

# THE FULL ARMOR OF GOD

DEFENDING YOUR LIFE FROM SATAN'S SCHEMES

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## Preface

**E**phesians was written to young believers in the city of Ephesus, the first city in Asia. Ephesus boasted the Temple of Diana, Asia Minor's premier deity, and was visited annually by thousands of pilgrims. But Ephesus, like the rest of the first-century world, was filled with people who were uncertain about their future and fearful that their fate was in the hands of powers over which they had no control. Every resident of Ephesus sensed what Paul meant when he wrote that "our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms."

Today we Christians are less aware than first-century believers that there is an invisible war between God and Satan going on around us. Yet we, too, struggle with uncertainty, fears and doubts. Scripture makes it clear that much of our self-doubt, much of our difficulty in maintaining satisfying personal relationships and many of the fears that trouble us are rooted in the efforts of those same "spiritual forces of evil" that plagued the Ephesians. That is why it is so vital that we understand the

message of the Bible's book of Ephesians. In Ephesians the apostle Paul unveils the strategies Satan uses to attack believers. And he also explains the armor that God has provided to shield us from Satan's attacks.

In this book we are going to examine each piece of God's armor in sequence as Paul treats it and see exactly how we can put that armor on. I am convinced that this can launch you on a journey that will bring you more freedom and more joy than you have experienced in your Christian life. In using the resources that God provides, you truly will be shielded from Satan's efforts to make your life empty and unfulfilling. You will know how to defend your life from the enemy's most powerful schemes.

This book includes much that I teach in the Freedom Workshops I conduct around the country at no charge. While it is impossible to re-create here the experience of participating in a Freedom Workshop, this book will help you understand God's provision. And the exercises I include will help you experience His freedom.

If you would like to schedule a Freedom Workshop in your church or community, please contact me at [ancient1@nc.rr.com](mailto:ancient1@nc.rr.com).

Larry Richards

PART 1

# UNDERSTANDING SPIRITUAL FORCES







# 1

## Spiritual Forces of Evil Then

In A.D. 53 the apostle Paul approached the city of Ephesus. He was traveling along a major Roman road known locally as “the common highway.” Leaving a broad plain, the highway mounted a ridge, and from its top Paul caught the first glimpse of his destination. The city of Ephesus was hidden behind a wall seven meters high, but from the ridge Paul could see the Artemision, the temple of the goddess Artemis (also known as Diana), which lay just south of the city proper. The magnificent temple, its columns glowing in the light of the sun, was hailed even in that day as one of the seven wonders of the world.

The Artemision was an appropriate possession of the city, for, in the first century, Ephesus was the third most prominent city in the Roman Empire. Ephesus boasted a quarter of a million inhabitants. The city sat astride important land and sea trade routes, and was both the economic and religious center of the province of Asia. Ephesus was also the destination of thousands of religious pilgrims who flocked to the city each year to worship the goddess and seek her aid.

Paul, however, was not approaching Ephesus as a pilgrim. He was coming as a missionary, intent on spreading the Gospel of Jesus Christ. That mission would bring him into direct conflict with the “spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms” (Ephesians 6:12), for Ephesus was more than a center of pagan religion: It was also a center of demonic activity, a place where magic and sorcery were practiced in an effort to control the powerful spirits that people believed ruled their destinies.

During Paul’s stay in Ephesus open conflict would erupt between Christ and demonic powers that owed their allegiance to Satan. And the powers would not surrender without a battle.

## **A Look at Acts 19**

Luke’s account of Paul’s ministry in Ephesus, given in Acts 19, serves as an appropriate introduction to the New Testament book of Ephesians. Acts 19 also explains the emphasis in Ephesians on the believer’s defense against demonic oppression. Note these features of the Acts 19 account.

First, Paul is described as casting out evil spirits and healing the sick (see Acts 19:11–12). These “extraordinary miracles” freeing victims of demonic oppression were performed in public. Everyone in the city knew of the apostle’s actions.

Second, we are told of seven sons of Sceva, who were exorcists (see verses 13–16). In the first century, Jewish exorcists were held in high regard, for they were thought to know the secret name of the Jews’ powerful deity and, thus, could enlist His aid. In those days, exorcism was performed by invoking the name of a powerful spirit—such as an angel, demon or deity—and placing that spirit under a spell. The spirit could then be directed to order out any lesser demon that was tormenting the victim.

But one day when the seven Jewish exorcists tried to invoke the name of Jesus in this way, the demonized man attacked and

beat all seven. The evil spirit spoke, saying that it knew Jesus and knew about Paul, but recognized no authority in these seven men. Because they had no personal relationship with Jesus, they had no authority over evil spirits. When this event “became known to the Jews and Greeks living in Ephesus, they were all seized with fear, and the name of the Lord Jesus was held in high honor” (verse 17).

The third story in Acts 19 indicates how powerfully Paul’s defeat of demons influenced the Christian community (see verses 18–20). Many who had practiced sorcery as a defense against demons brought out their books of spells and magic and burned them publicly. Luke tells us that the burned books were worth fifty thousand drachma, which represented fifty thousand days’ worth of income!

Taken together these three stories make it very plain that Ephesus was a center of satanic activity. Thus, the Acts account provides an important clue to understanding the purpose and value of this significant New Testament epistle—for Ephesians has more references to demonic powers than any other New Testament letter, and Paul views its teaching as divinely provided armor against the attacks of evil spirits.

## **First-Century View of the Spirit World**

In the first century, most people were well aware that the spirit world is real, and believed it to be occupied by a variety of spirits. There were spirits of the dead. There were spirits of the heroes of old. There were spirits who were gods and goddesses. And there were demons . . . evil spirits. All these spirits were believed to interact with the world of men and to have impact on the living. Everything—success in business, in love, in athletic competitions, even in one’s health—depended on whether the spirits were pleased or displeased with an individual. And

the spirits were at best capricious. None really cared about a human's welfare; any spirit was more likely to harm a person than help him. The best anyone could do was to make offerings to placate possibly angry or hostile spirits, or resort to magic to try to control them.

First-century Roman writer Plutarch notes that the sorcerers of his time advised those who were demonized to “recite and name over to themselves the Ephesians letters.” These “letters” were six supposedly magic words that were written on separate pieces of leather, and could be shuffled and recited in differing order. If one order of the six words did not work, perhaps another order would—for even sorcery was not reliable.

No one in Ephesus had ever seen a person dominate demons as Paul did. No wonder the people of the city held Paul and the name of Jesus in such awe.

And no wonder, after Paul left the city and the young Christian Church, he wrote them a reassuring letter. In that letter, his epistle to the Ephesians, Paul made very plain how Christians can defend themselves against the attacks of evil spirits who are armed with strategies devised by Satan himself.



## 2

# Spiritual Forces of Evil Now

**W**hat would Paul find if he approached a modern American city like Seattle, where I am as I write this? Seattle is an exciting city with its sea lanes touching the Pacific Rim. It is a prosperous city despite the current recession—the home of Google, Microsoft and important financial institutions. It boasts a fine art museum, fantastic mountain vistas and a major international airport.

It would not take the apostle Paul long, however, to realize that spiritual forces of evil are at work here. There are many churches, but most of the population is unchurched. In fact, the life of the pastor of one of the most vital churches in the community has been threatened so often that armed bodyguards attend all church services. According to research by the Pew organization, some 25 percent of people who attend evangelical churches hold pagan beliefs, such as a belief in reincarnation, and are unaware that these beliefs conflict with Christian teaching!

If this modern-day Paul were to turn on the television and scan the programs offered by the networks and cable channels,

he would find that no fewer than sixty programs feature the supernatural—everything from A&E’s *Paranormal State* to CBS’s *Medium*. Satan is using the media to infiltrate American culture with pagan notions.

Many people are hooked on the occult—as shown by a quick look at [www.Meetup.com](http://www.Meetup.com), a website that helps people find and join interest groups. Punching in a Seattle area zip code, Paul would discover that within 25 miles of the city are some eleven shamanistic groups, with memberships ranging from 60 to 219. He would find ten Wiccan groups, such as the Greater Seattle Witches meetup, with 587 members, and he would find the 205-member Free Witches meetup.

If Paul checked further he would find twelve groups that seek supernatural guidance through reading tarot cards. He would find nine groups, like the Spirit Speaks meetup, that look to spirit guides to help them make choices. He would also find nine groups like the 101-member Psychic Reading and Energy Healing meetup. And, of course, he would see that the Seattle Pagan meetup claims 371 members, while the nearby Everett Pagan meetup claims 251. If Paul kept looking, he might run across the Witch School, an online institution with more than 227,000 regular students, many of whom are working toward ordination as a witch or warlock.

Such active involvement in the occult and fascination with the spirit world was uncommon just 25 years ago. American culture is changing, and with it the beliefs of the new generations.

## What Is the Modern View of the Spirit World?

Strikingly, modern beliefs about the spirit world mirror the beliefs of the first century—notably that entities in the spirit world exert powerful influence over one’s personal life. These entities include the spirits of dead relatives, of individuals from ancient

times, of gods and goddesses, of angels and demons and even of spirits of animals (totems).

The major difference between the beliefs of many people today and the beliefs of first-century Ephesians lies in the fact that first-century men and women feared the spirits. Moderns assume that the spirits are well disposed to humans and eager to help. As a result moderns tend to be comfortable going to palm readers or clairvoyants, mediums or witches, or calling directly on spirits for help and guidance. When encouraged to invite a “spirit guide” into their lives, many unhesitatingly open the door to demons—for the spirits that modern pagans seek to contact are what the Bible identifies as demons!

### **What about Christians?**

If Paul visited a modern American church, he would find that most Christians are completely ignorant of what is happening in our culture. He would also discover that most Christians have no idea of the impact the spirit world has on our lives—even for good. Oh, most of us assume that there are such things as guardian angels. But we are totally unaware of how angels might minister to us.

Paul would also learn that few Christians today take demons seriously. If pressed, most of us would say that we believe that Satan exists and that demons probably are real. But the notion that demons might be the cause of many of our spiritual, emotional and even physical problems is totally foreign to most of us Americans. And this is not surprising. Satan today tends to operate behind the scenes in our culture, rather than in the open, public conflict that occurred in Ephesus.

If we look in the Bible, we find only three time periods when the struggle against demons broke out into the open.

- *The time of the Exodus.* The plagues that God brought on Egypt were judgments on the gods of Egypt, who were demons presenting themselves as deities (see 1 Corinthians 10:20). The destruction brought by the miracles demonstrated the power of God over the demonic.
- *The time of Elijah and Elisha.* In the eighth century B.C., King Ahab imported the religion of Baal in an effort to supplant worship of Yahweh. Elijah and Elisha performed miracles that demonstrated “the Lord, He is God” (see 1 Kings 18:24).
- *The time of Jesus and the apostles.* In the first century, demonic activity increased as Satan marshaled his forces against the Messiah. Jesus, and later the apostles, publicly cast out demons and healed the sick.

Aside from these periods of open, public conflict with evil spirits, demons remain active, but hidden. Despite the fact that few witness open and obvious demonic activity in our culture today, demons remain active. But with demonic activity “behind the scenes,” the tendency even among Christians is to discount their influence. Recognizing this tendency, Paul taught his followers and also left future generations a legacy enabling us to recognize and combat demons.

Recognition begins when we understand that real spiritual warfare takes place within the hearts and lives of individuals. Satan operates what Paul calls “schemes.” These schemes, or strategies, are designed to cripple believers and to make them miserable and ineffective. Demons are always looking for an open door through which they can enter to oppress and cripple believers. Thus, chances are good that there are areas in every Christian’s life where demonic oppression is robbing him or her of the freedom believers are intended to have in Christ.

Let’s look more closely at the work of these forces of evil.





# 3

## The Role of Demons

When the apostle Paul wrote to the Ephesians about the “spiritual forces of evil in heavenly realms” (Ephesians 6:12), he knew exactly what he was writing about. Ever since Satan showed up in Eden and manipulated Adam and Eve into declaring independence from God, dark forces have lurked behind the scenes of history, intent on causing as much suffering and misery as possible.

In Old Testament times, spiritual forces of evil found expression in the gods and goddesses who were worshiped by pagan peoples. According to Deuteronomy 32:16–17, the “foreign gods” of the nations around Israel were in reality demons. The Old Testament also refers to these dark forces as *evil spirits*, *perverse spirits*, *lying spirits*, *unclean spirits*, etc.

In the gospels, the spiritual forces of evil are called by the familiar terms *demons* or *evil spirits*. There we catch a glimpse of just how hostile demons are to human beings. Demons were responsible for a great number of mental and physical ills, from madness to blindness. They crippled human beings and were

intent on causing pain and suffering. But in the gospel accounts, demons run into Jesus. And in every confrontation, the demons lose and are driven out of the individuals they oppress.

The New Testament epistles refer to demons using words common to Greek language and culture. Paul did call these spiritual forces of evil *demons* in 1 Corinthians 10:20 and 1 Timothy 4:1, but normally the New Testament letters refer to evil spirits in the vocabulary used by the average first-century citizen. In the first century, the man on the street called the inhabitants of the spirit world—that is, the gods and goddesses, the spirits of the dead, the angels and demons—by the names *principalities*, *rulers*, *powers*, *dominions*, *thrones*, *spiritual forces* or *elemental spirits*.

When the apostle Paul wrote in Ephesians that “our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the *rulers*, against the *authorities*, against the *powers* of this dark world and against the *spiritual forces* of evil in the heavenly realms” (Ephesians 6:12, emphasis added), everyone knew he was referring to evil spirits.

Demons, whose realm is the spirit world—the “heavenly realms”—really do mount attacks on humans living in this world.

## What Are Demons?

Demons, while not flesh and blood, are personal beings. In my book *Every Good and Evil Angel in the Bible* (Nelson, 1998), I wrote,

The Gospels use personal pronouns when reporting dialog with demons (see Luke 8:27–30); individual demons apparently have personal names, and groups of demons have “team” names (see Luke 8:30). Demons can communicate and hold conversations (see Luke 4:22–26; 8:28–30). Demons also have intelligence (see Mark 1:23–24; Luke 4:34; 8:28), emotions (see Luke 8:28) and

will (see Mark 1:27; Luke 4:35–36). So demons, while spirit beings, are individuals—persons—with their own individual identities.

Most Bible students believe that demons are angels who followed Satan when he rebelled against God. Matthew 25:41 refers to “Satan and his angels.” Revelation 12:4 seems to suggest that about a third of the angels God created cast their lot with Satan and became demons.

Whatever the origin of demons, they clearly are allied with Satan. Demons are hostile to God and hate human beings. It is also clear that demons can “get inside” our personalities. When Jesus confronted a demon who was tormenting a human, the Bible describes Jesus as casting the demon *out*. To be thrown out, the demon must in some sense have been *in*!

So demons are evil spirits, hostile to us and eager to gain some kind of access to our lives so they can make us as miserable and unproductive as possible.

## Shut the Doors

The apostle Paul refers to demons using the *principalities* and *powers* vocabulary in seven of his thirteen New Testament letters. In Ephesians he mentions *principalities*, *authorities*, *powers*, *dominions*, *world rulers* and *spiritual forces*, and, as I noted earlier, refers to them more often than in any of his other letters.

This emphasis in Ephesians should not surprise us. As we learned from looking at Acts 19, Ephesus was a center of magic and sorcery, a hive of demonic activity. It is natural that Paul would deal with demons in this letter to a church deeply engaged in the struggle against the “spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.” Moreover, Paul would want to teach these believers how to slam the doors shut against any possible invasion by demons.

And what is exciting is that in teaching the Ephesians how to stand against demonic attacks, Paul is also teaching you and me!

In fact, we can view the book of Ephesians as Paul's handbook on spiritual warfare. Ephesians is Paul's "freedom workshop," instructing us how to break free, and remain free, from the influence of evil spirits that are eager to infiltrate believers' lives.

One special note. The danger from demons is not being "demon possessed." The word *possessed* is not found in the gospels. The Greek word is *daimonizomai*, which simply means "demonized." Demons do not "possess" their victims, in the sense of gaining control.

What demons do is influence us. They tempt us, twist our thinking and cloud our understanding. They lie to us about our identity in Christ, telling us we are useless and hopeless. Demons encourage bitterness and anger and destroy healthy relationships. They stimulate our fears and cause panic. They drown us in depression and despair. They tell us that we cannot risk stepping out in faith to respond to God's Word. Demons push us toward addictions that can ruin our lives. And sometimes in the process demons ruin our health.

In all these ways demons can and do oppress believers. It is no wonder Paul uses one of his letters to spell out God's defense against demons. And to set God's people free.



# 4

## Combating the Forces of Evil

**T**he book of Ephesians has proven difficult for the writers of commentaries. Simply put, they cannot agree on what this brief letter is really about, or how to outline it. Everyone recognizes common themes. But it seems no one can agree with anyone else on how these themes fit together to make a unified whole. Only one book on Ephesians that I know of even comments that repeated references to *principalities* and *powers* play a central role in the book. Yet when we realize that Paul's whole letter is about combating spiritual forces of evil, the structure of Ephesians is easily discernible. Paul even points out the structure he uses near the end of the book.

### The Armor of God

In the first century, the whole Mediterranean world was at peace. It was a peace imposed and maintained by Roman armies. And

the key to this Roman military achievement was the heavily armored Roman legionnaire.

Infantrymen in the Roman legions were equipped with a standard suit of armor. Paul describes this armor in Ephesians 6, and draws an analogy between the pieces of the infantryman's armor and the spiritual armor God provides so that we can stand against demonic enemies that operate in the spiritual realm.

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.

Ephesians 6:14–17

Notice that each piece of armor stands for a spiritual truth or resource.

Belt	=	Truth
Breastplate	=	Righteousness
Sandals	=	Preparation that comes from Gospel of peace
Shield	=	Faith
Helmet	=	Salvation

Then Paul tells us to take up the “sword of the spirit,” and explains that the sword is “the Word of God.” The sword is the only item that Paul defines, in part because the sword is an offensive weapon. Paul’s focus is on defense against spiritual attack, not offense. But the basic reason that Paul identifies the sword and does not explain truth, righteousness, peace, faith or salvation here is that *these pieces of armor are fully explained throughout the letter he has just written!*

By observing one additional point, we find that the structure of the book of Ephesians is unveiled. In Ephesians 6, Paul lists the pieces of armor in the order in which the Roman legionnaire put the armor on. But in writing this letter *he deals with each piece of armor in reverse order.*

So now we can both outline Ephesians, and grasp the nature of the armor God provides—armor that enables us to slam the door on evil spirits and stand securely against them.

The Structure of the Book of Ephesians

Acts 19	Ephesians 1:1–23	Ephesians 2:1–10	Ephesians 2:11–4:16	Ephesians 4:17–5:7	Ephesians 5:8–6:9	Ephesians 6:10–24
Introduction to Ephesians	Helmet	Shield	Sandals	Breastplate	Belt	Summary
	Salvation	Faith	Peace	Righteousness	Truth	

## Journey to Freedom

As I promised in the introduction, in this book we are going to examine each piece of God’s armor in sequence as Paul treats it. I believe this can and will launch you on a journey that will lead you to experience more freedom and joy than you have known so far in your Christian life. In claiming the resources God provides, you can truly experience freedom from demonic oppression.

Each of the following five parts of this book treats a portion of Ephesians that explains a different piece of God’s armor. Each part follows the same basic plan. (The final part of this book, the conclusion, will discuss the sword of the Spirit.)

In his letter to the Ephesians, the apostle Paul focused on certain schemes that Satan has hatched to try and wreck our lives. Thus, we begin each part of this book by describing a particular scheme of Satan. You will see how Satan has attempted

to work in your life, and how evil spirits might have gained a foothold from which to harass and oppress you.

Next we examine a relevant piece of armor. How did it protect the Roman infantryman? And how, by analogy, does it protect you from Satan's scheme? What, for instance, does Paul teach about salvation, and how does that teaching function as a helmet to protect you against one of Satan's schemes?

Then we look in some depth at the truth Paul is revealing. Once you understand the lesson Paul is teaching and how that truth is meant to function in your life, we move on to see how you can claim it and put it into practice—right now!

The final chapter in each section is especially important. It explores ways you can respond to the truth you have learned, and by responding slam the door on any evil spirits that have attacked you or might try to attack you using that scheme. Not only will you discover how to slam the door on evil spirits that might try to attack you in the future, you will lay the foundation for expelling any that might be oppressing you now.

That is why I am so excited to share with you through this book the freeing truths I have been teaching in my Freedom Workshops. Our battle really is spiritual, as Paul wrote to the Ephesians. It is a struggle “against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.” This is a struggle that we need to win if we are to be all that God intends us to be. It is a struggle that we *can* win . . . if only we understand Satan's schemes, and put on the armor God provides for us.