

Ephesians 6:10-20. 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 saints. ¹⁹ Pray also for me, that whenever I open my mouth, 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.

Be equipped for battle

1. Put on the full armor of God

2. Pray for your fellow Christian soldiers

When you came to church this morning you weren't afraid, were you? You weren't wracked with anxiety as you walked to church anxious that someone would threaten you for going to worship. As you drove here this morning did you fear that your life was in danger? There were no gunshots, no mobs lining the streets, no intimidating force here protesting in front of church; there was no one here to harass you and keep you from entering this church. Of course there wasn't. Instead for many of us the only fear we had was something rather silly or small. We may have only feared that we were going to be a little late or we weren't going to get the seat or the pew that we wanted.

Halfway across the globe, Christians in Egypt are afraid for their lives. They are daily being threatened. They live in fear as their businesses and homes and churches are targeted. Satan is hard at work, as the forces of evil are openly targeting the Christian Church in Egypt.

We don't have to deal with such fears. We are blessed to live in this country and to enjoy the freedom to worship in peace. We travel to church in freedom. We come together without a thought of warfare interrupting our worship and we go home in peace without thinking twice about being threatened because of our faith.

But maybe we should think twice, for we *are* being threatened because of our faith. These words from Ephesians chapter 6 remind us of the battle that wages every day. No we do not need to feel unsafe as we come to church. We do not have to wear Kevlar vests

under our church clothes for fear some sort of physical attack. But we do have to be equipped and ready for battle each and every day because Satan and his evil forces want nothing more to destroy our faith. This is a battle that doesn't make headlines in the newspapers of the world, but this is the spiritual battle of which every Christian needs to be aware. And so in his closing remarks to Ephesians, a congregation of believers that he loved and deeply cared about, Paul puts his fellow Christians on alert as he talks about the dangerous warfare that daily awaits all Christians in this dark and evil world.

Paul makes it clear, that the struggle, the warfare, the fight, that we Christians are to be primarily concerned about is not a battle against flesh and blood. Even though Paul was being held prisoner because of the influence the Jewish leaders and his sentence was being enforced by the Roman government, the fight he was primarily concerned about was not a fight against a group of people, or an opposing religion. Rather, his chief concern was a spiritual battle against the forces of Satan. Paul writes, 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.*** So too our concern is not primarily with false teachers and members of false religions and members of secular society. Such people are simply agents and instruments of Satan's schemes. Our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the one who can destroy both soul and body in hell.

We are in the midst of a spiritual war, everyday and our struggle is against Satan as he prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Our foe is powerful and he is crafty. In this part of the country Satan's forces do not regularly take the form of extremists who threaten our lives. No instead the devil has chosen to wage war on our soil, in our lives, with much more stealthy tactics. The devil is our fierce unrelenting enemy who sends out laziness and apathy to whittle down our defenses so that we marginalize our relationship with God into mere and meaningless religion. He attempts to poison our minds with the sinful and flawed opinions of this world that daily descend on us like a suffocating haze. He attacks us with false teachings and false ideas and increasing pressure from our peers to abandon our foundation on God's Word. He sets the wicked traps of temptation all around us like explosive landmines or IEDs with some temptations so powerful they could destroy our lives and sever our relationship with God.

Are we prepared for this? Are we equipped for this battle? Are we even aware that this is going on or do we wander around in this life naïvely ignorant of the danger around us? Are we swept away by the world's changing views on morality or are we firmly rooted on God's Word so that we may stand firm? Do we regularly fill up with nourishment of God's Word or are we more likely to spend our time consuming the junk that this world pushes onto us? Are we cautiously aware of the temptations of lust and greed and addiction that could tear apart our lives or do we ignore God's warnings and carelessly put ourselves in harm's way?

Daily we are under attack from those who belong to the dark spiritual realm. But this need not alarm us for the one who rules over all the heavenly realms is there to lend us his strength. ***Be strong in the Lord***, our faithful God is there to give you refuge and

shelter. He is there to protect you and support you. Paul encourages the Ephesians, he encourages all believers, ***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.***

What does Paul mean when he talks about this full armor of God? He mentions five pieces of defensive armor and one offensive weapon. Paul describes the full armor of God as including these items for our defense: *the belt of truth buckled around your waist, the breastplate of righteousness, with your feet fitted with appropriate shoes or boots, the shield of faith, and the helmet of salvation.* The one offensive weapon in the list ***is the sword of the Spirit***, which Paul tells us, ***is the word of God.*** The military items Paul enumerates here were the standard equipment of an infantryman in the Roman army, but of course Paul does not mean actual armor. Paul is using this extended illustration to draw together different aspects of Christ's redeeming work. The Christian can rally to our Savior's work of redemption whenever he or she comes under attack from the forces of Satan. The truth of Christ, his righteousness, the peace and the salvation that his death and resurrection bring, the victory and the readiness that comes from the gospel, the confidence of being God's own child through faith, this all will equip us to stand up for the faith and shield us from the devil's attacks. And of course we do not simply have to hunker down and ride out the storm of Satan's onslaughts, but the Christian may wield the sword of the Spirit which the word of God. Using God's Word the Christian can rout any of the powers of this dark world. The Word helps us to strike down temptation. It reminds of the victory that Christ has won over sin and the devil. The Word of God protects us and wards off many would-be-attackers. Put on the full armor of God! Put on Christ's saving work.

After this striking military metaphor Paul reminds the Ephesians of one more tool they have in their fight against evil: prayer. ¹⁸ ***And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests.*** Through faith in Christ, we are able to approach the almighty God and bring all our prayers and requests to him. Because the Spirit dwells in our hearts we can pray to God and he will hear us. And Paul encourages the believer to pray on ***all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests.***

At times we may think that are problems are too small for God. Perhaps when we consider how fierce the battle with Satan is, we are then compelled to consider our requests too arbitrary and our God too busy or too far off to care. But our God is everywhere and he is near. He cares about every one of his believers. He cares about your every need. He reassures of us his presence. We can bring all our problems, all our requests to him. You can cast all your anxieties on him because he cares for you. **"Pray"**, says Paul.

Standing on the word of God, may be difficult in this sinful world. It may cause conflict and division, perhaps even in our families, as we saw today in our readings. But it also brings unity. We are united to the church of God. We are united with those who believe in Jesus and who fight that same fight against sin and temptation. And so ***with this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints.*** Pray for believers who are undergoing a spiritual struggle as well as physical persecution. Pray for Christians in Egypt and throughout the world who are enduring hardship because of their faith. Pray

for believers closer to home, who may not be suffering physically, but are struggling with a private sin. Pray that your fellow believers, who have been made holy through faith in Christ Jesus, may be able to continue to lives of faith and obedience so that Christ may be glorified in their words and actions and that others may see Christianity in a positive light through them. Pray for your fellow believers, for we are bound together as a band of brothers and sisters in Christ, who are all fighting this spiritual fight until God brings us home.

In this nation, in this place of peace and freedom, we don't often consider ourselves as people who daily have to wage war. For many at this time of year the only mention of armor and helmets is the thought of preseason football on television or young men once again putting on football pads as practice for the local high school teams begin. For others the only thought of being properly equipped is making sure that they have everything checked off on their back to school list. What a blessing it is to live in such a land of peace and freedom! But dear friends, we all need to remember that a spiritual war is indeed going on and that we are very much involved. Be prepared. Be equipped. Each day is a battle. Each day is a struggle. But take courage. Pray for yourselves. Pray for each other. Fight with confidence for the Lord is your strength. You have victory in Jesus. His saving work covers you and protects you.

That's the good news that brings us comfort. That's the good news that we celebrate today in the life of Liam Sindelir. As a parent looking down at this new member of your family so many thoughts go through your mind especially when you think about the challenges that Liam will face in this world and in his life. *What's in store for this little guy? What kind of child will he be? What kind of man will he become? Will he ever wear a baseball helmet or put on football pads? Will he enroll in the military or the National Guard?* You will have to help him make those decisions down the road and thankfully some of those questions are way down the road. As you prepare him for those challenges you will also want to make sure that Liam is properly equipped to daily fight his spiritual battles. Equip him with the good news of Jesus and the Word of God so that he may take on the forces of evil. Bring him up in a lifetime of training and instruction of the Word.

Today, this day of his baptism, is a special part of this life of faith. Today God brings him into his family. Today God clothes him with the righteousness and the redeeming work of Christ Jesus. Today God gives him that full armor of God to which he can run and find refuge and strength. In this world of sin your son will have to fight against Satan and his evil forces. Don't be afraid! In times of temptation he can find strength in the Lord his God. In times of uncertainty he will be able to find peace and stability in Christ Jesus. In times of poor judgment and spiritual weakness he will be able to find forgiveness and love in Christ Jesus and the strength to resist such temptation again. May the Lord bless this child! May the Lord give him a spirit that stands firmly on the word of Christ Jesus! May the Lord daily protect and guard his child with that full armor of God!

Let us all, being covered and protected by the saving work of Christ, pray for this newest member of the church of God. Amen.