

Put on the full armor of God **Ephesians 6:10-20**

¹⁰ Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. ¹¹ Put on the full armor of God, so that you can stand against the schemes of the Devil. ¹² For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the world rulers of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. ¹³ For this reason, take up the full armor of God, so that you will be able to take a stand on the evil day and, after you have done everything, to stand. ¹⁴ Stand, then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness fastened in place, ¹⁵ and with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace tied to your feet like sandals. ¹⁶ At all times hold up the shield of faith, with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming arrows of the Evil One. ¹⁷ Also take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. ¹⁸ At every opportunity, pray in the Spirit with every kind of prayer and petition. Stay alert for the same reason, always persevering in your intercession for all the saints. ¹⁹ Pray for me also, that when I open my mouth a message will be given to me that boldly reveals the mystery of the gospel, ²⁰ for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may speak about it boldly, as it is necessary for me to speak.

With one word *finally* Paul alerts that he's coming to the end of this letter to Christians living in Ephesus. Paul had been speaking about the blessed effect that God's saving grace has on the life of his believers. The new life of the children of God will show itself in a life of holiness. Their holiness is committed to keeping the Spirit-worked bond of unity and to leading a life of personal purity. Holiness shows itself in being willing to shoulder the responsibilities God has given them as husbands and wives, as children and parents, as a slave or master. If we apply it to our society today, we would use employer or employee. Paul closes his letter by pointing out one final effect of God's saving grace. It is making God's people willing to contend for the faith and fight against evil. But Paul shows us in these final verses that we can't do this alone. We need some special equipment that only God can supply. So we'll take Paul's words to heart and put on the full armor of God.

As long as we live on this earth, there is always danger that we might become separated from the grace of God. We might slip into behavior that would turn the Lord against us. But there is help in the Lord. So we keep turning to him for strength.

We need to turn to the Lord for strength because of the one who is out to undermine our relationship with the Lord. It's the devil. He has a bag full of tricks. If he cannot undermine our doctrinal position, he try to get us to relax our moral standards. If he cannot overthrow our faith with one bold lie, he will try to wear it away. He'll try and convince us to compromise. He'll inject a little leaven of false teaching so we accept the lie as strongly as we would any of God's truths. If he cannot seduce us into gross sin, he'll try to lead us to become Pharisees looking down on others.

But the Lord has prepared a full armor for us. Paul knew firsthand the full battle equipment that a Roman soldier wore. As he is writing this letter, he may have been chained to a Roman soldier. Paul will shortly describe each piece that we Christians are to wear. But first Paul shows us why that equipment is so necessary. Paul writes, *"Put on the full armor of God, so that you can stand against the schemes of the Devil. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the world rulers of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places."* We are involved in a struggle against powerful foes. This is life and death. On our own we are no match for these opponents. Too often we underestimate the opposition. We know we are surrounded by temptation. But we think we are too wise to be taken in. We won't go to far. We won't let it happen a second time. So we tell ourselves. But the devil and his evil forces have thousands of years of experience in leading people astray. Those trying to rely on their own cleverness are in for a big fall.

So we can withstand the attacks, we need God's strength. We need his full armor. When you put on God's full armor you are able to withstand the evil day. Every Christian, no matter what period of history in which they are living are going to be involved in the struggle of which Paul is speaking. At times life may be rather calm. But then comes the crisis, the catastrophe or a great loss. That particularly evil day is when faith is severely tested. Job had his evil day when he was struck by catastrophe. Joseph had his when he was tempted by Potiphar's wife and ended up in jail for resisting sin and remaining pure. David had his evil day when he saw Bathsheba bathing. Peter had his in the high priest's courtyard during Jesus' trial.

But we have our Lord's assurance that equipped with the full armor of God we will be able to withstand the evil day. If we employ God's full armor, when all is said and done, we will stand as conquerors and victors. The Lord will not leave us alone in our weakness.

Paul now lists the items that comprise the full armor that God supplies believers. *Stand, then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness fastened in place, and with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace tied to your feet like sandals. At all times hold up the shield of faith, with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming arrows of the Evil One. Also take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.* The first item is the heavy belt that supported and protected the midsection. For the believer this weapon is truth. The devil is a liar and the father of lies. He operates with lies to undermine faith and godly living. The only thing that can expose his lies is the truth of God's Word. Jesus used that truth in the wilderness when he opposed the devil's lies.

The next item is the breastplate of righteousness. The devil tries to get us to despair because we don't measure up to God's standard of righteousness. If Satan succeeds in plunging us into some gross sin, he will quickly follow up by telling us we can never be forgiven. What are we to do? Use the breastplate of righteousness. Admit the sin. Then remember your Savior's suffering and death that won you perfect righteousness. Paul told the Romans, *"Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us"* (8:33, 34).

The next item are the boots that a soldier wore. They represent the preparedness or readiness of the gospel of peace. The gospel proclaims the peace that Jesus established between God and mankind. He did this with his reconciling work on the cross. When a believer had the gospel of peace, he is ready and equipped to stand up against the tempter. He has a firm footing. As Paul told the Corinthian Christians with the assurance of Christ's resurrection, *"Stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain"* (1 Corinthians 15:58).

The shield of faith also needs to be taken up. With this shield we are able to ward off and extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. With flaming arrows the devil tries to imbed in us a some doubt or a sinful desire, or a vengeful impulse or some pride. He knows that if any of these gains a foothold, it will spread like gangrene. But if we hold to the faith, to what we have been taught from God's Word, we can resist Satan and extinguish his fiery arrows.

What would a soldier do without his helmet? So we soldiers of Christ wear one too. It's salvation. We were rescued us from guilt and the punishment that our sin deserved. Jesus won that for us. If we hold to our salvation in Christ, it will serve us to ward off the assaults of Satan. Our salvation is so precious. Our Savior once asked, *"What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul"* (Mark 8:36).

The final item is the sword, the one offensive weapon in God's armor. It's the word of God. The word can be a defensive weapon. We are no match for the tempter. But oppose him with the word of God, and we'll emerge victorious, just as our Savior did in the wilderness. But the word

can also serve as an offensive weapon. Let the word shape your thinking. The devil will be repelled before he can even approach us with his lies. James wrote: *“Resist the devil, and he will flee from you”* (4:7). When the devil sees Christ ruling your heart and life, he’ll want nothing to do with you. That roaring lion will run away scared like a kitten.

While the word is not mentioned until verse 17, all the other items are closely related to that word. If we are to be strong and safe, we need to live in the word. If a congregation is to be strong, all of its members need to live in the word. If a church body is to be and remain strong, all of its members and congregations need to be rooted in the word. Remain in the word and you’ll remain well equipped with the armor of God.

Paul mentions one last thing that soldiers of Christ need. It is a strong prayer life. Paul writes, *“At every opportunity, pray in the Spirit with every kind of prayer and petition. Stay alert for the same reason, always persevering in your intercession for all the saints.”* When our Lord Jesus was in Gethsemane before his arrest, he warned his disciples that they would be exposed to severe temptation. He told them to remain alert and pray. When Paul tells the Ephesians how to face up to the assaults of the devil, he also urges them to pray. While we are to put on the full armor of God, so we are to be using every kind of prayer and petition. No kind of prayer dare be overlooked. Use silent prayer, spoken prayer, formal prayer and spontaneous prayer. And this praying is not to be done occasionally, but at every opportune moment. It was not to be done thoughtlessly, but in the Spirit in which heart and mind and our whole inner being is involved. It takes effort to pray wholeheartedly.

And we are to pray for fellow believers. They have to face the same attacks from the devil. They need our prayers. Since we love them as ourselves, we will support them with our prayers. They may be more hard-pressed. Then we will especially plead their cause before the throne of grace.

Paul adds one more person to the Ephesian prayer list. *Pray for me also, that when I open my mouth a message will be given to me that boldly reveals the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may speak about it boldly, as it is necessary for me to speak.* Paul was in a trying situation. He had appealed his case to Caesar. The temptation was real for Paul to say nothing about Christ and save his skin. But Paul wanted his readers to pray that when he opened his mouth the Lord would give him the right words to speak. He told them what to ask for because he knew how important and effective their prayers would be. In his court hearing Paul would have the opportunity to make the gospel known. He wanted his readers to pray that he might do so boldly, not holding back anything. He would be face to face with the Roman emperor. He wanted them to pray that he might not quiver but rather speak out boldly.

Paul adds that he was serving as an ambassador in chains. It was the Lord who had set him upon this course which led to his bondage. He wanted to speak freely. He prayed that the gospel that he made known would make him bold. The gospel is truth. The gospel is power. The gospel is good news to be shared no matter what the circumstances. So he spoke the gospel boldly. On more than one occasion Paul called himself a herald of the gospel. A herald does not mumble the message that the king has entrusted to him. He proclaims it loudly and clearly. He is backed by the authority of the king.

We who have been entrusted with the gospel are to feel the same necessity of sharing it. We don’t do that timidly, or hesitantly, but boldly. We are speaking for our Lord. And faith comes by hearing. Paul asked his people to pray for him. I ask you to pray for me. And I ask you to pray for all the members of St. Michael’s to set aside 5 hours on a Saturday in September to see if the Lord can use you to speak boldly for him. As ambassadors for Christ we serve our Lord by proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ, our risen Savior in our community and the world. God bless you in your mission.