

EPHESIANS 6:10-20

BATTLE READY!

August 1945 saw the surrender of Japan, and, officially at least, the end of the Second World War and the return of peace to the Pacific region. However, some Japanese soldiers who had been placed on small islands in the Pacific either didn't hear the announcement of Japan's surrender, or if they did refused to believe it, and so continued to act as if they were at war. The result? As the Allied soldiers went around 'cleaning up' these islands, believing the war to be over for everyone, they found themselves under attack from Japanese soldiers who had vowed to fight to the death. When this first started happening the allied soldiers weren't prepared for it. They knew the war was over, and so they were landing on these islands quite casually, unprepared for battle, only to find themselves unprotected when they came under fire from an enemy they weren't aware still existed. Until they caught on to what was happening, the allies continued to sustain casualties because they weren't prepared for the attacks they came under.

The war was won, but the battles were still going on. Sounds a bit like the spiritual battles which happen in our lives as Christians. The devil has been defeated; when Jesus rose again from the dead He made sure of that. But has the devil finished his work? No way. It's like we see sometimes in the movies; the ceasefire has been declared from 12 midday, and so in the hours leading up to that time the battles intensify, with each side trying to gain as much land as they can before it's all over. The devil knows he's lost, so right now he's fighting even harder; fighting to get as many people as he can for himself before Jesus comes again and it's really finished. He knows he's lost, but he's not ready to give in yet.

Paul, writing from a prison cell in Rome to the new Christians in Ephesus, knew this is where the battle between God and the devil is at, and so he writes to them, 'Be ready!' *Ephesians 6:14a*. Paul knows that the best way for the devil to win is for us to ignore him, to be like those allied soldiers walking up an island beach and suddenly, unexpectedly, coming under fire. He knows too that because this is a spiritual battle, we need spiritual armour. As he was writing this letter, Paul may well have been searching for a picture he could use to explain how as Christians we prepare for this battle. He may have looked up, seen a Roman soldier standing there on guard, and then had the light go on and thought, 'that's it! That's the picture I can use'. And so he writes, 'Put on all the armour that God

gives, so you can defend yourself against the devil's tricks'. *Ephesians 6:11* This armour comes from God, it comes with the power God showed when He beat the devil in Jesus' resurrection. And it's armour we are now urged to put on so that we are ready for what the devil throws against us.

The purpose of this armour God gives us is to enable us to stand firm. There's the image here of the Roman soldier who is under attack but who, because of all his armour, is able to hold his ground. It's a good picture. We are 'armoured' to stand strong in our faith. The devil might hit us with small slingshots or arrows, the little things which sneak under our guard or through the cracks. The things we do, say, see or hear which we don't think are harmful, just a bit of fun, or constructive criticism, but which the devil uses to get through our armour and attack our faith or our commitment to God.

Then there's the more full-on assaults. The things in our lives which test our faith and create doubts. The conflicts we have with others, especially in our church family. The things we know are wrong, no doubt about it, but we find ourselves doing anyway. We know that in either the small ways or the large ways the devil is fighting hard, trying to win as many battles as he can before the war finishes. And he does have his victories. He uses our feelings, both the good and the bad ones. He uses other people. And he uses the world around us. He uses whatever he can to take people away from their faith and trust in God. Can we fight him alone? No way. That's why God gives us the armour to put on.

Let's have a bit of a look at how Paul describes this armour. First of all there is the belt of truth. Who is the truth? Jesus, the way, the truth and the life. The truth is knowing, being sure, of all that Jesus has won for us; His victory over the devil, and His help to us each day in taking up this fight. This truth, not ours but God's, now like a belt holds everything else together.

We have the armour of righteousness or justice; the armour of having overcome all evil and been triumphant. Is the armour our victory? No, it's God's. And that's what makes it so strong and sure. It's the armour which makes us know that there is nothing the devil can do which will make him stronger than God.

The third piece of armour is the shoes of the good news of peace. Now, as the shoes of a Roman soldier, these aren't running shoes, but shoes which help the soldier to stand their ground against attack. As we know God's peace in our lives, we can know that He gives us all we need each day, we don't need to go elsewhere looking for more. Having God's peace helps us to stand firm, being able to live our lives content with what we have from Him.

Fourthly is the shield of faith. Paul goes a bit further here and describes how it 'stops all the flaming arrows of the evil one'. What would put out flaming arrows? Water. When we think of water we think of, Baptism. Our faith, given to us in our baptism, now helps to ward off all that the devil

tries to fire at us. It's why Luther, whenever his faith was under attack, claimed as his defence, 'but I am baptised'. It's that shield of faith, given to us by God through the Holy Spirit, that we hide behind. When we feel that we can't stand up to what is being thrown at us, we can hide behind that shield of faith which God gives to us.

The last of the defensive armour is the helmet of God's saving power. The helmet of course protects that very vulnerable and important part of our body, the head. It needs to be strong, and it is, because it's the power that God showed when Jesus died, went to hell, and then rose from the dead. Once again, it's the power Jesus showed in the resurrection. As such, when we put on this helmet there is nothing the devil can throw against us which can beat us.

And the last thing mentioned is different, because it's no longer to protect us, it's to take up the fight, to go on the offensive. Having stood firm, we now take the fight back to the enemy with the sword of God's message from the Spirit. Remember after Jesus was baptised and He went into the desert. Three times the devil tempted Jesus, and three times He responded with ... God's Word. God's Word is now our best weapon of attack too. When we read it, hear it, use it in our lives, it helps us to not only withstand the attacks we face, but to get on the front foot and take the attack back to him. It's God's Word that shows us all of those other things Paul talks about here, and that we can not only stand against the attacks, but we can defeat them. Just like the devil fights right to the end, so too can we.

Paul finishes his teaching off here urging Christians to 'Never stop praying, especially for others. Always pray by the power of the Spirit. Stay alert and keep praying for God's people'. *Ephesians 6:18* Why? So that God's message can keep on going out in the battle. The reason the Roman soldiers conquered so many other nations wasn't just because they were individually well armoured, it was also because they fought well together, protecting and helping one another. Together they could protect and help each other. It's the same for us as Christians. We can pray for one another. We can support one another. We can give counsel and feedback which is meant to be constructive not destructive. Think about the way we sometimes talk to and relate to others. Sometimes we are working for God, but other times the devil is using us in his work, and we're not even aware of it. The best thing we can do is to pray for one another. Pray that each one of us may take up this armour. Pray for the work of this Church, all Christian churches. Pray for this school, all Christian schools. Pray for Christians everywhere, in their lives, in their work, that they may both stand firm against attack and take out the message of God. Pray that we may both be alert and aware enemy and his ways, and be aware too of what God gives us in our fight against him.

To underestimate or ignore the enemy is a dangerous thing, and yet, all too often, that's what we do with the devil. And so once again, the warning here is; Be ready! The Roman soldiers Paul uses for his illustration here had to provide their own armour and weapons. But we have the assurance that we don't have to dress ourselves for battle, but God gives us all we need. With God's armour for our protection may He help us to stand firm against attack, and pick us up in all of those times we know we slip backwards. As the devil continues to wage those final battles may we continue to fight, to pray, and to work for Him so many more can both come to know Him and stay strong in Him also. Amen.

FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION/REFLECTION

Put On the Full Armour of God

Think about all the different parts of armour which God gives us to keep us strong in Him, and to enable us to take His message out to the world. How do you use each part in your life?

- The belt of Truth: The truth that Jesus died and rose again for us, so we have new life in Him.
- The armour of God's Justice: In God you have been forgiven and set free. You are now free from the devil and free to serve God.
- The shoes of Peace: through Jesus we have the peace which passes all understanding, the peace we can find nowhere else. Knowing this peace gives us the desire to go and share it.
- The shield of Faith: the faith we were given in our Baptism can now help protect us from all the ways the devil tries to attack us and take us away from God.
- The helmet of Salvation: because of Jesus, we are saved. The devil can make all sorts of accusations he likes, and bring in any doubts, but knowing that Jesus is our Saviour helps us to stay strong in God.
- The sword of the Spirit: protected by God, through the Holy Spirit we can now go out to share God's message of forgiveness, hope and peace with others.

Stay Alert and Keep on Praying for God's People

Pray for the Christian community you are a part of. Pray for all Christians everywhere. Pray that God will help all Christians to stay strong and secure in Him, and that by His Spirit they will continue to take His message out.

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