

Prayer

We ask You, Almighty God and Lord of history, to make Yourself known through all that is happening in the world around us. Give us the eyes to see Your Judgement, Your Love, Your Glory and Your Mercy at work, and give Your people the wisdom to explain it to a world that needs Your direction and help. We ask this in the name of our Saviour Jesus AMEN

Prayer Suggestions

Prayer ideas

Ask the Lord to bless the different people you meet in all the various circumstances of your day

On-going prayers

- **Pray for those who preach.** *Pray that preachers will be people who study God's Word because they love it, as well as to preach from it.*
- *Pray for Russia and its many peoples and vast land mass*
- *Thank God for the great gifts He has given you, especially love*

Meditation

Jesus Christ, You break into our world with

Fresh insight which inspires us to new heights;
Awesome visions by which we see the Father;
Profound wisdom to strengthen our minds;
Divine energy which breaks through barriers;
Amazing beauty through which we find joy;
Superb kindness to transform relationships;
Incredible sensitivity which values all life;
Astonishing bravery by which evil is defeated;

Jesus Christ, You are our inspiration!

Bible passage – Ephesians 6:10-13 (10-18)

¹⁰ From now on, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. ¹¹ Put on the complete armour of God, so that you may be able to stand against the strategies of the devil. ¹² For our fight is not against flesh and blood, but against powers, against authorities, against the rulers of this dark world, and against spiritual wickedness from the heavenly world. ¹³ Therefore take up the complete armour of God, so that you may be able to take your stand on the day of evil, and being ready in every way, stand firm.

¹⁴ So take your stance, with your waist wrapped with truth, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, ¹⁵ and with the urgency of the Gospel of peace worn on your feet. ¹⁶ In addition to all this carry the shield of faith, with which you will be able to quench all the flaming arrows of the evil one. ¹⁷ Take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God. ¹⁸ In your prayer and requests, pray in the Spirit on every occasion; and keep alert to this with all perseverance, making requests for all the saints.

Thought for the Day

Text

Ephesians 6:11

¹¹ Put on the complete armour of God, so that you may be able to stand against the strategies of the devil.

Thought

The purpose of putting on the whole armour of God is to fight against the enemy. You may have heard much about the 'whole armour of God' and you may be familiar with all the elements of this great picture of the Christian, standing ready to face the foe; but have you fought?

Too many speak of being 'in a battle' only when life is difficult, but the fight against sin and evil never stops. The man or woman of God is not secure when stopping for a rest, but when actively using the gifts of God to fight life's battles and all evil proactively and victoriously, in Christ.

Bible Study

Review

Paul's letter to the Ephesians suddenly bursts into life with a wonderful and powerful illustration of the Christian life. The 'complete armour of God' (6:10-18) has captured the imagination of millions of Christians throughout the years, largely because it provides both an explanation of how God, through Christ, enables His people to battle the evils of this world and live victoriously. Whether we live at times of peace or war, most people understand the language of battling against an enemy.

The 'complete armour of God' comes right at the end of Ephesians. However, this passage is not just a self contained message, because it draws the whole letter together, as shown by this summary (roughly by chapters).

1. God is to be praised for His work of salvation in Christ
2. Salvation is by faith and not by the 'Law', and in Christ, God has made a new people
3. Even Gentiles are now invited into God's household; God has given Paul this message
4. So God's people should live together in unity, using His gifts, like 'light' in a 'dark' world
5. But there are still evils in the church; so Christians must be careful to live by God's rules
6. God has given His people all they need to live the life of faith victoriously

This great passage describes how the glory of God in Jesus Christ (as described in chapters 1 and 2) may be demonstrated in the life of a Christian. The Gospel message is that Christ has won the victory over evil, so His people may live victoriously! Christians are not just saved; in Christ, they are powerful to defeat evil and able to change the world. This is important. God's people cannot afford to make the 'whole armour of God' sound like a personal spiritual choice. It is a powerful description of how the whole church testifies to the truth of the Gospel within the world, and we should read it as such.

Because of its importance, we will study Ephesians 6:10-18 over two days. Today, we will look at the first four verses (6:10-13), which describe the nature of the battle in which we are engaged. Tomorrow, we will look at the well known features of the armour, which tell us how to fight the battle.

To begin with, the style of this passage is striking. Rather like the opening chapters of Ephesians, to read these words is like listening in to a preacher in full flow. The first verse has three words emphasising strength, 'be strong ... in the power of His might'; we can be in no doubt that once saved, our life is rooted in the Saviour, and His strength is our strength. We need this strength, for like Christ on the Cross, we face a real enemy.

Throughout history, the fallen world under the authority of Satan has been responsible for the evils that have separated both people and all creation from God. Jesus has defeated these powers on the Cross, and the Christian is called to continue this work in both the world and in 'heavenly places'. This is why we need God's 'complete armour' if we are to take our stand with Christ against the various 'rulers and authorities' described in verse 12 (see 'going deeper'). It is a battle that will be won because Christ has already fought the defining battle, and the final outcome has been secured. But whilst there is evil both in the world and also within the church (as is clear from 5:2f. – see above), they must be fought.

'Pre-battle' speeches are common in literature, for example, the famous exhortation of Henry V before the battle of Agincourt, in Shakespeare's play 'Henry V'. They rouse troops to fight battles of uncertain outcome, and the words themselves inspire the heroism that wins the day. We must never allow ourselves to think that the 'complete armour of God' acts like this. God's people are to take their stand in the eternal battle that will secure the victory of love over all sin, evil and death, and lead to eternal life.

Going Deeper

The Bible study goes deeper to look at these issues:

- Why does Ephesians speak here about fighting the devil? (6:10,11)
- What are the worldly and heavenly powers and authorities? (6:12)
- What does it mean to 'take up' God's whole armour, and 'stand'? (6:13)

Notes on the text and translation

V10 **'From now on'**

The Greek words 'tou loipou' are mostly translated as 'finally'. However, this sounds as if it is the last point in the letter whereas the Greek suggests something slightly different. The word 'loipos' means 'the remainder', and it could equally refer to 'what it remains for a Christian to do' after all that has been written in the letter. Hence my translation, 'from now on ...'.

V11 **'complete armour'**

This is one word in Greek, 'panoplia', meaning the full suit of protective armour used by a soldier for combat. The word implies total covering and all round protection.

V11 **'the strategies of the devil'**

Other translations:

'the devil's schemes' (NIV)

'the wiles of the devil' (NRSV)

The Greek word I have translated 'strategies' is 'methodeia', which is clearly the origin of the English word 'method'. However, the Greek uses this word in a negative sense here. Any word such as scheme, strategy or design will do, but I do not think that 'wiles' (as found in the NRSV) is helpful.

V12 **'against spiritual wickedness from the heavenly world'**

Other translations:

'against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms' (NRSV)

'against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places.' (New American)

The Greek phrase here says literally 'against the spiritual things of wickedness in (or from) the heavens.' Instead of trying to explain this strange phrase by adding words, I have attempted a translation by reducing them, and in my opinion, this makes the phrase more understandable, and has the benefit of not assuming what the 'spiritual things' are, except that they are wicked.

V13 **'and being ready in every way, stand firm'**

Other translations:

'and after you have done everything, to stand' (NIV)

'and having done everything, to stand firm' (NRSV)

The Greek word 'katergadzomai' is a word that can mean a variety of things depending upon its use in a sentence. Its core meaning is to 'do everything', and in this sense, it can be translated as 'accomplish, commit, be ready, overcome' or any word that indicates a completed outcome. At this point in Ephesians, Paul is speaking about being prepared to withstand evil, so I have properly interpreted 'do everything' as meaning 'being ready'.

Going Deeper

Why does Ephesians speak here about fighting the devil? (6:10,11)

There are only a few places where Paul or any of the other 'letter writers' of the New Testament speak about the devil (1 Tim 3:6,7, 2 Tim 2:26, Heb 2:14, James 4:7 etc.). Mostly, the letters speak positively about the life of God's people, describing how they may overcome problems without ascribing them to demons or devils. They tend to reserve talk of the devil for grander themes such as this today.

Our passage describes the same 'battle' between good and evil fought out since the 'Fall', as a consequence of God's Creation (Gen 3). There is no doubt that Jesus thought in these terms. After he sent the disciples on a mission to preach the Gospel, He received the news of their success with these words (Luke 10:18) '*I saw Satan fall from heaven like a flash of lightning!*' Wider afield, the Bible uses various words to speak of personified evil, 'Satan', 'the devil', and 'Beelzebul' for example. We will not look further at the reasons for this multiplicity within scripture, but for the purposes of our study, it is worth noting that whenever we read about the devil or Satan, the Bible describes something of how the heavenly 'battle' between good and evil touches the human world. Jesus is able to see this within human life, and casts out demons, but the end result is always to liberate people so that they are free to accept Christ and His Kingdom.

One phrase stands out in this passage, which is 'stand against the strategies of the devil'; it is a clear instruction about our role in the spiritual battle. There is little detail in the Bible about how we might fight against Satan, the devil and his demons, and all evil. However, we are encouraged to follow the example of Christ (Matt 10:1f.), and here, to watch out for the devil's 'strategies'. This is not mere advice to be careful. The phrasing suggests we should out-think the devil's plans, which cannot be done by hoping he will go away! It also suggests that if we keep tracks on the devil, we have already taken a crucial step to defeating him, for he likes to work in darkness (2 Peter 2:17, Col 1:13 etc.). We start to do this by accepting that he is at work in the world, and using God's gift of discernment (see 1 Cor 12:10), and we build on this by using our discernment actively, discussing with others the rights and wrongs in our world, and seeking God's wisdom.

It is no accident that Ephesians ends with a dramatic call to fight a battle. Unless God's people perceive the truth about this battle then they fail to grasp the extent of Christ's work. There may be many ways to fight against evil and the devil, but it is always a battle, and we all need clear advice if we are to fight. One good reason for Paul's reference to the devil here is because he needed to say these famous words; 'our fight is not against flesh and blood'. Too often, we see evil at work in the world and we attack the people who are caught up in it in, rather than confront and defeat the evils themselves and offer salvation to the people involved. Evil will sometimes reside in individuals, but this is not ours to presume.

What are the worldly and heavenly powers and authorities? (6:12)

How we think about our world today is very different from how people thought about it in the first century, and in looking at verse 12, we must be clear about some of these differences. In the first century, people thought of the spiritual world as above us, tantalisingly beyond reach and yet as visible as the sky; but today, people tend to think of the spiritual world as utterly unconnected to our world. The reason for the difference is because science has provided us with a detailed description of the sky and what is above it and beyond it, so we are left with believing in a spiritual world inhabited by God and imperceptible except by spiritual means.

Because of this, we tend to miss out on understanding the intricate connections that the Bible sees between the spiritual and physical worlds, and this is true of verse 12. Our fight is not against '*flesh and blood*', but against the very real spiritual influences of '*powers, authorities, and rulers of this dark world*'. It would be easy to lump all these together as if they constitute a general description of evil spiritual forces at work, originating in the spiritual world and affecting the physical. The words used are these

- 'arche' – meaning 'origin', but in this context it refers to primal forces. I have called these '*powers*', but we might call them 'natural forces' today, such as hurricanes or natural disasters that bring great evil and sometimes death into the world today, just as they have always done.
- 'exousia' – meaning 'authority or power' in its various meanings, mostly referring to authority or power exercised in this world. I have translated it here as '*authorities*'. Today, we advocate assigning power by democracy, but the ancient had a far more spiritual understanding of power, believing that spiritual authorities lay behind the reasons why some people or nations had power in this world, and others did not. Such authorities had power for good and for ill.
- 'cosmokratos' – meaning devilish evil forces that acted against this world. In combination with the adjective 'darkness' found in verse 12, I have translated this here as '*rulers of this dark world*'. This closely reflects the Biblical notion of heavenly evil, headed variously by the devil or Satan

(For a complete understanding of the words used in verse 12, please refer also to the translation notes above.)

Having looked at these words, it is not too difficult to attempt to understand them. Paul speaks of evil in a way that is completely understandable to us today; natural forces that do evil, the mystery of power and authority wielded in this world (again, for good or ill), and lastly, those things that happen in this world that are plainly evil, whether we are talking about paedophilia or genocide. The whole sentence carries some aspect of almost every form of evil we can think of, and this is precisely the point. Our battle is against all forms of evil that characterise the fallen world, so that one day, God's Kingdom will come and our God will re-create His world and make it into a new 'spiritual creation' (see Revelation 21:1f.)

What does it mean to 'take up' God's whole armour, and 'stand'? (6:13)

Our passage today is important, and each verse must be studied carefully if we are to understand what God requires. Some appreciate the picture of the 'complete armour of God' so much that they focus on its elements and forget that they are given for a battle, which is the main subject of our study today.

Due to the nature of the battle before us, Paul calls God's people to be prepared, and take up '*the complete armour of God, so that you may ... take your stand*' (6:13). We will study the parts of the armoury next time, but here it is described as 'complete', or as other translations say, 'whole'. The word used here means 'totally sufficient for the purpose', and it does not mean 'everything that God has on offer'. If our faith is a

little lacking, we may be tempted to think that God's provision is partial, and there must be more for us to discover. The truth is that in Christ, God has revealed everything. Certainly, in asking us to take our stand in battle, He does not hold back what is necessary for our protection, but we must accept it and receive it.

God tells us to 'take up' what is offered; the Lord does not do everything for us, because we need to be willing and take what He gives. Verse 13 is full of activity on the part of the Christian, firstly taking the armour, and then proceeding to 'stand'. This word appears a number of times in verses 13 and 14, and there are small variations to the Greek word for each, which add important nuances to its meaning. Here where it appears for the first time, Scripture says we must 'take our stand'. This Greek word could mean to resist or oppose, or possibly 'stand one's ground', however, we are talking about getting ready for battle, so the idea of taking a stance seems right. We are to take our stand 'on the day of evil', and then 'stand firm', and the repeat of the word 'stand' confirms we must be ready! The 'day of evil' could refer to the end times, an occurrence of evil in our lives or some natural force or disaster. The passage is not specific, and we are simply told to be ready, and stand.

Application

It seems then that standing at the ready for battle is the right stance for a Christian. From verse 10 to verse 13, the message is crystal clear, we are being given an armour to fight evil, and there is no choice about it.

The trouble with many of us today is that we have been so blessed by relatively peaceful lives that we find the talk of battle unreal and perhaps remote. We go to church on Sunday, enjoy worship and house groups, seek to be godly at home and at work, and attend the occasional Christian conference. In these ways, we feel that we are doing what is right and appropriate, so we look at this passage and probably spiritualise it, thinking of it as an aspect of spiritual warfare and done by the 'prayer warriors' of the church. We reckon it may have implications for every Christian and appreciate its graphic description of the battle between good and evil, but we sit lightly to the issue of whether it makes any demands upon us directly. I would even suggest that it is easy for us to sit lightly to it if we focus on the 'complete armour of God' solely to appreciate the details of the armour, the belt, breastplate, shoes, shield, helmet and sword and their spiritual counterparts. The real challenge of the text lies in what we have read today, and the challenge to take our stand in battle.

The truth is that we do not live in a happy world in which things will work out fine if we live an orderly life of love and obedience. This text is a healthy reminder that our world suffers from natural forces than have evil consequences, evil institutions and governments that create great turmoil, and from time to time the direct work of Satan or the devil, whether on a large or a small scale. This is all the result of the Fall, just as our own separation from God (that has been overcome in Christ). So when God calls us to take up His armour and fight, this is an important message. He is telling us something about how we should handle ourselves and give our witness, and as people who live in the midst of a fallen world, we need to pay attention to what the Lord says here. I will not comment further today, because the most important thing we can do is to take these verses seriously.

Discipleship

Questions (for use in groups)

1. Do you perceive yourself as fighting a battle on behalf of God, and if so, how would you describe your experience of this?
2. What does it mean today to 'stand' against evil? What evils whether in the church or the world should we stand against?
3. What is the difference between earth and heaven, and how can we explain what the Bible says about this to a scientific world today?

Topics covered by this text

- *The battle of good against evil*
- *The nature of Christ's victory over evil*
- *The call placed on all God's people to be ready to stand in Christ's 'battle'*

Personal comments by author

I find myself concerned that many of the good people I meet in church act as if they only have to be 'loving' to be Christ like. Love is essential, but we need to fight battles against evil with it, and this is the test! I know there is a problem in the church over these things, because when the subject of evil comes up, by and large, people discuss it rather than fight it. In addition, when things go wrong for people, they often blame God, unable to see that what has happened has been 'evil'. We must stand and fight what is wrong, not withdraw from the world when it gets tough!

Ideas for exploring discipleship

- *As you have read this study and the text, which aspect of it affects you most? The reality of battle, the nature of evil, the call to stand? Write down your thoughts about this today, and carry them over to tomorrow, so that you can make connections between this and the next study.*
- *Pray for God's people to find an appropriate way to be obedient to this Scripture, to 'stand' and 'be ready' to resist evil and fight it, as the Lord so leads.*

Final Prayer

Almighty God; You made the world in love, and it breaks Your heart to see the mess people have made of what You intended to be for good, for enjoyment and for blessing. Fill us with Your Holy Spirit so that we may be constructive in Your world instead of destructive, and so bring joy to your heart. AMEN
