

SOLDIERS OF THE CROSS

Ephesians 6:10-17

Today is Veterans Day - an annual holiday meant to honor individuals who have served in the armed forces. Many of us here today are veterans of our country's wars and feel honored by the national observance of our service.

Some of you arrived here this morning believing that you were **not** a veteran of war, but I am here to tell you that every one of you who has professed Jesus as Lord and Savior of your life is actively engaged with the enemy. You are a Soldier of the Cross; you enlisted with Jesus; You're in the Army Now! When you receive Jesus and start following Him, the battle is enjoined. Now, you can't have a battle without an enemy and we have a strong one. As Soldiers of the Cross, we are fighting the Axis powers of, "The World", The Flesh" and "The Devil."

The World refers to the system around us that is opposed to God, that *caters to the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life.*" (1 John 2:15-17)
Society apart from God is a simple, but accurate, definition of "The World."

The Flesh is the old nature that we inherited from Adam, a nature that is opposed to God and can do nothing spiritual to please God. By His death and resurrection, Christ overcame the World (John 16:33); and the flesh (Romans 6:1-6); and the devil (Ephesians 1:19-23). In other words, as believers, we do not fight **for** **victory**, but **from** **victory!** The Spirit of God enables us, by faith, to appropriate Christ's victory for ourselves.

Our Scripture passage this morning is Ephesians 6:10-17: **The Armor of God**

¹⁰ Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might. ¹¹ Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of

the devil. ¹² For our struggle is not against ^[e]flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual *forces* of wickedness in the heavenly *places*. ¹³ Therefore, take up the full armor of God, so that you will be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm. ¹⁴ Stand firm therefore, having girded your loins with truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, ¹⁵ and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; ¹⁶ ^[e]in addition to all, taking up the shield of faith with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil *one*. ¹⁷ And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

For the past three decades, I have been a practicing student of military tactics and strategies. I have been exposed to the teachings of the greatest military minds in the history of mankind. I have seen the evolution of weaponry and of the application of its force. While weapons have changed, the political application of force has changed, and battlefield tactics have changed, I have noted that two principles inherent to every good Soldier have remained constant throughout the centuries. In this Scripture passage, Paul noted these same principles that every good Soldier should practice; Know the enemy, and Know your equipment. For the next few minutes we will examine these two principles and see how we can apply them to our lives as Soldiers of the Cross.

First, **Know the Enemy**. I recognize that many people think that “military intelligence” is an oxymoron, but it is a vital part of warfare because it enables Soldiers to know and understand the enemy. Unless we understand who the enemy is, where he is, and what he can do, we have little chance of defeating him. Thankfully we, as Soldiers of the Cross, have the ultimate source of intelligence at

our fingertips; the Bible. God instructs us about the enemy throughout the Bible so there is no reason for us to be caught off guard.

Let's start by looking at their leader – the devil. The enemy has many different names. *Devil* means “accuser,” because he accuses God's people day and night before the throne of God (Rev 12:7-11). *Satan* means “adversary,” because he is the enemy of God. He is also called the tempter (Matt 4:3), and the murderer and the liar (John 8:44). He is compared to a lion (1 Pet 5:8), a serpent (Gen 3:1), and the *god of this age* (2 Cor 4:4).

Origin of Satan: Where did this spirit-creature who seeks to oppose God and defeat His work come from? Many scholars believe that in the original Creation, he was “Lucifer, son of the morning” (Isa 14:12-15) and that he was cast down because of his pride and his desire to occupy God's throne. Many mysteries are connected with the origin of Satan, but what he is doing and where he is going are certainly no mysteries! Since he is a created being, and not eternal as God is, he is limited in his knowledge and activity. Unlike God, Satan is not all-knowing, all-powerful, or everywhere present. Then how, you may ask, does he accomplish so much in so many different parts of the world? The answer is in his organized helpers.

Satan's helpers: Paul called them “**rulers, powers, world forces, spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places.**” I like Charles Williams' translation of this verse, *For our contest is not with human foes alone, but with the rulers, authorities, and cosmic powers of this dark world; that is, with the spirit forces of evil challenging us in the heavenly contest.* This suggests a definite army of demonic creatures that assist Satan in his attacks against believers. The apostle John hinted that one-third of the angels fell with Satan when he rebelled against

God ([Rev 12:4](#)), and Daniel wrote that Satan's angels struggle against God's angels for control of the affairs of nations ([Dan. 10:13-20](#)). A spiritual battle is going on in this world and you and I are a part of this battle.

The important point is that our battle is not against human beings. It is against spiritual powers. We are wasting our time fighting people when we ought to be fighting the devil who seeks to control people and make them oppose the work of God. The advice of the King of Syria to his soldiers can be applied to our spiritual battle: "Fight neither small nor great, save only for the king." ([1 Kings 22:31](#))

Once you know who the enemy is, you need to understand what the enemy can do. Paul tells us that Satan is strong and that we need the power of God to stand against him. Don't underestimate the power of Satan! The book of Job tells us what his power can do to a man's body, home, wealth, and friends. Jesus calls Satan a thief who comes to steal, kill, and destroy ([John 10:10](#)). But Satan is not always so overt in his tactics. He accomplishes much of his work through subtle deceptions, and cunning. Like a good politician, Satan will tell you what you want to hear and persuade you to believe it is righteous. Soldiers of the Cross cannot afford to be ignorant of his devices. While some men are cunning and crafty and plot to deceive, behind them is the arch-deceiver, Satan. He masquerades as an angel of light and seeks to blind our eyes to the truth of God's word. He wants us to doubt the truth of God's word because if he can plant the seed of doubt in our hearts, fertilize it with a healthy dose of fear or pride, he can cultivate his desired crop – opposing the work of God. Satan wants to use our external enemy, the world, and our internal enemy, the flesh, to defeat us. His weapons and battle plan are formidable.

Since we are fighting a formidable foe, it is important that we understand him. It is equally important that we also understand the **equipment** given to us with which to wage the battle. Since we are fighting enemies in the spirit world, we need special equipment for both the offense and defense. God has provided the whole armor for us and we dare not omit any piece of it. Knowing that Christ has already conquered Satan, and that the spiritual armor and weapons are available, by faith we accept what God gives us and go out to meet the foe.

A recent medical report on the health and mobility of Soldiers indicated that the average “combat load” (protective gear and equipment) of a Soldier in Iraq was 100 pounds. That is a heavy burden to put on the human skeleton. Luckily, the whole armor of God will not weigh you down, but lift you up!

The girdle of truth: The first piece of this armor is the girdle of truth. The girdle holds the other pieces of armor together, and truth is the integrating force in the life of the victorious Christian. A man of integrity, with a clear conscience can face the enemy without fear. The girdle also held the sword. Unless we practice the truth, we cannot use the Word of Truth. Once a lie gets into the life of a believer, everything begins to fall apart. For over a year King David lied about his sin with Bathsheba, and nothing went right. Read Psalms 32 and 51 to see the price he paid.

The breastplate of righteousness: This piece of armor covered the body from neck to waist front and back. It symbolizes the believer’s righteousness in Christ (2 Cor 5:21) as well as his righteous life in Christ (Eph 4:24). Satan is the accuser, but he cannot accuse the believer who is living a godly life in the power of the Spirit. The life we live either fortifies us against Satan’s attacks or makes it easier for him to defeat us (2 Cor 6:1-10). Satan will and does accuse every Christian, but our

righteousness in Christ assures us of our salvation. But, we must also be righteous in our daily lives or we will give Satan the opportunity to attack us.

The shoes of the Gospel: Millions of dollars are spent by the military each year on the development and acquisition of boots. In my career, I have owned countless pairs specifically designed for the conditions in which I would be fighting. Desert boots, arctic boots, and jungle boots are quite different from each other, but they all share a common purpose. They help the Soldier keep solid footing and stand and withstand the environment he is in.

If we are going to stand and withstand in God's Army, then we need the shoes of the Gospel. The Gospel brings us peace with God so we don't need to fear the attack of Satan or men. But, the shoes also have another meaning. We must always be ready to **share** the Gospel of peace with the lost world. The most victorious Christian is a witnessing Christian. If you want to be stronger in your faith, start actively sharing your faith. Being obedient to the Great Commission will bring forth the power of the Holy Spirit which indwells all believers and you will have the "beautiful feet" mentioned in Isaiah 52:7. Satan has declared war, but Christians are ambassadors of peace; and, as such, we take the Gospel of Peace wherever we go.

The Shield of faith: Shields provide a defense against the effects of the enemies' weapons. In Paul's day, the Roman Soldiers' shields were large and designed to interlock with each other so that a line of Soldiers could advance on the enemy like a solid wall. This suggests that we Christians are not in the battle alone. The "faith" mentioned here is not saving faith, but rather living faith, a trust in the promises and the power of God. The shield protects us from the "fiery darts" fired at us by Satan. He shoots darts at our hearts and minds: lies, blasphemous

thoughts, hateful thoughts about others, doubts, and burning desire for sin. If we do not, by faith, quench those darts, they will light a fire within and we will disobey God.

The Helmet of salvation: The helmet is the most researched and technologically-advanced piece of protective gear for a Soldier. Why? Because it protects the most vital part of the body – the mind. The helmet of salvation refers to the mind controlled by God. Unfortunately too many Christians subjugate the importance of the intellect to the emotional side of faith. In truth, the two are vital to the Believer's faith and growth. When God controls the mind, Satan cannot lead the believer astray. The Christian who studies his Bible and learns the meaning of Bible doctrines is not going to be led astray too easily. 2 Peter 3:18 tells us that we are to "grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ."

Wherever Paul ministered, he taught the new converts the truth of the Word of God, and this helmet protected them from Satan's lies. I have known far too many Christians who have turned away from God and bought into Satan's lies by joining false cults because they were not well-disciplined or disciplined in their study of God's word. As believers and as a church, we must be ever-vigilant to training ourselves in the truth of God's Word.

The Sword of the Spirit: After we have suited up with the defensive armor of God, we now learn how to use the most powerful weapon in the world – the Bible. Hebrews 4:12 compares the Word of God to a sword, because it is sharp and is able to pierce the inner man just as a sword pierces the body. A physical sword pierces the body, but the Word of God pierces the heart.

The Spirit wrote the Word and the Spirit wields the Word as we take it by faith and use it. The Sword of the Spirit wounds man so it can heal and give life. But, when

used against Satan, it deals a blow that will cripple him from hindering God's work. The sword is powerful and, like all powerful weapons, it must be understood and used correctly. Satan too will use the Word to mislead us by taking it out of context or omitting parts to change the meaning. This is why it is so critical that Christians carefully study the Word and practice sound teaching of its principles so we aren't confused by Satan's deceptions.

In one sense, the "whole armor of God" is a picture of Jesus Christ. Christ is the truth (John 14:6), and He is our righteousness (2 Cor 5:21), and our peace (Eph 2:14). His faithfulness makes possible our faith (Gal 2:20); He is our salvation (Luke 2:30); and He is the Word of God (John 1:1, 14). This means that when we trusted Christ, we received the armor.

As followers of Christ, we have, by faith, received the armor of God in the person of Jesus Christ. We received that armor at the moment of salvation, but it requires a daily commitment from us to don the armor and use the power God provided for us to thwart Satan's devices.

Satan is indeed a formidable foe, but, as believers, we can take heart in knowing that our leader, Jesus Christ, has already defeated Satan by his work at the Cross. Soldiers of the Cross fight **FROM** victory. All we need to do is receive and put on the whole armor of God and we too are ensured victory over Satan. As a Soldier in this Country's Army for three decades, I can tell you I have never seen another battle whose outcome was so guaranteed. As Soldiers of the Cross, it is game, set, and match – the Victory of Our Lord is ours and the reward is eternal. All hail King Jesus!

