

Ephesians 6:10-17 - 22nd after Pentecost (16.10.2016)

Called to a Battle!

¹⁰ **A final word: Be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power.** ¹¹ **Put on all of God's armour so that you will be able to stand firm against all strategies of the devil.** ¹² **For we are not fighting against flesh-and-blood enemies, but against evil rulers and authorities of the unseen world, against mighty powers in this dark world, and against evil spirits in the heavenly places.**

¹³ **Therefore, put on every piece of God's armour so you will be able to resist the enemy in the time of evil. Then after the battle you will still be standing firm.** ¹⁴ **Stand your ground, putting on the belt of truth and the body armour of God's righteousness.** ¹⁵ **For shoes, put on the peace that comes from the Good News, so that you will be fully prepared** [Or: *For shoes, put on the readiness to preach the Good News of peace with God.*] ¹⁶ **In addition to all of these, hold up the shield of faith to stop the fiery arrows of the devil.** ¹⁷ **Put on salvation as your helmet, and take the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.**

¹⁸ **Pray in the Spirit at all times and on every occasion. Stay alert and be persistent in your prayers for all believers everywhere.**

It is one of the ironies of life that Paul should be dictating this final word to the Christians in Ephesus while he was chained to a Roman soldier. Certainly being chained to rotation of soldiers 24 hours a day would class under 'difficulties'. Perhaps it is because of his present situation that Paul wants to give the recipients of his letter a strong image for being protected from the attacks of the enemies of Christ and the church.

Paul does not have to look far for an image to convey this - he is constantly in the presence of a soldier, and of the armour they wear. Soldiers had to be ready for any eventuality - and that is the reminder we need today also. We are to know that our life as followers of Jesus is not a life of comfortable ease. Instead we have been

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Called to a battle for which we have to be prepared - and where we can't underestimate the enemy. That was something the South African army did a number of years ago when they entered Lesotho, and were sent packing with their tails between their legs!

Called to a battle - and so Paul's final word [is]: **Be strong! Be strong** - not of yourself, but **with the Lord's mighty power**. Being able to fend for yourself may be OK if you're in the super hero category - but very few of us find ourselves in those ranks.

Paul had discovered that his power was not in what he could do, but in receiving

from the Lord's mighty power the strength he needed to deal with his many 'difficulties'. In facing the daily challenges of your life - in preparing day by day to live as a follower of Jesus Christ - you know that it is not about your power or what you are able to do. So that we do not come up short at the time we face challenges and difficulties, we need to **put on all of God's armour so that you will be able to stand firm against all strategies of the Devil**. The strategies of the devil are varied - depending on the situation you may find yourself in. And his method of tempting us is different - different for men than it may be for women. Different from one person to another, because he knows where our weak spots are - our 'Achilles Heel'. That's why the reminder to **put on all of God's armour** so that we will be able to stand firm as followers of our Lord is important for us.

I have been amazed by the number of parties where those invited are expected to dress up according to the theme. Well, this not a call to get ready for a party, but to ready for life by 'dressing up' with what God supplies us with. We are to wear the different parts of the armour Paul describes here - and to teach our children about them also.

The first part - although it logically belongs at the end is **the sturdy belt of truth**. This is a belt more like those weight-lifters might put on, as they prepare to lift a heavy weight, definitely not a delicate fashion article. Perhaps Paul puts it right at the beginning, because this truth is to be present in all we do. As such a belt it also serves to strengthen our backbone - to help us stand up to the weight of temptation or persecution.

What the belt of truth holds together is **the body armour of God's righteousness** - this armour which protects the vital organs of its wearer. The righteousness God gives is meant to protect our heart of faith - so that we may know the truth that we truly have been received by God as his children. This gives us great freedom in dealing with the thrusts of doubt whether God has not perhaps forgotten us, as our lives seem to fall apart. Wearing this armour protects the vital part of our faith - it assures us of God's love and acceptance.

Then there are the shoes: **For shoes, put on the peace that comes from the Good News**. Good shoes are important to any soldier - you can't march well with badly fitting shoes, let alone fight. We are not soldiers (anymore), but anybody who goes hiking knows that you can't just put on a new pair of shoes when you set out on a long hike - and, as with a soldier, you don't simply choose the shoes by how they look - what others

think of them, but what is important that fit well, and how they give you support. You have to wear them in. In the same way we need to 'wear in' the peace of God we receive from the Good News of Jesus. We are to walk in this peace wherever we are - so that this peace will change how we act. Where God's peace determines our footsteps, we withstand the urge to harm others by word or deed.

In every battle you will need faith as your shield to stop the fiery arrows aimed at you by Satan - throughout the ages there have been different forms and types of shield. The important thing about them is that they are adapted to your situation - and that they don't carry unnecessary ornamentation which only gets in the way in a battle. Our faith is to be 'functional' - not filled with a lot of things which might look nice, but which really do not add to the basic trust we are to have in God. Such ornaments may be the things we often believe are essential to also do and believe - e.g. not too long ago that meant women were to wear hats, and men a suit when they attended church services. But those are not the kind of things which will support us when our faith is challenged by debilitating disease or a sudden death in the family. What we wear will not support our faith, when we face the questions of those who look to science to answer their seeking for purpose to our life.

Put on salvation as your helmet - I often have people mispronouncing my name as this article. Perhaps it is part of my calling to help others realise what a helmet does - it is there to protect the centre of your thoughts and desires. The fact that you are saved may be a protection to you in what you think, say and do - what you look at, and what you read. Being saved does not mean living outside of everyday life, but it does mean that we can't do what everybody else believes is acceptable. So we wear the helmet of salvation - also as protection in case we get bashed for not going along with what others do.

Lastly you are to **take the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God**. While all the parts of the armour named here have defensive qualities, this is the one which also has attacking capabilities. We should note, however, that it is the Spirit who guides this sword - we should be careful not to simply attack those who may have different practices and a different approach as far as our life of faith is concerned. But at the same time, there really are things which must be cut away by a sharp sword - and we need the Spirit's guidance to get this right.

Wear this armour - because as Paul tells us, **we are not fighting against flesh-and-blood enemies, but against evil rulers and authorities of the unseen world, against mighty powers in this dark world, and**

against evil spirits in the heavenly places. This fighting is not like when you have a paint-ball party, where somewhere along the line 'time' is called. It is an all-out onslaught with the express aim of taking captives for the devil and destroying lives. The only way to **resist the enemy in the time of evil ... [so that] after the battle you will still be standing firm**. Is by wearing this armour of our Lord.

The thing with armour is that it was useless left hanging on a hook somewhere - until there was danger. The danger was that it would be rusted and useless if it was not constantly used and cared for. That danger was that it would grow heavy and would feel uncomfortable, if one did not constantly practise using the armour - wearing it, getting accustomed to the weight, and with wielding the shield as much as practising with the sword.

It may sound like somebody crying 'wolf' to say that we are constantly surrounded by danger - yet that is the reality of our life as followers of the Lord. The fact that we feel safe should not make us too assured. The question may be, whether we have fallen asleep to the danger or whether we have become so much part of our world and what is happening around us, that we are not aware of danger anymore.

In the old Eastern Germany the 'honeytrap' was often used to compromise enemies of the state - they were lured into a sexual relationship, details of which would be photographed by hidden cameras. So too we may be lured into doing something - and only realise what we have done when it's too late. The thing is, the devil does not fight fair - and he fights to win and destroy what he can. He will use any means to gain his aim.

What we may know is that we don't have to let ourselves be blackmailed because of what we have done. The breastplate of God's righteousness does not only protect us - it also has incredible healing and restorative power. So even if we may have fallen, we may that know that God's aim for our life is **that after the battle you will still be standing firm**. And if we fall, he picks us up again - if we turn to him.

A victorious life does not mean having all you want, or always getting your way. Rather it is a case of having what God wants you to have, and him always getting his way in your life - so that you are changed. Then, even though you might occasionally stumble, he will be there to pick you up, to renew your strength, and to give you the ultimate victory.