

Kevin Plank was an average Joe who played college football. He was frustrated from having to change his perspiration drenched undershirt several times during the game. That was the impetus that set Plank about designing an athletic undershirt that would wick away the moisture and keep the wearer dry and comfortable. He found the fabric, sought out a tailor and produced his first prototype for about Four hundred dollars.

His next step was to create a market for the shirt. He took out loans, maxed out his credit cards, and bought enough fabric to make 500 shirts. He sent those promotional undershirts to professional football and baseball players, and encouraged them to give them a try. If they liked them, he invited them to give their friends one of his shirts.

It took a lot of risk on his part. . .he incurred several hundred thousand dollars worth of debt, but the gamble paid off. Kevin Plank is now the CEO of global athletic clothing empire called Under Armor. He sells not only to professional athletic associations, his athletic apparel is in high demand by the main street athlete. It is estimated that last year he had 800 million dollars in sales.

What fascinates me about the whole affair of Under Armor is this idea of wicking. A wick is a cord or strand of loosely woven, twisted, or braided fibers, as on a candle or oil lamp, that draws up fuel to the flame by capillary action. A wick is also a piece of material that conveys liquid by capillary action. What Under Armor has going for it then, is that it has the ability to draw the moisture away from the wearer, and keeps him or her comfortably dry and sweat free.

Wouldn't it be great if there was some kind of product on the market that would wick away the everyday pressures that soak us in. . .debt, job loss, financial insecurity, medical crisis, trauma, stress, high blood pressure, weight gain, aging??? Unfortunately, we are not born into this world with bail out under armor. No Kevin Planks have arrived on the scene to give us a product that will wick away the bothersome sweat of life.

There is no under armor for the human condition on the worldly market, but today in the lesson from Ephesians, Paul tells us that there is Wonder Armor. Wonder armor. . .the full armor of God.

So take an imaginary trip with me into God's Sports Authority. . .and let's take a look at this wonder armor.

Here's the inventory: the Belt of Truth, breastplate of righteousness, shoes outfitted with the gospel, the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation and the

sword of the spirit. This is the equipment every believer needs to withstand the heat of spiritual skirmishes.

The first item, says Paul is the belt of truth. Here it is. Notice that it isn't one of these flimsy designer belts, a inch or so wide, made of supple calf skin. This kind of belt is something like the kind of belt a Roman soldier wore. A wide piece of thick leather, like elephant hide. It protected his lower abdomen and prevented him from being disemboweled.

Truth. We live in a culture and time where truth has been relativized. What that means is what's truth for you isn't necessarily truth for me. Truth isn't always black and white.

Truth. Today we have to deal with a cacophony of voices claiming theirs is the truth. This is the way, no this is the way. . .no, no no! This is the way. There appear to be scores of directors, all conducting different orchestras, and creating confusing choruses. As people of God how do we keep from swallowing fiction versus truth? Because the fictions of this world can gut our virtue, our character, our honor, our integrity, our morality.

A generation or two ago, we lived in an either/or context. Now we live in a both/and. These are paradoxical times. That's not to say there are no absolutes. But more and more what was once black and white seems better expressed in shades of gray.

Let me give you an example. Back in the day, when a young teen got pregnant, she disappeared. She went to live upstate with auntie or downstate with grandma for nine months. Shame and condemnation rested heavily on single mothers.

Today our culture, our times and our society, takes a broader view of single moms. For the most part, shame and condemnation have given way to acceptance and understanding. even support. That is not to say that all unwed single moms experience social empathy, but for the most part, in Christian communities, grace wins out over communal censure.

Old Testament teachings decreed that if an unwed teen/woman got pregnant she was to be taken to the city gate and stoned. We hold Scripture to embody truth. But many times what was truth for the culture of the Old Testament in that regard, is no longer practiced as truth for our social religious community today. Does that mean the Bible isn't truth? Does it mean that we are being untruthful to the bible?

In Jesus' day, if someone was born with a birth defect, it was considered to be a judgement of God on some sin the parent had committed. Do we still hold this as truth today?

Remember that the church once avowed the world was flat and that the sun revolved around the earth. And anyone who challenged that line of thinking suffered persecution. Remember when John Hus wanted to translate the Latin Bible into the people's language (German). He was burned at the stake. Remember that an entire Christian nation turned a blind eye to the heinous atrocities of Adolf Hitler because they really believed he was moving the Jews to 'relocation' camps. A Lutheran pastor: Dietrich Bonhoeffer challenged the church's apathy. . .he was even involved in a plot to assassinate Hitler. It cost him his life in a German concentration camp. Was he a traitor or a hero?

It took courage, audacity, and something more. . .it took guts. . .it took guts for guys like Copernicus and Galileo to offer alternative views about the way the universe operated. It took guts to John Hus to knowingly put his life on the line to argue that people had the right to read the Bible in their own language. It took guts for Bonhoeffer to speak out against the sinful apathy of the German church. It took guts for him to take action against an evil national leader.

Why did they do what they did? What gave them the conviction to risk their lives for what they believed in? They were wearing their wonder armor. The belt of truth. It wicked away the flawed teachings of the day and revealed the grace of the gospel.

Truth. Paradox. Relativism. We are living in a time when former truths, half-truths and untruth can give us religious indigestion, constipate our discernment processes and foul up the grace line. Our systems can even become bound up by our unyielding dependence on traditional opinion versus our own spiritual insight and holy nudgings.

It is this belt of truth that wicks away what is false, and what is grace-filled. The Hebrew bible (which Paul knew backwards) speaks of both the truth of God and "truth in our inward parts". What else are our inward parts except guts, the very thing which the leather belt protects? The substance of the gospel, truth, lends us substance; and this in turn fortifies us.

What is truth then. . .philosophers and wise men have asked this question through the eons. Jesus answered it this way, I am the way, the Truth and the life.

It is my own experience to ask this question, when I am trying to discern the truth in a time when either/or thinking is giving way to both/and reasoning.

What did Jesus do? Not what would he do? What did he do? How did he react in situations where the truth of day seemed to collide with the needs of the day?

I have to say, I like God's Sports Authority. I think I'll come back and take a closer look at the rest of the apparel. There's a lot more to consider here; about the Wonder Armor of God. The breastplate of righteousness, shoes outfitted with the gospel, the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation and the sword of the spirit. Join me over the next few weeks as we move about God's Sports Authority and take a closer look at the equipment he has available.

10Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his power. 11Put on the whole armor of God, so that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. 12For our struggle is not against enemies of blood and flesh, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. 13Therefore take up the whole armor of God, so that you may be able to withstand on that evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm. 14Stand therefore, and fasten the belt of truth around your waist, and put on the breastplate of righteousness. 15As shoes for your feet put on whatever will make you ready to proclaim the gospel of peace. 16With all of these, take the shield of faith, with which you will be able to quench all the flaming arrows of the evil one. 17Take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. 18Pray in the Spirit at all times in every prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert and always persevere in supplication for all the saints. 19Pray also for me, so that when I speak, a message may be given to me to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel, 20for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it boldly, as I must speak.

Belt of truth

Breastplate of righteousness

Shoes of proclamation of the gospel of peace

Shield of faith

Helmet of salvation

Sword of the spirit