

Football season is almost here. The Lions played their second Pre-Season game yesterday and begin their regular season three weeks from today. The Michigan High School football season begins this week and the Michigan football season begins on September 6th. Dexter High School, the Michigan Wolverines and the Detroit Lions all have one thing in common, and I'm not talking about trying to improve over disappointing seasons last year. The players all wear the same kind of equipment: helmets, facemask, pads and cleats. Players wear this equipment to protect themselves.

Christians need God's Armor to protect themselves too. In Ephesians 6:11 (NLT) we are told to, **"Put on all of God's armor so that you will be able to stand firm against all strategies of the devil."** We need God's help to stand, to face the enemies of our faith. It is one thing to think about a football player needing a helmet and pads. But it is another thing to think that we as Christians need protective gear as well. It's easy to see the need for protective gear when a huge linebacker is running at you. It is not so easy to see the need when we don't see or recognize our enemy.

So the first thing we have to remember is that our enemy is spiritual. The armor of God helps to protect us against the devil and his strategies. It is too easy for us as Christians to fight the wrong battles. We can be fooled into thinking that our enemies are those who disagree with us, people who don't share our faith. But that's wrong. If you ask people on the street what they think about Christians, they might tell you that Christians are negative, hateful, judgmental, or closed minded. Why? Could it be because they have the impression that Christians are against those who are not with them? It shouldn't be that way.

Jesus came as the Savior of all. Because God loves all the people of the world, no one is His enemy. We shouldn't look at them as our enemies either. Even though we may disagree with them, we have to remember that God **"wants everyone to be saved and to understand the truth."** (1 Timothy 2:4 NLT) Jesus ate with the Tax Collectors and Sinners and reached out to the outcast. He helped them, he didn't condemn them. We need to reach out to the people around us too, without condemning them. After all, we all need God's love and forgiveness.

Ephesians 6:12 (NLT) tells us, **"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."** The Bible describes the devil as the adversary, the accuser, the father of lies, and the tempter. He wants to confuse us, to get us wrapped up in our own lives, to lead us to compromise, to become apathetic, to ignore or distort the truth.

The Armor of God is defensive, designed to protect us from Satan's attacks. The truth protects us from Satan's lies. Satan is a very good liar. The very 1st temptation came in the form of doubt followed by a lie. First Satan asked, **"Did God really say you must not eat the fruit from any of the trees in the garden?"** (Genesis 3:1 NLT) Then he said, **"You won't die!"** (verse 4) Because Adam and Eve believed the lie and ate the forbidden fruit, sin and death entered our world. Ever since then it has been harder to recognize the truth. But God gives us the truth in His Son, Jesus Christ and in His word. When we know the truth, it can protect us against Satan's lies. Faith is the shield that can prevent Satan from accusing us, from filling our lives with guilt and shame, because through faith we know that we are forgiven by God and that we have a new life in Christ. The Armor of God is designed to help us live as authentic Christians, people who follow the example of Christ. When we know that God is protecting us, we are free to love, to serve and to forgive others in His name.

Ultimately we have to remember that the Armor of God is God Himself and His Word. God is the one who protects us by giving us His peace in the storms of life. God is the one who rescues us from sin and death with the Good News the Jesus has defeated sin and death for us. God is the one who saves us and restores us to a place in His family. God is our shield and defender. Even the sword, the word of God, does not have to be an offensive weapon. Remember after Jesus was baptized and tempted by the devil in the wilderness. Jesus responded to each of the temptations with God's word. When Joseph was being seduced by Potiphar's wife, he knew God's word and answered by saying, **"How could I do such a wicked thing? It would be a great sin against God."** (Genesis 39:9 NLT) Knowing God's word, taking it to heart, and applying it in our lives can help keep us from falling for the devil's lies.

The Apostle Paul used the image of a Roman Soldier dressed for battle when he wrote about putting on the armor of God. When the Romans went to war, they always fought in formation. They stood shoulder to shoulder in what was known as a phalanx so that they could help protect and defend one another. As Christians, we need to stand together to protect one another as well. When we try to go it alone, we find ourselves in more trouble. It is easier to stand together than to stand alone. Nehemiah helped the Israelites rebuild the walls of Jerusalem by getting them to stand together in family units, with some working and others ready to defend them. We need to stand up for one another in the Christian faith as well. We can do that is by praying for one another, by looking out for one another, by encouraging one another. After all, we are all part of God's family.

We all have clothes in our closet that we never wear. They don't do us a lot of good just hanging in the closet. God has put a full set of armor in our closets. Don't forget about it. Don't shove it to the back of the closet. Wear it. Put on the armor of God so that he can help you continue to stand up in the face of temptation, in the time of personal struggles, in your own spiritual battle. God's given you the armor. Get to know it and then use it. Amen.