

+ Ephesians 6:10-18 + Stand Firm in the Lord! + 14th Sunday after Pentecost + 14 September 2014 +

How would you feel if you looked out from a fortress wall and saw a vast army waiting to attack? Terrified? Overwhelmed? Imagine the scene for a moment. The forces of evil have overrun the land hell-bent on covering the land in darkness. The shrinking forces of good have had to retreat, losing ground again and again until they find themselves hiding in a place of last resort—a small fortress in a mountain valley. A final battle is coming.

As the forces of good look out from their fortress, before them lies a vast army of thousands of evil soldiers determined to wipe them off the face of the earth. The forces of good have their backs against the mountain wall and they can't retreat any further. Yet even as they look out over that vast, terrifying army chomping at the bit to attack, the forces of good—although heavily outnumbered—stand ready and waiting, confident in their armor, confident in their defense and in their fighting ability. The battle ensues.

The forces of good seem to fend off every attack, but the enemy with superior numbers continues to make advance after advance further into the fortress. The battle rages on through the night. The forces of good are dwindling. As dawn approaches, the final victory of evil seems guaranteed. So the remaining forces of good prepare to make one last, valiant defense, but as they ride out, suddenly a rider, dressed in white, with a large army of reinforcements comes down from the hills above and wipes out the enemy. To the rear, reinforcements cut off what's left of the enemy retreat. As the new day dawns the forces of good hold the field and stand victorious.

While that scene makes for an exciting action sequence in a movie, in a sense, it really describes the Christian life, doesn't it? We live in a world long overrun by the forces of evil. Darkness is covering the land. Confessional Christians always seem to be on the retreat, losing ground again and again as hearts grow cold and opposition increases. At times, your life and mine seem like a constant struggle against an overwhelming force that wants to wipe us off the face of the earth.

So what do we do? How do we fend off this overwhelming attack? How confident can we be in our defense, in our fighting ability when our backs are up against the wall and total defeat seems imminent? Thankfully, the Lord encourages us through his Apostle Paul to not give up, to not despair, to keep fighting with these simple words—**STAND FIRM IN THE LORD!**

Paul writes, **"...Be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power."** ...But how do we do that? To **"be strong"**, you need to know your enemy. Will he attack with overwhelming ferocity? Will he make sneak attacks that don't abide by any modern rule of warfare? Will he seek to destroy you from within? Will he be obvious or subtle? Is it going to be someone you know or some organization out to get you? Who is your enemy?

Paul makes that clear. **"Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms."** When life becomes a struggle or you face challenges to your Christian faith, realize that it's not personal. It's not necessarily the person making the comment or putting up the opposition. It's deeper and darker than that. That opposition comes from an enemy who wants your soul. So that struggle you face, that challenge or opposition you endure is just another battle in the war raging over your soul.

Now the commander of these evil forces is crafty, battle-tested, and well-organized. Satan uses every possible tactic to destroy you. He never fights fair, but uses deception, seduction, and treachery to defeat you. He uses the worst in you to bring you down. He knows your weak spots. He knows those pet sins that bother you every day. He knows how to use a passing lustful or loveless thought or a sarcastic word. He knows how to use other people to push your buttons. He knows how to take advantage of those times when you've grown lazy in your faith or when your faith is at a low point. He carefully calculates his every strategy against you.

To carry out that strategy, Satan deploys vast forces to attack you. Paul puts this hellish army on display to show the difficulty of the struggle, to show you and me how terrifying and overwhelming it really is. You look from that fortress wall and you see an army of darkness hell-bent on wiping you out.

What's even worse is the traitor inside you—your sinful nature. Ever since Adam and Eve fell into sin, believers like us have had to struggle not only with the outward temptations and opposition of this world, but also with the sinful traitor within. No wonder Satan knows our weaknesses!

With such an enemy, we can be sure that he will attack, but when? Paul tells us, **"Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you**

have done everything, to stand.” Paul wants you to prepare for **“the day of evil”**, but what’s that? On the Last Day Jesus will return and wipe out the forces of evil forever, but do you ever have “evil days” in your life? As Christians, we face many “evil days”, not the everyday temptations, but those days when your faith is severely tested, when you have to withstand the most violent attacks of the enemy.

It’s not just a single attack. Even after you have withstood one attack of temptation, Satan always regroupes and attacks in an even fiercer way. This struggle continues until either the Lord calls you home or he returns. At that time, the Christian, who is in the armor and strength of the Lord, will hold the field of battle and stand victorious, but in the meantime, you and I need to heed Paul’s advice to **STAND FIRM IN THE LORD**.

We know our enemy. We know how he’ll attack. We need to stand firm against every attack, so what kind of defense will we have? How can we prepare? How can we withstand the constant threat of being overwhelmed? Paul answers that question simply. **“Put on the full armor of God…”**

Now Paul has been under house arrest chained to a Roman soldier for nearly three years. He obviously knew the parts of a soldier’s armor. When it comes to the **“full armor of God”**, each piece is a precious gift of God’s grace through Christ for each believer and a powerful defense against Satan.

“Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace.” If you’re going to fight against the attacks of Satan, you need to protect yourself. Putting on the belt of truth protects you against Satan’s attempts to undermine you with his lies—empty lies that cannot withstand the solid truth of God’s Word.

The breastplate of righteousness protects you from those times when Satan tries to fill you with doubt and despair over the guilt of your sin. Maybe you’ve asked yourself, “What have I done to deserve this?” Perhaps you focus on your own sins and think, “My sin is so bad. He’ll never forgive me.” Yet you have a Savior whose perfect life and innocent death on the cross have freed you from the guilt of every single sin. No sin is too great for his forgiveness.

Now the good news of Jesus helps you to stand your ground and fight against the lies of evil with the **“the gospel of peace”**. Amazingly that message that defeats your greatest enemy is the message that God has given you peace and reconciled himself with you through your Savior Jesus!

That’s not all! God provides even more to protect you from all those evil attacks. **“In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one.”** The Roman shield was large and like a door that could protect most of the body. The **“shield of faith”** protects you from the fiery arrows that Satan uses to try to embed a little doubt or a little selfish desire in your heart or mind. Yet faith takes hold of Jesus and his deliverance through his blood like a shield. Satan’s fiery attacks can do nothing, but be extinguished against it.

“Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God.” Knowing you are saved through Jesus protects you when Satan levels the “You aren’t worthy of heaven” attack against you. Yes, because of who you are by nature, he’s right, but now you are worthy of heaven because of Jesus. You have the sure hope of rescue from eternal death in hell for your sins. You were given that salvation at your Baptism and whenever you receive Christ’s body and blood in his Holy Supper.

Even with all this defensive armament, you still have the ultimate weapon that can and will defeat any and every attack of Satan and his forces of darkness. You have **“the sword of the Spirit”**—the Word of God. This weapon is defensive because whenever you’re in the Word, you fend off Satan’s attacks more easily. That’s why we need to be in the Word regularly. It’s also an offensive weapon that you can use to share with others the good news of Jesus’ rescue. As Jesus promised to Peter and the disciples in Matthew 16, not even the gates of hell will be able to keep souls from being rescued when **“the sword of the Spirit”** is put into action.

This **“full armor of God”** is impressive because of what God can do with it through us, but what happens when **“the fight is fierce”** and **“the warfare long”**? (*Christian Worship* 551:5) What happens when we get tired of the struggle and the attacks just keep coming? Paul had been there too, so he encourages us to go to the Source of our strength. **“And pray in the Spirit on all kinds of occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints.”**

There are times in your life and mine when you realize that you desperately need reinforcements. You need relief and rescue. Prayer is the hotline that calls in that support, that relief, that deliverance from your Savior

Jesus. He comes to your aid for the big issues and major challenges, yet also for the minor concerns and the daily stressors. He is always there, always ready to provide the aid and reinforcement and rescue that you need.

You and I don't have to fight this lifelong war alone. In fact, with every other believer in Christ, you and I are part of the "church militant"—the one, holy, Christian, and apostolic Church here on earth struggling against Satan and his forces of evil, but it's not just us. Our Savior is fighting for us too.

Through our prayers, we receive the strength to stand firm together against Satan as Jesus joins us on the field to win the day for us. With prayers constantly on our lips, we daily put on the full armor of God, and with Christ's help, we will stand firm. We will hold the field, because Jesus will win, and through Jesus, victory will be ours forever. Amen.