

How to Stand in Dark Days, part 2

Ephesians 6:13-17

According to Ephesians 6:11, every Christian brother or sister is contending in a spiritual battle. We are the targets of the wily schemes of the devil. Be prepared stand against the appearance of Satan's surprising schemes.

It was one of the darkest days in the history of the Roman Empire. Arminius, the trusted adviser to General Publius Varus, warned him about a revolt among the Germanic tribes. But, in fact, Arminius, who had been taken hostage in that region years before, was setting up a trap for the Romans. Schooled in the ways of the Roman military, Arminius had risen through the ranks to assist Varus.ⁱ An uprising in the Balkans (just across the Adriatic Sea from Rome) caused Caesar to divert several legions to that region. General Varus assembled the 3 remaining legions near the Rhine River. But unbeknown to the general, Arminius had united as many as fifty Germanic groups to attack the Romans. And on that fateful day, Arminius led the unwitting General Varus and his three legions into an ambush by those Teutonic peoples at the Battle of Teutoburg Forest. As the Roman armies approached the forest, they did not march in formation. As they went forward, they found that they were hemmed in by a narrow, muddy trail. The Romans also failed to send out any scouts ahead of the armies for reconnaissance. The Germans had diverted the muddy trail, planned how they would scare some soldiers into a swamp, dug trenches and built walls to attack the Romans. The best estimates are that 15,000 – 20,000 Roman soldiers were killed within two days' time. What do we learn from stories like these? We learn about the dangers of conspirators and their surprising schemes. Believers can learn that in spiritual warfare, we ought to prepare ourselves to face Satan's surprising schemes. But to do so, we must take up the essential weapons of spiritual warfare.

Dark Days in America

The news of these last few days has been deeply discouraging to our nation. Some communities in our country are no longer being governed; civil unrest is surging. Whether it is from Taliban in Afghanistan, runaway inflation, political scandals, or opinions masquerading as science, our nation is wracked with despair. And even now, raging forest fires and a major hurricane threaten the people of our nation. Is there any hope? Yes, there is hope. But that hope is not to be found in men. In the words of Psalm 60:11-12 **"Give us help from trouble: for vain is the help of man. Through God we shall do valiantly: for He *it is that* shall tread down our enemies."** As wise soldiers in this spiritual warfare, we can learn how to help others with hope.

In the last messageⁱⁱ from this text, we focused on verses 12-14.

"For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high *places*. Wherefore take unto you the whole armor of God that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness; and your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace; Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery

darts of the wicked. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God:"

We have learned to follow God's commands to be strengthened in the Lord and to put on the complete armor of God. We learned that each of us must fasten the belt of Biblical truth into place. We learned to employ the breastplate of doing right because we are clothed with Christ's righteousness. In this message, we want to learn how to take hold of four pieces of spiritual armor: Gospel shoes, the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit. Each of these was an object lesson of sorts that reminded the members of the Ephesian congregation about what Paul had written earlier in the letter. We must take hold of these essential weapons of spiritual warfare.

Gospel Shoes

"...and your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace."

In the last message, we learned how important Ephesians 1:13 is in this study: **"In whom [Christ] you also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise."** Have you placed your trust the Gospel of God's powerful truth? In Ephesians 6:15, we learn that we can take our stand on the Gospel. It is indeed a piece of armor. The Roman army footwear was called the "caligae" and it was basically a leather sandal with metal cleats embedded in the sole. It protected the soles of the soldier's feet, but also allowed the soldier to stomp on an attacker. Our gospel shoes remind us about how we became Christian soldiers in the first place. Ephesians 3:6 reminds us, **"That the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel:"** Yes, you know that Christ died for your sins, was buried and rose again bodily the third day. But have you become a partaker of the promises associated with this gospel of Christ? Ask the Lord to show you the real significance of Christ's finished work. According to Ephesians 6:19 we could use our words to make the mystery of the Gospel known to others. We could help others with genuine hope. But we must take hold of these essential weapons of spiritual warfare.

The picture of a Gospel foot covering in verse 15 is designed to bring to mind the words of Isaiah 52:7, **"How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that brings good tidings, that publishes peace; that brings good tidings of good, that publishes salvation; that says unto Zion, Thy God reigns!"** This helps us better understand the phrase about "the preparation of the gospel of peace." Does it mean that the gospel is a preparation for every Christian soldier? Or does it mean that every Christian soldier must be prepared to share the Gospel? Probably the best answer is "both." The Gospel is a sure foundation, giving us a sure footing. But since the armor must be put on, there is also an emphasis on being ready to share the Gospel of peace. Picture every Christian soldier as being trained as a medic to give the healing balm of the Gospel to all Satan's victims. Are you ready to give the Gospel that way?

Let's ask the question this way: what if this afternoon you are the first person on the scene of an accident, and it is clear that the driver is dying. That driver asks you the question, "Can you help me know for sure how I could go to heaven?" What would your answer be? To get you ready to answer that question, we will review Gospel verses in our services for the next several weeks. If

you are not ready to share the Good News which will guide someone to heaven, then you are not in the battle. You can prove this for yourself. Beginning this evening, start praying earnestly that the Lord would lead you to someone to share the Gospel with. Keep praying that daily, and notice how many times you suffer spiritual attacks and pressures during those days you devote yourself to prayer. This will help you to know that you really are involved in spiritual warfare using these essential weapons.

If you don't get into this battle, it will affect you in a very different way. You will start to think that the believers around you are "tilting at windmills" to use the expression based on Cervantes' novel, *Don Quixote*. Quixote imagined that a windmill was a giant and battled against it. Thus the expression, "tilting at windmills." So as you listen to this message, are you thinking, "What's the big deal? I just don't see the conflict." Then, my friend, you need to ask the Lord to help you arise from being a casualty to become a conqueror. Ask the Lord to awaken you to this great conflict all around you. And take up these essential weapons of spiritual warfare.

The gospel is described as "the gospel of peace." Here is a helpful acronym to remember for Gospel P.E.A.C.E., "Placing Everything At Christ's Expense." Are you still trying to earn your way to heaven, or have you placed everything at Christ's expense?

The Shield of Faith

"Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked."

What is meant by the expression, "above all?" One author noted that translations of this include, "withal," "in addition to all," "most especially," "at all costs" and "in all circumstances."ⁱⁱⁱ So taking up the shield of faith is extremely important. Up to this point, all the pieces of armor have been affixed to the body. But the shield of faith is to be taken up for use. This shield referred to the "full body" shield of the Roman soldier. Proverbs 30:5 reminds you that the Lord is a shield for those who put their trust in Him. In Ephesians 1:1, Paul addressed "the faithful" (another word for believer or Christian). He had not stopped praying for them since he had heard about their faith (Ephesians 1:15). For, the apostle explained, **"For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast"** (Ephesians 2:8-9). This faith gives the believer confidence and allows Christ to settle down to dwell in their hearts (Ephesians 3:12,17). Now believers stand together around **"one Lord, one faith, one baptism"** in **"the unity of the faith"** (Ephesians 4:5, 13). It is this faith that will quench the fiery darts of the evil one. The Roman soldiers faced enemies who would dip their arrows in pitch and set them aflame before they shot them. Picture a group of soldiers withstanding this fiery hail of arrows. The soldiers would frequently saturate their shields with water to help quench the fire.

Arrows are flying wedges designed to separate things that are in essential unity. A fire is a chemical reaction designed to change the form of something. So part of the devil's scheme is to separate families, friends and churches. Most of all, he tries to separate believers from their Lord. The only way to withstand this is to employ the shield of faith. This is best done with a group of believers within a local church. One of the formations that the soldiers used was the "testudo" (the tortoise). They would hold their shields above and around their formation to go forward. This is a beautiful picture of what a congregation is supposed to be like.

The Helmet of Salvation

Once again, Paul alludes to Ephesians 1:13 with its reference to “the gospel of your salvation.” Salvation is not something we try to acquire; salvation is what Christ has already accomplished (Ephesians 2:5-6). It is not a matter of *trying* to please God but *trusting* the One who pleased God by His death, burial and resurrection.

Using the phrase, “the helmet of salvation” links this verse to Isaiah 59:17 where the Lord puts on the helmet of salvation. This verse occurs in a very important context and we will return to Isaiah 59 in the next message. The Roman soldier wore a helmet of bronze which also covered the side of his face. The clear implication of this picture is this: believers must protect the way they think. Do you have the mind of Christ (1 Corinthians 2:16)? In Philippians 2:5, Paul made this appeal: **“Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus.”** How would you apply this practically? Paul wrote to the members of the Colossian congregation: **“If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sits on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth. For you are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God”** (Colossians 3:1-3). What a way to think! It’s time to put on the helmet of salvation to think this way in these dark days. This is an essential weapon for spiritual warfare.

The Sword of the Spirit

and the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God:”

Like the shield of faith and the helmet of salvation, the Sword of the Spirit is something we must take hold of. This is the Word of God. In Ephesians 1:13, this is called “the word of truth.” In another illustration in Ephesians 5:26, the Word is the water that washes us. This is the Spirit by whom believers were sealed (1:13), who opens our eyes (1:17-18), who grants us access to the Father (2:18), and who makes us part of the building of God (2:22). It is the Spirit who has given revelations to God’s servants (3:5) and who strengthens you in the inner man (3:16). He unifies congregations (4:3-4). Don’t grieve the One who has sealed you until the Day that Jesus returns (4:30). The Spirit will produce the fruit of goodness, righteousness and truth in us as we use His Word (5:9) as He fills us (5:18) and enables us to pray (6:18). These are the great benefits of the Holy Spirit to us. Will you participate in this great blessing by taking up the Sword of the Spirit, the Word of God, to fight this spiritual warfare? You desperately need this Sword in dark days, and these are dark days.

In this passage, we have learned how to stand in dark days. How can we do this? We do so by taking up the essential weapons of spiritual warfare.

Pastor Gordon Dickson, Calvary Baptist Church, Findlay, Ohio www.cbfindlay.org

ⁱ See: Tom Ames, Top Military Disasters in History, January 11, 2021, accessed at <https://www.historyhit.com/military-mistakes-in-history/> and The Battle of Teutoburg Forest accessed at https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_the_Teutoburg_Forest

ⁱⁱ How to Stand in Dark Days, part 1, accessed at <https://www.cbfindlay.org/how-to-stand-in-dark-days-part-1/>

ⁱⁱⁱ Harold Hoehner, Ephesians, an exegetical commentary, Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006, p.845