

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

You are at war. Did you know that? I'm not talking about Iraq. I'm not talking about Afghanistan. I mean you personally are at war. You are fighting on the front lines of a battlefield every single day. All around you people are falling. The dead are scattered all around you. The fighting is fierce and horrific. And the consequences of losing the battle are far more severe than just losing your life. You die eternally. This war is largely invisible. But it is very much a war. It is the war for your very soul.

The moment the Holy Spirit created faith in Jesus in your heart... whether it happened at your baptism as a little baby, or later through the Word of God... at that moment that faith entered into you, you became a member of God's own family. God claimed you as his very own. Your sins were forgiven and God assured you that his Kingdom belonged to you for eternity.

But we haven't yet received the crown. Heaven is not yet our home. And from the moment God claimed us as his, Satan declared us his enemy. He declared war on us. From that moment on, he has made it his set plan and purpose tempt you and distract you and deceive you and to entice you so that you will walk away from your God who loves you. You are in his sites. He's got a bead on you all the time. He's studying your weaknesses. He's waiting to pounce as soon as your guard is down. He wants to tear you apart the moment you drift a bit from your all-powerful God.

You are at war. Will you live or will you be killed in action? Let's focus our attention on the words we heard in our second lesson today in Ephesians 6:10-18. There we heard this:

**Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. 11 Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. 12 For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. 13 Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand.**

If we're going to successfully fight the battle, we have to know who our real enemies are. Back during the Korean War, our Air Force pilots thought their battle was with the North Korean pilots who were flying Soviet-made aircraft. It didn't take long for them to discover that sometimes the real enemy in the cockpit was a Russian pilot... a pilot who was far more skilled and had received far more training than his North Korean counterparts. When our pilots knew who the enemy was, they had to change their tactics.

We too need to know who the real enemy is. You might see your enemy as the person at work who's keeping you from advancing. Or as the kid at school that can't stand you and seems to have it in for you. Or even one of your brothers or sisters that you can't seem to get along with. It's possible you might even feel you have an enemy within this church... the person that you just don't get along with and have never seen eye to eye with. Maybe you see the bad economy as your enemy. Or your broken down car or your roof that needs replacing. Maybe you see your health problems as your enemy.

In all these cases, we're not seeing the real enemy. God tells us this: **"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."** Sometimes

Satan and his evil spiritual forces stand behind the behavior and attitudes of our earthly enemies, or they may be the causes of the earthly problems and circumstances that challenge our faith. But keep your eyes focused on the real pilot... Satan.

When you know your real enemy, you'll pick your weapons appropriately. Guns, tanks, missiles and bunkers are useless against Satan. He is a spiritual enemy and you need spiritual weapons. Praise God that the equipment we need is readily available... and God provides it.

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Did you catch what our goal is in this battle? Most wars have the objective of attacking and defeating the enemy. But our goal in our spiritual battle is this: To stand your ground. Here's the glorious truth: Jesus already won the victory over Satan. Through his death on the cross, he destroyed the devil's power. The accuser can no longer accuse you, for Jesus' goodness belongs to you. He no longer has a case against you for the verdict was already announced for your wrongs, and the judgment made. Death! And Jesus Christ, God's Son, took that penalty *for you*. In Christ, you have already been tried, convicted, sentenced to death... and the death penalty carried out. You have already died with him. And in his resurrection, you now live with him. Christ rose victorious. Imagine around Christ is a giant, impenetrable, glorious sphere. Anyone inside that sphere with Christ is in his light and is protected from eternal death, and Satan's power and influence. In Christ, the victory is already yours.

So what does Jesus say to you? Stand your ground! Stay where you are! Don't let Satan coax you out of that sphere of security in Christ Jesus. Stand firm and let nothing move you!

Satan is doing everything in his power to get you away from Christ and his sphere of protection. How can you stand firm? How can you stay protected? You need the armor of God. Let's look at that perfect armor that God himself provides.

Now, in describing the armor of God, Paul compares it to the standard issue military equipment of the Roman soldier. Now what I'd like to do is with each of these pieces of armor, first talk about what the attack is that Satan uses. Then we'll see how God's armor protects us perfectly.

1) The first attack: **Lies and deception.** Satan used it already in the Garden of Eden, right? He lied through his teeth (or should I say, through his forked tongue?) when he said, “Eat! For then you will be like God, knowing good and evil!” The equality with God that Satan promises Adam and Eve was a flat out lie. And he's using similar lies to deceive us today. “You will be happier if you live together instead of getting married.” “It's your body so you can end the life of the fetus within you!” “You're not hurting anyone if you slack off at work!” “Your spouse doesn't deserve your love and respect so you must not give it!” “You know better than your parents, don't listen to them!” All lies. But here's one of his most effective lies: “God's Word seems to say this, but we know today that we must understand it another way. Evolution, homosexuality, fellowship issues... you name it. Don't take the Word as it's written. You decide what it really means!

Lie after lie after lie. What's the defence against these relentless attacks: “Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist.” Attached to the Roman soldier's belt was a metal apron which protected his midsection and thighs. In addition, the belt held all the armor and equipment together. It kept the breastplate in place. It secured his sword. It kept the clothes from being loose or falling off. Paul compares God's Truth to the belt. If your grasp of God's unchanging truth loosens, you very well could lose all your other armor with it. Keep that belt of truth buckled around your waist. Stay in the Word. Humbly accept what it says. Build your life the word of Christ and you will

stand firm and you will not fall to Satan's attacks. The attack of lies and deception are defended with the belt of truth.

What other common attack is there?

2) Has your conscience ever troubled you over a particularly bad sin? You know... you did something that was just plain wrong. Satan tempted you, and you dove in head first. Now your conscience troubles you greatly. You know God is angry. You stand before God red handed and guilty. You're tempted to despair. Maybe you run from God. Stop coming to church. Have you been there? Maybe you are there?

God says: "Stand firm... with the **breastplate of righteousness in place**. The Roman soldier's breastplate had a simple purpose: Protect the soldier's vital organs. Without the breastplate, a single sword thrust would be fatal. If we are not righteous, then Satan easily can plunge a sword right into our heart. He accuses us before God and says, "This sinner does not meet your requirements! He must die!" If we are not righteous, Satan is right. We must die.

The righteousness Paul talks about here is not our own righteousness. We could never be righteous enough to ward off Satan's blows. Rather the righteousness is that which Christ gives us. Jesus' perfect life of righteousness is credited to us by faith. All of our sins are removed and forgiven through Jesus' suffering and death. When we put on Christ's righteousness, we are ready for battle with Satan. His accusations that we have not met God's requirements are no longer true! In Christ, we are righteous. We are perfect. We are holy in God's sight. Put on the breastplate of righteousness and you are well-equipped to withstand Satan's attacks!

3) Another common attack: Satan catches us off guard. He tempts us, he lays a trap where we least expect it. Suddenly our peace is destroyed. Or... he sometimes tries to out-flank us. Have you ever been blindsided by a family member or friend. How quickly peace can be destroyed in a family!

What's the defense God provides? "**Stand firm.. with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace.**" The Roman soldier wore sandals in battle. They enabled him to move quickly and march for great distances and cover rough terrain. Without his sandals, he was slow and vulnerable. God equips us with his Gospel of peace which also makes us ready. Keep the Good News about Jesus in your heart and mind at all times. When the unexpected temptation comes, you're ready. When Satan strikes from behind, or strikes close with a family member or friend, if your feet are fitted with the Gospel of peace, you will be quick to forgive as Christ forgave you. You're ready for the surprise attack.

4) Another common attack: Satan really stokes our pride. He like nothing more than we like to think we are self-sufficient and able to stand on our own two feet. He rejoices when we forget to pray and forget about God when our life is comfortable. "You don't need him! Look how fine your doing on your own!" And we eat this up. We are very quick to put faith in ourselves.

His other tactic is to rob you of all hope and certainty. He wants you to doubt God's love and goodness. He wants you to doubt God's presence in your life, and that he is at work to bless you.

God provides us again with the armor to stop such an attack: **take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one.** ." The Roman soldiers carried a shield into battle made of wood and covered with leather. When the army laid siege to a city, frequently the enemy would fire flaming arrows from atop the city wall. When the army expected such an attack, the shield would also be soaked in water before the battle. When the flaming arrows would be fired, the soldiers would line up shoulder to shoulder and their shields

would interlock to form a solid wall of shields. The flaming arrows would strike the shields and the flames would be extinguished.

Faith in Christ Jesus is such a shield. Through the Holy Spirit, God gives us faith to rely upon Jesus for forgiveness, life and salvation. When we rely upon Jesus, Satan's attacks are powerless. He tempts us to trust in self! The shield of faith in Christ stops that temptation. He tempts us to despair of God's love and help! The shield of faith stops that temptation too. Take the shield of faith which God offers!

5) Next attack you can expect: the humanistic attack. The humanist says people are good and they are improving. You don't need saving, you just need a little assistance. With enough positive thinking and enough self-help groups and enough boot-strap pulling, you can do it... and we as a human race can ultimately make this world a heaven on earth.

God says the opposite. We are corrupt by nature, and our disobedience to God cannot be reversed or turned around. We need to be rescued from a downward spiral that is guaranteed to land us in hell. So God says: **"Take the helmet of salvation."** Without a helmet, a soldier wouldn't last long. The helmet God gives us is the salvation of our souls through the Lord Jesus. We can't save ourselves. It is only by God's daring and costly rescue mission in which his Son's blood was shed and life lost that we were rescued from our downward spiral. Salvation is ours through Christ! That is your helmet that protects you!

6) We've been looking at defensive armor so far. They keep us from being overpowered by Satan's attacks. But wouldn't it be nice if we had an offensive weapon? Something that would drive Satan far from us and keep his attacks from us? Here it is. God says, **"Take up the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God."** Remember when Jesus was tempted in the desert three times by Satan? Each time he fended off the attack by quoting Scripture. And at the end Jesus said, "Away from me Satan!" Attacking with the Word of God, Satan left Jesus. And he will leave us too when we wield the word of God and are able to draw it out and use it when Satan comes near with his temptations.

There's one more part of the armor God provides, it's not an actual piece of armor, but it's every bit as important. Satan wants to catch us unawares, unconcerned and spiritually asleep. And so alertness is one of a soldier's greatest weapons So he says: **"And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints."** If you are going to stand firm in the sphere of Christ's protection, keep on praying... always. This keeps you alert. Talk to your God often, for in doing so you are expressing your dependents on him and his protection. And keep on praying for your brothers and sisters in Christ as well.

Dear friends, with this full armor which is God's, but which he offers to you, *you are prepared for battle!* And God promises you will not be overcome. The victory already won by Christ is also your victory. To him be the glory. Amen.

And the peace of God which surpasses all human understanding will guard and keep your hearts and your minds through faith in Christ Jesus. Amen.