

FBC Service Sunday November 21 2021 Ephesians 6:10-17 Spiritual Warfare

In our text, Paul is seeking to prepare the people of God for the inevitability of spiritual warfare. We may wish that it were different, but the fact is, there is a spiritual battle, and Paul wants us to be ready.

Just because we're Christians doesn't mean we're immune to being enticed or coerced or attracted to things that can compromise our faith. Paul says that the temptations are real, and the enemy very, very present. No believer is safe who faces satan in his own strength.

So how do we stay focused, not only on who we are, but "whose" we are? Paul tells us to put on the armour of God. He employs the metaphor of equipment used in battle in order to protect us when we leave this safe place and go into the world. Ponder these solemn words from Ephesians 6:11-12.

"Put on all of God's armor so that you will be able to stand firm against all strategies of the devil: For we're not fighting against flesh-and-blood enemies, but against evil rulers and authorities of the unseen world, against mighty powers in this dark world, and against evil spirits in the heavenly places" (NLT). That leads to a question!

Do you believe in the devil? Not everyone does.

Many who believe in God don't believe in the devil. When people say, "The devil made me do it," they mean the exact opposite. When someone says, "Oh, you devil," it's a kind of compliment. If someone brings the devil into a polite discussion, the response is likely to be, "You're not serious, are you?"

In a scientific age, medieval visions of the devil dressed in red with horns and carrying a pitchfork seem, well, very medieval. Science and psychology have relegated the devil to the pages of ancient mythology.

Satan's greatest triumph is causing people not to take him seriously. Maybe that's why we rarely hear him talked about or preached about.

The Bible says a lot about the devil. He appears the first time in Genesis 3 and the last time in Revelation 20. Among his many titles, he's called satan, the devil, the serpent, the deceiver, the evil one, and the accuser of the brethren. Every New Testament writer mentions him. Jesus encountered him at the beginning and end of his ministry, and often spoke of him.

There is much we don't know, but this much is certain. The devil is a real being. As followers of Jesus Christ, we've been thrown into a spiritual conflict that rages all around us. You certainly don't have to look far these days to find evidence of spiritual warfare.

The Apostle Peter writes: *"Stay alert! Watch out for your great enemy, the devil. He prowls around like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour."* (1 Peter 5:8 NLT). The devil is hungry, and you're on the menu! He attacks us when we least expect it.

But no believer is more secure than he who goes into battle wearing the whole armour of God. **Paul doesn't say, "Put on your own armour" but put on God's armour.**

In this passage, Paul tells us that we need constantly to be ready for battle against spiritual powers. Evil exists all around us. It doesn't go away just because we close our eyes to it.

Our battle is not against other people. Sometimes we focus on abortionists, pornographers, godless politicians, drug dealers, as if they were the only source of our world's problems. **But our struggle is not with flesh and blood—even though it seems that way most of the time.**

We're fighting a spiritual battle against the devil and his minions. What are the marks of his diabolical work? Here are a few examples:

Unusual or repeated temptations.

Attacks from an unexpected quarter.

Delays that hinder us from obeying God.

Inducements to doubt God's Word.

Circumstances that produce unusual pressure upon us.

Temptations to sin in areas that never troubled us before.

Prolonged bouts of discouragement.

Worries that seem to consume us.

Seductive appeals to sinful compromise.

Bitterness toward others.

Desires to give up on the Christian life.

Excuses made for lack of spiritual growth.

Critical comments about other believers.

Attempts to hide your behaviour from others.

When we face these temptations, we may be sure Satan has us in his crosshairs. That's exactly the moment when we need to "*put on the whole armour of God*" The command "**put on**" is a military term. It's the last step you take before going into battle. It's like cleaning your rifle, checking your ammo, putting on your flak jacket, and grabbing your helmet.

Ephesians 6:14-17 tells us how we should fight back against the devil:

"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.

While Paul was writing these early Christians about the forces that they faced, he was imprisoned—probably chained to a soldier who was charged with guarding him. He took his images from the guard’s military uniform:

Paul paints a picture of the Christian in complete armour, ready to go into battle with the devil. He describes six parts of the soldier’s uniform:

The Belt

The Breastplate

The Shoes

The Shield

The Helmet

The Sword

He lists them in the exact order a soldier would put them on.

#1: The Belt of Truth

Paul saw the belt around the soldier’s waist. The soldier’s sword hung from the belt, providing him quick access to his weapon. Paul tells us, Fasten the belt of truth around your waist.

The belt comes first because it covered the most vulnerable organs and held other pieces of armour in place. The belt held the soldier’s uniform in place. Without the belt he couldn’t move quickly, and if he couldn’t move, he couldn’t fight.

The “belt of truth” refers to the truth God has revealed in his Word. When we’re discouraged and under attack, we need to go back to the things we know to be true.

When I say “we need to go back,” I mean that literally. In moments of temptation, recall and even speak out loud those things we know to be true. Sing out loud great hymns and gospel songs that build your faith. “Great Is Thy Faithfulness” or “In Christ Alone” or “A Mighty Fortress,” or “Jesus Loves Me” or the powerful “Immortal, Invisible” or “How Deep the Father’s Love.”

This is the practical meaning of putting on the belt of truth. It’s my job to **“put it on”** by reminding myself of what I already know to be true.

#2: The Breastplate of Righteousness

Paul saw the breastplate protecting the soldier’s heart and said, put on the breastplate of righteousness. Righteousness is an excellent defense.

The breastplate covered the vital organs of the chest, especially the heart. It was like an ancient bulletproof vest. Nothing gives us more courage than knowing we're right with God and with others.

#3: The Shoes of Gospel Peace

A soldier must have good shoes so he can fight without slipping. Roman soldiers wore sandals with spikes driven through the soles that gave them traction on any surface. You can't fight very well if your feet are slipping out from under you.

Paul saw the soldier's shoes, and tells us to put on whatever will make you ready to proclaim the gospel of peace. Shoes on our feet are a sign of readiness to perform our mission. The soldier with his boots off is at a serious disadvantage when the action starts.

When Paul speaks of the "gospel of peace," he means the gospel itself is the only true source of peace. Because of Jesus Christ, we now have peace with God (Romans 5:1), and we have the peace of God.

The devil will do all he can to distract us through fear and discouragement, but God gave us the shoes we need to stand firm in the heat of battle.

#4: The Shield of Faith

Paul saw the soldier's shield. It covered most of the soldier's body. When soldiers stood side by side with shields raised, it formed a solid wall against the enemy's flaming arrows.

The word that he uses here is not the small round shield, but was the tall oblong shield that was designed for maximum defense. It was made of thick wood. When flaming arrows hit it, they sank deeply enough that the flame was extinguished. Paul tells us to take the shield of faith, with which you will be able to quench all the flaming arrows of the evil one.

What are the "fiery arrows" the devil launches against us? We may be sailing along when "something" happens—an unkind word, an unplanned interruption, a difficult person intrudes, a subtle seduction, a careless comment, a crass invitation.

The devil's "arrows" come in a thousand varieties. They catch us off guard and throw us off balance. They stick like burning arrows on the inside. These "arrows" may come from anywhere at any time and in any situation. Members of your own family might knock you because you choose to go to church.

How does one fend off this sort of criticism? By being confident that God loves you, and promises to be present in your life, even when storms come. That's the shield of faith.

We all have experienced this sort of thing. When the day begins, we feel strong and confident, and we're just sailing along, checking things off our list. Suddenly satan hits us with a "flaming arrow," and our mind begins to slide in the wrong direction.

What do we do in the moment of attack?

Right then and there, call on God for help, “Lord, I can’t handle this alone. Help me!” Never be afraid to go to God again and again and again. If the devil hits you with a “fiery dart,” send up an “arrow prayer” to the Lord.

F. B. Meyer said that when he felt himself getting angry or irritable, he asked the Lord for the help most needed at that moment:

Your patience, Lord Jesus.

Your kindness, Lord Jesus.

Your love, Lord Jesus.

Your courage, Lord Jesus.

Your wisdom, Lord Jesus.

Your joy, Lord Jesus.

Your purity, Lord Jesus.

Those “arrow prayers” go straight from our heart to God’s heart. They work!

Pick up the shield of faith, and you can snuff out the devil’s fiery arrows.

#5: The Helmet of Salvation

Paul saw the soldier’s helmet, and said Take the helmet of salvation. The helmet is one of the soldier’s most important pieces of equipment. The helmet protects his head and face. Made of heavy metal with a visor, nothing short of an axe or hammer could pierce it.

Even a small splinter of shrapnel can do terrible damage if it strikes a soldier in the head. The salvation afforded by Christ protects “who we are,” through every experience—even in death.

Woe to the soldier who goes into battle without his helmet. He won’t last long when the enemy begins firing from the other side. **The helmet of salvation speaks of our security in Christ.**

That’s why Romans 8:38-39 declares that nothing in all creation can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. When we put on the helmet of salvation, we can boldly declare, “*We’re more than conquerors through him who loved us*” (Romans 8:37).

#6: The Sword of the Spirit

Then Paul saw the soldier’s sword and called us to take the Sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God. The sword is the soldier’s offensive weapon. It was a short, double-edged weapon, almost like a dagger, to cut and thrust against the enemy in close combat. Razor sharp, the soldier’s sword was a deadly weapon.

All of the pieces of armour we've talked about are defensive in nature. The belt, the breastplate, the steel-toed shoes, the shield, the helmet; all are intended to protect us. **But the sword of the Spirit is an offensive weapon.** The purpose of a sword in battle is to inflict damage on the enemy.

That's the only weapon the soldier of Christ carries to go on the offensive. All the other armour protects him during an attack, but the sword of the Spirit is to be used to hack away at the principalities and powers that would harm the church.

That's why when Jesus was tempted in the wilderness, he responded to the devil by quoting Scripture (Luke 4:1-13). **Nothing defeats the devil like the Word of God.** Our clever arguments mean nothing to him. He brushes aside our self-confidence because our reputation means nothing to him. But when we stand on the Word, we strike a decisive blow he cannot answer.

The believer who arms himself with it will never lack for a weapon in the battle. This is all we have, and this is all we need. The church marches triumphantly when it relies upon God's Word.

Finally, Paul adds this command: *"Pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests"* In the School of Christian Living, this is Prayer 101. Prayer is our ultimate weapon in spiritual warfare. **It's not part of the armour; it's that which makes the armour effective.**

God supplies us with everything we need for spiritual battle through prayer. There are many ways to pray, and they are all valid. We may stand or sit or kneel when we pray. We may pray with our eyes open or closed. Sometimes we will pray out loud; other times we will pray silently. Our prayers may be filled with praise or petition or with thanksgiving.

Sometimes we will recite the Lord's Prayer. In times of trouble, we will pour out our hearts to the Lord. In times of great stress, we may simply cry, "Lord, have mercy!" Sometimes our prayers will be nothing more than an unspoken groan.

The best time to pray is when you feel the need to pray. That's why Paul instructs us to pray "on all occasions." It speaks of coming to a time of need, with a sense of our own weakness, and crying out to the Lord in prayer.

Sometimes you may think, "I should pray about that." Don't ever brush that thought away. Do it. Go ahead and pray right then. Sometimes people say, "I wish we could pray about that."

If you think about praying, go ahead and pray. You don't have to pray out loud. You can pray to the Lord without speaking any words at all, and the Lord will hear you from heaven. **So when the Lord nudges your spirit, don't say "No." Go ahead and pray.**

This is the Christian's secret weapon." Prayer is the weapon that makes the armour of God effective in your life.

Put all this together and you have a picture of the Christian soldier fully armed for combat. May God grant that we all will be; **Strong in the Lord and in His mighty power.**

Words of "Stand up, Stand up for Jesus, stand in His strength alone, the arm of flesh will fail you."