



(Play [video of Ira Glass](#) denying the presence of “devils” and a spiritual battle.) This man, Ira Glass, is considered to be one of the best storytellers of our day. His PBS show is called This American Life. In the clip I pulled this from, Ira was actually defending and complementing Christians so he is not your typical liberal Christian hater. But as a Jewish atheist, he cannot possibly understand the presence of actual demons engaged in an actual spiritual battle.

He was wrong about two things—atheists and believers do not share common ground on this topic and there really is a war going on with “actual devils.” Last week I said that we have two basic reactions to this topic—either we assign Satan too much influence and power or we give him too little. Actually, I think many Christians are more like Ira Glass than we care to admit.

1. Who is my enemy?

- People are not our enemy
- Satan has schemes and strategies
 - Deceiver
 - Accuser
 - Destroyer
- Satan is not all powerful
- But he is the ruler of this world

2. Why do I need the armor of God?

- The armor of God is indispensable to the Christian life

We are not aware of this battle and therefore we do nothing or else we have a vague sense that it is happening but we don’t know what to do about it.

First, let me remind you of what we covered last Sunday (left).

Our third main point is: We fight because the enemy has been defeated. We fight because the war has been decided. Battles remain but the war has already been won.

Look at the how Paul uses the description of demonic powers in this chapter and also in chapters one and three.

Ephesians 6:12

rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.

Ephesians 1:19-21

and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, 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.

In the chapter three reference, Paul made it clear that Christ has been seated as victor over all of these powers. The powers exist for now but they are in a subservient role to Christ. Moreover, Ephesians 2 reminds us that we are seated with Christ in the heavenly places. We sit with Christ in his victory over these powers. They may rage, but do so because they know that their time is short.

Our fourth main point is the explanation of the armor of God.

1. What is the armor of God?

a. It is submission to God

James 4:7—*Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.* As I said last week, putting on the armor of God is an act of submission to God.

Q—will Satan really flee from us? Then in what sense does the battle rage around us 24/7?

b. It is GOD'S armor

It may seem a bit redundant, but I think we miss the point that the armor of God is literally God's armor. There is an amazing passage from Isaiah 59 and I want to read portions of it.

*59:1 Behold, the LORD's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save,
or his ear dull, that it cannot hear;
2 but your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God,
and our sins have hidden his face from you so that he does not hear.*

This is the bad news about our human condition. Lately, if I ask someone how they are doing and they answer "Good," I begin to quote my own translation of Romans 3. "There is no one who is good, not even one; there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God." I mostly do it to be irritating, but it also serves to remind me of our condition apart from Christ, which is what Isaiah made painfully clear. Our sins have separated us from God.

*8 The way of peace they do not know, and there is no justice in their paths;
they have made their roads crooked; no one who treads on them knows peace.*

*9 Therefore justice is far from us, and righteousness does not overtake us;
The LORD saw it, and it displeased him that there was no justice.
16 He saw that there was no man, and wondered that there was no one to intercede;*

The lack of righteousness in the human condition was troubling to the Lord. It “displeased” him. He saw that there was no man to intercede for the unrighteous mass of humanity. And what was his solution to this problem of sin and unrighteousness?

*17 He put on righteousness as a breastplate, and a helmet of salvation on his head;
he put on garments of vengeance for clothing, and wrapped himself in zeal as a cloak.
18 According to their deeds, so will he repay, wrath to his adversaries, repayment to his enemies;
to the coastlands he will render repayment.
19 So they shall fear the name of the LORD from the west, and his glory from the rising of the sun;
for he will come like a rushing stream, which the wind of the LORD drives.
20 “And a Redeemer will come to Zion,
to those in Jacob who turn from transgression,” declares the LORD.
21 “And as for me, this is my covenant with them,” says the LORD: “My Spirit that is upon you,
and my words that I have put in your mouth, shall not depart out of your mouth, or out of the
mouth of your offspring, or out of the mouth of your children’s offspring,” says the LORD, “from
this time forth and forevermore.”*

Do you see? This is literally God’s armor. The Lord himself put on a breastplate of righteousness and a helmet of salvation. The end result was that “a Redeemer will come to Zion” and bring them a new covenant of righteousness. God looked down and saw that there was no one to intercede on behalf of mankind and so he sent a Redeemer from Zion. Christ came to rescue us from sin and death and to grant righteousness to us.

So what does this mean for us? It means that the armor of God really is God’s armor. Putting on the armor of God is like putting on the Lord Jesus Christ. Not only is it his armor, but his armor is himself. God is salvation. God is righteousness. God is truth. All of the individual pieces of armor flow from the very essence of God’s character. The armor of God is both God and the result of his salvation our behalf.

The battle imagery and pieces of armor have been overdone in the Christian realm. It’s fine for kids to play with plastic armor and shields. Obviously Paul wanted us to picture the armor something like the Roman soldiers of his day would do for battle. But in the process I think we have dehumanized the armor of God. We look at the armor of God as a thing rather than as a person. We understand the armor of God to be like pieces that we put on one at a time. Twenty some years ago in a Bible study, one of the guys explained how each morning he visualized putting on each piece of the armor. It seemed like a sort of ritual without much understanding. So as we look at the parts the armor and what they mean, let’s keep in mind that:

1. The armor does not belong to us, per se, it is God’s armor.
2. The armor is not a thing or a collection of things but rather a person—Jesus Christ.
3. Therefore, we are to put on the full armor of God. The pieces cannot be separated any more than God can be separated into parts.

Belt of truth

Last week we described our enemy in some detail. Do you recall his number on weapon? As the father of lies, deception is his most destructive tool against us. Destruction is his end goal but deception is the means he employs to bring about our destruction.

Jesus said, “I am the way and the”... what? “I am the truth.” Jesus does not contain truth. Jesus is truth. And how do we get to know the truth? Two Sundays ago I said that the amount of armor you are wearing is directly proportional to the amount of time spent reading, meditating and applying the word of God. If you are not spending regular time in the word of God it is not possible to know the truth of God.

In the church we talk a lot about having your daily quite time or devotional time. We hand out Bible reading lists and ideas. If we are not careful, our daily time in the Word can begin to sound like just another ritual. And it can be. It can be as ritualistic and as dead as anything the Pharisees ever did or the religious people of our day. Or it can be lively, relational and transforming. But chances are, over the long haul, it will land somewhere in between electric and ritualistic; between pure obedience and pure joy.

Last week I read part of a personal letter written by John Newton to one of his parishioners. Here is another section of that letter where Newton is speaking of the habit of Bible reading.

Though he knows that communion with God is his highest privilege, he too seldom finds it so; on the contrary, if duty, conscience, and necessity did not compel, he would leave the throne of grace unvisited from day to day. He takes up the Bible, conscious that it is the fountain of life and true comfort; yet perhaps, while he is making the reflection, he feels a secret distaste, which prompts him to lay it down, and give him preference to a newspaper.¹

Sometimes we give up because it feels as if “duty, conscience and necessity” are all that is driving our daily devotions. They feel flat and dry so we think if the only reason I am doing my devotions is out of duty, then that is a bad motivation. So we quit doing them. We think that it would be better to have no devotions than to have dry devotions. But I love what Newton is saying here. There is a competition of our time, desires and motivations. But it is OK if sometimes duty and conscience is all that motivates us to read our Bibles. Yes, if it is always like that month after month, you need to seek some counsel and do something different. But the Christian life is a mixture of duty and joy. Don’t tell anyone, but I don’t always feel like doing everything a pastor is supposed to be doing. I don’t always jump for joy in all of my roles and responsibilities as a father and husband. If it were not for duty and conscience, many important thing and tasks would go undone.

Duty is not necessarily a bad motive for doing something good. Just because we don’t feel like reading our Bible doesn’t mean that reading our Bible out of a sense of duty is a bad thing. The other day I was working out and talking with a guy about various topics. I knew that he lived in Madison and I may not see him again for a long time, and perhaps never again. I knew that I really needed to share the gospel with him but I honestly did not feel like it. There was a very

real sense of duty and necessity that drove me to begin the spiritual conversation. I had to figure out how to transition the conversation and how I would begin. It doesn't always happen this way, but we had a really good, twenty minute conversation. I shared the whole gospel and he was very receptive and contemplative about it all. So before the conversation I felt a sense of duty but how do you think I felt after the conversation? I had a true sense of joy, no doubt about that.

All this is to say that wearing the armor of God requires you to be in his word all of the time—reading, meditating, praying through, acting on the commands and truths. If you are already doing this, how is it going for you? If you are not, what is your plan for the next six months?

The breastplate of righteousness

By nature, God is righteous and we are not. This is why God sent a Redeemer from Zion, to deal with our unrighteousness. Most of us understand the basic idea of the gospel, that Christ took our sins upon him on the cross. But if you remove a person's sin you are left a zero balance. Let's say you owed \$40,000 in college loans. If some nice person came along and paid your debt, you would be free from that obligation. You wouldn't have a debt but neither would you have a positive balance. God doesn't merely require that we be without sin but he requires us to have a positive balance of righteousness. This is why in addition to removing our debt of sin he also gives us a positive balance of righteousness.

A key verse for this piece of armor is 2 Corinthians 5:21. *God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.* This is what we call imputation of Christ's righteousness. It simply means that Christ's perfect righteousness has been credited to our account. So the breastplate of righteousness is simply the application of this truth. When the deception of the enemy attacks us telling us that God would never accept us; that we are hopeless and helpless we need only to claim the righteousness of God that has been given to us. It is a breast, for certain, but it is also a full covering of righteousness. If all you have is Christ, then you are submitting to Christ.

Gospel shoes

as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace

This piece of armor flows out of Isaiah 52:7—*How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, who publishes peace, who brings good news of happiness, who publishes salvation, who says to Zion, "Your God reigns."*

Would you say that shoes are more of a defensive or offensive weapon? Most people conclude that the armor is all defensive except for the obvious sword of the Spirit. But I am of the opinion that the preaching of the gospel is an offensive weapon. In Matthew 16, Jesus said, *I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.* The church is built through the preaching of the gospel and even the gates of hell will not prevail. Gates are meant to keep people out. They are defensive in nature. The gates of hell are a defense against the offensive weapon of the gospel. Even though it may appear that our preaching is in vain and the enemy has gained too much ground, the gates of hell cannot and will not prevail.

Shield of Faith,

The kind of shield Paul envisioned was probably the large shield carried by the Romans. This is meant to *extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one*. Like the others, this piece of armor is also described in the Old Testament. *This God—his way is perfect; the word of the LORD proves true; he is a shield for all those who take refuge in him* (Psalm 18:30). According to this verse, what is our shield of faith? Again, it's not a *what*, it's a *who*. Jesus is our shield of faith. Our faith is the shield. Do you see? Jesus is our shield of faith and the object of our faith. Our faith is not in faith. Our faith is in Christ.

Which of the following three options is least likely to happen?

1. The church roof will come crashing down upon us before the end of the sermon.
2. The sun will not rise tomorrow morning (meaning that the earth would stop rotating on its axis)
3. Jesus will break his promises.

I have total confidence in this roof, partly because I watched as the roof trusses were set in place, as the sheeting was nailed down and I helped to shingle it. It could come crashing down, but I doubt that it will. As much confidence as I have in this roof, I have more confidence that the earth will continue to rotate on its axis. It has done so for thousands of years and there is no evidence that would lead me to believe otherwise. And as much confidence as I have in the fact that the earth will continue to rotate on its axis, I have even more confidence in the fact that Jesus will not break his promises. Not a single one. I know this because I study his word, because I have walked with him for 33 years and he is infinitely faithful and perfect in all his ways. My faith is not a credit to me but to the object of my faith. My faith is based upon my confidence in his perfect faithfulness.

This kind of faith is attractive to other people. A few years ago I presented a biography on George Whitefield, the famed evangelist of the First Great Awakening. During one of his outdoor sermons preached with his booming voice, Scottish philosopher and skeptic, David Hume, was recognized among a crowd. Someone standing near Hume asked, "I thought you didn't believe in the Gospel." "I do not," Hume replied. Then, with a nod toward Whitefield, he added, "But he does." David Hume never professed faith in Christ but was drawn to Whitefield's faith.

Helmet of salvation

The helmet is salvation. This is similar to the breastplate of righteousness.

Sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God,

Hebrews 4:12—For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

Can you imagine a legion of soldiers who line up at the front lines of battle fully arrayed in armor but fail to bring their swords? That would be ludicrous, absurd, insane.

Now imagine the same legion of soldiers lining up for battle and they all have swords but they have never used them or been trained with them. That would be ludicrous, absurd, insane.

Finally, picture a legion of Christians lined up for battle in the real world and they either don't have their swords or else they have not been trained with their swords and by their swords. This too would be ludicrous, absurd, insane.

Atheists will never understand the nature and reality of spiritual warfare unless God opens their eyes to his truth. But Christians can understand it and live it. It's not all that complicated. Submit to God, resist the devil and he will flee from you. The more you know the Lord, the more submissive you will be to his will and his ways.

Last week I shared a portion of the hymn, *A Mighty Fortress is Our God*.

For still our ancient foe
Doth seek to work us woe;
His craft and power are great
And armed with cruel hate
On earth is not his equal

As we close by singing this hymn, listen and watch for how our ancient foe is defeated.

A mighty fortress is our God,
a bulwark never failing;
our helper he amid the flood
of mortal ills prevailing.
For still our ancient foe
doth seek to work us woe;
his craft and power are great,
and armed with cruel hate,
on earth is not his equal.

2. Did we in our own strength confide,
our striving would be losing,
were not the right man on our side,
the man of God's own choosing.
Dost ask who that may be?
Christ Jesus, it is he;
Lord Sabaoth, his name,
from age to age the same,
and he must win the battle.
3. And though this world, with devils filled,
should threaten to undo us,
we will not fear, for God hath willed
his truth to triumph through us.
The Prince of Darkness grim,
we tremble not for him;
his rage we can endure,
for lo, his doom is sure;

one little word shall fell him.

4. That word above all earthly powers,
no thanks to them, abideth;
the Spirit and the gifts are ours,
thru him who with us sideth.
Let goods and kindred go,
this mortal life also;
the body they may kill;
God's truth abideth still;
his kingdom is forever.

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June 9, 2013

¹ Personal letter, John Newton, 1776.