

# Spiritual Warfare

EPHESIANS 6:10-20

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Today we come to the end of our extended study of the New Testament book of Ephesians! We started this series back on September 7. Two weeks ago, one of the young women of the congregation came up to me and said, “You know, I’ve really liked the series on Ephesians, because even though it’s all been from the same book, every lesson has been different!” I am thankful for that comment, because the study has been quite diverse.

- We started by looking at Chapter 1 and the fact that all spiritual blessings can be found ***“in Christ.”***
- We continued in Chapter 2 by learning that Christ is our Peace. At one time we were separated from God because of our sins, but then we were brought near by the blood of God’s own Son, and now we are together in the church.
- We then looked at Chapter 3 and Paul’s prayer for the church in Ephesus. He wanted them to be strengthened in the inner man, he wanted them to understand the amazing love of Christ, and he wanted the church in Ephesus to be filled up with all the fullness of God. And up to this point in the book, Paul had not really told us to DO anything. It was all theory. It was all about how good we have it and how amazing God is, and these are all things we need to remember from time to time.
- But then we get to Chapter 4, and Paul addresses the issue of Christian unity. Because we are ***“in Christ,”*** there are certain attitudes we need to have; there are certain actions we need to take, particularly as we interact with one another in the church. We are to treat each other with humility, with gentleness, with patience, with tolerance, and we must be diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.
- We then looked at that extended passage in the last half of Chapter 4 where we compared the Christian life to repainting that trim around the garage door – there are certain behaviors and attitudes we need to scrape away before we come in with the new. And the difference there comes when we are taught the word of God. We study, we learn, and based on God’s word we make changes in our lives.
- We then moved over into Chapter 5 where Paul tells us to imitate God. God is a God of love, and purity, and light, and wisdom. And since God is our Father, we are to bear the family resemblance; we are to imitate these qualities in our own lives.
- We then continued with several lessons on family relationships. We learned that marriage is a great mystery. Husbands are to love, just as wives are to submit.

- In Chapter 6 we found some inspired advice to children. Children are to honor and obey their parents.
- And then the next week we looked at parents, at fathers in particular. Fathers are not to provoke their children to anger, but they are to bring up those children in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.
- And then, two weeks ago, we left off with Paul's inspired words for the workplace, a word to slaves and masters. Employees are to do their work from the heart, as if they are working for the Lord himself, and then we learned that employers are to manage, knowing that they also have a manager in heaven.

All of this brings us to our final lesson. I am especially thankful this morning that we were able to sing a number of songs that fit in so well with the passage that we are about to consider. It is almost hard to believe, in fact, that there are so many songs that refer to the Christian life as a fight, and so many songs that compare our spiritual service to being in the military. We think of Paul's invitation to the young preacher Timothy, ***"Suffer hardship with me as a good soldier of Christ Jesus"*** (2 Timothy 2:3). And there are certainly many other references scattered throughout the letters of the apostle Paul.

Most of you know me well enough, though, to know that when it comes to the military, I do not have a clue! I married into a military family. My father-in-law is retired from the United States Air Force and has now retired again after teaching ROTC at a high school in Ohio. My brother and sister-in-law have both served in the military and are now working for the Department of Homeland Security. Because of these relationships, I have spent some amount of time on various military bases – not only in Illinois where my wife was living when we were dating, but also in Alaska, in Ohio, and on several bases in Germany. I have several other friends and loved ones who are currently serving in the military. A number of you have served in the military (or may be heading in that direction), but the rest of us are left with either the personal stories or maybe with what we read in the news or maybe with what we see in the movies. Most of us, though, will never know what it means to fight in a war.

At the same time, however, we do need to understand from the scriptures that all of us as Christians are, in fact, fighting in a battle. And this morning I would like for us to consider one of these passages as it was first written by the apostle Paul. The passage is found in Ephesians 6:10-20. I would invite you to turn with me there and to keep your Bibles open as we study – Ephesians 6:10-20 (p. 1834). At the very end of the book, we find that Paul starts out with the word ***"Finally."*** In other words, this is what it's all about. This is the main idea in this letter. If we are to get anything out of the book of Ephesians, this is it. And this is where we pick up with Ephesians 6:10-20,

***<sup>10</sup> Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might. <sup>11</sup> Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil. <sup>12</sup> For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places.***

***<sup>13</sup> Therefore, take up the full armor of God, so that you will be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm. <sup>14</sup> Stand firm therefore, having girded your loins with truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, <sup>15</sup> and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; <sup>16</sup> in addition to all, taking up the shield of faith with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. <sup>17</sup> And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.***

***<sup>18</sup> With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints, <sup>19</sup> and pray on my behalf, that utterance may be given to me in the opening of my mouth, to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel, <sup>20</sup> for which I am an ambassador in chains; that in proclaiming it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak.***

What an amazing passage!

- I. **As we look back at paragraph of scripture, I'd like for us to come away with several ideas that will hopefully change the way we live this week, starting with the reminder from Paul that we are to BE STRONG IN THE LORD.**

Remember those verses back in Chapter 1 about being *"in Christ," "in the Lord," "in Him"*? This is what all of that boils down to: We are to be strong *"in the Lord."* And specifically, we are being called upon here to use this strength to take a stand. We are to be strong, because we are in a spiritual battle.

And we need to understand here at the beginning that the battle is, in fact, spiritual. The battle is not against flesh and blood. The battle is not against another person. The battle is not against those who refuse to believe in God. In fact, the battle isn't even against those who are evil. Instead, the battle is against the devil himself, as Paul tells us that we are to ***"stand firm against the schemes of the devil."*** We think of what Peter wrote (based on his own personal experience) in 1 Peter 5:8, ***"Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour."*** The devil, obviously, is not an actual lion, but the devil himself is very real. He is more deadly and more powerful than any other enemy we could ever possibly imagine. He cannot be harmed by a physical sword or rifle; because, as Paul says, our enemy is ***"not...flesh and blood."*** As Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 10:3-4, ***"For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses."***

And so it seems the first basic thought in this passage is that we need to know we are in the fight. We need to be strong and stand firm. There is great danger, in fact, in slacking off. There is a great danger in underestimating the enemy. In world history, we think of Neville Chamberlain, the prime minister of Britain before WWII. He knew people were still worn out from what happened during WWI, he wanted to do everything possible to avoid another war. The problem was, though, that Hitler had plans to take over Europe, including Britain. Chamberlain wanted to avoid all of this, so in September 1938, he signed the Munich Agreement, where Italy and France joined Britain in agreeing to give Germany a chunk of Czechoslovakia in return for Hitler's agreement to not invade any other European countries. Chamberlain came home from that conference, of course, proclaiming "peace for our time." The Munich Agreement is now held up as a model concerning the failure of appeasement. Chamberlain was either clueless or he willingly ignored the evil he was dealing with. We cannot afford to make this mistake spiritually. We can either be aware and step up to the fight, or we can sit back and ignore all of the horrific possibilities. Ignoring the threat, though, is dangerous. And this is the danger Paul warns about in these opening verses. The first step in fighting a spiritual battle is to be strong, knowing that we are in the battle in the first place. We are to be strong in the Lord.

- II. **As we move on to the next little section in this paragraph, we see a second idea that will hopefully change the way we live this week, and that is: Paul tells the Christians in Ephesus that they are to PUT ON THE WHOLE ARMOR OF GOD.**

When we look at when this book was written, it appears that it was written during Paul's first Roman imprisonment, referred to in the last few verses of the book of Acts, as Paul was placed under house arrest, chained to a Roman soldier, the ancient equivalent of a GPS ankle bracelet. So here he is in his own rented apartment, much cheaper than a jail for the Roman government – the inmate has to provide not only the space but also all of the food – but Paul is apparently chained to a Roman soldier, his own personal jailer. And in this situation, I would point out that instead of getting mad at the guy, instead of taking it out on his own personal jailer, instead of cutting on the Empire, instead of taking a protest to the streets, instead of whining about the situation, Paul instead looks at this soldier's uniform, and he uses this physical uniform (highly specialized for physical warfare), and he takes this soldier's gear and uses it to teach an amazing spiritual lesson. And the lesson is: When we stand firm (as we were just told to do), we must stand firm using the proper equipment. We are to put on the full armor of God. Just as an army does not send its soldiers into battle decked out in shorts and flip-flops, neither does God send Christians out to do battle with Satan without offering us the best of equipment. Yes, there are times when the equipment might be heavy, there are times when the equipment might need some special training, but all of it has its place.

And I would point out here at the beginning on this point that we are to put on the **WHOLE** armor of God – not just some of it, but **ALL** of it. Imagine a football player coming on the field with a helmet, but no shoes, or maybe pads and shoes, but no helmet. That player will not be allowed to play. In the same way, God expects us to use every tool that he has provided.

Paul starts in verse 14 by telling us to **GIRD OUR LOINS WITH TRUTH**. We look at the uniform of just about any soldier or even firefighter or police officer, and it would be hard to overestimate the importance of the belt. The belt is what holds everything together. As I was doing the research for today's lesson, I ran across an article about the prevalence of serious back trouble among police officers, and they traced it back to the weight of the equipment on the belt. But the belt is important. Ancient Roman soldiers wore what I would describe as a skirt...although I would never say that to any of them face to face! But the belt held it all together. If they were wearing some kind of outer coat or covering, it could be tucked in the belt to make it easier to run. The belt held the sword. The belt included the all-important leather groin guard. The belt was critical. And we find that Paul starts here and basically says: As the belt is to the Roman soldier's uniform, so also is truth to the Christian. Truth is everything. Truth holds it all together. God's word is always true. Today, many people around us will say that what is true for you might not be true for me. Paul, though, reminds us here that actual truth is so important for the Christian. When we do battle with the ***"father of lies,"*** we want truth holding us together. Truth matters.

Paul goes on to write about the **"BREASTPLATE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS."** And here again, the breastplate (for thousands of years) has been one of the most basic pieces of equipment for those who stand in harms way. The breastplate, body armor, the bulletproof vest (whatever we want to call it) protects the vital organs. Recent improvements in body armor have drastically improved survivability rates from what at one time would have been life-ending wounds in Iraq and Afghanistan. Last summer when we went out to California, we stopped in at the Richard Nixon Presidential Library, and on the day we were there, we ran into Mike Huckabee who was helping with a fundraiser along with the mother of the first Navy Seal killed in Afghanistan. They were raising funds for those K-9 units that go to war in Afghanistan, raising money for vests and bulletproof goggles. Even dogs have that kind of protection these days. You know, I've been thinking about this: No matter what happens from this point forward in my life, I hope I never run into a dog wearing bulletproof goggles! If I ever do, I suppose something has gone terribly wrong in my life! But we know the importance of protecting the vital organs.

Here Paul refers to the breastplate – not of Kevlar, not of ceramic, but of righteousness. Righteousness is the state of being right with God. When we do battle with Satan, Satan wants us question whether we are really good enough. Remember: Satan is sometimes referred to as the Accuser. As we do battle with Satan, Satan is always out there, “Who do you think you are? You claim to represent God? You have done this, this, and this.” The breastplate of righteousness keeps those accusations from doing any permanent damage. The breastplate guards our hearts. Righteousness keeps Satan’s accusations from sticking.

Paul goes on to refer to having **SHOD OUR FEET WITH THE PREPARATION OF THE GOSPEL OF PEACE**. Again, it is hard to overstate the importance of proper footwear for a soldier. Roman soldiers had specially designed sandals that had little cleats on the bottom, designed to give traction while still allowing flexibility. As I remember it, Roman soldiers were trained to defend a 6 x 6 foot area...to the death. They could not afford to slip. They could not afford to be pushed back. And spiritually speaking, neither can we.

Paul says that just as proper footwear is to a soldier, so is the gospel to a Christian. The gospel keeps us grounded. The good news keeps us moving forward. There is another picture here as well. Just as our feet carry us, we must also carry the gospel into the whole world. Don’t we remember what Paul said about the feet of those who preach? Those feet are “*beautiful*,” Paul says. When a Roman soldier was defending that small patch of ground to the death, and when he saw the messenger come over the horizon bringing a message of peace, bringing a message that the enemy has surrendered, that messenger’s feet were beautiful. In the same way, we as Christians bring a message of peace to the world – peace between God and those who have sinned. Peace through the blood of God’s own son.

In verse 16, Paul goes on to refer to “**THE SHIELD OF FAITH**, *with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one.*” We seem to have moved beyond traditional shields in modern times, probably because various vehicles have taken the place of a shield. Although we do see the shield sometimes used by police in riot gear. In ancient times, though, shields were very important. As I understand it, Paul had two words he could have used here: One word referring to the small shield we sometimes see, but he used another word here, the word for the full-length shield of leather-covered wood bound together with iron, a shield that protected the entire body. Soldiers would often use their shields together, almost as a moving wall. Some could even be placed on top so they could approach a city wall, deflecting projectiles from above.

Spiritually, Paul refers to this as the “*shield of faith.*” And again, as with the breastplate of righteousness, our faith protects us from those accusations made by the devil. Our faith grabs on to God’s promises and allows us to put up with whatever Satan sends our way. I would point out here: God doesn’t stop those flaming arrows from being launched, but he does give us a shield. God does not pull us out of the world, but he gives us protection while we are here.

In verse 17, Paul goes on to mention the “**HELMET OF SALVATION.**” And here again, it would be hard to overstate the importance of a helmet. We think about some of the world’s most dangerous activities – driving a race car, riding a motorcycle, playing football, or even going into war – all of these are activities where helmets are either highly recommended or required. Thankfully, God has provided us with a skull, and yet we know from experience that the human skull can often use some help. Several years ago (about the time we had children) I started wearing a helmet while riding a bicycle. And I can tell you: When you are out riding your bike in the city of Madison (at least), you very quickly come to understand the importance of a helmet. Keola and I both have had some very close calls. The helmet, though, gives some assurance. In a similar way, the helmet of salvation also gives us confidence. We can know we are saved – right here, right now. When the devil tries to make us doubt, the helmet of salvation serves as a reminder.

And then finally, Paul gets to the only offensive weapon in verse 17, the **SWORD OF GOD'S HOLY SPIRIT**. The Roman gladius is a short sword, only 18-23 inches long, designed (obviously) for very close combat. For years, I have come very close to purchasing a replica of a Roman gladius. In so many ways, I thought: This could be either the best or the worst illustration in the history of preaching! I can just imagine passing an actual sword around the auditorium! The potential for total chaos! This is where we might end up on the evening news. This, in fact, might be my chance to meet a dog with bulletproof goggles! So I decided against the purchase of a Roman sword (at least for now). Roman soldiers, though, would train, and train, and train, with the sword. I have a friend in Janesville who went into the Army and became the fastest person at the time to completely take apart and reassemble his rifle while blindfolded. He actually went on to teach riflery in the Army. He's a few years younger than me. Just a few days ago he was released from Meriter Hospital, and he is now recovering from brain surgery after a cancer diagnosis. They do expect him to do well. But he was able to do so well with his rifle because he was familiar with it. He knew it inside and out. He knew every piece in the dark. He could take it apart and put it back together with frozen hands, sweaty hands, under water, or whatever.

And so the lesson is: In the same way, we as Christians are to be just as familiar with the word of God. We should know where the books of the Bible are. We should know something of what is in each one. We should know God's plan of salvation and where to find it. We should know how to teach the love God. We need to be using the sword of the Spirit. We need to be familiar with it. We need to be using the sword effectively. And so we have here the importance of daily Bible reading, the importance of training in our Bible classes, the importance of every sermon delivered from this pulpit being firmly grounded in the word of God! The sword is our only weapon.

And again, we are to be using ALL of the armor, as Paul says – not just some of it, but all of it. We are to put on the full armor of God.

- III. **As we move into the last little part of this paragraph, we see one final piece of advice that will hopefully change the way we live this week, and that is: Paul tells us to BE ALERT – and specifically, we are to stay alert by PRAYING AT ALL TIMES WITH ALL PETITIONS FOR ALL THE SAINTS.**

In a sense, we can almost lump this in with the armor – the idea of communication, calling in air support. How important is communication in the military today? Vital! It means everything. In the same way, we call on God for courage, we call on God for help. We are to be alert, praying at all times. And what I love here especially is that Paul wants these people to pray for him in particular, that he as a preacher might present the gospel with clarity and courage.

### **Conclusion:**

And with this, we get back to where we were at the beginning of this passage: We are in a battle, even if we do not realize it at the time.

- We win this battle by being strong in the Lord, by standing firm, by acknowledging that we are in a struggle. And again, I have never been in the military, but I'm thinking that one of the quickest ways to lose a battle is to not know you're in a battle! Paul is saying here, first of all, therefore: Stand firm!

- And then, we win this battle by putting on the full armor of God, by using all of the tools that God has provided – his word, truth, righteousness, faith, salvation, the gospel.
- And finally, we win this battle by staying alert in prayer, calling on God for courage and help.

As we close our study of this passage, as we close our study of this amazing book, we as a congregation would like to pass along God's invitation to those of you here this morning who have not yet obeyed the gospel. The gospel is the good news that Jesus came to this earth to die in our place. He was buried and was raised up on the third day. We obey the gospel by turning away from sin and by allowing ourselves to be buried in water for the forgiveness of our sins. At the point of baptism we are transferred from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of God's Son. At the point of baptism, we are ***"in Christ."*** If you have any questions, if you would like to talk about it, let us know. If you have something we need to pray about as a congregation, let us know. But if you are ready to obey the gospel right now, you can let us know by coming to the front as we sing this next song. Let's stand and sing...

To comment on this lesson: [fourlakeschurch@gmail.com](mailto:fourlakeschurch@gmail.com)