

O Church arise and put God's armour on

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 24 June 2012

Preacher: Philip Copeland

[0 : 00] Well, we're going to turn to our Bibles now, and you'll see that our preacher this morning is our very own apprentice, Phil Copeland. Phil is just finishing up his two years of apprenticeship with us and is shortly to be moving to work as a youth worker in a church down south in Harpenden, just near Luton, north of London.

And before he goes off, he's going to be preaching to us this morning. And our passage is in Paul's letter to the Ephesians. Ephesians chapter 6 and at verse 10.

You'll find that on page 979 if you have one of our church visitors' Bibles. And we're going to read this passage together now. Ephesians chapter 6 then at verse 10.

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. Put on the whole armor of God that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil.

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.

[1 : 18] Therefore, take up the whole armor of God that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm.

Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace.

In all circumstances, take up the shield of faith, with which you can distinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, praying at all times in the Spirit with all prayer and supplication.

To that end, keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints, and also for me, that words may be given me, and opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains, that I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak.

Amen. Amen. This is the word of the Lord. May it bless us, as we read it and study it today. Friends, if you have a Bible, please turn to Ephesians chapter 6, verses 10 to 20.

[2 : 47] And before we come to God's word, let's pray together. Let's pray. Our loving Lord, and heavenly Father, indeed, with reverence and awe, we come before your word. Father, we thank you that your word is as sharp as a double-edged sword.

And we pray that you would cut through our sinful defences this morning, that you would show us your truth, and you would make our hearts sensitive to the truth of the word, so that we would be more like Jesus Christ, our Saviour and King.

We pray this in his precious name. Amen. Amen. We shall go on to the end. We shall fight in France.

We shall fight on the seas and oceans. We shall fight with growing confidence and growing strength in the air. We shall defend our island, whatever the cost may be. We shall fight on the beaches. We shall fight on the landing grounds. We shall fight in the fields and in the streets. We shall fight in the hills. We shall never surrender.

[3 : 50] In the Second World War, these words of Sir Winston Churchill stirred the hearts of the nation, reminding the people that they were at war. And his call was to stand.

Stand against the enemy and fight. And in our passage this morning, we've got the battle cry of the Apostle Paul to the church in Ephesus and all those today who are in Christ.

Paul wants Christians to be strong and stable, to stand against the schemes of the devil, the enemy. Now it's very important this morning that we don't divorce this text from the rest of the letter or treat it as though it's some kind of a random bolt-on finish.

Paul has been writing to blow his readers' minds about the gospel and about church. Church is a big deal. In this world that is under the curse of the fall, that is under the judgment of God on man's rebellion, God is creating a new humanity in Christ.

God is creating a new humanity in Christ. and God has given that new humanity a name. That is the church. That's a people who are united in submission to Jesus Christ.

[5 : 14] And as a community, show off God's plan for the fullness of time to unite all things under the authority and headship of Jesus. Church, if you like, is God's preview of what's to come in eternity.

And the letter can be split into three sections that flow into one another. Paul begins in chapters 1 to 3 with the wealth of the church.

The wealth of the church. You can't help but marvel as Paul unpacks the riches of God's grace that he's shown his people. By God's grace, all those who have put their faith in Jesus Christ are no longer spiritually dead wrath magnets but have been made alive in Christ.

We've gone from being children of wrath, sons of disobedience to children of God. That is the riches of God's grace. And then Paul goes on, having unpacked the wealth of the church to say that the riches of God's grace must shape the walk of the church.

In chapters 4 to 6 verse 9, Paul says, walk in a manner or live, behave in a manner worthy of your calling. Be what you are.

[6 : 34] By grace, you are royal children. That means royal behaviour. You are to live distinctively different lives to the rest of this world.

The old sinful behaviour of the life outside of Christ needs to be put off and the new man of grace needs to be put on. Everything from speech to sexuality, from relationships at home to relationships at work.

All of the church's everyday living is to be mastered by the grace that God has shown them. And Paul urges the church walk like this, walk in godliness because it's in this context, in the everyday relationships and routines of the life of the church that Christians face the attack of the powers of darkness.

Paul finishes the letter with this climax, the warfare of the church. I've got three points this morning. Firstly, the church is at war with God's enemy.

The church is at war with God's enemy. Please look at verse 12, chapter 6, verse 12. Paul says, 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.

[8 : 05] O church, arise and put God's armor on because you're at war. The church is at war with the devil and the powers of darkness that oppose God and his kingdom.

One of my friends at school came from Greece and I loved to wind him up. He was a lovely guy. He was the most undisciplined guy you've ever met, laid back.

But I used to love to wind him up about the fact that at some point in his life, because he belonged to the Greek nation, he was going to have to go back to his country and carry out national service. But little did I know that in the unseen reality, every human being is tied to national service, to one of two kingdoms. There are two kingdoms at war with one another, the kingdom of God and the kingdom of the devil.

And every single human being in this building today is fighting for one or for the other. In chapter 2, Paul reminds the Ephesians that before they came to faith in Jesus Christ, they were children of the devil like the rest of mankind, they were hostile to God.

[9 : 20] By nature, we are all hostile to God, prisoners in the kingdom of darkness. It's only when we accept God's gift of saving grace by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ that we swap sides.

It's the same for everybody. The second you put your faith in Jesus Christ, you swap sides. You're fighting for the Lord against the darkness that once held us.

See, friends, Christians have been saved for the fight, not from it. Look at verse 12. The word Paul uses to describe our life is wrestle.

We're in a wrestling match. Our enemy is not firing long distance missiles at us. Paul doesn't talk about bazookas or Uzi 9mm. This is an up-close and personal, face-to-face, hand-to-hand combat. The image is like two foot soldiers wrestling together. And again, verse 12, we do not wrestle against flesh and blood. Now, Paul isn't saying that we will not face opposition from human beings.

[10:25] We know that's not true. In fact, he's already warned in chapter 4 about the dangerous false teachers. But what Paul wants us to see is behind any human opposition lies the ultimate opposition, the devil.

And verse 12 is a sobering reminder to us all. The devil's powerful, and at the same time, in our own strength, we cannot stand against him.

In our own abilities, we cannot stand against him. But the surprise here is Paul's tone. Paul's not worried. Paul is not depressed.

Paul is confident. Confident. He wants the church to have a balanced view of the enemy. Yes, the devil is powerful. Yes, he is out to destroy the church. But remember that ultimately he has been defeated through Jesus' death and resurrection.

That's why he says that Satan only has this time of present darkness. It's not eternal darkness.

Soon Jesus Christ will come back to judge the living and the dead.

[11:37] And he will crush Satan's head completely. And until then Jesus has promised us that he will be building his church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

Friends, let me stop for a second and ask, do we really believe this is true? You might be thinking, come on, we live in the space age.

Paul lived in the Roman age. They had parchments and camels. We have iPads and Ferraris.

Thank Kath Kidson. Surely all this talk of demons is just myth and fantasy.

It's for the cinema. Well, that's just what the devil wants you to believe. That he doesn't exist. This is reality.

This is the conflict that we are in. We must take Paul's words seriously. But before I move on to my second point, let's just quickly ask, what are the devil's tactics?

[12:39] What are the devil's tactics? Well, we know from elsewhere in Scripture that he'll try to stop people from being converted. And if he can't do that, he will try to conform the church to behave like the rest of the world.

Please look at verse 13. We are told that he will strike in the evil day. And I take that to mean that there will be times when we face obvious attack, obvious pressure.

Satan may well bring war from outside the church. But according to Paul, the devil has another subtle scheme, and that is to start civil war inside the church, amongst our church family here.

See, the devil is mentioned twice by name, specifically in the letter, and I think it's very important to see it here in chapter 6 verse 11, but also in chapter 4 verse 26.

I wonder if you would turn to that, please. Paul says this, be angry and do not sin. Do not let the sun go down on your anger and give no opportunity to the devil.

[13:47] Friends, we must be alert and give no opportunity to the devil because he's going to hit us as a church in our relationships. We are God's new humanity, united in Christ.

The devil would love to tear that apart. Let me give you some practical applications to watch out for. The devil wants me to be uncontrollably angry with my wife.

Dads, the devil doesn't want you to lead your household and to teach your children about God.

Wives, the devil doesn't want you to submit to your husband.

Children, Bible class, the devil doesn't want you to submit to your parents. Workers, the devil doesn't want you to submit to your boss.

And everybody in this building who has the ability to speak, the devil wants you to spread gossip about your brothers and sisters in Christ. Whether that's talking behind people's backs or posting slander over Facebook.

[14:54] Friends, this is where the fight is on. Our everyday relationships is a war zone. This is where the battle is on. Don't let Satan get a foothold.

Second point, the church must put on God's armor. As our enemy is supernatural, we need the ultimate supernatural defense and that is the Lord himself.

Please look at verse 10. This is Paul's command. He says, finally be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. And you might think, well how do I do that Paul?

What does that look like? Well he tells us in verse 11, put on the full armor of God that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. In Cornhill they always try to get you to sum up, if you like, a big idea in one punchy sentence.

So let me try and sum up bluntly what the armor of God, what it means to put on the armor of God. I've got A and B. Put on the armor of God means A, take the gospel to heart, and B, imitate God's

character and agenda.

[16:12] Let me say that again. Putting on the armor of God involves A, taking the gospel to heart, and B, imitating God's character and his agenda.

Let me unpack these two. So A, the armor is the victory that Jesus Christ has already won for us.

Take a look at verses 14 to 17. When you strip away the armor metaphor, you're left with these.

Truth, righteousness, good news of peace, faithfulness, salvation, the word of God.

As these things are ours already when we have faith in Jesus Christ. See, in order to stand against the devil, we must first grasp hold of the victory that is ours in Christ.

You're a lot more sinful than you realize. You're a lot more saved than you realize. It is wrong to think that the gospel is only needed to get you into God's kingdom.

[17:14] The gospel is needed every day to keep us in God's kingdom. In Christ, God has given us everything we could possibly need to stand. That's why Paul uses the word stand anyway.

Did you notice that? Four times he says it. Stand. Verse 11, twice in verse 13, and once in verse 14. Stand. Not go out and conquer.

Not go out and destroy or win the final day, but stand. Stand firm in what Christ has already won for us through his death and resurrection. In fact, we must take the gospel to heart.

Well, armor point B is this. Wearing armor means imitating God's character and agenda. See, it's quite common to think that Paul is alluding to or describing a Roman soldier.

That might be a nice idea, but I don't think it's Paul's main concern. His deliberate allusion is to the Old Testament. Where God and his Messiah are described as warriors, men of war, clothed in armor, as they go out to vindicate the people of the Lord and judge his enemies.

[18:27] They're dressed up in this powerful armor. It's really bits of his character, of his righteousness. Listen to the prophet Isaiah and see if anything sounds familiar. Listen to this.

But with righteousness he shall judge the poor and decide equity for the meek of the earth. He shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked.

Righteousness shall be the belt of his waist and truthfulness the belt of his loins. Then again at the end of Isaiah describing God's Messiah says this He put on righteousness as a breastplate and a helmet of salvation on his head.

He put on garments of vengeance for clothing and wrapped himself with zeal as a cloak. So the armour of God is not just the doctrine of the gospel but it's also about how we behave as gospel people.

Imitating God's character, putting on his agenda, letting that shape our everyday behaviour, our everyday living. God's well let's briefly look at the pieces from verses 14 to 17.

[19:38] I don't have time this morning, we don't have time to look at every detail, but let's go through with a broad sweep and I'll try and apply it as we go along. First verse 14, fasten on the belt of truth.

Well this is the truth that has been revealed to us in the Bible about our Lord God. and as we learn it and stand for a minute, it will keep us, protect us from the devil's lies, from false propaganda.

And as we let the truth of God master our hearts, it must also master our behaviour. We have a new heavenly father. He is truth. His character is truthfulness.

So as his people, we are to imitate him. Our old father is the father of lies. Lying is a mark of the kingdom of darkness. We have a new father.

Imitate his likeness. As Paul says in chapter 4, put away falsehood. Let each one of you speak the truth to your neighbour. And as we belt on this truthfulness, it will keep us from making false promises.

[20:45] I wonder how many times we've said to a brother or sister, I'll pray for you. And yet we don't really pray for them. With this belt of truthfulness, we really will pray for them.

Or when describing a meeting to someone at church who was not there, we will not exaggerate the truth of what happened. We won't be saying false things about what was said.

We will be a truthful people like our heavenly father. Then, verse 14, put on the breastplate of righteousness. When Satan fills Christians with false guilt, reminding us of every time that we fail, every sin that we've committed, we must remember that there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ.

In Christ, we have a righteous status before God. And just as soldiers want to hold their ground in battle, to defend our ground, we also want to defend our ground by imitating God's righteousness in

our behavior.

Think of a young Christian who is put on righteousness, makes a conscious decision to stop getting drunk. Or an older Christian, maybe recently retired, has discovered the internet, and because they have put on righteousness, they make sure that the computer has an internet adult protection filter, which stops unhelpful websites being opened up.

[22 : 18] Then, verse 15, Paul talks about our footwear. readiness given by the good news, the gospel of peace. The foundation for every Christian, for our feet, is that in Jesus Christ, through faith in him, we now have peace with God and peace with one another.

And again, we're to let God's character and agenda master our lives. Paul, I think, has two things in mind. Firstly, as he says back in chapter 4, verse 32, we are to be kind to one another, tender hearted, forgiving one another as God and Christ forgave you.

And it's so easy to hold grudges, isn't it? It's so easy to build dividing walls of hostility amongst God's people. Paul says, if we have our feet ready with the good news of peace, by imitating God, we'll be quick to forgive one another, eager to maintain our unity and peace that we have in Christ. But I think Paul's main concern is quite simply, we must be ready to share the gospel. He's alluding to Isaiah 52, where God sent his messenger out to proclaim the good news of salvation.

And we have to follow that agenda. It's quite a paradox, actually. The church that is armoured up to fight is the church that is ready and quick to proclaim the gospel of peace.

[23 : 44] The church that is ready to fight is the one that is ready to share the gospel of peace. Then verse 16, in all circumstances, take up the shield of faith.

This could be really translated as take up the shield of the faithfulness of Jesus Christ. God the Son, the Messiah, he was totally obedient to God, the Father, during his mission here on earth. He always trusted in the Father for strength and for victory. At the end of the day, it's God's fight. He is in control. That is what faith is. And it's Christ's faithfulness that shields us.

Those of you who could spend more than two days in my company know that I love to imitate Bob Fowle. Oh dear. But I'm not going to do that, although I just have. Sorry, Bob.

But my favourite Bob Fowle quote of all time is something along the lines of this. Bob says, I don't understand people who make such a huge emphasis of their own faith.

[24 : 50] My faith is weak. My faith is fickle. And that's so true. You show the devil your own faith, then you're going to take a beating.

But if we present the devil with the faithfulness of our Lord Jesus Christ, then Satan's fiery darts will not impose us a threat. God. Then verse 17, the helmet of salvation.

I don't know what will go through your head on Monday morning, tomorrow morning, as you drag yourself out of bed to face another week of toil, another week of hard work.

The last thing that comes into my head is that one day, all those who are in Jesus Christ will stand before God face to face, holy and blameless.

That is a certain hope. For all those who are in Jesus Christ, they will stand before the God who made them, holy and blameless. That is your salvation.

[25 : 51] We are saved from the wrath to come. We must guard our thinking when Satan fires doubts at us and chucks doubts into our heads.

And again, this is to affect our behavior. Again, I think Paul simply has in mind that we are ready to share the message of salvation. As a church and as individuals, we are ready to share something good about the Lord Jesus with someone who doesn't know him.

Well, then verse 17, the sword of the spirit, which is the word of God. Notice that this is the only thing that is used for an attack in the metaphor. And it indeed was the weapon of choice for the Messiah.

How many times do we read in the Gospels, time after time, of Jesus defeating the forces of evil just by the power of his words? And it's the same power for us today.

He's given us his written word. Listen to John Stott. He says this, still today, God's written word is his sword, for he still uses it to cut through people's defenses, to prick their consciences and to stab them awake spiritually.

[27 : 07] We, that's the church, must therefore never be ashamed to use it. God's word must be in the driving seat of our lives as individuals and as a church family.

for preaching, teaching, rebuking, training in righteousness and evangelism. Never be ashamed of the Gospel. Well friends, that is the armor of God.

We are to put it on and wear it with confidence. Take the Gospel to heart and imitate God's character, his agenda. That is how to successfully stand in these last days.

Well briefly, my last point, point three, the church must pray for God's people.

The church must pray for God's people. Christians are to watch out for one another and to pray for one another in the battle. One of the great things about being a Christian is that you can pray about all things.

[28 : 14] But how often do we ask God to help us with these things, with battle matters? Paul wants the church to be a prayerful and watchful people.

You'll notice the repetition of the word all in verse 18. Please look at verse 18. Let me read it.

Praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication.

To that end, keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints and also for me.

Praying at all times, not just now and again, not just on a Sunday, but praying at all times, not just for some Christians that we like, but praying for all Christians, all those who are united in the Spirit, all people.

We all have a responsibility to pray for one another, not just here in Glasgow or in Scotland, but throughout the world. all those who are caught up in this same conflict.

In verse 18, prayer in the Spirit must not be read out of context. See, having just told the church that they are to take the sword of the Spirit, which is God's Word, prayer in the Spirit must simply mean prayer that has been directed and has been shaped by the revealed will of God in the Bible.

[29 : 38] It's prayer that's concerned with God's thoughts. There's that helpful phrase, isn't it? Thinking God's thoughts after him. We are to pray about the battle.

And having just told the church this is what they are to pray like, Paul models in verse 19 this type of prayer, prayer that is shaped by the gospel. See, Paul is in chains.

Paul's in jail. And notice what his prayer request is for. It's not for his release. It's not for his self-esteem. It's not that his human rights would be met.

It's astonishing really, isn't it? He asked that God would help him be bold to preach the gospel. God would help him use the sword of the spirit. And that the gospel would advance.

God's kingdom would be built up. Let me say again, one of the great things about being a Christian is that you can pray about all things, can't you? To your heavenly father.

[30 : 37] But how often do we ask God to help us with these things? With the battle? I wonder what dictates your prayers. I wonder when was the last time you prayed that the gospel would advance here in Glasgow or in Scotland or in the world?

How often do we ask God to help us in our struggle to put off the old sinful nature and put on the new man of grace? How often do we pray for opportunities to share the gospel with those around us?

How often do we pray for our leadership? Those of us in ministry? Someone asked Spurgeon, what is the secret to your ministry? And Spurgeon replied, my people pray for me.

Friends, the church is at war with God's enemy. This is reality. The church must put on God's armor, take the gospel to heart, imitate his character, his agenda.

And the church must pray for God's people. Let's pray. Our loving Lord and heavenly Father, we thank you that in the gospel of Jesus Christ, you have given us everything we need to stand against the schemes of the devil.

[31 : 56] Father, we do indeed ask for your help and protection, that when the devil tempts us, we will be already dressed in your armor. help us to imitate you and your character and our behavior and not to give Satan any opportunity to break apart your church, the household of faith.

Lord, we especially pray for those who are in the Apostle Paul situation, those who are in chains for believing in you. We pray that they would remember their eternal security in Christ and that they would be bold to preach the gospel.

Lord, help us here as a church, as a family, to be bold in preaching the gospel. We pray all these things in Jesus' precious name. Amen.