

The Armour of God (Ephesians 6:10-23)

As those in Christ, how do we find strength to cope with the struggles of life? As Paul wraps up his meditation of life in Christ, he finishes with this rallying cry to make full use of the resources we have in Christ, to deal with the trickery of the devil and the pressures of life.

Where do we find the strength to cope?

There is a saying, "What does not kill you, makes you stronger!"

There is some truth in the phrase. Often going through struggles can teach us a lot and can give us new perspectives that can help us to deal with similar struggles better in the future.

However, it is not always true. Sometimes tragedy and difficulty comes along that can leave people seriously damaged emotionally and mentally in such a way that they are less able to cope in the future.

We cannot be complacent! We need to be prepared. We need to make sure we have the strength to cope with the struggles and difficulties that we will inevitably face.

In verse 13, Paul talks about the difficult times in life as 'the day of evil'.

The 'day of evil' is a general term to refer to the times when we feel under the most pressure and strain. Those are the moments when our strength is really tested. We may be coping fine now, but how can we be strong enough to cope when life gets really tough? How can we stand firm as a Christian when we face strong pressures to give up on our faith?

Ephesians 6:10-23 is the conclusion of this letter. In it Paul, wants to inspire and encourage us to be prepared for the struggles we will face in life, especially as Christians. He prepares us by first of all helping us to know our enemy, but secondly by encouraging us to know our strength, by helping us to see the incredible resources we have in Christ and to make use of those so that we are strengthened and prepared for the struggles ahead.

Know Your Enemy: The Devil

So, first of all know your enemy. Being a Christian does not mean entering an easy life. Rather it is to join a battle, a struggle, a fight.

But, this is not a battle on the human level. We need to realise that our real enemy is the devil and the spiritual forces at his command. Forces that in a mysterious way have an influence in our world to corrupt it so that evil abounds.

We need to be careful, because many of us have been influenced by films and TV that often portray evil spiritual forces in very graphic ways. In films and TV those forces are often defeated by a kind of magical warfare, which is more Harry Potter than Biblical.

So what is the Biblical idea of Spiritual warfare? Paul says in verse 11, that we need to take our stand against the devil's schemes. What are these schemes? The same word is used in 4:14, where Paul talks of deceitful scheming, distortions of the truth.

Jesus in John's gospel calls Satan, the Father of Lies. When Jesus is tempted by the devil, the devil tries to trick Jesus with words and in the Garden of Eden it is in manipulating Eve with half truths that the devil leads her and Adam into disobeying God.

The Spiritual battle then is as much a battle about the way we and the world arounds us think and about what we believe. It is a war for truth in a world manipulated by lies.

Know Your Strength: The Armour of God

So our enemy is the devil. If we want to be strong against him we need ways to resist the distortion of truth. How can we do that?

Paul says in verse 11, 'be strong in the Lord'. Then, in verse 13, he tells us to 'put on the armour of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground...'.

Paul's answer is to find strength in the resources that God provides, what he calls the armour of God.

Paul wrote Ephesians, when he was a prisoner, possibly under Roman guard. It may be that he was being guarded by a Roman soldier and it was as he looked at the Roman soldier and his armour that he was inspired to write this concluding section of his letter.

Just as the Roman soldier is provided with the armour to enable him to go to battle with confidence, so God can provided us with the armour to face the battles of life with confidence and stand up against the deceptions of the devil.

So what is the armour that God provides, that we need to put on and how does it help us as we seek to stand firm against the devil?

The Belt of Truth - vs. 14

The first item, Paul mentions is the belt of truth. Truth has been a theme throughout the letter. We are saved by believing God's word of truth, we were taught the truth in Jesus, a truth that shows us how we are to live as Christians. We are encouraged to speak the truth in love to one another and are called to speak truthfully to one another and to avoid falsehood and we are told that truth is one of the fruits of light.

And as we have seen this is fundamentally how we can be strong against the devil. If the devil is the father of lies, then we can defeat him when we hold on to God's truth.

So, if the truth is so important to being strong in the face of the pressures of life, how are we taking hold of the truth? Does our truth come more from the media we read, watch and scroll through? Or is it rooted in God's word, the Bible? If we want to be strong, we need to be serious about Bible study and a thirst for God's word.

In Psalm 1, there is a beautiful picture of what the person who meditates on God's word is like. They are like a tree planted by streams of water, that bears its fruit in season. Trees are strong, they are very hard to knock down. They also produce beautiful fruit. If we want to be strong and fruitful we need to be rooted in God's truth by meditating on his word.

The Breastplate of Righteousness - vs. 14

The second item we need to put on is the breast plate of righteousness.

The gospel is that we are not saved by good works, we are saved by faith in God's good work. That is a great truth, but it is one that the devil twists. If we are not saved by good works, then it does not matter if we live good lives. This is the devil's corruption of the truth, when we

believe that lie as Christians, then we do not try to live like God or Jesus and the result is that we end up living and behaving just as badly as everyone else.

But, when we put on the breastplate of righteous, we are saying: Yes we are not saved by good works, but we are saved for good works. In the letter, Paul has spoken a lot about the king of good lives we are to live. He has said, that when we are in Christ, we are created to do good works. He has called on us to put off the wicked ways of the world and put on the new ways to become like God, like Jesus in the way we live.

When we seek God's strength and support to live the way he calls us to then we find real strength to cope through the storms of life. It says in Proverbs:

"When the storm has swept by,
the wicked are gone,
but the righteous stand firm for ever." (Proverbs 10:25)

Feet fitted with the gospel of peace - vs. 15

Another lie that the devil seeks to trip us up with is that we are to think there are fundamental and permanent divisions between different types of people. The devil loves division within the church and for the church to separate themselves off from the rest of the world or to think of themselves as better than the rest of the world. It is no wonder that the devil loves division, as Jesus said, a house divided against itself cannot stand. There is strength in unity, but division creates great weakness.

As Christians, however, we believe in the gospel of peace, that helps us not to stand far off from others, but to walk over to them. The letter to the Ephesians has spoken a lot about peace and unity. In chapter 2, Paul emphasised that Jesus creates unity, that he has brought down the dividing wall between Jews and Gentiles, that in the church he is creating a new unity with Christ at the head. In chapter 4, he tells us to make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit in the church. The church is to be a beacon of unity. It is in unity that we find strength.

But also, this is the gospel of peace. In the next few verses, Paul asks for prayer to speak to others about the gospel, the good news of God. He does not see those who are not Christians as people who are permanently divided from him as enemies of the truth or his persecutors - even though he himself was imprisoned by them. Rather, he sees them as not-yet-Christians, as those who can also become in Christ and share in the blessings of God with him.

Is this how we think about our Christian lives? As those who desire reconciliation and unity? Or are we too quick to fall into the devils tricks and see ourselves as permanently separated off from others?

Shield of faith - vs. 16

The fourth and central piece of armour, is the 'shield of faith'. Roman shields were massive - 6' x 2.5' and when put together with each other created an impenetrable barrier.

The devil loves to undermine faith. He loves us to focus on our failures, rather than God's salvation. He loves us to think that we are not good enough for God, that we have messed up too much for God to forgive us. To think that it is only by being good enough that we can come to God.

Faith, however, is about trusting God and his salvation and not depending on our own goodness. In chapter 2, Paul emphasised that we are saved by our faith in what God has done, not by our own good works. In chapter 3, he reminds us that by faith, we can be confident in coming to God, because we know he has completely forgiven us our sins. He also reminds us that it is by faith that Christ dwells in our hearts. Because of what God has done, we can have an intimate relationship with God.

One of the dangers as we grow as Christians and God helps us to live more righteous lives, is that we can begin to focus on our own goodness and forget that it is God's goodness that saves us. Let's not be tripped up by the devil. Let's find our strength by focussing on the one who is strong: Jesus Christ and what he has achieved for us.

Helmet of Salvation - vs. 17

Another trick of the devil is to make us focus on the present rather than the future. At times our present situation can be terrible. Perhaps you have experienced that because of the Pandemic or perhaps you have experienced it for other reasons in your life. It can be hard to see beyond our present circumstances and begin to believe that your present suffering is all there will be. You lose hope and you think God has abandoned you. Such an attitude can lead to despair.

But, this is where the helmet of Salvation comes in. In Ephesians, Paul usually links Salvation with our future inheritance. Back in chapter 1, he spoke of the blessings that we have stored up for us in heaven and the Holy Spirit as a guarantee of our inheritance. You have to wait for an inheritance and we have to wait for the full blessings of salvation. But whatever our present sufferings in this life, Paul is clear that when we are in Christ, our future is secure and it is a future of unimaginable blessing.

When we ignore the devil and learn to focus on our future glory, rather than our present blessings, then we can find strength to endure the sufferings and stand for Jesus no matter what life throws at us.

Sword of the Spirit = the word of God - vs. 17

Up to now the armour has been defensive. But now Paul turns to two things that help us to go on the attack. Not just so that we can be strong on the day of evil, but so that we can help others to be strong too.

The first thing is the sword of the spirit, which Paul says is the word of God. If the devil spreads lies in the world, then the way to fight the devil is to speak the truth.

This was Paul's focus in chapter 4, where he pointed out that Jesus appoints Apostles, Prophets, Teachers and Pastors, people who teach God's word in order to help make the church mature and strong. This is the sword of the spirit cutting through the schemes of the devil.

But it is not just the role of church leaders, Paul also has a vision of all of us speaking the truth to one another in love, in order that the whole church is built up and becomes mature and is not swayed by the falsehoods of others.

Paul's vision is not just about survival as Christians, but growth as we work to defeat the devil using the tools God has given us - in particular the word of God.

Pray - vs. 18-20

Finally, the seventh weapon is also offensive. This one is not actually linked to a weapon on a Roman soldier, but nonetheless it is perhaps the most powerful weapon we have: prayer!

The devil likes us to think that he is the one really in control. That evil will inevitably win, that God is powerless to help us.

Yet, Paul throughout Ephesians has emphasised the power of God. Back in Ephesians 1, he prayed that we would know the power of God, the power that raised Jesus from the dead and put him far above all rule and authority, power and dominion. Jesus is head over everything for the church, so no matter how powerful the spiritual forces are, the false ideologies and thinking of our world, Jesus is above them all. And he is above them all for the church, which means we can ask for his power to help us in this world. Prayer is powerful, because the one we speak to, is the one who is truly in charge.

So, if we want to be strong. We need to pray. But we need to pray not just for ourselves but for all God's people. Paul even asks that people pray for him, that he might have courage. Here is someone who took incredible risks to take the gospel to new places, despite being stoned, flogged, imprisoned and shipwrecked. How was he able to have the strength and courage to do that? By people praying.

Are you ready for battle?

So, are you ready for the battle? Are you equipped to fight the good fight?

If our government sent soldiers into battle without guns, helmets, flak jackets or decent boots, it would be seen as an outrage. Yet, so many Christians today are not really ready for the battle. They don't care enough about the truth of God's word, the need to become like God, the call to unity and to see everyone as potential brother and sisters in Christ. They are too focussed on the present and forget about God's promises of future blessings and become too focussed on their own goodness and forget that it is God's salvation in Christ that we need to depend on. As a result they are weak, the church is weak and the devil is having a field day.

Let's listen to Paul's battle call, let's put on God's armour and let's find strength in Christ to stand firm and bring real transformation to our world.