

Introduction: Last week we talked about prayer as a mode of spiritual conditioning. Typically we think of prayer relationally and that is a good thing. But prayer along with fasting can also condition us to level up spiritually. I want to take you to Eph. 6:10-20 this morning. Let's look at this text and then we'll make some key observations from it relative to our battle with evil and the role of prayer.

10 Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. 11 Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. 12 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. 13 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. 14 Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, 15 and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. 16 In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish 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 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.

Let's look at some of the verbiage that Paul uses to warn us and inform our prayer lives...

- “**scheme**” here is the word ***methodeia*** and it refers to the plot, the ploy for subterfuge. Satan’s methods and techniques are always at odds with God’s. And always set against God’s Gospel going forth into the world, and set against God’s people who are carriers of that Gospel.
- “**the Devil**” identifies who is behind all this evil in the world, and the forces that are set against the Gospel and God’s people. Satan is a real foe, and the Bible always speaks of him as a real personage who is the embodiment of ungodliness and the chief agent of deception.
- “**be strong**” literally means “**be endued, endowed, enabled.**” That we may be able to withstand the Devil’s methods.
- “**our struggle**” is not ultimately against the people we encounter—but it most certainly does involve the people that we encounter. As it turns out that some are unknowingly under the influence of Satan and his evil forces. The words used here are pulled directly from Roman governing culture: (1) “rulers and authorities” (2) ***kosmokratos*** meaning “world ruler”—a direct allusion to the Greek idea of ruling spirits over territories. Clearly we are interfacing with human beings in power and positions of influence, but we are to engage in spiritual Warcraft against the unseen powers of darkness that are pulling the strings—seeking to influence and control earthly authorities, rulers, policy makers, educational institutions, and the entertainment industry—in order to oppose the Gospel of God and the People of God.

Transition: Now, that is our fight. That's the epic struggle that we find ourselves today.

Paul then gives us two ways to engage in Christian Warcraft—Spiritual warfare. And I'll tell you—they are not what many have been told it was.

So if that is the enemies method—his scheme, then How are we called to withstand the Devil's plan to oppose the Gospel through the halls of power?

I Don't think Satan is the least bit worried about a bunch of mouthy Christians shouting into the darkness and “binding” his activity. I think he is shaking in his shoes at the prospect that there may be a company of Christian soldiers who are living godly lives and praying to God for those in the halls of Power.

1. By reinforcing our character in Christ (6:13-17).

I just gave the principle that the analogy is pointing to. Now, let's look at the imagery.

Armor. He introduces this idea in v. 11, then fills in the blanks in vss. 14-17.

What it is? (1) It's a metaphor (2) The metaphor illustrates the reality—which is action (3) It is mostly defensive, these moral actions are designed to shield or to protect us from the onslaught of darkness.

- **tell the truth (v. 14a). “The belt of truth”.** The truth can be expressed in two ways:
 - **Missionally—the Gospel of truth.** Paul said “I am not the least bit ashamed of the Gospel of Jesus because it is the power of God that leads to salvation.”
 - **Apologetics:** The First Century Church was very engaged with the apologetic (defense) of the Gospel as true vs. the false Gospel of Caesar, or the Greek Pantheon, or mystery religions. You name it.
 - **2 Cor. 10:3-5** “For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. ⁴The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. ⁵We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.”
The strongholds we're called to demolish are bad arguments, and every thought, idea, or worldview that pretentiously sets itself up against the Truth of God's Word, and His Gospel.
 - **Personally—we don't lie, or bear false witness.** When we fail to tell the truth we reflect poorly on the Gospel of truth.

The second way we're called to reinforce our character in Christ is to...

- **live right (v. 14b).** The breastplate of righteousness is a stunning visual. That Roman soldier breastplate was designed to protect vital organs. And the metaphor just means, I think, to “live right.” Righteousness in this context does not mean “justice” or “justly” it means “rightly” as opposed to “wrongly”.

- **Saved by Grace/Imputed Righteousness:** I genuinely hope that all of you have been saved by the free gift of God's unmerited grace. By faith that you have trusted in God's only Son for forgiveness of sin. This results in the imputation or transference of righteousness to the believer. Christ is our righteousness—he and he alone has fulfilled the Law through perfect obedience.
- **Trained by Grace/Unfolding Righteousness:** But, I hope you aren't just saved by grace. I hope, as Paul told Titus, that you are being trained by grace. **This same grace that saves us also trains us to resist temptation, to say no to ungodly desires, and to follow the moral demands of the Christian life.** When we live right—when our lives are equal to our confession, we bring honor to the Gospel.
- **Christians whose lives are not in alignment with the faith they profess open the Gospel up to accusation.** God surely has grace for us in our failings. Anyone who says they do not sin makes God out to be a liar. Christians still succumb to temptation. But a repeated, unrepentant pattern of failure casts aspersions on the glorious Gospel of Grace. It **communicates what Dietrich Bonhoeffer called "Cheap Grace."** This cut rate grace seeks to get its ticket punched for heaven, but seeks no transformation by the power of the Spirit.
- **be prepared (v. 15).** The “sandals tied and fitted to the feet” is an image of readiness, of a sure footedness. The Gospel of peace with God through Christ makes us ready. Let me ask you a question: Can you tell someone the Gospel of Jesus in 2 minutes or less? If someone asked you to explain the Gospel to them, could you? We need a readiness that comes from this Gospel of reconciliation, but also preparedness to share it.

Creation, Fall, Redemption, Restoration

- **Creation**
- **Fall:** Sin and self-rule leading to mass idolatry
- **Redemption:** Promise to Abraham, Election of Israel, A new kingdom through David's line. Jesus fulfills **Abraham's promise**, upholds the Law and atones for sin, and inaugurates an everlasting Kingdom as the true heir of David. Offering salvation to all, redeeming fallen man.
- **Restoration:** God promises to restore the world in new creation, and restore those redeemed by resurrecting them from the dead and repopulating a new world and so shall we ever be with the Lord.

way we're called to reinforce our character in Christ is to...

- **deploy your faith (v. 16).** The shield of faith evokes the imagery of a Roman shield which was as large as the soldier himself—running the length of his entire body. In fact, this shield was the soldier's first line of defense, though Paul mentions it further down the list here. **Romans would also form a shield wall by huddling and creating shield dome to withstand flaming arrows from the top of a city wall launched against them.** These heavy shields were covered in animal hides, shrunken and fitted to the individual shields, then soaked in water which enabled them to extinguish the barrage of flaming arrows.

○ **Who is launching these flaming arrows toward us?**

- In the passage it is clearly Satan, but I would point out that we are still talking about his scheme, his method of using earthly rulers, powers, political systems, and cultural thought leaders.
- **Directly to the mind**—he can launch a barrage of doubts, fear, anxiety, and also self-loathing. He can fool you into thinking that you are worthless.
- **What are the flaming arrows?** Satan launches a firestorm of false teaching, lies and deception, accusations. Any false, ungodly, unbiblical worldview—especially as it is held among those in power and influence over a culture.
- **How do we utilize or deploy our faith so that we quench the fiery lies, deception, accusations**—and keep them from setting the place on fire with chronic fear or anxiety? We “take up” our faith. The shield is not merely a defensive weapon—it is an offensive-defensive weapon.

The only reason why a Roman soldier would need to take up his shield is if he had been called to march on the enemy. The only reason for him to create a collective shield wall with which to douse blazing missiles raining down upon him, is because he and his company are at the city gates. Laying siege to enemy territory.

We are called to storm the gates, to breach the walls of hell and death in order to rescue our neighbors, our family, our friends and children—who are trapped in darkness and deception.

1 Jn. 5:4 “This is the victory that has overcome the world—our Faith.”

- **be assured of your salvation (v. 17a).** The “helmet of salvation” —the metal Roman helmet was a piece of the armor that gave the soldier assurance. The helmet was made of bronze, coated with leather and soft sponges on the inside, covering his head, top of his spine and two strips down his face and one strip down his nose. It could withstand a direct arrow, a sword, a mallet and even a poorly thrown javelin. Without it, the soldier would not be able to stand for a second in a frenetic battle field where implements of war are whirling about his head. But with it, he had the confidence and the assurance that he could stand in the worst place and fight on for King and country. Our salvation should bring us a similar

assurance. The presence of the Holy Spirit in our hearts, the salvation and deliverance from sin's deception is a self-authenticating witness.

- **Phil. 1:5-6** “I always pray with joy⁵ because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now,⁶ being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.”
- **Eph. 1:13-14** “And you also were included in Christ when you heard the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation. When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit,¹⁴ who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God’s possession—to the praise of his glory.”

See the confidence Paul has in the salvation of his Philippians and Ephesian converts.

- **pierce the darkness (v. 17b)**. The “sword of the Spirit” is identified as “the Word of God” and this is surely the message of the Gospel, and the teaching in the Bible as Scripture. Again, the phrase “take up” applies to this piece of armor and weaponry equally. The only reason why a Roman centurion would have to draw his sword is if he intends to use it—and he is engaged in a battle.

- **The Spirit is the razors-edge of God’s Truth.**

2 Tim. 3:16 “All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness,¹⁷ so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.”

When we share our faith, tell our story, and tell people the Good News of salvation from sin in Christ alone—we have a mysterious enabling from on high. And we aren’t just hammering people with the blunt object of our made-up theories, our genius ideas—No. Instead we are piercing the darkness, clearing away the fog of doubt in their hearts, chasing away the hobgoblins of deception. With God’s truth, sharpened to a razor edge by the anointing of the Spirit the Gospel has power.

- **It is the hot knife of the hardened conscience.**

Heb. 4:12 “For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.

Now, all of this is a precursor to prayer.

2. By praying continuously (v. 18a)

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.

- in the Spirit (v. 18b): enabled by the Spirit to pray all kinds of prayers.
- for the saints (v. 18c)
 - Eddie Zhang, Missionaries in China: Protection, open doors, effectiveness in the church.
 - President Shee Jin Ping, China's president. We pray that you would turn his heart, that the grip that Satan has on him will be released and he will choose to act in a way that favorable to the Gospel.
 - The seeds sown by our missionaries and the Zhang's will grow, took deep root, and never be stopped by any policy of any government.
- for your leaders (v. 19-20)
 - For our President, Congress and Judicial Branch: Release them from the prince of the power of the air—from his grip. Save them, help them to make policies that will assist us to further your Kingdom.
 - For our local governments, states, and the state of Idaho—God help them to lead with godly Kingdom values. Protect them from the influence of this dark world power...
 - For our elders and pastors and all the Christian Churches preaching your gospel in this town and state.
 - Protection, Provision, for Power and opportunities. Open doors to proclaim, defend, and lead people to your truth.

Communion: I'm going to have the ushers come up and prepare to hand out communion. As far as a complicated story—well, it just doesn't get any simpler than this. A savior who is God the Son—who gives himself willingly for us—whose body is broken and shattered—yet defeats our ultimate foe, raising bodily from the dead vindicated as the world's true Lord and Savior.

The Gospel is forever enshrined in these two little symbols—tasting death, and defeating it in his grave.