

Be Strong in the Lord

Ephesians 6:10-24

23 February 2020, Covenant Waterfall

Pray

Introduction

Some weeks ago I watched the new film, 1917, at the cinemas. It was a story about two young English soldiers in WW1 who were on a mission to deliver an important message to a general that would result in saving the lives of many thousands of soldiers. As someone who loves history, especially war history, I was in my element. It's an incredible movie, well-acted, excellently produced and gripping. Really brought home the reality and the horrors of the War. It also made me relieved that I was born in peace time, not having to experience those horrors of war.

Yet while we may be blessed now to live in peace time, there is a real sense in which, as Christians, we are actually in the midst of a war. This is indeed the reality that our last section of Ephesians describes. Paul, bringing this magnificent letter to a close, has explained to us the majesty and beauty of the gospel in the first three chapters. What is it? That God the Father chose us before the foundation of the world, that Jesus redeemed us from our sins by dying on the cross in our place, and that the Holy Spirit now seals us until the day that we will be raised to new life with him in the new creation. This incredible gift of salvation is a free, undeserved gift to us, receive it simply by faith in Christ!

He has also explained to us how to live in the light of the gospel, from chapters 4 to 6. How do we live as Christians, a part of Christ's church? We are to flee from the darkness of the lifestyle of sin which we once lived, and instead pursue Christ and his righteousness – in all areas of our lives: our marriages, our families, in bringing up our children, in our workplaces, how we treat those who work for us and how we relate to those whom we fall under.

Now, in concluding this letter, his final exhortation to us is that we would **“be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might.”** (v.10) and that we would **“put on the whole armour**

of God that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil.” (v.11) This is because, as he goes on to explain – we are actually in the midst of a cosmic battle against the spiritual forces of evil over **“this present darkness.”** (v.12)

The whole point of this final section in Ephesians is to hit home this reality: that because we’re in a spiritual battle, we are to stand firm in the armour of God.

Unpack this in three ways:

- The reality of the spiritual battle
- Stand firm in the armour of God
- Persevere in Prayer

A. The Reality of the Spiritual Battle vv.10-13

“Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. ¹¹ Put on the whole armour 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 armour of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm.”

Aware that the danger of getting into topics such as this – tendency for some Christians to see Satan behind every bush. Reason you had a bad day, the reason for the heavy traffic in the morning, the reason for your husband or wife shouting at you, the reason you have a head ache - was because you were under attack from Satan.

Before we dive in here, need to put things in perspective: contrary to popular opinion, God and Satan are not equal and opposite forces! God is the Creator, the devil is a part of the created order. God is infinite, Satan is finite. God is eternal, Satan had a beginning and he has an end – he will one day be destroyed by the breath of Jesus’ mouth, as 2 Thessalonians 2:8 reminds us. Our adversary is a defeated foe – he may have some limited power in this age, as he is the prince of the world (Jn 14:30), but even his power is ultimately restrained by God himself, as we see in places like the book of Job.

The truth that we see here is that Satan is indeed real and he does pose a threat to Christians. This is precisely why Paul instructs us to **“be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might”** (v.10) and to **“put on the whole armour of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil.”** (v.11). What then are the **“schemes of the devil”**? One thing about Satan – he is predictable. His tactics haven’t changed since Genesis 3 in the Garden of Eden. What did he do there? He got Adam and Eve to doubt the Word of God. How did he do that? “Did God really say...?” He lied to them, sowed doubts in their minds about the truth of God’s Word and in so doing, got them to disobey it – and therefore fall for his temptations to sin. That is what he is all about. That is the reason Jesus, in John 8:44, calls Satan, “the father of all lies,” who when he lies, speaks his native language.

The battle in which we find ourselves – this battle against “the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.” (v.12). Like in the Garden of Eden, today, Satan’s scheme is to get us to doubt the truth of the Word of God, and in so doing, tempt us into sin, to disobedience towards God. Why? Sin brings a rupture in our relationship with God and weakens our faith.

How does he try and get us to do this?

Broadly - False teachers – bad teaching – undermine truth of God’s Word. Two broad categories today: First - the health and wealth “prosperity gospel” folks – modern day, self-appointed ‘apostles’ and ‘prophets’ – add to God’s Word (in effect undermines his Word – saying it’s not enough, need something else – a new revelation etc.).

Second: liberal theology – old main line denoms, but also encroaching into independent churches – emergent church folks – subtract from God’s Word – take out things that are disagreeable with our culture – sovereignty of God, virgin birth of Christ, sinfulness of homosexuality etc. Try their best to get the church to conform to the culture / dominant political views of the day. Both sow doubt in our hearts about the truth of God’s Word – open door for sin.

Satan’s schemes also closer to home – did God really say that? Doubt God’s Word – leads us into temptation – rationalising sin – “a bit of porn is harmless” what’s the worst that can happen? Surely it’s ok to sleep with my girlfriend – we love each other, how can that be a bad thing? You’ll never be happy and content unless you have this thing, x amount of

money, buy your own property etc. Because you're a good and moral person, you'll get into heaven... You don't need to go to church to be a Christian.

It's because of all these things – see them for what they are – schemes of Satan – aimed at shipwrecking your faith – that we need **“to take up the whole armour of God – so that you may be able to withstand in the evil day and having done all, to stand firm.”** (v.13). Stand firm in Christ and hold to the faith once delivered to the saints, clothed in the armour of God. What then is the armour of God? The following verses tell us...

B. Stand firm in the armour of God vv. 14-17

“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”

Ephesians is not the first place in Scripture where we hear about the armour of God. Actually, Paul borrows most of these images of the God's armour from Isaiah. Mixes them with imagery from Roman soldiers, but the heart of this is from Isaiah. All over Isaiah, there are pictures of God and the coming Messiah clothed in armour. Here in Ephesians 6, we are told to put on this exact same armour that God himself uses – hence it's called the “armour of God”! Let's zoom in here:

The Belt of Truth – v.14 - We've seen that Satan is the father of all lies, and uses his lies, his undermining of God's Word, his truth, to tempt us to sin. It is for this reason that we need to be clothed in God's truth – the truth of the gospel, his Word. As a belt holds our clothes together, so putting on the belt of truth holds all God's armour on us in place. Being secure and strapped into God's truth makes us less susceptible to the lies and schemes of Satan.

The Breastplate of Righteousness – v.14 –Most important piece of armour is the breastplate – covers front and back, from neck to thighs. Protection from arrows and swords against vital organs. Now image is cut and paste from Isa 59:17 – **“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.” Describing God himself going out to do battle against his enemies, putting on righteousness and his breastplate. We put on God’s own righteousness here – not our own. Can’t trust in our own righteousness, all fall short. Instead, in Christ, we are clothed in his perfect righteousness which he earned because he’s the only one that had obeyed God’s law. Clothed in Christ’s own breastplate we can face an enemy not in our own strength, not through our own level of faith or good works – but instead covered in his righteousness.

The Shoes of the Gospel of Peace – v.15 - the purpose of soldiers wearing sturdy shoes in battle -help them run and take ground from the enemy. Here is another reference from Isaiah, this time from ch. 52:7 – **“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!”** Paul also quotes this verse in Romans 10. Point here – proclaiming the true gospel of peace, running into enemy territory, the world, declaring that in Christ, we who were once separated from God, enemies of God, have now been reconciled to God through him. Proclaiming this gospel of peace, that “Your God reigns” takes ground from the enemy – lost are saved, sinners can be brought to repentance, God is glorified through the preaching of the gospel.

The Shield of Faith with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one – v.16 - a shield is a defensive part of armour. Protects against the fiery arrows of the enemy in battle. What then are the arrows of Satan? His accusations against us. Satan’s name in Hebrew, HaSatan, means “the accuser”. He specialises in accusing us of being unworthy before God, reminding us that God will never love us because of all the many filthy sins we’ve committed – that we’re so bad that we have no hope. Consider this quote from Martin Luther:

“So when the devil throws your sins in your face and declares that you deserve death and hell, tell him this: “I admit that I deserve death and hell, what of it? For I know One who suffered and made satisfaction on my behalf. His name is Jesus Christ, Son of God, and where He is there I shall be also!”

The shield of faith extinguishes these accusations of Satan against us, because it reminds us that we are indeed justified before God – made right with him – called his own sons – because of our faith in Jesus Christ.

The Helmet of Salvation – v.17 – also from Isaiah 59:17, which quoted earlier – God wearing helmet of salvation when he returns to defeat Satan. In Christ, we wear the same helmet. Why? Protects our minds from Satan’s attacks – doubting our salvation because of our sins, not enough good works etc. No – expose the lie that in Christ our salvation is secure. It’s secure because thankfully it’s not reliant on our work, it’s all his work – our salvation indeed belongs to the Lord! It’s his gift of grace to us in Christ!

The Sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God – Only offensive weapon in the armour of God is the sword. It’s not only used to defend, but also to cut through the heart of the enemy, disabling him. The Sword of the Spirit is the Word of God. There are some who place the Word and Spirit in opposition to one another – Word is dry, dead letter and legalistic, we instead need to be led by the Spirit, who is dynamic and life-giving. This verse shows up how patently false that assumption is. The truth is that the Word and the Spirit always work together and achieve the one in the same purpose. God’s promise is that the Spirit of God works in hearts, turning the heart of stone into a heart of flesh, and exposes the lies of the enemy, every time the Word of God is faithfully proclaimed. Word and Spirit are inseparable! That should give us great confidence to proclaim God’s Word, as we are promised that God’s Spirit will always use it for his glory – his Word never returns void.

Best example of this is when Jesus faced the temptations of Satan in the wilderness. Matthew 4. For every temptation that Satan used to entice Jesus, Jesus responds by quoting from the Word of God to resist Satan’s attacks. Jesus was hungry, Satan tempted him by telling him to turn the stones into bread. Jesus replies, quoting Deuteronomy 8:3, **“Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.”** Here we see the Sword of the Spirit in action – slaying every scheme of Satan, driving him away – the Sword of the Spirit, *which is the Word of God*. Hebrews 4:12, **“For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword...”**

C. Persevere in Prayer vv.18-20

“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.”

We’ve been exhorted to put on the whole armour of God. This exhortation is in the context of prayer. A Christian who doesn’t pray is a contradiction in terms. Praying is what we do – verse 18 – “pray at all times in the Spirit”. Praying in the Spirit does not mean praying in tongues – bear in mind the context -praying in the Spirit is praying according to the Word of God, which is the sword of the Spirit.

Our prayers show our reliance on God and need for him in the midst of this present darkness – realising that we can’t live this Christian life in our own strength. We need to cry out for God to strengthen our weak arms, give us our daily bread, help us forgive those who sin against us, to keep us from evil, and to deliver us from temptation. Specifically in this verse, 18, we are called to pray for alertness, to persevere in the faith and to pray for our fellow brothers and sisters in Christ – pray for the church. Don’t forget that a soldier never fights alone, always in the army, surrounded by fellow soldiers. This is why every Christian needs to be knitted into his local church – it’s the place where you’ll be strengthened and encouraged in your faith!

In verses 19-20 Paul asks that the church would pray for him to give him strength to boldly preach the gospel. It’s this prayer that we should continue to pray for the whole church – that the true gospel would be faithfully and boldly proclaimed. That we would not be distracted and confused by the many false gospels out there – health & wealth, liberalism, political stuff. Ultimately the only way that hell is plundered – is by faithfully proclaiming the gospel. The preaching of the gospel is what God uses in order to raise the dead to life. Pray that the church – our church, all others in our community, Durban, RSA, would not compromise on this, but be faithful in proclaiming the true gospel – that Jesus lived the obedient life we couldn’t live, and died the death on the cross we deserved and trusting in him, forgives us our sins, seals us for eternal life in him.

D. The Benediction, vv.23-24

“Peace be to the brothers, and love with faith, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. ²⁴ Grace be with all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with love incorruptible.”

Paul brings this letter to its conclusion with a benediction. A benediction is not a prayer, but it means “good word” – it is a prophetic utterance. When Paul gives his benediction here – he is speaking as an ambassador of the King – he’s announcing a blessing directly from God upon his people. This is why the benediction is the highpoint of our worship service – it’s not me who blesses you, but God himself does! He gives us a free gift every week through this!

Here, as Ephesians is brought to a close, God leaves us with the following blessing for us who are in the midst of the battle, who are living in this sin cursed world, facing temptations daily. He says, *receive* his peace, his love, faith from himself, and grace from him our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might!

Amen