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Text: Ephesians 6:10-20 (EHV)

Pentecost 14

Grace and peace to you from him who is, and who was, and who is to come. – Rev. 1:4

Time to Suit Up for Battle

Dear fellow Christian soldiers,

What Paul uses today in the book to the Ephesians is an image that he was all too familiar with. For where was Paul when he was writing this book? Paul was in Rome, awaiting trial before Caesar. He was not there because of some terrible crime he committed, but because he was preaching the Gospel. So while he is in Rome, awaiting his day in court, he gets to live in his own rented place, but he has to have a Roman soldier right by him at all times. So Paul is actually using the kind of armor that Roman soldiers wore at his time, that he would have seen each and every day in Rome, to talk about this kind of suit that Christians have. So its time for us to suit up for battle.

I.

Paul is wrapping up his letter to the church in Ephesus, which was a city on the western side of modern day Turkey. His parting remarks to this church are vivid and strong; they speak of the reality of the Christian's life while in this life. He starts by saying, **"Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power."** (v.10) This sets the tone and is the backbone for everything Paul will say. "Be strong" not just in anything, but "be strong" in the Lord and his power. For that is the one and only thing, Christians need in this life: Strength in the Lord. Now listen to how Paul further describes this strength in the Lord.

"Put on the full armor of God, so that you can stand against the schemes of the Devil." (v.11) The picture is you are about to face your enemy, the devil. You want to be fully prepared to face him, so what is your only defense against the devil's schemes, the armor of God, the strength of the Lord. Notice that the devil's schemes are plural, that means, they are constant, he won't just attack once, but multiple times, in multiple places to find the chink in the armor you wear. So our battle in this life is not really against what we see, but against whom we cannot see. Listen to what Paul says next.

"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." (v.12) Like I said, our battle, our struggle is not against people and their temptations, but is against the

devil and his minions, his fallen angels. They *are* the powers of this dark world. They *are* the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Understand it like this: they lost the war against God already. And they are now in retreat. But as they retreat, they want to still inflict as much damage on God as possible. And how much more damage could they inflict on God than by taking down one of his believers with them! So what is our defense against all of this, Paul says.

"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." (v.13) Here Paul repeats that armor of God, the strength of the Lord. This armor *is* the only defense. This armor will take all the attacks, but still allow you to stand your ground. This armor can take all the blows of the devil, but still will allow you to stand after it all. This armor is spiritual for our enemies are spiritual and so is our Lord. Listen as Paul breaks down every little piece of this full armor of God.

"Stand, then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness fastened in place," (v.14) Now for all of these parts of the armor, notice that they are a defense against a specific attack of the devil. We first of all have the belt of *truth* around us. We need the truth, because the devil is **"the father of lies"** as Jesus said in the gospels. (Jn 8:44) Remember how he tricked our first parents. He first got them to start doubting what God said and then came out and lied about God to their faces, **"You will not**

certainly die.” (Gen 3:4) When God said you would die if you ate from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Lies: so we need the belt of truth, what God says is true in his Word.

We also have the breastplate of *righteousness*. A piece of metal to cover our vital organs, especially our heart. Notice we need this righteousness because of the devil’s attack, the attack that says we are sinful. Another name for the devil is Satan, which means accuser. In Revelation 12:10, he is described as accusing believers **“before our God day and night.”** But to all these attacks to our sinfulness, which we are, what can we always point to: Christ’s righteousness, his holiness, his perfection. What he won for us and freely gave to us. That is our defense against *this* attack of the devil.

Paul continues: **“and with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace tied to your feet like sandals.”** (v.15) In battle, you also need to cover up your feet, protect them, and what covers our feet against the devil’s schemes: the gospel of peace. For another attack of the devil is to use the Law and its demands. We must keep the 10 commandments, we must be sinless. But we cannot be. One of my college professors used to describe the devil’s temptations like this: he will tempt you to commit any and every sin, and when you do, he will come back and say, **“And you call yourself a Christian and you did THAT!”** To those demands of the Law, what can we say, **“The gospel of Christ. He has done right all I have done wrong!”**

Paul continues, **"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."** (v.16) If you have ever seen pictures or paintings of the Roman soldiers marching, you most likely saw these kinds of shields. They would have been full body shields, covering head to toe, looking more like doors than anything else. They were great when arrows came flying in, for they would cover your entire body. *That* is the kind of shield *faith* is for us against this attack of the devil's flaming arrows. For this attack of the devil is the attack of doubt. It is when he makes us question whether or not we are Christians. "How can you really be sure? Look at all the horrible things you do? You lie, you cheat, you steal, you take your God's name in vain, you envy, you hate. Is that what a Christian does? Isn't that what you do every day?" In these attacks, we turn to our faith, or rather what our faith trusts in: Christ. For our faith trusts in what Christ has done for us and it does not matter what we have or have not done. Christ did it all for us. He saved us completely. And it is the Holy Spirit who gives us this faith in Christ's accomplished salvation anyways. So even our faith is not something we have to do. So that means even our faith is never in doubt, for it is all God's work.

Paul continues, **"Also take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God."** (v.17) The helmet of salvation. A helmet protects another vital part of your body, your head. Something pretty important. For this attack of the devil attacks something else pretty important in our lives, a future salvation, a future glorious heaven. For the devil,

especially on our deathbeds, wants to make us doubt *that* as well. At our deathbeds, that is his last shot of defeating us and winning us to hell with him. So he wants us to doubt where we will spend eternity, but we do not have to doubt this either! For again our salvation was won by Christ and nothing we do. (Notice how all of the pieces of this full armor of God, all of the ways we defeat the devil's schemes, is because of the Lord and what he has done for us. It is because of the Lord's strength, not our own!)

And then the final piece of this armor: the sword of the Spirit, which if you noticed, is the only offensive weapon in this full armor of God. This is the only offensive weapon for it is the *only* weapon we need to use to strike back against the devil and his attacks. This is what has defeated him for millennia; this is what will still defeat him today and always. Paul finishes up with one more piece of this full armor: prayer. For prayer is the natural response of a Christian. When we are attacked, when we feel the devil and his forces pushing in around us: we can and should pray to the one who is our strength.

II.

To paraphrase Pat Benetar, "Love is a Battlefield" "Life is a Battlefield." Is that what you view life as? A fight against unseen enemies? A war against you? Your greatest enemy wanting to drag you to hell with him for eternity? If not, that is another clever scheme of the devil and one his flaming arrows! Now since our battle is against spiritual forces, since we have this full

armor of God at our disposal, since it is the only thing that can defeat the devil, do we make use of the *full* armor of God? Why wouldn't we? Or do we think we can take on the devil ourselves? Or do we think he really is not that bad of a guy? Or do we think he doesn't even exist? Those are more of his schemes. Those are more of his lies, doubts, half-truths, and all his other tricks to try and get us to fall to him even as he is defeated and in retreat.

Don't give in. Make use of this full armor of God. Be strengthened once again in the Lord's mighty power. Sharpen that sword of the Spirit, the Word of God. Be in the Word of God for that is how we are ready for the next attack of the devil, and there will always be a next attack. Count on that. But we can always count on our Lord too. So it is time to suit up for battle. AMEN.

The peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. AMEN.