

Put on the Full Armor of God ¹

Ephesians 6:10-24

Key Verse: 6:11

“Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes.”

In this study of Ephesians we have learned God's plan for his church. God wants to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ (1:10). For this purpose God destroyed the dividing wall of hostility through Jesus Christ, who is our peace, and made one new humanity which is the church. Now those who believe in Christ are heirs together, members together of one body and sharers together in God's promises regardless of any human distinction. In Christ, we are new creations called to a new lifestyle and new relationships. We can live in true spiritual unity in our homes and in our community as we grow to maturity in Christ.

Now, as he comes to the conclusion of his letter, Paul talks about spiritual warfare against the devil. Why did he conclude his letter like this? It is because the devil is working to destroy the unity of the body of Christ. Where there is the work of God, there is always the work of the devil. So keeping unity in the church is not just a matter of human effort. It requires fighting a spiritual battle against the devil. When we think about the devil’s work, it may seem unreal. But it is very real. For example, when God is at work among us, suddenly someone stirs up a problem that draws everyone’s attention and plants a divisive spirit. Or, someone will see God’s work from a human perspective, become judgmental and critical and complain, which breaks the unity of the church. Or again, when God establishes a beautiful house church, after a time of honeymoon, they begin to see each other’s weak points. Instead of love and respect, they misunderstand and blame each other. They lose the joy of godly marriage and become grumpy and ineffective. These are all elements of the devil's work to destroy the unity of the family and the church. In order to fight against the devil we need to understand the nature of this battle and to put on the full armor of God. Of course, we need to apply this as individuals. But let’s also remember that Paul was speaking this message to the church as a whole.

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First, be strong in the Lord (10-13)

In Paul's final admonition in verses 10-20, we find a lot of military language. Paul reminded Ephesian believers that they were in a spiritual war. The book of Acts tells that Ephesus was full of sorcerers and demon-possessed people (Ac 19:14-16). In such an environment, Ephesian believers needed to be strong. That is why Paul said in verse 10, **"Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power."** How can we be strong? Shall we exercise, lift weights and drink high protein nutrition shakes? Sure, let's do so. That may strengthen our bodies and minds, but it will not help us against the devil. In spiritual warfare, we need the strength that only the Lord can give. When our bodies become weak, we become vulnerable to colds and the flu. Likewise, when our spirits become weak, we become vulnerable to the devil's temptation and can be enslaved by sinful desires. So we must be strong in the Lord.

Paul goes on to explain how to be strong in the Lord and why it is important. Verses 11-12 say, **"Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. 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."** Here we must realize the nature of our spiritual warfare and who our real enemy is. Sun Tzu, in "The Art of War," said, "If you know the enemy and know yourself, you need not fear the result of a hundred battles. If you know yourself but not the enemy, for every victory gained you will also suffer a defeat. If you know neither the enemy nor yourself, you will succumb in every battle." Sometimes we blame others and hate them, thinking that they are our enemies. But the Bible clearly says that our real enemy is the devil. 1 Peter 5:8b says, **"Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour."** The devil's power is manifest both through visible agents: rulers, authorities and powers of this dark world, and through invisible agents: the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Elsewhere Paul described the devil's rule: **"He will oppose and will exalt himself over everything that is called God or is worshiped, so that he sets himself up in God's temple, proclaiming himself to be God...He will use all sorts of displays of power through signs and wonders that serve the lie..."** (2 Th 2:4,9b-10a). Some other names of the devil are: accuser (Rev 12:10), liar and father of lies (Jn 8:44), deceiver (Rev 20:8, 10), murderer (Jn 8:44), destroyer (Rev 9:11), tempter (Mt 4:3) and so on.

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This devil is very strong. Revelation 12:3 says that he has seven heads and ten horns. Horn symbolizes strength. Man has only one head and no horn. The devil is much smarter and stronger than the best human being. But we must know that Jesus is stronger than the devil (Mk 3:22-27). In the New Testament we find that at the name of Jesus the devil and his agents trembled and fled. The same is true today. In the name of Jesus demons can be cast out (Mk 16:17). Jesus crushed the devil's head through his death and resurrection. Through his resurrection God's power was exerted to give him final victory and a seat at the right hand of the Father (1:20). People are held in slavery to the devil by the fear of death. But Jesus' power sets them free (Heb 2:14-15). So we must be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power.

This devil is also evil and crafty. The devil uses his power to destroy. He concocts schemes and carries them out through his agents. Through Peter, he tempted Jesus not to go the way of the cross in order to thwart God's world salvation plan. So Jesus rebuked him, **"Get behind me, Satan!"** (Mk 8:33) Peter was not Satan. But Satan was working through Peter. Sometimes Satan works through a close friend, coworker, or family member. In the Garden of Eden, Satan's target was Adam. But he did not approach Adam directly. Rather, he first tempted Eve, and then worked through her to make Adam fall. So we need spiritual discernment. Jesus always discerned the work of demons in people. Jesus separated the person from the demon, like a doctor separates a patient and a disease. Jesus cast out the demons, but saved the people. On the other hand, we often blame those tormented by demons and call them hopeless. We may want to confine them in prison or control them with drugs. But if the demon is cast out, the person can be cured and be a blessing to others. To fight against the devil's schemes together with Jesus, we need to pray (Mk 9:29).

The devil masquerades as an angel of light, a servant of righteousness (2 Cor 11:14). Though he is a ferocious wolf, he disguises himself as a gentle lamb and comes into the church to devour the sheep (Ac 20:29). One of his greatest deceptions is that he does not exist. These days many people don't take the devil seriously. But he is real. M. Scott Peck, M.D. obtained his degree from Harvard U., and established a thriving practice of psychology. Among his patients there was one who visited him 421 times in three years but never made progress. Finally, he found that she was controlled by an evil power that existed simply to do evil. Ultimately this led him to seek the help of a Christian worker who guided him to drive out the demon in Jesus' name. Through this Dr. Peck became a Christian. He wrote a book that declares demon possession is real.¹ This real enemy is plotting to

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attack God's children like a terrorist. No one expected an attack on the World Trade Center on 9-11-01, but it happened suddenly. In the same way the devil attacks without warning. So we must be alert. We must put on the full armor of God. Then we can take our stand against the devil's schemes. The word "stand" is repeated four times (11,13,13,14). Standing firm is the basic position of one ready to fight. He is not lounging, lying down or complacent. He is awake and ready to fight. Such a person is not easily moved. He can resist the enemy on the day of evil (13). The "day of evil" refers to a time when evil seems to be overpowering the social and political environment. In that day it is not easy to keep our faith. But when we put on the full armor of God, we can stand even in the day of evil.

Second, the full armor of God (14-24).

Apostle Paul strongly exhorted the Ephesians to put on the full armor of God. When American soldiers go into battle in Afghanistan, they put on helmets, Kevlar vests, and body covering, until they are fully protected. It is not a children's game or a sport. It is war. It is a matter of life and death. The spiritual battle is even more serious. It is a matter of eternal destiny. That is why we need the full armor of God. The armor of God is not man-made. It is provided by God. It is "made in God." Paul describes six pieces of armor.

1 - The belt of truth. Verse 14a says, "**Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist...**" A soldier's belt is very important. It ties his uniform together; it provides a place to attach his sword and other items. When he tightens his belt he is preparing for action. Then what is "the belt of truth"? It refers to Jesus, who is the Truth, and to the Word of God. Characteristics of the truth are sincerity, honesty, and trustworthiness. The belt of truth binds all the members of the church together. 1 Timothy 3:15 describes the church as "**God's household, the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth.**" The character of the devil is that he is a liar (Jn 8:44). If his lies penetrate the church, they become like an insidious poison. But when Christians stand in the truth, we are united, strong and effective. So Paul said, "**speak the truth in love**" (4:15).

2 - The breastplate of righteousness. In Pilgrim's Progress² Christian had to face the enemy Apollyon. "...the monster was hideous to behold: He was clothed with scales like a fish; (and they are his Pride) he had wings like a dragon, feet like a bear, and out of his belly came fire and smoke, and his mouth was as the mouth of a lion." When Christian saw him, he wanted to run away. But he realized that he

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had no armor for his back. If he fled, he would be pierced by many arrows. So he stood and fought, and the Lord gave him victory. God's children are constantly accused by Satan that we are too sinful, lazy, proud, and selfish to do God's work. Satan taunts us with past failures and family problems, sneering that we cannot serve God. Then we become frustrated and powerless. We can't defend ourselves, because our own righteousness is like dirty rags. We need Jesus' righteousness. When we are clothed with Jesus' righteousness, Satan's accusations lose all their power to wound us. So Paul sang a song of victory, **“Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. Who then is the one who condemns? No one. 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”** (Ro 8:33-34).

3 - Feet fitted with readiness that comes from the gospel of peace (15). Boots are very important for soldiers. If they wear flip flops into battle, they will have a lot of trouble fighting. Roman soldiers' boots were made of treated leather. They could walk well even in rough places. They were always ready to go and fight. Likewise, Christian soldiers' boots give them readiness to go and fight at any moment. This readiness comes from the gospel of peace. Why is it called “the gospel of peace”? The gospel brings peace between God and people, and among people. People really need peace. We need peace in our homes, peace in our communities, and peace in our own hearts. How can we have peace? Wherever the gospel is preached, true peace comes. We must be ready to preach the gospel anytime, anywhere. When the gospel is preached, the devil trembles with fear because the gospel is the power of God for the salvation of all who believe (Ro 1:16).

4 - The shield of faith. Verse 16 says, **“In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one.”** Recently I watched the movie, “300.” The Spartans used very heavy shields. Once, the enemies shot so many arrows that the sky became dark. But when the Spartans defended with their shields, they were so well protected that no one was injured. Satan's arrows come like that, but they are even more dangerous for they are flaming arrows. As snipers shoot from concealment, so Satan shoots while we are unaware, targeting our weaknesses. When hit with the flaming arrow of doubt, his victim suddenly becomes confused. If it is the arrow of fear, his victim suddenly becomes a coward. If it is the arrow of lust, they become crazy. He also spreads the flames of despair, pride, anxiety, and so on, making the whole person sick to death. Nowadays Satan shoots through the Internet. We need the shield of faith. It has

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power to extinguish the arrows so they do not hurt us at all. When Abraham was filled with fear after a hard battle, God appeared to him and said, **“Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your very great reward”** (Gen 15:1). God is our shield.

5 - The helmet of salvation. Verse 17a says, **“Take the helmet of salvation....”** The helmet protects the head. We need protection for our heads when riding a bicycle and especially a motorcycle. In spiritual war, we must take the helmet of salvation. This means that we must have assurance of salvation which guards our minds. Without the assurance of salvation, we are so irritated by fear and anxiety that we can hardly focus. But with the assurance of salvation, we can overcome fear and doubt; we can fight with confidence and win the victory.

6 - The sword of the Spirit. Verse 17b says, **“Take...the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.”** This is the only offensive weapon. The word of God is written by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit works through the word of God. Hebrews 4:12 says, **“For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.”** When Jesus was in the wilderness, being tempted by the devil, Jesus defeated him with the word of God: **“It is written: ‘Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God’”** (Mt 4:4). We can defeat the devil’s scheme with the word of God. The word of God has transforming power. When Jesus was crucified, a robber next to him heard his word, **“Father, forgive them....”** Though he was in deep anguish and pain, this word pierced his heart and enlightened him to know who Jesus was. Then he prayed, **“Jesus remember me when you come into your kingdom,”** and he was saved (Lk 23:42). The words of God are an irresistible weapon. The word of God gives light to those in the darkness. The word of God gives life to those who are perishing. The word of God gives love to those who are unloved and miserable. The word of God gives wisdom to the simple. The word of God enables us to participate in the divine nature and makes us holy (2 Pe 1:4). Only the word of God gives us salvation and equips to do every good work (2 Ti 3:15-17). The best defense is a good offense. Let’s take the sword of the word!

In verses 18-20 Paul talks about prayer, which makes all the armor work well, like oil in a machine. Paul encourages us in verse 18a **“to pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests.”** **“In the Spirit”** means that our prayer should not be self-centered, but God-centered, and it is not a

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burdensome duty, but joyful fellowship with God. In verse 18b Paul tells us to be spiritually alert all the time and to keep on praying for all the Lord's people. In verse 19 Paul asked them to pray for him. Though Paul was a great servant of Christ, he humbly asked them to pray for him--not for his release from the prison, but that whenever he spoke, God's words would be given him so that he could fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel (20). We cannot carry out God's work without prayer. God works through prayer. Now we know how to win the victory over the devil; we must put on the full armor of God, take the sword of the word, and pray.

Verses 21-24 are Paul's final greetings. Though in a Roman prison, Paul's heart was in Ephesus. So he sent Tychicus to let them know his situation and to strengthen and comfort them. He closed his letter with the words: **"Peace to the brothers and sisters, and love with faith from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Grace to all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with an undying love."**

Let's remember that our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the spiritual forces of evil. 2 Corinthians 10:3-5 says, **"Though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought and make it obedient to Christ."** In spiritual war, there is no ceasefire. We must always put on the full armor of God.

¹ Peck, M. Scott, M.D. "Glimpses of the Devil: A Psychiatrist's Personal Accounts of Possession, Exorcism, and Redemption," 2005. Free Press, Simon & Schuster: New York, New York.

² Bunyan, John. The Pilgrim's Progress: From this World to that Which Is To Come. 1985, Barbour and Company, Inc.: Urichsville, OH, p. 58.