christ brought you out of darkness and into the Kingdom of light! Don't go back. Take off the old self, which is deceived and put on the new self, created in the likeness of God, which is righteous and true. Be truthful, don't steal. Do an honest days work so that you have resources to help others. Be kind, tenderhearted, be forgiving as you have been forgiven. Walk in love, be sexually and morally pure. Let your words speak life to others. Be wise with your time, understand God's will. Don't get drunk but be filled with the Spirit. Be filled with music and thanksgiving while you demonstrate submission to each other following the example of Jesus who submitted to the point of death for us.

Third: Be Strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might. Don't be a 3-year-old. Don't rely on yourself or any of the rituals that you have created to make you a better person. Get rid of anything that might serve as a good luck charm for you.

Utilize the whole armor of God because our enemy is not made of flesh and blood. Make sure you are in the right battle. When you are going after someone on social media because of their views, remember who the enemy is – it is not that person. Stand for justice, but in a way that remembers that the person you are facing is not the real enemy. Our neighbor in the building next door is not the enemy – he is influenced by the enemy. Your political leaders are not the enemy, the other political party is not the enemy, your neighbor is not the enemy, your family members are not the enemy, the pastor of the church you were hurt in is not the enemy (that one is really hard for me). The gates of Hell are our enemy, and we've already noted that the church will be ultimately victorious, which takes us back to the first point of the application – believe what is true.