

Put on the Full Armor of God

Ephesians 6:10-20

“Be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes.”

What comes to mind when you think of your Christian life? Taking a peaceful stroll through the park? A life driven by rest and convenience, staying within the comforts of your homes? Many want to live a peaceful life in the nice and quiet suburbs. But how many of you want to live in the midst of an active, intense battlefield? In our Christian lives, there are certain truths we must remember every day. One such truth is that we live in an active battlefield and are at war of the most serious nature. Unfortunately, we often forget this truth or ignore it completely. In an age of self-indulgence and comfortable living, we want to avoid challenge and confrontation.

But this morning, Apostle Paul challenges us by reminding us of spiritual warfare. You may ask why we are studying Ephesians 6 in the middle of Revelation study. It is because the passage opens our eyes to the unseen reality of spiritual warfare as described in Revelation. The passage gives us a right perspective on spiritual warfare that can dramatically shape our daily lives. It shows us how to properly engage in this great war. Our battle is not against flesh and blood, but against sin and the evil forces of darkness. How we think about this battle is critical in determining how we fight it. Our primary focus is not the devil, but Christ, who is the victor over all things. In light of this spiritual reality, all believers are soldiers of Christ. We are the army of Christ the king, advancing the gospel of the kingdom. My prayer is that we may be equipped to think and fight biblically to push forward and win the spiritual battle.

1. Be strong in the Lord’s mighty power

Look at verses 10-11, “Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes.” Paul begins the final section of his letter with a stirring call: Be strong in the Lord and put on the full armor of God. The whole tone of this passage is military. The command to “be strong” literally means to “be strengthened or made powerful.” Why should we be made strong and put on the armor of God? It is because we are at war and engage in the fiercest battle against the devil’s schemes. We want victory, don’t we? So, how can we be victorious?

The first step to victory is recognizing the reality of our spiritual battle. How aware are you of this unseen reality? Though it may be invisible, it is very real. Our eyes need to be opened by the Spirit of God in order to perceive it. In 2 Kings, the Prophet Elisha prays to the LORD to open his servant's eyes so that he might see the powerful army of the Lord (2Ki 6:16-17). A worldview is like a set of glasses; the lenses we adopt shape the values and behaviors of a society. A widespread Western secular worldview is called naturalism. A naturalistic worldview assumes that nothing is real outside of the natural, physical world. This view blinds people to the unseen reality by trying to explain away everything using empirical science and psychology. But the Bible teaches us to think otherwise; it teaches us to see through the lens of the kingdom worldview--the undeniable reality that we live in a world torn by spiritual warfare. To win this war, we need to be trained by the truth of God.

In battle, first and foremost, you must know who your enemy is. So, who is your real enemy? Who do you fight against? Our battle is not against other human beings, but against the devil's schemes. V12 says, "For 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." The devil and his army are fallen angels. Their different names here may refer to the hierarchy of evil spirits working through worldly powers, but their titles indicate that they are all powerful; they are wicked and deceptive; darkness is their natural habitat; lying is their native language. They have no moral principles and no respect for the truth whatsoever. Like garbage attracts rats, demons work through our sins; they bring conflict into communities, families and relationships. They can easily outwit and defeat us if we rely on our own wisdom and strength. In fact, if you start blaming people and seeing them as your enemies, you are outwitted by the devil. Are you aware that the devil is at work? He is behind the fallen systems of this world; he is behind every evil thought and deed, planting doubt and hatred in our minds, entangling us in our sin and evil addiction, and ultimately dragging us into destruction and death. "One of the main causes of the ill state of the church today is the fact that the devil is being forgotten. We are ignorant of the existence of the devil, the adversary, the accuser, and his fiery darts" (M. Lloyd-Jones).

Since the devil can easily overpower us, we must recognize our own weakness and the Lord's mighty power. Only the power of God can deliver us from the devil's evil schemes. [Blank Slide] While the devil is strong, the power of God is stronger. Jesus came to destroy the works of the devil by winning the victory over all temptation and sin (1Jn 3:8). Christ triumphed over Satan and all authorities by His cross and resurrection (Col 2:13-1). We need not quiver in fear, for Christ

is now seated at the right hand of God. Christ himself is far above all rule and authority, power and dominion (Eph 1:21). Are you persuaded by this amazing reality of Christ? Look! He is the exalted King of kings. The risen Jesus has all authority in heaven and on earth (Mt 28:18). “God placed all things under his feet” and so Christ is the “head over everything for the church” (Eph 1:22).

Since Christ reigns sovereign, now we are encouraged to be strong in the Lord and his mighty power. It is important to note that we become strong only by putting on the armor of God. Putting on the armor of God is directly related to putting on our new identity in Christ (cf. 4:24). This new identity comes from our union with Christ: We were dead in our sin, but because of God’s great love, we are alive together with Christ, raised up with him and seated with him in the heavenly places (Eph 2:4-6). When we believe in Jesus, we are A-plus Christians. Because of our union with Christ, we have three things: 1) Acceptance (as children of God), 2) Access (to God’s presence), and 3) Authority (to exercise power over the enemy). Praise God who blesses us in Christ with every kind of spiritual blessing in the heavenly realms! Christ’s power is made perfect in our weakness as we rely on him (2Co 12:9).

2. The full armor of God

Verse 13 says, “Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand.” Here, the word “stand” is emphasized. Christians are like soldiers in the battle line, confidently marching toward the enemy’s charge. At times, spiritual battles may frighten us. The devil can take advantage of even small moments of weaknesses to attack us, planting the fear of defeat. But we are called to “stand” and not to give in even one inch by putting on the full armor of God.

Now let’s think about the armor of God. If you want to learn how to fight the devil’s schemes and be set free from his claws, pay attention. The ultimate winning strategy is to put on the full armor of God. Visualize the armor of a heavily armed soldier--fully protected and equipped from head to toe that consists of the belt, breastplate, shoes, shield, helmet, and sword. The armor of God is prepared, supplied and guaranteed by God himself. These pieces of armor are metaphors for the spiritual resources that are given to us in Christ: his truth, righteousness, the gospel of peace, faith, salvation, and the word of God. These are aspects of Christ’s character and work with which believers are to be equipped. In fact, putting on the full armor of God means putting on Christ himself (cf. Ro 13:14). Let’s consider these pieces of armor one by one (Eph 6:14-17).

The belt of truth: The belt refers to the large leather belt Roman soldiers wore. It kept his outer garments in place and held other weapons. The devil is a liar and loves to play games of confusion. (If you watch the science fiction movie “Inception,” you need to assess whether what you are seeing is a dream or reality because it uses a “dream within a dream” strategy.) Likewise, to combat the devil’s deception, the first line of defense is the truth. Putting on the belt of truth means accepting the truth of the Bible and choosing to follow it with integrity. Jesus is the Truth that can dispel the devil’s lies. The devil hates transparency and loves deceitfulness. To defeat his schemes, we need to be committed to the truth. Unless we choose to follow the truth with integrity, we cannot defeat the devil. So, may we buckle ourselves up with the belt of truth.

The breastplate of righteousness: The breastplate of a soldier typically consisted of metal with an inner layer of leather. You cannot run into battle without a breastplate. It protects the chest, the most vulnerable and vital part of your body, in battle. Satan accuses and condemns us of our sins. You may suffer under a guilty conscience. But the breastplate of righteousness protects us from any accusations that Satan hurls at us. This righteousness is Christ’s, not ours. Who shall bring any charge against God’s elect? No one. Christ is the one who died, was raised from the dead, sits at the right hand of God, and is now interceding for us (Ro 8:33-34). Christ is your righteousness and your conscience before God. Put on Christ, who protects you against the devil’s accusations. Put on Christ who empowers you to live a righteous life before God.

The shoes of the gospel of peace: Shoes are important in battle, in running sports or in whatever rough path we walk through. Soldiers needed to wear boots for a solid stance and long marches. The readiness of the gospel of peace means the readiness to proclaim the gospel of peace. Christ himself is our peace; by his death he has broken down the dividing wall of hostility and has reconciled us to God and thus to each other (Eph 2:14). This is truly good news in this troubled world. As we believe in the gospel of Jesus, we are geared up to be messengers of the gospel of peace. In this way, Christ’s army advances by sharing the message of peace.

The shield of faith: Roman soldiers used large rectangular wooden shields, four feet high and two and half feet wide, the fronts of which were covered with leather and could be soaked in water to extinguish flame-tipped arrows. Now, keep in mind. Fiery arrows can come at you anytime, in the form of doubt, fear, rebellion, lust, rage, criticism, and despair. All these are planned by the devil to burn and destroy you. What do you do then? Retreat? No. We are given a shield of faith with which we can extinguish all such fire-tipped arrows. Faith is not strong willpower, but simple trust in God. God himself is a strong shield to those

who take refuge in him (Ps 18:2). I vividly remember when I struggled with fear in the first period of my missionary life, how I took refuge in God's promise, "Have faith in God," and was protected. Faith holds onto the promises of God in times of doubt and crisis. Faith relies on the power of Christ in times of temptation. This reliance on God can extinguish the enemy's fiery darts when they come flying at you.

The helmet of salvation: The tough-metal bronze helmet was necessary to protect the head. Most often, head injuries are fatal. It is through the helmet of salvation that we protect our head from the devil's attack. This salvation is not a matter of uncertainty. Salvation is not our achievement, but a gift from God. God himself is the bringer of salvation (Isa 59:17). This assurance of salvation should dominate our minds and hearts. Are you doubting your salvation because you make a lot of mistakes? The devil plants a fatalistic mindset to prevent us from living as God's people who have already been saved. In moments of doubt, remember that salvation doesn't depend on you. In Jesus, we are not losers or orphans, but children of God. We are saved by grace alone. By Jesus' death and resurrection, we have been saved from the dominion of sin. In Jesus, we are being saved from the power of sin. We have hope that we will be completely redeemed from the power of death. We can confess, "Sovereign Lord, my strong deliverer, you shield my head in the day of battle" (Ps 140:7). When we put on the helmet of salvation, we can be assured of our identity as children of God and live victoriously.

The sword of the Spirit: The sword is a weapon for defense and offense. God's word is the only offensive weapon mentioned in this list of spiritual armor. The word of God is sharper than any double-edged sword through the power of the Holy Spirit. "It penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart" (Heb 4:12). In the past, we used to refer to one to one Bible study as one to one battle. Our Bible study is a spiritual battle against sin and the devil's lies. Every morning when I meditate on the word of God, I experience the victory of Jesus. We can win over temptations like Jesus did in the wilderness. Jesus defeated the devil through the word of God. So, when any kind of temptation arises in our hearts, just quote the Bible back to the devil. Then he will be dispelled at the slash of the Word.

[Blank Slide] So then, we have been given the full armor of God. Why are we given this authority? It is not for display, but for our use in battle. Now our responsibility is to take it up into battle. So, put on the full armor of God and use it confidently against the powers of evil. May we take up the full armor of God! Amen.

3. Pray in the Spirit on all occasions

Look at verse 18: “And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord’s people.” In the last section of spiritual warfare (18-20), the reference to prayer or praying is repeated. Prayer is more than another piece of armor. Putting on the full armor of God means depending on him, that is through prayer. It is through prayer that the armor of God is going to work properly. To pray in the Spirit means to pray by depending on the Spirit, who is our helper and advocate. So, ask the Holy Spirit to help you to pray, and to anoint you and guide your prayer. Pray from the point of Jesus’ victory, letting the Spirit of his resurrection empower you in battle.

In this verse, the word “all” is repeated and emphasized. We pray sometimes, with some prayers and some degree of perseverance, for some of God’s people. But we should pray on all occasions and use every kind of prayer we can think of: individual prayer, two by two prayer, group prayer; silent prayer, shouting prayer, weeping prayer; kneeling prayer, walking prayer; eloquent prayer, groaning prayer; early morning prayer, evening prayer, bedtime prayer, 24-hour watch prayer; prayer of confession, prayer of thanksgiving — just to name a few. It is through prayer that the armor of God operates. Prayerless Christians can never be victorious, because we can only go to battle through prayer. So, pray for yourself, your family, your church, and all the people of God.

[Blank Slide] As a church community in Chicago, we are a prayer army of Christ. Jesus is the commander in chief, victorious and invincible. We are not enemies of each other, but comrades on the same side. Why do you think God gathered us here in Chicago? I believe that it is to fight our spiritual battle together as the army of Christ. I thank God for many prayer warriors among us. Have you watched the movie “War Room”? There, an elderly woman named Miss Clara shows to the troubled Elizabeth a special closet which she dubs her “war room,” where she fights spiritual battles in prayer. At the end of the movie, we hear Miss Clara’s fervent prayers, requesting God to raise up a generation of believers who are not ashamed of the gospel, to raise up an army of believers who hate to be lukewarm, and to raise up warriors who will fight on their knees and worship the Lord with their whole hearts. In the same way, let us pray. O Lord, raise us up as your prayer army. Call us to battle to fight confidently with a sense of victory.

Our battle is about the kingdom of Christ. In verses 19-20, Paul requests prayer support. He does not ask to be free from his chains, but to use his mouth to freely and fearlessly preach the gospel. Paul’s one main purpose was to preach the gospel of Christ. He called himself “an ambassador in chains.” We are all soldiers and ambassadors of Christ who is the King of kings. As we know our identity as

soldiers and ambassadors of Christ, we will be fearless and courageous in proclaiming the gospel.

[Blank Slide] Those who know me may think I am a good-natured person, yet for a long time even in my Christian life, I struggled with my passive aggressiveness because of my strict father; I never thought my father would love me. I perceived God to be the same distant and strict figure. Sometimes I became shamefully stubborn and angry in my family. But God's word taught me to fight against a satanic concept of an authoritarian God. Whenever I fought the spiritual battle with the truth of God at the cross, he renewed my mind and instilled in me his truth that he is my gentle and loving Father. Every day as I put on Jesus the Lamb of God, then he lives in me and helps me to be a strong soldier of Christ.

As a Puritan minister said, "In heaven we shall appear, not in armor, but in robes of glory. But here these [armor] are to be worn night and day; we must walk, work, and sleep in them, or else we are not true soldiers of Christ" (William Gurnall). Are you afraid of or tired of the spiritual battle? We must not forget one great truth: Christ has infinite resources and we can continuously draw from his strength. As we put on the full armor of God, we are not toiling for victory, for we are already fighting from the position of victory. Christ is overwhelmingly victorious through the power of his cross and resurrection. [Title Slide] Therefore, we can rest in the knowledge that Christ is the all-sufficient source of our strength. The kingdom of Christ advances not by our own strength, but through the power of Christ. So, let's put on the full armor of God and ignite our battle with prayer!