

“Put on the Whole Armor of God”

Ephesians 6:10-20

A week ago Thursday, at our Coach House Bible study, we had an interesting discussion concerning the two natures of Christ – that from the moment of conception, Jesus was both True God and True Man. He is not just half God. Also, His divine nature did not leave Him while hanging on the cross so that only the “human” part of Him died. And, in addition to the portion of First John we have been studying, we ended up reading all of Second John (it’s only 13 verses), and all of Psalm 22 (which begins with the words, “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?”)

In regard to understanding the two natures of Christ, the Church’s most clear and succinct statement is found in the Athanasian Creed. I encourage you to read through that more than just the one time each year we use it – on Trinity Sunday. It is a complex reality to wrap your mind around, but one which is fundamental to our faith – that God has become human; that the Second Adam has come; that our hope is not heaven – our hope is the resurrection of the body.

There have been times in the life of the church when clear teaching about this seemed elusive. And, like within our current political sphere, opponents on the one side or the other offer polar opposite views.

This happens in the secular world all the time. “My opponent holds one view, so I will hold the opposite view, even if it is not beneficial to anyone or even if it has no truth. But Satan uses the same tactics to distract and destroy within the church. I want to tell you about Theodoret of Cyrus – not to be confused with Theodoret’s most influential teacher Theodoret of

Mopsuestia. (I love that name.)

Theodoret was the Bishop of Cyrus – a city near Antioch which is in modern day Lebanon (just north of Israel) – [he was bishop in the early to mid 400's AD.] Theodoret played an integral role in preserving the truth concerning Jesus being true God and true man in one person. Contrary to God's command in Deuteronomy, as was read in our Old Testament lesson, there has always been a great temptation to add to or subtract from God's Word.

In Theodoret's day, there were several groups within the Christian Church which either added to or subtracted from the Biblical teaching of who Christ is. One group denied Jesus had a true human nature – they said that He had human qualities mixed in with His divine nature, but He wasn't truly a man "composed of a rational soul and human flesh" as we rightly confess in the Athanasian Creed.

Another group, in an over-reaction to the first group mixing together the divine and human natures said that Jesus' divine and human natures are completely separate – essentially saying that there were two separate Christ's – like two blocks of wood glued together, which was the example that Nestorius, the leader of this group, used. The Athanasian Creed clarifies this error also.

The battle over the natures of Christ was waged on geographical grounds. Each group demonstrated control over the churches in their region, and each of the two factions demanded that bishops take sides or be removed from their office of bishop and possibly from the church itself. Theodoret was removed from his position as bishop in Cyrus because he would not side with either of these groups which, to him (and, more importantly, according to God's Word), were clearly in the wrong.

He was removed as bishop; he lost his pulpit; he lost his church. He must have felt alone and that all of the world was against him. But he stood

firm, and as one of 520 bishops at the Council of Chalcedon in 451 AD, Theodoret was vindicated. He found out he was not alone. Theodoret was highly revered and played an important role at that Council. It was there that the Nicene Formula, put forth at the Nicene Council in 325 AD was finally ratified and put into the form of the Nicene Creed. We confess this one true faith to this day.

Theodoret put his office as pastor and his personal reputation at risk for the sake of the truth about God. Many other faithful men and women have put even more at risk for the sake of the Gospel armed with nothing but the belt of truth, the breastplate of righteousness, the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit [Eph. 6].

I often wonder how I would respond to real persecution. I pray that we do not face that in our lifetime.

But Theodoret, having this as his history, being oppressed by those in authority over him, he does not interpret Paul's letter to the Ephesians as you might think. He does not add to or subtract from it to benefit his cause or puff himself up. When Paul says that we wrestle "against the rulers, against the authorities, Theodoret says, Paul is not speaking of those who have received authority from God, but rather is speaking of anyone or anything which, as he says, "[makes] captive loose-living people as their willing slaves."

Our fight is not against people in power, but is against our own sinful desire to once again become slaves to unrighteousness. There are many willing task-masters in this world. Jesus gives us a big list in our gospel reading: evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting . . . envy, slander, pride, foolishness. Where do these come from? Jesus says, they come out of the heart. Satan has snares and traps that we can avoid, but the bait he uses is always so desirable to our carnal nature. The desire to sin lives in each of us.

Paul says, stand firm. Theodoret might say, stand firm, and don't worry about other people causing you harm, it is the devil's schemes and temptations of the world which is our greatest struggle. Don't let Satan or his desires become the rulers or authorities in your life. It is a terrible thing to be controlled by something or someone else. This is why addiction is such a terrible plague. As Jesus says, you can have but one Master – you will hate the one and love the other, or love the one and hate the other. You cannot love both.

Like Theodoret of Cyrus, we are to focus our life on God and His will, and stand firm – even if it is unpopular – because there is but one ruler and power or authority in your life whose opinion really matters. As we heard Jesus say last week in our Gospel reading, everything else is merely “rules taught by men.”

Paul says, “Put on the whole armor of God.” When we think of the belt, breastplate, shield, helmet, and sword, we think of attacking and defending against that which is outside of us. But Paul says the instruments with which we fight are truth, righteousness, faith, salvation, the Spirit, and the Word of God. This is what God has put inside of you, and He is the One who fights for you.

You cannot separate your day to day life from your life of faith, and truth, and salvation, and the Word of God. You cannot look at yourself the way some did in Theodoret's day in regard to Christ – when they said, “His divine person is over here, and His human flesh is over here.” You cannot say, “My life of faith is here on Sunday morning, but in my life at work, or school, or behind closed doors, I allow myself to be ruled or mastered by a different spirit.” The Holy Spirit lives in you. The battle that takes place is in you.

Truth and righteousness and salvation is what you carry in you. The Spirit and the Word of God is in you. You are not alone. Amen.