

SCRIPTURE FOCUS	Ephesians 6:10-20	DATE	11.24.19
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LESSON SUMMARY	Christians will face spiritual opposition as they follow Jesus. They need to stand against such opposition by taking advantage of the spiritual resources provided in Christ.		

all scripture taken from NIV unless otherwise noted

ENCOUNTER THE TEXT

¹⁰Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. ¹¹Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. ¹²For 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.

In 6:10, we come to the final exhortation of Paul's letter to the Ephesians. "Finally" links this section to what has come before. When we view the encouragements of Ephesians together (they start in 4:1), they look like this:

1. Live a life worthy of the calling you have received by keeping peace in the church (4:1-16).
2. Live as God's people and not as the Gentiles when it comes to relating to one another in the church (4:17 – 5:3).
3. Live as God's people and not as the Gentiles when it comes to sex, greed, and speech (5:4-14).
4. Live wisely and be filled with the Spirit (5:15-6:9).
5. Be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power (6:10-20).

As can be seen, Paul's first four calls to the Ephesians had to do with proactively embracing their new identities in Christ and leaving their old identities behind. Now, in this fifth call, he reveals that they are not doing all of this in a vacuum. Instead, they are doing it in the realm of the "ruler of the kingdom of the air" (2:2), who actively opposes their efforts to leave him behind. This active opposition becomes apparent in v 11, where Paul speaks of the "devil's schemes," a term that points to Satan's purposefully planned push against God's saints.

In order to "stand" against such opposition, Christians need to "be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power" by putting on "the full armor of God." In v 12, Paul underscores the need for this armor. We need spiritual weapons because we are waging a spiritual battle against spiritual powers. Important here is that our spiritual weapons are available to us in Christ. This "in Christ" language has been used throughout Ephesians, and it appears again here. Just as Christians are saved because of their connection to Christ (2:4-7), they are also able to stand against spiritual attacks through their connection with him, specifically regarding his mighty power that is available to them.

¹³Therefore 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. ¹⁴Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, ¹⁵and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. ¹⁶In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. ¹⁷Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

Paul follows up vv 12 by reiterating his call to “put on the full armor of God.” By doing so, Christians will ready themselves for “the day of evil.” This is an interesting term that may refer a time of struggle in the end-times. I think it is better, though, to think of it as *any* day of evil that comes on a Christian.¹ In this light, the day of evil refers to any time Christians become targets of the devil’s schemes. Importantly, Paul calls the Ephesians to put on the full armor *before* the day of evil comes rather than only when they see it approaching. The armor imagery points to a life that is continually strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. This is meant to be the Christian’s normal state.

Regarding the armor, Paul lists several resources that are available to Christians in Christ. Importantly, his emphasis on the “full armor” stresses the need for believers to take advantage of all these resources rather than picking and choosing. The pieces of armor include:

- Truth: Truth is to be wrapped around the Christian’s waist like a belt. Literally, the Greek says to “gird up your loins in truth,” a phrase that refers to a person tying the ends of the long robes of his clothing to his waist, thus allowing freedom of movement. In the context of military armor, it probably refers to “the leather apron which was put on under the breastplate and offered some protection to the lower part of the abdomen while leaving freedom of movement and readiness for action.”² Truth, then, (much of Ephesians has focused on grasping the truth of the gospel) both protects against false teaching and makes a person free to move properly.
- Righteousness: Righteousness is the Christian’s breastplate, the piece of armor that covers the chest. I understand righteousness to refer to the Christian’s commitment to righteous living. This commitment protects our hearts from the corruption of temptation.
- Readiness: The Christian’s feet are to be shod with “the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace.” Interestingly, the gospel of peace makes us ready to stand our ground in battle! Some commentators take this to be a call to evangelism. The idea here would be that we speak the gospel regardless of the challenges we face. For my part, I suspect that the gospel of peace makes us ready to protect the peace that Jesus has achieved for us with both God and one another. This line of thought connects us back to Paul’s calls to healthy community earlier in the letter. A last option would be that the gospel creates peace within us that makes us confident for any fight that comes.
- Faith: The Christian’s shield is faith, which can be defined as our belief that God is who he says he is and will do what he says he will do. This steadfast belief empowers us to remain faithful when we are targeted by “the flaming arrows of the evil one.” I take these arrows to refer to the various hardships of life that might cause us to doubt or abandon God. Strong faith keeps our devotion intact.
- Salvation: Salvation is the Christian’s helmet. Arnold helpfully defines salvation like this: “As people who have been made alive with Christ, co-resurrected with him and co-exalted with him, believers

¹ Arnold makes this point.

² Best, 598.

have been delivered from the domain of the powers and participate with Christ in his power and authority over that realm. This new identity through union with Christ assures believers of their future destiny and provides hope, but it also connects them with the supreme source of power for deliverance.”³ This reminds me of 1 Cor 10:13, where Paul says, “No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it.” The God of ultimate salvation continues to save us from the attacks of the powers if we will only take the way he provides!

- God’s word: God’s word is the Christian’s “sword of the Spirit.” In Genesis 1, God speaks and it is. Isaiah 55:10-11 speaks of God’s word like this:

As the rain and the snow
 come down from heaven,
and do not return to it
 without watering the earth
and making it bud and flourish,
 so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater,
so is my word that goes out from my mouth:
 It will not return to me empty,
but will accomplish what I desire
 and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.

In the New Testament, Jesus is described as the Word of God, by whom the Father brings about a new creation. In each case, God’s word is his unstoppable influence on the created order. By the Spirit, Christians are able to share in God’s word, which will never fail them. We do so by remembering the promises that God has made to us (these promises enable us to overcome the lies that would lead us in ungodly directions of thought and action).

Every now and again, you’ll hear people debating whether the armor is meant to be offensive or defensive in nature. In this context, the meaning is most definitely defensive, as the armor empowers us to “stand” (the concept of “standing” shows up again and again in the passage) against the devil’s schemes. The idea is that Christians are under attack, and the armor makes them able to hold their ground. That being said, we don’t need to think that Christians are only on the defensive in God’s story. Instead, we most definitely see God using his people to push back darkness in the world. The key is to stand against attack *wherever God places us*, for we will face opposition both to becoming like Jesus and accomplishing the specific tasks God sets before us.

³ Arnold, C. E. (2010). [Ephesians](#) (p. 459). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

¹⁸ And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord's people. ¹⁹ Pray also for me, that whenever I speak, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel, ²⁰ for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should.

Accompanying the full armor of God is an attitude of continual prayer. Not only should we sink deeper and deeper into our place in Christ (the armor), but we should also ask God for help in the process. We do so for ourselves and for our brothers and sisters in the faith. To do this effectively, we need to stay alert, a state of mind that allows us to notice the needs around us and offer them up to God in a timely manner.

Paul ends this section with a request for the kind of prayer he has just described. Being jailed for his proclamation of the faith, Paul himself is facing a battle. He asks that the Ephesians lift him up in prayer that he may stay true to his calling.

TEACH THE TEXT

In teaching this text, I would focus on opposition, armor, and prayer.

OPPOSITION

When we think of spiritual opposition, we can fall into one of two extremes. As C. S. Lewis put it in his preface to *The Screwtape Letters*, "There are two equal and opposite errors into which our race can fall about the devils. One is to disbelieve in their existence. The other is to believe, and to feel an excessive and unhealthy interest in them. They themselves are equally pleased by both errors and hail a materialist or a magician with the same delight." As we approach the subject of spiritual opposition, we need to help our people find a middle ground that appreciates the opposition Paul describes in a way that doesn't devolve into an unhealthy fear or interest.

ARMOR

In the section above, I have outlined my take on the full armor of God. This part of vv 10-20 is fertile ground for conversation. Challenge your people to think about what each piece of armor means in real life and why each is important.

PRAYER

For Paul, the armor is found in connection to Christ and is meant to be teamed with reliance on God's help. Thus, prayer takes center stage in the struggle. When it comes to prayer, some people just don't think God could care about their small concerns, while others simply neglect the practice. Regarding the former, challenge them to consider Paul's direction in this passage. God is big enough to care for all of our small needs! Regarding the latter, this passage challenges them to live a life of dependence on God's help and provision. Challenge them to make prayer a special task in the coming week to see how God honors it. Be sure to chat about people's experiences in prayer briefly next time your group convenes!

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

6:10-12

1. In our passage today, Paul talks about the devil and spiritual “powers.” How do you understand the subject of spiritual opposition?
2. For Paul, where is the Christian’s true fight? What about the flesh and blood people who sometimes stand against us?
3. Where are Christians to find the resources for standing against spiritual opposition? What are they?

6:13-17

1. What is the “day of evil”?
2. Why is truth a belt?
3. Why is righteousness a breastplate?
4. Why is readiness to shod our feet?
5. How is faith a shield?
6. Why is salvation a helmet?
7. What is the sword of the Spirit? What does it mean that it is the word of God?

6:18-20

1. Why is prayer important when we talk about spiritual struggle?
2. What does it mean to stay alert? Why is alertness important to prayer?
3. What do we pray for?
4. Is there anyone who would like for us to pray for you today?

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