

Ephesians 6:10-20

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[0 : 00] Well, we're going to turn out to our Bibles, and Euan Dodds is going to be preaching to us this morning shortly. And we're going to be looking at Ephesians, and the last chapter of Ephesians, chapter 6.

It's page 979, if you have one of our church Bibles. A very well-known passage, coming right as it does at the end of Paul's letter to the Ephesians.

And after Paul has expounded the wonderful gospel and the fact that God is recreating, through his people, a glorious future to display his glory in all the universe, he's applied that to how we are to live now as the people of God.

Through all the earthly relationships that we have, you'll see there, it's all about walking in love. Husbands and wives, children and parents, slaves and masters, employers and employees.

And then at chapter 6, verse 10, finally, he reminds us of something that we need to know about, that lies behind all the strife, all the difficulties, all the struggles we have in all of these areas in our earthly lives.

[1 : 19] And that is that there's something behind that in the heavenly realms. So Ephesians 6, verse 10, Paul says, 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.

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 extinguish 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.

[2 : 44] To that end, keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints, and also for me, that words may be given to me, in 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. May God bless to us this, his word. Let's pray together. Father, we ask that as we gather in your name, that we may be strong in you, and in the strength of your might.

Amen. Martin Lloyd-Jones said that these verses are some of the most important verses in the Bible.

So important he fact, he wrote two books about them. Not the record, though. I think William Gurnall the Puritan wrote 1,700 pages on these ten verses.

I'll speak for about 25 minutes today. Now, I've never been to the country of Tibet, but the people I know who've lived there, or who've worked there, tell me that it is a place of massive idolatry, superstition, fear of the demonic, sort of involvement in occultic practices.

[4 : 10] And a friend of mine's mother was involved to some degree in translating the Bible into Tibetan. And the story really is quite remarkable.

It's told in a book called God Spoke Tibetan, and it took over 90 years to get the scriptures into Tibetan. It reads like an adventure story.

The first missionaries couldn't decide which language to put it in. The people spoke very different languages. It took them 23 years when they'd found a language to complete it. They had a paper copy, but there was no metallic Tibetan printer, so they had to write these copies by hand.

The war broke out. One of the manuscripts was brought to England. The cathedral it was kept in was bombed. The manuscript survived the bombing, but after the war, the ink was found to have run over all the pages.

Things were taken back to Asia. People involved in the project got sick. People died. People were caught up in war zones. There were all sorts of problems until eventually 90 years later they got it finished.

[5 : 18] And one writer commenting on this book says, Why did it take so long? In part, the delay was because the devil was so actively opposed to the work.

Tibet was the devil's kingdom where his power was actively displayed. It took 90 years because the entire country was in the grip of Satan. And any attempt by Christians to translate the scriptures into that language was met at every turn by opposition and disappointment.

Well, Ephesians 6 tells us quite plainly that as Christians, we are in a battle. We wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, the authorities, the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.

Now, you might say, as we begin, well, just a minute, you know, this is the 21st century, it's not the first, and here you are talking about demons and angels and Satan.

It seems a little bit outdated, doesn't it? We've got the Apple store down the road, and here you are in the Tron church speaking about the devil. And many people think that way. But a great many people think differently.

[6 : 34] And it's interesting that as you leave Europe and travel to Asia, to Africa, to different parts of the world, most people there would still claim some belief in the supernatural, some belief in spirits, some fear of those same spirits.

We see it when we travel, but we see it in Britain as well. In the past week, I've been in different restaurants, groups from Asia coming to establish restaurants, and in each case, there has been a shrine with an idol to protect the restaurant from the supernatural forces of evil.

So many people throughout the world still consider this a very real issue. In fact, it's still a major issue in Europe. France is nominally a Roman Catholic country.

80% of people would claim to be Roman Catholic, Catholic, and yet there are four times as many full-time paid clairvoyants as there are Roman Catholic priests. The clairvoyant industry in France is worth 3.2 billion euro a year.

The country from which the Enlightenment grew is in fact a hotbed of superstition. And we're not much better in a few weeks, of course. We have a psychic coming to the concert hall in that main auditorium that can seat almost 1,500 people, no doubt sold out, people coming to hear a psychic.

[7 : 54] So these words have enduring relevance. And they had great relevance for the Ephesians. In chapter 19 of the Acts we find Paul arriving in Ephesus and at the very beginning of his ministry he performs an exorcism.

And that becomes known to all the residents of Asia. People see the power there is in the name of Jesus and they recognize that they need to follow him. And there's this wonderful scene where those who practice the magic arts, those who dabble in their cult bring their magic books and they burn them in public.

And we're told that those books were worth 50,000 pieces of silver. I don't know quite what that would be in our current exchange but it sounds like an awful lot, doesn't it?

50,000 pieces of silver. And then of course there's a revolution in Ephesus. There was a great temple there to Artemis this goddess of fertility and there was a temple there was a sacred meteorite that had fallen to the earth and Ephesus was the center of this cult.

And there's a revolution because as people become Christians of course business for the temple business for the idol makers goes down and the people bring charges against Paul as he turns people away from idolatry and superstition and fear to follow the living God.

[9 : 15] And that was the message he preached. He preached that though these Ephesians were dead in sin and trespass following the prince of the power of the air in his great love and because of his great mercy God had made them alive together with Christ seating them with him in the heavenly places.

It was by grace they had been saved through faith saved from idolatry saved from superstition saved from fear saved from hopelessness. And so Paul writes to remind them that though they have been saved they face a battle a spiritual battle each day of their lives individually and corporately but God has not left them alone to fight this battle by themselves he has put at their disposal all that they need to stand firm in the Lord and all that they need to advance the gospel in their place.

So we want to look at these verses together really under two headings the first one it's war out there the reality of spiritual warfare and secondly the secret of standing firm firstly it's war out there you see the Ephesians had turned away from the power of Satan and they turned to the power of God they changed sides but the consequence of that of course was that the forces of darkness wanted to win them back in Australia in the 1960s there was a famous defection of a Russian spy and he sought immunity with the Australians but then one day two KGB officers turned up and they took his wife onto a plane hoping to take her back to Russia well it's a bit like that in Ephesus at one point they had followed the prince of the power of the air they'd gone to his temples they'd worshipped at his shrines but now they worshipped the true and the living God and they followed instead his son the Lord Jesus Christ and so Satan seeks to win them back to win back those who'd been rescued from his sinister power they are in a battle but verse 10 tells us the Lord hadn't left them be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might put on the whole armour of God that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil well what were those schemes well throughout the New Testament we're given a glimpse of the designs the wiles of Satan in his commentary

Peter O'Brien helpfully lists various references to them Satan distorts Christian teaching seeking to lead people off into heresy into error Satan hinders the work of gospel ministry bringing opposition discouragement disappointment across our path and Satan persecutes believers in Revelation we're told that the devil was to cast some of them into prison but it does seem to be there are two particular tactics he employs one writer says this tactics of intimidation and insinuation alternate in Satan's plan campaign he plays both the bully and the beguiler force and fraud form his chief offensive against the camp of the saints practiced by turns Satan seeks either to lead Christians away from the true worship of God by false teaching or to force them away from the true worship of God by persecution by making their lives so painful the easiest thing is to turn away from Christ

God's purpose in Ephesians we're told is to unite all things in heaven and earth together united in Christ a great multitude worshipping around his throne Satan's purpose is to wreck that plan and to lead people into worship of anything else but the living God but as Paul reminds the Ephesians he is a defeated enemy he tells them to stand firm in God's strength and in chapter 1 verse 19 we're given a glimpse of how great that strength is Paul prays that they might know the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe according to the working of his great might that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places far above all rule and authority and power and dominion and above every name that is named not only in this age but also in the one to come they wrestle against the powers and authorities and yet

[14 : 06] God has shown his might in raising Christ from the dead and in seating him above every authority in the heavenly places that's what we see isn't it in the book of Revelation Bob has been preaching through that in Revelation 12 and 13 we see this conflict in heaven we see the woman giving birth to a child and the dragon symbolically Satan seeking to attack the child but he is taken up to heaven to God and his throne and the devil realizing that he can no longer hurt the Messiah hurt Christ begins to turn his attention to his people and knowing that his time is short he begins to persecute and to harm the followers of this child it's the same here in Ephesians Jesus is seated above every authority and so the dragon Satan seeks to persecute and harm his people in his stead Satan is a great enemy but he is a defeated enemy and Jesus himself reminds us that unless a stronger man binds a strong man he cannot plunder his goods

John tells us that he who is in us is greater than he who is in the world so often the way isn't it you remember Elisha and his servants surrounded by that great Assyrian army and they trembled at the sight of their opponents and Elisha pleaded oh God please open his eyes and the servants saw on the mountains these great chariots of fire and he heard the words that those who are for us are greater than those who are against us and although the Ephesian believers face the spiritual battle he who is for them is much greater than he who is against them so they are in a war but they are on the winning side so these are very sobering words I suppose not words we necessarily read anywhere else God is working his purpose out but Satan seeks to wreck that purpose to cause believers to fall to lead them into sin to lead them into error to turn them away to worship anything else but the true and the living

God so what does that mean well firstly it means that as Christians we need to be aware of this we need to understand that though the society around us pursues comfort and ease as Christians we can never do that we are involved in a battle against the forces of evil and against the powers of darkness the singer Keith Green had a very I suppose amusing song a few years ago called no one believes in me anymore and he plays the role of the devil and he sings this song about how easy it is to get away with stuff because no one believes in him anymore well Paul doesn't want us to be unaware and he tells us that we face a battle and secondly of course that means we shouldn't be surprised if we face difficulty and discouragement and disappointment in our lives and in our Christian service the devil hates the sound of the gospel and he wants to frustrate it at every turn he wants to frustrate believers we mustn't be surprised therefore when things go wrong

I remember waiting for a plane in Luton airport with an old man who'd spent many decades preaching the gospel in different countries and he was explaining his latest project and he said to me of course I expect everything to go wrong everything that can go wrong will go wrong why?

because he was proclaiming the gospel and he knew the devil would seek to oppose him at every turn but thirdly we must remember that Christ is on the throne what Satan intends for evil God can use for good and Christ is greater than the devil he who is in us is greater than he who is in the world Ephesians chapter 1 verse 11 Paul tells us that God works out all things according to the counsel of his will these people struggled for decades to get the bible into tibetan but in the end it was done and the bible was able to go into that country and be read and studied by the people God works out all things according to the counsel of his will so be strong in his strength and put on his armor and the armor of God has of course attracted great interest as to what it actually means Bunyan in his book

[18 : 47] The Pilgrim Progress has Christian quite literally wearing the armor and he travels around wearing this and somebody throws a fiery dart and he holds up a shield and he takes allegory quite realistically and has Christian wearing it but what does it actually mean well what is the purpose of the armor I think is the important question four times we're told that we have to stand verse 11 put on the whole armor that you may be able to stand verse 13 take up the whole armor that you may be able to withstand in the evil day and having done all to stand firm verse 14 stand therefore so God's will is that his people stand in the face of opposition Satan's desire is to cause them to fall God wants them to stand and therefore he provides for them armor but what does it represent well some people have seen in the armor an allusion to Isaiah and in

Isaiah he describes prophetically the Messiah in chapter 11 we're told the Messiah will in verse 5 righteousness shall be the belt of his waist and faithfulness the belt of his loins we have this picture of a powerful figure but one characterized by righteousness in Isaiah 59 we have this image of God himself coming to save his people verse 17 says he that is God put on righteousness as a blessed plate and a helmet of salvation on his head he put on garments of vengeance for clothing and wrapped himself in zeal as a cloak we have this image therefore of God as the warrior battling the forces of darkness coming to bring salvation to his people and as he does so he cloaks himself in armour and it is that same armour which he gives to his people in order that they might stand firm against those same forces of darkness that's quite possible

I think that is a genuine illusion but I think the armour is connected in fact to the whole business of putting on the new life in chapter 4 verse 22 Paul commands the believers put off your old self which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires verse 24 and to put on the new self created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness we put off the old self we put on the new self when we become a Christian and part of that is putting on the armour of God and the various terms that are used the belt of truth the breastplate of righteousness shoes on the feet put on the readiness by the gospel of peace the shield of faith the helmet of salvation all these terms have already occurred in the course of the letter so for example in Ephesians 1 13 we're told that in

Christ you also when you heard the word of truth the gospel of the gospel of salvation were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit chapter 5 verse 8 for at one time you were darkness but now you are light in the Lord walk as children of the light for the fruit of the light is found in all that is good and right righteous and true so the armour of God I suppose is a visual illustration of showing what it means to put on the new self to put on truth to put on righteousness to put on an eagerness to share the gospel to put on saving faith and as Christians that's what we're to do we're to put on truth in the specific sense of coming to believe the truth of the gospel but also in the broader sense of our speech and our conduct being marked by truth and integrity we're to put on the breastplate of righteousness the righteousness that comes from

God that is by faith and not by works but also to pursue righteousness in our daily living right living before God we're to put on the shoes of peace of course we have peace with God through faith in our Lord Jesus Christ but we are to seek to share that hope and that the message of salvation we are to take up the shield of faith to trust in Christ for our salvation but day to day to lean on God in humble dependence and in trust putting on the new self putting on the armour of God and that's so important because in verse 27 of chapter 4 Paul says to us give no opportunity to the devil he doesn't want there to be any chinks in the armour and in that passage we can see that we can give an opportunity we can give a foothold to the devil by our conduct put away falsehood verse 25 verse 26 be angry and do not sin verse 28 let the thief no longer steal verse 29 let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths the devil is seeking an them back under his sway you've maybe been following the news in

[24 : 23] Germany about the prime minister wolf and he took a loan from a wife of a business woman and German paper billed threatened to expose this and he phoned them up and left a very threatening message on their answer phone claiming there would be war if they published this story well that was a foolish thing to do because he there was a chink in his armour and they are now exploiting that and there's these big debates in Germany about whether he should resign but Paul says do not give the devil a foothold in your language in your conduct in your anger in your integrity in your financial dealings give him no cause to gain a foothold in your life put on the full armour of God and importantly of course verse 17 take up the sword of the spirit which is the word of God when

Christ was tempted by the devil what did he do three times he was tempted and three times he responded to him with the words of scripture and Paul here says the Bible the word of God is the sword of the spirit the means by which we can resist the devil and fend him off in John Piper's church they have memory verses which people are encouraged to read and they call them fighter verses because when people come under temptation when they face persecution they have these verses already memorized and they are able to fight to take the sword in their hands and to fight the evil one through a knowledge of these verses so the question we need to ask and the question I need to ask myself is are we wearing this armor daily are we putting off the old man and putting on the new self are we putting on the armor of truth of righteousness of faith are we wearing shoes shorn with the gospel of peace are we putting on our heads the helmet of salvation and are we picking up the sword of the spirit or are we leaving it to gather dust in the armory as we face trials as we face temptation as we face opposition are we wearing the armor of

God and not giving the devil a foothold in our lives but of course weapons aren't always defensive and as we move from verse 17 to verse 20 Paul seems to take things on an offensive tack English evangelist Michael Green in his recent book describes one time he did a university mission in Cambridge and the mission was going okay people were coming you know the talks were going all right but nothing much was happening as he proclaimed the gospel and the final evening before the last talk one of the team had a dream and in the dream he had this image of Michael Green in a trench in and various other people sitting with him and as Michael Green went over the top in the trench everyone else just sat there eating their dinner playing cards talking to one another and he didn't quite know what it meant and he told this to

Michael and Michael immediately realised the problem he realised that he had been standing up and proclaiming the gospel but he had been doing it alone and in his own strength people hadn't been praying for him nobody had been interceding as he was speaking and in verse 17 to 20 Paul holds these two ideas together the preaching of the word and the prayers of the saints to show Christians advancing against the forces of darkness verse 18 he says that be sure to be 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 we notice four times the word all is repeated pray at all times not just on a Sunday morning with all prayer and supplication to that end keep alert with all perseverance making supplication for all the saints if the

Christian is caught in a battle then he or she is a member of an army and we need to be praying for our brothers and sisters who throughout the world are facing the same battle praying for them at all times being faithful and consistent in prayer with all supplication with all perseverance keeping going through long months and long years making supplication for all the saints not just ourselves or those known to us but our brothers and sisters in different places one writer in his commentary told the story of a church that never had a prayer meeting and he asked them why that was and they said well we don't really need to pray for anything because everyone in the church is a Christian and we all have houses and we all have plenty of money and we all have food on our table and we all have very large families we just give thanks to God for all he has given us the preacher rebuked them for being perhaps a little bit self centred

[29 : 50] Paul says no pray for all the saints at this present our Christians in different countries are facing very great problems we've spoken today of Egypt of Iran the news has focused a lot on North Korea recently these are all regimes which seek to oppress Christians which seek to persecute them which are very much in the thrall of Satan and the spiritual forces of evil we need to pray for our brothers and sisters that they will stand that they will know the strength of the Lord the strength of his might and the power of the gospel for salvation and finally verse 19 we need to pray for the proclamation of the gospel Paul says pray also for me that words may be given to me in 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 twice he repeats the word boldly and I think the sort of meaning is a mixture of boldly as in fearlessly but also as in clearly he wants people to understand what he is saying but he wants to have the courage to declare to them the whole counsel of God Paul prays for the proclamation of the gospel one writer says the devil fears and hates the gospel because it is God's power to rescue people from his tyranny both us who have received it and those with whom we share it Paul realizes as he shares his faith with his friends his family his colleagues as he goes out into the streets as here he sits in prison whenever he is sharing the gospel he is taking a stand he's lifting his head above the parapet and assaulting the forces of Satan seeking to rescue men and women from his tyranny and so he says I need your prayers

I need to make it clear I need to be bold in proclaiming it I need your prayers that the gospel will go forth and will liberate people in this battle and friends that's the wonderful thing isn't it about being a Christian we can look at the world and we can see all the darkness and all the evil and we can shake our heads and sigh and think oh it's terrible isn't it but the Lord has put into each of our hands the power to do something about that when John Wesley first went to Newcastle he was appalled he said we got there in time for dinner we had something to eat and then we went out and I've never seen anything like it drinking and cursing even children swearing in the streets he was just appalled by what he saw but he didn't shake his head and go back to his inn he said to those around him surely this place is ripe for him who came not to call the righteous but sinners to repentance and he went into the streets and he began to share he began to sing psalms and gather a crowd and he began to preach to them and he realized that yes we're in a battle and yes we need to be defended against the flaming darts of

Satan but God has put into our hand the sword of his spirit and he's told us to make progress in that campaign and to advance in that battle and to go over the top and to rescue men and women from the tyranny of Satan and the hopelessness of a world without God prayer and proclamation in the advance of the gospel so what should we do well we should remember to pray for all the saints throughout all the world at all times and to do so in perseverance we need to pray for one another as I stand I can see hundreds of people and I know that each of us faces struggles and our lives struggles with sin but also spiritual struggles we need to pray that God will strengthen us that he will cause us to stand that we might not fall into disappointment we need to pray for each other in our work of evangelism in our homes again our families perhaps the people we meet on buses or in restaurants we need to pray for people we know involved in preaching leading

Bible study groups teaching Sunday school pray that words will be given to them that they might proclaim clearly and boldly the gospel which is the power of God for salvation for all who will believe well there's much more in these verses probably 1700 pages more but Paul wants us not to be ignorant he wants us to be aware that there is a war out there but he wants to know that God is for us and not against us and he wants us to know the secret of standing to trust not in our strength but in God's mighty power to lean on him to put on the armor he gives us to pray at all times in his spirit and to proclaim the gospel of his son who is greater than all let's pray together father we thank you for these words we thank you that because of your great love and mercy you have raised us and seated us with

[35 : 28] Christ in the heavenly places and Lord we thank you for the inheritance we have in him and for your spirit who is a guarantee of that inheritance we pray Lord that as we continue in this age in this life to face the fiery darts of Satan the onslaught of the forces of darkness that we might know your strength and your might helping us to the armour you give us and take up regularly the sword of your spirit to be faithful and persevering in prayer and to seek to proclaim that same gospel to others we encounter we thank you Lord that he who is in us is greater than he who is in the world that your son is the king of kings and the lord of lords and we pray this week as we go our separate ways you will strengthen and keep us protect us from falling and uphold us in your sight and so we thank you for your marvellous grace for your wonderful power and your amazing love in Jesus name Amen