

PM Ephesians 6:10-20

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[0 : 0 0] Good evening friends, it's good to be with you again, it's good to be sharing together from Paul's letter to the church in Ephesus. We've reached this evening Ephesus, Ephesians chapter 6 and verses 10 through 20, this kind of very famous section that Paul speaks about the armour of God, Ephesians chapter 6 and verses 10 through 20.

As we come to it, let's read it together now, Ephesians chapter 6 and verses 10 through 20. Finally, to stand firm.

To that end, keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints.

And also for me that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains that I may declare it boldly as I ought to speak.

Amen. This is a reading of God's inspired and inerrant word. Let's turn to the Lord in prayer. Now let us pray. Heavenly Father, we thank you for the living vitality of your word.

[2 : 0 2] We thank you that although it was written perhaps some 2,000 years ago, Father, we thank you that it still speaks to our situation, that it speaks to the need of every man, woman and child, that it speaks to the need of being saved, that it speaks to the need of being reconciled to you.

We pray, Father, as we come this evening that you would give us insight and understanding. We pray that the Spirit, that he would remove our hearts of stone and give us a heart of flesh.

We pray that he would open our blind eyes. We pray that he would unstop our deaf ears. And we pray that he would minister to us mightily, even in our distance, even in our separation this evening, we ask.

We thank you that we can take great comfort from the example of the Apostle Paul, that although he was chained, he said that the word of God was not bound, that although he was in chains, that the word of God was not.

And we thank you that the truth remains today, that although we may be separated by distance, that although we may be apart from one another, we thank you, Father, that the Spirit can still minister mightily to us, that the word can still go forth.

[3 : 0 9] So go before us now, bless us, and be with us, we ask in Jesus' name. Amen. So it would be helpful for us if you had Ephesians chapter 6 and verses 10 through 20.

Open Ephesians chapter 6 and verses 10 through 20 as we study it together this evening. The place I grew up in in Northern Ireland, it was a little place called Carrickfergus.

There's not a huge amount in it, to be honest, but it was famous for two things. Firstly, it was famous for a very old Norman church that was in the town. Secondly, it was famous for a very old, very famous Norman castle that was in the town.

Now I have to confess that until my brother got married, I'd never actually been in the castle. I was about 16, 17 when my brother got married, maybe a little bit older, and I hadn't been in the castle.

In first year in secondary school, they took a day trip to the castle. We were studying the Norman conquest, and it was, of course, a great opportunity to go and look at this Norman castle in Carrickfergus.

[4 : 11] But I didn't go. Why? Because I drove past it every day, because I'd seen it every day. A couple of years ago, when the boys came along, we decided that we would take Noah and Eli to see the castle.

On the way to Granny's one day, we thought we may as well stop in and see what all the fuss is about. We may as well stop in and have a tour of the castle. And it was there, as I went through the castle, as you saw all the different bits, as you saw how well the castle was protected, as you saw those little windows for archers to fire out, as you saw all the things, the thing that stuck with me most was the armour.

You know, we've all seen pictures of people wearing chainmail. We've all seen those images and drawings. Perhaps we've even seen films of people wearing chainmail. But it's only when you see it up close, it's only when you feel the weight of it for yourself, it's only when you get your hands on it yourself, that you realise this is a serious bit of kit.

Perhaps as you see the pictures, perhaps as you see the films, you wonder, well, how on earth could this protect anyone? How on earth would this keep anyone safe? But it's when you see it in the flesh, when you feel the weight of it, you realise this is serious.

It was heavy. It was cumbersome. It looked like it made fighting in a battle about ten times more difficult than it really should be. It was designed to protect you.

[5 : 39] It was designed to protect you. It was designed to keep you safe. It wasn't comfortable, but it was designed to keep you safe.

It wasn't comfortable, but it was necessary. And as we come to Ephesians 6 this evening, as we come to these very famous words of Paul that speak about the armour of the Christian, that speak about the armour of the believer, Paul's drawing imagery from the Roman army around him, Paul's drawing imagery from perhaps the Roman soldiers that he has chained to, Paul drawing on this imagery, outlines for the Ephesian believers why they need this armour.

He conveys to them, using this imagery, the spiritual realities of the warfare that the Christian is engaged in. This armour, he says, is for our good.

This armour, he says to the Ephesian believers, is for your protection. It's for your safety. It may not be comfortable. It may be difficult at times to get the disciplines needed for this armour.

It may not be comfortable all the time. But it's necessary. It's for your protection. And it's for your good.

[6 : 55] This will keep you safe in the spiritual war that's raging. This will keep you safe in the days that come, Paul says. It's not comfortable, no. But it is necessary.

We want to see three things together this evening. Think about three things together tonight. We want to think, firstly, about the purpose of the armour. Why does Paul tell the Ephesian believers that they need this armour? What purpose does the armour serve?

Secondly, we want to think about the particulars of the armour. What things in particular Paul reminds them of? And then thirdly, we want to think about Paul's prayer for gospel growth.

That even in the midst of imprisonment, even in the midst of being chained, Paul prays that the gospel would advance. Paul prays not for his own situation, not for his own difficulties, but prays that the gospel would advance.

The purpose of the armour, the particulars of the armour, and the prayer for gospel growth. So firstly, then, we want to think about the purpose of the armour, the purpose of the armour. And we see that in verses 10 through 13.

[8 : 00] Verses 10 through 13 of Ephesians 6, the purpose of the armour. As we come to this section, then, we notice that Paul's beginning the conclusion of his letter.

He's beginning to sum things up. He's beginning to draw things to a close. And we notice that in verse 10, don't we? He says, finally, after all of these rules about the household, after all of these instructions about the household, after telling husbands and wives how they should interact, after telling children and parents how they should interact, after telling slaves and masters how they should interact, finally then, Paul says, finally, verse 10, here's the thing to take away.

Here's the thing to remember. Here's the summing up, if you like. Here's what I want you to focus on. Finally, he says, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might.

And that's a tremendously reassuring thing, a tremendously encouraging thing, as Paul finishes his letter, to remind the Ephesian believers of, isn't it? Because what's he saying?

That in and of themselves, they're not strong. In and of themselves, they are weak and vulnerable. But Paul says, actually, be strong in the Lord.

[9 : 13] Be encouraged by the strength of the Lord. Be encouraged by the strength of his might. This wasn't that the Ephesians could work this strength up in themselves.

This wasn't that if the Ephesians went to the gym regularly enough, if the Ephesians lifted heavy enough weights, they could have this strength. Rather, this strength came from the Lord.

They could know the strength of the Lord. They could be strengthened by the Lord's strength. But what does it look like? Practically, on the ground, what does it look like to be strengthened in the Lord?

What does it look like to be strong in the Lord? Well, Paul gives them the instruction. Paul tells the Ephesian believers what it looks like in verse 11. What does he say? Put on, then, verse 11, the whole armor of God, that you might be able to stand against the devil, that you might be able to stand against the schemes of the evil one.

That's the purpose of the armor. That's the point of the armor. It enables the believer to stand against the devil. Well, that's why we need it.

[10 : 24] Because the devil is scheming. Because the devil is a liar. Because the devil is the father of lies. Because the devil is a roaring lion, constantly ruling, seeking those who we may devour.

Because the devil is ultimately still our enemy. Because that's true, Paul says. Because the devil is a schemer, Paul says. Then put on the whole armor of God.

It will be the armor of God that enables the Ephesian believer to stand. It will be the armor of God that strengthens the Ephesian believer in days of distress and difficulty.

And we get some insight into the enemy that the Ephesian believers are fighting in verse 12, don't we? Because what does Paul remind them of? What does Paul say to them in verse 12? For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood.

In some senses, for the Ephesians, it would be easier if they wrestled against flesh and blood. It would be easier if their enemy was a physical enemy. It would be easier if they could identify their enemy.

[11 : 23] If they could look them in the eye and say, That is my foe. That is who I am fighting against. But Paul here in Ephesians 6 reminds them, Actually, Your enemy isn't flesh and blood.

Who sensed this as a nation in recent weeks and months, haven't we? As we've waged this war against the coronavirus.

That's been the imagery. That's been the language that the politicians have used. That we're very much in a wartime setting. We're very much in a wartime footing.

But we can't see our enemy. We can't see the virus. We may see the effects. We may see the sickness and disability that the virus causes.

But we can't physically see it in our day-to-day lives. And it makes it hard to keep that fight going. Because we don't have an identifiable source. We don't have an identifiable thing to say, Well, this is our enemy.

[12 : 25] This is who we're fighting. And it's exactly the same in the Christian life. Paul tells the Ephesian believers, We're not wrestling against flesh and blood.

We're not wrestling against other men. We're not wrestling against a physical enemy that we can see and touch and taste and fight. But rather, what is the war against?

Well, he continues verse 12. 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. So that's who the war is against. That's who the battle is against. It's against the rulers.

It's against the authorities. It's against the cosmic powers. It's against this darkness that pervades our world. But that maybe throws up some questions for us.

[13 : 25] Well, what does that mean for the government who are over us? What does that mean for the SNP? What does that mean for the Tories in Westminster? If our war is against the rulers and against the authorities, what does that mean for us practically day to day?

The implication here is that the rulers, that the authorities, that the powers over us are somehow complicit in this darkness. That they have been somehow raised to do the devil's work.

Yet other places in scripture confirm that God does indeed raise up and cast down nations. That God does indeed raise up and cast down rulers over us. We have Paul's instruction, Paul's injunction to pray for the authorities.

So how do we tie these two things together? That Paul here in Ephesians seems to be saying that the part of the Christian warfare is against the rulers and authorities of this present evil age. And the instruction we have, the teaching that we have in other parts of the Bible, that God raises up and casts down these authorities.

How do we tie these two things together? How do we make them fit together as a whole? Well, quite simply, we remember that there is not one Adam in this universe that is outside the control and will of the sovereign creator God.

[14 : 42] If there was, God would cease to be God. But the opening chapters of Job are helpful for us, aren't they? The opening chapters of Job are insightful as we think about this question.

The devil comes into the presence of God from roaming to and fro on the earth. And he's given a delegated authority. God says to him, you may touch this far, but do not touch the man himself.

You may touch his goods and his possessions, but don't touch Job himself. The governments are ultimately answerable to God. The governments over us are ultimately answerable to God.

Yet that doesn't prevent the devil from raising up evil men and women to positions of power. It doesn't prevent the devil from using evil men and women to achieve his purposes.

It doesn't stop the devil from using people to make rules that go against God and his word, to make laws that go against God and his word. That's been the plan since the beginning of creation, ultimately.

[15 : 48] That's been the outworking of the devil since the beginning of creation, isn't it? Think about Adam and Eve in the garden. What was the temptation? What was it that the devil said?

Well, did God really say? Does God really have your best interests at heart? You will be like God. That's what the devil promised. The plan for the devil from the beginning has always been driving a wedge between God and his people.

Has always been creating a separation between God and his people. The plan for the devil from the beginning has been the destruction of God and his word. And if he can use civil governments, if he can use civil powers to achieve that end, then all well and good.

So what do we do? Do we just withdraw into isolation? Do we just cut ourselves off and not vote at all? No, I don't think that's the answer. Rather, we vote.

We pray for the governments that God has given us. We pray for the leaders that God has raised over us, that they would make laws that honour God and obey his word. Because of that, Paul says, because our war isn't against flesh and blood, because our war is against the cosmic powers, because our war is against the rulers and authorities, he says, verse 13, take up the whole armour of God.

[17 : 14] Because of the reality of the warfare, because of the reality of the war that rages, as Paul says, to the Ephesian believers, put on the whole armour of God, so that you can withstand on this evil day, so that you can stand firm in days of trial and difficulty.

We see, friends, then, how key this is, don't we? The devil is real. His power is real. His dominion is real.

His dominion, dominion is this world, as Paul reminds us. Knowing that, then, we need to be ready. Knowing that, then, we need to have the full armour of God on. Knowing that, then, we need to be ready for the fight.

I wonder, friends, if too many of us are slumbering. Too many of us have got the slippers on and the pipe out, ready for relaxation, ready for a night in front of the TV when there's a battle to be fought.

When there's a war being waged. Rather than watching for the enemy, we're taking things easy. If we don't know we're in a battle, then we can't fight it.

[18 : 27] If we're not aware of the reality of the world around us, then we can't fight it. If we don't appreciate the midst of the battle that we're in, then we won't be ready. Paul here gives the Ephesian believers the reminder that they're in a battle, that they're in a war, and he gives us the same reminder.

He calls us to have the armour on. He calls us to be ready because of the reality of the war. That's the purpose of the armour. Secondly, then, we want to think about the particulars of the armour, the particulars of the armour, and we see that in verses 14 through 17.

Verses 14 through 17. So we're moving on from the purpose of the armour. We're moving on from the reminder about why the armour is necessary to some of the particulars of the armour, some of the things, the items of the armour, if you like.

And we see the first thing that we're called to, and the first thing that the Ephesians were called to, verse 14, stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth. The belt was the thing that girded the soldier.

The belt was the thing that kept him all together. The belt was the thing, if you like, that made fighting easier. That made fighting a realistic possibility. And Paul says to the Ephesian believers, having fastened on the belt of truth.

[19 : 48] So what is the belt of truth for the Ephesian believers? What is the belt of truth for the Christian today? Well, it's the Bible, isn't it? It's the Bible that is the belt of truth.

As Christians, the things that will keep us together, as Christians, the thing that gives us hope in the midst of a world filled with coronavirus and fear, as Christians, the thing that will gird us and steal us from the fight, as Christians, the thing that will enable us to fight effectively, is the Bible.

That's why it's important that we know our Bibles. That's why it's important that we spend time in our Bibles. Because it's the belt that holds everything else together.

It's the belt that girds us. Secondly then, Paul calls the Ephesians to put on the breastplate of righteousness.

Verse 14, the breastplate of righteousness. The breastplate would have covered your heart and your vital organs. It would have been protection from attack. It would have been a source of safety and a source of comfort.

[20 : 54] And as Christians, we're told here that the breastplate that we should have is the breastplate of righteousness. Righteousness is the thing that will keep us safe from attack.

Righteousness is the thing that will keep us secure. Righteousness is the thing that covers our vital organs, if you like. Now, how does that work? Well, we know that in and of ourselves, we know that the Ephesian believers here, in and of themselves, we're not righteous.

There is no one who is righteous. No, not one. There is no one who seeks after God. So how then is righteousness our breastplate? How is righteousness the thing that keeps us safe, that protects our vital organs?

Well, of course, we stand in the righteousness of another. It's the righteousness of Christ that will protect us from the devil's attacks and lies. It's the righteousness of Christ that will protect our heart and our vital organs whenever we're being attacked.

Then for their faith, the Ephesians are called, verse 15, to put on the gospel of peace, the readiness given by the gospel of peace.

[22 : 04] peace of the gospel is to what we are to bring. The peace of the gospel is to be our signature sound. The peace of the gospel is to be our tune, if you like, the thing that we carry with us to note the noise of our coming.

I wonder if you've ever watched the changing of the guard, ever seen the pump, the circumstance, ever seen the ceremony of the British Army. You know that distinctive sound that the boots make.

I can't quite describe it, I can't quite sort of put it into words, but if you've heard the sound, you'll know it. It's that distinctive sound, that distinctive crunch that the boots make.

So too with the Christian, the distinctive sound that they're to bring, the distinctive noise that they're to carry on their feet is to be the gospel of peace. As we approach, that should be the sound that we bring, that should be the tune that we sing.

Not the sound of war that the Roman army brought, not the ominous sound that the march of the Roman army brought, but the gospel, the sound of peace.

[23 : 13] In all circumstances, Paul says, take up the shield of faith, verse 16, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one.

The shield we, as we see here, the shield was designed really as protection. The shield would parry sword blows. The shield could absorb fiery darts that had been fired by the enemy.

And Paul calls the Ephesians here to take up that shield in the spiritual war. To take up the shield of faith in the spiritual war. Now what, perhaps, is the shield of faith?

What will it be that causes us to deflect, to parry the devil's darts? What will it be that can absorb the fiery darts of the devil?

What will it be that protects us against his attack? Well, it's the gospel, isn't it? It's the word of God. Jesus' own example reminds us of that. Remember when he was in the desert?

[24 : 16] Remember when he was being tempted by the devil? What was it he said? It is written. It is written. It is written. What for him put out the devil's fiery attacks? It was the word of God.

When the devil causes us to doubt, when the devil causes us to wonder at our own sinfulness, when the devil causes us to wonder, well, could we really be saved? Would God really say that?

What will it be that will keep us saved? will be knowing God and his word. It will be knowing his son, the Lord Jesus Christ. Taking the helmet, Paul says, verse 17, of salvation and the sword of the spirit.

Finally then, we come to the offensive weapon. Everything else has been defensive. Everything else has been designed to keep us safe, really. But then, finally, we come to this offensive weapon, the sword of the spirit, which is the word of God, Paul tells us.

The sword, which is, of course, sharp enough to divide between soul and spirit. The word of God, which, of course, goes forward and men and women are converted. Friends, make me mistake this evening, we're in a war.

[25 : 33] And it's important that we have the right armor on. We need to know God and we need to know his word. We need to know God and we need to know ourselves. If we're going to survive in this war, if we're going to make any advance in this war, then we need to know God and we need to know ourselves.

More than that, we need to be taught God's word. And that's why as we come week by week, we spend time studying the Bible because we're in a war, because these are our orders, if you like.

It's the weapon we have in our fight against the devil. So we need to know God, we need to know ourselves, but we also need to know who we are in Christ.

We need to know that we are righteous, we need to know that we are forgiven, we need to know that we're saved. And even in those dark days, even in those days of indwelling sin, even in those days when things seem to be going wrong, we need to remember who we are in Christ as part of our armour.

We need to remember who we are in our Saviour. At all times we need to be ready to preach the gospel of peace, to bring that good news, to bring that good news of sins forgiven, that good news of peace with God, that good news of broken relationship restored.

[26 : 59] that's our message. We've seen the purpose of the armour, we've seen some of the particulars of the armour, and then thirdly, finally tonight, we want to think about the prayer for gospel growth, the prayer for gospel growth, and we see that in verses 18 through 20.

Except as we come to verse 18, it seems like a bit of an artificial break to make, doesn't it? But every break in every sermon is in some sense artificial, because the original had no breaks in it, prayer.

But we see that verse 18 is a call to prayer. Prayer is a part of our spiritual armour, prayer is a part of our spiritual warfare, talking to God, asking for things from God, confessing our dependence upon him, our need of him, asking God for his wisdom and guidance, but note what Paul calls the Ephesian church to pray for here.

Praying 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. Okay? Verse 19, and also for me, the words may be given to me in my opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel for which I am an ambassador in James.

Paul calls them to pray for the saints. He calls them to pray with all perseverance for the saints. But he prays them, he asks them to pray for him that he may speak boldly.

[28 : 24] He asks them to pray for him that he may declare the world word fearlessly. Now bear in mind that Paul is in prison here. Bear in mind that Paul is probably chained to a Roman soldier and the thing that he asks them to pray for for him isn't freedom.

It isn't that his own situation would improve. It isn't that his own circumstances would be better. But rather he asks them to pray that he would be given words in each and every circumstance, in each and every opportunity.

Paul's request even in the midst of imprisonment is that the gospel would go forth, that the kingdom would grow, that the gospel would bear fruit and that he would speak about it boldly even in his chains.

We've said it before and we'll say it again. How often do our prayers live in the mundane minutia of life? Dear God, help Bob who's feeling ill. Dear God, help Siri with her appointment tomorrow.

What an example Paul gives to us. What an example Paul gives to the Ephesian believers here that we should ask that the kingdom would be further, that the gospel would be advanced, that Bob would use his weakness to advance the gospel, that Siri would use her appointment to speak of the wonder of Christ.

[29 : 49] Our prayers should be for gospel growth. Our prayers should be for all believers, of course they should, but our prayers should be for gospel growth. That the gospel would bear fruit in all circumstances.

What have we seen this evening? Well, firstly, we've seen that we're in a war. And we need to know that because we need to have our armor ready. We need to know that because we need to be ready to fight in the war. We've seen the armor, we've seen the resources at our disposal.

So friends, the evening when tomorrow comes, when the enemy attacks, when the devil causes you to doubt the goodness of God, when the devil causes you to doubt your salvation, will you be ready?

Will you be prepared to stand and fight? will you be found wanting because you haven't prepared? Because you haven't considered the reality of the Christian warfare?

We're in a war. The question is, are we ready? Or not? Amen.