

Sermon for September 15, 2024 - Pentecost 17

Ephesians 6:10-18 EHV

Theme: **Are you ready for battle? You are if you...**

- 1) Understand your enemy (10-12)
- 2) Stand ready in God's armour (13-17)
- 3) Stay in communication with your Commander (18-20)

*<sup>10</sup>Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. <sup>11</sup>Put on the full armor of God, so that you can stand against the schemes of the Devil. <sup>12</sup>For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the world rulers of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. <sup>13</sup>For this reason, take up the full armor of God, so that you will be able to take a stand on the evil day and, after you have done everything, to stand. <sup>14</sup>Stand, then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness fastened in place, <sup>15</sup>and with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace tied to your feet like sandals. <sup>16</sup>At all times hold up the shield of faith, with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming arrows of the Evil One. <sup>17</sup>Also take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. <sup>18</sup>At every opportunity, pray in the Spirit with every kind of prayer and petition. Stay alert for the same reason, always persevering in your intercession for all the saints.*

The war is raging. Are you ready for the fight? You might be thinking, "What are you talking about, Pastor? The war in Ukraine or what's happening in Israel? Are you thinking about the cultural wars between progressives and conservatives?"

War terminology is frequently used these days, and many conflicts fill us with concern. But sadly, we don't think enough about the war that's right here and now, affecting our lives the most. What conflict is that? The war Satan and his allies wage against us over our souls. And it's everlastingly important for us to take this war seriously, for the consequence of falling in battle is not just a destiny with the grave. No, it is hell. The devil desires nothing less than to drag us down with him into hell, severing us from the everlasting love that God has for us in Christ.

Therefore, let's heed Paul's encouragement to be ready for the devil's attacks under the theme: **Are you ready for battle? You are if you** 1) Understand your enemy, 2) Stand ready in God's armour, and 3) Stay in communication with your Commander.

Part One: Understand your Enemy.

After encouraging readers of this letter to fulfill their various callings in life out of love and reverence for the Christ who loved and saved them, the apostle Paul writes:

*<sup>10</sup>Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power.*

Paul uses three different words for strength in this little verse. His point? He wants us to understand that being a Christian on Earth isn't easy. You face a formidable adversary who detests you beyond comprehension. His desire is nothing less than your utter destruction: to separate you from Jesus and get you thrown into hell forever.

Understand that your strength to stand firm against such an enemy cannot come from inside you. No, it can only come from the LORD himself.

*<sup>11</sup>Put on the full armor of God, so that you can stand against the schemes of the Devil.*

Here's the big mistake we make about Satan: we constantly underestimate him. When we consider how he attempts to separate us from Christ, we merely envision him tempting us to commit egregious acts against the Ten Commandments. But here's the thing: Satan's been around since the beginning of time. He has learned a lot during that time and knows how to play the long game. He's not just trying to get you to commit big sins, instead he lurks in the little details of your life unnoticed, attempting to influence every seemingly insignificant decision you make. He constantly strives to stir your emotions and manipulate your thoughts. Moreover, he never employs a single tactic, but is perpetually changing them.

For instance, the devil may initially attempt to entice you to indulge in your sinful desires. If that fails, he might try to make you feel proud of yourself for resisting his temptations, thereby ensnaring you with self-righteousness. If that doesn't work, he might try to make you feel hopeless and believe that God doesn't love you because of your sins. If that doesn't work, he might try to convince you that grace is like a free pass to do whatever you want, because God will forgive you in the end. If that fails, he might try to make you think that God's grace is so complicated and conditional that it's not really grace at all.

I could go on, but I think you get my point: Satan is a master manipulator, constantly seeking new ways to separate us from Jesus. That's why Paul emphasizes:

*<sup>12</sup>For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the world rulers of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.*

Our adversaries are not the kind we can physically see and wrestle. No, they are spiritual and immensely powerful. They entice entire governments to wage war, commit genocide, and make immoral decisions. They constantly tempt individuals to be selfish and self-serving - working in the background to destroy all that is good and lead entire nations away from Christ.

And we must comprehend this point: the real masterminds behind all the chaos in the world are not "woke" politicians, antidemocratic strongmen, out-of-touch academicians, or social media influencers. No, the actual culprits are Satan and his demons, operating in the shadows, convincing people that he doesn't exist. They're the ones tempting, influencing, and even possessing individuals to carry out their bidding.

Still worse, Satan is targeting you, trying to make you blindly follow him and believe everything he says! He's like an evil piper, leading people to their doom. Don't be fooled into relying on your own cunning and power to resist him. The Bible says that even God's archangel Michael didn't rely on his strength when he faced off against Satan. He simply said, "The LORD rebuke you."<sup>i</sup>

And that brings me to my next point: if the devil and his allies are so strong, what hope do we have to stand against them? The answer is: we have every hope and confidence in Christ. Why? Because even if the devil were stronger than the strongest archangel, he still is no match for God. The archangel Michael knew that, and so did Paul.

### Part Two: Stand ready in God's Armour.

*<sup>13</sup>For this reason, take up the full armor of God, so that you will be able to take a stand on the evil day and, after you have done everything, to stand.*

Just as a spacesuit protects an astronaut from the overwhelming forces in space, God's armour protects you from Satan and his allies. Yes, in God's armour, you be confident that the devil's attacks will fail. How so? Because standing in God's armour means standing in God himself.

*<sup>14</sup>Stand, then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness fastened in place, <sup>15</sup>and with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace tied to your feet like sandals. <sup>16</sup>At all times hold up the shield of faith, with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming arrows of the Evil One. <sup>17</sup>Also take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.*

I want you to notice something about the armour God gives us: each piece is a promised result of Jesus' saving work for us. Every piece connects us to Him.

Regarding *truth*, Jesus once told Pilate, "For this reason I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice."<sup>ii</sup> To buckle truth around your waist is to clothe yourself in Jesus' teachings, as He once said: "If you remain in my word, you are really my disciples. You will also know the truth, and the truth will set you free."<sup>iii</sup>

The *righteousness* God wants us to put on is the righteousness Jesus won for us through His perfect life and innocent death. When the devil tries to accuse you of being sinful and unrighteous, simply point to Jesus who is your righteousness,<sup>iv</sup> as St. Paul wrote about Jesus on another occasion: *God made him, who did not know sin, to become sin for us, so that we might become the righteousness of God in him.*<sup>v</sup>

Having *the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace tied to your feet like sandals* is a poetic way of urging us to rejoice constantly in the good news of Jesus forgiving our sins and reconciling us with God. Stand firm in this truth – fully convinced of it. Let the joy of knowing that nothing can separate you from God's love in Christ give you courage, enabling you to stand opposed to Satan by joyfully proclaiming: "Jesus loves me! This I know, For the Bible tells me so; Little ones

to Him belong; They are weak, but He is strong. Yes, Jesus loves me and promises to not let anything snatch me from his hands.”<sup>vi</sup>

The *faith* Paul mentions as our shield is not our act of believing. Rather, it is the content of what we believe: Jesus and his promised salvation. Jesus, the one in whom we have faith, extinguishes the devil’s fiery arrows. And, as we stand firmly convinced of God’s unwavering promises for us in Christ, Jesus will not let the seeds of doubt that the devil is trying to sow in our hearts grow and spread.

No matter how much the devil rages against you – accusing you of all sorts of unrighteousness - he cannot break the *salvation* Christ won for you through His cross. Even before the devil’s attacks strike, you can use God’s word to deflect them – just like Jesus did when the devil tempted him in the wilderness. God’s Word – the Gospel – is our impenetrable defence against the myriads of weapons the devil hurls at us. By believing God’s Gospel promises – always meditating on them and taking them to heart - we remain in Christ. He is our mighty fortress. His Word, which the world despises and dismisses as insignificant, is the mighty weapon from which the devil must flee.

So, brothers and sisters in Christ, do you get Paul’s point? Always be in Christ - applying his Gospel promises to every aspect of your life. Remain in Jesus by remaining steadfast in His Word. This way, you will have unwavering confidence, peace, and joy in the face of Satan’s attacks. Why? Because you know that, regardless of how evil things seem on this earth, you are God’s dearly loved child. He will keep His promise to deliver you from every evil attack and bring you safely to his side in heaven.<sup>vii</sup>

### Part Three: Stay in communication with your Commander

Now that we’ve identified our adversary and are armed for the fight, Paul gives us one last piece of encouragement to fully equip us for battle. Guess what a modern soldier’s most important piece of equipment is? The radio! Why? Because it enables a soldier to summon combat support, request medical supplies, and call for airstrikes or any other assistance he may need. A soldier can also relay information for another group so that they can be helped. You could say that the radio puts a nation’s entire arsenal at a soldier’s disposal.

For this reason, our text encourages: *<sup>18</sup>At every opportunity, pray in the Spirit with every kind of prayer and petition. Stay alert for the same reason, always persevering in your intercession for all the saints.*

Prayer is how we talk to God, and it puts His entire army of angels at our disposal. Not only that, but the Almighty God, who created everything and from whom all the legions of hell run away in terror, has promised: *Call on me in the day of distress. I will deliver you, and you will honor me.*<sup>viii</sup>

Is it any wonder that Paul encourages us to always pray, informing God of everything happening in our lives and the lives of others? Therefore, pray for yourself and every other Christian you know on earth. Pray when you see a friend or family member going through a tough time. Pray

when things are going well, thanking God for the peace you enjoy. Always pray - rejoicing in Jesus, your commander and chief, who protects you.

Brothers and sisters in Christ: we are at war - living in hostile territory, far from our heavenly home. Whether you realize it or not, the devil is gunning for you. Are you ready for battle? You are if you understand your enemy, have God's armour on, and maintain constant communication with your Commander. Having prepared yourself in such a manner, you can go out into the world after worship – ready for battle and confident of victory because Jesus has already won the war. We are merely rescuing those still caught under Satan's tyranny, eagerly awaiting the last trumpet call that will bring us home. Amen.

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<sup>i</sup> Cf. Jude 9

<sup>ii</sup> John 18:38 EHV

<sup>iii</sup> John 8:31-32 EHV

<sup>iv</sup> Cf. 1 Corinthians 1:30, Jeremiah 23:6, 33:16

<sup>v</sup> 2 Corinthians 5:21 EHV

<sup>vi</sup> Cf. John 10:27-30 & Romans 8:38-39

<sup>vii</sup> Cf. 2 Timothy 4:18

<sup>viii</sup> Psalm 50:15 EHV