

The Book of Ephesians

Lesson 13: The Whole Armor of God -- Ephesians 6:10-24

Every Roman soldier Paul could see from his prison cell was a walking sermon. Chained to that soldier day and night, Paul had studied the armor up close: the heavy belt that held everything together, the breastplate guarding the heart, the hobnailed sandals gripping the ground, the great shield, the helmet, the short sword. And as he comes to the end of his letter, Paul looks at that armor and sees a picture of something far more important than any earthly battle. He wants the Ephesians to understand that they are soldiers too, in a war they cannot see with their eyes.

This is how Paul chooses to end a letter soaked in grace. After three chapters of blessing and three chapters of practical instruction, he sounds a final note: be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. Put on the whole armor of God. The Christian life, for all its peace and joy, is also a battle, and we are naive if we forget it. There is an enemy, and he is real, and he is cunning, and he does not fight fair.

But Paul is careful to tell us exactly who the enemy is, because here is where most of us go wrong. We do not wrestle against flesh and blood, he says, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. The person across the table is not our real enemy. The struggle behind every visible conflict is spiritual, and we will keep losing if we keep fighting the wrong opponent with the wrong weapons.

And then notice the strange command Paul gives, not once but four times: stand. Stand against the schemes of the devil. Withstand in the evil day. Having done all, stand firm. He does not tell us to advance and conquer new territory; he tells us to hold the ground Christ has already won. The victory was secured at the cross and the empty tomb. Our task is to stand in it, clothed in armor that is not our own but God's: His truth, His righteousness, His gospel, the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation, the sword of the Spirit which is the word of God, and over it all, prayer. We do not fight for victory. We fight from it.

Group Discussion: Paul says our real struggle is not against flesh and blood but against unseen spiritual forces, and he tells us four times to stand firm. How does it change the way we face conflict and temptation when we realize who the real enemy is, and that our task is to stand in a victory Christ has already won?

Personal Reflection: Paul lists the pieces of God's armor: truth, righteousness, the gospel, faith, salvation, the word, and prayer. As you read the list, which piece do you sense you have been neglecting, and where has that left you most vulnerable?

Read Ephesians 6:10-24

Study Questions

1. In verses 10 and 11 Paul says to be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might, and to put on the whole armor of God. Whose strength is meant to win this battle, and what does it tell us that the armor is called the armor of God rather than our own?
2. Paul calls us to fight in the Lord's strength rather than our own. In what area of your spiritual life are you most often trying to fight in your own strength, and what would it look like to draw on the Lord's strength there instead?
3. In verse 12 Paul says we do not wrestle against flesh and blood but against rulers, authorities, and spiritual forces of evil. Who is the real enemy in the Christian's battle, and how does misidentifying the enemy lead us astray?
4. It is easy to treat other people as our enemy rather than seeing the spiritual battle behind our conflicts. Where have you been fighting a person when the real struggle was deeper, and how would seeing the true enemy change the way you respond?
5. In verses 13 through 15 Paul repeatedly tells us to stand and to stand firm, clothed with the belt of truth, the breastplate of righteousness, and the gospel of peace. Why do you think Paul emphasizes standing rather than advancing, and what does it mean to stand firm in the evil day?
6. Standing firm means refusing to give ground to the enemy where we are tempted to retreat. Where are you most tempted to give ground right now, and what would standing firm look like in that specific area?
7. In verses 16 and 17 Paul names the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. What do these pieces, especially faith and the word of God, contribute to the believer's defense and to the one offensive weapon in the list?
8. Paul calls the word of God the sword of the Spirit, our one weapon of attack. How well do you actually know and use the Scriptures in your daily battles, and what is one step toward taking up that sword more skillfully?
9. Taking verses 10 through 18 as a whole, Paul describes a real spiritual battle fought in the Lord's strength, against spiritual rather than human foes, with the armor God provides, including the word of God and prayer. How should a Christian engage in spiritual warfare rightly, avoiding both the error of ignoring the battle entirely and the error of becoming fixated on the demonic, and what does it mean that our chief weapons are God's word and prayer rather than worldly means or new revelations?
10. In verses 18 through 20 Paul urges praying at all times in the Spirit, with perseverance, for all the saints. Looking back over this whole passage, and indeed over the entire letter to the Ephesians, name one specific way the Lord has been forming you through this study, and one piece of God's armor you most need to take up as you go forward.

Now or Later

Reflect on these passages: 2 Corinthians 10:3-5, our weapons are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds; 1 Peter 5:8-9, be sober, watch, and resist the devil, firm in your faith; James 4:7, submit to God, resist the devil, and he will flee from you; 2 Timothy 3:16-17, all Scripture is breathed out by God and equips the believer for every good work; Philippians 4:6-7, in everything by prayer let your requests be made known to God.