

EPHESIANS

ENGAGING THE POWER OF GOD'S AMAZING GRACE



ABUNDANTLIFE
FOURSQUARE CHURCH

GRACE PROVIDES US WITH THE ARMOR OF GOD

Week Eight

Ephesians 6:10-20

A final word: Be strong in the Lord and in His mighty power. Put on all of God's armor so that you will be able to stand firm against all strategies of the devil. For we are 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.

Therefore, put on every piece of God's armor so you will be able to resist the enemy in the time of evil. Then after the battle you will still be standing firm. Stand your ground, putting on the belt of truth and the body armor of God's righteousness. For shoes, put on the peace that comes from the Good News so that you will be fully prepared. In addition to all of these, hold up the shield of faith to stop the fiery arrows of the devil. Put on salvation as your helmet, and take the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

Pray in the Spirit at all times and on every occasion. Stay alert and be persistent in your prayers for all believers everywhere. And pray for me, too. Ask God to give me the right words so I can boldly explain God's mysterious plan that the Good News is for Jews and Gentiles alike. I am in chains now, still preaching this message as God's ambassador. So pray that I will keep on speaking boldly for Him, as I should. (NLT)

COMMENTS AND THOUGHTS

In the Christian life, we battle against rulers and authorities (the powerful evil forces of fallen angels headed by Satan, who is a vicious fighter 1 Peter 5:8). To withstand their attacks, we must depend on God's strength and use every piece of His armor. The whole body needs to be armed.

Ephesians 6:10 *Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power (NIV).* Our strength is derived from God, not strength we humans have to somehow obtain. The words “be strong” describe continual empowering of the Christian community. The power that raised Christ from the dead empowers God's people as they prepare for the spiritual battle they must face on this earth. They will need it, for, as the text continues, the struggle occurs in the spiritual realm and must be won with spiritual weapons. While the victory is certain, the battle still must be waged.

If you want to complete a marathon, you have to run hundreds of training miles. If you want to learn a foreign language, you have to spend some hours memorizing declensions and conjugations. If you want to play the piano, you have to learn the scales and how to read music. And if you want to accomplish anything for God, you have to spend time with the spiritual disciplines: Bible study, prayer, church involvement, fasting, serving. Being a Christian is not a learned skill or discipline; it's a living relationship with our living Lord Jesus. But like any other relationship, if you want it to be deep and meaningful — beyond the superficial and empty formalities — it takes time and commitment.

Ephesians 6:11 *Put on the whole armor of God, so that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil (NRSV).* God empowers His people, but He does not send them into battle unarmed. God's people must put on the whole armor of God (Romans 13:12). The panoplia, or full armor, means complete equipment, head-to-toe protection, both defensively and offensively. This gear was for hand-to-hand combat. God gives believers in order to provide all we need to be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. "Stand against" was a military term meaning to resist the enemy, hold the position, and offer no surrender. Our "ability to stand" in battle depends on our use of "the whole armor of God."

Ephesians 6:12 *For our struggle is not against enemies of blood and flesh, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places (NRSV).* Our battle is not against enemies of blood and flesh. Instead, we battle the demons over whom Satan has control. Demons work to tempt people to sin. They were not created by Satan because God is the Creator of all. Rather, the demons are fallen angels who joined Satan in his rebellion and thus became perverted and evil. The descriptive words "rulers," "authorities," "cosmic powers," and "spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places" reveal the characteristics of these enemies. "Rulers and authorities" are cosmic powers, or demons. These spiritual beings have limited power. "Cosmic powers of this present darkness" refers to those spiritual powers who aspire to world control. The "spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places" refers to the demons' dwelling, planets and stars, from which the demons control the lives of people.

These are real and powerful beings, not mere fantasies. These powers are "cosmic" and "spiritual"; thus, we fight the battle in that realm. We face a powerful army whose goal is to defeat Christ's church. When we believe in Christ, the satanic beings become our enemies, and they try every device to turn us away from Him and back to sin.

We fight a spiritual battle, but we might well ask, who is the enemy? It's not the nonbeliever, although occasionally you will meet a person so full of evil and rebellion against God that he or she actually declares himself or herself the enemy of Christianity. The secular media or world systems work relentlessly to undermine God's truth, but they are not the enemy either, although they are often tools in his hands. Our enemy is Satan and the spiritual "forces of evil." Satan, the deceiver (Genesis 3), the accuser (Zechariah 3), the destroyer (1 Peter 5), is the adversary of our souls and of the souls of our friends and loved ones.

Ephesians 6:13 *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 (NKJV).* The armor is ready for us; we merely need to take it. "Take up" is a technical military term describing preparation for battle. The armor is available, but the believer-soldier must "take it up" in order to be ready. We would be neglectful to do otherwise, for the battle is real, and we are Satan's targets. The evil day refers to the hours of trial that have within themselves the seeds of the last and greatest trial. Christians must be prepared for every day's conflicts with the forces of evil. The words "having done all, to stand" probably summarize the believer's victory after the battle. In ancient times, those still standing after the battle were the victors. We know the outcome of the war, but individual battles can be lost if any believers have not done all in order to stand.

Ephesians 6:14 *Stand therefore, and fasten the belt of truth around your waist (NRSV).* Fasten the belt of truth around your waist. This belt, also called a girdle, was about six inches wide. Probably made of leather, it held together the clothing underneath as well as holding the other pieces of armor in place, such as the breastplate and the sheath for the sword. It contained a “breechclout,” an apron that protected the lower abdomen. It may have also braced the back in order to give strength. When the belt was fastened, the soldier was “on duty,” ready to fight. A slackened belt meant “off duty.” As the belt formed the foundation of the soldier’s armor, the truth is the foundation of the Christian life. This “truth” refers to the believer’s character as a person who can be relied on for the truth.

Ephesians 6:14 *And put on the breastplate of righteousness (NRSV).* Next, the soldier must put on the breastplate of righteousness. A breastplate was a large leather, bronze, or chain-mail piece that protected the body from the neck to the thighs. Protecting the vital organs, the breastplate was a vital piece in the soldier’s armor. No soldier would go into battle without his breastplate. Often this had a back piece too, protecting the body from hits from behind.

“Righteousness” provides a significant defense; it gives the evidence that we have been made right with God and that this righteousness has been given us by the Holy Spirit. Believers have been made righteous through the blood of Christ. Righteousness is the opposite of Satan’s complete wickedness. Satan seeks to thwart righteous living.

Ephesians 6:15 *And with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace (NIV).* A soldier wore special sandals or military shoes that protected his feet without slowing him down. Roman soldiers had special shoes made of soft leather with studded soles. This allowed them to march farther and faster as well as giving them facility of motion in battle — they could dig in and hold their ground when in hand-to-hand combat.

Believers also need special “shoes” — the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. The Word of God is the gospel, or Good News, that brings peace. In other words, believers are ready for battle because “the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard [their] hearts and minds through Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:7). When the enemy, the deceiver (Revelation 12:9), offers false ways to peace or tries to get us to focus on our concerns and fears, we Christian soldiers can stand up to him. *Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid (John 14:27 NKJV).*

Ephesians 6:16 *With all of these, take the shield of faith, with which you will be able to quench all the flaming arrows of the evil one (NRSV).* With all the pieces of armor mentioned above, the soldier needed to also carry extra protection in the form of a shield. The image was taken from the Roman shield, a large oblong or oval piece, approximately four feet high by two feet wide, made of wood and leather, often with an iron frame. Sometimes the leather would be soaked in water to help extinguish flaming arrows. The ancient “flaming arrow” or “fire dart” was made of cane with a flammable head that was lit and then shot so as to set fire to wooden shields, cloth tents, etc. Faith means total dependence on God and willingness to do His will. It is not something we put on for a show for others. It means believing in His promises even though we don’t see those promises materializing yet. God gives faith to protect the believer.

Ephesians 6:17 *And take the helmet of salvation (NKJV).* The helmet protected the soldier's head. Helmets were made of leather and brass, or sometimes bronze and iron — no sword could pierce a good helmet. The dressed soldier would take his helmet and sword from an armor bearer. In the same way, believers are to take this helmet of salvation, for it is handed to them by God Himself.

Ephesians 6:17 *And the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God (NKJV).* Finally, the soldier takes the sword of the Spirit — the only offensive weapon mentioned. This refers to the short sword used in close combat. The sharp, short sword was one of Rome's great military innovations. The Roman army was called the "short swords" because of its use of the short swords in winning battles. The sword's double edges made it ideal for "cut and thrust" strategy. The Word of God is the Spirit's sword. The Spirit gives the Word its penetrating power and sharp edge.

Ephesians 6:18 *And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord's people (NIV).* This verse, although not naming another "weapon" in the believer's armor, does continue the thought of 6:17.

As we take the sword of the Spirit, God's Word, we must also pray in the Spirit on all occasions. Praying in the Spirit means that the Spirit helps us when we pray (Romans 8:26); the Spirit prays on our behalf (Romans 8:27); the Spirit makes God accessible (Ephesians 2:18); the Spirit gives us confidence when we pray (Romans 8:15-16; Galatians 4:6). He inspires and guides us when we pray. He helps us communicate with God and also brings God's response to us.

Any military strategist will tell you that while you cannot win a war without ground troops, air superiority gives you an overwhelming advantage. Paul describes our "air support" as prayer because God's army advances on its knees.

We are engaged in a spiritual battle - all believers find themselves subject to Satan's attacks because they are no longer on Satan's side. We are to use every piece of God's armor to resist Satan's attacks and to stand true to God in the midst of those attacks.

A summary of the armor pieces and their use and application:

Belt – Truth

Satan fights with lies, and sometimes his lies sound like truth; but only believers have God's truth, which can defeat Satan's lies.

Breastplate – Righteousness

Satan often attacks our heart - the seat of our emotions, self-worth, and trust. God's righteousness is the breastplate that protects our heart and ensures His approval. He approves of us because He loves us and sent His Son to die for us.

Shoes – Readiness to Spread the Good News

Satan wants us to think that telling others the Good News is a worthless and hopeless task-the size of the task is too big and the negative responses are too much to handle. But the footgear God gives us enables us to proclaim the true peace that is available in God - news everyone needs to hear.

Shield – Faith

What we see are Satan's attacks in the form of insults, setbacks and temptations. But the shield of faith protects us from Satan's flaming arrows. With God's perspective, we can see beyond our circumstances and know that ultimate victory is ours.

Helmet – Salvation

Satan wants to make us doubt God, Jesus, and our salvation. The helmet protects our mind from doubting God's saving work for us.

Sword – the Spirit, the Word of God

The sword is the only weapon of offense in this list of armor. There are times when we need to take the offensive against Satan. When we are tempted, we need to live in the Spirit of God's word.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why would Christians not want to use the full armor?
2. How can we appropriate God's strength and protection?
3. Practically speaking, how do we put on the full armor of God?
4. What do you think and how do you feel about the fact we are in a spiritual battle?
5. Although prayer is not a part of the armor, how is it a weapon that we can use?

**WHAT WILL YOU
DO WITH WHAT
YOU HAVE LEARNED
???**
