

**Ephesians 6:10-18 Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. <sup>11</sup>Put on the full armor of God, so that you can stand against the schemes of the Devil. <sup>12</sup>For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the world rulers of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. <sup>13</sup>For this reason, take up the full armor of God, so that you will be able to take a stand on the evil day and, after you have done everything, to stand. <sup>14</sup>Stand, then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness fastened in place, <sup>15</sup>and with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace tied to your feet like sandals. <sup>16</sup>At all times hold up the shield of faith, with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming arrows of the Evil One. <sup>17</sup>Also take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. <sup>18</sup>At every opportunity, pray in the Spirit with every kind of prayer and petition. Stay alert for the same reason, always persevering in your intercession for all the saints.**

After studying different languages over the years I have become a big fan of words. I love it when another language comes up with a word for something and there is no equivalent in English. One example would be the German word Schadenfreude. It means to take pleasure from someone else's misfortune. So when I was at MLS if someone dropped their tray in the cafeteria, everyone would clap. That's Schadenfreude. Since English doesn't have a word like that, we just took it directly from German and declared it to also be English.

One of my grandfather's favorite words which he would slip into sermons every now and again is the word vicissitudes, especially in the phrase "the vicissitudes of life." That basically means the same thing as "that's the way the cookie crumbles." Or someone might just say, "That's life." Weird things happen from time to time. There's no sense getting upset about it. When I was in Wisconsin my uncle wrote a paper that he presented at our district convention. I was very pleased when he snuck the word vicissitudes in there.

This text has one of my favorite words in it. It's the word translated as "**full armor.**" It's another word that has been taken right into English: panoply. It is also used to describe an impressive collection of something. Not only is it a fun word, but it is very meaningful for believers. God has completely equipped us to live like the children of God that we are. Prepare for War. Know your enemy, arm yourself, and speak to your commander.

In time of war, it is essential to know who your enemy actually is. In some cases that is easy. When the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor, the enemy was crystal clear. More recently, that's been more difficult. When the Twin Towers in New York City were destroyed by terrorists, this was not state-sponsored. There was no one country we could bomb into oblivion.

In this text Paul is talking about a war that all believers are fighting. So the first thing we need to do is identify our enemy. If I would ask believers who the enemy of the Church is, I'm afraid that an awful lot of them would get it wrong. They might point to a particular candidate for some political office. Maybe they would talk about different governments in our world that are openly hostile to God's Word.

Now people like that can be influenced by the real enemy, but they themselves are not who Paul is talking about here. Those are the puppets. We're after the puppet masters. Paul writes, "**<sup>12</sup>For our struggle is not against flesh and blood.**" So that helps us figure out who the enemy is not. It is not other human beings. It's not a nation that we can declare war on. It's not a terrorist group that the FBI can keep tabs on.

God doesn't leave us guessing as to who the enemy is. He inspired Paul to tell us. "**<sup>12</sup>For our struggle is...against the rulers, against the authorities, against the world rulers of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.**" When you read that you might think of the worldly leaders, but remember he said that the enemy is not flesh and blood.

So who are these rulers, authorities, and forces? In the previous verse one of them was called out by name: "**the Devil.**" That title for him shows that he's always up to no good. He is plotting and planning to destroy every Christian. He might do that by pointing to the problems that we have in life and using them as "evidence" that God doesn't love us anymore. Another one of his favorite tricks is to get us to focus so much on God's blessings to us that we forget that about the one who gave them to us.

It seems strange that Paul would say that the Devil and his cronies are "**the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.**" The word "heaven" can describe where we will spend eternity. It also can mean the sky above us. We sometimes talk about "all the stars in the heavens." It's that second meaning that's used here. Paul's point is that these forces are not earthly. They are not just found in one particular location. These forces are spiritual and they are everywhere.

If the war is just us versus Satan and all his forces, it's going to be a slaughter. It'd be like your next door neighbor declaring war on the United States. That little rebellion won't last long, especially if any of the

other neighbors are armed. Martin Luther wrote about how hopeless we are in the hymn “A Mighty Fortress.” “With might of ours can naught be done, soon were our loss effected.”

But we aren’t alone. Paul writes, “**Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. <sup>11</sup>Put on the full armor of God, so that you can stand against the schemes of the Devil.**” Don’t try to be strong in yourself. God is our refuge and strength as we just sang in the 46<sup>th</sup> Psalm. In the next verses Paul tells us how God has equipped us so we won’t just fight. We will win. Actually, through Christ we’ve already won.

Prepare for War. Know your enemy and then arm yourself.

Paul’s letter to the Ephesians is one of his prison epistles—a letter he wrote when he was in Rome, awaiting trial before Caesar himself. He wasn’t in jail. It was more like he was under house arrest. He could have visitors. But everywhere he went, he was chained to a Roman soldier who would make sure that he wouldn’t escape. He wasn’t really interested in escape anyway since God had given him an opportunity to proclaim Christ crucified to the single most powerful man in the world.

But I often picture Paul writing this part of the book while looking at the soldier who was his constant companion. He lists the parts of a Roman soldier’s armor in the order that he would have put them on. He used that man’s preparation for battle as a picture of a believer’s preparation to do battle against Satan and his forces. Our equipment is not a product of the American military industrial complex. It all comes from God.

The goal in using all of this is that we would be able to stand. Paul uses that verb three times in a row because it is so important. He’s not talking about standing as opposed to sitting but standing firm as opposed to running away. The equipment that God gives enables us to stand up to our enemies, march against them, and ultimately defeat them. There’s no reason to be afraid.

Paul starts out with the belt. That would hold the sheath for a sword as well as show the soldier’s rank. The belt around us is truth—God’s truth, the truth of his Word. The fact that this belt is around us shows that we are completely surrounded by the truth of God’s Word. We know the truth that Jesus is our perfect Savior. That message motivates us and encourages us no matter how bad the day might be.

Then we put on “**the breastplate of righteousness.**” That would protect a soldier’s chest and vital organs. This righteousness is not our own. It is the righteousness we have through Jesus. He obeyed his heavenly Father perfectly in our place. He went to the cross to take all of our unrighteousness on himself. God no longer sees our sin when he looks at us. He sees Christ. That has to be intimidating to Satan too. He looks around the battlefield and everywhere he sees a bunch of little Christs opposing him.

The next one is interesting, “**the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace tied to your feet like sandals.**” If a soldier has his sandals on, he’s ready to march out at a moment’s notice. In the same way, knowing the good news about Jesus makes us ready not only to defend ourselves against Satan but to bring that life-saving message to other people. Interestingly enough, we are fighting a war that is the only way that people can have real peace with God now and forever.

Paul continues, “<sup>16</sup>**At all times hold up the shield of faith, with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming arrows of the Evil One.**” We don’t have faith in our faith. The shield of faith here is the one we have faith in—our Savior Jesus. When Satan wants us to doubt God’s love, we just have to point to the cross. When Satan tempts us to turn away from God, Jesus’ love for us holds us tight. Tied in with that is “**the helmet of salvation**” which guards our minds with the good news that heaven is ours.

Lastly we have our weapon, “**the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.**” You can’t damage our enemy with a sword made of steel, but you can with the sword of the Spirit. One swing cuts Satan in two from top to bottom. It’s interesting that Paul starts with truth and ends with the Word, which is the truth. God’s truth protects us and God’s truth enables us to fight against Satan and win.

Prepare for War. Arm yourself and finally speak to your commander.

In times of war, one of the first things that generals will try to do is to knock out command and control, that is, eliminate the ability of the enemy leadership to be in contact with the troops on the ground and vice versa. They become effectively deaf and blind. That’s why our military has spent so much money on satellites over the years. It’s much harder to knock communications out when they are in outer space.

Communication is also key in our war with Satan and his allies. We already talked about how we listen to God. The truth of God’s Word is our defense and offense. But there should be communication back to God too. If you are a private in the U.S. Army, your commanding officer is not looking for your input. He gives the order. You follow it. We aren’t just foot soldiers in God’s army, we are members of the royal family—princes and princesses. God invites us to come to him in prayer and he will take our requests into consideration in the way he governs this world.

First of all pray for yourself. There's nothing wrong with that. The war we're fighting is already over. Jesus won it for us when he died on the cross. But there are going to be a lot of battles yet to come. Satan wants to turn it into a war of attrition. He wants us to forget that we've already won and act as if victory is impossible. The burden is far too heavy to try to carry yourself.

You don't have to. Take all of your cares and concerns to God. Your burden is trivial to someone who is almighty. Pray that God would give you the strength to keep on keeping on when you just feel like giving up. Pray that God would give you opportunities to talk to someone who doesn't know about their Savior yet so that they can be rescued. Pray that God would give you the confidence to seize those opportunities when they come.

Here's a good idea. Do you want to make your world a better place? Do you want to do something that is guaranteed to improve the United States of America? Then pray for our leaders. If we complain about them, but never pray for them, then you are just going to keep complaining and things will never get better. Pray that God would give them wisdom and that he would guide and direct the affairs of our country for his glory.

While you are at it, pray for your spiritual leaders too. Yes, pray for me, our teachers, and our lay leadership. But also pray for our District President, Gene Sims, and our Synod President, Mark Schroeder. We can remain relatively anonymous, but because they are our leaders, they are convenient targets for those who oppose the Gospel message. Pray that God would give them strength and wisdom to lead us faithfully.

Finally Paul says, "**Stay alert for the same reason, always persevering in your intercession for all the saints.**" Saints aren't people who have died and gone to heaven. Every believer is a saint—that includes you and that includes me. Maybe right now your struggle isn't as great as it sometimes is. I guarantee that one of your fellow believers is in the fight of his life right now.

If you know someone is having difficulties in one way or another, pray for them. Even if you aren't sure or don't know at all, pray for them anyway. I've always found that that is one of the best uses of a church directory. Open up to a random page, pick a name, and pray for them. We aren't lone wolves. We are all in this together. Satan hates it when we are united to God and to each other. Let's make his life miserable.

Prepare for War. Know your enemy, arm yourself, and speak to your commander. All the battlefield imagery in this text might make us think that every day for a Christian is going to be miserable. It won't be, but every day we will need to stand our ground against the Devil, this unbelieving world, and our own sinful nature. The armor, the panoply, that God has given to us is all we need to stand firm and to win.