

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. ¹¹ Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. ¹² 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. ¹³ Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. ¹⁴ Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, ¹⁵ and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. ¹⁶ In addition to all this, 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. 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 saints.

¹⁹ Pray also for me, that whenever I open my mouth, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel, ²⁰ for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should. (NIV84)

Theme: Dress for Battle

1. Know your enemy
2. Defend against attacks
3. Go on the offensive

A soldier wears what he does because of what he might face in battle. Soldiers 200 years ago wore long heavy wool coats with brass buttons and a high brimmed hat. They were outfitted with a single-shot muzzleloader that had to be reloaded after each shot. It wasn't until WWI that U.S. soldiers first started wearing a hard helmet. Nowadays a soldier will carry some sort of submachine gun with hundreds of rounds of ammunition, grenades, a "camelback" for water, first aid kit, special eye wear, infrared goggles, a gps system, bullet-proof body armor, and much, much more. Altogether, the equipment that a modern U.S. soldier wears weighs 90-100 pounds. If they go on a longer mission and have to carry a ruck sack, you could take on

another 35 pounds or more! Everything that they carry has some sort of specific purpose—either for protection or to attack the enemy. Although they serve the same purpose, what a soldier wears today is completely different and yet similar to what soldiers wore 2000 years ago. Paul knew what soldiers wore first-hand. When he wrote this letter to the congregation in Ephesus he was in jail for preaching Christ. Perhaps there was a soldier or two guarding him at all times. So Paul used this picture of a Roman soldier to urge us on in a fight against our enemy the devil. And he tells us to dress for battle.

One of the most important things an army can do in a battle is to do some reconnaissance work. You need to know your enemy—how many there are, what weapons they possess, where they are located, and so on. You can't fight an enemy when you don't have any information on that enemy.

We know that our enemy is the Satan. That term, Satan, actually means enemy or adversary. We often think that we can defeat the devil on our own, that we can withstand his temptations, or go weeks or months without any help from the Lord and still survive. We tell ourselves that we have nothing to worry about because we know the devil's tricks, we know how he operates. Many assume that they are on a level playing field with the devil—but that simply isn't the case. Listen to what Paul says in verse 12, **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.** The devil and his demons aren't flesh and blood like we are—they aren't an enemy we can see or kill. They are leaders of a whole pack of evil doers; authorities of a well-organized kingdom of wickedness. They rule and control sinful darkness. And they live in the heavenly realm. That is, they aren't of this world, but above it. Nothing escapes their observation, they know where you are weak and when you let your guard down and they seek the most opportune time to attack.

And attack Satan will. He has a complete arsenal. If he cannot undermine your doctrinal position, he will try to relax your moral standards; if he cannot overthrow your faith with one bold lie, then he will chip away at it wearing it down over years of compromise, by injecting a little bit of yeast here or there. If he cannot seduce you into

sin, he will lead you to self-righteousness. Our enemy has thousands of years of experience and has killed countless of victims for eternity. It's clear, then, that we don't stand a chance on our own against this enemy. He is smarter, stronger, and has more experience than us. It's not a fair fight. It like bringing a knife to a gun fight, or an army of 2000 years ago going against an army of today. We need someone who can face the devil on his level. Someone who has the power, ability, and knowledge to defeat the devil—and give that victory to us. We need the Lord. That is why Paul encourages us to put on the full armor of God.

One of the devil's most basic tactics is to lie to us. He twists God's Word to make it say something that it doesn't, he mixes lies with truth so it's harder to tell one from the other; and at times he simply flat-out denies the truth of God's Word. Think of lies and deceptions that the devil used against Eve in the Garden of Eden, "you will not die, but you will be like God." For this reason Jesus calls the devil, **a liar, and the father of lies**. In fact that term, devil, means liar or accuser. So Paul tells us to have, **the belt of truth buckled around your waist**. This was a large heavy belt that would have protected the middle section down to the thighs of a soldier. The only thing that can protect us from the lies of the devil is the truth of God's Word. Like Jesus did when he was tempted by the devil in the wilderness. Jesus was said that about his Word, **your Word is truth**. So we turn to this truth often, whenever it is under attack to see what God truly says, not letting any traditions, opinions, reason, or logic get in the way of the truth of God's Word or changing its doctrine.

Another big weapon of the devil is to try to lead us into despair. He hones in on some sin we have committed or he hits on the fact that we have not lived up to the perfection that the Lord demands of us. He tries to convince us that because of our sin God has disowned us; that we can't possibly be forgiven for the wickedness that we have done. Notice how another meaning for devil is accuser, for he is always trying to accuse us and condemn us. This lie is what he convinced Judas of, which lead him to commit suicide.

What can we do against such an attack? Use the breastplate of righteousness, which protects the heart like a bullet-proof vest. Remember what Jesus accomplished for us by his suffering and death on the cross. He took our place and our sins upon himself, suffering

our eternal punishment for our sins. He sacrificed himself so that we wouldn't die eternally and he gave his perfect life, his righteousness to us. His perfect life is now ours, we are righteous in God's sight despite the sins that we have committed. As Paul wrote in Romans 8, **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.**

Jesus talks about it in our gospel for this morning. He brings about division in this world. Because of Christ families will be divided. Not really because of Christ but because of the devil, who leads people to reject Christ and his grace and turn against those who believe in him. Because he accuses us of sin and condemns us, the devil leads our souls to have pain and torment as we question the reality of our forgiveness.

So we fit our feet with the gospel of peace. Which reminds us of Isaiah 52, **How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, who proclaim peace, who bring good tidings, who proclaim salvation, who say to Zion, "Your God reigns!"** The gospel brings peace to our souls—the peace of forgiveness, knowing that our sins have been paid for and removed. Knowing that the Lord doesn't hold our sins against us and that they won't come back to condemn us leaves us with peace. And this peace, brought to us by the gospel, leads us to live at peace with one another.

Fiery arrows not only can kill you if they strike you, but they can also start a fire that can quickly spread and destroy a large area. So it is with the false teachings spread by the devil. One may kill you instantly. Others may imbed in our inner being an ember of doubt, faith in a false teaching, a sinful desire, or pride. Over time the fire spreads and may destroy our soul.

Against such attacks the Roman Soldier carried a large oblong shield, covered in leather. This shield could be doused in water and be an effective tool against fiery arrows. This shield represents faith. Not the individual faith of a believer, but the faith which is taught—the one truth faith, the teachings of the Christian Church. Using this faith, the true teachings, we are able to ward off attacks and extinguish the fiery arrows of the devil before they imbed in our hearts and begin to burn. It can be said that that a helmet, which protects the head, is the most important piece of equipment that a soldier wears. Our Salvation is

the most important thing to a Christian. The devil seeks to attack our salvation by mixing our good works in with it, leading us to think that we contribute in whole or in part to our salvation. And in doing so, he puts our salvation in doubt—we wonder if we have done the right things or enough of the right things to be saved.

Against this attack we put on the helmet of salvation. Christ crucified and raised is foolishness. The love that God would have for his enemies makes no sense to unbelievers. And yet is the most basic and important truths of all of Scripture; it is the foundation of our faith. We are saved by grace through faith alone—apart from anything we have ever done. And because salvation depends on Christ and Christ alone and not on what we have done or will ever do, we know and believe that our salvation is sure and guaranteed!

Up until now we have talked about how to defend against the attacks of the devil. But no one wins a war by being on the defensive the entire time. We must go on the attack against the devil. For this reason we grab a sword, the most basic and important weapon for the Roman Soldier. But this sword is the sword of the Spirit—the Word of God. The Writer to the Hebrews says, **the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow.**

It is the Word, specifically the gospel found in that Word, that the Holy Spirit uses to bring to faith and to keep in the one truth faith. Through the Word we hear about Christ and everything that he has done. And is it the Word of God that gives the sacraments its power to bestow upon us God's grace. So to go on the offensive we spread the Word—the devil has no defense against it because the Lord's power is in it. We spread the Word then, to make disciples of all nations and to keep those disciples in God's flocks.

There is another thing we can use to attack the devil—prayer. We talked about prayer a few weeks ago. James says in chapter five, **the prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.** In our battle against the devil, when we face temptation, when the tinge of doubt enters our hearts, when the devil lies to us we pray to the Lord. And he promises to hear and answer our prayers; and to guard and defend us against our enemy.

And we pray for others as well. Since we love all people, especially our fellow believers we pray for each other on a daily basis. We pray

that God may strengthen their faith, that they may grow in the grace and knowledge of the Lord. That he may comfort in them in times of sorrow and encourage them in hard times. That he may lead them away from temptation and give them victory over the devil. We pray also that the Lord may work through the gospel to bring many others to faith.

Paul employed this weapon as he fought the devil. The devil had led some officials to arrest Paul and throw him in jail for preaching Christ. So he asked the Ephesians to pray that he would have boldness and confidence. That he may not back down from preaching the gospel no matter what the cost. That he may share the good news of salvation through faith in Christ alone to king and rulers and others in authority. God, of course, answered that prayer. Paul, when given the chance, testified to the truth boldly. Leaders and rulers heard the gospel. Eventually Paul was released from prison and went on to boldly spread the gospel in other places throughout the world and Satan fell like lightning once again.

A soldier wears what he does because of what he may face in battle. Your enemy, Satan, is not of flesh and blood; but the leader of darkness and wickedness. You can't defeat him on your own. Dress yourself for battle by clothing yourself with God. He has already defeated our enemy for us. And in him you are safe. Amen.