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***The Armor of God
Ephesians 6:10-18***

*Finally, **be strong** in the Lord and in the strength of **his power**. ¹¹ Put on the **whole armor of God**, so that you may be able to **stand** against the wiles of the devil. ¹² For our^[a] 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. 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**. ¹⁴ Stand therefore, and fasten the **belt of truth** around your waist, and put on the **breastplate of righteousness**. ¹⁵ As shoes for your feet put on whatever will make you ready to proclaim the **gospel of peace**. ¹⁶ With all of these,^[b] take the **shield of faith**, with which you will be able to quench 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 **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.*

I think we've been **bombarded with war images** this week, right?
Watching what's unfolding in Afghanistan as we withdraw after 20 years of war.
It's incredible to think of how long it has been,
It's also incredible and tragic to think of what it means to the Afghan people.
We see images of the Taliban, guns in hand, taking over the country.

It doesn't make you want to think of warrior imagery and God, does it?
In fact, the wars and violence of the Bible are some of the hardest passages to understand in all of scripture.
How do we square it with Christ? And grace? And his call to peace?

I was reading about a young man in seminary who announced to his class that he **didn't want to have anything to do with the warrior imagery** in the Bible, because he is a pacifist.
To his surprise another student spoke up to say well, I guess you can feel that way because **maybe you haven't needed** a warrior God to stand up for you. This man was a Coptic Christian who had turned to a strong and mighty God when his church in Egypt, and his life, was threatened. Austin Crenshaw Shelley, *Christian Century.com*, August 16, 2021.

The author went on to say that after bringing home his own special needs child who faced countless surgeries and challenges, he could finally understand the desire to have *a strong and mighty God* on your side.

Believing in God's strength fighting for us *doesn't solve the problem* of violence in scripture, but it does give us a different take on Paul's words today.

I think it's also important to remember that God's armor is *defensive*, It's not about bloodshed, it's about faith, truth, and prayer.

The imagery of a *Roman soldier's armor* would have been familiar to the early Christians who received this letter from Paul, Because they were a persecuted minority under Roman rule. And Rome ruled by the sword. But Paul gives armor a whole new meaning.

He's talking about warfare—but not a physical kind. He's talking about *spiritual warfare*. when good comes up against evil. He's saying that the world we live in is full of spiritual powers hostile to God, and We need to stand firm—with God's power—and God's armor.

Whether you think a lot about spiritual warfare or not, We all know what it's like to *come up against evil, right?* Ever feel like you are *fighting a battle* in your life? We've all been there, right? Maybe with financial adversity, health problems, family feuds, stresses with kids or parents, or jobs...haven't we all faced serious battles? And aren't we facing some right now?

Does it ever feel like there's a lot happening *behind the scenes* of life?

Do you *believe in a spiritual world?*

If you do, you're not alone.

Some Gallup polls say that at least 75% of Americans believe in spiritual beings like angels and the Devil.

<http://www.gallup.com/poll/1690/religion.aspx>

The **Bible** says that the spiritual world is real.
We may not completely understand it,
but the Bible is very clear about its **existence**.

Paul says in Ephesians 6:12

*For our struggle is not against enemies of blood and flesh, but against the rulers, .. authorities, .. cosmic powers ... the **spiritual forces of evil**.*

Angels are mentioned in 34 of 66 books of the Bible.

They are spiritual beings created by God, for God's purposes.

*Psalm 34:7 says, the **angels** of the Lord encamp around those who fear him...*

Psalm 91:11-12

*"For He will give **His angels charge** of you, to guard you in all your ways.*

Seven Old Testament books,

every New Testament writer,

and **Jesus** himself mentions **Satan**.

Satan is known as a liar, an accuser, a slanderer,

a spiritual being who tempts people to sin, to discouragement, to hold grudges, to false teaching, and to dissension in the body of Christ.

Demons are mentioned many times throughout the Bible, promoting pain, anger, bitterness and suffering.

Jesus *heals people* suffering from demon possession.

But--does all this talk of **angels and demons** make you squirm?

It does most Presbyterians.

We don't talk a lot about spiritual warfare or Satan.

Some say there is no Devil.

I don't believe that, but I understand the hesitation in talking about it.

I personally think that C.S. Lewis had it right when he said in The Screwtape Letters. *"There are two equal and opposite errors into which [we] can fall about the devils. One is to **disbelieve** in their existence. The other is to believe, and to feel an .. unhealthy **interest** in them. They themselves are equally pleased by both errors, ...Some people totally **dismiss** Satan as an impersonal force or somebody in a red suit with a **pitchfork**. On the other end of the spectrum, many people attribute too much power and importance to Lucifer. They feel he is God's equal."*

The thing is, there is **no equal to God**.

Evil is not as powerful as Good!

And it's not healthy for us to become
too wrapped up in angels and demons,
just like it's not healthy to deny it all exists!

So what do we do?

Paul says, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his power.
stand firm.

We're not told, even when putting on armor,
that we are supposed to go out and wage war against other people.
We are told to stand firm against evil.

This is an important *distinction*.

Many times in the history of Christianity
The Bible has been used as license to wage war against non-Christians,
or those considered heretics.

We need only remember things like the Crusades,
to realize that *Christianity has been used to justify violence*.
Our own faith has been used to wage war,
Just as other faiths have been used to wage war and terror.

So what does it mean to for us to stand firm in our faith?

Well, have you ever been led *to stand up* for something that you know is right?
It's *not easy*---Many of us have lost a lot in standing up like that.

As I was studying these verses I realized that
Standing firm in the Lord,
standing up for truth and righteousness
is **NOT the same** thing as just *speaking your mind*.

Americans have a strange '*respect*' if you can call it that,
for people who *speak their mind*—
no matter how hurtful, rude, or outrageous.

We say we are tired of folks being too politically correct and careful about
offending people.

People should just speak their mind.

But is that a *good* in and of itself?

Is it what Paul is saying?

Probably not.

The Christian's calling is to stand firm—in Christ,
And speak God's Word, God's truth.

Not OUR pride, our way, or our opinion.

There's a big difference!

So how is Paul envisioning us standing firm?

Think of ***Martin Luther King, Jr.*** who stood firm for non-violence.

Or ***Margaret Sanger*** and the women's suffrage movement.

Or ***Nelson Mandela*** and his fight against apartheid!

Or our ultimate role model for standing firm —***Jesus Christ!***

Think of strong people of faith that you know—what do they stand for?

It's always good to ask ourselves: ***What do I stand for?***

Am I standing for ***truth? faith? righteousness?***

And, do we realize that the ***battle is already won?***

We have ***hope!***

We know the outcome!

What if we lived that way?

Like we knew that victory is ours?

Wouldn't that change our attitude on the battles we face?

Evil cannot win, even though it looks like it might.

The Psalms talk about this a lot:

Psalm 94 says *How long, O Lord, will the wicked be jubilant?*

We've all felt the unfairness of evil appearing to win, for now.

We are called to stand firm in the face of that.

In John Bunyan's "***The Pilgrim's Progress***".

The main character, Christian receives the armor in the armory of the House Beautiful, for the next stage of his journey.

But, there was ***no armor for his back.***

Christian would not be able to run.

His only option was "to ...***stand firm***". □ ["The Whole Armor of God,"](#) Rev. Bryan Findlayson, Lectionary Bible Studies and Sermons, Pumpkin Cottage Ministry Resources.

When faced with challenges, enemies or evil...

What if we stood ***strong in the Lord and in the strength of HIS power?***

Isn't that why we need the armor of God?
And Paul gives armor a whole new meaning.

First, ***The Belt of Truth.***

The belt was a very important part of a Roman soldier's uniform.
 It had many different loops to hold clothing and weapons.
 Regardless of how he moved, or fell, or climbed.
 If the belt was not on right,...it could cost him his life.

How do we cling to truth, in a world that doesn't value truth?
 As Christians, we're called to ***stand upon the truth.***
 The truth of God's Word.
 The truth from the life of Jesus Christ—who IS Truth.

We also wear the ***Breastplate of Righteousness***

The breastplate was used to protect vital organs--especially the heart.
 Same is true of our spiritual lives--
 Are we giving thought to what goes into our hearts?
 What we listen to, read, pay attention to?
 Are we asking God to guard our hearts?

Next we put on ***Shoes*** to proclaim the ***Gospel of Peace.***

Some historians credit ***footwear*** as one of the greatest reasons
 why the Romans were so victorious over their enemies.
 The Roman Soldier was equipped with hobnailed sandals,
 which provided them a strong stance and balance on hills and uneven terrain.

Our sure footing comes from the peace of Jesus Christ.
 That peace has power-- in a world without it!
 Are we standing up for peace?
 It's easy to fight, and argue---are we acting as ***peacemakers?***

Next *it's the Shield of Faith,*

Roman soldiers had a large 2 and ½ foot by 4 foot shield
 that virtually covered the front of the soldier.
 It was made of inch thick wood, wrapped in leather, and edged with metal.
 It could be soaked in water before battle,
 so that it would extinguish flaming arrows shot by the enemy.

http://cep.calvinseminary.edu/sermon-starters/proper-16b/?type=lectionary_epistle

How is our faith helping our daily lives?
 Do you think about that?
 How often are we relying on that faith to make it through our day?

Paul says we wear a ***Helmet of Salvation***.
 The helmet protected the head in battle.
 Putting on our helmet of salvation means
 that we know up here—
 that Jesus Christ died for us, and has saved us from our sins.
 Does knowing that help us live in a new way?
 What does it say to us about what happens after this life? We have that hope, right?

Finally, our ***Sword of the Spirit***, is the ***Word of God***.
 How do we use God's Word?
 Do we spend in the Bible? To read it, learn it, memorize it?
 Is it really in our hearts and heads?
 When we are faced with challenges--
 Do We turn to God's Word?

Putting on the armor of God is not about hurting others, or waging war.
 They are tools for the battle when trials and evil comes knocking.

And just like we ***each have spiritual armor***, so does our ***church!***
 The whole letter to Ephesians is about unity
 in the one body of Christ, the church.

So when we put on the armor of God, ***we do it together***.
 And ***together*** we are ***stronger*** than any of us ever could be, alone.

The question is, what do we stand for?
 And how are we using the armor that God provides for us?
That truth, goodness, peace, faith, salvation, and the Bible.
How do these things help us live our lives?

Friends, hear the **Good News** of the Gospel
 We have a strong and mighty God, who ***makes us strong*** as well.
 May we use everything we've been given, to stand firm in our faith.
 And all God's people said, Amen.