

# The Armor of God – Pt. 1

## Ephesians 6:10-24

(Expanded Sermon Notes)



Perspective is a powerful thing. Perspective in film shapes how audiences perceive and connect with scenes. It adds depth, making shots feel immersive and impacting emotional tone. Low-angle shots give characters power, while high-angle shots make them seem vulnerable. Perspective can highlight relationships, like placing characters at different depths to show distance or intimacy. Point-of-view (POV) shots align viewers with a character's experience, building empathy. Focus directs attention, guiding viewers to key elements. Perspective tricks, like forced perspective, alter the scale to affect perceived significance. Together, these techniques let filmmakers control mood, emphasize themes, and deepen storytelling, shaping how scenes resonate with viewers. Perspective in our personal lives causes us to step back and evaluate what we are experiencing. As a dad, I've tried to think of the perspective of my children when I've had to discipline them. Do I stand towering over them, or do I get on their level? Their perspective matters, and they way I interact communicates a great deal. Gaining perspective on a situation often means listening to someone else who has had a different set of life experiences. Their vantage point helps to bring clarity and informs decisions. This is the essence of research-based projects. We seek out information to give perspective. Perspective ultimately informs how we see the world and others around us. It isn't a casual thing that randomly or occasionally intersects into our worlds. No, it is something that we are always and even unconsciously viewing the world through. But, perspective can and needs to be intentional.

In my early twenties, I was working in sales at a high-end bicycle shop in the north suburbs of Chicago. While working there, I got into racing mountain bikes in Wisconsin on the weekends. When I registered for my first race, I had to choose a division, and I chose the most novice division. This was my first race, and my competitive side wanted a chance at winning. A friend of mine, Jeff, who raced a lot, asked me a poignant question that gave me perspective about my decision. He asked, "Do you want to win or be challenged and have fun?" I wanted to be challenged and have fun. So, I registered for the next division up in the most competitive age bracket. This race was double the distance of the original one I had registered for, and the pace was far more aggressive. Halfway through I was so cooked trying to keep up I thought about bailing, but then Jeff's question came back to me. It drove me on, I picked up the pace over the final three laps, passed a bunch of people, and finished in the bottom third! Ha! Perspective made all the difference that day. Perspective is a powerful thing, and **the right perspective makes perseverance possible.**

# 1. Perseverance – Keep Going

## a. The focal point of this section – Persevere

- i. When reading this section, our eyes get drawn to the Armor of God section. That is an important part of the passage but it really isn't the focal point. Instead, Paul is encouraging the Ephesian believers towards faithfulness and perseverance. The Armor of God, reminds them of how they are strengthened by God to persevere.
- ii. The conclusion of the letter, 6:10–24, makes us acutely aware that, humanly speaking, Christians are called to prepare, to contend, and to struggle each new moment as earnestly as if it were the first, the beginning of the journey.<sup>1</sup>

## iii. How do we hear Paul say it in this passage?

1. **V.18** – “keep alert with all perseverance...”
  - a. Paul literally tells them to persevere... it doesn't get much more clear than this.
2. **V. 11** – “that you may stand against...”
  - a. This is an active expression - These weapons (Armor of God) that he is to describe are given that people *may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil*. *Stand* indeed is the keyword of the passage; for, as Moule puts it, ‘the present picture is not of a march, or of an assault, but of the holding of the fortress of the soul and of the Church for the heavenly King.’<sup>2</sup>
3. **Vv. 13 & 14** – “Stand against” & “Therefore, stand...”
  - a. *Having girded your loins with truth* accurately translates the Greek participial phrase, showing the tense used, and conveying the sense of a deliberate personal action.<sup>3</sup>

## b. This is a normal exhortation from Paul for believers, and we see it clearly in his own life.

- i. How are believers supposed to act when it gets tough? – Persevere – The letter of 2 Timothy helps us to get a picture of Paul's seriousness in expecting and exhorting others to persevere.
  1. Paul writes to Timothy, a young and discouraged pastor, who is trying to Pastor a church in Ephesus. And, you know what, it isn't going well. Why? Because Ephesus is a tough place to be a Christian and a pastor!
- ii. **Encouragement Amidst Hardship**: 2 Timothy is often seen as Paul's last letter, written while he was in prison, anticipating his death. This gives the letter an intensely personal and urgent tone. Paul encourages Timothy to endure hardship, continue preaching, and remain faithful to his calling despite opposition (2 Timothy 1:8, 4:1-5).
- iii. **Guarding the Gospel**: Paul urges Timothy to "guard the good deposit" of faith and teaching (2 Timothy 1:13-14). He warns that many will abandon sound doctrine, and he

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<sup>1</sup> Karl Barth, *The Epistle to the Ephesians*, ed. R. David Nelson, trans. Ross M. Wright (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic: a division of Baker Publishing Group, 2017), 146.

<sup>2</sup> Francis Foulkes, *Ephesians: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 10, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1989), 176.

<sup>3</sup> Francis Foulkes, *Ephesians: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 10, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1989), 179.

calls Timothy to persist in teaching the truth, no matter the personal cost (2 Timothy 4:2-4).

- iv. **Paul's Example of Perseverance:** Paul reflects on his own life and ministry, saying he has "fought the good fight" and "kept the faith" (2 Timothy 4:7). His personal example is meant to inspire Timothy to stay faithful to his own calling, even when faced with trials and isolation.

**c. Be strengthened – We do not persevere under our own power.**

- i. The Holy Spirit empowers our perseverance. → We have heard from Paul multiple times in this letter about the role of the Holy Spirit.
  - 1. 1:13 – We are sealed with the Holy Spirit
  - 2. 5:18 – We are not to be drunk with wine, but instead filled with the Spirit.
  - 3. 6:18 – We are to be praying at all times in the Spirit.
    - a. It is clear from Paul that there is a special role that the Holy Spirit plays in helping us persevere as Christians on this side of heaven.
- ii. The work of the Holy Spirit in the heart of the believer is perhaps the most distinctively new feature of the New Covenant. Instead of simply addressing his people from the outside through his law, God now works powerfully by the Spirit to change the heart: **"I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws" (Ezek. 36:26-27).** In exalting the ministry of this new covenant that has now come in Christ, Paul declares that we all "are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit" (2 Cor. 3:18). In Christ, Paul declares, God has "condemned sin in the flesh in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the flesh but according to the Spirit" (Rom. 8:3-4).<sup>4</sup>
- iii. **A key question for us - Do I regularly depend on God's Spirit in my everyday life?**
  - 1. Do I think it is possible to live the Christian life on my own? Or, perhaps even more poignant for the days we find ourselves in, do we think we can solve the problems of this age on our own?
  - 2. In order to persevere, we need the Holy Spirit, and we need to have the right perspective.

## 2. Perspective – Right Sight

**a. Ephesus was not an easy place to be a believer and so the Ephesian believers needed to be reminded of the perspective that was theirs in Christ.**

- i. The standards have been set, the standards for personal life, for life in the fellowship of the Christian community, and in the more intimate circle of the home. Yet he wants still to remind his readers that such a life cannot be lived without a spiritual battle, of whose intensity he has become more and more conscious in his own experience.<sup>5</sup>
- ii. Perseverance is not going to happen accidentally. It especially won't happen if they do not have the right perspective. What does this perspective involve?
  - 1. **Who is for them – God**

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<sup>4</sup> EFCA. *Evangelical Convictions*, 2nd Edition (p. 189). Free Church Publications. Kindle Edition.

<sup>5</sup> Francis Foulkes, *Ephesians: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 10, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1989), 175.

- a. We have heard this over and over again through this letter. From Paul's opening in chapter 1, we heard about the God who lacks for nothing and deeply loves his people.
- 2. **Who and what they are not struggling against.**
  - a. In Acts 19, we read about the account of Paul and his ministry companions getting chased out of Ephesus by a crowd because as the church grew it disrupted the idol industry.
  - b. It could be easy for believers in Ephesus to think that their struggle is against their neighbors or against the human powers of Rome. And, yes, we shouldn't be naive, there were real struggles and hardships that were caused by their neighbors and ruling authorities. But, Paul helps to reframe all of this for them. There is a very real spiritual dynamic going on and is at work. That is what they are truly struggling against.
    - i. We have to remember that around 40 years after Paul sends this letter, the Ephesian church will be admonished by Jesus himself. They will be corrected not because they let their theology drift, but because they lost the love of sharing the gospel with their neighbors.
- 3. **Who and what they are struggling against.**
  - a. This is a helpful reminder for us today as well, our struggle is not against our neighbors or even ruling authorities. It is against the spiritual forces of darkness that seek to distract humanity away from the goodness of God and the love of Christ.
  - b. This reframes the problem and struggle at hand for us. Just like the Ephesians, we are more likely to hold to robust and orthodox theology, while drifting from our love of neighbor. This can stem from thinking that our struggle is against our neighbors and not a spiritual battle.
- b. Perspective helps us be... (live the virtues of Christ – Eph. 4:1-3)
  - i. When we understand the real source of our struggle, it reframes our response to our neighbors.
- c. **Humble – Thinking of myself less often.**
  - i. **A rightsized perspective of yourself.**
    - 1. If you operate with an achieved identity, you have to compare yourself to others. This means your worth and value is only in relationship to others around you. This posture of comparison routinely leads us away from joy and contentment.
    - 2. If you operate with a received identity, your value and worth come from someone who esteems you greatly. In Christianity, that is God. This means your identity is both stable and rightsized through God's Word.
  - ii. It is really hard to think of yourself less often if you only ever think of yourself.
    - 1. When we have a rightsized perspective, we operate in confidence, security, and sensitivity for others.
  - iii. **Concern & sensitivity for others.**
    - 1. **Have you ever been in the grocery store, at a game, or in class, and you were so focused on what it was that you were doing that you missed someone or something right in front of you? This is what happens when we focus on ourselves, we can't see others around us.**
    - 2. When we operate in humility, we grow in our concern and sensitivity for others.
  - iv. **Purposeful responsiveness.**

1. The natural outflow of seeing the needs of others is to purposely respond to them.
  2. We can't forget, purposeful responsiveness is not about responding to every possible need, but it is about responding intentionally with our time, talents, and treasure for the good of others and the glory of God.
- d. **Patient – Seeing the big picture even when something bothers you.**
- i. **A commitment to the big picture and the long view of things.**
    1. Patient people tend to be those who can see the bigger picture or how something plays out over the long run. This allows them to choose their reaction to the immediate situation that will help get to the preferred vision in the future.
    2. When we operate with short-sighted vision we can overreact and lose control quickly.
  - ii. **Operating out of a healthy sense of identity.**
    1. Being able to see the big picture requires a healthy self-awareness and awareness of the greatest good of others in the situation.
    2. There is a leadership maxim that states, "You cannot lead someone to a place that you have not been before." This is a helpful reminder even for our own self-identity. When we bump up against difficult situations and people, we are going to have a difficult time seeing the big picture for the situation if we haven't seen the big picture in our own lives. This doesn't mean that we have to be experts, but we have to be aware. And there is no greater threat to awareness than insecurity.
      - a. Insecurity causes us to be tunnel-visioned.
  - iii. **Working to establish understanding and shared purpose.**
    1. One of the things patient people do when they see the big picture is that they work to establish mutual purpose with those they are in conflict with. Often, everyone in the situation wants a very similar outcome. Patient people are self-controlled people and they are able to articulate the mutual purpose.
    2. One of the crucial steps in establishing understanding and mutual purpose is not writing a negative backstory for another person. This comes back to the virtue of gentleness, where we gave the benefit of the doubt.
      - a. We all write stories in situations that we face. And too often, even when we're in the wrong, the story we tell is that we are in the right.
      - b. If we are going to be patient people who work for the good of others, we have to get in the habit of telling accurate stories where we represent each person in the situation (including ourselves) honestly.
        - i. We'll only be able to do this through maturity and having a secure identity.
- e. **Gentle – Self-control to remain composed in a difficult or stressful situation.**
- i. **A commitment to self-control.**
    1. Gentle people do not lose control. This is not some magical gift or supernatural power.
    2. Self-control can be cultivated and developed.
      - a. One of the best steps in developing self-control is to rehearse your response ahead of time with the intention of staying in control.
    3. **The truth is that all of these virtues can be developed and cultivated. Especially, since we are indwelt with the Holy Spirit who helps and empowers us to live in a God honoring way.**

ii. **Giving the benefit of the doubt.**

1. Too often we ramp ourselves up when going into difficult situations by creating a backstory where we assume the worst intent of the other person.
2. People who remain self-controlled begin by not ramping themselves up through assuming the best of those they are in conflict with.
3. Giving the benefit of the doubt does not mean that we excuse poor behavior or wrongdoings. It does mean that we work to understand the other person.

iii. **Understanding the significance of your response.**

1. Not every situation demands the same response. Gentle and self-controlled people think through the level and type of response that is warranted in every situation. They do this because they understand that their response is significant, not just in proportion to the situation that they are responding to, but ultimately to the outcome they are hoping to achieve.

### 3. Prayer – Holy Resistance

a. What is prayer?

- i. This is a pretty simple and straightforward question even for those who are not religious or practice religions outside of Christianity.
  1. Prayer is most often seen as making a request to a divine being.
  2. In Christianity, we understand prayer to include supplication, but it is not limited to that. Prayer also includes listening to God, it is an act of worship, and isn't limited to spoken words either.
- ii. Summed up - The addressing and petitioning of God. Prayer to a god or gods is a feature of many, if not all, religions, but here attention will be restricted to the biblical teaching and some of its implications. A classic definition of Christian prayer is **“an offering up of our desires unto God, for things agreeable to his will, in the name of Christ, with confession of our sins, and thankful acknowledgement of his mercies”** (Westminster Shorter Catechism).<sup>6</sup>

b. How does Paul see prayer?

- i. **1 Thes 5:17-18 - Rejoice always, <sup>17</sup> pray without ceasing, <sup>18</sup> give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.**
- ii. This is part of Paul's closing instructions to the church in Thessalonica. He tells them to pray without ceasing

c. **Prayer, the response of a Christ-like posture.** → Let's take a minute and look at prayer a little deeper. We've seen how Paul's posture towards the believers in Ephesus was informed by his own identity in Christ.

- i. Closeness with God & prayer → **It is this covenant relationship that gives the warrant for prayer.**<sup>7</sup>
  1. What this means is that the motivation for the believer to engage in prayer is not to win God's affections or attention. Instead, it is that God has made himself known to man first and foremost and in this drawing near God has demonstrated his love and grace that motivates the believer to then engage in prayer.

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<sup>6</sup> Walter A. Elwell and Barry J. Beitzel, "Prayer," *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1988), 1745.

<sup>7</sup> Walter A. Elwell and Barry J. Beitzel, "Prayer," *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1988), 1745.

- ii. And we shouldn't be naive in that perspective. This letter would have been sent around to several churches in the city and with that, each of those churches would have things that they are doing well and things that they aren't doing so well. Still, Paul leads off by reminding them that he is praying for them.
- d. **The personal impact of prayer.** → How does prayer change you and me, personally?
  - i. Who is Paul praying to?
    - 1. Simple question right? He is praying to God. That action in itself is an acknowledgement that we are in need and are not sufficient for our own provision. Prayer in this way causes us to consider the reality of humility.
  - ii. What is Paul praying for?
    - 1. Paul is praying that they might know Jesus in increasing clarity and depth. This too helps to orient us in both our nature and our need.
- e. **Keller on prayer – Struggle & Awe**
  - i. “We should not drive a wedge between seeking personal communion with God and seeking the advance of his Kingdom in hearts and in the world. And if they are kept together, then communion will not be just wordless mystical awareness on the one hand, and our petitions will not be a way of procuring God's favor for “our many words” (Matt. 6:7) on the other. This book will show that prayer is both conversation *and* encounter with God. These two concepts give us a definition of prayer and a set of tools for deepening our prayer lives. The traditional forms of prayer adoration, confession, Thanksgiving, and supplication are concrete practices as well as profound experiences. We must know the awe of praising his glory, the intimacy of finding his grace, and the struggle of asking his help, all of which can lead us to know the spiritual reality of his presence. **Prayer, then, is both awe and intimacy, struggle and reality.** These will not happen every time we pray, but each should be a major component of our prayer over the course of our lives.”<sup>8</sup>
  - ii. Struggle and Awe
    - 1. Paul is in awe of God's work in and through them.
    - 2. Paul prays that they would be strengthened.
- f. **What are some practices of prayer?**
  - i. **1-minute pause. (John Eldredge)**
    - 1. Sixty seconds to be still and let everything go.
    - 2. <https://wildatheart.org/daily-reading/one-minute-pause>
  - ii. **ACTS prayer model.**
    - 1. Adoration – Praising God for who he is.
    - 2. Confession – Declaring our shortcomings and sin to God.
    - 3. Thanksgiving – Thanking God for his provision.
    - 4. Supplication – Asking God for his help and provision in our lives.
  - iii. **Praying the Psalms**
    - 1. Utilizing the Psalms as a guide for prayer. This is literally when we read a Psalm and pray it over a person or a situation. This practice connects us to God's Word and expands our vocabulary in prayer.
    - 2. Reference: Praying the Bible: Donald Whitney

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<sup>8</sup> Timothy Keller, Prayer-Experiencing Awe and Intimacy with God. (2014) p. 5