

#37
August 26, 2018

“...having done everything, to stand firm”. Ephesians 6:13b.

Ephesians 6:10-20

6:10 Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his power.

6:11 Put on the whole armor of God, so that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.

6:12 For our struggle is not against enemies of blood and flesh, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.

6:13 Therefore take up the whole armor of God, so that you may be able to withstand on that evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm.

6:14 Stand therefore, and fasten the belt of truth around your waist, and put on the breastplate of righteousness.

6:15 As shoes for your feet put on whatever will make you ready to proclaim the gospel of peace.

6:16 With all of these, take the shield of faith, with which you will be able to quench all the flaming arrows of the evil one.

6:17 Take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

6:18 Pray in the Spirit at all times in every prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert and always persevere in supplication for all the saints.

6:19 Pray also for me, so that when I speak, a message may be given to me to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel,

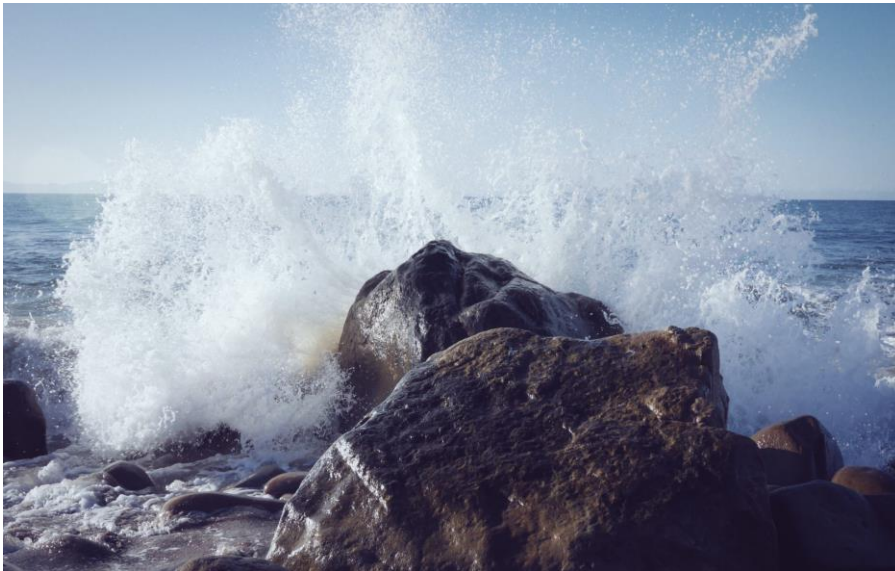
6:20 for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it boldly, as I must speak.

We have been learning from Paul's letter to the Ephesians during the month of August. Today we come to his last set of instructions. In the first chapters the apostle composes astonishing claims: God unites everything in the universe through Christ (Ephesians 1:10) and has put everything under his authority (1:22). God has created a new humanity. (2:14-16). We were chosen by God before creation (1:4), have not only been raised with Christ but already have been seated with him in the heavenly realms (2:6).

These are strong claims and beliefs. It almost sounds like there is nothing wrong will ever happen to us. At the same time, we have learned that we do face a hard life and difficult issues. We face illness, addiction, anger, destruction and death. We face the world, the flesh and the devil. We are called to be one in Christ. We are called to be united in the church. When we become a new creation, it requires a long life journey learning to live life in union with Christ.

We considered how we connect with each other. We are to be humble, gentle and patient. We are not to stay angry. We realize we need wisdom that comes from God.

Paul now comes to the summary and conclusion: “Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his power.”



In our hymnal is an African-American spiritual, “Stand By Me”. Charles Albert Tindley worded it well. It is actually prayer. “When the storms of life are raging, stand by me. In the midst of tribulation stand by me. When the host of hell assail, and my strength begins to fail, thou who never lost a battle, stand by me.”

Be strong in the Lord – not in yourself, not in the world. Be strong in Lord. It does not say feel strong. It says be strong. This strength comes from your willingness to give up control over the outcome of the situation. We gain strength by trusting God no matter what happens. We are strong, when we recognize our weakness. In another letter Paul writes that we embrace our infirmities and weakness because it brings greater glory to God and His power.

“Put on the whole armor of God, so that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil”.

I know, we would rather not to talk about the devil. We wish there would be no evil. The reality is that evil is powerful and active. Satan goes about as a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour. We must constantly remind ourselves and encourage one another that the power of the Holy Spirit is greater than the power of evil. It is not easy because we live in a frightening world.

I have realized many, many times, that there are battles I cannot win. Have you ever tried to stop somebody from destructive behavior? Have you ever tried to explain or help somebody who is addicted? Or just try to fight with your own feelings and with your own thoughts. We have no strength or power to win because “our struggle is not against enemies of blood and flesh, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places”.

How many times have I asked my kids to put the dirty laundry in the laundry baskets? We have 3 of them in our home. It seems to be every single day for years now. You know it is just not easy to change our behavior. How many times we have heard love your enemies. Love your God with all your heart and your soul. How many times do we fall back into old ways of selfishness?

I led a group in a program called Celebrate Recovery for a few years. You can judge people as long as you want for what they do and who they are until you face the reality in somebody who is very close to you and until you recognize in yourself your total helplessness to fight the battle in your own head and your own life. The people who are bound in addiction and are no longer in denial. They are willing to change. They are tired of being who they are and in what they are, but they do not have strength in themselves to change and live a new life. Even when you turn to God, it is a walk with many failures and many struggles. I wish it would be easy. It is possible when we realize the fight, when we realize what kind of battle it is and we surrender to absolute God's power. Maybe you do not know what I am talking about. But ask yourself how easy it is for me to show love in my family? Not to raise my voice? To respect my spouse? Do live a healthy and holy life? How many times you have decided no more and then you find yourself exactly in the same place. How long do your New Year's resolutions last?

Because “our struggle is not against enemies of blood and flesh” We need different tools to fight. We need a strength that is not found in us.



The Eagle does not fight the snake on the ground. It picks it up into the sky and changes the battle ground, and then it releases the snake. The snake has no stamina, no power and no balance in the air. It is useless, weak and vulnerable unlike on the ground where it is powerful wise and deadly.

Take you fight into the spiritual realm by praying and when you are in the spiritual realm God take over your battles.

“Therefore take up the whole armor of God, so that you may be able to withstand on that evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm”.

This is an interesting metaphor. We'll look at it more closely. Paul was, of course, describing a Roman soldier. At the time he was writing this letter, he was in prison. So, when he began to think of spiritual warfare, he looked at the man next to him and noticed that in the same way this soldier's armor protected him in battle, God has provided strength to protect us in battle.

I think is the most important word for us today verse 13. “... and having done everything, TO STAND firm”.

Then he begins verse 14 with the same word: STAND therefore, and fasten the belt of truth around your waist, and put on the breastplate of righteousness.

Belt of *truthfulness* or *sincerity of heart* buckled around your waist. It is not absolute truth. It is your honesty, the sincerity of your heart;



Breastplate's role was obvious. It was like a bullet-proof vest. It protected your most vital organs. The breastplate of righteousness refers to the righteousness purchased for us by Jesus at the cross. Only believing and giving our heart and our sins to Jesus, we have a breastplate that protects us from evil

Roman soldiers used two kinds of shields. A small one in hand-to-hand to combat, and a large one—four and a half feet tall by two feet wide—for use when the army was advancing. Each soldier would stand side-by-side, holding up his shield, and the enemy would be faced with a solid wall of shields—row after row after row. This made the army impenetrable. Our shield is faith and works the best when we stand together.

Shoes for your feet: put on whatever will make you ready to proclaim the gospel of peace. Having yourself witness of a living God and risen Jesus, we are ready to witness others. In the book of Romans, we read “How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news.”

Use your salvation to protect your head. What do you use to protect your head? Paul insists that this new armor is not of our own making. There is nothing we can make with our hands and nothing we purchase on Amazon. Instead, the belt, breastplate, shoes and shield belong to God. I can try to protect myself in many different ways. I can spend hour after hour constructing every sort of armor, but my efforts will fall short. The breastplate of ministerial self-righteousness will not protect me. I have learned over the years that a helmet made of wine and a sword forged from cynicism are also insufficient, as are prosperity, religious zeal, fitness and even family.

And having done all this... when you got all this on you... Stand. I would think I would like to run for a fight. I would think when I get ready. I am not ready to just stand. I am ready to go, to run and to do something... But what we read is after putting all armor of God is stand and the verse 18 and 19 it says: PRAY...



Notice that all of the armor is defensive. It is protection. The helmet, shield, breastplate, the shoes, the cloak, the belt all are to protect you. Yes, we are to stand firm. You do not win victory by only being on the defense. You do have an offensive weapon. It is the sword of the spirit which is the word of the God. We have the written word of God called the Bible and we have the living Word of God whom we know as Jesus.

We are more than conquerors through him who loves us (Romans 8). Conquering means moving forward.

We want to fight with people who we think are dead wrong in their words and in their actions. And yes, I am not arguing with you. However, the fight belongs to God.

Whether we recognize the spiritual warfare or are just realizing there is something I cannot win. We stand and start with our heart. We confess our own sinfulness. We turn to God to admit and submit to our weakness. We turn to Jesus and what He did for us on the cross. We turn to the Holy Spirit to be our sword. We let the Spirit to take over so we can be instruments of love and peace.

In the morning we get up, dress up, put on shoes and we are out of the door. It feels like dressing up is the priority. You can go out without breakfast, even without brushing your teeth. But you kind get the importance of dressing up. How about your soul? Your heart? If you are empty and naked, you are already doomed to loose. You have nothing in you that will help you to win in peace and love. You are not ready in your heart, in your soul or in mind. There are battles. There are choices how to win the battles. Do not run naked. Put on the whole armor of God. Faith, salvation, holiness, living Spirit, word of God and stand. Yes, and pray. Stand and pray with all of God's armor.