

Ephesians: The Spiritual Armor

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Prayer of Illumination

Lord, open our hearts and minds by the power of your Holy Spirit, that we may hear your Word with joy and respond in love. Amen.

Background

The book of Ephesians mentions four spiritual positions that God has made possible for believers: *sit, walk, stand, and finally, kneel.*

We're to sit. This indicates the believer's status and position before God. We're seated with Christ in the heavenly realms.

Second, we're to walk. In Christ, we can walk the walk. This means we're empowered to live out our status and calling by abiding in Christ.

Third, we're to stand. Four times in our Scripture reading this morning we're summoned to stand firm and stand up to Evil.

Finally, we're to kneel. To pray at all times.

Before we hear the reading of God's Word, I think it's important to properly interpret the metaphors found in our reading.

First, this passage definitely doesn't sanction military crusades by the church. Paul reminds us in 2 Corinthians 10:3, "we don't wage war according to human standards."

Second, the Scripture reading isn't advocating violence or combative attitudes in our human relationships. Demonizing individuals and groups are incompatible with our faith.

Despite these cautions, I believe the imagery of the full armor of God is still helpful for the Christian.

God has equipped us with supernatural weapons to wage active peace—building and shielding community, reconciling relationships, and proclaiming the gospel.

Let's hear now the Word of the Lord, a great summary and conclusion to the book of Ephesians.

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Scripture: Ephesians 6:10-20 (NRSV)

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his power. Put on the whole armor of God, so that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For our struggle is not against enemies of blood and flesh, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. Therefore take up the whole armor of God, so that you may be able to withstand on that evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm. Stand therefore, and fasten the belt of truth around your waist, and put on the breastplate of righteousness. As shoes for your feet put on whatever will make you ready to proclaim the gospel of peace. With all of these, take the shield of faith, with which you will be able to quench 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.

Pray in the Spirit at all times in every prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert and always persevere in supplication for all the saints.

Pray also for me, so that when I speak, a message may be given to me to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it boldly, as I must speak.

*The grass withers and the flower fades,
but the Word of God endures forever.*

SERMON – Ephesians: The Spiritual Armor

There are four great struggles found in literature:

First, *Man vs. Man*. This is the good guy vs. the bad guy story line.

- Snow White vs. The Queen.
- Dorothy vs. The Wicked Witch of the West.
- Dora the Explorer vs. Swiper.

Second, there's *Man vs. Self*. A great example of this is Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. "To be or not to be. . ." What will Hamlet do about his dysfunctional family issues?

Third, there's *Man vs. Society*—like in Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451* where the individual struggles against and resists the culture of normal. Dystopian novels like *The Hunger Games, 1984, or The Handmaid's Tale* are also good examples.

Fourth, there's *Man vs. Nature*—Classic examples can be found in *Moby Dick, Life of Pi, The Perfect Storm* or most convincingly *Sharknado*.

There are other struggles like *Man vs. Technology*, *Man vs. Fate*, or *Man vs. God*.

Our passage addresses another major struggle in the drama of salvation:

Man vs. Evil. Or more accurately **God + Man vs. Evil.**

What's different about this one is that we know who will win in the end. But there's still a struggle leading up to the final victory.

But wouldn't it be nice if our faith were one long retreat filled with retreat, tranquility, solitude, and rest? Or what if we could daily enjoy those spiritual mountain tops—and never have to go down into the valley? We all know this isn't reality, even for good and faithful Christians.

Life is more often than not ... *a struggle*. A wrestling match. In the spiritual life, we're going to face opposition, resistance, and evil—*guaranteed*. This spiritual conflict can be manifested in different forms. The Scriptures identify them as the world, the flesh, and the devil.

The world. Institutional structures can become literally demonic. Institutions aren't inherently evil. But they can become infected with evil if injustice is ignored, not resisted, or rewarded. We encounter evil in governments and councils whenever there is genocide, terror, tyranny, oppression, or racism. Then there are the not-so-subtle pressures by society to be worldly instead of godly. It takes deliberate effort and mindfulness not to blindly follow the herd and instead go against the grain.

Toxic environments in varying degrees can also fester in other institutions like homes, work places, schools, school boards, and even in church systems. This conflict is exhibited through *silos, politics, and turf wars*.

We have to deliberately foster good relationship, thoughtful procedures, and healthy boundaries to keep a community vibrant and glorifying to God.

In addition to the world, there's **the flesh**. Human pride. Ego. Selfish ambition.

I regularly need to don the full of armor of God to protect me from ... *myself*. All of us need to regularly be attuned to and checking and re-checking our tunnel vision and motivations and impulses that can take a turn to the dark side.

No one is immune—not pastors, not God-fearing Christians, nobody.

Prayer, reflection, and listening to mentors, honest friends, and peers is crucial to self-mastery and being Spirit-controlled. These important people are sounding boards and checks and balances. They're a second set of eyes to speak into our lives when we get too full of ourselves or have blind spots. We need to be open to their feedback and pushback.

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Then there's **the devil**. Our passage lets us know there's a lot more to the Evil One than a red suit, pitchfork, goatee, and widow's peak like Eddie Munster. Evil is much more subtle and seductive than that.

Lucifer in Scripture is described as an angel of light. Here we see the Evil One's MO unveiled. The spiritual forces of the Angel of Light are scheming, cunning, and malevolent. We can't be naïve—like a virus, evil is on a seek and destroy mission.

Like it or not, we're engaged in spiritual warfare against it. We need to remain spiritually awake and attuned. We're in a wrestling match between our old self and our new self. Between being selfish or serving. Between darkness and light. And to remember all of us are mixed bags of both darkness and light.

So what we need is a power and a strength beyond ourselves that will help us continue to overcome these dark urges that come from within and from without.

Paul tells us we're to find our **STRENGTH IN THE LORD** and **GOD'S MIGHTY POWER**. But we need to be careful how we use this power entrusted to us—it's like electricity. Electricity can be destructive—like being electrocuted or hit by lightning. But electricity can also be harnessed for good—to light up a home or power an appliance or vehicle. Power can be wielded destructively or redemptively.

Let's prayerfully choose redemption over destruction. I know all too well in my own life, this is easier said than done. And yet the full armor of God reminds us that the powers that be don't always see it that way. And so we need spiritual covering—we need all of God's armor, not parts of it.

We need the spiritual armor not only individually, but also collectively as a church.

The **full armor of God** reminds us to not be self-sufficient, but rather God-sufficient. With this divine hedge of protection, we can stand fast and stand firm and stand together united—to the end.

First, let's tighten the **BELT of TRUTH**, Immanuel. The belt of truth is really more like a girdle or jockey underwear.

The belt goes under the armor and frees us up to be nimble and ready—in and out of season. Truth is not only authenticity, but faithfulness and loyalty in our dealings with others. The Psalms remind us: "God requires truth in our inward being." We're called to be trustworthy and truthful in all our interactions. We're to have nothing to do with lying or falsehood.

Next, fasten on the **BREASTPLATE of RIGHTEOUSNESS**.

This represents integrity. Character and virtue protect our vital organs. As Proverbs reminds us, "guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life." Upright living protects us from putting ourselves in compromising or destructive situations--to ourselves and others.

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We're to also lace up the **SHOES of the GOSPEL of PEACE**.

This piece of our spiritual armor likely alludes to [Isaiah 52:7](#),

"How beautiful are the feet of those that bring good news."

Our task is to get out the good news of peace that we can have with God, others, and ourselves through Christ. But God's peace isn't a cheap peace. The cultivation and preservation of peace is proactive—and never easy. It takes us to difficult places—steep trails and narrow ledges. The shoes of the good news give us firm and sure footing.

Next, we're to take up **THE GREAT SHIELD of FAITH** to quench burning arrows of the evil one.

The shield Paul referred to covered much of the body. These Roman shields were made of wood and were covered in leather. Before battle the leather was soaked in water so that flaming arrows from the enemy would be extinguished, even if they lodged in the shield.

Panicked or inexperienced soldiers would let their guard down out of fear of being burned by flaming arrows lodged in their shield. But when they let their shield down, they were most exposed to the flying arrows.

Faith is that confident trust in God's protection—especially in times of difficulty. Faith believes and be-lives that Christ can and will shield us from the fiery furnaces and fiery darts of life.

There are times where we'll feel like Satan's own personal target practice: With flaming darts of self-doubt, discouragement, condemnation, temptation, fear, and bitterness whizzing past. We've just got to keep our shield of faith up and not drop our guard.

As David says in [Psalm 3](#) when he was being hounded by King Saul,

"Thou O Lord art a shield about me, my glory, and the lifter of my head."

We're also to receive the **HELMET of SALVATION** from God.

Roman helmets were made of bronze and they often had cheek pieces. Others had visors. They would often times have a large plume or crest—which would clearly identify the Roman soldiers. The inside would be covered with sponge or felt to make it fit comfortably.

The helmet of salvation is first a gift. God alone gives it to us.

We enjoy salvation not only in the future—but in the present. People will know that we're God's because of our helmet of salvation. The helmet protects us and our thinking. "God has not given us a spirit of fear, says Paul, "but a spirit of power, of love, and a sound mind." Salvation is a salve to our mind and soul.

We're also to grasp the **SWORD of the SPIRIT**—which is **GOD'S WORD**, sharpened and made effective by the Spirit. Scripture has the power to cut through our defenses, pierce our hearts, prick our conscience, sharpen our character, and give us guidance and hope during temptation.

The sword of the Spirit is the lone offensive weapon in the full armor of God. The rest are defensive.

What piece of the armor do you need most?

Is there a chink in your armor?

What's your spiritual Achille's heal that's exposed?

Our struggle and wrestling take place mostly on our knees, rather than with our fists. In fact, the Christian stands tallest on their knees.

Prayer keeps us humble, aware of God's power, and plugged into God our Source.

KEEP WATCH and **PRAY IN THE SPIRIT**—not only for yourself, but also for others—loved ones, strangers, and enemies.

Pray for your leaders. Pray for me, pray for our elders, pray for our staff, pray for our deacons, pray for our church. Pray, pray, pray.

To close I want to bless you with Paul's closing words in [Ephesians 6](#):

"Peace to you, brothers and sisters. And love with faith from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Grace to you who love our Lord Jesus Christ with an undying love."

Amen.

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