



Friday night I officiated at a wedding in Sonoma. As you might imagine, it was a breathtakingly beautiful setting. Blue sky overlooking straight rows of old, gnarled vineyards. A gentle breeze. Good food. Everyone all dressed up, looking their best. A bride and groom anticipating a lifetime together. But as I was experiencing all of this, I couldn't help but think of the passage I'd be speaking on today. It's a passage that seems light years away from that peaceful scene in Sonoma. It's a passage that describes our lives as a war zone where a battle is taking place.

Although sometimes our lives resemble a Norman Rockwell painting, the things that can't be put on canvas—our thoughts, our struggles, our fears, our doubts, our dreams—they're in the midst of a fierce battle. All day long we're engaged in combat, in a war hard-fought and not easily won, a war in which the casualty count can include many of the people we meet each day. Every day there are things happening around us that can't be seen with the natural eye, but are still real. I'm not talking about ghosts and goblins; I'm talking about what Paul refers to in Ephesians: spiritual warfare.

**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 (Ephesians 6:12).**

Paul says we live in a war zone and we have an enemy. Jesus called him a liar and a murderer. Peter called him a roaring lion seeking someone to devour. John called him the accuser of the brethren. Here Paul calls him *"the devil"* and describes a host of spiritual forces working with him.

We're engaged in spiritual battle. And this is true for **all** of us. This isn't just for apostles, missionaries and pastors. Paul is addressing every member of the church at Ephesus, and all of us. It's no mistake Paul writes about spiritual warfare right after he addresses husbands and wives about their marriages, and children and parents, and slaves and masters, because it's in these arenas of everyday life we experience the enemy's attack. There's more to life than meets the eye.

This isn't the first time Paul has mentioned it. In chapter 1 he talked about every ruler, authority, power and dominion—and his point was Jesus is superior to every spiritual being that exists. Through the cross and resurrection he defeated them. He's the

name above all names, the king above all kings, the Lord above all lords.

Jesus has already won the battle against Satan. We know Satan's final destiny. Rev. 20:3 says he'll be thrown into the abyss forever. The future doesn't look bright for him! But while the victory has been won, the fruits of that victory haven't been fully realized. Though his time is running out, Satan can still do a lot of damage. That's why in chapter 2 Paul called him, *"the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient."*

If this is true, if Satan is our very real and powerful enemy, how do we fight him? How do we survive spiritual warfare? The answer is found in Eph. 6:10–17. It's here that Paul brings Ephesians to a grand finale with a battle cry to take arms and prepare for war.

### **Be Strong in the Lord**

**Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power (v. 10).**

Paul issues an emphatic command. *"Be strong in the Lord."* You see, a source of strength has been made available to us and it's the Lord's strength. Our strength won't cut it in this battle. We need him! He'll supply all we need for battle. He's our source of strength. Remember back in chapter 1 Paul prayed that the eyes of our heart would be opened to see the *"incomparable great power towards those who believe. That power is the same as the mighty strength he exerted when he raised Christ from the dead"* (1:19–20). Then in chapter 3 he prayed again that we'd be *"strengthened with power through his Spirit in the inner man."* This isn't about our strength but his strength.

How do we get this power and strength? It's only out of our own experience of weakness and helplessness that we experience his strength and power. We have to learn to let God strengthen us in our weakness. There's a great story out of the life of David that exemplifies this. David was living in a place called Ziklag. He and his men were out fighting a battle and while they were gone the Amalekites raided Ziklag. They burned it and took captive the women and everyone else in it, both young and old. 1 Samuel 30 says. *"When David and his men reached Ziklag, they found it destroyed by fire and their wives and sons and daughters taken captive. So David and his men wept aloud until they had no strength left to weep."* To make matters worse, David's men blamed him for the whole mess! It says, *"David was greatly distressed because the men were talking of stoning him; each*

*one was bitter in spirit because of his sons and daughters.*" Talk about feeling weak and helpless! What would David do? What would **you** do? The first thing David did wasn't to muster up his troops. The writer simply says, "***But David found strength in the Lord his God.***" There's no magic formula to this. But you have to turn to the Lord and open yourself up to him. And you have to do what Paul says next.

### **Put On the Full Armor of God**

**Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes (v. 11).**

We're to put it on the full armor of God. He's going to repeat this command in v. 13 and tell us more about what this armor actually is. But for now notice what this armor helps us do. It helps us to "***stand firm.***" That word "stand" is repeated three times in the paragraph. That means we're positioned and ready for battle, not with our own armor, but with God's armor on. We're not soldiers rushing into battle on our own, but we're not running away in fear either. I picture soldiers here, linked up, forming a wall of protection together and fighting the enemy. We don't fight alone; we stand together.

Notice there's a balance here. On the one hand, only the power and strength of God can defend and deliver us. But, on the other hand, we have a job to do. We're not passive spectators in this battle. We have a role to play. Our job is to be strong in the Lord by putting on his armor so we can stand against him. And the implication is that we **can** stand against him. With God's armor on, we don't have to live in defeat. Remember Jesus in the wilderness? He was out there for 40 days. He fasted and the devil came and tempted him. What did Jesus do? He stood against him. He didn't give in. And with him living in us, we can stand as well.

### **Our Struggle is Against the Devil and His Forces**

I'm not much of a war strategist, but I know that a key to winning any battle is to know the enemy. Paul gives us just a peak at the enemy and his strategy. Notice Paul tells us in no uncertain terms who our enemy is. He calls him "***the devil.***" That word means slanderer, accuser. He tells us to stand firm against the "schemes" of the devil. The Greek word is *methodeia*. Our English word "methods" comes from it. The devil is crafty; he's methodical. He appears as an angel of light. He's a schemer. He and his forces study us and contrive ways to tempt us and trip us up. Later in v. 13 Paul also talks about "***when the day of evil comes,***" indicating there are certain times he chooses to attack. We'd all do well to think about when we're most vulnerable. For me it's on Monday. After the excitement and adrenaline rush of Sunday, I crash emotionally on Monday. And Satan knows just how to tempt me.

**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 (v. 12).**

Then in v. 12 he gives us more detail about our enemy. Paul also says this struggle is "our" struggle. No one is exempt, even the great apostle Paul. This is our struggle. The word for "struggle" used here is loaded with meaning. It literally means "to wrestle." I love the sport of wrestling (the real kind, not the fake stuff you see on channel 848). I love it because I know how difficult and exhausting it is. I know what kind of condition you have to be in to wrestle for just six minutes. And I love it because it's just two men on a mat in the closest of combat. The picture here is of hand-to-hand combat with the enemy and his forces.

The battle is "***not against flesh and blood,***" it's spiritual. Paul describes a host of adversaries—"rulers...authorities...world forces of darkness...powers of this dark world...spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms." These are demonic forces of evil organized to oppose the work of God on earth. These forces are active in the spiritual realm, but their activity impacts us here on earth.

Let me give you some examples of things attributed to the devil in the Bible. The catastrophes experienced by Job's family were part of the devil's plot to get Job to curse God. Paul tells the Thessalonians that a visit he wanted to make there was "blocked" by Satan (1 Thess. 2:18). In the book of Revelation, John tells the church at Ephesus that "***the devil put some of you in prison to test you***" (Rev 2:10). In the gospels, many of the illnesses that Jesus confronted were accompanied and perhaps even caused by an evil spirit (Mt. 12:22). In 1 Tim Paul describes false teaching as "***doctrines of demons***" (1 Tim 4:1). Even the power of death itself is said to be held by the devil (Heb 2:14). There are times he makes himself very obvious, and other times he works beneath the surface.

A year ago when I was in Niger I confronted demonic activity head on at the fistula hospital CPC helped build. One day I was summoned by two of the nurses, one of whom was my daughter, as one of the women patients was manifesting some very strange behavior. When I got to the hospital, I encountered something I've never seen before. One patient was doing all of the classic things you hear about: convulsing, angry, frothing at the mouth, yelling, laughing, etc. I was aware there might be medical explanations for such behavior, but even the doctors insisted this was a spiritual problem. Over the next two days, two African pastors and myself spent a good deal of time praying and casting out at least one spirit. As we prayed, the demon kept saying, "I don't like that prayer" and pointing to my Bible and saying, "I don't like that book." Several times I commanded him to tell us his name, but he refused. The interesting thing about this is the woman didn't speak English but I was speaking in English and she understood me! How could that be?

Finally, the demon said, "We are here to make the urine leak," referring to the symptoms of obstetric fistula. On the second day, she calmed down and we felt confident the demon(s) were out. When we asked for her name she gave us her real name. We then led her in a prayer to receive Christ. For the next two days, she was at perfect peace (and no leaking!).

This was the most frightening experience I've ever had. I've come to learn many of these women, desperate for a cure to their leaking bladders, consult witchdoctors for help and thus leave themselves wide open to demonic attack. The spiritual struggle Paul describes here became very real and tangible to me that day.

That's something we rarely see here in America. Satan has different methods with most of us. His work is more subtle; he prefers to stay under the surface. In the classic book on spiritual warfare, *Screwtape Letters*, C.S. Lewis describes advice Satan gives to one of his demons to prepare him for battle against God's work in a person's life: "You'll say these are very small sins; and doubtless, like all young tempters, you're anxious to report spectacular wickedness. But do remember, the only thing that matters is the extent to which you separate the man from the Enemy. It doesn't matter how small the sins are, provided their cumulative effect is to edge the man away from the Light and out into the Nothing. Murder is no better than cards if cards can do the trick. Indeed, the safest road to hell is the gradual one—the gentle slope, soft underfoot, without sudden turnings, without milestones, without signposts."

Most of us will never encounter a frontal attack like I witnessed in Niger, but we're in no less of a battle and the challenge for us is not to be gradually lulled to sleep.

## The Armor of God

Thankfully Paul goes on and speaks very specifically about the armor of God we're to put on in order to stand. We don't have to be unprepared. We have all that's necessary to fight because God has provided his own armor for the battle.

**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. Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God (verses 13–17).**

Most of the time when this passage is taught it's related to the armor a Roman soldier wore. Paul was in prison as he wrote this, chained to a Roman soldier. But I'm convinced that's not the only

thing Paul is thinking about here. He's also thinking about God. In the Old Testament, God is pictured as a warrior who fights for his people. Isaiah wrote a lot about this. Listen to what Isaiah wrote and you tell me if this doesn't sound familiar: Isaiah 11:4–5 says, "*He will strike the earth with the rod of his mouth; with the breath of his lips he will slay the wicked. Righteousness will be his belt and faithfulness the sash around his waist.*" Isaiah 59:17 says, "*He put on righteousness as his breastplate, and the helmet of salvation on his head...*"

You can see why Paul calls this "*the full armor of God.*" These are the things God himself uses to fight. But as his representatives in the world, his armor is provided for us as we engage in battle. Paul paints for us a picture using six images of armor, telling us what they represent and what action is needed to put them on.

### Belt of Truth

The first piece of armor is the belt of truth. Usually made of leather, the soldier's belt actually belonged to his underwear and held his tunic and his sword in place. We're told to "*have the belt of truth buckled around your waist.*" In other words, we need to fasten or tighten our belts and be ready for action. The way we do that is with the truth. What does he mean by truth? I believe he's talking about our character; we're to be people who stand for truth and tell the truth; people of integrity. Paul has talked a lot about truth in this letter. In 4:15 he talked about how the church matures when we "*speak the truth in love.*" He talked about how as new believers we were "*taught in him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus*" (4:21). He told us to "*put off falsehood and speak truthfully to your neighbor, for we are all members of one body*" (4:25). Satan is a liar, but we're to be people of truth.

### Breastplate of Righteousness

The second piece of armor is the breastplate of righteousness. The breastplate of a Roman soldier actually covered both his front and back, protecting all his vital organs. The breastplate can be interpreted in two ways. First, it can refer to our position in Christ. Often in Paul's writings righteousness and justification are synonymous. Through the death and resurrection of Jesus, God has justified us and given us Christ's righteousness as a gift. And since one of the nicknames of the devil is "*the accuser of the brethren*" we have to fight with the conviction that we're righteous not in ourselves but in him. Second, it can also mean our own righteous deeds. When you receive the gift of righteousness, you start to develop a righteous character in righteous living. Right here in Ephesians Paul told us to "*put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness*" (4:24). That's talking about our character.

### Boots of the Gospel of Peace

The third piece of armor is "*having your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from of the gospel of peace.*" The Roman

soldier wore a kind of half-boot on his feet, which was designed for long marches, protecting the soldier's feet from sliding out from under him. The gospel of peace as boots is the good news that we're at peace with God. The gospel gives us certain firmness and makes us steadfast during troubled times of battle. The gospel of peace as boots also readies us to proclaim peace to others. Only those who have peace with God are ready to announce peace to others. As boots carry us from place to place, we bring the gospel of peace wherever we go. How are your boots fitting you these days? When was the last time you shared it?

### Shield of Faith

The fourth piece of armor is the shield of faith. There were two kinds of shields soldiers had during those days. One was small and the other was large and oblong. Paul is referring to the large one. These large shields were very effective in battle. Paul says our shield is faith. Faith lays hold of the promises of God. We begin the Christian life by putting our faith in Christ as Savior. Remember chapter 2, "*By grace you are saved, through faith...*" But that's just the beginning of a life of faith. Through faith we see our circumstances through God's eyes; we're able to trust in him to keep us in times of temptation and doubt and stand safely behind his shield of protection. Proverbs 30:5 tell us God himself is our shield. Notice he says the shield of faith protects us from the "*flaming arrows of the evil one.*" It's interesting, soldiers would drench their shields in water so they could actually extinguish those fiery arrows. What are those arrows? False accusations, false guilt, doubt, pride, discouragement, lust, fear. What do you do when those fiery arrows come your way? Do you stand on the promises of God in times of doubt, discouragement, trouble and temptation?

### The Helmet of Salvation

The fifth piece of armor is the helmet of salvation. The Roman soldier's helmet was made of bronze and it took an ax to cut through it! The Christian's helmet is salvation itself. Our salvation is based on the work of Jesus. Do you know the three tenses of salvation? There is the **past** tense of salvation: through him we've been saved from the penalty of sin. This has to do with our justification before God. We're forgiven and cleansed. There's also the **present** tense of salvation: through him we're being saved from the power of sin. This has to do with our sanctification. His Spirit lives within us and he's transforming us from the inside out into the likeness of Jesus. Finally, there's the **future** tense of salvation: through him we'll be saved from the presence of sin. This has to do with our glorification. When we finally see Jesus face to face we'll be instantaneously changed into his image. I don't think it's any mistake that this helmet of salvation

fits over our head because these are truths we must remember and rehearse in our minds. Back in 4:23 he told us we're to "*be made new in the attitude of our minds.*"

### Sword of the Spirit

The final piece of armor is the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. In the Roman arsenal, there were two swords, a long one and a short one. Paul is referring to the short sword again suited for hand-to-hand combat. This sword was razor sharp, very light, and highly effective. It's also the only offense piece of armor we have.

The vocabulary Paul uses here for "word of God" is unusual. The normal word would have been *logos*, but instead he uses *rhema*, which emphasizes the word spoken or proclaimed. We speak the word of God and like a sword it cuts through the façade of half-truth. When Jesus was tempted in the wilderness by Satan his defense was to speak the word of God—and Satan fled. This spoken word is also used for evangelism. Like a sword, the word cuts through people's defenses, it pricks at their conscience, and stabs them spiritually awake.

In order for us to use the word of God as a sword in this battle, we need to know and understand it. Are you committed to reading, meditating on and even memorizing God's word? How many of you eat only on Sundays? If you did that, you'd starve. You'd for sure come here on Sunday morning malnourished. But how often did you open your Bible this week? How often do you take in a solid meal from Scripture to nourish your soul. I'm not trying to make you feel guilty; we're in a battle. You can't fight without your sword!

There's one more weapon we haven't talked about today. It's our secret weapon. Paul talks about it in verses 18–20. It's prayer. We'll talk about that next week. But for now listen to God's word: Open your eyes. You're in a battle. Your life is a war zone. The only way you can win this battle is through the strength of God. But to receive God's strength you must act. Put on the belt of truth: live truthfully. Put on the breastplate of righteousness; he's made you righteous so you can live a righteous life. Put your shoes on and be ready to announce that peace with God is possible wherever God sends you. Take up the shield of faith, and be ready to live by faith. Take the helmet of salvation, and fill your mind with thoughts about all that his salvation means to you. Get into the Word, listen to God's voice so you can speak truth in a world of lies. If you do all that, you'll stand your ground against the fiercest of all foes, and when the battle is over, you will remain standing.

*This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.*

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