

Part 2

THE ARMOR



THE BELT OF TRUTH



My wife, Lois, and I recently celebrated our fortieth wedding anniversary. Forty years of sharing a life together through both good and challenging times is worth honoring in a special way. I wanted to take Lois to just the right place, where we could spend some quality time together and where she would feel the depth of how much she means to me.

Knowing my wife, I sought to pick someplace peaceful where we could relax and enjoy each other's company away from the demands of everyday life and ministry. So I took Lois to a resort getaway with a view of the ocean. We had a wonderful time remembering what God has done in and through our marriage.

But before we went on our trip, we had to do something—we had to pack. We couldn't just show up at the airport with what we had on and expect it to last us the several days we had planned to be there. Instead, we filled suitcases with clothes and belongings to take with us.

Looking at the weather forecast, we knew that we would be experiencing pleasant weather, so we packed comfortable clothes. Some were dressy (for an intimate night of dining), and some were casual (for when we wanted to relax outside together during the day). We didn't pack our coats, boots, mittens, and scarves. Neither did I pack any long-sleeve shirts or thick, wool socks.

In other words, what we packed in our suitcases to spend a few days at a beachside resort in the summer was entirely different from what we would have packed if we were going to my parents' home for a family vacation in Baltimore at Christmas. Where you are going should determine what you pack for the trip.

Prior to going anywhere, for example, you assess the occasion to determine what attire is appropriate for your destination. If you're going to a formal event, you'll put on a formal outfit. Ladies will probably spend extra time choosing just the right pair of shoes. Men may even reach for their cuff links. But if you are going to spend an evening at a ballpark, you will probably leave your formal clothes hanging in the closet. Most people wouldn't wear shorts to a wedding or suits to an outdoor barbeque because the attire does not fit the occasion.

The apostle Paul wrote to the church at Ephesus and to Christians everywhere about what we are to wear when we're engaged in spiritual warfare.

Therefore, take up the full armor of God, so that you will be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm. Stand firm therefore, having girded your loins with truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; in addition to all, taking up the shield of faith with which you will be able to extinguish all of the flaming arrows of the evil one. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God (Ephesians 6:13-17).

Within these verses, Paul has given clear instructions about a specific wardrobe that is necessary for us, not only to wear but also to have packed and ready to put on if we are going to have victory in spiritual warfare. This list of armor can be compared to a travel guide that's given to you when you're going somewhere you've never been before. For example, before people go on a safari in some remote region of the world, they usually go online and find a travel guide that recommends

all of the articles of clothing and items to bring with them. In the same way, in Ephesians 6, Paul has given us our travel guide so we will know what to suit up in and take with us as we conduct ourselves in spiritual warfare.

Let's take a brief refresher before we begin our look at the various pieces of our armor. Why is Paul so concerned that we know what we need to wear? He realizes something we often don't: *We are in a battle*. Not only that, but this battle is fundamentally not against flesh and blood. People are not your ultimate problem. People are merely conduits for something else that's operating in the invisible realm. People, and even your own flesh, are merely hosts for the invisible conflict to manifest itself in the physical, visible realm.

Everything visible and physical is preceded by something invisible and spiritual. Therefore, if your goal is to address some form of a stronghold, conflict, or trial in your visible, physical world, you will first need to address its invisible, spiritual antecedent. You must investigate that which has come before it as its root cause. What we see, hear, taste, touch, and smell is simply the fruit and not the root behind our battle. We cannot ignore the fruit, but our problem is that we too often focus so heavily on managing or attempting to overcome problems with the fruit, we ignore the root altogether.

Many of the issues we must deal with in our lives come to us as flesh-and-blood situations, so we use up a considerable amount of our energy trying to overcome them through flesh-and-blood solutions. We spend a large amount of our time attempting to use physical means to fix physical problems because we have forgotten or have never realized that a spiritual cause is behind the circumstances we're facing. The primary focal point of our battle is not down here—it's up there, in the spiritual realm. When we fail to realize this, the spiritual realm does not get the same attention we give to the physical realm. As a result, we often end up frustrated, hopeless, and defeated.

As Christians, our major problem is that we are in a wrestling match against principalities and world forces in the spiritual realm, but far too often we do not take that into consideration. Until we discover that our journey on this earth is right in the heart of spiritual warfare, which

originates in another realm, we will never learn to pack or dress accordingly. And we will remain defeated.

Trust me, sitting outside in a wool outfit with a knitted scarf near the ocean recently with my wife would not have been the best way to celebrate our fortieth wedding anniversary together. Similarly, going through this life as a believer wrongly dressed for spiritual warfare will inhibit us from walking in the purpose and God-appointed destiny that He has designed for us.

Only when we shift our attention to the invisible realm and start addressing our issues from the root first will we walk in a more potent, powerful, and permanent victory. Jesus has already accomplished this victory for us. Paul admonishes us to “stand firm” in the truths God has given us in order to actualize this victory in our own lives.

Have you ever been to an amusement park or a public place where there are a lot of children? Occasionally when I go to one of these places, I will see a mother or a father with a leash around his or her wrist. Naturally my mind thinks that the leash is going to be attached to a dog. But then I look and notice that the leash is actually attached to a child. Apparently some children today need more than their parents’ words to keep them nearby.

Unfortunately, the same is true for many Christians as well. God has already told us in His Word how to find our greatest source of strength and victory—by recognizing how very close to Him we actually are. “[God] raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus” (Ephesians 2:6-7).

It is in this location where we receive the “surpassing riches of His grace in kindness.” It is in the authority attached to this location that we are to “stand firm.” It is here where we are to remain, not wandering away like the child at the amusement park.

God longs for us to believe and live in obedience to His words because we *choose* to, not because He has to put us on a leash to abide with Him “in the heavenly places,” where the spiritual war is taking place. If you run away from your location near Jesus Christ, you will

be running away from your victory. But when you stand firm in your heavenly location, you will then be able to utilize the full armor down here in order to live out the complete revelation of your victory.

Putting on the Belt

The first piece of the wardrobe God has given us to wear as we wage victorious spiritual warfare is a belt. We read in Ephesians 6:14, “. . .having girded your loins with truth.” In biblical times, Roman soldiers “girded their loins” by fastening a belt around their midsection.

Now I, probably like you, have a number of belts hanging in my closet. When I’m getting dressed, I choose which belt I wear based on its color. If you are a lady, you probably also consider a belt’s design. However, when Paul instructed us to gird our loins with truth, he was not talking about ordinary belts, colors, or designs.

A Roman soldier’s belt was a useful tool—a place where some of his other armor could hang. He might hang his sword on his belt. He might also hang a dagger there or any number of needed items. When the soldier was ready to head into battle, he could reach down and pick up the part of his tunic that was draping near his feet and tuck it in this belt. If you’ve ever seen a movie that takes place in the Roman era, you’ve seen that the men frequently dressed in long robes. You’ve probably also noticed when it got time to get serious with work or move into battle, the Roman soldier would lift his robe and tuck it underneath his belt. By doing this, he was given greater freedom to move his feet.

The belt not only held additional pieces of armor and provided soldiers with increased mobility, it also produced stability by holding things in place. When you or I wear a belt today, we put it on to fulfill a few fundamental purposes. The first purpose is that we want it to hold up our pants. The second purpose is that it needs to keep our shirts tucked in. Maybe a third purpose is that it offers some decorative appeal, but most importantly, belts stabilize whatever else we are wearing.

What Paul is telling us in Ephesians is that the belt of truth is designed to stabilize things by keeping them in their proper order.

Satan is the ultimate truth twister. Like a magician at a stage show, Satan distorts reality, altering it into any number of shapes and forms. John 8:44 reveals what we are up against when we face him. “[Satan] was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth because there is no truth in him. Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies.”

Everything about Satan is a lie, and he uses his lies to create chaos and disorder—moving things out of alignment in our lives. However, everything about God is true.

- “[God] interposed with an oath, so that by two unchangeable things in which it is *impossible for God to lie*, we who have taken refuge would have strong encouragement to take hold of the hope set before us” (Hebrews 6:17-18).
- “...in the hope of eternal life, which God, *who cannot lie*, promised long ages ago...” (Titus 1:2).
- “God is not a man, *that He should lie*, nor a son of man, that He should repent: Has He said, and will He not do it? Or has He spoken, and will He not make it good?” (Numbers 23:19).
- “Also the Glory of Israel *will not lie* or change His mind; for He is not a man that He should change His mind” (1 Samuel 15:29).

When a believer understands the objective nature of God’s truth—and operates in that understanding—all other areas in that believer’s life are automatically stabilized. Jesus said in John 8:32, “You will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.” I often hear Christians quoting this verse, frequently emphasizing that the “truth will make you free.” However, the factual reality of truth doesn’t free anyone. If it did, we would all be free because truth exists whether we want it to or not. Truth is truth whether we recognize it or not.

Rather, it is the truth that you “know” that will make you free. “You will *know* the truth...” is the part of the verse that should be emphasized because the truth that you know is the truth that frees you. And

since God is the only one who cannot lie, He is the only one who lives and exists in a state of absolute truth. He is the Source of our freedom, our stability, and our victory.

Feelings cannot be the standard by which we measure reality. Feelings are important, but they aren't always true. Our feelings must always be brought in line with God's truth, or they can guide us down an unstable path. In fact, Christ goes so far as to say we are to be sanctified in the truth. To be sanctified means to be set apart and holy. We are to be unique in our responses, thoughts, decisions, relationships... and also in the way we do battle in spiritual warfare.

What Is Truth?

"What is truth?" Pilate asked 2000 years ago. People everywhere today are still asking the same question. We live in an age where relativism permeates our culture, with the result being that my truth may not be your truth, and your truth may not be your neighbor's truth. This leaves us in a state of constant flux because there is no overarching and guiding truth to which we all subscribe. It's similar to the situation we read about in Judges 21:25: "In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes."

Yet doing what was right in their own eyes got the Israelites into a world of hurt and defeat as their culture entered into a number of destructive behaviors, including rape, violence, and bloodshed. Truth cannot be defined by the individuals who have been created because individuals are finite beings with limited knowledge and deceitful hearts (see Jeremiah 17:9). Only the Creator of truth Himself can define truth because He is the only one who knows and understands all truth. Truth is fundamentally God-based knowledge.

Truth, at its core, is God's view of a matter. Truth is powerful enough to stabilize lives both in history and for eternity. The presence of truth brings clarity and victory, but the absence of truth leads to confusion and defeat.

Truth Includes God's Original Intent

The first principle of truth is that though it is comprised of

information and facts, it also includes God's original intent, making it the absolute, objective standard by which reality is measured.

This reminds me of a story about a man who went fishing and brought home 20 catfish for his wife. He said, "Honey, I caught twenty catfish today." That was a fact. He had actually done what he said—he had brought home the 20 catfish he had caught.

His wife, however, knew that he wasn't a very good fisherman, so she asked him, "How did *you* catch twenty catfish?"

He answered, "Well, I went to the fish market and asked the guy to toss me twenty catfish. And I caught them all."

Originally this man had given the facts, but it wasn't the truth. He had cast the facts in such a way so as to hide the truth. Truth always involves more than just facts; it also includes the intention behind the facts. That's why Scripture tells us that God desires truth within us and not just outwardly in what we do. We read in Psalm 51:6, "Behold, You desire truth in the innermost being, and in the hidden part You will make me know wisdom." God wants truth to resonate in our "innermost being" because that's the core out of which our intentions flow into our actions.

Truth Is Predetermined by God

The second principle of truth is that truth has already been predetermined by God. Truth is not on trial.

An accountant, a psychologist, and a lawyer got together one day to discuss the nature of truth. The psychologist said, "Working with people, I've learned that truth is what you *feel* it to be." The accountant said, "Working with accounts, I've learned that truth is what you *need* it to be." And of course, the lawyer offered, "Working in the justice system, I've learned that truth is what you *want* it to be."

Our world today is in a constant shifting of its analysis of truth. Truth is comprised of opinions, perceptions, and ideas. What was true yesterday is rarely true today. One week we are told that coffee is bad for us. The next week a new study comes out that says coffee might save our lives. One year we're told we should avoid eating eggs. The next year a new study comes out telling us we should eat

two eggs every day. New studies offering supposed truth pop up all around us all the time. But truth is objective, predetermined, and fixed. It cannot change with the latest fad or find. Truth is the standard to which all other things must conform because truth is reality in its original form.

One plus one equals two. One plus one has always equaled two. One plus one will always equal two. Even when I don't feel like one plus one should equal two, and I really feel like I want it to equal three, one plus one will still equal two. Even if I hope, believe, and name and claim that one plus one should equal three, one plus one will never equal three because the laws of mathematics are not adjustable. I must adjust to the laws of mathematics rather than suppose that mathematics will adjust to me. When I pay the bills each month, I use an objective standard in counting the numbers I will be subtracting. If I didn't, I would have confusion and chaos in my finances.

Truth cannot change simply because we want it to. Truth never adjusts itself to our feelings, hopes, or desires. God is the originator of all things true, and He does not lie, so He and His Word comprise the point of reference by which all else must comply.

Lois and I were recently walking in London near Westminster Palace when I noticed a number of people looking down at their watches and then looking back up again. This pattern continued for some time. They would look down at their watch, make a small adjustment, and then look back up.

They were setting their timepieces according to England's timepiece, Big Ben. While I was there, I never saw anyone approach a guard and tell him he needed to get whoever was in charge of Big Ben to change its time because it was five minutes off. To do that would have been ridiculous because everyone in England knows that all timepieces must be adjusted to match the true time as declared by Big Ben.

Big Ben doesn't care about anyone else's watch. Big Ben doesn't care how anyone else feels about his or her watch. Big Ben doesn't even care if a lot of people prefer a certain kind of watch or have the same time that's on each other's watches. Big Ben is not impressed by how much money someone spent buying his watch. Big Ben doesn't take polls to

find out what everyone's watch has to say. Big Ben simply tells the time, and everyone else is supposed to adjust to Big Ben.

Or suppose you go to a doctor for chest pain, but instead of examining you, he tells you he wants to put you on some great new pills he had just read about. He tells you he isn't exactly sure what they're for, but he says a fancy flier described how good they tasted. Would you take the pills? No. Instead, you'd probably get yourself out of that office immediately and never go back.

When it comes to things like time and health, we want to function by a standard of truth. How much more important is it to function by a standard of truth when it comes to facing and battling the enemy, whose mission it is to destroy you with his lies? The devil doesn't want you to know the truth because the truth is the one thing that can set you free. Truth is a powerful reality predetermined by God. It sets the standard under which our thoughts and decisions must align.

Truth Is an Internal Reality

A third principle of truth is that it must resonate internally in order to have any validity externally. What is true outside of us in our actions, decisions, conversations, and choices ought to be true inside our spirit because it is within our spirit that God relates to us. When Jesus is speaking to the Samaritan woman about knowing God, He says, "God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth" (John 4:24). Cultivating internal truth—being honest with who we are and our motives, sins, mistakes, beliefs, desires, longings, and issues—is one of the essential steps to strapping on the belt of truth. God is not a God of pretense, but He is a God of great mercy.

In 2 Corinthians 3:18, Paul tells us, "But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory."

One of the primary places Satan seeks to distort truth is within our relationship with God. His goal is to keep us veiled before God. He wants our relationship with God to be a charade rather than a spiritual reality. But let me tell you a secret—God already knows everything about you. He even knows the things you think you are hiding from

Him. You can't shock God. You can't surprise God. He already knows it all. This is the God who says of Himself, "I make known the end from the beginning, from ancient times, what is still to come" (Isaiah 46:10 NIV). God knows the past, present, and future of all things—your thoughts, your actions, and even what you want to do that you don't do. He knows all of it. You're not hiding anything from Him by praying in superfluous, spiritual-sounding holy words. Wearing the belt of truth means being real with God, being raw and unveiled before Him. When you get real with God, you will find it much easier to get real with yourself.

People can look fine on the outside. They can even do good and moral actions. But God views more than the outside. He views us holistically. He views us intimately, internally. What's more, He knows what we're up against within us, let alone what we have to face with others. "He knows how we are formed, he remembers that we are dust" (Psalm 103:14 NIV).

He knows that we're struggling, hurting, desiring, and failing, and He knows that at times we doubt Him. Since He already knows all this, why should we go to Him camouflaged and veiled? Why should we simply look the way religion says a Christian ought to look or pray the way religion says a Christian ought to pray. If a person cannot be truthful with God, who already knows the truth, then Satan has stripped that person of the foundational piece of armor before the battle even begins.

The Battle Between Our Ears

Here is the question I want you to ask yourself regarding truth: What will you use to determine what you believe to be true? Will it be your emotions? Emotions fluctuate, respond, and change. If I tell you I'm going to give you \$1 million, your emotions might fly high. But then if I tell you that the \$1 million is in play money, your emotions would undoubtedly sink back down. We need to acknowledge our emotions because they are real, but they should never be the final arbiter for determining truth.

Will you use your intelligence? Yes, I hear you—you're smart. You have your degrees, experience, and your common sense. Others admire

you for that. But are you infinite in your brilliance? No, of course not. None of us are. How many times have you learned something, only to later find out new information and have to change your opinion? There is always new information and new data to influence what you believe. God is the only one who has all of the information. The rest of us are still gathering information as we go through life.

Will you use your moral instincts to determine what you believe to be true? Everyone has some form of a moral compass within them, but even that can change with emotions, new information, outside influences, or maturity.

What will your standard be? Will it be feelings (which are constantly changing) or intelligence (which is finite) or moral instincts (which differ)? Or will it be divine revelation? Only God is the author and originator of truth. Knowing Him and His Word is the only way to know how to function with the belt of truth because only God can define what is entirely true.

Much of our battle takes place right between our ears. The things you are struggling with, the things that make you feel defeated, the things you think you cannot face for yet another day...none of these is the real problem. The real problem is waged in your mind—what do you believe to be true? Your problems may show up in your feet, hands, eyes, heart, mouth, bedroom, bar, workplace, hospital, computer, and anyplace else, but the root of the problem is in what you believe to be true.

I'm sorry to have to tell you this, but it is important to know: *You can't trust yourself.* I'm disappointed to have to admit it, but I can't trust myself either. Why? Because our souls—our mind, will, and emotions—have been distorted. They have been contorted since birth. Have you ever been to an amusement park and seen the mirrors that make you look fat, tall, short, or skinny? Our souls have become distorted like these mirrors. The penetrating effects of sin have reached into our souls and twisted them so that they are no longer recognizable as what they were created to be.

A person looking into a carnival mirror could not accurately describe the true person who is being reflected in the mirror. Neither can you accurately define truth when looking through the distorted mirror of

your soul. The soul within you, your viewpoint on a matter, needs to be restored. You need to exchange your thoughts with God's truth.

How does this process take place? It happens through the help of the third person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit. Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 2:10, "The Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God." The Greek word Paul uses for "searches" (*ereuna*) means to "continually examine" something. In this case, the Holy Spirit is continually examining everything—even the depths of God.

Paul goes on to explain, "Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may know the things freely given to us by God" (verse 12). It is through the work of the Spirit that we gain the ability to know God and the truth that can give us the capacity to walk in victory in our day-to-day lives. Please note that we *gain the ability* to know God. The Holy Spirit never forces us to know God or be restored by His truth. But it is through the work of the Spirit that we are given the opportunity to exchange our viewpoint on a matter with God's.

This exchange is a key aspect of wearing the belt of truth. We read in 2 Corinthians 10:3-5 how critical it is.

For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses. We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ.

In this passage, God reveals one of Satan's key strategies. Satan seeks to set up speculations (wrong thoughts) that contradict God's truth. In fact, anything that inhibits, distorts, or alters God's viewpoint on a matter is used by the enemy in his bid to defeat you. It could be something that seems as harmless as your mother's or father's opinion about what you should do or think. It could be what your friends or the media are persuading you to do or believe. It could even be the thoughts generated in your own distorted soul.

Satan doesn't care if you mix some of God's truth with the rest of

the “truth” you’re gathering from all of your other sources because he knows if he can twist what you believe to be true, that will be enough for him to set up speculations and raise lofty things against the knowledge of God. It can be compared to a woman who decides to prepare a pan of lasagna. She slices up the tomatoes, boils the noodles, fries the meat, adds some chopped onions and garlic along with cheese and sauce. Then, just as she’s about to put the pan in the oven, she sprinkles arsenic all over the top.

Would you eat the lasagna? Neither would I. But that’s what Satan seeks to do in order to strip us of the belt of truth. He says, “Go to church. Read your Bible. Memorize your verses. As a matter of fact, even I quote those verses—*out of their contextual truth*. But at the end of the day, sprinkle in a little bit about what the world says, what your parents say, how your friends think, what the television portrays, or whatever else you feel, desire, or want to believe.” Satan knows that when you have done that, you have taken off your own belt of truth.

He didn’t even have to take it off for you.

Wearing the belt of truth involves realizing that truth is fundamentally God-based knowledge—His viewpoint on a matter, containing three principles:

- Truth is comprised of information and facts, but it also includes God’s original intent, making it the absolute, objective standard by which reality is measured.
- Truth has already been predetermined by God.
- Truth must resonate internally in order to have any validity externally.

When you wear the belt of truth and operate with it by aligning your mind, will, and emotions underneath God’s view on a matter—His truth—He will then empower you to fight your spiritual battles with the freedom of greater mobility and increased stability. By knowing and functioning according to the truth of God, you will be on your way to experiencing victory over anything or anyone seeking to overcome or defeat you.