

## **Ephesians 6:10-20**

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Good Shepherd Lutheran Church + Boise, Idaho

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Stand

The Word of the Lord from Ephesians 6:11: "Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil." This is the Word of the Lord.

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen

You're in the midst of a fight for the ages every day. It's a battle between good and evil, life and death. You sense part of the battle: life is a struggle. It's not easy staying healthy in body, mind and emotion. It's not easy for a society to remain free and just. It's a battle. That's why you battle the waistline and fight for adequate rest. That's why, within society, you have all sorts of campaigns like "fight against cancer" or "fight against poverty" or "fight against discrimination." The battle continues.

But that's the easy part of the battle, because that's more or less wrestling with flesh and blood. There's a whole 'nother level of battle going on every day, and St. Paul describes it like this: "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."

There you go. It's not you against "just" cancer or you against poverty. It's you against cosmic powers and demonic forces. It is good and right to fight disease and hardship in this world, but they're only the foot soldiers. It's the forces of evil in the heavenly places that are running the war against you. Even if you were to manage to defeat the common cold on behalf of the world, your cosmic enemies would simply shrug and move on to their next weapon of mass destruction.

The battle rages. Daily. Continuously. Exhaustingly. Taking the cue from how wars are fought in this world, many a preacher will spend his time psyching you up to fight, telling you that every day you've got to get up, gear up, move out and do battle. It's on you to do your part for the sake of everybody. After all, Jesus died to liberate you, to set you free and place you in His army of light. He's made you one of the good guys, so keep the fight going. You'll take your share of hits, of course, but it's up to you to brush them aside and keep on swinging. That's what faith is to some: it's the will to keep fighting.

In such a sermon, then, the whole message is that Christian living and the daily battle is pretty much all your doing. Jesus has done His part at the cross, and now you've got His blessing as you take your turn on point.

If that's the case, here's part one of the bad news: you don't have a chance. If the battle is you v. the devil and all of his demonic allies, you're done for. If you think you can win, you've already lost. If you think you're a match, you've already been taken prisoner.

Here's part two of the bad news: your enemies have an ally on the inside, by which I mean inside of you. Don't take my word for it: you heard it from Jesus Himself in our Gospel lesson as He described your heart. He declared, "What comes out of a person is what defiles him. For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person" (Mark 7:20-23). So there you are, trying to take on the spiritual forces of evil, and your own heart is on their side. That old, dead sinful nature rears up each day and says, "Seeing as how you're seriously outnumbered and outgunned, and seeing as how your Commander, Jesus, demands perfection that you can't achieve, how 'bout we just switch sides and go back to where we started?"

So there you go: you're supposed to fight the forces of evil, and you can't do it. The chance that you triumph is zero. Countless headstones in cemeteries around the world testify to that.

How about some Good News, then? Because there is Good News as Paul describes the battle in our text. The Good News is simply this: the battle has already been fought and won. It was fought and won by Jesus Christ on the cross. You know this to be true because His grave is empty – He is risen from the dead.

The battle went like this: sin, death and devil accuse and say, "You're sinful, and so you're enslaved to sin. You're not holy, and so you face God's judgment. The wages of sin is death – death of body, sure, but even more *eternal* death." Against these enemies, Jesus goes to the cross and says, "I'll take that judgment: I'll suffer for the sins of the world. I'll suffer death of body and I'll suffer hell. I'll suffer My Father's judgment for sin." That's what He does on the cross, as the perfect and righteous sacrifice for sin. But because He is perfect and righteous, sin can't lay a finger on Him and death can't hold Him. The devil loses, too. Jesus rises from the dead, having conquered sin, death, devil and all evil.

That victory is forever, and He shares it with you.

Since the victory is won, this is how the battle goes: You don't take on the forces of evil yourself. You repent. You confess all the times you've given in to the temptations of evil and sided with your sinful heart. You also confess all the times you take it upon yourself to defeat sin, death and devil by your own strength, without Jesus' help. And you trust in Christ who has already won the battle for you. You're no match for these enemies, but Jesus has already defeated them.

This is what Paul is saying when he tells you to take up the whole armor of God. Many believe that this is a call to fight, but a careful read shows that it's a call to faith. "Take up the whole armor of God," he writes, "so that you may be able to withstand in the evil day." How do you withstand or stand firm? By confessing, "I can't defeat devil, world and sinful flesh – but I trust in Jesus who already has."

That is the belt of truth you wear – the truth of Jesus' cross and victory.

You're also protected by the breastplate of righteousness – you wear the righteousness of Jesus, not your own (you have none!).

Your shoes are the readiness given by the Gospel of peace: because you are forgiven, you are at peace with God; and if today is your last day on earth, you are ready to stand before Him because you've got the right shoes on for standing. Jesus has made you righteous; therefore, you're at peace with God.

At all times, you carry the shield of faith by which you extinguish the flaming darts of the evil one. Sore loser that he is, the devil keeps hurling accusations at you, saying, "You're still a sinner and a loser who deserves only death and hell." By faith, you say, "That's true, but Jesus took away my sins and shared His victory with me – for His sake, I have life and heaven!"

And so you wear the helmet of salvation – heaven is yours because Jesus has given it to you.

And you carry a sword – the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God. Tempted and hounded by these enemies, you speak the Word. Specifically, you speak of Christ, of His death and resurrection and forgiveness. That Gospel strengthens your faith to stand, even as it makes your enemies blanch and groan. It makes demons run away. That Gospel is the Word of Christ's victory – His eternal victory for you.

That's how you fight the battle – you put on the armor of God. You put on Christ. Which leaves one more serious question: how do you put on Christ?

Here's more Good News: you already have. Paul writes in Galatians 3:27, "For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ." At your baptism, Christ gave you forgiveness and clothed you in His own righteousness. Even if you were an hour old when you were baptized, Jesus declared, "Satan, sin, death, you're on notice: this one now belongs to Me. I've conquered you for the sake of this holy child of Mine." This is another reason why it's such a joy to baptize babies in their helplessness: it's a declaration that it's Jesus who does *all* the fighting.

It also puts perspective on the battle. As one baptized, the victory is already yours. The battle isn't about you trying to beat sin, death and devil so that you win. The battle is sin, death and devil trying to tempt you to give up the victory that you already have in Jesus. It's no wonder, then, that Paul's description of the armor of God is all about defense, standing firm, holding on. You don't have to win anything; daily, by the grace of God, you cling to the victory He's already given to you. That's what it means to live daily in your baptism. That's what it means to live a life of daily repentance. It's daily to say, "I can't win the battle, for I'm a poor miserable sinner; but by His death and resurrection Jesus has won it for me!" And then it's daily to do what Christians do: pray, serve, work, love, and fight all those other battles in life with the certainty of God's love and favor, as if you've already won. Because in Christ, you have.

Rejoice and be at peace: heaven is yours because Christ has won the victory over sin and shared it with you. And if the victory over sin is yours, then it must be that you are forgiven for all of your sins.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen