

¹⁰ Finally, be strengthened (*made 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 tricks of the devil.** 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. 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, 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. 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, ²⁰ for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it boldly, as I must speak.

This Bible reading from Ephesians ch6 brings us right towards the end of this letter of the Apostle Paul. It's the 'Armour of God' passage – it's a Sunday school teacher's dream for letting the children wear cardboard swords, helmets & shields, belts, a Roman soldier's breastplate, and maybe shoes to match. The picture is that of an ancient Roman soldier in the New Testament times. The equipment was clearly intended for a physical battle of war between nations and empires.

But looking at Ephesians ch6, we have a different kind of battle. As St Paul wrote, he used the imagery of a Roman Soldier to point us to the spiritual battle that we face. God has not only created us as physical creatures, but also as spiritual creatures. And we all face a spiritual battle – a battle against the tricks of the devil, says the apostle Paul. In the middle of enjoying God's good creation, Paul reminds us that there is always spiritual darkness lurking near us.

I don't like talking too much about the devil, because the devil doesn't deserve too much attention. But the devil will try to drag us down; the devil will try to make us despair about God's love; the devil will try to make us believe in anything other than the cross & resurrection of our Lord

Jesus Christ. The devil especially wants to attack Christian people – he wants to wear us down and get us off track with the love of God. And he will do this in sneaky ways, when we least expect it. And it takes time for Christians to prayerfully test the spirits and find out what the devil's tricks really are at any given time.

The devil loves to accuse us, to make us feel endlessly guilty, to make us feel continuous shame. He loves to get us down. These are spiritual attacks against the good faith we share in our Lord Jesus Christ.

We can't easily see the tricks of the devil coming toward us. Therefore, we are given the full armour of God to stand guard, to stand firm in faith at all times – with the help of God. Paul used the Roman soldiers' uniform, as a picture, to help us wear this 'Armour of God' wherever we go.

There are six pieces of armour listed here, as a way to think about including Jesus in our spiritual battles with the devil.

1) The first piece of armour is the belt of truth. We need to fasten the belt of truth around us. But what is the belt of truth? Even Pontius Pilate asked Jesus, "What is truth"? People talk about truth as meaning integrity and honesty. People might talk about truth as correct details. But 'truth' in the New Testament ultimately points to Jesus Christ himself (a word study on the word 'truth' would show this). Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life. The first part of our armour is Jesus himself. In his letter to the Romans, Paul said to 'put on Christ' for self-control (Rom 13:14). We are already clothed with Jesus in our Baptism (Gal 3:27); therefore, we can intentionally start each day reminding ourselves we have Jesus wrapped around us like a belt of truth. To put on this piece of armour, could be as simple as saying 'Jesus is Lord'.

2) The second piece of armour is the breastplate of righteousness. The breastplate of righteousness might best be seen as having a clear conscience before God. We are given a clear conscience from God by receiving his forgiveness. What a relief it is to come before the Lord, admit our sinfulness, and receive God's forgiveness. Some Christians make the sign of the cross upon their breast – and how appropriate – for we are armoured with the forgiveness of Christ. Others will praise God aloud for the freedom they feel in their heart. Either way, the devil's attacks are weakened when we celebrate the righteousness that God has placed upon us.

3) The third piece of armour is a pair of shoes. These shoes represent 'the readiness' that we need to travel with the gospel of peace. Walking is fairly natural for us. As we put on the armour of God each day, peace is meant to flow fairly naturally. Walking isn't something you have to think too hard about – and we want to be ready with the gospel of peace wherever we walk. Peace is no small deal – both in the church and out the church. When we are faced with different values to our own; different ethics to our own – we need to keep returning to the peace of God. We can't control the ethics of our own families, let alone the world around us. Next time you talk to someone with different values, you might walk beside them with shoes of peace.

4) The fourth piece of armour is the shield of faith. This is a very defensive piece of armour. Paul said the shield of faith would enable us to quench all the flaming arrows of the evil one. So, when faithful, peaceful believers are attacked with ridicule, gossip, rumours & mockery – what better can one do than to have faith in God? Christians are not the only ones who are mocked in this world. And the shield of faith may help us to identify with other people who are bullied or intimidated for no good reason. This can be a strong witness to the genuine love of Christ. The shield of faith is a quiet, yet certain 'trust in God', especially in times of deep trouble.

5) The fifth piece of armour is the helmet of salvation. Protecting the head is fairly crucial for a soldier. And we are completely protected from eternal death through the everlasting salvation of our Lord Jesus Christ. So, we are not going into battle concerned about death & defeat. We are going into battle each day, knowing that our own salvation is secured – and we have that same salvation to offer our fellow person.

6) The sixth piece of armour is the sword of the Spirit. Paul said the sword of the Spirit is the word of God. God's message to us is living & active says the book of Hebrews (4:12). When you speak gospel words to another person, the Holy Spirit is keen to use this for the good of God's kingdom. Ultimately, Jesus himself is the living word of God. So, we begin with Jesus in the belt of truth; and we end with Jesus as the living word of God. Wherever we go, Jesus is promising to be with us.

And so we have the 6 different pieces of the armour of God. As we look at the armour of God that Paul described, Jesus has something for every occasion. Whether it be a positive time or a negative time, Jesus is with his people.

And with this armour of God upon us, we are then certainly ready for prayer. In this passage today, Paul speaks about 'praying for others'. So much more can be said on prayer in other sermons. But let us take note here that Paul urges us to 'prayer for others'. Sometimes we think of the Psalms as we pray for our own problems. But today, we are thinking about spiritual battles against the devil, where Christians realise the need for the gospel to reach more & more people.

Yes, the devil wants to trick people and pull them away from God. But let us be people who are ready for 'spiritual battle' at any time. Every battle can start with the strength of Jesus and can finish with the strength of Jesus. That's God's promise. And the devil knows that there is no greater strength than Jesus who overcame death & sin forever.

As we live in this confidence, as we live in this Good News, we are fighting the good battle with Jesus. So next time you think you are alone with the devil, think again – and remember the armour of God. And be strengthened by the power of God. Amen.