

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. ¹⁴ Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, ¹⁵ and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. ¹⁶ In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. ¹⁷ Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. ¹⁸ 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. ¹⁹ Pray also for me, that whenever I open my mouth, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel, ²⁰ for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should. (Ephesians 6:10-20)

Put on the Full Armor of God

What do you picture in your mind when you think of armor? A knight in shining armor? Maybe a storybook from your childhood or a movie about King Arthur or maybe even one of those guys at a Renaissance festival who walks around in a suit of armor? Maybe you've been to a museum where they have medieval armor on display, like the DIA. But would it surprise you to know that St. Paul was not thinking in those terms when he told us to put on the full armor of God? This chapter of Ephesians is one of the most famous things that ever Paul wrote. But he lived before the days of knights in armor. He was thinking of the armor worn by Roman soldiers, which covered much less of their bodies than a full suit of medieval armor did. But even so, the Roman army was one of the greatest fighting forces ever assembled. Their armored infantry had a reputation for being almost unbeatable and their armor was a huge part of that. Paul was thinking of that armor when the Holy Spirit inspired him to write these famous words. These words apply to us today, even though the days of soldiers in armor are long past. My friends, **put on the full armor of God.**

I.

In the ancient world, soldiers didn't walk around in armor all the time. It was too heavy for that. They put it on when there was a chance that they would have to fight. So when St. Paul tells us to put on the full armor of God, he's telling us that battle is coming and we need to be ready. **Put on the full armor of God because you have a real battle to fight.**

Paul says, **"Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. 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."** The devil is real. These two verses tell us a great deal about him and his tactics. First of all, the devil is crafty. He's been trying to destroy the faith of believers ever since the Garden of Eden. He's learned that his best attack is rarely a frontal assault. He doesn't hit us where we're strongest. The devil hits hardest in the places we least expect him to. He explores our weaknesses and tries to take advantage of them.

He is behind most of the challenges that we face in this life. Our struggle is not against flesh and blood but against the spiritual forces of evil. Does it feel like that? Or does it seem like our real enemies are in the society all around us? Paul is saying that those real flesh and blood enemies are just pawns of the devil. Do we think like that today? In the twentieth century, a famous theologian said that we live in a house with a roof, so no angels can come down from heaven and a floor so no devils come up from underneath. He was comparing the Christian belief in angels and demons to the superstitions of primitive peoples that attribute illness and disasters to curses or evil spirits or devils. In most ancient religions, if something bad happened to you, some god or demon or spirit or ancestor must be mad at you and you had to find the right sacrifice or pilgrimage or gift to get him or her to lay off. And sadly, these ideas did creep into the Christian church in many places.

So, does that mean that devils and angels are really just holdovers from a prescientific age and we modern Christians need to think in more realistic terms? Not at all. The Bible is very clear. The devil is a real

being. The demons are also real. They are fallen angels. They have enormous power and knowledge and cunning. Left to ourselves, we could never stand up against them. They can reach into our lives and wreak havoc on us. They have enormous influences over unbelievers – who rarely seem to realize it. We Christians are at war with the powers of hell and their surrogates in this life. That war will last until Jesus comes back. We will have to fight until we see Jesus.

So St. Paul says, **“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.”** What is the day of evil? In one sense, it’s any day when evil is winning. We could all list the trends in our society that drag us away from God: a majority of people favoring gay marriage, tens of millions of babies aborted, more people living together than married, and so many more. Every day in America is an evil day because every day, we’re subjected to a flood of unchristian attitudes presented as the only right way to think.

But that’s not the only kind of evil day. Every day that we suffer is also an evil day. All pain and sorrow, all illness and old age and even death itself are the products of sin. Jesus called the devil a liar and a murderer because he led Adam and Eve to sin and he ultimately is responsible for the death of every human being. So every day in the hospital fighting for our lives, every day when a marriage is destroyed by cheating or selfishness, every day that hurts and makes us long for the end of life is an evil day.

On all those days, we need to stand. So put on the armor of God. Notice, Paul does not say, “Put on your own armor.” He does not say, “Get ready and stand.” Paul says, “Put on the full armor of God.” None of us has the strength to stand on our own in any evil day even though we’ve been Christians all our lives. For us to take a stand and fight against the devil and to still be standing when the battle is over, we need the weapons that only God can provide.

And in love, he gives us those weapons. There is no evil day on this earth when Christ is not with us. There is no torment that we have to face alone. God is always there. Nothing comes to us without his permission. So no matter how hard the battle is, no matter how long it seems or how much we hurt, God promises that it will all serve our good. God promises that the Holy Spirit will strengthen us through the gospel and we will stand. God promises that when we reach eternal life, we will rejoice and see that it was all worth it – no matter how hard that is for us to see right now.

How do we know that promise is true? Because our God doesn’t sit up in heaven and leave us to struggle along down here as best we can. Our God sent his Son into this world to live our lives. God the Son came down from heaven and became a real human being. Jesus knew pain and sorrow. Jesus felt what the death of friends and relatives feels like. He knew what it was like to have pain wrack your body. He felt the hatred and insults and rejection that many of us have suffered. He knew it all. But he didn’t just suffer those things so that he could have solidarity with us. He suffered all those things in our place. Jesus died and paid for our sins. He died so that the day will come when we humans won’t have to die anymore. He suffered hell and all the torments of life, and even went to the cross to free us from all those things. The only thing that could make him do that is his love. That same love makes all those promises to us. And when he had suffered all that sin does to us, he conquered death. He showed us that he has the power to lead us out of death, to give us heaven while we wait for the resurrection, to protect us from all harm and danger while we’re here and to even use hurt and sorrow for our good. Jesus died and he rose and he defeated the devil and all his evil angels. And he gave us the full armor of God so that we can stand in every evil day.

II.

Trust in his promise and fight the battle. **Put on the full armor of God because it is God’s tool to fight the battle.** What is the armor of God? Paul spells it out for us. First come the belt of truth and the breastplate of righteousness. God has spoken the truth to us in the gospel. He promised us eternal life and forgiveness in Christ. That truth defends us from all the lies and schemes of the devil. And the breastplate of righteousness is the righteousness of Christ which protects us even from our own sin. It makes us holy and righteous in God’s sight. But then both truth and righteousness come into our hands. Without faith, truth and righteousness are almost unknown to us. But with faith, God calls us to speak the truth in love. In the truth of the gospel, in truthful speech and an open life, we are protected from the devil, because those things are fruits of faith. When we live a righteous life because God has given us the holiness of Christ, we defeat the devil.

Next comes **“feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace.”** Almost every sport begins with footwork. You can’t throw a football or make a basket or win a wrestling match if your feet slide

all over the place. In any sports store, you can find athletic shoes specially designed for every sport. Our spiritual battle begins with footwear, too. The basis of a Christian life is readiness to fight and to stand. There is only one way for you and me to be ready: the gospel of peace. Every time Jesus says, "Peace be with you. My peace I give to you," he makes us ready to fight. He heals us with the good news that we are forgiven. He ends all battle between us sinners and a holy God and makes us ready to fight on God's side.

Paul tells us to take up the shield of faith with which we can extinguish the devil's flaming arrows. What are the devil's flaming arrows? All the ways he attacks us, all the ways he tries to get us to doubt, all the arguments and questions he raises in our minds. On this side of heaven, there isn't always an answer that will satisfy our reason. There is only trust in God and his Word. That defeats the devil. Take up that faith. Put it to work against the devil! Answer all those doubts and questions of the devil with the love of Jesus. That puts those flaming arrows out. Closely related to the shield of faith is the helmet of salvation. That's the promise that no matter what happens to us here, we are going to live with Christ. It's no accident that he pictures that protecting our heads. The part of our body we think with needs to be totally wrapped up in the promises of eternal life.

Have you noticed that up to this point, all the equipment has been defensive or perhaps supportive? St. Paul mentions only one weapon to fight back: the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. That is our only weapon in this life. It's not clever arguments. It's not magnetic personalities. It's not even love and fellowship in our churches, as important as those things are. The weapon God puts in our hands is the word of God. With that, we destroy the devil's work and we win souls for heaven. You can only take up that sword when you hear and study and learn the word of God. But when you swing his sword – even when your swing is clumsy and unpracticed – God works. It's the sword of Spirit. God swings that sword and fights for you.

The whole armor of God comes from God. It is weapons and protection that he puts in our hands. We have to use it, but his power is behind it. Then Paul adds one more thing: prayer. He tells us to pray in all occasions, to pray for all the saints – for each other, and even for him. Today, we don't really need to pray for Paul. He's in heaven. But we do pray that his message would spread throughout the world. We do pray for our pastors and teachers that they may courageously speak the truth, as they should. We do pray for each other, that each one of us may stand in the evil day and defeat the devil with the sword of the Spirit. When we pray, we place all our trust in God who hears and answers and fights and wins for us.

The armor of God is God working for us as we use the tools he has given us. All those tools really come down to the proper use of law and gospel. When we condemn sin, in ourselves and others, when we offer forgiveness in Christ, we are fully equipped for the battle that we must fight until our Lord returns. Put on the full armor of God so that when you have done everything, you will stand. Amen.