

P Levy Eph 6 Spiritual Warfare (II)

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 14 April 2019

Preacher: Paul Levy

[0 : 00] And turn to Ephesians chapter 6. If you were here last week, I'm going to take a new series just on Christian armor, looking at the subject of spiritual warfare. I've been reading, as I said last week, William Gurnall.

These kind of three great volumes, this English Puritan on Christian warfare. And nothing I'm going to say over these weeks is going to be original. All the best insights will be William Gurnall's. So don't read those books until I'm finished.

I'm going to come back to the series. Chris Roberts is going to preach in the next little bit. And then we'll come back to the series in the summer. But do listen to last week. So I want us to begin to look in the armor. There's lots of different ways I think of preaching the Bible. Normally we go through a passage, working through a book.

But I think it is helpful sometimes to take an in-depth look at a passage and to kind of dig down and see the sweep of Scripture behind it. And that's what we're going to try and do in this series.

So we're looking at the resources that God has provided for us. And so the first handpiece of armor is in chapter 6 and verse 14. He says, stand, therefore. I'd remember the three stands from 13 and 14. Keep standing. I'm having fastened on the belt of truth.

[1 : 29] That's just what I want to look at tonight. Having fastened on the belt of truth. I don't know if you have a routine in the morning. When you get up in the morning to get dressed.

And I'm not going to tell you my routine. But I always get dressed in the same way. And so do you. I'm sure you do. Whatever routine you use when you get dressed. I'm pretty certain you don't put your belt on first. Do you?

That would be particularly odd if you wear a belt. And a belt is normally something you put on last, isn't it? Something that holds the rest of our clothing together. And yet here, when the apostle describes the Christian's dress.

The Christian's protective clothing, his armor. He mentions first of all, can you see it? The belt of truth. Now as a matter of fact, that's how Roman soldiers dressed in South of Battle.

They would put their belt on first for the simple reason. And then it was in a way a kind of foundation. Garment. Everything else was fastened to it. The breastplate of righteousness. The breastplate was fastened to the belt.

[2 : 40] You couldn't wear the breastplate. Unless you had your belt of truth on. The sword was probably stabbed to the belt. And for that reason, you'd have to put the belt on first. And another reason is, apparently in those days, they were loose tunics.

Kind of like an old-fashioned nightgown. A loose, flowing garment. So before you're going to fight, and before you're going to run and charge at the enemy, the first thing you'd have to do is fasten in this loose, flowing garment.

You fasten in your tunic. And that's what the belt is for. It was to pick up the loose, flowing garment and fasten it so they were ready for action.

Now again, you see the picture again through Scripture. You go to Exodus. Do you remember the Passover? And do you remember how they were to eat the Passover? In the Old Testament, the people, they were told to eat it with their belt on.

They were to gird up their loins. They were to gird up their garments. And they were to eat the Passover with their belts on and with their sword in their hand.

[3 : 44] Their staff in their hand. They're told to eat that meal, ready to move at a moment's notice. And Jesus picks up the same idea in the Gospels in Luke 12, 35. He uses the same picture.

Tells his disciples that to be ready for action at a moment's notice. And again, he's picking up on Exodus 12, on the Passover. And he says there, kind of gird up your loins.

They're to be ready at a moment's notice. Apostle Peter, in his first epistle, he calls on them to kind of gird up, to fasten, to gird up the loins of their minds.

The ESV misses it. It's exactly the same picture that Paul is bringing before us now. And it's a picture of preparing, of preparation. There is a sense, isn't there, where the belt of truth isn't actually a part of the armour.

in the way that the other pieces are. It's preparatory for the fight. And the first thing we've got to do before anything else, is we've got to make sure, can you see verse 14?

[4 : 45] We have a belt of truth on. Our lives are girded by the truth. Now, a few recent commentators on what does this mean?

What does this belt of truth mean? They're a little bit puzzled. There are some who suggest, well, it's just the gospel. It's just the gospel that he must be talking about. Because he's describing for us the armour of God.

And he must be, therefore, speaking about something that God himself provides. And most people take it as a reference to the gospel itself. But the problem is, in verse 14, is there's no definite article.

Did you spot that? Paul doesn't think, put on the belt of the truth. And he uses the indefinite article. He says, no, just put on the belt of truth.

There are others who notice that, and they go to the other extreme, and they say, well, he's only talking about truth in a general way. Now, he's talking about being true, about being honest, and about being sincere, and about being open.

[5 : 47] And lots of lots of commentators interpret it in that way. In terms of sincerity, and openness, and honesty. But it seems to me that we shouldn't really take either of those ways solely looking at the passage.

And we must take it at face value. And we must take it as it reads. And I think we need to understand truth in its widest possible sense. Now, that includes gospel truth, doesn't it?

But it includes the truth that is in Jesus Christ, but it's much, much wider than that. And I think it's important for us to see it in that way. And Paul is saying, if you're going to stand in the evil day, if you will stand in the warfare against the devil, that if you are in Christ, you are involved in, you need an accurate perception of the way things are.

Well, I think that's where we need to begin. That if we're going to stand against the evil one, then the first thing we need is an accurate perception of the way things really are. We need to know the truth, firstly.

You see, that is where the devil attacks us, isn't it? That is his favourite and most successful line of attack. Children, do you remember, that is how he ruined the human race.

[7 : 01] That's how he ruined Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. And so we find ourselves in the state that we're in, this fall in the state we've been talking about with the children for the last few weeks. That was his line of attack, was it?

Eve in the garden. He says, do you remember, has God really said? What Eve should have done, of course, was to say, yes, God did really say.

And that's good enough for me. She should have put on the belt of truth, shouldn't she? But instead of that, she began to listen to the devil. And the devil is a master at distorting truth and distorting reality.

Is that how it really is? Says the devil to Eve. Surely it's not like that, is it? It's not that extreme. You know, Genesis 3.

And if you and I have to stand against the devil, then the first thing we have to do is to put on the belt of truth. And I want to try and help you to do that tonight in the most practical way I can.

[8 : 03] And to give you a few examples of what does it mean to face the devil in this way. The first thing you have to do in any situation, and it seems to me in any situation at all, is to ask, what is true?

What is true? That's the first thing I want to ask this week. Whether it's in the church, or in the world, or in our families, whether it's in work, whatever context you're in, you and I are not to lose touch with reality.

You need to ask the question, what is true? In every situation. We're first to ask ourselves, what is true?

Because the devil is a master at distorting reality. Do you remember what the Apostle Paul says here? In verse 14, he says, this is the first thing you've got to do.

Once you've done that, you can put on the breastplate of righteousness. And a Roman soldier, as I said before, couldn't put on his breastplate of righteousness and didn't put his belt on. It was impossible.

[9 : 09] And you and I cannot, and we will not ever be able to do what is right, unless we know what is true. So let me give you a simple illustration.

Let me imagine you've got a teenage son or a teenage daughter. And you've laid down the law and you say, well yes, you can go up with your friends, but you have to be in by eleven.

Half time. Half time. And she comes in at two in the morning. What's your immediate reaction? Well, your immediate reaction, if you've said, come in at half ten and she comes in at two, is to hit the roof.

To fly into a rage. And before you know it, there's a blazing row, isn't it? And you've got real problems. Well, what's the first thing you've got to do in that situation? Are you going to establish the truth?

Why has he or she come in at two o'clock in the morning? Well, the facts, it may not be what it looks like. So the first question, if I'm going to avoid damaging a relationship, if I'm going to avoid doing the wrong thing, the first thing I've got to ask is, what is true?

[10 : 20] I could have called the belt of truth. What are the facts? And there may be a simple and innocent explanation of what is true. Because the devil always wants you and I to act without considering what is true.

But if you're going to do the right thing in any situation, first of all, don't discover the truth. let me give you another example. One of the most damaging things in church life in the UK in the life of the church are problems in relationships between Christians.

And you know, don't you, how easily these things can arise in church life. Someone says something quite innocently, they don't mean anything by it at all, but it is misconstrued.

Someone says something quite innocently, they don't mean anything about it, but it's misconstrued. Or you overhear something, or someone passes on something that somebody else said, and you begin to brood on it.

Suppose you're day, suppose you're week, suppose you're sleep. And before you know it, you're living with it, it's day and night, you're dreaming about it, and the devil has got in.

[11 : 33] And you know, if you know church life at all, you will know how these things can blow up out of all proportion. And before you know it, people are beginning to take sides, and there's a split in the church, and the work of the gospel is ruined in the lives of the neighbourhood, and in the lives of the children of that church.

And the credibility of the church's witness and message is gone. And all because you and I have not put on the belt of truth. All because we go about our daily lives or our church lives without wearing the belt of truth.

If we were wearing the belt of truth and we heard something, we wouldn't brood over it, would we? Because we would know the truth of God's word, it tells us, that love thinks no evil.

And so we don't misconstrue what people say. We don't put the worst possible construction on what people say. If we're Christians, if we have the belt of truth around us, do you remember, love thinks no evil.

Love is patient, love is kind. David Watson, not my father-in-law, the kind of church of Angelus who died in the Sonties.

[12 : 43] He's got a book on Christian warfare, it's not really very good, but he's got a good little story in it. And he tells the story of a missionary, a young missionary who went out to the mission field and she was put with an older missionary who had been on the mission field for about 30 years.

And this older missionary had become kind of spiritually fossilised. This older missionary, she had become hard and cynical and very difficult to live with.

And she made that poor new missionary, that poor girl's life of misery to the point where the girl was really questioning whether she should stay on the mission field.

Do you know how the situation changed? Every day that young girl, she got out 1 Corinthians 13 and she prayed through it. She said, it's impossible Lord to live with this woman.

But she read through 1 Corinthians 13 and she prayed through it and for a whole year every day she put on the belt of truth. she tried to live with that woman according to God's word.

[13:47] 1 Corinthians 13 and by the end of the year the situation had been wonderfully transformed. And they were actually quite a useful partnership. They're trouble with us very often and the reason why the devil gets into church situations very often is because we're not wearing the belt of truth.

We can quote scripture but we don't wear it. And if I'm thinking wrongly of a fellow brother or sister in our church I'm not wearing the belt of truth because love thinks no evil.

Let me give you another kind of example. Romans chapter 8. You know that great chapter we read it? And in Romans chapter 8 it's a great chapter on assurance and Paul there is dealing with this whole question in his own personal life.

It's one of the great chapters isn't it? Dealing with assurance. How we know that we're saved. God wants you and I to enjoy our salvation. He wants us to be sure.

He doesn't want you to go through life looking over your shoulder. He wants you to be sure that you are in Christ and he wants you to enjoy it. And Romans chapter 8 is a great chapter in the Bible dealing with this whole question of how do I know that I'm in Christ?

[15:03] And that is one of the places isn't it? Where the devil is always attacking you and I. At that level. The devil wants to spoil it for us. The devil wants to rob you of your assurance. The devil is described as the accuser of the brethren.

He's always coming with accusations if you're a Christian tonight. You'll know that. The devil is always accusing you. He comes to you and he says you'll never last. That's what he says to newcomers.

That's what he says to young people. He says you'll never last in school. You'll never make it. You'll never send. It's a flash in the pan. What if this happens? Or what if that happens?

You'll never cope. The apostle Paul knew that. And the devil had come to him in that way and so he buckles on the truth and he says to me we know that in all things God works together for the good of those who love him.

Who are called according to his purpose. The devil is saying you'll never cope if this happens or that happens. It will destroy you. No says the apostle. He says no we know that whatever happens to us it is for the good of those who love God.

[16:17] And so the devil comes back to him and says you're not a real Christian but for your life. Look at the kind of person you are. How can you possibly say you're a Christian? What does Paul say? Well in Romans chapter 18 verse 31 he says what should we say to these things if God be for us who can be against us?

And then verse 33 who will bring any charge any accusation against God's elect it's God who justifies. It's not if Paul is saying I'm not going to justify myself to you it is God who justifies.

Who is going to bring any charge against those whom God has chosen to save? It is God who justifies and so the devil comes back to him. And the devil accuses him and says you've been a total failure and Paul's answer is in verse 34 he says who is it to condemn?

You can almost hear the devil talking to him between the lines of Romans 8 The devil comes back and whispers to him you're a total failure Paul and Paul says who is he that condemns?

Christ Jesus is the one who died more than that who was raised and who was at the right hand of God and who was interceding for us Who is he that condemns?

[17:23] I've got a saviour who died for me who took the punishment for me who is raised from the dead and is alive forevermore and he speaks my name to the Father Now at this very moment in heaven who is there to condemn me?

The devil comes back he says God doesn't really love you How can God possibly love you you worthless little creature? And Paul says there is nothing that can separate me from the love of God in Christ What can separate me from God's love?

Nothing at all and he ransacks the universe to try and find things that could possibly separate him from the love of God and there is absolutely nothing at all that I can think of nothing in all the universe that can separate the believer from the loving of God in Christ Do you see this book?

That's all I'm trying to get you to see tonight I'm not trying to expire this book in Romans 8 but do you see what Paul is doing? Paul is putting on the belt of truth isn't he? And when the devil is attacking him when the devil is trying to undermine his confidence in the Lord and spoil his

enjoyment of the Lord what does Paul do he puts on the belt of truth?

And he keeps asking himself what is true? Is it true what the devil is saying to me? No it's not Christ has died Christ has risen from the dead Christ intercedes for me nothing can separate me from the love of God which is in Christ and that's why he said the devil couldn't get anywhere with Jesus from a Matthew 4 he comes and he tries to deflect the Lord from his purpose that's why the devil couldn't get anywhere with him not because Jesus didn't quote the Bible there's nothing powerful about being able to quote scripture there's nothing magical about verses from the Bible that wasn't the point all the point was here was a man whose life was girded by the truth he put on the armour of God and the devil couldn't penetrate that couldn't get through it and no matter at what direction the devil came at Jesus whether it's at the temptation whether it's through Peter whether it's in the garden of Gethsemane he found a man whose life was girded by the truth of God's word it is written it is written it is written

[19:50] Satan you tell me this but this is reality and this is where I'll stand my life is fastened together by his word reality is the way that God sees things and if you and I have to face the enemy the first thing we have to do is to put on the belt of truth and not just gospel truth but all kinds of truth in every situation we have to ask ourselves what is the truth here because God is the God of truth and the devil is a liar from the beginning that's the first thing we have to have the word of God dwelling in it where to hide his word within our hearts so that we will not sin against him if we're to be ready to fight your life and my life is to be held together by truth and not by feelings and not by consensus and secondly we must know the truth but we must show the truth that brings in the second idea doesn't it that of sincerity not only must you know the truth but you must show the truth

David in Psalm 51 verse 6 that great prayer of confession he speaks about having truth in inward parts it's a great line it's particularly powerful when you know the background to that song because David had become a casualty hadn't he in the war he'd fallen to the enemy in the evil day Jonathan and the Puritan who died in Ealing he describes the evil day as that day when opportunity and desire and temptation coincide it's very helpful the evil day is when opportunity and desire and temptation coincide in warfare some days are worse than other days aren't they and there are days that the apostle speaks of here in Ephesians 6 as the evil day and he wants you to be able to stand in the evil day in those days when the devil is really attacking you when opportunity and desire and temptation coincide in your life there was a day like that for David he's on a rooftop it was an evil day and instead of standing

David fell and he became a casualty he fell morally and for a year and a half or around that time he lived a lie he lost his inner integrity before God and before the people no one took him seriously he lost his authority his more integrity as a leader of the people and so Nathan the prophet God's messenger comes to him Nathan tells a story if you know your Bible you'll know it he tells a story rich man who had a neighbour who was very poor who had a little lamb that's all he owned it was a lovely little lamb and the rich one took it he stole the poor man's lamb the story about David that David couldn't recognise it so much that he'd fallen prey to Satan's attack that he'd lost any sense of reality any in a reality so God comes then through his spokesman Nathan the prophet and God who Nathan paints a picture that describes into the smallest detail it's a brilliant brilliant sermon but David doesn't see himself and David doesn't recognise himself and it can be that like that under the preaching of the

Bible can't it but when the preacher is preaching we don't see ourselves that we look over our shoulders at someone else and we say well that is a good word for so and so isn't it I wish he could have been here to hear that or I wish he was here and we lose our inner integrity and inner reality and David had lost in his life that and so he prays and he is finally restored so that God would make him to know the truth in inward parts and I think we don't understand the belt of truth in that way too and don't excuse what I've said already I don't see why we have to pit the truth of the gospel with the truth being wider I don't think we have to do that there's no reason to pit them against each other the two fit together perfectly in the fight against the enemy we must know the truth but we must also show the truth if we're going to stand and we need to not only know the truth of doctrine but the truth of life as well integrity there ought to be an inner reality about us and the emphasis comes out again and again in the New

Testament the Apostle Paul when he describes the armour in Romans 13 he calls it the armour of light and the armour we are to wear is to be clothed with light to be transparent we're not to play the devil at his own game 1 Corinthians 4 tells us 2 Corinthians 4 not to be devious we're to be open the

Apostle Paul commends Timothy doesn't he find sincere and unfeigned faith James tells us that a double minded man is unstable in all he does and he will not stand on the evil day he's unstable and if you and I are insincere in our profession if we are living some kind of double life we're not going to be able to stand on the evil day and to buckle on the balance of truth is to be honest with ourselves and to be honest before God and before one another maybe it's time to do that sort and that goes much deeper

[25 : 53] I think than many of us are conscious of let me illustrate it often we imagine don't we that we are doing something out of a true spiritual motivation but when we really stop or somebody points out it to us or we think about it we're not doing it for spiritual reasons at all but what lies behind so much of what we do isn't driven by a desire to glorify God but some kind of inner psychological desire that we have we've all got these things we want to be recognised we want to feel that our life adds up to something there are people that go into Christian ministry like that there are people that go onto the mission field like that they don't see it and no one has the guts to point it out to them and the devil gets in and the devil gets in because we're not being sincere and we're not being honest with ourselves or with one another to buckle on the belt of truth is to be open and transparent and honest and to be real before God we'll be with others and with ourselves and if we're ever going to stand on the evil day this is how it must be we must seek that in the whole of our life so I take on this word truth in the widest possible sense not just in the truth of God's word or in terms of gospel truth but in terms of truth in its widest sense

God is the God of truth as Christians we believe don't we in the sanctity of truth it matters because God is true and the devil is a liar so let me just bring this all together to buckle on the belt of truth what is it what does it mean to buckle on the belt of truth is a willingness to apply the whole of God's word to the whole of our lives that's what it means to put on the belt of truth and that takes on not only the truth but sincerity as well to buckle on the belt of truth is a willingness to apply the whole of God's word to the whole of our lives so do you remember this church in Ephesus was a priest there for three years and when he came to leave of that church he spoke to the elders in Acts 20 and this is what he said he said pay careful attention to yourselves you leaders and to all the flock in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers to care for the church you fierce wolves will come in among you not sparing the flock and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things to draw away the disciples after them he's warning the elders isn't he what are you saying the church leaders you are in a battle he says

I preached the word of God to you for three years I'm leaving now and I'm warning you after I go and in every church people will come in and they will try and spoil the work and actually many of those people will rise up from amongst you from your own numbers and people will speak all sorts of things that spoil the work and the devil is going to get into the situation and there he says to them therefore watch be alert remembering that for three years I did not night or day to admonish everyone with tears you see the devil wants to get into every church and the only way to prevent him is to put on the belt of truth he says remember what I have been saying to you for these past three years I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God the only way that we will withstand the enemy is by putting on the whole counsel of

God to put on the whole truth and nothing but the truth you are to hide into nothing unless you do that you can't stand and when the devil comes you won't be able to stand against him unless you put on the whole counsel of God the whole word of God is to be applied!

to the whole of your life I am where wish they said it differently we were unwise in some of the things that they said most of all they were just a little bit embarrassed they quoted the Bible in public and the responses of Christians have been remarkably useless because they haven't put on the belt of truth and you and I if we think as a church that we!

[30 : 51] be! able to stand in the next 5, 10, 15 years in this culture by downplaying the truth of God's word we've got no chance let me just point out finally let me point out the context it's one of the most important things that people forget about Ephesians 6 on this battle where is the battle we fought in Ephesians 6 remember we saw it last week it's so helpful where's the battle to be fought it's in the home and it's in work and it's in relationships between husbands and wives and parents and children let me tell you about a man he's a great champion for the truth in church but actually his love for his wife needs much to be desired Spurgeon said he's an angel in public but a devil in private here's a woman and she's really active in church life she's involved in so much but she will not and does not submit to her husband in a biblical way she doesn't respect him in the way the

Bible demands here's a young person or child even in church people think you're a little angel maybe you pray for your friends to become Christians but at home you don't obey dad and mom you adamantly refuse here's a man who's really a Christian at work speaks about the Lord Jesus but he's actually a very poor worker he's a bad time keeper!
he's always late for work and if we have to stand against the devil you've got to apply the whole of God's word to the whole of our lives it's a belt it's meant to encompass and circle let the truth encircle your life Paul is saying let it gather up and fasten all the loose ends all the untidy corners belt the truth on he's saying let the whole of God's word control the whole of your life your family life your prayer life your sex life let there be no unreality no insincerity no double standards therefore take up the whole armour of God that you may be able to stand in the evil day and having done all to stand therefore having fastened on the belt of truth let's pray