

The Real War and How to Fight It

Ephesians 6:10-20

June 23, 2024

It'll come to as no surprise to any of you when I say that we are living in some contentious times. Wars, battles, fights and talk of the same, it's common, isn't it? It's constant in the culture. It's like white noise. It's become so constant: wars, battles, and fights all the time. We've actually got actual wars, they're in the news and headlines all the time, kinetic and violent, like Israel and Hamas, Russia and Ukraine. Those are just two of more than a hundred wars and armed conflicts that are going on in the world right now. We're also hearing talk about culture war, cyber war, media war, sounds like 1960s, race war. All this stuff is in the headlines. Battles are being waged against cancer, against disease, and for victims of all kinds, battles. Fights are being fought: the fight for mental health, the fight for psychological well-being, the fight for rights, the right to privacy, the right to free

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speech, and all kinds of rights are being talked about that we need to fight for.

As individuals, as members of society, as employees in the workplace, as citizens in a nation, we can find ourselves involved in various wars and battles and fights throughout various seasons of our lives and for various reasons. Not all battles, not every battle is ours to fight, but there are some wars and there are some battles and fights that are our duty, our duty not just as citizens, but our duty as Christians. And the Lord will give us wisdom about what we should and should not be involved in.

But there is one war from which no Christian is exempt, and it is the war that is at the root of all warfare in this world and all conflict. This is the war that we are called to fight as Christians every single day. It is the most real war of all that we're called not only to fight, but to win.

So to see our call to arms as Christians, I'd like you to turn your Bibles to a very familiar portion of Scripture. It's

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the letter of Ephesians, in Ephesians chapter 6, verse 10. This is the passage that many young people growing up in church learn from a very young age, on the full armor of God, the full armor of God in Ephesians 6:10-20. The Ephesian letter is one of the four prison epistles. It's called one of the prison epistles because Paul wrote this letter literally from his prison cell in the imperial city of Rome. Twice he refers to himself as the "prisoner of the Lord" and at the end of our text this morning in Ephesians 6:20, he calls himself "an ambassador in chains." He's quite literally in prison.

He's quite literally thinking about warfare because Paul had, as constant companions, Roman soldiers. Ever since he was in Jerusalem, ever since he was in Caesarea, imprisoned there for a couple years, ever since his voyage to Rome, he's been in very close proximity to soldiers. He's even been proclaiming the Gospel to Caesar's Praetorian Guard. Never one to waste a trial, but always redeeming the time and taking advantage of every opportunity, Paul found in the soldier's equipment, armor, his weaponry an apt illustration of the Christian life. And no doubt he's reminded of texts like Isaiah 59, which we read earlier, about God himself as a warrior entering in and winning salvation

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for his people. And so he sees that what God wears as weaponry and armor, he gives to his people to wear as well. And so he finds in the soldier's equipment an illustration for the Christian life.

He's written a full epistle of encouragement and exhortation to the Ephesian church, and that letter to the Ephesian church is going to make the rounds to all the churches of Asia Minor. And Paul realizes, then, an opportunity that he has, here, to prepare the churches for the inevitable attack that is going to come to these Christians when they put into practice everything that he's taught them in this letter. If they practice what he has written, they're going to get attacked.

Think about it. Christians, God by his sovereign choice, God by his redeeming grace, God by his election, God by his favor that he's shown to us, he has made us inveterate enemies of Satan when he elected us by his grace. When he united us with Christ, he made us a foe to all of Christ's foes. He put us on his side. And we read about all that in chapters 1-3, what God

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did to save us and bring us into his own family, into his household.

We are devoted to maintaining unity and harmony in the local church and maturing in doctrine and practice, as Ephesians 4:1-16 says, and that the enemy does not like. As Christians, we're growing in the practice of repentance, as Ephesians 4:17-32 says. We are repenting all the time. We're identifying thoughts, attitudes, thinking that needs to be abandoned. The enemy doesn't like that. He likes us to think wicked thoughts. He likes us to be self-centered. He likes us to be proud and not humble. And so when we practice that, the enemy doesn't like it.

Ephesians 5:1-21, Christians are to walk in holiness and love and wisdom. Christians are to play their positions in marriage and in the family, in Ephesians 5:22 all the way through chapter 6, verse 9. They live out the faith in the home and in the world, and when the enemy sees us doing what is written and prescribed by the Apostle Paul, not only in this letter but in other parts of Scripture, when we follow the Lord

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Jesus Christ, from the perspective of our ancient enemy, Satan, people like that are the most dangerous people on the planet.

On the other hand, there are Christians, professing Christians, who are lazy, distracted, in love with the world, caught up in worldliness, concerned about themselves and not really others, Christians who prefer to pursue selfish ambition, Christians who go to church, show up, do the stuff, but their hearts are really elsewhere. They are no threat to the enemy whatsoever. He has really no need to waste any resources fighting against them, because they're no bother to him in any of his operations at all. They're like the soldier who should be on the front line, aiming his weapon at the enemy, but instead of being there in place, being depended on by his brothers and sisters down the line, he's off in the woods somewhere, wandering around; he dropped his gun, took off his helmet looking at the trees, distracted by things. Why should Satan worry about that one?

The true Christians, those who love God, those who live in constant gratitude for eternal salvation, those who are devoted

to the Apostles' teaching, those who are eager to love and obey the Lord Jesus Christ, those who are humbled before God, meek before others, the enemy opposes those kinds of Christians at every single turn. He sees those kinds of Christians as threats that need to be neutralized, taken out of the fight. And that is what brings us to this text: Paul's warning order, his call to arms so that Christians engage in the real war, to fight, to win and stand firm when Satan attacks.

I've got three points for you, starting with the first section there, Ephesians 6:10-13. And you might just write down if you're taking notes: The nature of our warfare, the nature of our warfare. That's Ephesians 6:10-13. Before we run to the front as soldiers in Christ's army, it's crucial that we understand the enemy. It's essential that we know what's at stake, how to define winning and losing, what our assets are, what the enemy capability is. This is mental preparation for combat, you might say, and this is going to set us up for success when the enemy attacks, which he most certainly will. If you are following what Paul writes in Ephesians 1-5, you're going to be a threat, and you're going to be engaged by the enemy. You're going to be targeted; you're going to be on his

hit list. And so we need mental preparation for what's about to come to us, right?

Ephesians 6:10-13, follow along. Paul writes, there, "Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the might of his strength. Put on the full armor of God so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places. 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."

There are several questions that Paul answers here, like, Who's our enemy? What is the aim in battle? What's the goal? What does success look like? And then, What resources do we have to achieve our aim in battle? You can just write down three subpoints, there. Let's first start with, the enemy. We'll start with the enemy, here. The commander in chief, Paul, identifies him in verse 11 as the devil, and then in verse 12 he introduces

the enemy forces. And just some brief observations; obviously, I've only got an hour. I can't get into every detail here, though I'd like to.

But some brief observations on the enemy forces. First, we see it's not a flesh-and-blood war against flesh-and-blood human armies. It's not primarily political or social, though the spiritual war does affect the political and the social and the cultural. But the real war is with spiritual enemies and demonic forces that are arrayed against us, and we can just make some observations about them. They're not flesh and blood. They're spiritual. They're invisible enemies. We can see they're not chaotic. They're not spinning here and there, but they are highly organized and ranked. They march in step. They have an authority-submission structure.

They're not few; we also know from other parts of Scripture they're not few, but they are many; legion, in fact, upon legion. They're not weak, but they are powerful because they are supernatural. If they're not flesh and blood, then they are not natural. They are supernatural, and so that means they're

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stronger than we are. And they are not benign forces. They're not innocent. They're not even neutral. These spirits are malignant, malevolent, evil, defiling forces, and they're personal.

The terms that are used here, rulers, powers, world forces, spiritual forces, they're not synonyms. They are defining different things in the structure. Paul tells us there's a rank structure; there's a hierarchy among these demons, increasing degrees of prominence and authority among the demon hordes. They traverse terrain that is unknown to us, unseen by us. They wander through unseen places between heaven and earth, what some refer to as the sub-celestial, that's below the heavens, and the supra-terrestrial, that's above the earth. There's this space they inhabit, and they move back and forth between it.

The demonic army, highly intelligent, well-organized, supernaturally powerful, able to see what we can't see; so it's beyond night vision and heat signature. And this was definitely the advantage of US forces fighting in Iraq and Afghanistan in the recent 20-year war that we had, that we could see when the

enemy couldn't. We could see at night. We can attack them when they can't see us. They don't know what's coming. They don't know there's a Predator drone above them that's about to rain down fire, and so we can catch them unawares. Well, it's even worse in the spiritual warfare because this enemy has got the capability to see spiritually, to attack from spiritual realms, which means that for us, every attack that comes from them to us is a sneak attack.

That's just a quick overview of the enemy forces. Second, what is the aim in our daily battle with these spiritual forces of evil? What's the aim? Our aim in spiritual warfare, our goal in the battle, pretty clear from two explicit statements there in verse 11 and verse 13. In verse 11, it's "that you may be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil." By the language that Paul uses, we're supposed to face the enemy head-on. We're to confront the attack. On every level of the hierarchy, we're to be engaged against the rulers, against the authorities, against the world rulers. When the enemy comes, Paul says, we are going to be struggling against him, verse 12. And the word, struggling, there, is the word for wrestling. It's talking about hand-to-hand combat. It's a word that could be, in

today's terms, translated as grappling or like Brazilian jujitsu. It's down on the mat. It's face-to-face with your enemy. It's very personal, very intimate, up close and hard.

Another statement of our aim or our goal in spiritual warfare is in verse 13, "that you may be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm." What's this, evil day language? Is Paul talking about some end-times battle, fighting demons belching forth from, from the black abyss? Is this some type of *Left Behind* book or *This Present Darkness*? Remember the Peretti novels? We're slashing demons? No, that's not what he's talking about. Is this a call to bind Satan, cast out demons in the name of Jesus? No, it's not that either.

What's the opposite of resisting? Giving in. What is the opposite of standing? Falling, right? Paul is using martial language, military language, a call to combat to illustrate the true gravity of giving in to temptation and of falling into sin. The fiery darts of verse 16: Darts penetrate, and then the fires

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of temptation go to work, and they burn with enticement until the victim succumbs and sins. That's what's going on here.

Satan and all of his demonic hordes and all the hounds of hell, listen, they cannot destroy God's elect, whom he reconciled to himself by the cross and by the righteousness of Christ. And if you have any questions whatsoever about that, you need to read the great chapter of Paul in Romans 8, especially the latter part of the chapter, Romans 8. If you read that, and you still have questions and doubts about whether or not you're protected truly from the enemy or can ever be lost and ever fall forever away from God, after reading that chapter, if you still have questions, come and talk to me. Come and talk to one of us here at the church and let us help you through that. But Satan and his demonic forces cannot ultimately destroy God's elect because they belong to him. They're united to Christ. They can't touch Christ. They can't touch his people, either.

So unable to destroy God's people, unable to possess those who are already fully possessed by the Holy Spirit, what is Satan able to do to us? How does he engage with us? How does he

fight against us? Well, he tries to make God's people sin. Why? Why is that his strategy? Because he wants to neutralize them. He wants to use their sins to separate them from God in their conscience, not positionally, that can never happen, but relationally, which does happen. Every time we sin, there's a dark cloud that comes over our mind and our conscience, and we pull away and we retract from our God, who loves us, who calls us, child, who wants us to be near. He wants to use sin that we commit to pollute us and darken our consciences and drive a wedge between us and our Father. That's his tactic. That's his strategy.

You may remember in Numbers 22-25 the story of king Balak of the Moabites, who called on Balaam the false prophet to come and curse the Israelites. And when Balaam was unable to curse Israel because God protected them, and overcoming him by the Holy Spirit to speak true prophecies of protection and blessing upon Israel, he was overpowered by the Spirit. So Balaam took a different approach. He counseled Balak the king in a different plan. Hey, I know. In order to get that little reward money you promised me, let's get Israel to sin. Let's get Israel to sin.

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That'll work because then God will judge Israel for you. You don't even need to lift a finger. It's the same strategy for us.

If Satan's goal, then, is to get us to give in to temptation, to fall into sin, to no longer resist, but to give in, to no longer stand but fall, so that he neutralizes our effectiveness, so he pollutes our conscience, so that he defiles us, so that he distracts us from our mission, so he discourages us from living the Christian life, then what's our goal? What's our goal? Do not sin. Do not sin in your thoughts, your attitudes, in your heart, in your will, in your imaginations, in the grumbling and complaining of your heart, in the way you speak or think about other people. Don't sin.

In the way you interact with people, don't sin. In the way you live your life and set your priorities of your life, don't sin. Stay on mission. Make progress in holiness. That's the goal. Keep trusting God. Keep obeying Jesus Christ. Keep making disciples. In other words, keep on pursuing the faithful obedience that Paul wrote about from Ephesians 1:1-6:9, that whole section. Do that. That is standing firm. Stay on mission.

So how do we do that? This is the third question just in this first section, here. The third question: What hope do we have when we're on the defense all the time? What, what hope do we have when we face sneak attacks from an invisible enemy? He's not using night vision, heat signature, he's not doing any of that. He's actually seeing us spiritually and moving in ways that we can never even see or detect. How do we deal with sneak attacks from an invisible, superior enemy? What's our resource?

The truth is, when we understand the resources at hand and at our disposal, when we really get this as Christians, we realize Satan does not stand a chance. His attacks are fruitless. His efforts are worthless, futile. The thesis verse of the section, verse 10, says it all, "Finally," here's the secret, "be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might." In a war with a non-flesh-and-blood enemy, a spiritual enemy of demonic forces, we would be nuts to think that we have the resources in ourselves, natural human intellect, ingenuity, wisdom, cleverness, strength, political prowess, whatever it is, we'd be nuts to think we have the resources to fight a non-flesh-and-blood enemy ourselves, in our own strength and our own

power, because this fight is on a whole different plane. It's in a spiritual realm, and we would be fools to think that the weapons of our warfare are carnal. They are not carnal.

But if we're strong in the Lord, as it says here, this one-of-a-kind, unique person of Jesus Christ, the only one who possesses both a divine nature and a human nature in one person, he's omnipotent God and at the same time perfect man, if we're strong in the strength of his might, Satan and all the hosts of Hell, they don't stand a chance, do they? The command that Paul lays down here, it's kind of unique in the way he puts it, the way he writes it.

The command is not in the active voice: John hit the ball. It's in the passive voice: The ball was hit by John. It's a passive voice command, and it's not a one-time act of obedience. It's a call to repeated action here. It's something that we do daily, if needed, hourly. Sometimes in a great fight, moment by moment, literally, he says here, the way he constructs this in the language, he says, Be being continually strengthened in the Lord and in the strength of his might.

So the passive voice, to be strengthened, it reminds us and it highlights the fact that this is not our strength. It's the Lord's strength. And the present tense, Keep on being strengthened, highlights the reality that we have a constant need, a daily need, as I said, and sometimes an hour-by-hour and a moment-by-moment need for his strength. Do you sense that need? Do you have the sense of your own need every single day that you need the Lord and his strength? Because if you don't have that sense, you're already neutralized. You're the soldier wandering around, drop the weapon, drop the helmet, drop the shield, everything. You're wandering around the woods. You do not understand what you're a part of. Do you sense your daily need? I sure do. I really do.

And what can we do when we sense our need but respond in humble prayer, praying after the pattern of someone like Augustine in his *Confessions*, who said, "Give what you command and command whatever you will." "Tell me to charge whatever hill, take whatever mountain, fight whatever enemy. Just give me what I need, whatever you've commanded me, equip me, provide for me, help me." That's the attitude of a Christian.

Obedience to the command requires fear. There's a healthy fear of the threat that we have from our enemy, yes; but more importantly, it's the fear of the Lord to turn away from evil. There's a greater fear, a deeper fear we have. It's a reverence for the holiness of God, and that brings obedience to the command. Obedience to this command to be strong and strength of his might also requires humility.

We have to know that our strength in and of ourselves is utterly insufficient to resist any temptation. It's insufficient to keep ourselves from falling into sin. His strength is what we need so desperately. We need it every day. Obedience to the command requires trust. We have to believe that the Spirit who has issued the command through Paul has the ability and the willingness to give us what we need so we can stand firm, resist temptation, not fall into sin, but actually keep on the march, obeying his will.

To encourage you in these virtues, fear, humility, trust in the Lord and to motivate you to seek his strength daily, moment-

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by-moment, hour-by-hour, consider the kindness of our Lord. He is willing and able and joyful to give us what we need every time we ask it. Some people bemoan their station. They look at what God has put in their lives by his good and faithful wise providence, and they think it's too much for them. I can't handle this. I can't handle this. Whenever you feel that way, it's a good sign because that's the point you're supposed to realize: I can't handle this. That's a good lesson for you to walk through all the time. Feeling overwhelmed, feeling overcome—it's not a terrible thing. It's what you do next.

Do you isolate and complain? Do you lash out, get angry? Do you feel resentful of what God has put into your life and the station that's yours by his grace and his kindness? Or do you go to him and ask? Do you seek his help? Do you search the Scripture for the help that you will find there? Because God has given us his wisdom on the pages of Scripture. Do you seek more mature Christians who will come to you and actually confront you and tell you, You know what, your attitudes are wrong, here, and you need to repent. I've been there. I need to repent, too. Let me show you what I did. Let me encourage you to do that because we have a God who loves to be asked for help.

Consider these words from the Puritan pastor William Gurnall. He writes this, "Which, think you, speaks more love and condescension for a prince to give a pension to a favorite on which he may live independently by his own care," that is, for a prince who's got somebody he's going to care for, and he just dumps upon them everything they'll need forever. Does that speak great love and condescension? Maybe.

But what about this? Gurnall says, "or for this prince to take the chief care upon himself and come from day to day to this man's house, and to look into his cupboard, and see what provision he has, and what expense he's at, and so constantly to provide for this man from time to time?" That is, the prince entering into your home every day, opening up your cupboards, looking in your kitchen, seeing what you need, looking at your bank account, looking at your statements. Gurnall goes on to say, "Possibly some proud spirit that likes to be his own man or loves his means better than his prince would prefer the former, but one that is ambitious to have the heart and love of his prince would be ravished with the latter."

Which one are you? Do you say, God, give me what I need for the rest of my life and don't bother me any further? Or do you say, God visit me and my heart and my house every day. Show me my need, and let me ask you for your wealth, for your resources to help me; but come again tomorrow and the next day and the next day, because I love you more than your stuff. Which one are you? This is how our God attends to us in giving us his Son, isn't it, in granting us his Holy Spirit to show us our need every day, commanding us to come to him. William Gurnall continues; he says, "The great God comes and looks into our cupboard to see how we're laid in, and he sends in accordingly as he finds us. Your heavenly Father knows you have needed these things, and you shall have them. He knows you need strength to pray and to hear and to suffer for him. And in the very hour it will be given."

I mentioned the Cortezes and Isabel. When she first found out about this and was waiting for a full diagnosis and then kind of a decision on what the treatments should be, she admitted to me, "I'm scared. This is frightening. I don't know what I'm going to do." And yet her Lord visited her in her

moment of need and has strengthened this woman to make her not just an example of a Christian, but an example of a very mature Christian who now gives thanks for the trial and gives thanks for the process, that though it's going to be grueling and painful and fatiguing and take every ounce of life out of her, her Lord is there to give her everything that she needs.

What is the need of the hour, every hour? It's protection from our enemy, to resist the enemy, to keep from falling into sin so that we keep walking righteously, we keep pleasing the Lord. This leads us to a second point, number two if you're jotting down notes: the weapons of our warfare. We talked about the nature of our warfare, now the weapons of our warfare. The word that's translated there, full armor in verse 11 and verse 13, *panoplia*, a panoply. You've heard the word, panoply. It joins together two words: *pan*, which means, all, and then the word *hoplon*, the word for the equipment of warfare. In studying history, you may have heard the word, hoplite, before. That's the, the heavily-armed Greek soldier. That's this word *hoplon*, *hoplite*.

The individual pieces of his equipment are listed here in verses 14-17. Now anybody who's studied history knows that not everything that the Greek or Roman soldier wore into battle was listed here in Ephesians 6. Paul's not intending to give an itemized list of his equipment. He doesn't put on greaves or shin guards or, you know, javelin and spear. Those were all essential pieces of equipment in warfare back in those times. But he puts down the pieces of equipment that best illustrate the virtues that we need in the Christian life.

As Paul begins in verse 14, he pictures the soldier dressing for battle in his tent before he heads out to the battlefield. Look at verse 14. It says, "Stand firm, therefore, having gird your loins with truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and having shod your feet with the preparation of the Gospel of peace." And we see the point, don't we? Paul is using the pieces of a soldier's armor to illustrate the spiritual protection that God provides for those who walk in Christian virtues. It's living in the sincerity of the truth. It's living in righteousness. It's walking in the confidence that the Gospel of peace gives us. When we live to please God,

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God becomes our ever-present champion. He is our secret weapon who obliterates all of our enemies.

So we're looking at the imagery of a soldier in this section getting ready for battle, getting ready for the day's warfare. He's in his tent, and he girds himself, straps on his body armor, and then he puts on his footwear. Let's break that down a bit. For the soldier in those days, the belt fastened all the loose folds of his flowing tunic, fastened all those folds of the tunic to his body and allowed him to move about freely, rapidly, without any hindrance. And then the belt also didn't just strap him down and keep him tight, but it also provided a platform for all the other equipment that he would attach to himself. So body armor, the pad beneath the body armor, the dagger, the sword—all that was attached to his belt.

So like the soldier's belt, the truth is what keeps all the loose ends of our Christian thinking tucked in, organized, tightly bound. The doctrinal truths of Scripture, the theology of God's Word, the deeper this goes, it provides a sound and sure platform for every other virtue of the Christian life.

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Those who don't think according to the truth, their minds and their emotions and their thinking is all over the place. It's loosely flowing, not strapped down. That's what the truth is supposed to do to us, and it provides a platform for every other virtue to grow from.

The most important piece of armor, you could say, just vitally speaking, the most important piece of the inner armor, it protects all the vital organs, is the breastplate. In modern terms it's called, you know, that plate that covers over the essential organs. And for the Christian, what protects our vitals is righteousness. Righteousness protects us from taking any life-ending blow. Listen again to William Gurnall; he says, "For the devil, Christian blood is sweet to his tooth." He's talking about the blood of martyrdom, there. "For the devil, Christian blood is sweet to his tooth, but the blood of the Christian's godliness is far sweeter. He'd rather, if he could, kill that than them. He would rather draw the Christian away from his godliness or his righteousness than to butcher him for it."

As we said earlier, this is the exact strategy the devil had that he taught to Balaam and to Balak. Rather than pronouncing a curse upon Israel, which they could not do, they were able to make Israel accursed, which they could do by their engaging in sin with the women of Moab and then watching God judge them for it. Gurnall says, "The devil counts that the complete victory. He'd rather see saints defiled with unrighteousness and sin than defiled with blood and gore. Persecution, he has learned, only mows the church, which afterward comes up thicker for it. It is unholiness that ruins it."

The final preparatory piece of equipment for the soldier, what he's to put on before he leaves his tent, it's his footwear. Verse 15: "Having shod your feet with the preparation of the Gospel of peace." Some translations say "readiness of the Gospel of peace." Soldiers in that day wore sturdy, hobnailed, cleated boots secured with leather strapping around their feet, their ankles, and up their calves. If they were engaged in cold weather campaigns, their footwear was stuffed with wool or was lined with fur. For the soldier, proper footing on the battlefield is the difference between life and death, between

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standing and falling, between striking a deadly blow or being struck by one because you're off balance. For the Christian, the footwear pictures our preparation, or a better translation is our readiness or our stability. It's the readiness that comes from the Gospel of peace.

The Gospel of peace, we're talking, there, about not the feeling first, but we're talking about the status, primarily. The Gospel of peace is an objective peace with God, the end of his hostility against us for our sins because of the cross of Christ. That is what stabilizes us whenever we're under attack: to know that God has saved us, to know that our sin is forgiven and it's gone, to know that Christ's righteousness covers us—that's what stables us. That's what enables us to stand firm and fight, have courage, be bold. The Gospel of God's objective peace with us because of Christ provides a foundation for our subjective sense of peace, so necessary on the battlefield. When a soldier is at peace with a quiet conscience and a settled heart, he makes good decisions, he fights intelligently, he stands firm.

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It's how a soldier, this whole picture, here, in the very first portion, these first three pieces, this is how a soldier gets dressed in his tent. This is how he readies himself for the day of battle, for facing the enemy. And this is how a Christian readies himself every single morning. We're not passive about this. We're intentional. We're active. It's a conscious commitment, through diligent prayer and by intentional planning, to walk in truth and walk in righteousness because of the Gospel of peace. It's how we live.

So girded up vital areas, protected footwear securely fastened, the soldier then leaves his tent, and he grabs two more pieces of equipment and one weapon. Look first at the shield of faith in verse 16, "In addition to all," or that could be translated, above all, high priority here, "take up the shield of faith with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one." It's not an overstatement to say that the shield was the soldier's most important piece of defensive equipment on the battlefield. With the proper use of the shield, one could literally hide naked behind his shield and survive any attack. That is how comprehensive the protection of the shield was.

This is why the shield was the most prized piece of equipment above all other pieces on the battlefield. Gurnall says, "The soldiers counted it a greater shame to lose their shield than to lose the field, and therefore went under the very foot of their enemy. They would not part with it, but esteemed it an honor to die with their shield in their hand. The charge of one mother that she laid upon her son going into the wars when she gave him a shield was that he should either bring his shield home with him or he be brought home upon his shield. She'd rather see him dead with it than come home alive without it." End quote.

To drop and lower the shield in the battlefield, it doesn't just expose a single soldier to danger; it puts the whole line of soldiers at risk. The whole squad, the whole platoon, the whole company is at risk with one weakness in the line. It creates a vulnerability that can be exploited by the enemy, and that's why it's better to come home dead on top of the shield than to come home alive without it. Dying with honor is better than living with the shame that you let your whole platoon down and got others killed.

Pre-eminent above all the soldier's gear, the shield is the most fitting picture for the pre-eminence of faith. Faith is that which provides comprehensive protection for the Christian in every single battle over a lifetime of warfare. And the stronger we are at lifting that shield, which is heavy, I mean, the literal word for shield, in the Greek is door. It's like a door. It's like a small door you hide behind. It's heavy to lift that thing, and sometimes they had to soak that thing down with water to extinguish flaming arrows in battle. You have to be strong. That means you have to lift. That means you have to get strong for battle. We're not talking about preening guys who strut around the gym. We're talking about hardened soldiers on the battlefield who know what it is when their life is on the line, and the life of their buddies is on the line. It's comprehensive protection. It's hard to lift it. You have to exercise.

Faith is like that. It's hard to lift because we live in a flesh-and-blood reality where everything is seen, where everything is visual, everything is tangible. We can touch it. We feel it. Faith requires vision that is beyond this world.

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It's trusting that what is unseen is more important than what's seen. It's looking to the invisible God and depending upon his stated promises. That's what lifting the shield is. And you can be weak at it, and you can be strong at it.

The stronger we are in exercising faith, the more protection for us and the more protection for others around us, too. Why is that? Because protected by faith, strengthened in faith, all the other graces and all the other virtues of the Christian thrive and grow to maturity, and they blossom and bear fruit. It's comprehensive protection that ensures comprehensive growth in the Christian life.

For lack of faith, the mightiest mind, the most superior intellect, the most gifted among us, that person can fall, be led away into sin and into apostasy. But conversely, by faith, the very weakest saint among us can send the demons fleeing and be protected from sin and error and unbelief. All they need to do is just get behind that shield.

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Faith protects the life of the Christian from every attack of the enemy. How is that? Because faith brings our God into the battle. He is our fortress and our shield. Bret was preaching that last week in Psalm 144. God is our fortress. God is our shield. God is our refuge. When we hide behind him, he's pleased to step up and extinguish the flaming arrows of the evil one and to mash the enemy with his big, powerful hand. So Christian, never drop your shield. Don't lower it one inch. Prefer to be carried dead on top of your shield to the very gates of heaven than to live without it.

So fully equipped with belt, body armor, combat boots, protected by the shield, it's time to grab our helmet, grab our rifle or our sword, go out and meet the enemy. Fully protected, now we are ready to go take the field, to meet the enemy, and to see God do some damage. Look at verse 17, "Also receive the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God." Notice that unlike previous pieces of armor, the helmet and the sword do not illustrate Christian virtues, but Christian gifts. As a soldier in God's army, you already possess a helmet of salvation. You already hold a sword of the Spirit.

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All you need to do is take them into battle and use them.
They're yours.

With the head protected, the soldier has confidence to face the enemy and engage in combat. With the head protected, the soldier has clarity of mind to make good decisions. That's why the helmet represents salvation, the assurance of eternal life by which the Christian has full confidence, total clarity to think in spiritual warfare.

What about the final piece, the sword of the Spirit? The sword is the most defining piece of a soldier's equipment, isn't it? After all, what is a soldier without his sword? And when you see someone holding a sword or walking around with a weapon, you know they're part of the military or part of law enforcement. It means something, doesn't it? This is a defining piece of equipment. One has said, "A pilot without his chart, a scholar without his book, and a soldier without his sword are all alike ridiculous. But above all these, it is absurd for one to think of being a Christian without the knowledge of the Word of God and some skill to use this weapon."

The sword that's referred to in verse 17 is the Roman short sword. It's called the *machaira*, very light in weight, razor sharp, about 18 inches long or so, double-edged for cutting. It was tapered to a point for thrusting and stabbing. It is the perfect weapon for close-quarters battle, which was all that warfare back then. Once they broke through the line with the javelins and spears or missiles that were fired into the line, once it got personal and up close, which is what this warfare is talking about, it required close-quarters combat, and that's what this sword is for.

It's the same imagery, same word used in Hebrews 4:12, "The word of God is living and active. It's sharper than any two-edged," here it is, *machaira*, "sword, piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, joints and marrow, able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart."

It's very sharp, very penetrating like a scalpel on the battlefield. This razor-sharp precision weapon, it does require training and skill for effective use, right? We understand this,

that in the hands of the immature or the unwise, those who are unskilled in handling such an exceedingly sharp weapon, the sword can do great damage, collateral damage, and cause friendly fire. But in the hands of a well-trained, skilled, experienced swordsman, it's mighty, through God, to the pulling down of strongholds.

Think about the privilege that we have, here. The Spirit's sword is the Word of God, and God is pleased to put this very special weapon into the hands of each of his soldiers. What an honor and what a privilege to wield this infinitely powerful weapon. Think about God's wisdom in giving us this privilege as his people, as his soldiers. He is the one who's chosen his Spirit to dwell in every single believer, and this means that he has armed each and every one of us with this weapon. That means the Holy Spirit has not just one sword in his hand, but he has many swords in the hands of many swordsmen, all of whom he controls.

The Spirit is the one who trains us to use the sword. He directs us for example and for instruction to the master

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swordsman, Jesus Christ, who is an expert in wielding the sword. The Scripture becomes to us like a series of training videos, always showing us Christ, always showing us how to wield the sword of the Word of God. We just need to observe. We've been doing that, haven't we, through the Gospel of Luke, watching our Lord as a master swordsman cut his way through every enemy challenge.

In peacetime, a soldier becomes very familiar with his weapon. He learns to break it down, clean it, knows its specs, rate of fire, max effective range. He can tell you, especially the Marine Corps, they can tell you everything about that weapon. I remember being on a boat with Marines, and I'm watching this particular Marine that I have in my mind, and he was breaking down and cleaning his weapon every single day. We hadn't gotten to the battlefield, yet. In combat, though, the soldier becomes an expert with his weapon. Why is that? Obviously, because he uses it all the time, and he uses that weapon as if his life depends on it. He makes sure that that weapon is always functioning, always shooting accurately. He's getting better and better, more proficient with his skills. He's practicing all the time, and when he's in combat, he's not

practicing. He's doing it for real. He knows his weapon, and he shoots accurately.

And that is just one of the benefits in spiritual warfare, of engaging in the fight, of resisting in the evil day and standing firm against all the devil's schemes. God uses in our lives an aggressive, evil, malevolent, cunning enemy always intent on taking us down. He's using that enemy to train us, to turn us into battle-hardened soldiers, mature and strong in Christ, who know how to wield the sword, following the pattern of the master swordsman, Jesus Christ himself.

So beloved, get up every day of your life, secure your minds in the truth. Let the truth revealed by God, accurately interpreted, let the truth be the judge of all right and wrong, of all good and bad. Don't let tradition or what I'm used to, or what feels right, and all that stuff. Truth is the key. Does it line up to the truth or does it not? That's the issue. And truth must be understood, right? You've got to know what it means. Commit yourselves to righteousness as defined by the truth of God's Word, not according to the culture, not according to your

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own personal sense of justice. Righteousness is defined by God's Word. Commit yourself to that, obedient to the Lordship of Christ.

Let the Gospel of peace with God secure your hearts and minds so that the subjective peace of God guards your hearts and minds in the evil day. Lift the shield of faith every single day as if your life and the life of your teammates depends on it, because it does. Your faith strengthens the soldiers around you. When you drop your shield, it weakens those around you, too. So believe God, trust his Word without any doubt, without any hesitation. That is the main work of the Christian. It offers total protection, comprehensive protection against every flaming arrow from the evil one.

And then, beloved, fully protected, charge into your day to do the work of the Lord with a helmet of salvation to give you confidence and clarity of mind in making wise decisions, and become an expert swordsman by constant use, not an expert about the technical issues of all the Word of God. That's important to know, but that's not how you use your weapon. You wield the

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sword of the Spirit, the Word of God, with skill and accuracy because of constant, daily use.

When you're prepared like this, you link arms with your comrades in arms. You become an effective member of the team to carry out your strategic role in warfare, which brings us to a third and final point, very brief point here, and I'll expand on this point a little bit more next week. Number three, it's the practice of our warfare. We've talked about the nature of our warfare, the weapons of our warfare, and now the practice of our warfare, number three.

Notice how the practice of our warfare involves, verses 18-20; a lifelong, always maturing habit of prayer. Look at verses 18-20. We're to be "praying at all times, with all prayer and petition in the Spirit, and to this end being on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints, as well as on my behalf," Paul says, "so that words may be given to me in the opening of my mouth, to make known with boldness the mystery of the Gospel, for which I'm an ambassador in chains, so that in proclaiming it, I may speak boldly as I ought to speak."

By this point, as you can see for yourself, Paul has left the metaphor of the soldier's armor behind, and he speaks directly about prayer. There's no mistaking his intent. He's calling Christian soldiers who are mentally prepared, properly dressed, ready for a battle to engage in spiritual warfare, to go on the offensive by all prayer and petition in the Spirit, by staying alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints, and for Paul in particular, for the success of his apostolic mission.

If Paul had continued the metaphor here, what is analogous to prayer in terms of modern warfare, I think, is communication, say, the role, the vital role on the battlefield of a field radio or these days satellite communications. Because far more potent and deadly than an individual soldier with a rifle is an individual soldier with a radio. Higher power, something coming from the sky, raining down lethal firepower.

I just finished reading a book about the highly trained, skilled men of the Air Force Combat Control teams, the CCT.

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These are men who embed with Tier 1 special operators, like the army's Delta Force and Navy SEAL Team 6. They're capable of all kinds of things, including air traffic control for bombing runs on the battlefield, gun runs from all kinds of aerial platforms, fast moving jets, AC-130 gunships, attack helicopters and the like. These men, the CCT, the combat control teams, these men are the definition of force multipliers. They're able to move quickly and stealthily with small units of four to six men, but they bring an outsized influence of firepower on the battlefield by raining death and destruction on the enemy ground forces.

Beloved, you who are Christian soldiers engage in this spiritual warfare. That is who God has called you to be, force multipliers. That's what God has called you to do. And from the youngest Christian child to the oldest, say most feeble senior saint, from the frailest grandmother to the most physically capable among us, "by all prayer and petition in the Spirit, staying alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints," you are the ultimate force multiplier when you engage in spiritual warfare in prayer.

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Do not underestimate this weapon, this power. Those who do not pray do not understand what we're engaged in. You need to pray and pray thoughtfully, intentionally, according to the truth, according to righteousness, according to the Gospel of peace, according to faith, according to salvation, according to the word of God. Pray. You are bringing divine power, firepower, into the battlefield. You're unleashing the omnipotent power of God on spiritual forces. You are obliterating all obstacles that stand in the way of God's will and God's Gospel.

This is how, back to verse 10, this is how we're to "be strengthened in the Lord and in the might of his strength." His unstoppable power is brought to bear when we pray. And just very quickly looking at this section, what are we praying for, and for whom are we praying? First, we're to pray for all the saints, your comrades in arms around you, your brothers and sisters who are fellow soldiers in Christ's army. Pray for church members. Pray that they would be intentional and diligent and habitual about putting on the full armor of God along with you, to stand firm, to resist in the evil day, to keep standing firm. Pray for one another.

Second, according to this text, we're to pray for specially chosen servants of Christ, such as those whom Paul identified back in Ephesians 4:11, "He gave some as apostles, some as prophets, some as evangelists, some as pastors and teachers." We know the time of the Apostles and the prophets is past, but they were men, weren't they, chosen specially by Christ. They set the revelatory and doctrinal foundation of the church, and their mission was successful. And we have the results of their ministry and their mission recorded right here in the New Testament. So everything that the Apostles and prophets have provided is with us now, that we need for life and salvation.

But there are other specially chosen servants of Christ whom Paul mentioned. He talked about the evangelists and the pastors and the teachers, those specially gifted men given to the church to equip the saints, Ephesians 4:12, for the work of the ministry. They, like Paul, are called to open their mouths and to preach the truth accurately and to preach it boldly. It's after the pattern that was set by Paul, set by the other Apostles. These men are chosen by God for a very special assignment, namely to use their words with wisdom and faithfulness and maturity, but to use their words, opening their

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mouths to proclaim the mystery of the Gospel, the doctrines of the church, the theology of conversion, of repentance, of sanctification, of Gospel ministry. These men are commanded to speak and exhort and reprove with all authority, Titus 2:15 says. They're to let no one disregard the truth that they're charged by God to administer to the saints.

So, Grace Church, you are chosen by God to be force multipliers through your prayers. Are you doing that? Are you putting your faith and love into daily practice by praying for one another, for the needs of your brothers and sisters in this church? Or is your heart only sensitive to yourself and your own concerns and quite cold toward others? Ask the Lord to reveal that to you, to help you with that.

Are you praying for the men that God gave you, specially chosen gifted servants of Christ, your pastors, elders, so that they will make known to you without partiality, without fear, with total courage, make known to you with boldness the mystery of the Gospel? Do you welcome the truth preached clearly? Do you

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welcome exhortation, even confrontation from your pastors and elders and other Christians?

Because listen, a church that suits up for battle in the full armor of God, a church that prays for one another with all prayer and petition in the Spirit, a church that prays for its pastors that in proclaiming the truth to you, they may speak boldly as they ought to speak, listen, that is a healthy church, strong in the Lord. It's a church with its members that stands firm, that resists the devil, that advances the cause of Christ and his Gospel. It's a healthy church, filled with healthy church members who are force multipliers on the battlefield. Let that be us, Grace Church. Let that be us. Let's pray.

Our Father, we thank you for this clear word from the Apostle Paul about a Christian suited up in the full armor of God and doing on the battlefield what he's called to do, to wield the sword of the Spirit and to pray for one another as soldiers in the Christian army, but also to pray for the leaders in the Christian army under the Lord Jesus Christ, under the commander in chief of all the forces of the hosts of the Lord.

And we pray that you would use us, and I know we're using militant language and military language, but this is talking about Christian virtue, Christian grace, gifts given to the Christian that we might grow and be strong and be steadfast to resist all temptation and enticement, to turn away from all distraction; that we'd put our faith fully in you and have a clear-eyed vision to the Lord Jesus Christ to follow in his steps, to listen to his commands and obey him with joy and that we would be on the battlefield with good effect.

We pray that you would save and sanctify many through the bold, clear witness of the mystery of this Gospel that's proclaimed through the members of this church, and we pray that you would do a mighty work among us. Help us, each and every one, to put on the full armor of God and to resist in the evil day and to stand firm. For your glory we pray this, Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, and obviously, by the power of your Spirit who indwells each one of us, we pray. Amen.