

Stand “The Belt of Truth”

Ephesians 6:10-18

Delivered at Central Baptist Church on October 10, 2021

INTRODUCTION

- (SHOW SLIDE 01) This whole series on the armour of God raises a big problem. You see, Paul has been teaching us to think of the Christian life in terms of war, armour, enemies, and fighting.
 - This is a problem for people today because the attacks of 911 changed our world forever. 911 made everyone see the connection between religion and violence.
 - Many books were then written that make two basic points: first, religion causes violence. And second, if we only get rid of religion and build societies on secular ideals we will be on the path to world peace.
- Long before 911, John Lennon's song *Imagine* perfectly captured this idea.
 - (SHOW SLIDE 02)
 - *Imagine there's no heaven*
It's easy if you try
No hell below us
Above us only sky
Imagine all the people
Living for today
 - (SHOW SLIDE 03)
 - *Imagine there's no countries*
It isn't hard to do
Nothing to kill or die for
And no religion too
Imagine all the people
Living life in peace
 - So, if religion leads to violence and secular ideals lead to peace then you can see why people want nothing to do with Christianity. (SHOW TITLE SLIDE 04) And you can see why scriptures like the armour of God are viewed as dangerous because they use warfare imagery.
 - So here is my plan for today: I want to take about 10 minutes to address this issue of religion leading to violence and once we have done that, then we will look at the first piece of armour, which is the belt of truth.
 - So let me give four responses to this (SHOW SLIDE 05 – make this sentence a header on next few slides) **objection: religion leads to violence, whereas embracing secular ideals will lead to peace.** First, (SHOW SLIDE 06) to an extent, Christians must agree.
 - Historically people have used religion as a means to enforce beliefs and agendas. It is easy to see how this happens. If you believe that you have the ultimate authoritative truth and others do not you can feel superior to them and look down your nose at them.

- That superiority can lead to villainizing others who do not share your views and once they are villainized it is only a short step to passive aggression and a few more steps to active aggression through violence.
- But in the second place we must say **(SHOW SLIDE 07)** it is unfair to say that **only religion has the potential for violence. Any ideal has this potential.**
 - When society rejects God as its ultimate ideal it will simply fill that void with another ultimate ideal through which people will judge others, villainize those who disagree with them, and this can and does lead to violence.
 - For instance, it was in the name of socialism that Pol Pot killed his millions in Cambodia. Or think of the French Revolution. The French got rid of God and lived for the idea of freedom or liberty. But when people disagreed with how liberty should look they were killed.
 - There is a famous incident in 1793 when Madame Roland went to the guillotine because she disagreed with how freedom should look. She bowed to the statue personifying liberty and said, **(SHOW SLIDE 08)** ***"Liberty, what crimes are committed in your name."***
 - So, I am arguing that it is false to say religion is *the* cause of violence because history shows that *any* ultimate ideal can be abused, not just religion.
- But let's go further. In the third place, **(SHOW SLIDE 09)** **Historically, secular values have also led to violence.** Let's grant John Lennon's dream does happen and we rid the world of religion and build societies on purely secular values. Will getting rid of God lead to peace? We don't have to guess because it has already been attempted numerous times in the 20th century. What were the results?
 - Think only of the big two atheistic or secular regimes of the 20th century – Communist Russia and Communist China. Stalin was responsible for around 20 million deaths. Jung Chang and Jon Halliday's recent study *Mao: The Unknown Story* attributes to Mao Zedong's regime around 70 million deaths.¹
 - The worst mass murders in history utterly rejected religion and built their societies on their own ideals.
 - It is clear then that *all* ideals – whether religious or otherwise can be abused. There is some violent impulse in human nature that comes out no matter what the ideal. Therefore, when religion is abused it needs to be confronted and opposed.²
- It is right here that the Christian message brings hope to a violent world. How so? **(SHOW SLIDE 10)** **True Christianity produces peace.**
 - Those who have committed violence in the name of Jesus are not doing so not because they have *too much* Jesus but because they have *too little* Jesus.
 - For it was Jesus who commanded his followers to love their enemies, to pray for those who persecute them and Jesus absolutely forbid his followers to extend his message through force. Furthermore, Jesus

¹ Dinesh D'Souza, "What's so great about Christianity?", 214.

² For further discussion see, Alister McGrath, *The Dawkins Delusion*, 75-99; Timothy Keller, *The Reason for God*, 51-67; Dinesh D'Souza, *What's so great about Christianity?* 203-224.

- breaks any notions of superiority because his message is that we are all sinners and all are saved strictly by grace. When God's grace gets a hold of a person they turn from superiority to helping those who are in need.
- It was Christian activists such as William Wilberforce who brought about the abolition of slavery because he believed what the world needed was more Christianity with its high view of human nature. Martin Luther King called white Christians to a fuller embracing of Jesus as the means to end racism in the south.
 - Christianity can be abused and lead to violence but those who do so are not following their Lord for when he was being crucified he prayed, "Father, forgive them." He calls his people to do the same.

WHY DOES PAUL USE WARFARE IMAGERY?

- **(SHOW TITLE SLIDE 11)** So that is my brief 10-minute response. As we transition to our passage today then we might ask, "*if Jesus is about peace, why then does Paul then call us to think of the Christian life in warfare imagery?*" The answer is *not* that Paul glories in violence. Moreover, the answer is *not* to encourage us to fight other people. Paul is crystal clear that our fight is not with people, but with evil spiritual powers.
 - Look at verse 12. **(SHOW SLIDE 12)**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.
 - Paul uses warfare imagery because our enemy is evil and powerful. Only warfare imagery captures what is going on.
 - Paul wants us to be able to stand against our enemy. And the key to it all is to put on the armour that God gives us. God has given us what we need to stand against our enemy but we must put the armour on.
 - So let's look at the first piece of armour we must put on. It's in verse 14. **(SHOW SLIDE 13)**¹⁴ Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth.
 - Let's ask three questions of this: what is the belt? What does the belt refer to? How does the belt enable us to stand against the adversary?

WHAT IS THE BELT?

- Let's begin then by asking, **(SHOW SLIDE 14)** **What is the belt?** The image that Paul is giving is one of a fully armed Roman soldier. The first piece of armour he says we must put on is the belt of truth.
 - **(SHOW TITLE SLIDE 15)** Now if you have another version it may say, "*Stand firm then having your loins girt about with truth.*" What in the world does that mean?
- In ancient times men wore a tunic which was basically just a big piece of cloth with four holes that you pulled on over your head. The tunic was very loose fitting and long which, though comfortable, hindered quick movements such as running or fighting. You could trip over the bottom or get caught up in it.
 - So every Roman soldier also had a girdle or a belt made of leather. Here's an image of what it looked like. **(SHOW SLIDE 16)** The girdle provided protection

for the private parts but also was used to tuck in the loose parts of the tunic. So, before a battle the first thing he did was to gather up all the loose parts of his robes and tighten his belt over them. With the loose parts of clothing securely in place he was now free to move unhindered.

- So putting on the belt, or girding up your loins, meant you were prepared and ready for action.
 - It is no wonder the belt of truth is the first piece of armour we must put on.

WHAT DOES THE BELT REFER TO?

- In the second place then we need to ask, **(SHOW SLIDE 17) What does the belt refer to?**
The belt is not any old belt; it is "**the belt of truth**".
 - **(SHOW TITLE SLIDE 18)** It is in the truth of God's word. We are only ready to withstand the attacks of the evil spiritual powers when we have the truth belted around us – when we know what the Bible teaches and we are living it out. If we do not gather up our mind and buckle it with the great truths of the faith the devil can trip us up or grab onto loose thinking and lead us astray.
 - This means far more than knowing bare facts. This is truth possessed in the innermost part of your being. In the words of one preacher, "**It means a mastery of truth, but it also means being mastered by the truth.**"³ It means letting the truth inside you and letting it change you.
- So, what does the belt refer to? **(SHOW SLIDE 19) To put on the belt of truth means to learn, understand, digest, and apply God's truth in all areas of life.**

HOW DOES THE BELT OF TRUTH ENABLE US TO STAND?

- But that leads us to the third and most critical question. **(SHOW SLIDE 20) How does putting on the belt of truth enable us to stand against our adversary?**
 - This is important because if we can see how the belt of truth enables us to stand we will make sure we put it on. Let me give you the answer and then explain it. **(SHOW SLIDE 21) When you learn truth it enables you to stand firm against the enemy's lies.**
- Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones illustrates from everyday life what this looks like. **(SHOW TITLE SLIDE 22)** He was on a train one day when there was a great commotion. When he came on the scene a man was struggling on the floor, turning a bluish red colour and frothing at the mouth. The people who gathered around believed he was having a stroke or a heart attack. Based on these assumptions the good people had agreed they should stop the train and get the man to a hospital before he died.
 - But because he was a doctor, Lloyd-Jones saw things differently and came to a different judgement. The man was simply having an epileptic seizure which he probably had many times before and would recover just fine. He would surely be very annoyed if he woke up in a hospital having stopped an entire train. Lloyd-Jones stepped in and with an authoritative voice told them it was unnecessary to stop the train and that the man would be fine. They doubted

³ Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *The Christian Soldier*, 189.

him initially but were eventually persuaded. Sure enough the man was fine and went home without any assistance.

- So we see that because these people did not possess the truth about the man's condition, they were about to deal with it in all the wrong ways. What prevented them? It was the voice of truth. When truth spoke they were given a whole new perspective and therefore reacted rightly.
- Isn't this the way it works in your life? There you are in a terrible condition. Perhaps you are stuck in a certain sin? Perhaps your heart is doubting or in despair. What can help you? It is not keeping a stiff upper lip. It is not just trying harder. It is when a voice of truth speaks into your life.
 - It is when for instance you are listening to a sermon and suddenly a certain truth breaks in on you about how God is always with you. All at once you have a new perspective and this new light lifts you out of that pit.
- You see, the devil is always coming to deceive you in one way or another. He is trying to get you to believe wrongly about who God is, what he is like, about who we are as Christians, and how we are to live life. Having believed the lies we bring destruction upon ourselves and upon those around us.
 - But when we belt ourselves with the truth we can see through the lies. This is what Jesus is getting when he said at in John 8. "***Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.***"
 - What truth is he speaking of? It is his teaching. For Jesus *is* the truth and all he says is truth. So if we put on Jesus' teaching we will be liberated from the devil's deceitful attacks.
- It is like that a verse in that great hymn "For all the Saints". It says, **(SHOW SLIDE 23)**
 - ***And when the strife is fierce, the warfare long,
Steals on the ear the distant triumph song,
And hearts are brave, again, and arms are strong.
Alleluia, Alleluia!***
 - Do you see the picture? It is of a great army in battle. They are overwhelmed by the enemy. They are weary and losing. But then a sound from afar, a great trumpet call. It is the neighbouring king with his vast army come to aid. Suddenly hearts grow brave against and arms are strong. Why? Their whole thinking has been re-arranged. This new truth has changed them.
- **(SHOW TITLE SLIDE 24)** Friends, this is the way the belt of truth works. As we put it on, we can suddenly see through the enemies lies. The blinders that we had on for so long are removed.
 - This is why we must constantly be learning truth for we never know when are how the enemy's attacks are going to come.

APPLYING THE BELT OF TRUTH TO UNFORGIVENESS

- Well that is the teaching. But let's see if we cannot experience it right now by dealing with one specific area. Let me give you another *Lord of the Rings* analogy that I am praying will happen in these next few moments. Do you remember how that

treacherous servant named Worm-tongue lied and lied to Theoden the king of Rohan?

(SHOW SLIDE 25) His deceptive words cast a spell on the king and overthrew his mind.

The effect was that the king's strength left him. He grows old prematurely. He is self-absorbed, bitter, and unable to even discern the lies.

- That is until the day Gandalf enters the great hall. Worm-tongue verbally attacks him but Gandalf says, "*Be silent! Keep your forked tongue behind your teeth. I have not passed through fire and death to bandy crooked words with a witless worm.*" And Worm-tongue is struck down. (SHOW SLIDE 26) Gandalf approaches the king on his throne saying,
 - "*Theoden, Son of Thengel. Too long have you sat in the shadows...I release you from the spell.*" And with great struggle Theoden is released. With the power of the lie broken his skin changes back to normal and it is like he has awakened from a dream. Gandalf smiles and says, "*Breathe the free air again my friend.*"
- (SHOW TITLE SLIDE 27) Friends there are many areas that the Great Worm-tongue enslaves Christians with his lies. But today by God's grace, I want to bring the truth to bear upon just one area, that Jesus Christ might liberate some who have sat in shadows far too long and equip others for the day when they will be attacked in this area: I speak of the issue of bitterness or unforgiveness.
 - Someone has offended you - a family member, a spouse, or a colleague. In your pain Worm-tongue comes with his whispers. You find your thoughts going over the offense again and again. You find yourself creating scenarios in your head where you put that person in their place. And soon a seed of bitterness begins to grow. But you justify it for in your mind they were clearly in the wrong. But we all know in experience what happens when we are deceived into holding onto another's offense and not forgiving them.
 - First, like Theoden we are consumed by the lie. They go on their way but we are controlled by them and can even physically be ill with bitterness.
 - Secondly, we usually end up retaliating and often in a way that is far worse even than their original offense. And we have seen what happens when people live like this for some time. They become self-absorbed and self-justifying, always playing the victim, never taking responsibility. They drive others further and further away until like Theoden the lies overthrow our minds and we are enslaved.
 - Oh but Jesus wants to equip us to fight against the devil when he attacks like this and he wants to liberate those who right now are in bondage. How do you get out of such thinking? You need a voice from the outside. You need Jesus to enter the throne room of your heart with words His truth that will set you free.
 - How can you get free of unforgiveness? Buckle on Colossians 3:13: (SHOW SLIDE 28) "*Forgive as the Lord forgave you.*"
 - He does not say, "forgive because what that person did wasn't all that bad." No, Jesus never downplays the hurt others cause. He does not say, "forgive because it's just the right thing to do." That is true but the spell of bitterness is so strong, we can't do the right thing. No, Jesus gives us

the ultimate power to forgive. We are set free from the spell of bitterness when we see how Christ has forgiven us.

- This is so painful to see on the one hand, but it is the way to freedom. Must see that you owe God an infinite debt for your sins. Must be humbled to see that you are a sinner who cannot repay that debt and that you deserve judgement. Ah but then God sent Christ to pay the debt you cannot pay. And what a high cost Jesus paid. He gave his life on the cross and you are forgiven.
 - You can rejoice and sing, "***My sin not in part but the whole is nailed to the cross and I bear it no more, praise the Lord, praise the Lord oh my soul.***" You rejoice that God has forgiven you you massive debt.
 - When your heart is rejoicing in this newfound freedom, your heart can then forgive others for the debts that they owe you. As C.S. Lewis put it, **(SHOW SLIDE 29)** "To be a Christian means to forgive the inexcusable, because God has forgiven the inexcusable in you."
- Do you feel the truth working? Do you feel the shadow fleeing away? When you see how much Christ has forgiven you, when that truth comes to your soul, it frees you to be able to forgive others.

THREE IMPLICATIONS OF THIS PASSAGE

- **(SHOW TITLE SLIDE 30)** So what we do with this one issue of unforgiveness and bitterness we must do with everything. We must put on the belt of truth.
 - Truth about who God is. Truth about his love for us in Christ. Truth about how he wants us to live. Truth about our sexuality, marriage, relationships with others, anger, forgiveness, patience, world missions, caring for the poor, and so many other areas.
- How do you do this? Learn the truth. The more you understand the truth of God's word the more prepared you are for the battle. You can see through the lies. Suggest three things:
 - First, buy an ESV study Bible. What is a study Bible? It is a Bible with helpful notes under most verses which explain their background and meaning.
 - Second, set aside a regular reading time. Read slowly. Read meditatively. Don't just read to learn facts but pray and ask the Holy Spirit to open up your eyes to see what you need to change.
 - Third, commit to a bible-believing church. Many of you will move on from Central one day. Make sure that you choose a church that teaches and preaches the Bible that you may be equipped in the truth.
 - Put on the belt of truth. The truth is what prepares you to face all that you will face in this world.