

Ephesians 15-04-12a

This is Sunday, the 12th of April, 2015. We continue our study in the book of Ephesians, Paul's letter to the Laodicean church copied to Colossae and vice versa, carried by Tychicus upon Paul's receiving of reports from Epaphras and others on the conditions in those churches. We have come in our study to verse 12 in chapter 6 and that is where we will resume this morning with the introduction to and discussion of the full armor of God, the panoplia, the panoply.

Let's take a moment as is our custom to pause for a few moments and go before the Lord in prayer, dedicate ourselves, our fellowship, our time of worship and study to the Lord Jesus. Shall we pray? Father, we thank You once again for the blessings and the privileges, the manifestations of grace that You bestow on us every day in the life that we live before You as we seek to please You and to glorify Your Son, the Lord Jesus. We thank You for this time of fellowship and of opportunity for recharging our spiritual batteries, of renewing our dedication and our commitment and our energy in the direction of bearing fruit, laying hold of righteousness by faith and in every way being in all things pleasing in Your sight.

We pray that as we look at the truth of this passage this morning that God the Holy Spirit will minister it to each heart, that each one of us will come away with a fresh insight, a fresh perspective, renewed vigor and enthusiasm and appreciation for the Lord Jesus Christ and the wonderful potentials and opportunities that You have given us in Him. We ask these things in Jesus' name, Amen. For we do not wrestle against, we do not struggle against flesh and blood, actually blood and flesh in the original here, but against principalities, against powers, against rulers of the darkness of this age, parenthetically, not really sure that's in the original, it's just rulers of darkness, spirituals of wickedness in the heavenlies.

We've talked about that in detail. We know that these phrases all represent the unseen forces of darkness who operate at the behest of and in consort with and at the plan and purpose of Satan. Satan is God to those who are in darkness, whether they are spirits or whether they are humans.

Those who operate in, who dwell in, who love darkness rather than light are in the kingdom of the God of this world. The God of this world blinds the minds of those who are faithless, otherwise the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, would shine unto them. But men love darkness rather than light because their deeds are evil.

So there is a choice. And we took a look at, not exhaustively, but just quickly, the ubiquitous presence of light and darkness in the Bible. We begin with a contrast.

There is darkness followed by light. Let there be light and there was light. God separated the light from the darkness and light and darkness have been separate ever since.

And they are going to be separate until Revelation chapter 22 and the kingdom of the Father. First chapter, light shines in the darkness. Last chapter, light shines into eternity from the throne

of the Lamb of God.

There is no night. There is no darkness. There is no sea.

In that city that is built for square. Well, this is our struggle. And so what does it mean in practical terms? After all is said and done, when we resume our lives after this time of fellowship is over.

What does all of that mean? Those are conceptual. That's a wonderful perspective. It's a great thought.

It's good to know. But how does it affect us? us, as we work our way through the day, endeavoring to remember that we aren't here just to get things done, we aren't here just to survive, we aren't here just to keep to the schedule, we're here to please God in heaven. When we hit obstacles, we don't typically have much trouble when things are good, we can get distracted and we can get busy pleasing ourselves, but most of our challenge is in the area of conflict, it's opposition, we struggle, we wrestle, right? Something is keeping us from having that attitude and performing those actions that please God.

Normally that comes in the form of some kind of resistance, friction. It can be physical, our bodies can oppose us. I want to do a thing, my body is not letting me do that thing.

And nothing like the passing of time to impress that ever more deeply into your face as you look in the mirror, into your nervous system as you get up in the morning and as you walk across your bedroom floor, as the guy famously said, it sounds like you're walking on bubble wrap. That's your joints. You wake up in the morning and there is a chorus that seems to have new, it becomes an orchestra and they add instruments, it seems like month by month and year by year of signals to your brain, wow, it used to be I got up in the morning, it was just maybe I slept funny and my back might hurt or my neck might be in a kink, but now it's my ankle, it's my toe, it's my knee, it's my hip, it's my back, it's my neck, it's my shin.

And it's just, to me, it's like an orchestra. And I thought, well, what song are they going to play this morning? And well, you know, the violins are really hitting it hard, but there's a timpani in there and there's some oboes and brass and it's almost a source of amazement to me. I think, you know, I so took for granted when I would get up in the morning and nothing about my body even came to my mind.

I just start my morning ablutions now rolling out of bed. It's like, well, what's this going to do? And I just wait to hear from all of the messengers. You know, the, the, the messages start coming in through over the wires.

Ah, well did too much yesterday with that arm or did too much yesterday with those legs. And, but it's opposition. It slows us down and it distracts us.

If we're busy thinking about our, uh, inabilities and our limitations and the things that slow us down and prevent us, well, it's that much more difficult to walk as children of life, to do the things that God has asked us to do, to focus on our spiritual identity. The physical world tries to drag us down. So what is our conclusion from this? We think my struggle is physical.

I got to get over my physical challenges. And this is the physical world of people. People oppose us.

People slow us down. The world would be a great place. This is my refrigerator magnet.

The world would be a great place if there weren't so many people. California would be a great state if you could empty out, you know, a sizable and let me pick them, a sizable number of people. Um, there's, there are so many things in the physical circumstances, financial limitations.

Oh, what I could do if some long forgotten uncle died and left me a six figure fortune of some kind, what I couldn't do, pay off the house, get rid of my leaking, creaking, unpredictable old car. Uh, you know, I've seen those 80 inch flat screen TVs and I'd just like to have a wall. Oh, video.

Uh, what I could do, what I could overcome. Uh, wouldn't have to keep cranking on my old lawnmower. I'd get one with electric start.

Wouldn't have to keep, uh, weeding. I'd hire a crew to come once a week and manicure the yard. I had the money.

I'd have somebody manicure the house. I just sit around drinking mint juleps and watching everybody do my work for me. If I had the cash, we think that our struggle is physical.

And Paul reminds us here from the beginning, he says, look, your status is not how much money you have. It's not what job you have. It's not what education you have, how many degrees you have hanging on the wall.

You are valuable because you are in him. And that's an intangible. That is a spiritual value.

It's a spiritual fact. From the beginning of this letter, you think about the people in Ephesus, you think about Greek culture in that day, you think about Jews who are in the diaspora and are in the conflict of cultures where they're trying to maintain the heritage of their fathers and trying to shine the light of Christ in a, oh my goodness, if you've ever been to some of these Greek towns and seen the environment, it was as bad then as it is now in terms of perversion, overt immorality, blatant, physical perversions of every sort, size, shape, and description as a commonplace. People just trying to hide the eyes of their children as they walk through the marketplace and so on.

It was bad in those days. It was bad in Laodicea. It was bad throughout the Greek Empire.

It was bad in Colossae. It was bad in Ephesus where this book eventually ended up, this letter, and the other towns where it circulated. It was awful.

And people said, we're just trying to preserve some sanctification here in the midst of awful darkness and pollution. We're trying to shine in the midst of a very dark generation. It has ever been thus.

You can look at all the different times of history and we think it's physical. We think it is circumstantial. We think it is personal.

We think it is people and even ourselves. Paul says the struggle is against the darkness, spiritual darkness. Those forces of darkness are not chaotic.

They are not random. Everybody's got this idea that the universe runs on happy coincidences and lucky chances coming true and well, isn't it great that on our planet life formed and surely on other planets somebody got a lucky break and carbon chemistry being what it is will eventually find life on other planets and that will put the last stake through the heart of Christianity because it will prove that there is nothing special about the earth. Well, I ain't holding my breath.

But the belief has been brainwashing students in school for several generations now that it all happens by chance and when bad things happen it's just luck, it's fate, kismet, karma, whatever it may be. There's no intelligence behind it. Paul says not so.

Not only is our struggle not physical, number one, but it is not random. It isn't happenstance, number two. We're not wrestling against physical forces and physical circumstances.

As believers in the Lord Jesus Christ we struggle against organized, thinking individuals that have a plan. When you talk about Arkes and you talk about Cosmocrators, these aren't people that just woke up one morning as a ruler, who just woke up and decided, wow, look, I've got power, I've got authority, I've got things I can do. Some of you have heard these Bible and living sound things and my favorite was always the Job series and Satan is down there trying to talk to this mass of rebellious angels.

They rebelled against God and so the thinking is, well, they rebelled against Satan too. You taught us to rebel, to disobey, to oppose all authority. How do you expect us to follow your plan when we're rebels by definition? It's an interesting thought, but it doesn't reflect reality.

In reality Satan is the biggest, best, brightest, smartest thing to ever come from the hand of God. He is organized, he is dedicated, he is on a mission, he believes in his mission, he thinks he's right, he thinks he's got a case, he is angry at God because God won't let him do what he wants, because God restricts him and limits him. You think he's mad now, wait until God throws him in the bottom of his pit for a thousand years and you think of what he's going to be like when he comes out at the end for Gog and Magog.

That's why the fire of God is going to come down and consume so much at the end of the millennium. But if you think about those two things, and in the course of the day we have to try to remind ourselves of these. You're at the sink, you pick up a dish, you turn on the water and you say, you know what, I am not wrestling against dirty dishes here.

That's not why I'm here. I'm not here to just do the laundry, do the dishes, do the house cleaning. I'm not just here to do the homework.

I'm not just here to do the job that is put in front of me by my employers, deadline, meeting, report, conference, task. We think these are the things that define our day. These are the story problems.

This is the shape that the challenge takes. But the challenge, I've used this illustration many times, but I can't think of a better one. You remember in your grade school textbook when they're trying to teach you rate, time, and distance? A train leaves Chicago traveling at 45 miles an hour.

Another train leaves New York heading towards Chicago traveling at 50 miles an hour. The distance between these two towns is whatever it is, when are they going to meet and how far will they have traveled? And it's rate, time, distance. Well, look, the problem is couched in terms of two cities, two trains, and some details about each one.

As I sit in my little desk, my right-hand desk that lets my right elbow rest, and I get out on the left side, and the left-handed people are frantically fighting over the one or two left-handed desks that have the left-handed arm rest, and you get out on the right, and it's got the little cubby underneath for your books, and it's got gum underneath, and it's got some guy from three years ago scratched his initials and, you know, this plus this in the formica top that's chipped away. As you sit there, you don't give two hoots in a rain barrel about trains or New York or Chicago. What is the real challenge here? I have got to come to understand how the physics of travel across distances at speeds works.

And once I master this information, once I understand this concept and I can use the formula to calculate it, this is going to help me forevermore. I'm in Dallas. I want to go to Tulsa.

I know that it takes me experientially four hours to get there when I average 80 miles an hour driving. I don't have a map, and I don't want to take my phone out and Google it on maps to find out what the distance is, but I can get an approximate distance from here to Tulsa by how long it takes me to drive at a known speed when I don't make hardly any stops. I use that rate time distance all the time.

Somebody says, well, you've got to go up to Denton, or you've got to go up to McKinney. Well, and they say, well, that's 20 miles. Well, I know how long it's going to take me if I can average 60 miles an hour.

I know exactly how long it's going to take me to get there because I've got this rate time distance. It's useful. I learned that on the Chicago and New York train problem sitting at my little desk, but I use it for a variety of things all over the place, right? This is what's going on in our lives.

We are struggling in this conceptual conflict. Demons are not going to come in and start slapping teacups off of my shelf, I hope. We're not going to be plagued with poltergeists.

And well, you know, my problem is I can't keep a set of teacups because the demons keep knocking them off the shelves. Well, my problem is that the demons keep going out there and poking holes in my tires. And when I want to go, it's not a physical struggle.

It is a conceptual struggle. How do I think about the day if they can succeed in getting me to think in material terms and thinking that my job depends on whether or not I please my boss? That my fate depends on whether or not I get this grade at any cost. Whatever I have to do to get this A, if I've got to shade my principles, if I've got to get some unauthorized help, if I've got to find it online and somebody else has already done the problem and has the answers, somebody says, hey, I got my brother's homework from this same prof and we've got the thing done.

I can go online and somebody will write my paper for me because the grade is the thing. I've got to get the grade by any means. We're attempting to solve physical problems at the expense of our souls, at the expense of righteousness.

This is what Paul is talking about. This is why this armor of God isn't anything you can see. Now, I've been looking at you all for a long time.

You've been looking at me for a long time, some of you for nearly all your life. Have you ever seen me with a metal breastplate strapped to my body? Have you ever seen me with some kind of a Roman helmet and one of those red brush decorations sticking out of the top? Have you ever seen me with greaves strapped to my shins? Have you ever seen me pick up something other than my Marine Corps sword and go forth to accomplish the tasks of my day? No, and I haven't seen you do it either because this is conceptual. It's so taken for granted, just like light and darkness.

We say, well, take up the full armor of God. Well, this is more real than our circumstances. Rate, time, distance principles are more real than trains running between towns.

I don't know that they even run trains other than freight trains anymore. It used to be that this was all based on passenger trains. I rode a passenger train a grand total of once, and all of my knowledge comes from archival footage.

We're not struggling against flesh and blood, Paul says. Principalities, powers, rulers of the darkness, spiritual entities in the heavenlies. Therefore, because of this, take up the whole armor of God.

Pick it up. It's available. You don't have to forge it.

You don't have to create it. It's not some rite of passage where you have to make your own bow and arrows or you have to hammer out your own tomahawk and then go forth to battle. It says pick it up.

It is already available. Where do you think this armor came from? Where did it come from? The Lord Jesus Christ is the one who made this armor available to us. Remember David when he was going to go out to fight Goliath and Saul says, well, you got to wrap yourself up, boy.

That guy is going to make mincemeat out of you, so here, put my armor on. People say, well, they think that Saul wanted to get the credit if David won. Saul had no confidence that David was going to succeed, and I don't think he wanted to be disgraced watching his armor get all mashed flat for recycling out there by this giant.

I think he felt sorry for David and thought, well, you know, we can't just send the guy out there naked and afraid, so we're going to give him some hope. And David says, I can't wear this stuff. I have not proved it.

I don't know anything about this stuff. I've never operated in this, and he doesn't need it because David's armor was invisible. You come to me with a sword, spear.

I come to you in the name of the Lord God of hosts, a name that you have defiled. And he stood in his spiritual armor and easily defeated a physical foe. Well, therefore, take up the panoply.

Pan means all. Pan-American, we fly all over the Americas. Pandemic means the epidemic is everywhere, right? Pan, pas, that means all.

The aplia there is hoplite. You know what a hoplite is, right? That's the Roman infantryman. This is pan-hoplite stuff.

This is everything that a hoplite uses. It's all of his battle gear. The Marine Corps used to have 782 gear, which is your belt with your cartridge pouches and your first aid kit and your canteens, and you've got a set of suspenders for that thing so it doesn't fall off when you're running and rolling and doing all the stuff you have to do.

And then on top of that, that's what you gird about your waist. Then you have other stuff. You've got your helmet.

You've got your boots. You've got your flak jacket in later years. In earlier times, we didn't have those.

That flak jacket didn't really hit the big time until Kevlar came out. And then they changed over the steel pots into Kevlar and you couldn't make your coffee in them anymore. And you pick up your

weapon.

So it's analogous to that, that you may be able to withstand an evil day in having done all to stand. We've talked about that. What is the evil day? This has got the definite article.

It isn't an evil day or some evil day. It is the evil day. What is the evil day? Are we doing all of this for some scheduled event? We're waiting for Armageddon.

We're waiting for Gog Magog. What is the evil day? That's your evil day. That's the evil day when you are up against it with the principalities, powers, rulers of the darkness, spiritual wickedness in the heavenlies.

You will come up against it pretty much every day. And this take up, by the way, is like a military command. It's in the heiress tense.

That means do it and we don't have any command that says, once you've won the victory, take your armor off. Lay aside your sword of the Spirit. Unstrap that heavy breastplate of righteousness.

Cool off your head. Remove that helmet of salvation. The first thing a lot of people do, especially if they're of the non-male persuasion, is take their shoes off.

There's some kind of female genetic thing that says, no shoes. And so the first thing, oh, you know, my feet are hurting. My feet are hot.

My feet are this. My feet need to be free. And so take off your shoes.

There is no command. There are plenty of commands in the Word of God to put on. The only thing we're told to put off is what? The old man.

Put off the old man with his ways. Put on the new man. Put on the robe of righteousness.

Put on the armor of God. We have no command anywhere in Scripture to take off the armor of God. It's an heiress.

Put it on and keep it on. We don't know when the evil day is. It's any day that you oppose evil is the evil day.

Stand therefore, and now we get into the armor itself. Into the armor itself. Having girded your waist with truth.

The belt that Roman soldiers wore was like that web belt for a soldier or a marine. It is kind of the starting point. A lot of other stuff depends on having that belt.

You can't put on your breastplate and then try to gird your waist. You know, this has to come first.

It's the first thing you put on.

You've got to, it did many things. It secured and stabilized everything else the soldier carried by its size and shape and tightness. It kept the soldiers in an erect posture.

It kept them upright. It was kind of like these weight belts that guys wear when they know they're going to do heavy lifting. This was a, and this by the way is the reason a lot of dress uniforms are just incredibly uncomfortable because it is on purpose.

Dress uniforms in the Navy and in the other services, those full dress uniforms with those high collars and all the rest of it, they are tailored to be tight and to hold you in a military bearing that makes you and everybody else wearing that uniform look good. Nobody can slouch in a properly tailored set of marine blues. You cannot, you couldn't slouch if you wanted to.

You can relax every muscle in your body and you're still going to be pretty much standing at attention. They can just prop you up. You could pass out.

They'll just lean you in a corner. The uniform holds you up. That's what this girding your waist did.

It was the first thing, the first, this is when you're changing from civilian into military garb, the first thing you did after you discarded your civilian clothing was put on your belt. This is the foundation for everything else. And what is our waist girding belt? It is truth.

This would be better truthfulness. You say, well, it's the truth of the word of God. It's truth in the abstract.

You know, truth is my banner. You know, what does this letter say about truth? You remember our extended discussion back in chapter four and chapter five, remember four 25 putting away lying. Let each of you speak truth with one another.

No dissembling, no deception, no facade, no fainting. I'm going to go this way. No, I'm really going this way with each other and before God we are transparent and we are truthful.

We say what we mean. We mean what we say. We make a commitment.

We keep it. We say we're going to be there. We're there.

We say we're going to do it. We do it. It is truthfulness.

We gird our waist. That's the beginning. There's no point in trying to do any of the rest of this if we have not first put away deception, put away lying, put away hypocrisy, wearing the mask, you know, the tears of a clown.

You remember that song? I, I, I go to the party and everybody sees me smiling and they think I'm happy. What they don't see are the tears of the clown. I'm ha ha ha, but I'm really just dying

inside.

No, we are truthful. We rejoice with those who rejoice. We weep with those who weep.

There is a time to rejoice. There's a time to mourn. There's a time to sow.

There's a time to reap. There's a time for everything under God's heaven and when it is that time, that is what we do. We are dedicated to truthfulness.

That is the starting place. Now again, we're starting to get kind of abstract and conceptual as we're going through the day. This is a gut check.

Have I got my 782 belt on? Do I have my waist girded with truth? Am I being truthful right now? Am I leading this person on? Am I giving some sort of false impression? Am I glossing over something that shouldn't be glossed? Am I making a mountain out of something that shouldn't be mountainous? Am I truthful? And this is a horizontal vertical thing. Let's take the mountain molehill thing. We are often masters at taking small things and blowing them out of proportion.

How can we prevent that? To us, well, that's my truth. To me, this is incredibly important. You didn't say thank you.

I knocked myself out for X amount of time and it just seems to be totally unappreciated. Well, nothing else is going to happen until I get my thank you. And the angrier I get, the more I expect you to suddenly beam sunshine and say, oh, thank you.

I mean, you know, our very irritation is the best way to never get a thank you over something like that. I'm using this in the abstract because I can't think of any recent example of it. But what needs to happen in a situation like that where we become self-centered and I haven't gotten my just desserts? Well, I'm being truthful because I'm really upset.

I'm letting this person know I'm upset. What kind of truth are we talking about here? God's truth needs to illuminate me that it ain't about me and let this mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus. How many people walked up to the cross and said, well, thank you, Lord.

Really appreciate you dying for my sins here. He died for the sins of his people. He died for the sins of the nation.

The very Pharisees that got him crucified got their sins paid for as Jesus hung on the cross while they mocked him and jeered at him and said, well, if you're the son of God, come down. You know, if he delights in him, let him deliver him. And they made these inconsolably rude remarks.

And the Lord Jesus didn't say, I deserve better than this. This is the glorious moment of human salvation. It's the point of all of human history.

You guys are missing it. Let me just stop right here. Let's just halt everything.

Stop the darkness. Stop the bleeding. Let me come down and explain to you what is happening here so that you'll appreciate me.

It's not what the Lord Jesus did. Let this mind be in you which was in Christ Jesus. So what kind of truthfulness are we girding our waist with here? We have got to know the truth.

We have to be set free by that spiritual truth, free to serve, free to reflect God's glory. God's truth has to be illuminating us. That is the truth that we speak to one another.

I don't speak the truth of my sinful attitude. I don't speak the truth of my belligerence and my corruption and my perversion and my sinful nature. God's truth illuminates me, cleanses me, enlightens me, fixes me.

That is the truth that I can now speak to others. We're not talking about any old truth. This dinner stinks.

I have never had a piece of meat that tasted this bad. Roadkill would be my preference compared to what you just served. Not that kind of truth.

What truth are we talking about here? This is divine truth, biblical truth, spiritual truth, truth in action, truth like the Lord Jesus on the cross, truth like the Lord Jesus ascended and sitting at the right hand of the Father pleading our case, interceding on our behalf, in our ingratitude, in our short-sightedness, in our self-centeredness. And He is up there pleading our case, even though we are ungrateful. Gird your waist with truth.

That's the first piece of equipment. Nothing else can happen until you get that truth circulating. You'll know the truth.

It will free you, Jesus said. What's the mission of the Holy Spirit? What's His function? I will send you in out of the comforter. What's He going to do? Lead you into all truth.

Put away lying. Let each of you speak truth with his neighbor. Don't give place to the devil.

Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth but what is good for necessary edification, Ephesians 4.29. Good for up-building. That kind of truth. Not tear-down truth, not hyper-critical truth, not judgmental truth that does nobody any good because of the spirit in which it is given.

This is God's truth, up-building. What is good for necessary edification that it may impart grace to the hearers? Not just any old truth. God's truth imparts grace to the hearers.

Don't grieve the Holy Spirit of God. How would you grieve the Holy Spirit of God if His mission is to lead us into all truth and we are going in a different direction? The Holy Spirit is not able to do His job in us and through us. He'll do His job but it's going to change to a job of conviction and a

job of judgment.

Let bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, evil speaking be put away from you. Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another. Be imitators of God as do your children.

Walk in love, etc. This is girding your waist with truth. It's not an abstraction.

It's not strapping pages of your Bible around your waist. It's not filling your notebooks with helpful insights. This is functional truth.

I wake up in the morning and say, I have got to be transparently truthful. I've got to be a reflection. I am the body of the Lord Jesus Christ on this earth.

I am a part of it. He is the Word. Thy Word is truth.

Thy Word is a lamp and a light. We are here to shine as light. It's the light of truth.

It's the light of transparent reflection of the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ. That's girding your waist with truth. Well, we are going to pause here and take a break.

When we come back we are going to see some things and there are details about the rest of these pieces of the panoply that I think will be very helpful, things I did not know in the past, as many times as I've been through Ephesians. The Word of God, as I've said many times, it's the Mandelbrot set. The more you look at it, the more you see.

I'm very grateful to be able to pass on some things that I've learned just in this past week when we come back from the break.