




How to Put on
THE ARMOR
OF GOD

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Do you believe in the devil?

Not everyone does. Many who believe in God don't believe in the devil. When people say, "The devil made me do it," they mean the exact opposite. When someone says, "Oh, you devil," it's a kind of compliment. If someone brings the devil into a polite discussion, the response is likely to be, "You're not serious, are you?"

In a scientific age, medieval visions of the devil dressed in red with horns and carrying a pitchfork seem, well, very medieval. According to New Age author Deepak Chopra, "Healthy people do not have any need for Satan." *That sentence expresses the modern point of view.* Science and psychology have relegated the devil to the pages of ancient mythology.

The best trick the devil ever played was convincing the world he doesn't exist. *If people don't believe you exist, they won't try to stop you.* That's one cause of the church's weakness today. We fail to take the devil seriously. As a result, we rarely hear Satan talked about or preached about. We are ignorant of his strategy, his power, his vast army, and his infernal plans.

THE DEVIL *is for* REAL

The Bible says a lot about the devil. He appears the first time in Genesis 3 and the last time in Revelation 20. Among his many titles, he is called Satan, the devil, the serpent, the deceiver, the evil one, and the accuser of the brethren. Every New Testament writer mentions him. Jesus encountered him at the beginning and end of his ministry and often spoke of him.

There is much we do not know, but this much is certain. *The devil is a real being.* In the beginning he was an angel of God. Lifted up with pride, he attempted to overthrow the Lord himself. When he was cast out of heaven, one-third of the angels followed him. Those fallen angels we call demons.

We live on a rebel planet controlled by the devil himself. As followers of Jesus Christ, we have been thrown into a spiritual conflict that rages all around us. *In that conflict, every believer is on the front lines.*

Let's be clear about one thing. *You never have to sin.* God will never lead you to a place where your only choice is disobedience. When we do wrong, we can't say, "The devil made me do it." Like Eve in the Garden, we choose to eat the forbidden fruit.

Shortly after the terror attacks on 9/11, military strategists developed the concept of "forward-leaning defense." If you wait for the bad guys to attack you, you've made yourself an easy target. *Take the battle to the enemy and hit him before he hits you.* The Apostle Peter would agree with that. Remember what he said: **"Stay alert! Watch out for your great enemy, the devil. He prowls around like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour."** (1 Peter 5:8 NLT). The devil is hungry, and you're on the menu!

He attacks us when we least expect it. *Rarely does he approach us with an overt invitation to evil.* After all, if the devil came up wearing a name tag that said, "Hello! My name is Satan," we would recognize him immediately. If he said, "I've come to destroy everything good in your life. I plan to destroy your family, your marriage, your reputation, your integrity, and when I am finished, you will end up in hell forever," we would say, "Get lost!" But it doesn't happen that way.

SATAN *Doesn't* FIGHT FAIR

Satan's #1 tool is discouragement. He's already won if he can get you to drop your weapons and walk off the battlefield. That's why he attacks you on a thousand different fronts.

He doesn't fight fair!

He's not going to give you an even break. He is a liar, a deceiver, a diabolical "angel of light" who comes to you in a thousand guises, tempting you to disobey the Lord. He's a lot smarter than you are. He knows your weak points better than you do. Because he is invisible, he can attack you any time of the day or night.

Ponder these solemn words from Ephesians 6:11:

"For we are not fighting against flesh-and-blood enemies, but against evil rulers and authorities of the unseen world, against mighty powers in this dark world, and against evil spirits in the heavenly places" (NLT).

Our battle is not against other people. Sometimes we focus on the abortionists, the pornographers, the godless politicians, the corrupt business leaders, the drug dealers, and the purveyors of filth, as if they were the source of our problems. Yet those people are unwitting dupes of powerful spiritual forces they know nothing about. When someone has hurt us deeply, it's easy to say, "That person is the source of all my problems." But our struggle is not with flesh and blood—even though it seems that way most of the time.

We are fighting a spiritual battle against the devil and his demons. What are the marks of his diabolical work? Here are a few examples:

Unusual or repeated temptations.

Attacks from an unexpected quarter.

Delays that hinder us from obeying God.

Inducements to doubt God's Word.

Circumstances that produce unusual pressure upon us.

Temptations to sin in areas that never troubled us before.

Prolonged bouts of discouragement.

Worries that seem to consume us.

Seductive appeals to sinful compromise.

Bitterness toward others.

Desires to give up on the Christian life.

Enticements to turn away from the means of grace.

Excuses made for lack of spiritual growth.
Critical comments about other believers.
Attempts to hide your behavior from others.

When we face these temptations, we may be sure Satan has us in his crosshairs. *That's exactly the moment when we need to "put on the whole armor of God" (Ephesians 6:13).* The command "put on" is a military term. It's the last step you take before going into battle. It's like cleaning your rifle, checking your ammo, putting on your flak jacket, and grabbing your helmet. *Take up your armor, Christian, because all hell will soon break loose against you.*

Ephesians 6:14-17 tells us how we should fight back against the devil:

Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

Paul paints a picture of the Christian in complete armor, ready to go into battle with the devil. He describes six parts of the soldier's uniform:

The belt
The breastplate
The shoes
The shield
The helmet
The sword

He lists them in the exact order a soldier would put them on. The belt comes first because it covers the most vulnerable organs and held other pieces of armor in place. The breastplate covers the chest and upper abdomen. The shoes (sandals with spikes driven through the soles) give the soldier a firm foundation. The shield covers most of the soldier's body. When soldiers stood side by side with shields raised, it formed a solid wall against the enemy's flaming arrows. The helmet protects his head and face. Made of heavy metal with a visor, nothing short of an ax or hammer could pierce it.

The sword is his only offensive weapon. It was a short, double-edged knife, almost like a dagger, to cut and thrust against the enemy in close combat. Razor sharp, the soldier's sword was a deadly weapon.

Each piece of armor describes a spiritual trait the believer needs to survive the attacks of the devil.

#1: THE BELT *of* TRUTH

The belt held the soldier's uniform in place. *Without the belt he could not move quickly, and if he could not move, he could not fight.* The "belt of truth" refers to the truth God has revealed in his Word. When we are discouraged and under attack, we must go back to the things we know to be true. We must go back to what theologians call the First Principles:

God is holy.

God is righteous.

God is perfect.

All his ways are right.

His mercy endures forever.

Jesus Christ is the King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

We are kept forever by his love.

The Holy Spirit has sealed us.

The Lord Jesus died and rose again.

He now intercedes for us in heaven.

All things are working together for our good.

When I said "we must go back," I meant that literally. In moments of temptation, we ought to recall and even speak out loud those things we know to be true. As a practical matter, I find it helpful to sing out loud great hymns and gospel songs that build my faith. I may sing "Great Is Thy Faithfulness" or "He Will Hold Me Fast" or "In Christ Alone" or "A Mighty Fortress." Often I have withstood the attacks of the devil by singing "Crown Him With Many Crowns." When I feel a bit overwhelmed, I'll stop my work, take a bike ride, and listen to Christian music. It may be something as simple as "Every Time I Feel the Spirit" or "Jesus Loves Me" or a grand hymn like "Immortal, Invisible" or "How Deep the Father's Love."

This is the practical meaning of putting on the belt of truth. God has already provided the truth. It's my job to "put it on" by reminding myself of what I already know to be true.

#2: THE BREASTPLATE *of* RIGHTEOUSNESS

The breastplate covered the vital organs of the chest, especially the heart. It was like an ancient bulletproof vest. *The righteousness Paul has in mind comes to us by virtue of our right standing with God.* Since God declares us righteous in Christ (Romans 5:1), we now pursue righteousness in the choices we make (1 Timothy 6:11). Nothing gives us more courage than knowing we are right with God and with others. In Texas they have an elite law enforcement group called the Texas Rangers. They have a saying that goes like this: “You can’t stop a man in the right who just keeps on coming.” When we are conscious of wrongdoing, our guilt makes us cowards. But a man who knows he is right can face a multitude without fear. Proverbs 28:1 describes this man perfectly. **“The wicked man flees though no one pursues, but the righteous are as bold as a lion.”**

When we compromise morally or spiritually, it’s like a soldier standing uncovered before the enemy. The choices we make either fortify us against Satan, or they make us easy prey for him.

#3: THE SHOES *of* GOSPEL PEACE

A soldier must have good shoes so he can fight without slipping. Roman soldiers wore sandals with spikes driven through the soles that gave them traction on any surface. You can’t fight very well if your feet are slipping out from under you.

When Paul speaks of the “gospel of peace,” he means the gospel itself is the only true source of peace. Because of Jesus Christ, we now have peace with God (Romans 5:1), and we have the peace of God (Philippians 4:7).

We live in strange times.

During the recent pandemic, schools closed, churches went online, and we learned about social distancing and how to “shelter in place.” When we decided to “flatten the curve,” the whole world shut down within a week.

That had never happened before.

Our Lord had a word for times like these. Two days before his crucifixion, he met with his disciples to prepare them for what was to come. Under the shadow of the temple, he told them what the world would be like after he was gone. In that message, he included these famous

words: **“When you hear about wars and riots, don’t be afraid”** (Luke 21:9 CEV). The Living Bible offers us this paraphrase: “When you hear of wars and insurrections beginning, don’t panic.” Those are the words of a madman, or they are the words of the Son of God.

If we panic, it means we have forgotten who runs the universe. *Christians ought to be the calmest people on earth because we know the Lord, and he holds the future in his hands.*

There is no panic in heaven no matter what happens on earth.

The devil will do all he can to distract us through fear and discouragement. But God gave us the shoes we need to stand firm in the heat of battle.

When fear threatens to overwhelm you, put on the shoes of gospel peace.

#4: THE SHIELD *of* FAITH

The shield of faith describes what we might call dependent living. *It means calling on the Lord for help in the time of trouble.* Dependent living is the opposite of doing it your own way.

What are the “fiery darts” the devil launches against us? *The phrase suggests a sudden and unexpected attack.* It may begin small but becomes overwhelming to us. These “darts” may come from anywhere at any time and in any situation. That’s what makes this so tricky—and it’s why we must take up the shield of faith proactively.

We all have experienced this sort of thing. When the day begins, we feel strong and confident, and we’re just sailing along, checking things off our list. Suddenly Satan hits us with a “fiery dart,” and our mind begins to slide in the wrong direction. The temptation may be to anger, lust, bitterness, greed, doubt, despair, or any of a hundred negative emotions. We may be sailing along when “something” happens—an unkind word, an unplanned interruption, a difficult person intrudes, a subtle seduction, a careless comment, a crass invitation. *The devil’s “darts” come in a thousand varieties.* They catch us off guard and throw us off balance. One writer called it a “violent temptation in which the soul is set on fire of hell.”

So husbands and wives may fight about the tiniest troubles. Parents may blow up at their children for the slightest provocation. There may be a strong desire toward immorality, or an appeal to festering anger, or a reminder of hidden unforgiveness. It could be envy that eats away like a canker or fear that saps your strength.

Remember what Jesus said in Matthew 5:21-28:

Behind murder lies anger.

Behind adultery lies lust.

The heart of the problem is the problem of the heart. That's where the battle must be waged. These sudden attacks cannot be accounted for by any other means except the "fiery darts" of the enemy of our souls. They stick like burning arrows on the inside.

What do we do in the moment of attack? We must then and there and in that very moment call on God for help. We must cry out, "Lord, I can't handle this alone. Help me!" We must not be afraid to go to God again and again and again. When Satan hits us with a "fiery dart," we must send up an "arrow prayer" to the Lord.

F. B Meyer said that when he felt himself getting angry or irritable, he asked the Lord for the quality most needed at that moment:

Your patience, Lord Jesus.

Your kindness, Lord Jesus.

Your love, Lord Jesus.

Your courage, Lord Jesus.

Your wisdom, Lord Jesus.

Your joy, Lord Jesus.

Your purity, Lord Jesus.

Those "arrow prayers" go straight from our heart to God's heart. They work!

Pick up the shield of faith, and you can snuff out the devil's fiery darts.

#5: THE HELMET *of* SALVATION

The helmet protects the soldier's head. *Woe to the soldier who goes into battle without his helmet.* He won't last long when the enemy begins firing from the other side. The helmet of salvation speaks of our security in Christ. We can know we have eternal life (1 John 5:13). Because we have been purchased by the Lord Jesus Christ, we belong to him past, present and future. That's why Romans 8:38-39 declares that nothing in all creation can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. We must not downplay the danger we face every day in our warfare against the devil. He can attack us from any direction at once. We can survive if we know we are the children of God. When we put on the helmet of salvation, we can boldly declare, **"We are more than conquerors through him who loved us"** (Romans 8:37).

#6: THE SWORD *of* THE SPIRIT

Finally, the Bible tells us to take up the Sword of the Spirit, the Word of God. That's the only weapon the soldier of Christ carries. All the other armor protects him during an attack. The Word of God cuts like a double-edged sword, laying everything bare so that nothing is hidden (Hebrews 4:12-13). That's why, when Jesus was tempted in the wilderness, he responded to the devil by quoting Scripture (Luke 4:1-13). *Nothing defeats the devil like the Word of God.* Our clever arguments do not stop him. He brushes aside our self-confidence because our reputation means nothing to him. But when we stand on the Word, we strike a decisive blow he cannot answer.

A young man came to see me because he had been struggling to keep his thought life pure. Though he was bold about his faith on the job, he felt utterly defeated because of his ongoing struggles in the area of moral purity. As I talked to him, I sensed two things that gave me hope—his utter honesty and a deep-seated desire to do whatever it took to put his life on a new course. I challenged him to begin memorizing Scripture. Without hesitating, he asked where he should begin.

I suggested starting with Psalm 119, the longest chapter in the Bible—176 verses. It's all about the power of God's Word. Few people would have the courage to tackle such a huge project, and fewer still would finish. But I suspected this young man was different. He left my office promising to check in with me from time to time. It took him ten months to memorize all of Psalm 119.

One day he came to my office and said, "Check me out." I sat and followed along in my Bible as he recited all 176 verses. It was an amazing experience for me to hear this young man recite God's Word with so much confidence and so much joy.

Something had happened in his heart as the Word had taken root. From time to time, he stopped and commented on how powerful this verse was or how much that verse meant to him or what amazing truth this verse contained.

Clearly he had memorized more than words on paper. The lifegiving Word of God had entered his soul. And all that Psalm 119 promises had come true in his life. He was not the defeated man who walked into my office ten months earlier. The Word had done its work.

As he was leaving, I asked him about the struggle that brought him to my office in the first place. With a smile, he replied, "It's gone." Why

should that surprise us? The Bible says, **“The entrance of Your words gives light”** (Psalm 119:130).

The believer who arms himself with the Word of God will never lack for a weapon in the battle. It answers all our doubts and all our discouragement. This is all we have, and this is all we need. The church marches triumphantly when it relies upon God’s Word.

PRAY *in the* SPIRIT

Having explained the armor of God, Paul adds this command: **“Pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests”** (v. 18). In the School of Christian Living, this is Prayer 101. *Prayer is our ultimate weapon in spiritual warfare.* It is not part of the armor; it is that which makes the armor effective.

There are many ways to pray, and they are all valid. We may stand or sit or kneel when we pray. We may pray with our eyes open or closed. Sometimes we will pray out loud; other times we will pray silently. Our prayers may be filled with praise or petition or with thanksgiving. Sometimes we will recite the Lord’s Prayer. In times of trouble, we will pour out our hearts to the Lord. In times of great stress, we may simply cry, “Lord, have mercy!” Sometimes our prayers will be nothing more than an unspoken groan.

The best time to pray is when you feel the need to pray. That’s why Paul instructs us to pray “on all occasions.” It speaks of coming to a crossroads of life, in a time of need, with a sense of our own weakness, and crying out to the Lord in prayer.

Many years ago, my wife taught the little children in Sunday School a lesson based on the truth that “God is always with us.” She asked the children to draw a picture to illustrate that idea. One child drew a picture of a boy in bed, raindrops over the bed, and outside the window a sinister-looking creature. “Where is God with you?” Marlene asked. “He’s with me,” the boy replied, “when I’m in bed, in the dark, and it’s raining inside, and there’s a monster outside.”

We’ve all been there, haven’t we? Monsters come in many varieties, and we all have moments when we feel terrified in the darkness. But the little boy is right. *God is with us even then so go ahead and pray.*

Sometimes you will think, “I should pray about that.” Don’t ever brush that thought away. Do it. Go ahead and pray right then.

You don't have to pray out loud. You can pray to the Lord without speaking any words at all, and the Lord will hear you from heaven. So when the Lord nudges your spirit, don't say "No." Go ahead and pray.

Lee Roberson said, "Prayer is the Christian's secret weapon, forged in the realms of glory." It's the weapon that makes the armor of God effective in your life.

the REAL BATTLEFIELD

Put it all together and you have a picture of the Christian soldier fully armed for combat. Putting on the whole armor of God means living . . .

Truthfully,
Righteously,
Peacefully,
Dependently,
Confidently,
Biblically,
Prayerfully.

Our greatest problems are spiritual, not financial or intellectual or emotional. *Our real enemies are unseen because the real battlefield lies within the human heart.* That's why a change of scenery, a change of job, a change of circumstances, a change of lifestyle, a change of appearance, or a change of relationship often accomplishes nothing. *We're the same people because we face the same enemies and fight the same battles.* You can move from Miami to Beijing to Wichita to Lisbon and nothing will change unless you change on the inside. Our one hope—our only hope—is to put on the whole armor of God and so prove that what the Bible says is true.

Don't be surprised by sudden attacks or discouraging events or personal disappointments. We call it spiritual warfare for a reason. We all have our share of victories and defeats. *God measures our spiritual progress not by huge battles won or lost but by a thousand daily skirmishes no one else knows about.*

Now we can understand verse 13 in a new light: **"Put on every piece of God's armor so you will be able to resist the enemy in the time of evil. Then after the battle you will still be standing firm"** (NLT). I love that last phrase: "You will still be standing firm." It pictures a soldier standing in the middle of a battlefield after the conflict has ended. It has been a long, hard, brutal fight, with many casualties, many wounded, many fallen. The soldier stands and surveys the battlefield, his uniform soaked

with sweat, dirt, and blood. His eyes are red-rimmed with exhaustion. There are craters all around him where the artillery has chewed up the ground. He hears the cries of the wounded. He does not smile because he knows the enemy will attack again tomorrow. But tonight he will rest well, knowing that he was still standing when the battle ended.

No one said being a Christian is easy. Any representations to the contrary are false and dangerous. When you signed up for Team Jesus, you put on a new uniform.

You're in the army now.

You signed up to fight for the Lord. He doesn't have any desk jobs where you can stay far behind the lines and let others risk their lives. We're all in this together as soldiers of Christ.

No one gets a break from the battle. We are under attack 24/7. Because Satan doesn't sleep, we don't have the luxury of going to sleep spiritually. But God has provided everything necessary so that we can fight and win every battle we face.

No believer is safe who faces Satan in his own strength. But no believer is more secure than he who goes into battle wearing the whole armor of God.

My final word to you is this. Paul tells us to put on the whole armor of God. *It is God's armor, not ours.* He does not say, "Put on your own armor" because that's a good way to get clobbered in the head. *Everything we need, we already have in Jesus Christ.*

Christ is our armor!

Martin Luther said it so well in his famous hymn *A Mighty Fortress Is Our God*:

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.

We are not alone on the battlefield. We must still fight the enemy, but God provides the armor. He gives us what we need when we need it. The devil cannot defeat us when we put on the armor of God.

Stand and fight, child of God. The Lord is on your side.

Going **DEEPER**

1. If we don't "wrestle against flesh and blood," who are our real enemies?
2. Name the six pieces of the armor of God. Which one do you most need right now?
3. Why is the belt of truth mentioned first?
4. What does the shield of faith protect us from?
5. Why is Scripture memory so crucial in our spiritual warfare? What passage would you like to memorize?
6. What should we do when we feel prompted to pray?

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