

Armour for a victory already won

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[0 : 00] I want to begin by asking you to imagine a situation where you turn up for a job interview knowing that you've already got the job.

! Some of you, a bit younger, what if you take your year 12 exams, knowing that you already have a place in the course of your first choice.

Now, in fact, that probably does happen. I think ANU offers places to students before they do the exams. But that's great, isn't it? Because it takes the weight off your shoulders with the test, with the exam, or with the interview.

And yet, come back to the job interview, the company wants you to still go through the interview. And no, you wouldn't have the questions beforehand.

And so you still have to prep, don't you? Even though you know the outcome is known. Now, you don't want to go through the motions.

[1 : 09] Because even though you don't have to prove that you deserve this job, you've got it already, you want to conduct yourself consistently with the fact that you will have the job.

And you will be doing this job. Well, first of all, similar happens with the Christian life. Throughout Ephesians, Paul has told us that by faith in Jesus, we have His righteousness.

We are saved. The merits of His death is credited to us. No doubt about it. And yet, at the same time, we've also heard Paul urge us to live a life worthy of our calling, consistent with our status as God's righteous people, holy and blameless in His sight.

Well, in our final section today, Paul gives us a similar exaltation, except it's couched in warfare language. We discover, we know that Christ's victory in this world is secure.

The outcome is known. We know that history will end with Satan's defeat. And yet, we're instructed to engage in spiritual battle as though the fight matters.

[2 : 28] Because it does. Even though Christ has won, we are told not to let our guard down, to be oblivious to the plot or the schemes of the devil.

Instead, we're called to mobilize for Christ, as it were, to mop up the resistance. Not be bystanders watching on as it happens, but soldiers in the thick of the action.

So, let's begin then, in verse 10, where Paul urges us by saying, finally be strong in the Lord and in His mighty power. And so, we're reminded here that our strength and power actually comes not from ourselves, but in the Lord Jesus Christ.

And this power is not brute strength like mighty armies or nuclear power, or magical powers like Harry Potter. Instead, Paul has already been revealing to us through the letter what God's power really entails.

So, going back to Ephesians 1, verse 19, he said that that power is the same as the mighty strength he exerted when he raised Christ from the dead and seated Him at the right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all authority, power and dominion, and every name that is invoked, not only in the present age, but also in the one to come.

[3 : 54] It's the miraculous power, isn't it, that turns spiritually dead people, that's us, into being alive in Christ. Or, Ephesians 3, verse 16 and 17, is the power of God's Spirit at work in our inner beings, so that Christ may dwell in our hearts by faith.

Where together with all of the Lord's holy people, we may grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, which surpasses knowledge, so that we may be filled with the measure of all the fullness of God.

Now, you may be wondering, how useful is all that power for me on life, for life on earth? Because, you know, it doesn't help me do the dishes? It doesn't help me get rid of that person that's annoying me at work?

But make no mistake, it's the only power that can give us eternal life. And so, ultimately, only such power that can give us victory over Satan.

Otherwise, we remain dead in our sin, lost for eternity, which means the devil wins. Because his only goal on earth is to stop as many people finding life in God's kingdom as possible.

[5 : 20] And so, if we don't have that life, he wins. Which is why now Paul continues, as he does in verse 11, to say that this strength of the Lord that we have is to be used in battle against the devil.

So, verse 11, put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, authorities, against the powers of this dark world, and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.

So, you see, our battle here is not against flesh and blood. That is not against other human beings. Jesus himself said that his kingdom is not of this world.

But often in conflict, we're tempted to think, aren't we, that it is those who bother us, those who are against Christianity, that are the real enemies.

But no, they're not. Now, Paul does speak here of rulers and authorities, which point to political powers of this world, like, you know, superpowers and nations, the government, even, I think, like, mega-corporations like Meta, Facebook, world agencies like the United Nations.

[6 : 35] But here, I think, even when that is being referenced, it's not so much the people themselves, the individuals, but the manner in which these institutional powers are often used by Satan as pawns in his warfare.

Thus, they are grouped together with the other two, the powers of this dark world and the spiritual forces of evil, which is speaking of the heavenly realms. Satan plays on the greed, the lust for power, and all forms of evil desires that is in the human heart in order to manipulate them to his own ends.

And so, we may not particularly like people such as President Trump or Putin, but they're not the true enemies.

Neither is your boss. Neither is that bully at school. If anything, they are prisoners themselves, aren't they? Held captive by Satan in his domain.

And so, the mastermind of evil, really, is the devil or Satan. And that's why Paul says we are to take our stand against his schemes. And so, even though it's tempting to focus on what's wrong with the world out there, the real struggle more often is what the devil is trying to do within us, in our own hearts and minds.

[8 : 05] Therefore, if you recall, a few weeks ago in chapter 4, Paul does want us to be alert and not to sin in our anger. Why? Because it gives the devil a foothold, doesn't it?

And this is true not just for anger, but all other forms of temptation and sin in our lives as well. But remember, Christ has already won the victory.

God's people, the church, they are secure in God's kingdom. Satan has no hope of victory over us.

And yet, as I said earlier, we are to still engage in the battle, to be on guard, to not be deceived.

And the way to guard ourselves, Paul says, is to put on the full armor of God, not physically, otherwise we'd be clinking clunking here into church, but figuratively.

There are disciplines and habits that we can practice as part of putting on that armor to achieve this. Now, we'll get to this shortly, but let's keep reading. Verse 13, Paul again repeats the command to put on the full armor of God.

[9 : 13] Therefore, put on the full armor of God. And now he says, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground and after you've done everything to stand.

Repeatedly, isn't it? Paul commands us, instructs us to stand. Three times here, and then once more in verse 14.

Take your stand, stand your ground, stand, and then stand firm. Now, standing conveys a posture of readiness, isn't it?

Like a soldier defending a position on a front line, instead of slouching and sitting in your seats. He's poised for battle, alert and on guard.

But standing also conveys a defensive posture. That is, stand and defend ground that is already ours. Stand and don't retreat.

[10 : 10] We already command the high ground. We have the upper hand. All we need to do is stand, because the victory in Christ has already been won.

Now, what is this ground on which we stand? It's the truth that God is sovereign over all creation, and that Christ has conquered death on the cross.

It's the truth that we are already saved by His grace. That our judgment of sin, the punishment for that, has been paid. And therefore, we are righteous before God.

Now, those various phrases I've used, righteousness, salvation, these are the very attributes that are used to describe the individual pieces of armor.

So, verse 14, let's keep going. Stand firm then with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace.

[11:12] In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

If you're following now, we are on point two of the outline. But the first thing to note here is that Paul says, put on the full armor of God. That is, every piece, nothing is optional.

And notice, too, the words, buckled, fitted, take up, in place. They show that every piece has to be in its proper place, fitted, ready for use.

Many of you are familiar with the type of armor that a Roman soldier puts on. There's a picture of it on the next slide. Right? And you see that as they go into battle, they need every one of those pieces, don't they?

To be in place. To be fitted. Otherwise, they will be exposed. They will not be able to fight effectively. And that's the same with spiritual warfare.

[12:19] Every aspect of what Paul speaks of here provides complete protection against Satan's schemes. Now, I'm not going to go into the individual pieces today.

Although you can probably see that it makes some sense how each piece of armor fits with its description. So, for example, feet fitted. That's for spreading, walking, going.

The gospel of peace. The sword of the spirit being used in defense. But there's also a sense in which some of these items, it's not that critical.

Which goes with what? Because what is happening here is that actually Paul is using Old Testament imagery that is applied to God himself. So, on the next slide, in Isaiah 11, verse 5, Now, you'll see that it doesn't quite match.

Next, in Isaiah 59, verse 17, we read, And so, the point is that although not everything matches exactly, what Paul is trying to show is that just as the strength we have is from God, so is the armor.

[13:41] We are asked to put on what God himself puts on. Qualities and virtues that he himself possesses, and which are the hallmarks of his actions.

Truth, righteousness, peace. And if you consider them all together, what I think Paul is describing are the manifold aspects of the gospel.

Thus, to defend against the devil and stand firm is to stand firm and remind ourselves again and again the blessings that flow from the gospel.

Teach and instill in ourselves the truth about the gospel, the good news of Jesus and what he's done for us. And what the implications are of believing in him.

This habit of reminding ourselves and teaching ourselves and assuring ourselves what it means to keep putting on the full armor of God.

[14:42] Paul wants us to be armed with the truth about God and his son and what the cross means for our lives. He wants us to be convinced about our righteousness before God.

That even though we're sinners, we're already saved by grace. That we now have peace with God and with one another because of what Jesus has done. That we have the power of the Spirit in our lives again because we are disciples of Jesus.

So, all of these are pieces of that armor, isn't it? Can you see? And they work together as a package to give us total protection.

And then when the devil fires his arrows at us, we hold up the shield of faith. That is, we affirm again. We say we believe in the gospel.

We believe in the truth of God as a way of extinguishing the darts. Now, in reality, although Paul talks about all these arrows coming in from the devil, he really only has one trick, I think, up his sleeve.

[15 : 48] All he does actually is to lie and deceive. And if you look back at that other reading in the Old Testament in Genesis 3, you see that that's exactly what he did.

Because how did the serpent tempt Eve? By casting doubt on what is true. Right? So, verse 1 over there, he said, Did God really say you must not eat from any tree in the garden?

And then verse 5, he falsely accuses God of ill intent. For God knows that when you eat from it, your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.

You know, God is threatened by you guys. You know, you'll be just like him, Eve. And throughout time, that is Satan's main weapon.

That's why he's called the father of lies, the accuser of the brethren, the one who deceives the world. It's the way he works. By making us doubt that God is good and loving.

[16 : 58] Are you sure God loves you? Why would you be going through this if God loves you? Or, for some of us who grapple with doubt, God's very existence.

Are you sure he's real? How do you know? You can't even see him. Or, by accusing us when we sin, so we lack assurance of salvation.

You sure? You sure you're good enough for God? Or, enticing us with false hope or fleeting pleasures in the world, calling what is good bad and vice versa.

He pretends to be able to offer us satisfaction and abundance. Look at what the world has to offer. Look at all these comforts. When all he really wants to do is rob and deval.

And the only way to counter these things is to remember God's word and the gospel. And to keep believing that God is trustworthy, so as to extinguish the lies and the fears of the devil.

[18 : 04] Tell ourselves that our salvation is assured because of Jesus. Not because of what we are or what we do, but because of what Jesus has done. Tell ourselves we have peace with God because Jesus is our peace.

You see, whatever Satan throws at us, the gospel is our defense. And we need to stand firm in it. Hence, we spend a lot of time, don't we, trying to know the truth in his word, studying his word carefully, growing in it, so that we're not tossed about by every wind of doctrine.

And that's why, too, putting on the full armor goes hand in hand in chapter 4 with putting on the new self. Because as we gird up the loins of our minds and we know the truth, we practice the truth, we reinforce the truth by living it out and cementing the virtues of the Christian life in our habit.

Now, thus far, all the pieces of the armor, they're all defensive, aren't they? But there are two that are a bit more proactive. So, first, the feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace.

And again, this image is taken from the Old Testament. It comes from Isaiah 52, verse 7. So, we see on the next slide, it says there, I love this image.

[19 : 41] I don't know whether you do. It's actually a song that was written about it from this very verse. But the thing about it is that even though Paul here is speaking of warfare, when we advance into enemy territory, what we bring, actually, is a message of peace, not war, of hope, reconciliation, joy, and salvation.

Where Satan comes to us to accuse and destroy, to steal and to cause havoc, when we go to people, what we say to them is, come join us in the kingdom of light and love, where there is forgiveness of sin, where our King loves us and laid down his life for us, where our God himself gives us his own strength and spirit, and where we have an inheritance in the new creation waiting for us for eternity.

Of course, we also warn people to repent and rebuke them, but that is for the sole purpose of rescuing them from the enemy and death, so that they can find blessing in God's eternal kingdom. Likewise, the sword of the spirit can be defensive against the devil's lies, but it is also an offensive weapon in that that is the thing that we use to preach the gospel of peace, to teach and train up so that more are rescued from darkness.

And then in verses 18 to 20, Paul asks for prayer, and he instructs us and encourages us to pray. And while it may seem separate to the armour of God, I think it's connected, and you might see it when we read it.

[21 : 25] So Paul says, So the explicit connection there is the spirit.

We have the sword of the spirit, and then Paul asking us to pray in the spirit, because God's spirit works in both of these ways. We're strengthened in the Lord by the spirit through his word and through prayer, both of which are means by which the spirit ministers to us, but also helps us to

engage in this spiritual battle, because he prays that he might be given courage to proclaim the gospel of peace or the mystery of the gospel.

And so just as we use the Bible constantly and we saturate our services and gatherings with God's word, so we should saturate our gatherings with prayer as well.

And you know, for us as Anglicans, we're privileged actually because our services are shaped around the prayer book. We don't just pray when, you know, Emma comes up here to do mission sport or Jackson prays later on.

The entire service is actually a service of prayer. So Paul says pray, but he also says pray on all occasions, that is, not just here, but as you go out into the world.

[23 : 07] And then pray with all kinds of prayer and requests. Anything can be brought to the Lord, but particularly pray for all the Lord's people, both here but across the world.

And pray for the gospel, which is what Paul worked so hard to spread, for he wants courage and strength to be fearless in making known the mystery of the gospel.

And so friends, we are to be watchful by praying. God's word and prayer are the two things that will help us to remain watchful so that we do not fall unwittingly for the schemes of the devil.

Well, that's verse 20, and I think that sort of wraps up Paul's letter in one sense. But then, of course, as with most letters, he has a little postscript. And so for completeness, let's just read them and see what he might have to say.

So verse 21, Titicus, the dear brother and faithful servant in the Lord, will tell you everything so that you also may know how I am and what I'm doing. I'm sending him to you for this very purpose, that you may know how we are and that he may encourage you.

[24 : 18] Titicus, I think, is the very person who brings this letter. He brings this letter to Ephesus. So, you know, thank God for him because without him, they would not have got the letter and, you know, we might not have this in the Bible.

Then, of course, Paul gives them a final blessing. Peace to the brothers and sisters and love with faith from God and the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Grace to all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with an undying love.

And here, Paul blesses them with all of God's good gifts to us as believers. Peace, love, grace. Now, it's a bit unclear right at the end who the undying love refers to, whether it's God's undying love for us or our response, our undying love for Christ.

But either way, I think we know that when God chooses us, he gives us the faith to persevere. So, yes, he loves us with an undying love, but we will also stand firm until the end, and therefore we will still have an enduring and undying love for Jesus.

You know, many of you support a footy team in the AFL, and you do so with an undying love, don't you?

[25 : 36] If you pick the right team, they will repay your loyalty by winning some of the time. But even if they don't, I think St Kilda is a team that hasn't won a flag for many years, the longest, although they won four games in a row recently, so who knows.

But even if they don't win, we follow them, don't we, with an undying love. Well, in the case of our love for Jesus, we know that our love for him won't let us down.

Because Christ himself, we have chosen the winning side, as it were. Christ has already won the victory. Satan has no hope of winning.

Even though we are asked to engage in battle, Jesus has won. And he will come victorious one day. So, our job then is really to live that out.

Let us stand firm, knowing that God's will is to bring all things into unity under his Son. Put on the full armour of God.

[26 : 50] Live lives worthy of our calling. So that when Jesus' victory finally comes, we will be counted with all the Lord's people.

Standing firm. Proclaiming praise to his glory when that occurs. Let's pray. Father, thank you for the victory that is now secure in Christ Jesus.

Thank you that we already have salvation and righteousness in Christ. Help us to trust in you, to trust in your Son, to trust in your word.

Teach us so that we will be ready with the truth of the Gospel whenever the Satan schemes and his fiery darts are shot at us.

Help us to be watchful. Grow us in prayerfulness. Help us to stand firm with an undying love for your Son, Jesus, until he returns.

[27 : 54] In his name we pray. Amen. Thank you.