

The church's armour

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Date: 20 May 2018

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[0 : 00] If you are new to this church, we're coming to the end of a series on the book of Ephesians. So if you could keep your Bibles open to Ephesians chapter 6.

Also there's a sermon outline in front of you, in your bulletin, for you to follow along. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we do thank you for the word of God, which is the sword of your spirit. And so Father, we really pray that your sword will be in action this morning. That you would use it to chase away the distractions and the schemes of the devil. But instead, that you would use it to build our confidence in you and strengthen our faith in you. All this we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

On December 7, 1941, just before 8 a.m. that Sunday morning, the skies above Honolulu, Hawaii, began to buzz with the sound of engines.

[1 : 18] It was soon filled with planes bearing the insignia of a white flag with a red dot in the middle. Within minutes, hundreds of Japanese fighter planes had descended on the American naval base of Pearl Harbor, where they managed to destroy 20 American naval vessels, including eight battleships and over 300 planes.

Over 2,000 people died in the attack with a further 1,000 wounded. No one saw it coming. Pearl Harbor, after all, was located more than 4,000 miles away from Japan and just 2,000 miles away from the U.S. mainland.

So since the American leaders were not expecting an attack so close to home, the base was relatively undefended. Sure, World War II had been going on for a little while by then, but the Americans were still a little indifferent at that stage.

Because they had not anticipated an attack, they became an easy target. The Apostle Paul does not want Christians to fall into that trap.

There's a war going on, he declares. There's a cosmic struggle between the forces of good and evil. And we're fools if we think that we can just gladly stand on the sidelines relatively unaffected by it all.

[2 : 51] And if we're not prepared, we leave ourselves vulnerable. If we're not informed, we leave ourselves exposed. If we're not watchful, we leave ourselves defenseless against the enemy.

And that's especially silly, because we will be attacked. You see, in this passage, Paul is bringing to a conclusion the entire letter of Ephesians.

And in particular, the section that he began in chapter 4, verse 1, where he appealed to us to live a life worthy of the calling we have received.

And then all throughout chapters 4 to 6, right before today's passage, he asked us to pay careful attention to how we should walk.

In chapter 5, verse 2, for example, we are to walk in the way of love. In chapter 5, verse 8, we are to walk as children of light. In chapter 5, verse 15, we are to walk as those who are wise.

[3 : 58] And in the last few sermons on Ephesians, we saw how we are to walk as husbands and wives, parents and children, and employers and employees.

But Paul now reveals to us that walking God's way is no walk in the park. Walking God's way is going to arouse opposition that is not just human, but supernatural.

We are going to face forces that go beyond human explanation. We have an enemy that wants to harm us. And so like a good general, Paul wants to present us with the bigger picture of the battlefield so that we'll be better equipped to live our Christian lives and fight a good fight.

We need to see the world the way God sees it. And when we do, not only will we be better equipped, we'll actually see that there is nothing to fear.

So I might have sounded an alarmist note at the beginning, talking about being vulnerable and exposed and defenseless. But actually, today's passage is not written with the purpose of creating fear, but instilling confidence.

[5 : 22] We're fighting against defeated foes. After all, Ephesians chapter 1 to 3 has been crystal clear. The victory has been won.

But we're still in a fight. So what does Ephesians chapter 6 have to say about our spiritual battle? Well, we'll cover today's passage by looking at how Paul describes our situation, and then look at the exhortation he gives us, and finally, what instrument God has gifted us.

So let's begin firstly with the situation. And the situation is this. The devil is at work. The devil is at work.

Just look at verse 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.

Paul tells us straight away who our enemy is not. It's not flesh and blood. It's not human beings.

[6 : 37] Paul, of course, knows very well that human beings can do plenty to obstruct the advance of the gospel and to cause great harm to believers. Just last week, we heard about those suicide bombings in Surabaya, haven't we?

Where three churches were attacked just before Sunday service was about to start. And of course, we just prayed for the Central African Republic as well, where something similar happened. Human beings are very capable of great oppression, of enacting anti-Christian legislation, of mounting intellectual opposition, all to bring down Christians.

Human beings are sinful. They sin against Christ and against Christians. Paul is not denying that at all. Chapter 2, verse 3 makes that clear.

And yet, Paul's point here is simple. There is another dimension at work. The truth is, there is also a whole range of evil spiritual forces at work that want to frustrate the cause of Christ.

Paul wants us to know they do exist. He names them. These rulers, these authorities, these powers, and spiritual forces of evil. That's who our enemy is.

[8 : 08] And their intent is to cause havoc. Now, it's unwise, as some supposedly Christian writers have in the past, to speculate about all these powers and categorize them into various ranks and hierarchies.

It's a bad idea to build an entire theology of demons that has more similarity to Robert Jordan fantasy novels than to the scriptures. The Bible gives us no encouragement to speculate.

But God does want us to be aware that these evil powers do exist. And knowing that they are around can sometimes help us to make better sense of the universe we live in.

When we look at events such as those suicide bombings in Surabaya recently, well, it gives you an extra chill, doesn't it, when we realize that those suicide bombers were girls as young as 12 and 9? And you can't help but think that that could be an instance where the evil powers could have been at work, planting the lies of false and violent ideology in hearts as young as those.

[9 : 39] And our chief adversary is the devil. You can see that in verse 11. Our stand is against the devil. Now, just in case we are starting to feel fearful again, well, the good news is the devil is already defeated.

Don't forget that in Ephesians chapter 2, we used to live under the realm of the ruler of the kingdom of the air. That's the devil.

That's how Paul describes him. But now, by God's grace, we have been made alive in Christ and transferred from the devil's realm to the realm of Christ. And so the devil has no hold on us if we're trusting in Christ today.

So don't forget that. But though he is defeated, he remains active in this present age.

Verse 11 again. We are asked to take a stance specifically against the devil's schemes. After all, he's a cunning fellow.

[10 : 51] He knows how to twist and bend things to try to bring you far away from Christ. Now, sometimes when we think of how the devil works, we are often influenced by horror movies or perhaps some unhelpful books on spiritual warfare, where we think of him usually working by possessing people or something dramatic like that.

But the devil often works in more subtle ways. Let's take one example. The word scheming has only appeared one other time in Ephesians.

And that's back in chapter 4, verse 14. In fact, it's the only other time that word is used in the Bible. And there, in chapter 4, verse 14, it is used to speak of false teaching that leads God's people astray.

And that's one major way the devil schemes, simply by introducing a distorted teaching here, false, a little bit of heresy there.

You can see this elsewhere. For example, in 1 Timothy 4, verse 1. The Spirit clearly says that in later times, some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons, which the next few verses go on to explain as certain legalistic practices taught by false teachers. [12:33] Nothing dramatic, and yet something that can cause plenty of negative impact on God's church.

Sometimes the devil doesn't even need to introduce false teaching. He just needs to distract us from God's word. One pastor says that the devil is most active during refreshments time after the Sunday service is over.

How? By simply making sure that we never, ever dwell on the sermon or how the word of God should shape our lives.

Instead, he gets us to think and talk about every other trivial thing under the sun while avoiding reflecting on the word of God. When that happens, Jesus remains distant and we become stunted. Again, let's just go back to Ephesians to find another time the devil has been mentioned specifically. And that's in chapter 4, verse 26 to 27. Let me read it.

[13:49] In your anger, do not sin. Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry. And do not give the devil a foothold. Again, when we read that, it doesn't seem like anything dramatic going on like in the movies.

But when we get needlessly angry, when we speak unwholesomely, and so on, you can be sure that Satan is ready to pounce, wanting to exploit our day-to-day sinfulness.

When he sees the bitterness festering in our hearts, he immediately encourages it, knowing that that could cause further relational breakdown, undermine church unity, or lead us to impulsive action.

And just like that, by appealing to our sinful desires, he causes harm, not just to us, but to those around us. Angry words lead to more angry words.

Gossip leads to more gossip. And before you know it, our collective witness for Jesus is weakened. While he lies to us, telling us that it's inevitable we have to give in to such talk, to say those thoughtless words, or engage in the darkness described in Ephesians 4 and 5.

[15:24] And when we sin against each other, and our Lord, and we begin to feel our guilt, well, the devil wants us to stay guilty.

He wants us to feel that we could never ever approach God. He wants to direct our eyes only ever to the dirtiness in our hearts, so that we no longer feel like we can serve God or serve each other. And again, that hurts the church, doesn't it? Above all, he wants to keep us away from the cross, from the Lord Jesus who promises forgiveness to the repentant.

That's where he does his most damage. And he doesn't necessarily need to engage in magic shows or special effects to achieve that.

So that's the situation. We might think we live in peaceful settings like those people at Pearl Harbor, but the battle is real. The devil is at work.

[16:31] He's scheming. Don't be fooled. And so we need to hear Paul's exhortation. That's the second point, and I hope his exhortation is crystal clear from the opening verses of this passage.

Paul causes to be strong in the Lord. Be strong. Be strengthened. Not by anything inside of us. Be strengthened.

Not by our own willpower. Be strengthened. Not by our own knowledge. Not by our own spirituality. Not by our own efforts to be good Christians. That's not going to work.

Because these spiritual powers are clearly stronger than us. But, verse 10, be strong.

Be strengthened in the Lord and in his mighty power. And that makes all the difference. Remember what kind of power we're talking about?

[17:36] In case you've forgotten, just flip back a couple of pages to Ephesians 1, verse 19 to 21. And let me read it to you again. Halfway through verse 19.

That power is the same as the mighty strength he exerted when he raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms.

Far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every name that is invoked, not only in the present age, but also in the age to come.

You see, as those in Christ, that's the kind of power that resides in us. We can hold firmly to God because God's power is holding us.

And that's why God says, stand firm. You can see that's repeated over and over again, four times in verses 11 to 13.

[18 : 45] Verse 11. Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. Verse 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. Verse 14. Stand firm then. You see, when we walk in the light, ultimately, by standing firm in Christ.

Standing firm in what Christ has already done. He has already won the battle. Spiritual warfare is not primarily about us, about what sort of special prayers we can say, or what sort of formulas, special formulas, we can use to bind demons.

For the Ephesian Christians, that would be no different from the pagan magicians that they were surrounded by, who would have resorted precisely to such things.

And for us, if we are dependent on that, then we would be no different from the Chinese mediums or the BOMOs. No.

[20 : 04] True spiritual warfare is simply standing firm in Christ. And we do have to stand firm because it's going to be a struggle.

That's the word Paul uses in verse 12. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers and so on. The idea Paul seems to have in mind here is that of a wrestling match.

Back in the day, in Ephesus, wrestling matches were popular. We're talking about hand-to-hand combat here. It's up close and personal.

And so this battle is more like that kind of wrestling match than simply playing board games. From time to time, we're going to feel the force of it.

I'm sure if you've been Christian for any length of time, you've felt the intense waves of temptation from time to time.

[21 : 12] Haven't you? And sometimes it's the devil directing his attacks against us. But though it's a struggle, Paul is confident that we can actually take a stand against the devil's schemes.

He's confident of success. Look at verse 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.

when is that day of evil? Well, he could be referring to a future specific season, but actually it's a little more likely that he's simply talking about today and tomorrow and the day after tomorrow.

Because in Ephesians chapter 5 verse 16, he refers to the current time we live in as the days of evil.

It's right now that Satan wants to move us away from Christ and his cross. And so it's right now that we must stand firm.

[22 : 34] And we can stand firm. We won't fall back. We can remain steady as long as we've done everything to use God's instrument.

For we are to put on the full armor of God. That's our instrument and that's our third point for today. I'm sure you noticed that in verses 11 and 13.

Put on the full armor of God. And really, as we'll see in a moment, to put on the armor of God simply means to stand firm in the gospel.

did you notice what this armor is made up of? Things like truth and righteousness and peace and so on.

And in the context of Ephesians, what is truth but the gospel of salvation? Here's Ephesians chapter 1 verse 13. It should be on the screen. And you also were included in Christ when you heard the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation.

[23 : 46] What is righteousness but the new self created by Jesus and given to us in his gospel? Here's Ephesians 4 verse 24. And put on the new self created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.

And what is peace but the gospel that makes the two groups one and brings us to God? Here's Ephesians chapter 2 verse 14. For he himself is our peace who has made the two groups one and

has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility.

And then verse 17 to 18 a little bit further. He, that's Jesus, came and preached peace to you who were far and peace to those who were near.

For through him we both have access to the Father by one's spirit. Putting on the armour of God therefore is about standing firm in the gospel.

Spiritual warfare is about running to Jesus and holding him tight even as he holds on to us. It's not about us as the war hero acting like Gandalf in Lord of the Rings zapping demonic forces left and right.

[25 : 06] rather it's about Jesus as the war hero the one who has already caused all the powers in the spiritual realm to submit to him and the one under whom all things in heaven and earth will be placed.

It's his armour we're wearing. The reason we can stand firm is because God has clothed us with Christ himself.

And so putting on the armour of God is not something we do. It's something God has already done for us. We simply need to make use of it.

So let's look through some of these pieces of gospel armour. Verse 14 stand firm with the belt of truth buckled round your waist.

So to stand firm is to remain trusting in God's truth. And so that means if we want to stand firm we need to first of all see Christianity as true.

[26 : 22] It's not simply a religion to help us feel good. It's not simply a cultural heritage that we grew up with. If Christianity is just simply that but it's not actually true, it's useless.

It's not going to help you stand against the devil. All he has to do is show us that our Christian faith rests on shaky foundations and then we will fall just like that.

But Christianity isn't just a feel-good religion. It's a claim about what is actually real. It tells us what is really true.

It says there really is a God, that he really is gracious and compassionate and slow to anger, that he really is just and mighty and sovereign, that sin really is a big problem, but Jesus really is a bigger saviour.

and that truth provides the foundation for our lives to be transformed. Even if Christianity is really true, and if Jesus is really who he says he is, the person who rescues us from eternal wrath, the one more powerful than any demonic force, the one who enters perfect justice and happiness is our future, well, we can stand firm.

[27 : 56] We know for sure that we're on the right side, on the winning side, no matter what the devil says or does. And truth protects us from having too low or too high a view of ourselves by telling us that we are creatures made in God's image, who have become fallen sinners.

truth protects us from putting anything else on the throne of our hearts by showing us that Jesus is really the king of the universe.

And when the devil comes whispering that the wrong thing that you've committed for the thousand time, it's just too much for God to forgive, that God is actually very sick of seeing you stumble again and again and again.

well, we reply with the truth that is in Jesus. In Christ, we have no condemnation.

After all, verse 14, we have the breastplate of righteousness in place. How do you stand firm with this breastplate? By reminding ourselves every day of the gospel, that God has given us his righteousness.

[29 : 19] Our standing is based solely on Jesus' work, not ours. And so on your bad days of sin and failure, be encouraged.

You have Jesus' righteousness. And on your better days of success and victory, be humble. You still depend on Jesus' righteousness, not your own.

And you remember too, as Romans 6 puts it, that you are a slave to righteousness. And so you stand firm by living in accordance with the righteousness that is now yours, putting off the old self and putting on the new self.

You live out all those things that we saw in Ephesians 4 and 5. And that's actually spiritual warfare. That's standing firm.

And you stand firm by taking up the shield of faith, verse 16. And that is, as we exercise faith in Christ, we are actually taking refuge in him.

[30 : 35] in Roman times, Roman soldiers would use two kinds of shields. One was more for personal combat, but there was a larger shield, which they used when they were all marching in formation.

Those shields were soaked in water, so that when the flaming arrows from the enemy came their way, they just held that shield up together, and all those arrows would be neutralized.

And God says, the devil can throw every kind of flaming arrow against you, but you don't have to worry. Whether it's temptation to sin, or persecution, or false teaching, or an unexpected obstacle, when we find refuge in Jesus and in his mighty power, we are secure.

And did you know that having good doctrine in place helps you resist the devil? Look at verse 17. Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the spirit, which is the word of God.

The sword of the spirit is the word of God itself. Now today, if you were in charge of the U.S. army, what would you equip your soldiers with?

[32 : 06] Probably tanks and fighter jets and aircraft carriers. Not swords. That's suitable for warfare 2,000 years ago, but not today.

And unfortunately, many Christians today have a similar view of the Bible. It's outdated, suitable for 2,000 years ago, but not today.

But the devil knows very well God's word, which ensures that our doctrine will be solid, will be extremely effective against him.

And that's why from the very beginning, even in the Garden of Eden, he was already trying to cast doubt on God's word to Eve. So let's not neglect our Bibles.

Let's not look down on Bible studies, or sermons that explain God's word, or classes that help you interpret God's word rightly, or the habit of regularly reading God's word, because it's actually part of our spiritual warfare.

[33 : 18] When we stand firm on God's word, we stand firm against the evil powers. And it's not just having good doctrine that is good spiritual warfare, so is evangelism.

Now, that might surprise you, but that's what verse 15 says. And with your feet, fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace.

Paul is drawing on language from Isaiah chapter 52, which says, how beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news.

And he's saying, because we already have good news, we are ready always to give the reason for the hope we have. The missionary CT start once said, some want to live within the sound of a church bell.

I want to run a rescue operation within a yard of hell. For him, standing firm is not a purely defensive stance.

[34 : 34] We're on the winning side, so we can go on the offensive. We can win people for Christ, snatching them away from the devil. So to stand firm is to put on the armor of God.

But there is one other instrument that we must not neglect, and we see that in verses 18 to 20, and that's prayer. Since Christ has done everything for us, it's not surprising that Paul finishes his letter by asking us to go to him.

Apart from Christ, we have nothing. But in Christ, we have everything. So, verse 18, pray in the Spirit on all occasions, with all kinds of prayers and requests.

With this in mind, be alert and always keep praying for all the Lord's people. Did you notice that awe and compassionate call to prayer?

on all occasions, with all kinds of prayers for all the Lord's people. Like good soldiers, we need to keep alert because the devil is constantly active, and that's why we constantly pray on all occasions.

[36 : 05] And we pray not just for ourselves, but for our church, KEC, mercy, that we would keep the unity and truly be God's new humanity.

This is prayer based on God's word. That's what praying in the Spirit means. It doesn't mean praying in tongues. Notice that there is absolutely nothing in the book of Ephesians about tongues. And so in context, praying in the Spirit can't mean that. But he's just told us that God's word is the Spirit's sword.

And so praying in the Spirit is really to pray knowing we have access to the Father. It's to pray according to his will as revealed in the Scriptures. It's to pray his master plan will come to pass.

That's Paul's prayer request in verses 19 to 20. Pray also for me that whenever I speak words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel.

[37 : 15] In other words, God's master plan for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it fearlessly as I should.

Let that be the kind of prayers that we ourselves pray as well. So my friends, as we close our series in Ephesians, hear the call.

Stand firm. Stand firm in Christ. Stand firm in the one who is all-powerful. Stand firm in the one who unites everything under himself.

Stand firm in the one who made you alive even when you were dead. Stand firm so that you can walk in him to do good. Stand firm against the devil's schemes.

Stand firm with the sword of the spirit. God will and just to do it. And just as Paul says of Tychicus in 6 verse 22, well I hope that going through the book of Ephesians has really encouraged you and helped you to stand firmer.

[38 : 30] There's nothing more encouraging to a pastor than a congregation who is truly standing firm in Christ and genuinely walking with him.

And remember that though it looks like we live in peaceful settings, yet we are involved in a cosmic struggle. But we can stand firm.

For as Paul says in verse 24, there is indeed grace to all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with an undying love.

That's the beauty of the gospel. I want you to know church that this is my prayer for you. Stand firm. in the gospel. in the gospel.

[39 : 53] in the gospel. In the gospel. In the gospel. He went to the gospel. He went to the gospel. I'll tell you that there is teenage people are four tons of ■ in the gospel. In the gospel. There are two anth içinners. There are two mentors for certain systems to know sitting in the gospel. There's some ■ ani voices say of their high men, like the deadiyetra ■■■ of inteligente asi.

And the people who let him know's abilities. And at that point they get into the gospel. There are three new places where they look at the gospel, but they hear ■ stro means. So they don't think it is the contribution. So maybe I will see statues. And so not that can happen when they look like the content of truth. I'm getting some amazing ■ why aren't possible for you.