

Fight In Shining Armor

Ephesians 6:10-17 January 10, 2024

Ephesians 6:10-17 - ¹⁰ Finally, be strengthened by the Lord and by his vast strength. 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 cosmic powers of this darkness, against evil, spiritual forces in the heavens. ¹³ For this reason take up the full armor of God, so that you may be able to resist in the evil day, and having prepared everything, to take your stand. ¹⁴ Stand, therefore, with truth like a belt around your waist, righteousness like armor on your chest, ¹⁵ and your feet sandaled with readiness for the gospel of peace. ¹⁶ In every situation take up the shield of faith with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. ¹⁷ Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit—which is the word of God.

On January 16, 1991, President Bush announced the invasion of Iraq. In his speech, he outlined the ferocity of the enemy, the suffering of the innocent, and the valiance of American troops who joined the battle. He said, *“No President can easily commit our sons and daughters to war. Ours is an all-volunteer force, magnificently trained, highly motivated. The troops know why they’re there... Our goal is not the conquest of Iraq. It is the liberation of Kuwait.”*¹

It was a costly fight that demanded much of those volunteers.

In our text, Paul points our way and says, “There’s a battle going on and the Lord wants *you* to join it.” We have all we need for victory. But, the Lord’s army is made up of those who *volunteer*.

Ephesians 6:10 - ¹⁰ Finally, be strengthened by the Lord and by his vast strength.

We’ve come a long way from chapter 1, verse 1. Paul took us from eternity past to eternity future. He’s described where we’ve been and where we’re going. He talked about the spiritual wealth we have - the grace and the power and the protection and the enabling. He just finished describing day-to-day Christian life in the home, in the workplace, in our relationships. Now he says, *“Finally.”*

It’s a term that can mean “for the remaining time,”² or “from now on.”³ These are marching orders. And they begin with, “Be strengthened by the Lord.”

Life is difficult. We face hazards and challenges. But you *can* be strong as a Christian. In fact, you’re *supposed* to be strong - spiritually strong, mentally strong, emotionally strong - more and more capable as a believer. That doesn’t mean we don’t struggle, but God’s plan for you is *strength*. And *He’s* the One Who does it. You don’t strengthen yourself. Be strengthened by *the Lord* and *His* vast strength - the strength that Paul said is working in us back in chapter 3, verse 20.

¹ <https://millercenter.org/the-presidency/presidential-speeches/january-16-1991-address-nation-invasion-iraq>

² Markus Barth *Ephesians 4-6: Introduction, Translation, And Commentary*

³ *The Dictionary Of Biblical Languages With Semantic Domains: Greek (New Testament)*

How do we receive this strength? How do we cooperate with God's desire to increase our spiritual capability? Verse 18 says *prayer* is one way. Through prayer we are strengthened and we help strengthen others.

We're made strong by walking with God. As we walk worthy, God is able to fortify us and do His powerful, cosmic work through us in the city and the home, on the job and at the kids' soccer game.

Isaiah says, "Those who trust in the Lord will renew their strength." It happens as we exercise faith.

We're also made strong, the Bible says, in our *weakness*.⁴ As we surrender to God's will, as we allow His *grace* to operate in us, we become stronger and stronger.

Ephesians 6:11 - ¹¹Put on the full armor of God so that you can stand against the schemes of the devil.

Spiritual strength is not just so we can *look* good. We used to watch *Survivor*. There were always contestants with perfectly sculpted physiques, but when it came to dragging the heavy box out of the surf, across the sand, onto a platform, it became clear their muscles were for *looks*, not *labor*.

God's strength is for application, not appearance. We *need* to be strong because we have a very powerful, highly organized, savagely motivated adversary. He is no tin-pot tyrant - he's the ruler of this world. And he has declared war on the Lord and all His people.

How powerful is the Devil? Consider what he did to Job. After given permission by God, the Devil exerted power over people, inciting them to violence. He exerted power over the elements, bringing a hurricane to Job's house. He even exerted power over the health of Job's body.

Martyn Lloyd-Jones points out that Satan has enough power, and enough pride, and enough of a winning record that he had total confidence when he came against the Son of God Himself.⁵

With that said, he is no match for the Lord. There is no question Who will emerge victorious in this cosmic struggle. In fact, the war is already won. And the Lord now turns to us and says, "Take My armor. Take my weapons. Take my battle plan and you can share My victory over this enemy."

Thanks to God, you can stand against the Devil's schemes. "Schemes" is the word we get the word "method" from. What are the Devil's methods? There are *lots* of them - he's an expert at his craft.

His attacks come in the form of persecution against God's people. Or pollution of their minds and culture. He attacks us with fear and deception and temptation. He conspires to get you *angry* at

⁴ 2 Corinthians 12:9

⁵ Martyn Lloyd-Jones *The Wiles Of The Devil (Ephesians 6:10-13)*

God for one reason or another. He sends wolves into the Church, spies among friends, to do his terrible work undercover. He has *many* effective methods.

This is why we need the armor of God. There's that great moment in *Captain America: Civil War* where Iron Man and Cap are punching it out and Tony Stark is getting thrashed. The voice in his suit calls out, "*You can't beat him hand-to-hand!*" And it was true. Tony Stark needed the *armor* to analyze the fight pattern and harness its fantastic power to defend himself.

The Devil is real *but*, the New Testament is clear: We don't have to be afraid of him and he has no power over us because God has given us *His* armor, *His* power, *His* revelation, so we can stand. Stand means not only up on our feet, but to "hold out in a critical position on the battlefield."⁶

But, as one commentator points out, "*Standing firm requires effort. It does not automatically happen.*"⁷ We have to understand what's going on on the spiritual level and take our position and duty seriously. We need to recognize that the Devil's plan is to devour *anyone* he can. His life goal, his job, his hobby, his side-gig, his five year plan is to destroy *your* life if he can. And he has *lots* of resources at his disposal. But *we* have *more*. We have greater. We have the *splendid* armor of God⁸ - the very armor He wears Himself. But it will not help us if we don't put it on.

I read a story of a Georgia police officer named Tim Smith. His department issued him a bulletproof vest, but he decided not to wear it. He responded to a call about a man with a gun. He pulled the car over, the suspect came out shooting and hit Tim in the chest. And now Tim is dead.

Ephesians 6:12 - ¹²For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this darkness, against evil, spiritual forces in the heavens.

This is such an important verse. *Humans are not your enemy* - not *really*. It's the power *behind* the bad boss, the schoolyard bully, the deadbeat dad, the political antagonist that is the problem. Think of Abigail and Nabal, Daniel and Nebuchadnezzar, Paul and Felix. For the *believer*, the other person was not a hated enemy. They understood that there was a spiritual situation unfolding.

Our fight is with this dedicated group of demonic forces. Paul describes it as close up, hand-to-hand wrestling with a unified coalition of foes who have colonized every corner of the world.

Ephesians 6:13 - ¹³For this reason take up the full armor of God, so that you may be able to resist in the evil day, and having prepared everything, to take your stand.

I like this because, in verse 11 Paul says, "Here's your armor." And we might think, "Ok, great. I'll hang that next to my rain coat in case I need it." But then Paul says, "Take a look right outside your

⁶ Barth

⁷ Ben Witherington *The Letters To Philemon, The Colossians, And The Ephesians*

⁸ Barth makes the case that Paul is saying "splendid armor."

door here at the battlefield and the enemy troops headed your way." And then we get to verse 13 and Paul *again* says, "So, *here's your armor*. Go ahead and put it on. You're *in* this fight."

For the second time Paul calls it the *full* armor of God. We need every piece. It won't do to pick and choose. It's sufficient to defend our lives and gain ground against our enemy, but we need it all.

I saw a part of a football game over the holidays and during one play a receiver, apparently, decided he didn't need the chin strap on his helmet. Well, he caught the ball and was hit by a defender. The helmet immediately popped off and, as the receiver went down, another player's knee went straight into his head. He was missing a piece. Put the chin strap on!

Our orders are to *resist* the Devil. There are those who make a big show of talking to the Devil, even taunting him. I have to agree with Skip Heitzig who said, "Don't talk to the Devil."⁹ He's smarter than you, stronger than you, more experienced than you, and totally dedicated to destroying you. *Resist* him and he will flee from you. But don't trash talk the Serpent of Old.

Ephesians 6:14 - ¹⁴Stand, therefore, with truth like a belt around your waist, righteousness like armor on your chest,

Paul *keeps* telling us to stand. Christians need not cower. Standing means we're stable on our feet. It means we're ready to fight or rescue. There's not much we can do from the ground. God's desire is to keep you on your feet - to keep you from stumbling or getting knocked down.

In these verses, Paul describes our gear. Based off some of the terms he used, you can make the case that he was envisioning a certain type of infantry soldier that could do the job of a skirmisher when necessary or fall back to be a part of the phalanx of defense.¹⁰

As Paul speaks, he makes *many* references to Isaiah, particularly chapter 59. In Isaiah we see *God* wearing many of these very items, which makes sense because it's *His* armor that He shares with us.

We start with the belt of truth. A belt is central. It hold things together. Soldiers would hang things on the belt. Recently, my beloved, \$16 ratchet belt broke. It was a Sunday morning before first service and I felt a snap and suddenly my belt wasn't a belt anymore. I had to ask Kelly to bring me some other belt from home because I was having a wardrobe malfunction.

It's the belt of *truth*, not of feelings. Not of fads. It is God's eternal, constant truth that holds and girds everything together. That's what we hang the rest of our life on.

Next, we see the breastplate of righteousness. Righteousness protects us - our hearts and other vulnerabilities. And remember: It's *Christ's* righteousness that has been given to us, not our own self-righteousness. Paul's not saying, "Make your own armor out of good deeds." All *your*

⁹ Skip Heitzig *The Whole Armor (Ephesians 6:10-24)*

¹⁰ Based off of Paul's words for shield and sword. See <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thyreophoroi>

righteousness is just filthy rags. That's no good for combat. Instead, we are clothed with *Christ's* righteousness, and that protects us when we put *Him* on.

Ephesians 6:15 - ¹⁵ and your feet sandaled with readiness for the gospel of peace.

Shoes make a difference. No one wants to hike in high heels. The Gospel keeps us on our feet, giving us navigation and direction. But the Gospel also keeps us on our toes, reminding us that time is short and every day we can engage on mission. *Readiness* means prepared for combat.¹¹

But, notice: Paul uses the word *peace* here. It's a good reminder that we are *liberators*, not subjugators. God's goal is to save captives, reconcile enemies to Himself. To bring peace.

We live in a very antagonistic time. Everyone is against everyone else. Let's walk in forgiveness and peaceful reconciliation as far as it depends on us. God calls us to unity, not hatred.

Ephesians 6:16 - ¹⁶ In every situation take up the shield of faith with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one.

The missiles are coming. Maybe an arrow, maybe a javelin, maybe something big launched from a catapult.¹² The shield of faith is strong enough to protect us. Paul is referencing a large shield, probably around 2 feet by 4 feet.¹³ They helped you *and* the people around you. Soldiers would often line up together to create a *wall* of shields.

Faith helps us and the people around us. There was a Roman battle that happened a little before Paul wrote Ephesians. After the fight, a centurion counted 220 darts sticking into his shield.¹⁴

Soldiers would soak their shields in water to help protect from fiery projectiles. That's a great picture: Our faith being soaked in the Living Water. Soaked in the Word, soaked in the Holy Spirit.

The shield of faith is for every situation, not just times of obvious spiritual warfare. Fiery arrows can come out of nowhere. Maybe you see the archers up on the hill, or maybe there's an ambush set for you. An ambush of temptation. An ambush of discouragement. An ambush of disappointment. We hold the shield of faith in every situation because we *believe* that it would be a bad thing if that arrow of temptation hit us - that arrow of discontent. It always comes back to understanding what God has revealed and *believing* that what He says is true and then responding accordingly.

Now, it's no fun to think about fiery darts coming our way, but on one level, if they're *not*, that's probably a problem. If you are *not* a target, maybe you're not in the fight. Maybe you've been incapacitated, or in the mind of the enemy, you're more of a *help* than a hindrance.

¹¹ Witherington

¹² Frank Thielman *Ephesians*

¹³ Stephen Fowl *Ephesians: A Commentary*

¹⁴ *The Expositor's Bible Commentary, Volume 11: Ephesians Through Philemon*

Ephesians 6:17 - ¹⁷Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit—which is the word of God.

The Expositor's Bible Commentary says, *"'Take' is really receive or accept. The previous items were laid out for the soldier to pick up. The helmet and sword would be handed him by an attendant or by his armor-bearer."*¹⁵

The Lord provides all these resources, but in a special way He hands us salvation, He sends us the Spirit. Take them. Put them into operation. Walk in the provision you've received.

If you're a Christian here tonight, you *are* saved. You've got the helmet. You know it works. Markus Barth writes, *"[We] go into battle and stand the heat of the day in full confidence of the outcome... for [we] wear the same battle-proven helmet which God straps on His head (according to the original meaning of Isa 59:17)."*¹⁶

With this armor we receive a sword - the word of God. Paul doesn't use the word *logos* here, but the word *rhema*. Jesus Christ is the Word, the *Logos*. He's right there beside us on the battlefield. In our hands is the *rhema* - that which has been said and revealed to us in the inspired canon. When *Jesus* wrestled with the Devil He said, "Man shall not live on bread alone but on every *rhema* that comes from the mouth of God." And we remember how, after each volley from Satan, our Lord used Scripture to resist him. *That* was the weapon and it was absolutely effective.

These are heavy images. A new Christian might say, "Hey, I'm not ready for the front lines." But we *are* ready because it's the Lord's strength, the Lord's equipment, the Lord's strategy, the Lord's power working through us. We don't have to be afraid of spiritual warfare.

But we should be realistic about it. It's no laughing matter. Our enemy will fight to the bitter end. And our involvement may lead to heavy blows falling on us. What did Paul say to the Galatians? *"I bear on my body the marks of Jesus."* But this is our calling and privilege.

Witold Pilecki was a Polish soldier who fought the Nazis. The Poles heard some things that didn't add up when it came to what the Nazis were doing with their prisoners. And so, in 1940, Witold intentionally allowed himself to be taken to the Auschwitz Concentration Camp. For two and a half years, Witold gathered intelligence and worked to get the truth out.

At times, Witold felt overwhelmed by his mission. But, he soldiered on, even once "[giving] up his own planned escape through the sewers to an inmate in more imminent danger." He eventually *did* escape Aushwitz and then kept fighting the good fight. He was captured *again* in 1944 and sent to a POW camp. There, he cared for the younger inmates, who took to calling him "Daddy."¹⁷

¹⁵ *ibid.*

¹⁶ Barth

¹⁷ <https://www.hmd.org.uk/resource/witold-pilecki/>

Witold was liberated from *that* prison at the end of the war. And then there were other fights to join - other dark forces to oppose. I won't spoil the ending, I'll just tell you that from *man's* perspective, Witold's final chapter was a tragedy. From the perspective of the lives he saved and the good work he did? The life of *The Auschwitz Volunteer* was a triumph of good over evil.

Christian: Are you ready to get in the fight? Put on your gear, go where you're commanded, stand in strength and victory and confidence that the Lord will do what He has promised in you and through you.