

**God's resources to stand firm against the enemy**  
**November 23, 2008 - Ephesians 6:10-20**

*"To each his suff'rings: all are men,  
 Condemn'd alike to groan,  
 The tender for another's pain,  
 Th' unfeeling for his own.  
 Yet ah! Why should they know their fate,  
 Since sorrow never comes too late,  
 And happiness too swiftly flies?  
 Thought would destroy their paradise.  
 No more: Where ignorance is bliss,  
 'Tis folly to be wise."*

So wrote English poet Thomas Grey in 1742. The last phrases have become famous. "Where ignorance is bliss, 'tis folly to be wise." Ignorance is "lack of knowledge or awareness of something; often something important." Grey argues that there are times when not knowing about certain things contributes to bliss or a state of happiness. In some ways, he's right. If you're not the one paying the bills, ignorance of their magnitude can be bliss. You don't have to go through the strain of figuring out how to pay for them. If there's some difficulty happening in upper management at work, ignorance can be bliss if you can just do your job.

But there are times when blissful ignorance can be downright dangerous. It is pleasant to drive along a mountain highway enjoying

the scenery. But say a recent movement on one of the mountains dislodged a whole bunch of rocks. They teeter precariously over the highway. You're bliss will soon be shattered if the rocks start sliding. So an avalanche warning might be very welcome info even at the cost of some bliss. Ignorant bliss might have seemed a blessing before you got the diagnosis. But with a diagnosis, you can at least move forward to attack the disease.

We might think that the Christian life is mostly joy filled and abundantly blessed. There certainly are many blessings along the way. But a serious enemy opposes every Christian. Yet in our modern and post modern world, widespread ignorance or determined disbelief about the reality of our enemy abounds. Such ignorance can leave us incredibly vulnerable.

Our enemy loves taking advantage of vulnerable Christians. He and his elite like special-forces know our weaknesses and seek to exploit them. But before we crumble in despair in light of this reality, we must hear the good news God has for us today.

**God provides Himself and His armor to enable us to stand firm against abundant spiritual evil.**

We discover this in a letter the Apostle Paul wrote to a group of Christians suffering a crisis of confidence in Christ. Paul heard of their wavering faith. So he bolsters their faith by reminding them of their identity in Christ. Then he fleshes out what this identity means to enable them to live a Godly Christian lifestyle amidst powerful spiritual forces that oppose them. Near the end of this letter, Paul writes some of the most famous words in the Bible to bolster the Christian's confidence in facing the enemy.

Now what does all this have to do with our prayer series? Well friends, the reality of evil and the forces behind it permeate our world. To live Godly Christian lives in the midst of this reality, we must look up to the One we pray to. We discover that He has provided key resources to enable us to stand firm in this environment. Through prayer we can apply these resources to our lives.

So today, I want you to see first the Bible's claim regarding the abundant reality of evil. Then I will show you two incredible provisions of God to enable us to stand firm amidst this evil. Finally, we will look at the key role prayer plays in making use of these provisions. Ephesians 6:10-20 ESV.

## The Whole Armor of God

**10** Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. **11** Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. **12** 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. **13** 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. **14** Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, **15** and, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace. **16** In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one; **17** and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, **18** 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, **19** and also for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel, **20** for which I am an ambassador in chains, that I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak.

### What does this passage teach us?

#### **1) There is a spiritual battle going on.**

In fact, this is part of the centuries old struggle between God, the devil and their respective forces. The devil's schemes started in the Garden of Eden. Sin entered the world through Adam and Eve when they listened to the devil. The devil and evil spiritual forces continue to assault God's people.

Certainly this is an unsettling reality. Most people would choose peace over war. Yet we don't really have a choice about this battle. The enemy already wages war against us. This passage reveals our

enemy to us. Our chief adversary is the devil, first mentioned in verse 11. “Put on the whole armor of God so that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil.” The Bible provides quite a bit of info about the devil. Peter reveals the devil cruises the earth looking for victims: 1 Peter 5:8- “Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.” Our ancient foe has been a threat since Eve “was deceived by the serpent’s cunning,” and he remains active today (2 Cor. 11:3). The book of Job reveals the devil had access to the heavenly council and sought to discredit God by attacking Job (Job 1:6-12). Daniel tells us Satan not only tempts individuals but influences nations (Dan. 10:13, 20-21, Rev. 20:1-3). He also tempted Jesus after a forty day fast.

Verse 11 in our passage alerts us to the devil’s schemes or methods against us. These are plans designed to deceive us. The devil seldom attacks through obvious head on assaults. “Hey, why don’t you renounce Christ and everything about him on your Facebook account?” No, its more cunning, designed to catch us unaware. “Hey, why don’t you choose that movie? There’s nothing wrong with it.”

Meanwhile, we’re not even aware that by choosing it we might be renouncing Christ in that area of our lives for a few hours. The devil’s schemes include invitations to every kind of sin, false theology, false religion and worldly enticement.

But the devil is not alone in opposing us, Paul goes further in verse 12. I heard a preacher once claim that Ephesians 6:12 is one of the most *disbelieved* verses in the Bible. Perhaps that’s because it seems so surreal. Paul lists four different groups of evil: Evil spiritual rulers; Evil spiritual authorities; Cosmic powers over this present darkness; Spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.” Some commentators think he’s using four terms to represent the same group.

But it seems more likely these groups indicate rankings. It is like an organizational chart of evil forces. Whatever Paul meant exactly, the key point is that there is the devil and these groups of evil oppose us. We Christians struggle against these enemies.

Not people! The first phrase of verse 12 states our struggle is not against people; those of flesh and blood. Did you ever think about that friend with respect to the difficult people in your life? You struggle against them. You disagree with them. You see *them* as the

problem. But the real problem might be the spiritual forces of evil at work in their lives. The root of the problem may concern more who they're following or listening to. So our struggle is not against atheists but the spiritual forces of evil behind atheism. Our struggle is not against those practicing false religion. It is against the rulers and authorities promoting that false religion in their lives. One commentator puts it this way, *"the enemy is not a visible and weak humanity not even powerful human authorities; this enemy is in the heavenly realms and is therefore unseen; possessing a tactical advantage over those whose vision is earthbound."* This is the reality of the spiritual battle. What else does this passage teach us?

## **2) We're in the battle, whether or not we're aware of it.**

This battle is not limited to Jesus, the Apostles and church leaders today. We're all in it. Author Sunnic Floyd quotes a preacher he once heard say "if you are not having a head on collision with the devil every day, that probably means you're going his same direction. We face this personal battle in everyday trials. Listen carefully to Paul's words here. Verse 11 - So that YOU may be able to stand against the devil's schemes." Verse 12 - "OUR struggle is not against flesh and

blood." Verse 13 - "So that YOU may be able to withstand in the evil day." Verse 16 - "with which YOU can withstand the flaming darts of the evil one." Friends, all Christians are in this battle. If we don't recognize, we can walk right into the devil's traps or struggle against the wrong enemy, or tumble when the evil day comes or get overwhelmed when the evil one launches his flaming darts.

So we must avoid two extremes when considering this spiritual battle. One is to *overestimate* Satan's power and obsess about it. If we think a demon causes every difficulty, we're overestimating things. If we think that God and the devil are equals and it's not real certain whose going to win in the end, we've overestimated Satan's power. Satan is angel not an equal To God. If we overemphasize Satan's power, we can live our entire lives in fear, always terrified of what Satan might do. Satan likes to stir up that kind of fear in a believer, because it destroys his/her effectiveness for the Lord. So we must not overestimate Satan's strength. But we must not underestimate it either.

A person who underestimates the power and cunning of Satan may become unconcerned with Satan's activity and lulled into complacency. That is where Satan can do his most damaging work.

So there is a spiritual battle going on. We're in it even if we're not aware of it. But here comes the good news.

**3) Christians don't have to fear. Instead we battle with confidence because of God's provisions.**

The Lord resoundingly defeated the devil and his forces at the cross. Earlier in Ephesians, chapter 1, verses 20-23, Paul uses some of the same terminology to describe Christ's victory over Satan and his forces. In fact, let's hear Ephesians 1:18-23 from the NIV which lays this out for us.

<sup>18</sup>I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, <sup>19</sup>and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is like the working of his mighty strength, <sup>20</sup>which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, <sup>21</sup>far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. <sup>22</sup>And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, <sup>23</sup>which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.

We've got to have this part of Ephesians to get the full blast of hope found in chapter 6. . Christ himself has gained ultimate victory over hostile powers in the universe. But if that victory meant we would automatically win every skirmish, there would be no need to

teach about this battle. We must apply the result of Christ's victory in our own lives. But we can do so with confidence.

Bible Commentator Andrew Lincoln puts it this way concerning Ephesians 6 *the passage is a rousing call to summon all our energies in firm resolve to live out the sort of Christian existence in the world to which the whole letter has pointed. The battle imagery arouses a sense of urgency and intensity. At the same time, the passage does not provoke panic or fear. It conveys confidence and security that the readers "we" can have in the midst of a bitter combat.*

*(Andrew Lincoln).*

Jesus decisively defeated Satan through the cross, death and resurrection. The devil and his spiritual forces have lost the war. But they continue to fight the battle. God's people live in a world where this battle continues. It will continue until Christ returns. God has provided resources for His people to stand firm and overcome in this battle: But what has God provided?

**4) God's provides Himself and His armor.**

God provides Himself. Ephesians 6:10 states, "finally be strong *in the Lord* and *in his* mighty power." Now I always struggled with

verses like these. They seemed more like a “rah rah” verse rather than something that could really help. I can “be strong” when I “feel strong.” But what about when I am weak? I think it was at my baptism or ordination someone gave me a similar verse from Joshua. “Be strong and courageous.” But there are times I don’t feel very strong, especially in the face of these evil forces.

But the way Paul writes this is extremely important and our English translations don’t bring it out. Be strong; it is a present passive verb. We are the subject of the sentence. Remember your grammar? The verb describes the action. (I know some of you are twitching right now because you thought you escaped English class for the weekend. But just hang on for a couple more sentences and you’ll survive this). So we know about subjects and verbs. But there’s also something called the voice of the verb. It describes the relationship between the subject and the verb. This verb is in the passive voice. That means the action is being done to the subject. So it’s not present active – Christian you do the action of being strong.” Its Christian let yourself be made strong in the Lord. Let the action be done to you. Let the Lord strengthen you. Be made strong in the strength of His

might. Be made strong in His mighty power.” Let that power which God used to raise Christ and conquer Satan flow through your life too. That is all possible because God provides Himself and His strength for us in this battle.

But God also provides His armor. Notice I didn’t say *some* armor, but *His* armor. Verse 11 says “Put on the whole armor of God.” Now this could refer to any old armor God provides. But the Old Testament reveals this is the armor God Himself wears spiritually.

Isaiah 11 talks about a shoot of a plant coming up out of the stump of Israel. This refers to Christ. What does it say about Him?

- <sup>1</sup> A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse;  
from his roots a Branch will bear fruit.
- <sup>2</sup> The Spirit of the LORD will rest on him—  
the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding,  
the Spirit of counsel and of power,  
the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD -
- <sup>3</sup> and he will delight in the fear of the LORD.  
He will not judge by what he sees with his eyes,  
or decide by what he hears with his ears;
- <sup>4</sup> but with righteousness he will judge the needy,  
with justice he will give decisions for the poor of the earth.  
He will strike the earth with the rod of his mouth;  
with the breath of his lips he will slay the wicked.
- <sup>5</sup> ***Righteousness will be his belt  
and faithfulness the sash around his waist.***

There are the Lord’s words in Isaiah 52.

<sup>5</sup> "And now what do I have here?" declares the LORD.  
 "For my people have been taken away for nothing,  
 and those who rule them mock, "  
 declares the LORD.  
 "And all day long  
 my name is constantly blasphemed.

<sup>6</sup> Therefore my people will know my name;  
 therefore in that day they will know  
 that it is I who foretold it.  
 Yes, it is I."

<sup>7</sup> ***How beautiful on the mountains  
 are the feet of those who bring good news,  
 who proclaim peace,  
 who bring good tidings,  
 who proclaim salvation,  
 who say to Zion,  
 "Your God reigns!"***

How about Isaiah 59:15-17 talking about God himself?

<sup>15</sup> Truth is nowhere to be found,  
 and whoever shuns evil becomes a prey.  
 The LORD looked and was displeased  
 that there was no justice.

<sup>16</sup> He saw that there was no one,  
 he was appalled that there was no one to intervene;  
 so his own arm worked salvation for him,  
 and his own righteousness sustained him.

<sup>17</sup> ***He put on righteousness as his breastplate,  
 and the helmet of salvation on his head;  
 he put on the garments of vengeance  
 and wrapped himself in zeal as in a cloak.***

There's Isaiah 61 which Jesus read from the scroll when He began his ministry. What does Isaiah 61:10 state about the Lord's servant?

<sup>10</sup> I delight greatly in the LORD;  
 my soul rejoices in my God.  
***For he has clothed me with garments of salvation  
 and arrayed me in a robe of righteousness,  
 as a bridegroom adorns his head like a priest,  
 and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.***

This is God's armor with which He wages war against injustice and evil, the spiritual forces of evil. God provides his armor for His people to continue that battle in His strength today.

How do God's provisions help us?

**5) God's provisions enable us to stand and withstand the enemy's assaults.**

Verse 11 – Put on the full armor of God that you may be able to stand against the devil's schemes. Verse 13, "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. God's provision enables us to stand. He puts ability into us. He empowers us to stand through Him and His armor.

But that's pretty weak isn't it? We want to go out and fight. And we just get to stand there? Doesn't victorious warfare mean you advance and conquer the enemy? This sounds like we're just barely hanging on.

Our problem is that we interpret Paul's image in terms of contemporary warfare. In the ancient form of hand to hand combat described here, a key component for victory required soldiers to stand

side by side against attackers – often with large rectangular shields close to each other. Sometimes simply standing firm resulted in the attackers panicking once they saw the failure of their assault. Our job is to stand firm in connection to Christ.

When we stand firm, we win.

But how do we stand?

### 6) We stand by putting on the armor of God.

Verse 14 begins by declaring “Stand therefore.” How? First by putting on the belt of truth. **Put on the belt of truth – a genuine and authentic life. (14)**

In ancient times, people wore loose fitting clothing and robes. If they wanted to do some work unhindered by their clothes they would gird or gather up the loose clothes with a belt. So the first part of the armor outfit is this belt of truth; integrity of character. To gird might mean to get rid of anything that might be a hindrance in the struggle against evil. You can see the soldier’s belt holding in his clothes on the drawing.

This is connected to the next piece of armor: **put on the Breastplate of Righteousness.** The breastplate covered major organs

like bullet proof vests today. Righteousness is right living in God’s eyes. This is the moral quality of righteousness that characterized God in the Isaiah passages. A right life is essential for one to stand against evil. Now, of course, we’re not going live a perfect life of righteousness like the Lord. But we do need to aim for righteousness depending on the Lord’s strength.

If we live right lives in God’s eyes, we gain protection from the crippling lingering consequences of unrighteous living. Some sin’s consequences take years to overcome. Some sin’s blow marriages apart or families apart. Some bring churches, some bring down nations. But if we’re aiming at and growing in right living, we won’t waste time and energy getting out from the entanglement that comes with sin. Then we’ll be much more alert to the schemes of the devil.

Then verse 15 states “And as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace. This difficult phrase means something like **Put on the sandals of the gospel of peace.** The shoes Paul refers to were light but tough sandals. Nails studded their bottom (soles) for a secure grip on the ground. Soldiers could wear

them in hand to hand combat. With them on, they were ready for combat at the shortest notice.

But how does the Gospel of peace fit in with the sandals of readiness. Well, when satanic attacks come, we need to apply the gospel of peace to any situation. We need to be the ones with beautiful feet bringing good news. We need to know the Gospel and pray for wisdom to proclaim it in every circumstance where the enemy attacks. Say we walk into a situation where someone is filled with despair. Readiness with the Gospel of peace means we remind that person Jesus came to bring good news to the poor. He came to proclaim and deliver release for the prisoner and bind up the broken hearted. So the Gospel penetrates to the depth of despairing situations. Or in a situation of injustice, we proclaim the Gospel by remembering God is righteous and just. He will call all injustice to account. He walks beside and strengthens victims of injustice. So when Satanic attacks come, be ready with the Gospel. Preach it to others and to yourself.

In verse 16, Paul writes “In all circumstances, take up the **Shield of Faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming**

**darts of the evil one.** The term Paul uses refers to the large shield, four feet in length, and two and half feet wide. The drawing has the wrong shield but I liked the flaming arrows. Marching side by side, holding up these large shields, soldiers could advance or stand firm with great protection. The shields were often made of wood and then covered in leather. Though strong, a flaming arrow could cause great confusion. One historian describes how these arrows, dipped in tar and lit on fire, would cause panic. Even if they did not hit a soldier’s body, they blazed fiercely. This tempted the soldiers to throw down their burning shields and become vulnerable to the spears of their enemies.

To combat these flaming arrows, they soaked the leather in water before battle. This would protect the wood from lighting on fire which neutralized the destructive power of the arrows. Here the burning arrows represent every type of assault by the evil one. It could be temptation, false teaching, persecution, doubt or despair. Confident trust in and receptiveness to Christ and His power protects us against these darts.

Now the last two parts of the armor are introduced by a different verb. Paul instructed us to put on or take up the first four pieces. But the last two simply say take as if someone is handing them to you. These are gifts from God. Verse 17 says “**take the helmet of salvation.**” Now this does not mean coming to Christ for the first time. These readers were already Christians. So it could be referring to salvation to the uttermost that we talked about last week. Or the helmet could refer to protection from doubt about our salvation. Satan loves to attack Christians about the assurance of their salvation. But although our feelings about salvation may be damaged, our salvation itself is not in doubt. We can be strong in God’s promises of eternal salvation in Scripture.

Finally, **take the sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God. (17)** This is the only offensive weapon in this armor, (so the picture in your insert is wrong). Paul uses the word for the short sword used in hand to hand combat. God’s Word is our sword. We ward off and cut through Satan’s assaults with His Word. The Lord Jesus fought Satan during the temptation with the Word of God. Three times, Jesus quoted appropriate verses of the Word of God to stand

firm during Satan’s temptations. Knowing God’s Word enables us to cut through the fog of Satan’s lies.

In just 7 or 8 verses, Paul alerts us to the opponents against us. But he’s also poured into us the provision of God and His armor to enable us to face these opponents. I realize that though Paul’s image of armor is quite graphic, it’s still pretty abstract. How do you actually engage in this spiritual battle? We can’t just go and punch the devil.

### **How do we actually take hold of the provisions?**

Verse 18 – “By praying at all times in the Spirit with all prayer and supplication.” Prayer seems to pull this all together. It could be that we put on our armor in prayer. One commentator writes “Equipping ourselves with God’s armor is not a mechanical preparation; it is itself an expression of our dependence on God, in other words, of prayer.” In fact putting on, taking up and receiving God’s armor all require an attitude of dependence on God. A life permeated and saturated with prayer seems to be Paul’s way to take hold of these spiritual provisions for this spiritual battle.

This does not mean that we must literally be on our knees every waking moment in a posture of prayer. It does mean that we need to

grow in prayer so that it becomes more like breathing. We often don't think or plan to breathe, we just do it. The growing Christian, ready to stand firm against the devil and spiritual forces, naturally prays in any and every circumstance with eyes open and eyes closed; with mouth or in the mind; with others or alone. When we turn to God in prayer, we become the people of God standing firm in the face of the devil's assaults until the evil day or time passes.

Andrew Lincoln writes, "We are given a realistic perspective on Christian existence. It removes any naïve notion that living out our calling in the world will be an effortless or trouble-free assignment." The Christian life is not a cake walk. It's a battle but one we don't have to fear.

In fact, the opposition we face in living the Christian life has its source in the supernatural powers of evil. The true church's witness threatens these powers and reminds them of their ultimate defeat. So they retaliate. But we have totally adequate resources for defense and offense. And it means that when we live out God's commands, we resist or stand firm against the spiritual forces of evil. So when we

obey the commands found in Eph 4, 5, 6 for example, we are standing firm against the devil.

*"Maintaining the unity of the Spirit, growing in maturity and building up the body of Christ in the face of false teaching, living lives of righteousness, holiness, and truth, dealing with anger, cultivating edifying talk, loving others, valuing words and conduct that are free from sexual impurity, worshiping and giving thanks, submitting and loving in marriage, obeying parents and avoiding provoking children, and obeying and abstaining from threatening in employer-employee relationships can now all be seen to be part of resisting the powers of evil and to depend on appropriating Christ's strength."*

There is a devil who schemes to bring us down. There are spiritual forces of evil. Right now, non-Christian; you are powerless in their sway. Powerless to stand firm and overcome. But that can all change if you put your trust in Christ. If you turn from sin and turn to Christ in faith, God saves you. Then you begin the journey of "being made strong in the Lord." Will you respond to Christ's call today?

Christian, heed this reality. Then take up the provisions of God to stand firm against the foe where you work, through life, play and

ply. Ignorance about this may appear to be bliss. But ignorance about the devil and his forces is blissful weakness. Now that we've faced this together, let us fight together in the strength of the Lord.