

Ephesians 6:10-20

We live in two realms -- the physical and the spiritual. Both of these worlds are very real, and we are quite at home in both of them. The spiritual is unseen; the physical is seen, felt, and heard. All of you have thoughts going through your minds right now, but no one knows your thoughts except you. Your thoughts are part of the spiritual realm. But when you speak, your words are heard. Your words are part of the physical realm. We live in both worlds at the same time. We are made up of both body and spirit.

We also have enemies against us in both worlds. We have physical enemies. This is why we lock our doors. It's why we use passwords for our online bank accounts. It's why we pay taxes -- to enable the government to defend our shores from those who would attack us.

And we have enemies in the spiritual realm. Listen to the Apostle Paul in Ephesians 6: *"For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places."*

When the Israelites were taking possession of the Promised Land of Canaan, they had to fight flesh and blood enemies in the physical realm. They could see the enemy. They could kill the enemy with a sword, a spear, or an arrow. If you and I want to take possession of the Promised Land of heaven, we need not sharpen our spears and purchase more arrows. Our enemy is just as real as the one standing in the way of the Israelites, but we will not kill him, nor even wound him, with swords, clubs, or spears. Our enemy is unseen. He has no flesh and blood body.

When an Israelite warrior mortally wounded his enemy, he moved on to the next one. He could count the number of his enemies that he had killed on the battlefield. And he knew that once an enemy was dead, it would not rise up to confront him again. Our enemy is quite different. His number is innumerable. And when we defeat him one day, he rises up again to confront us the next day. He never tires. He never weakens. And he never quits.

And our enemy is not stupid, but is very clever. He finds our place of weakness. He seeks those gaps within our armor, and that is where he attacks. This is why Paul writes: *"Put on the whole armor of God."* Not some of it; all of it. What kind of soldier would go into battle without his helmet or with nothing on his feet? He might rest and relax in his tent this way, but in battle he comes prepared, dressed in full battle gear.

In looking at the Christian church, we see far too many soldiers who are taking their rest and relaxing. They are not battle ready. They have kicked off the shoes of the Gospel, removed the helmet of salvation, and put down the sword of the Word of God. They say, "I have the shield of faith," but it, too, is cast aside. They are not able to defend themselves, or their children, against the enemy.

Do we not realize that the battle is here and now? The enemy is not far off taking his time. He is here among us. He is in your home every single day. He goes to school and to work with you. He even follows you to church. His sword is drawn; why isn't yours? He is ready for battle; why aren't you? Too many Christian soldiers want to do the least they can to defend themselves. They do not want to put on the whole armor of God. They just want part of it. Is that Christian soldier prepared for battle who comes to church only when it's convenient for him?...who thinks that training in the Word of God is only for the young?

An enemy is most deadly when he is able to infiltrate his opponent and place an ally, a spy if you wish, to assist him with his battle plan. The bad news for us is that we, ourselves, are the devil's ally. Would the man of the house leave the door unlocked at night so that the enemy can come in unawares? But that is what we do for the devil. We drop our defenses to the bare minimum, if that. We walk headfirst into temptation. We leave our door unlocked with our inattention to the Word and to prayer.

We are the spy! The battle is not out there; it's in here -- within our conscience, within our heart. We who claim to be on the side of God have turned traitor by not standing watch at the door, and by not taking up the whole armor of God. Where is our weak point? It's us!

Now I'm going to be quite honest with you. Just telling you to put on the whole armor of God is not going to make you do it. Telling a Christian soldier to stand up for Jesus may get him to his feet for a few minutes, but not for a lifetime. The Law does not motivate. It exposes our weaknesses. It shows us that we have failed. The Law points out the fact that you and I have been pretty miserable soldiers, but it will not make better ones of us. Only Jesus can do that.

Here is what He did for you. Speaking of taking up the whole armor of God...Jesus laid everything aside for you. He exposed Himself to the enemy. He became vulnerable and weak. When accused before Pilate, He did not parry with the sword of the Word to defend Himself. He who is the Truth, allowed the enemy's lies to condemn Him. He did not cover His feet with the shoes of the Gospel, but He let nails be driven into them. Rather than taking up the helmet of salvation, He let them drive a crown of thorns into His head. Jesus went into battle against your enemy, and mine, without even a single piece of armor. He did this in order to draw the enemy's fire away from you to Himself.

At one time God was your enemy, but no more. Jesus made peace by His sufferings and death. In your Baptism, you are given the shoes of the Gospel of peace that Jesus won for you. You walk now at peace with God through Christ. He has completely forgiven you.

At one time you were unholy in the eyes of God. But in your Baptism Christ covered you with His holiness. You now wear Christ as the breastplate of righteousness. Once you believed the devil's lies, but now you are joined to Christ who is your belt of truth. At one time you wore no helmet and carried no shield, but were helpless victims of Satan. But in Holy Baptism, as the water was poured over your head, Christ Jesus became your helmet of salvation, and He gave you the gift of faith as a shield. And because your Lord was pierced through in His hands for you, He places into your hands the sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God.

Your armor, friend, from head to toe is nothing less than Christ Himself...every bit of it. When the Apostle says, "*Put on the whole armor of God,*" he is simply saying that we should put on Christ. And why wouldn't we? He laid down His life for us. How could we not want to stand up in Him and for Him?

Your enemy is God's enemy. He went into battle for you and was victorious. He now covers you with Christ, your armor, who is your victory. Do we fight well every day? Absolutely not. We tire, we compromise, we do not dress ourselves well for battle. God forgives you. He is not against you. He is not your enemy. He stands by you. He defends you. He does not accuse you of being a poor soldier. He pardons you for Jesus' sake. And He makes a better soldier of you. That's why we want to stand up for Jesus - because He stands by us, with us, and for us. Amen.