

The Only Way To Stand, David Turner, All Souls

Ephesians 6:10-20

English Standard Version

The Whole Armor of God

¹⁰ Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. ¹¹ Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. ¹² For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. ¹³ Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm. ¹⁴ Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, ¹⁵ and, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace. ¹⁶ In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one; ¹⁷ and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, ¹⁸ praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end, keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints, ¹⁹ and also for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel, ²⁰ for which I am an ambassador in chains, that I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak.

[00:00:00.000] - Speaker 1

Well, tonight brings us to the last paragraph of Paul's great Ephesian letter, where we've been for the last two months, more or less, on Sunday evenings. Chapter 6, verse 10, **Finally**. It's not really the preacher's finally that means, And another thing, and you know that you've got 15 minutes still to go. A Minister used to make a great thing of taking off his watch and setting it on the pulpit before he began at the start of the sermon. A little boy asked his father, what does it mean when the Minister does that, dad? Nothing, son. Absolutely nothing. This **finally**, in verse 10 of chapter 6, really means **for the remaining time**, in the sense of for the rest of your life, so that we know for sure that what's coming is important. Ephesians has been an amazing journey, hasn't it? And we're reaching its conclusion tonight. The first three chapters told us of the extraordinary privilege, the sheer richness of being a Christian. The next three made one overall point. Being different, we should try to live differently in the church, in the world, at home. I suggested that if you wanted the Book of Ephesians in three words, they might well be *the wealth, the walk*, and now, finally, *the warfare*, because that's the third dimension.

[00:01:40.570] - Speaker 1

That's where we are tonight in this final and famous section. Paul's argument is not difficult to follow. This is too important to overcomplicate. First, the Christian life is a battle from cradle to grave, life is war. Your soul, your mind, your body, your family, your career are all fields of conflict. The battle rages every day. We're in the thick of it. Second, the war we're in is not a war with flesh and blood, but with supernatural evil powers. We want instinctively, don't we, to misread verse 12. *Our struggle is not only against flesh*

and blood. Hadn't Paul been stoned and beaten and imprisoned and run out of time by flesh and blood? Yes, but that's not the real struggle. Something else is going on, something deeper, bigger, more terrible, more sinister, more destructive than meets the eye. He doesn't mean flesh and blood can't hurt or hinder the cause of Christ. Of course, they can. But behind that, there is a being he calls in verse 11, *the devil*, who is living and virulent, and who in turn works through the agency of what he calls in verse 12, *the powers of this dark world, the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms*.

[00:03:12.470] - Speaker 1

And they're more dangerous than any human being because ultimately this battle is fought with unseen supernatural, demonic forces whose supreme object is to hurt Christ and Christ's cause and Christ's people. Third, there's a danger of falling in this battle. There will be casualties. Four times, Paul takes the pains to tell us to stand. You see that in verse 11, twice in verse 13, and again in verse 14, that is not to fall. Fourth, God has made provision for us so that we can stand and not fall. That provision is armor. *Jude 24 (Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy.)* promises that God is able to keep us from falling. The way he does it is by fitting us for successful spiritual combat by providing armor. If you want to go the distance to persevere in the Christian life and not be defeated by the devil's schemes, you need the armor described in these verses. This isn't for the super Christian only. This isn't the special paraphernalia for the exorcist. This is the basic resource for everyday Christian living. God gives us all the protection we need. Well, that's the argument, and we need to try and unpack that a little bit further.

[00:04:49.720] - Speaker 1

The real issue may be how seriously do we take what Paul says here? I'd be surprised if already some of you hadn't heard a little voice in your mind saying, "wow, this is all a bit over the top. It's not much of an issue for me." Well, Satan will be delighted if you're thinking like that. Indeed, he's probably sown that thought in your head since the sermon started. As Dr. Martin Lloyd Jones said in his mighty expository series on these verses, The greatest delusion perpetrated by the devil is the belief that he no longer exists. I'd want to say to you what Londoners said to one another during the dark days of the Second World War, whenever people got complacent and went off guard and wasted precious resources, Don't you know there's a war on? Well, we need to hear that spiritually, don't we? I think it was Hitler who coined the phrase, Total War, meaning that there are no nonconfidence and there aren't in spiritual warfare. Before you were a Christian, Satan's main interest was blinding you to the truth of Christ. Frankly, that wasn't too difficult, was it? Now that you are a Christian, the gloves come off and the attack intensifies and temptation increases and discipleship becomes at times, a total struggle, doesn't it?

[00:06:16.030] - Speaker 1

Why? Because you've moved out of the green zone, into the battle zone. Because Satan is determined to use you, to derail you, to get back at God. Don't flatter yourself. To God, you are supremely important, but to the devil, you are personally unimportant. You matter only because of your potential for Christ's cause.

The devil hates Christ's cause with a vengeance. In the church, spiritually speaking, we are in total war. The sooner we understand that, the better. That's really Paul's first point. I've only got two points. The nature of the spiritual battle is the first. Verse 12, there's how he characterizes it, our struggle. It's a word that is nowhere else in the New Testament, although in the first century, it was in common usage. Paul's heroes would have known immediately what he was talking about. It's a reference to wrestling matches. The Ephesians would have known at once that that was what he was talking about. Wrestling at the Games. Not the rather woosy theatrical choreographed antics of WWWF or WWE if you're fans of that. No, this was deadly serious. It was painful, sweaty, hand to hand combat, which only ended when somebody won.

[00:07:38.010] - Speaker 1

And that's the metaphor Paul takes for our Christian struggle. Well, who or what is the enemy? *The devil*, verse 11, and *under him, the powers*, verse 12. Paul, I'm sure, wants to see that our enemy is, first of all, real. He doesn't present a biography of Satan here. He simply takes it as read. Of course, there are arguments from philosophy and the Bible and experience we can use to point to a personal devil, or better, as Bishop Tom Wright puts it, a sub personal or quasi personal devil, in a way refusing to accord to Satan the full dignity of personhood while not merely talking of a vague or nebulous force. Michael Green writes, Satan counterfeits even personality. We find ourselves using he, and that may be entirely proper, writes Michael Green, so long as we neither underestimate Satan as an insubstantial figure of fun nor glorify him with the feelings and understandings of human personality. The great it is in every way a pale imitation of the ultimate he. Now, the conclusive reason to my mind for believing in the personal, if we can use the phrase, reality of Satan, is simply this, Jesus believed it.

[00:09:01.730] - Speaker 1

He talks more about Satan than anyone else in the Bible. He had no doubt whatever of the reality or the intensity of the battle that was joined. Our enemy is real. Second, our enemy is powerful. Verse 12, *Rulers, authorities, powers, forces*. This is the language of power, isn't it? Satan and his forces are powerful, but they're not all powerful. We're not jewelists (a person who deals in jewels). The devil is important, but not that important, at least not compared to Christ, who has already secured and guaranteed his ultimate defeat at the cross. John tells us in 1 John 4, 4, *The one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world*. Let's never forget that. Paul has already said at the end of Ephesians 1, *all things are under Christ's feet*. But then in Chapter 2, verses 1 and 2, he's also recognized that Satan is *the ruler or prince of the world, the kingdom of the air*. That is of the host of forces who hold humanity in a slavery apart from God. He supernaturally influences people to disobey God. He insights people to sin. As Prince of this world, he works through the old enemies that derail Christian people and have done since time immemorial, the world and the flesh.

[00:10:30.260] - Speaker 1

But it reaches way beyond that, too. It's bigger than an individual attack because Satan is the ultimate undercover agent, and he exerts his polluting influences on all aspects of social life and culture, of values and traditions. When biblical ethics are portrayed in a negative light in society, he succeeded. When biblical morality is seen as a restrictive or irrelevant thing, he succeeded. When his powers can influence people and structures, authors, TV producers, political thinkers, university professors, artists, economic policymakers, business leaders, and edge them distinctly away from God's purpose and rule, he has succeeded. See, the principalities and powers aren't just up there. They're down here operating in the media and business, and politics, and culture, and in the individuals who make those things up. Our enemy is powerful. In biblical terms, he is the god of many of the structures that order our very existence. Third, our enemy is evil. If you mention the devil outside a Christian arena, the world really has no problem with the comic red horned, fork bearing figure of parody, you know, naughty but lovable. In biblical understanding, it's grotesque to think like that because the devil has one motivation only in the Bible's presentation, and that is to cause evil, evil in the world, evil in the church, evil in the individual Christian.

[00:12:20.450] - Speaker 1

He's the enemy of God. He's the arch deceiver. His purpose is to blind this world to God's goodness and love. He's the enemy of the church. He hates the church. He hates it because God loves it, and the church opposes his evil influence. He will do all he can to discredit, to disable, and to divide the church. He's the enemy of the individual Christian, too. He will do all he can to upset, distract, and undermine us, you. He specializes in doubt and guilt, and discouragement, and disobedience. He attacks us physically, intellectually, emotionally, and morally. In fact, I'd be surprised if he wasn't doing it right here, right now, he's evil. Fourth, our enemy is scheming, end of verse 11, *scheming*. C. S. Lewis' Screw Tape Letters remain a central reading where the junior demon Wormwood receives his marching orders. That little book is full of insight into Satan's schemes. All it needs is a touch of discouragement here or a little note of distraction there. Keep his mind off it. Get him to think about that insult. That woman's body, tempt him, fuddle him, keep him hazy about, and so on. Demonic activity, for most of us, has nothing to do with the occult.

[00:13:58.140] - Speaker 1

It has nothing to do with hearing voices in our heads. It has certainly got nothing to do with strangling chickens after dark in graveyards. But it has everything to do with plain human weakness, being distorted and exploited by the devil. Glance back to Chapter 4, verses 26 and 27, just for a second.

Ephesian 4: 26-27 Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and give no opportunity to the devil.

Chapter 4, verse 27, how do you give the devil a foothold in your life? Look at that. Here's an illustration. Answer by excessive anger and a refusal to make up. It's alarmingly basic stuff, isn't it? One tiny illustration, Paul throws in of the devil's ability to capitalize on our genuine faults. He's a schemer. He doesn't need much to derail us.

Well, let me turn from the nature of the spiritual battle to the means of the spiritual battle. So how are we going to meet satanic attack? Verse 13, *Therefore put on the full armor of God*. I suspect Paul's prison experience of having a soldier beside him might well have triggered the initial thought here of a Roman soldier carefully and methodically putting on armor ready for a battle. The language, though, has almost certainly come straight from Isaiah, where Paul will have meditated often.

[00:15:20.970] - Speaker 1

It's worth glancing back at this. Turn back to Isaiah 59 just to see this. It's worth looking at this language because it's hard to think that this hasn't inspired Paul.

Isaiah 59
English Standard Version

Evil and Oppression

- 59** Behold, the LORD's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save, or his ear dull, that it cannot hear;
2 but your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hidden his face from you so that he does not hear.
3 For your hands are defiled with blood and your fingers with iniquity; your lips have spoken lies; your tongue mutters wickedness.
4 No one enters suit justly; no one goes to law honestly; they rely on empty pleas, they speak lies, they conceive mischief and give birth to iniquity.
5 They hatch adders' eggs; they weave the spider's web; he who eats their eggs dies, and from one that is crushed a viper is hatched.
6 Their webs will not serve as clothing; men will not cover themselves with what they make. Their works are works of iniquity, and deeds of violence are in their hands.
7 Their feet run to evil, and they are swift to shed innocent blood; their thoughts are thoughts of iniquity; desolation and destruction are in their highways.
8 The way of peace they do not know, and there is no justice in their paths; they have made their roads crooked; no one who treads on them knows peace.
9 Therefore justice is far from us, and righteousness does not overtake us; we hope for light, and behold, darkness, and for brightness, but we walk in gloom.
10 We grope for the wall like the blind; we grope like those who have no eyes; we stumble at noon as in the twilight, among those in full vigor we are like dead men.
11 We all growl like bears; we moan and moan like doves; we hope for justice, but there is none; for

salvation, but it is far from us.

¹² For our transgressions are multiplied before you, and our sins testify against us; for our transgressions are with us, and we know our iniquities:

¹³ transgressing, and denying the LORD, and turning back from following our God, speaking oppression and revolt, conceiving and uttering from the heart lying words.

Judgment and Redemption

¹⁴ Justice is turned back, and righteousness stands far away; for truth has stumbled in the public squares, and uprightness cannot enter.

¹⁵ Truth is lacking, and he who departs from evil makes himself a prey. The LORD saw it, and it displeased him^[a]that there was no justice.

¹⁶ He saw that there was no man, and wondered that there was no one to intercede; then his own arm brought him salvation, and his righteousness upheld him.

¹⁷ He put on righteousness as a breastplate, and a helmet of salvation on his head; he put on garments of vengeance for clothing, and wrapped himself in zeal as a cloak.

¹⁸ According to their deeds, so will he repay, wrath to his adversaries, repayment to his enemies; to the coastlands he will render repayment.

¹⁹ So they shall fear the name of the LORD from the west, and his glory from the rising of the sun; for he will come like a rushing stream,^[b]which the wind of the LORD drives.

²⁰ "And a Redeemer will come to Zion, to those in Jacob who turn from transgression," declares the LORD.

²¹ "And as for me, this is my covenant with them," says the LORD: "My Spirit that is upon you, and my words that I have put in your mouth, shall not depart out of your mouth, or out of the mouth of your offspring, or out of the mouth of your children's offspring," says the LORD, "from this time forth and forevermore."

Footnotes

a. Isaiah 59:15 Hebrew *and it was evil in his eyes*

b. Isaiah 59:19 Hebrew *a narrow river*

Isaiah 59, 17, this is God. *He put on righteousness as his breast plate and the helmet of salvation on his head. He put on the garments of vengeance and wrapped himself in zeal as a cloak.* God is wearing the

armor there. Or glance back to Isaiah 11, verse 5, *Righteousness will be his belt and faithfulness the sash round his waist*. This time, the Messiah is wearing these things. Now, I'm sure we're not meant to miss this, given the way in which Scripture uses these pictures of clothing and armor. I'm sure we're not meant to struggle too much in an analysis of the individual items. What matters is that there are facets of armor, but armor we must have. This armor is not just armor that God gives, it's armor that God wears. This is God's own armor, and that's why it can be effective. This armor, back to Chapter 6 Verse 10, is about being strong in the Lord and his mighty power. So, what do we do?

[00:16:47.800] - Speaker 1

We put it on. Paul enumerates seven spiritual weapons here as a means by which God's enabling might is imparted. Five are objective endowments from God, truth, righteousness, the gospel, salvation, and the Spirit and Word of God. Two stress our responsibility, faith and prayer. And between them, they distill the essence of our spiritual warfare, which itself has two dimensions here, doesn't it? There is a resistance dimension, spiritual warfare, which is essentially defensive, and there is a proclamation dimension where we take the offensive and advance into enemy territory. Both dimensions matter in the Church and in our individual lives. First of all, spiritual warfare is resistance. Well, back in Chapter 2, verses 2 and 3, Paul has readily described the devil and his powers working in concert with the flesh and the world, our social environment, to promote sin among Christians and to hinder the progress of the gospel. If Satan can do that, he will be delighted because he loves stumbling Christians. And if he can make Christians stumble, he's a happy being. That's why Paul is so insistent, we stand. The devil is to be resisted with all we've got, or more accurately, with all God gives.

[00:18:21.560] - Speaker 1

Because as we put on this armor, we're doing no less than in another phrase you'll know of Paul's from Romans, we're putting on Christ. He's the one in whom we must be clothed if we're to stand and win the battle. Well, the first two spiritual weapons in the resistance battle are the belt of truth and the breast plate of righteousness. Where would we be without truth? That's the best reason of all, you know, for being a Christian, because it's true. But Satan has been a liar from the beginning. The father of lies, Jesus called him in

John 8:44 You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires He was a murderer from the beginning and does not stand in the truth, because there is not truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies.

His very first attack on humanity was a lie. You shall not die. He's done it ever since to Christian people. If he can undermine truth in our heads, what is true, what we believe, and truth in our lives, the quality of our character, our Christian integrity, then he's won. Somebody has summarized Christian truth as God is what he says he is. I am what God says I am. God does what he says he will do. I can do what God says I can do. How many of those statements does the devil distort and cause us to doubt?

[00:19:42.650] - Speaker 1

God doesn't love you. He's not in control. He can't really forgive your past. That setback or illness is your punishment. This Christian stuff is just plain moonshine. Well, a deep grasp of objective biblical truth is vital. Basic to all your defense must be an accurate perception of the way things really are and reality is to see things the way God sees them and reveals them in the Bible. If truth undergirds everything, being in a right relationship with God lies at the very heart of the Christian life. The breast plate of righteousness. It's a metaphorical alternative to the blood sprinkled conscience. Your best defense against a sphere, thrust of satanic accusation is to have received and learnt the solid assurance that the Father accepts you completely and unconditional because of the death of his son. We stand in God's righteousness, not our own. That's what the sacrament we're about to celebrate is about. Satan, you see, is not just a liar. He is also the supreme accuser and underminer of the Christian. The devil loves to tell us that we're no good as Christians. He loves it when we're discouraged. He loves it when we think that Christianity rests on our performance and not the Father's Grace.

[00:21:21.820] - Speaker 1

Once you've realized that being a Christian is the best thing that ever happened to you and the best thing that can ever happen to you, and suddenly you strangely want to find yourself now not just resting in God's righteousness, but hungry for righteousness in your own life to live differently. Just as truth matters, so now to holiness and integrity, and the devil hates that because when you're living like that, resting in God's righteousness, he can't get to you, and that drives him wild. Another piece of the defensive armor is the helmet of salvation, verse 17. That, too, is about our Christian security, our identity. We're Christ. Again, in chapter 2, twice in verses 5 and 8, Paul says, *By Grace, you have been saved*. There are the only two places in the New Testament where Paul uses the Greek perfect tense to refer to salvation. That tense stress is the result of decisive action in the past. It's a done deal. There's security, past, present and future. The devil may rough us up, yes, but he can't defeat us, or he can't pry us from Christ's loving, unshakeable grip. There's protection in that. The shield of faith, too, verse 16, can provide day by day, moment by moment protection against the flaming arrows, the fiery darts, as the authorized version called them, of verse 16.

[00:22:47.520] - Speaker 1

Paul is thinking here of the man-sized body shield, rounded on the sides, offering front and flank protection, especially effective when linked with others to make a protective roof or shield like a giant tortoise. The safety together for a whole company of soldiers. The skin over the wood of the shield, and the historian say it was actually soaked in advance with water to put out the literal bitumen fueled missiles raining down from the enemy strongholds. This is about clinging to God's promises, whatever we're going through, trusting him to work out his own purpose for us. It's the shield which says, come what may, he loves me. I'm his. It's the shield which quenches the missiles of doubt and despair and fear when they hit us. We all know this fiery darts, don't we? It aches in the mind on occasions when we're asking, Does God really love me? Or have you had that experience when you sat down to try and pray or read your

Bible, and suddenly you found your mind inexplicably full of the most extraordinary lust or hatred or blasphemy? Those are the flaming arrows. And you need the shield of faith which says, I'm his.

[00:24:23.200] - Speaker 1

I can resist this. I need not be defeated. You may have heard me say before that talking to yourself as a Christian is not the first sign of madness. It's a sign of health. It's the way the field of faith works. I often talk to myself, I shouldn't really tell you that, I suppose, publicly, but when I'm low or feeling under attack, I often say to myself, Psalm 116, verse 7, *Be at rest once more, oh my soul, for the Lord has been good to you.* Well, that's how the field of faith works. You use Scripture to inform your mind and to create your security. Using Scripture like that is no different, really, from the last of the defensive weapons and the first of the offensive ones, the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God, end of verse 17. When Jesus was tempted in Matthew 4, the devil took Scripture and applied it inappropriately. He still does that all the time through the church. Jesus responded from Scripture, applying it properly. That's our pattern for spiritual warfare. We let the specifics of God's Word apply to the specifics of our temptations. But I'm not sure that it's Scripture that Paul primarily has in mind here.

[00:25:47.780] - Speaker 1

I think it's probably the Gospel specifically. For if spiritual warfare has a resistance dimension, there's a struggle to stand. It also has a proclamation dimension, a challenge to advance. Have you ever noticed that odd piece of equipment in verse 15? *Good shoes to get you moving, your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace.* It's odd, isn't it, to find a reference to a gospel of peace in a passage on spiritual warfare? Well, again, there are echoes, of course, of Isaiah 52, verse 7, *the beautiful feet on the mountains of Him bringing good tidings*, and so on. What does it mean to be shod with the readiness of the gospel? What's this got to do with spiritual warfare? I think it means this, let your feet be ready to move with the gospel, with gospel power, for gospel purposes. Be prepared and alert and ready to talk about the gospel. When and as you give it away, you will experience its power in your life. Because it's true with so many areas of Christian service, the best way to taste the power of God in your life is to venture something on it.

[00:27:09.280] - Speaker 1

The more we're ready to be on the move with the gospel, the more we will know and experience the power and joy and security in our own battle. In giving, we will receive. There's no literal sword in Christian warfare. There's no crusade. There's no jihad. The primary aggressive action we are called to take as Christians is to take the war onto Satan's turf in a reasoned explanation and presentation of the gospel. That's our secret weapon of offense. That's the maximum offense allowed us. That's the way, ultimately, we defy Satan and rob his domain. And that's the way, ultimately, people are liberated or rescued from the evil, infected institutions and structures and mindsets of this present age where they are trapped by Satan, indifferent to God their creator, and blinded to the wonder of Christ's redeeming love. No wonder then, finally, and I mean finally, all this has to be bathed in prayer. The final weapon, verses

18 to 20. Do you see the 'alls' of verse 18? It's worth noticing those. All occasions, all kinds of prayer, always praying for all the saints. It doesn't get any more comprehensive than that. For himself, well, Paul is not exempt from the need.

[00:28:47.610] - Speaker 1

Verse 19, Why a request that even he may have the words fearlessly to make known the mystery of the gospel. It's that important. That's where the battle is joined. Well, this has been a pretty inadequate sketch of spiritual warfare. I suspect in your minds there are a dozen unanswered questions. I'd be surprised if there weren't. But don't let the devil, even now, distract you from the big principles here. They're clear enough. There's a war on. We're in a battle. The devil is a defeated but still formidable enemy. He hates us and would destroy us if he could, even as he will ultimately be destroyed. What's the battle plan? It's not principally about so-called power encounters or zapping demons on the road. It's simply this, consistently trusting and applying all I know to be true about God and his mighty power to the issues of life, past, present and future, and being constantly gospel ready in a hostile world. Well, may the Lord, who is over all things, help us as we help each other in this sometimes-bewildering battle.