

The Letter Of Paul To The Ephesians

*⁷In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, ⁸which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight ⁹making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ ¹⁰as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.
(Ephesians 1:7-10. ESV)*

Message 27

Spiritual Warfare
December 8th, 2013
Ephesians 6:10-20
Rev. Paul Carter

Introduction:

Good morning! Open your Bibles to Ephesians 6:10-20. We're dealing with a longer text today with a lot of moving parts so I think the best approach will be to read the text in full and then to notice the big picture connections and the primary means and perpetual manner of the Christian engaged in spiritual warfare. Hear now the Word of the Lord.

¹⁰Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. ¹¹Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. ¹²For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. ¹³Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm. ¹⁴Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, ¹⁵and, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace. ¹⁶In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one; ¹⁷and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, ¹⁸praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints, ¹⁹and also for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel, ²⁰for which I am an ambassador in chains, that I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak.
(Ephesians 6:10-20. ESV)

This is the Word of the Lord, thanks be to God.

The first word in the text we just read – FINALLY - ought to tip us off to the fact that this paragraph is essentially the Apostle Paul's closing summary and call to action. You can't really understand what this paragraph is about unless you look at it in reference to the letter as a whole. So in light of that, let's endeavour to make a few "forest level observations" as we note the

relationship of this paragraph to the larger body of Paul's Letter To The Ephesians. When we do that we naturally come to the conclusion that:

Forest Level Observations On The Text:

1. Persevering in faith and in righteousness is the essence of spiritual warfare

Again, think about the structure of Ephesians as a whole. There are 3 chapters on the content of the Gospel. Then there are three chapters on the appropriate lifestyle of the Christian who has believed in the Gospel. In chapter 4:1 we have that famous Pauline hinge: THEREFORE – if you've believed the Gospel, then you must respond by living this way. Christianity is SAVING FAITH PLUS FRUITFUL RESPONSE and so the goal of the devil is really simple; he has a two-fold plan: He wants to destroy faith and he wants to deny fruit. The devil doesn't know whether you are elect or not – only God can see into a heart and know if a person is truly saved – so he attacks you with two potential outcomes. If you are not truly saved, he will draw you into apostasy, ruin and spiritual death. If you are truly saved then by means of the same attacks he hopes to kill your fruit on the vine and rob God of glory and you of good. That's his plan and resisting that plan is the essence of spiritual warfare. He wants to blind your eyes to the Gospel and spoil all your efforts to walk in all the ways Paul was talking about from 4:1-6:9. He wants to spoil your humility, your patience, your purity, your peace, your love, your honesty and your forgiveness. He wants to interrupt or intercept your Spirit filling, if he can, so that he can corrupt your worship, spoil your marriage, ruin your kids, and poison your workplace. That's what is on his agenda for the next several hundred years or so or until the Lord returns. Your job is to be made strong and to stand firm.

What that means, friend, is that spiritual warfare at the end of the day, is not about how to get demons out of your cereal box or how to cancel generational curses or how to keep the witch next door from making your dog sick. Its' not about that and we would never think it was if we read this text in light of all of what Paul has been saying for 6 chapters. Spiritual warfare is about resisting deception, mortifying the flesh and standing firm in the Spirit and in the Word.

2. What God gives by grace (ch.1) we must protect by means (ch.6)

Most scholars recognize a lot of intentional parallels between this paragraph in chapter 6 and the opening eulogy and thanksgiving back in chapter 1. This sort of connection would have been a lot more noticeable to the original hearers than it is to us for at least two reasons. First of all they spoke Greek so they would have noticed the linguistic connections and second of all they heard the whole letter read in one sitting. For us, chapter 1 was way back in the spring and we can't remember what we had for breakfast, let alone what we heard in church 7 months ago! But if you read the letter carefully, even in English, you will notice that Paul seems to be making the point that what he prayed for them in chapter 1 was given to them by grace and must now be guarded by them through the use of grace fuelled means.

One of the things you've heard me say many times before is that salvation is a one handed work; God does it. He does it to you. You were dead in the water and dead people do not grab onto life preservers; dead people sink to the bottom of the sea and rot. And so dead people have to be born again by a miracle of grace. That's salvation. Its a one handed work. You didn't help. God did it. Perseverance and growth and sanctification are two handed works. God helps us to grow and persevere by enabling us to do the very things that cause us to grow and persevere. Two handed work. God does something and with that WE DO SOMETHING. If we neglect our means of grace we will suffer, we fall into terrible sin and decline and forfeit much fruit and eternal reward. We have what we have by grace but we guard what we have by means. Paul said to Timothy:

¹⁴By the Holy Spirit who dwells within us, guard the good deposit entrusted to you. (2 Timothy 1:14. ESV)

That's exactly what Paul is saying here. Chapter 1 is about GRACE, chapter 6 is about GUARDING. Of course Paul would want to remind us that the guarding we do is only possible by the grace God gives. The main imperative in this paragraph is found in verse 10, translated in most of your Bibles as "be strong". It is a passive imperative, meaning that it is something that has to be done to you, but cannot be done BY YOU. It literally means "be made strong". You can't just "be strong", you can't just pull a Hulk Hogan and rip up your t-shirt and go out to battle the devil – first you have to receive from the Lord. We worship before we serve. We get filled before we fight. That's Christian strength and that's what Paul is calling for here.

Alright, let's drop down to tree level now and enter the text. As I mentioned already the main verb is given in verse 10: "Be made strong" and then there are four parallel commands translated as some version of "stand" or "withstand". The imperative "put on the full armour of God" therefore functions to explain HOW that primary command will be carried out. We do this in order to do that. Let me put it this way:

We must be made strong in the Lord, protecting our faith, preserving our fruit, withstanding every assault of our enemy by putting on the following...

1. The belt of truth

The word "truth" can mean a lot of things in the Bible and so we need ask what it means in this particular context. Remembering as we do that this paragraph is given as a summary of the letter as a whole and as a call to action based on the teaching of the letter as a whole we are prepared to define "truth" as specifically "the truth of the Gospel" as per chapter 1:13.

¹³In him you also, when you heard **the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation**, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit (Ephesians 1:13. ESV)

In chapter 1 Paul defined the word of truth as being the Gospel of our salvation. The only way we can withstand the attempts of the devil to lead us into apostasy and ruin is if we are in fact believing and trusting in the Gospel. If the Gospel we believe in is not the true Gospel, we are easy prey for the wiles and deceitful schemes of the devil. It all begins with believing in the true Gospel. You can't protect faith if you don't have true, saving faith.

2. The breastplate of righteousness

The word "righteousness" is also used in a variety of ways within the Bible so we want to know for sure what Paul is talking about here. There are two main options: ethical righteousness and what theologians refer to as "forensic or legal righteousness". Is Paul telling us that the way we withstand the enemy is to act ethically or is he telling us that the way we resist the enemy is by trusting in the righteousness of Christ that is our legal justification before a Holy God? This question is answered by remembering that all of these battle metaphors employed by Paul in this

paragraph are borrowed from the Book of Isaiah in the OT. The breastplate of righteousness is a straight lift out of Isaiah 59:17:

¹⁶ He saw that there was no man,
and wondered that there was no one to intercede;
then **his own arm brought him salvation,**
and **his righteousness upheld him.**

¹⁷ **He put on righteousness as a breastplate,**
and a helmet of salvation on his head... (Isaiah 59:16- 17. ESV)

Clearly here the righteousness is God's righteousness which alone can bring salvation and that same meaning is imported into Ephesians 6. To "put on the breastplate of righteousness" therefore is to trust entirely in the righteousness of Christ. If we do this – practically speaking now – if we put the emphasis on Christ and his righteousness it will help us against a very common form of spiritual attack. The devil will often try to derail your faith by assaulting your feelings. He will bombard you with feelings of doubt and feelings of guilt. He will want you to defend that by trying to stir up positive feelings, intimate experiences and a false sense of freedom from guilt. What he's actually trying to do is to get you to put your trust in your feelings and in your performance as a Christian. As soon as you are trusting in those things the devil has you right where he wants you.

Let me slow down and unpack this because this is a common problem in our society and in our church. People will often come to me and say: "Pastor I don't FEEL like I'm a Christian. I don't FEEL the presence of God and I FEEL very guilty and overcome by FEELINGS of shame over the things I've done in the past." I usually reply like this: "Brother, sister, I don't mean to be rude or unsympathetic, but if I may, can I ask what possible difference could it make how you feel? Your feelings are not authoritative and your salvation is not based on the stability of your emotions. Let's deal in fact. Do you believe that Jesus Christ is the eternal son of God who lived a perfect life of obedience and who died on the cross as a substitute for sins? Yes. Do you trust in that for your salvation? Yes. Are you planning to tell God about all the good things you've done in order to enter into heaven? No. Do you harbour a deep sense of gratitude for what the Lord has done for you? Yes. Do you desire to thank him by learning his ways and walking in them as he gives you grace to do so? Yes. Then you are saved. Your feelings are IRRELEVANT!!!!"

My friends, feelings are not authoritative!! I'm sorry Dr. Phil, I'm sorry High Priestess Oprah – but they are not! The cross of Jesus Christ is authoritative and NOTHING ELSE GETS TO SPEAK ON THE LAST DAY. Do you want to protect faith, do you want to grow and preserve fruit? Do you want to withstand the attacks of the enemy? Then cling to the objective facts of Jesus Christ and his righteousness. Demote your feelings because as you promote them, so will your adversary assault you through them.

3. The shoes of Gospel readiness

The exact phrase there is:

as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace. (Ephesians 6:15. ESV)

That is a bit of a complicated phrase, both in English and in Greek. It is a lift out of Isaiah 52:7:

⁷ How beautiful upon the mountains are **the feet of him who brings good news, who publishes peace, who brings good news** of happiness, who publishes salvation, who says to Zion, “Your God reigns.” (Isaiah 52:7. ESV)

This refers to the ancient practice of sending a runner – usually an older teenage boy – to bring the news of military victory to the major towns and villages in Israel. This would allow the towns to stand down, open their gates and resume their lives. Such messengers were proverbially well received because they brought such welcome news – their feet were beautiful so to speak. The idea here seems to be that the Christian should likewise be eager and prepared to share the good news as good news to any and all who will listen. This will help us to protect faith, preserve fruit, to grow strong and withstand our enemy.

Let me just say a word about that because this one seems counterintuitive. How does sharing the Gospel help you in your own faith? The text in Ephesians seems to indicate that both preparing to share and actually sharing the Gospel will be helpful to you in defeating the schemes of the devil. How so? I think first of all that it will confirm you in your faith. There is no better way to learn something than to teach it. Seminary professors will often ask students to summarize the Gospel in 100 words or less to see if they actually understand what they mean one day to preach. Could you do that if someone asked you to? If you can't that might mean that your understanding of the Gospel is a little fuzzy. As a preacher I can tell you that saying something

out loud to other people forces you to carefully construct your thoughts. There is a reason that I don't just wake up on Sunday morning and preach whatever comes into my head. That would be bad for you and very bad for me. Preparing and then delivering the Gospel is a great way to confirm yourself in the faith.

Here is a simple application. Go home and write a summary of the Gospel in 100 words. You can send it to me when you're done. It's a great test of whether you fully understand the Gospel. Alternatively, prepare a 500 word presentation of the Gospel for 6 year olds. If you can't explain the Gospel in 500 words to a 6 year old child then you don't know it. Doing that sort of thing FOR REAL – whether at Tim Hortons, the bus station, the hockey arena or downstairs in children's ministry – will confirm your own faith and thwart the efforts of the devil to deceive and confuse you.

4. The shield of faith

Roman soldiers typically made use of two types of shield, a smaller one when fighting as an individual on the move and a larger one when part of a defensive battle line. The word used here implies that Paul has the larger version in mind¹. As to what Paul means by "faith" we once again return to his own words in chapter 1:

¹⁹and what is the immeasurable greatness of his **power toward us who believe**, according to the working of his great might (Ephesians 1:19. ESV)

The word translated there as "believe" is the Greek *pistis* just as it is in chapter 6:16. We see it used again in 3:16-17:

¹⁶that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened **with power** through his Spirit in your inner being, ¹⁷so that Christ may dwell in your hearts **through faith** (Ephesians 3:16-17. ESV)

Again, same word and again connected to our being filled with power. Faith in this context is the means by which we apprehend spiritual power. It is our abiding with Christ through the Spirit that makes us strong to withstand the assaults of our enemy. Here is the point in plain English. Your best defence against apostasy and fruitlessness is to develop your own spiritual life. By and

¹ As suggested by Peter O' Brian, Ephesians (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999), 479.

large, most of the people who crash and burn do so because they neglect the means of grace. They attend church infrequently, they are undisciplined in personal devotion, they are careless in their fellowship. They let the tank run dry and they are quickly and inevitably overwhelmed. Don't do it. Feed your faith.

5. The helmet of salvation

Now we've already seen this. It is a lift out of the same passage as was the breastplate of righteousness.

¹⁷ He put on righteousness as a breastplate, **and a helmet of salvation on his head**... (Isaiah 59:17. ESV)

In Isaiah those things are synonymous – they are both ways of saying that God has armed himself to bring salvation to his people. Likewise here in Ephesians they are synonymous but they are positioned in slightly different ways. The Bible often speaks of salvation simultaneously as a completed event and as a present process and reality. We see that same idea for example in Philippians 2:12:

¹²Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, **work out your own salvation with fear and trembling**. (ESV)

Is Paul telling them to try and work their way into heaven? No, he is saying that as saved people they need to keep working to understand, experience and live out their salvation. Salvation is like a gift that we are given. We have the receipt – we own it, it is ours and can't be taken from us. But we still need to unwrap it and unfold it and as we do that, as we work at it and on it, we understand it more deeply, and it works like yeast into our whole batch of dough, to switch metaphors, until the whole lump is leavened and we rise and are changed. That's the idea. This is why we preach the Gospel over and over again, a thousand different ways with a thousand different applications even though most of you have already professed faith in Jesus Christ. The Gospel isn't just for the unsaved – its for you and me and everyone. I need to hear the Gospel over and over again, I need to work it out a thousand ways. That's one of the ways we protect faith and prepare fruit under constant spiritual assault.

Lastly in terms of our resources, we need to take up:

6. The sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God

That's in verse 17. The Greek word *maxairan* refers to the Roman short sword. That's important. It is sometimes said that this is the only offensive weapon we are given, but I don't think that is the point here. You have to get into the imagery. Paul is saying that we have to guard the grace deposit of faith that is given to us. It is doing a miraculous work in our hearts that will produce fruit that will bring God glory. The devil wants to destroy that work. So we have to guard it. Imagine a high wall around a small castle. Inside the castle there is a court with a tree planted in the centre upon which grows the fruit of life. We have to guard the castle which is our faith to protect the tree which bears our fruit. All is dark outside. The devil and his minions launch wave after wave of assault. Volley after volley of flaming arrows which we turn aside upon the shield of faith. What then is meant by this short sword? Does it imply that we are to leave the walls and assault the enemy on the open plain? No. We were told to stand, not attack. What then does it mean? It means that sometimes the enemy will make it over the walls and we will have to beat him back face to face, hand to hand and chest to chest. The Roman short sword is for dirty, up close killing. You don't charge the enemy's line with a dagger. You stab him in the ribs as you grab hold of his beard in the dark.

The grammar of the text implies that the Spirit makes the Word effective. Paul is using a genitive of source meaning that he's not saying that the Bible IS the Holy Spirit, he's saying the Holy Spirit uses the Bible and makes it alive and effective in our lives. When we read the Scriptures and memorize the Scriptures we put a sword in the hand of the Holy Spirit with which he makes war against the devil inside the fortress of our hearts. It is the Word of God memorized, wielded by the Holy Spirit that wards off depression, doubt, guilt, shame, lust, deception, confusion and bitterness. When the devil is over the walls and in your face you had better be prepared. This, by the way, is what John Bunyan was trying to communicate in *Pilgrim's Progress* when Christian is trapped in the Dungeon of Doubting Castle. Bunyan himself struggled with depression and doubt. That was the devil over the walls and inside the fortress of his own heart. How did he defeat him and win free from the dungeon of Doubting Castle? With the key of promise, hidden in his heart which is able to unlock any door. The sword of the Spirit is for close in dirty killing. Its for those times in your life when you can smell

the devil's breath upon your face. In that hour, you need the Word of God hidden in your heart and wielded by the Spirit on your behalf.

The final section of this paragraph switches from the equipment of the spiritual warrior to the attitude of the spiritual warrior. The spiritual warrior, Paul says, should be:

¹⁸praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints, ¹⁹and also for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel, ²⁰for which I am an ambassador in chains, that I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak. (Ephesians 6:10-20. ESV)

The Attitude Of The Spiritual Warrior:

Very briefly, the warrior so equipped ought to remain:

- 1. Prayerful**
- 2. Watchful**

In terms of prayerful, Paul uses the word "all" four times to describe what he means by prayerful. The spiritual warrior prays in the Spirit:

- i. At all times – literally "in all seasons or occasions".
- ii. With all prayers and supplications – Private prayer, group prayer, corporate prayer; he's praising, thanking, confessing, asking.
- iii. With all perseverance. She sticks with it, she isn't frustrated at delay, she is steadfast and committed.
- iv. For all the saints. She prays for Christians in the Philippines, in Afghanistan, in Iran, in North Korea and in Orillia. Specifically Paul asks for prayer on his behalf that he might preach the Gospel with boldness despite his chains. The Spiritual Warrior prays for those who feed her the Word and for those enduring persecution on behalf of the Gospel.

The Spiritual Warrior also needs to be constantly watchful. They need to know where the battle is fiercest so that they can pray most effectively. They need to watch themselves and be self

aware. They need to be in frequent and fulsome fellowship with the Body of Christ so they can pray effectively and watchfully for all the saints.

Conclusion:

This is our battle and it is not against flesh and blood. Our battle is against the rulers, the authorities and the principalities of this present darkness. The demons of hell want to shipwreck our faith and ruin our fruit so as to rob God of glory. Stand firm. Abide in the truth, trust in the finished work of Christ, be ready and constant in Gospel proclamation, feed your faith, work out your own salvation and hide the Word of God in the deep places of your heart. Pray and be watchful always. Do that, and by God's grace, you will stand. You will persevere in faith and you will bear enduring fruit; this is the promise of the Gospel, to the praise of His glory and grace. This is the Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.