

2/9/2020 - Ephesians 6:10-20

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Preacher: Benjie Slaton

- [0 : 0 0] The following sermon is from Grace and Peace Church in Chattanooga, Tennessee. Grace and Peace is a new church that exists for the glory of God and the good of the northeast suburbs of Hamilton Place, Collegedale, and Ottawa.
- You can find help more by visiting gracepeacechurch.org. Well, if you are new with us, I'm really glad that you're here.
- My name is Benji. If I have not met you, I would really love the chance to meet you after the service. And today we're looking at the final passage in our series on Ephesians.
- Next week, Jim Powell will kind of bring the themes together, or Jim Pickett will bring themes together from this book. But today we're looking at Paul's final large section in the book of Ephesians.
- So if you would, give your attention to God's Word from Ephesians chapter 6. Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might.
- [1 : 0 9] Put on the whole armor of God that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. For 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.
- Therefore, 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.
- Stand, therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given for the gospel of peace.
- And in all circumstances, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish the flaming darts of the evil one, and take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God, 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, 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.
- [2 : 4 0] Amen. This is God's Word, and He gives it to you because He loves you, and He wants you to know Him. Amen. This passage, if you grew up in the church, you may be familiar with this passage.
- It's one of those visual and memorable passages. If you didn't grow up in the church, and maybe this is the first time you're hearing it, it might sound a little bit antiquated at best, maybe slightly offensive, all this language of battle and armor and weapons.
- You know, we, as you know, we live in this culture where we have a vision of masculinity that is toxic, and is oftentimes our culture is something that is dominated by violence.
- So it's a legitimate question to ask, is this kind of language that we see from Paul contributing to that part of our culture? I would actually argue no.

I would argue that this helps us see what strength looks like. It shows you what faith looks like. It's something that we can model our lives after.

[3 : 50] You've got to remember the context. Always start with the context. The context of what Paul has been talking about. He spent the entire previous chapter talking about the gentleness of a husband and his love for his wife.

He's talked to parents, but in fact specifically to fathers, about a father's patience and deliberateness with his children. That he doesn't overwhelm them in discipline.

Then he's talked to men and women, to people who are workers. He's talking about faithfulness and righteousness and honorability in their work. So this doesn't come as some sort of a different emphasis to create this kind of abusive and violent culture.

It's coming in the context of that gentleness and patience. So how does that all fit together? Well, a couple of weeks ago I took my son Sam, my oldest son, to see the movie 1917.

And it was a great movie. If you've not seen it, I'm sure it will win a lot of Academy Awards. One person called it visual poetry, and I think that's probably right. It's a really beautiful war movie. And when we were leaving, I was asking Sam, we were talking about why is it, like I feel a deep connection when I watch these war movies.

[5 : 10] What is that? And Sam was saying he felt something similar. And we were just talking about that. And I think what I settled on was that, because whether it's Saving Private Ryan, or whether it's Black Hawk Down, or whatever sort of war movie it is, is it just this sense of sensationalism around violence that is attractive?

As though I want to get out there and grab some guns and go kill people? I don't think that's what it is at all. It's something far deeper. It's something that in those kinds of films, there is this call to something, to a sense of courage, and a sense of conviction that would make you do something difficult, that for the simple reason that you are honor-bound to do it, that there's a sense of duty, a sense of bravery that is invited in those kinds of cultures.

There's a question that undergirds, at least for me and maybe for you, that undergirds the way that we watch those movies, and it's asking this question. If you were facing enemies as dangerous as these enemies that are shown here, would you act with the kind of courage that's shown?

Would you act the same way? Would you be strong in the face of these enemies? And the reality is, is I sometimes question whether or not I would.

I think there's some sort of similar thing going on in these verses that Paul is saying, look, you know that there is a real enemy out there. He's powerful. And the question is, are you going to fight in faith?

[6 : 45] Are you going to stand firm in the midst of temptation and difficulty and trial? Will you stand firm? The reality is, Jesus told us, He gave us the parable of the soils.

You might remember this one, where the seed goes out to all these places. And you and I have experienced that there are people in our lives, and maybe even in our own souls, where we have heard God's Word, there has been some evidence of faith that has grown up, but that for various reasons, it has not persisted.

It has not stood firm. It has faltered. Why? We live in a culture of people who say that they are Christians, and yet they don't stand firm.

And Paul is saying here, he's inviting you into the strength that he has provided and won for you, so that you will stand firm.

First thing he says here is that the enemy is real. Let's start there. The enemy is real. Paul says that the enemy is the devil. Other places he calls him Satan. All that means is, those names mean the accuser, or the destroyer.

- [8 : 02] He's clearly, the devil here is clearly meant to be a real spiritual entity, not some sort of literary device. You know, Paul's talking about something that he believes is very real.
- He says that we wrestle against him. That word wrestling is, the picture is of hand-to-hand close combat. That there is a wrestling that is happening with this enemy.
- Who is this enemy? Verse 12 is where we get some language for that. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers and authorities and cosmic powers over this present darkness, the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.
- This is a spiritual battle that he's talking about. But what kind of spiritual battle? What exactly are we to make of these powers? Well, to take us on a little side trail here, these powers are meant to be seen as both structural powers, as well as personal powers.
- In the last 50 years in America, as we have had a more materialistic worldview, as we have had less and less patience for the supernatural, the way that people have wanted to read Paul in passages like this, and like the one that Mark read for us earlier, is to say that these demonic powers that Paul is talking about are structures.
- [9 : 29] They are the structures of government and of economics. They are systems of injustice and corruption and racism and poverty, systemic problems.
- Traditionally, we focused on a personal demonic influence, as we read earlier. And the reality is, is we're to see this as both.
- Because you can't focus simply on the systemic to the neglect of the personal, nor can you focus on the personal to the neglect of the systemic. They are united because there are personally evil people that are at work in every unjust system in the world that we see.
- You know, you don't see, you don't see someone who is, racism is not just a personal problem.
- Racism is a systemic issue. But there are personal people who have fostered and furthered racist systems in our country. You want to see how this works together?
- [10 : 35] Think about something as simple as pornography. Every time you click on a pornographic website, you put money into the pockets of the people who are publishing pornography.
- And what do they do with that money? But they create more content. And more content, where do they find more content? Well, they go pay other people who are paying people who are weak and who are vulnerable to perform.
- And how do they get those people who are weak and get them and are vulnerable. But they go out and they oftentimes will convince them. They will take advantage of weak people.
- They will sometimes enslave people to serve the purposes of the one click that you might make. There is personal sin united to this systemic and worldwide problem of sexual slavery and injustice.
- See how that works together? And these are the cosmic powers of this present darkness at work. At work in you, on your personal computer, and at work across the world.
- [11 : 44] And they're linked. And you can't separate them. I take you on that just to say that every problem that we see can be as part of that.
- That there is an evil and demonic influence in this world. The enemy is real. And the enemy is real both in your own personal sins, your own personal addictions, whether it be pornography, as we talked about, or to a substance, alcohol.
- The misuse of alcohol is all of these things are, there is an empowering, demonic influence in those lifestyle choices.

But it goes deeper in every family that allows abuse to go unchecked and unreported. In every church community that allows gossip and backbiting and judgmentalism to go unaccountable.

To be unaccountable. I don't know how I said that. For every marriage that allows there to be words that tear down one spouse or the other.

[12 : 58] We see this even in the way that depression and anxiety falls upon us and sometimes sits on us like a 400-pound sumo wrestler sitting on our chest.

We see it in the way that we have, in the way that our personal private sins feel like we're in an iron cage.

There is a real enemy who is out there, who is at work in your life and in my life, in my family and in your family, in our country and in this world.

Everywhere the enemy is present and he is real. And we are to see this enemy as powerful, as evil, as accusatory, as slanderous.

The enemy is real. But, as Martin Luther wrote, the prince of darkness grim, we tremble not for him. His rage we can endure, for lo, his doom is sure.

[14 : 02] One little word shall fell him. That word, above all earthly powers, Martin Luther wrote about Jesus. Jesus is the one above all earthly powers that Paul has consistently, throughout this book, has been saying that Jesus reigns over every power and principality in this world.

There is no system, there is no person, there is no particular sin, there is no cultural movement that is not under the rule and the reign of Jesus Christ.

And that is good news. We may have an enemy who is real, but we have a hero who is victorious over it. Amen. We have a king who rules over it.

And so, that king, then, gives us weapons with which to fight. Now, here is the thing that you have to know. Each of these six weapons that he goes through, the armor of God, each one of these six has been won by Christ.

They are things that derive particularly from his person and his work. His accomplishments are given to us as weapons with which we are used, that we are to use to fight the very real enemy we face.

[15 : 22] And what's interesting is that these weapons are not necessarily weapons of attack, most of them. They're weapons of defense. You know, people who see this as violence don't take into account oftentimes the fact that these are weapons that are not to be used in some sort of crusade.

They're to be used to uphold and to defend righteousness and truth and beauty and goodness. In fact, you may not have even noticed, but there's a repetition here.

Look in verse 11. Put on the whole armor of God. Why? So that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. Look down at 14. Sorry, 13.

Take up the whole armor of God that you may be able to withstand. That's the second time in the evil day. And having done all to stand firm. 14. Stand therefore.

Four times. What Paul says is the reason that Jesus has given you these gifts is so that you will stand firm. Standing firm.

[16 : 32] Not attacking in some sort of a culture war, although there's reason to talk about that, but to stand firm against the enemy. See, there's no suggestion that Christians are somehow well-equipped in and of themselves.

We are those who have received from Christ His gifts to stand firm. What are they? There's six of them. The first one, the belt of truth.

All of these are picturing a Roman soldier. A Roman soldier would have had a belt, but it wasn't for decoration. It wasn't something that would have even really necessarily been seen. It was really part of the undergarments of what he would wear.

But what it did was provide a function. It held his sword on, but it also held up his robes so that while the Roman legionnaire was running or while he was marching, he would be unencumbered.

It's something that gave him a sense of internal strength that he would be able to do the job. He would not be encumbered and be free to do the job that he had been given. And what Paul is saying is, is you have the belt of truth to keep you unencumbered in order to do the job that you've been given.

[17 : 45] You have the truth of God's Word. You have the truth that Jesus even said, you shall know the truth and the truth will set you free. That Jesus has given us his Word.

He says that when you see me, you see the Father. In Jesus, he is the truth. By knowing him and seeing him, you can have the internal strength to be able to live out your calling.

The belt of truth. The breastplate of righteousness is the second one. The breastplate was something that they would wear over their torso front and back and that they would, that it was used to protect them in close combat, hand-to-hand fighting.

So that their torso would not be easily, would not be easily injured. The breastplate of righteousness. It's talking about our own personal goodness, but it's actually more than that.

I think what Paul has in mind here is that the thing that protects us from the predominance of the injuries that we would get is the righteousness that he has given.

[18 : 57] You know, most Christians, when you ask them, what is the gospel of Jesus, they will say that Jesus came and he died on the cross for my sins. And that's true, but it's incomplete. They will say that Jesus, on the cross, my sins, you can picture your sins as soiled clothes, a robe of soiled works, your sinfulness.

It's tattered and torn and smelly. That he, Jesus, took upon himself every one of your sins and he paid the penalty for each one of them on the cross.

And even more than that, Jesus was called a sinner in your place. Jesus was called a liar. Jesus was called an adulterer.

Jesus was called a murderer. Jesus was called an idolater for you. Every label that should have gone on you went on him.

But here's what the other part of that is that there's an exchange that happens. Not only does he take our sin, but he has his own set of righteousness. He was perfectly obedient. What happens to his perfect obedience?

[20 : 16] But that it is placed upon us. That we are clothed in the righteousness of Christ. And so what that means is when God looks down from his judgment upon Jesus, Jesus is seen as the sinner.

We no longer bear that sin. But when he looks at us, he sees the righteousness of Christ draped upon us. we are not just judged as not guilty and now, Christian, you're not guilty anymore.

Jesus died for your sins. Go get busy with obeying and making God happy with you. That's not the gospel. The gospel is your sin has been removed from you and Jesus has given you his perfect righteousness.

That when God looks at you, he has the pleasure of looking at his own son. that you are protected by the breastplate of Jesus' righteousness that is not yours.

You have done nothing to deserve it and yet he has draped it over you. It is your protection. It is your life. The righteousness of Christ is yours.

[21 : 27] The belt of truth, the breastplate of righteousness, the shoes that are ready to spread the gospel of peace. A Roman legionnaire would have been wearing these heavy-soled shoes, sandals, that would have had the straps going all the way up their calf.

And the reason for that is that they would have provided some stability for these long marches as they went out to go do their job. And Paul is saying that you need the stability for the strength to go as you are those who proclaim the gospel of peace.

Why does he pick the gospel of peace here? Well, because the fruit of our lives and our lives together, because of the peace that has been established between God and us and between us and one another is peace.

Satan hates the gospel of peace. He wants conflict and war and violence and accusation and suspicion. And Jesus says, my peace I give to you.

My peace I leave with you in a world filled with trouble. You have my peace. See, you have been given the stability to go and to live in a life of peace.

[22 : 47] Shoes for peace. Shield of faith. The shield is indispensable. It's not one of these small little shields, you know. What's pictured here is one of those big ones, you know, kind of from Lord of the Rings that you can hide behind, the whole soldier can hide behind it while these arrows that have been dipped in pitch and set on fire, while the arrows are shot down on the army, you can hide behind these things.

That's the image here. It is that these flaming arrows are accusation and lies and untruth and suspicion and manipulation and all the things that constantly are heading our way.

And Jesus says that you have the shield of faith. He doesn't say the shield of truth. He doesn't say you go back out and you fight against their arrows with your own arrows.

He says you have the shield of faith. Because in a world that thinks that you are crazy, in a world that will tear you down, that will take advantage of you, in that world, what you need is faith.

And where does that faith come from? Paul's already told you. In Ephesians chapter 2, he says you are saved by grace through faith and this is not of your own doing.

[24 : 03] It is the gift of God that no one may boast. The gift of God is to believe that what is true about you, that what he says about you is more true than what anybody else says.

Lauren Daigle gets that one right, I think. The helmet of salvation. These would have been iron helmets that were, they were decorative.

They were meant to scare you. They were decorative as well as protective. And nothing short of an axe could split open one of these iron helmets.

Elsewhere, Paul calls our salvation our helmet of protection. That it is the assurance of our full and final salvation that is the thing that protects us, that protects our heads.

That you are Christ's and there is nothing that you can do or anyone can do to you that will snatch you out of his hand. If you are one who has come in faith to Christ, in repentance, in bowing the knee to Christ, then you can be assured that you are his and that you have protection from him in salvation.

[25 : 28] The belt of truth, the breastplate of righteousness, the shoes ready for the gospel of peace, the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit.

The sword of the Spirit, this is the only one that can be remotely seen as an offensive weapon. The word here for this sword is not like a big broad sword, it's something small, maybe about a foot or 18 inches, it's hand held, it's something for close range, hand to hand combat.

And what does he say here? But the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God, the Scriptures are the means by which you will be able to fend off the attacks of the evil one.

And where do those Scriptures come from? But from the mouth of Christ. The revelation of God in this world has given us the Scriptures. In fact, when he left, what he said was, I'm leaving you a helper, I'm leaving you the Spirit.

Jesus has given you all of these weapons, everything you need in order to battle against very real enemies in this world that are inside of you, the world, the flesh, and the devil, all of that, you have the weapons to fight against them.

[26 : 49] The question is, will you stand? Will you fight? Will you use these weapons? What's fascinating is where Paul's mind goes after this, after he describes this.

Look at verse 18. Or starting at 17. Take the helmet of salvation, the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God. Verse 18. Praying at all times in the Spirit with all prayer and supplication.

That sounds redundant, but listen to what he's saying. He repeats all four times 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. What Paul is saying is, is the response that you are to have to having all of these weapons is not to go out as some sort of, you know, cowboy on your Rambo mission, but you are to be one who then turns and comes to the feet of Jesus in prayer.

Four times, he says, bring all of your prayers to me. The way that you access the weapons that God has given you to fight the enemies that are very real in this world is prayer.

[28 : 14] We could say it even more directly. If you are not praying, you are not fighting. Prayer gives us the access to what God has already provided for us and given to us.

And he says that even he needs that. Verse 19, pray also for me that words may be given to me and opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel.

He goes back to that fundamental phrase. It's on the front of your bulletin, the mystery of the gospel. What is the mystery? The mystery of the gospel is that God himself, the eternal and unchangeable God has made his presence in a very normal group of people like this and he has done so with such power that this group of people like us become the means by which outsiders who would never have hope of salvation are brought in.

And that reconciliation between enemies is made secure and where weak people, people full of sin and shame and death and despair are empowered to stand firm.

The mystery is that the God that you can't see and that you wonder if he's even there and ever even hears one of your prayers, the mystery is that he is more powerfully at work in you than you think he is.

[29 : 55] your perception of his presence is not determinative. He is with you.

He is with us and he is at work among us to create something glorious. Paul is desperate for you to see that vision for yourself.

That's what this whole letter is about. That's what he wants every person in Ephesus to see, to be confident in, that there is more for you because of Jesus than you think.

And the question is, will you stand firm in it? Will you submit to it? And will you find his salvation there, his gospel mystery there?

Amen. Let me pray for us. Our God, we need you to reveal this mystery to us. We can't see it for ourselves.

[31 : 10] It has to be given the eyes of faith and we pray that you would give us that faith today. In Christ's name, Amen. Amen.