

We are Soldiers NOT Tourists Ephesians 6:10-18

It was late October of 1944 when an officer commanding a platoon of American soldiers received a call from headquarters. Over the radio, this captain learned his unit was being ordered to recapture a small French city from the Nazis-and he learned something else from headquarters as well. For weeks, French resistance fighters had risked their lives to gather information about the German fortifications in that city, and they had smuggled this information out to the Allies.

The French Underground's efforts had provided the Americans with something worth its weight in gold: a detailed map of the city. It wasn't just a map with the names of major streets and landmarks; it showed specific details of the enemy's defensive positions. Indeed, the map even identified shops and buildings where German soldiers bunked or where a machine-gun nest or a sniper had been stationed. Block by block, the Frenchmen gave an accounting of the German units and the gun emplacements they manned. For a captain who was already concerned about mounting casualty lists, receiving such information was an answer to prayer. Although the outcome of the war wouldn't depend on this one skirmish, to him it meant that he wouldn't have to write as many letters to his men's parents or wives telling them their loved one had been cut down in battle.

Before the soldiers moved out to take their objective, the captain gave each man a chance to study the map. And wanting to make sure his men read it carefully, he hurriedly gave them a test covering the major landmarks and enemy strongholds. Just before his platoon moved out, the officer graded the test, and with minor exceptions every man earned a perfect score. As a direct result of having that map to follow, the men captured the city with little loss of American lives.

Nearly thirty years after this military operation took place, an army researcher heard the story and decided to base a study on it. The project began in France, where instead of a platoon of soldiers, he arranged for a group of American tourists to help him with his research. For several hours, the men and women were allowed to study the same map the soldiers had, and then they were given the same test. You can guess the results. Most of the tourists failed miserably. The reason for the difference between these two groups was obvious-motivation. Knowing their lives were on the line, the soldiers were highly motivated to learn every detail of the map. For the tourists, being in a research study provided some motivation. But most of them had nothing to lose but a little pride if they failed the test. (*The Gift of Honor*, Gary Smalley & John Trent, Ph.D. pp. 1-2).

This morning we have a heightened awareness of the dangers we all face in the spiritual war we are in. We again sense that our spiritual lives are on the line and the honor of our king is on the line. We have new motivation to listen carefully to our commander, Jesus Christ, as to how we are to fight so that we can STAND in the war that we are in. We have new motivation to read our maps carefully AS SOLDIERS RATHER THAN TOURISTS.

So I would like you to consider yourselves soldiers this morning, in the most important and deadly war that has ever been fought in the history of the world. Our meeting this morning is to get oriented to this war.

Structure

The first exhortation of the paragraph is a command "be strong in the Lord" in verse 10. Paul then specifies what this entails by two more commands- "putting on" the whole armor of God in verse 11 and "taking up" the whole armor of God in verse 13. Paul then tells us specifically how we do this: by fastening

on or putting on the different pieces of the armor. So, given this structure, Paul is very obviously concerned with telling us HOW succeed in this spiritual battle. **There are spiritual things that we have to do.** This fact serves as a corrective for two common errors:

Two errors corrected by looking at the structure

1. “Let go and let God. Just sit back because God is sovereign. God has called you and justified you therefore he will glorify you so don’t worry about exerting effort in the Christian life.”

Correction: Paul COMMANDS us to put on the armor and then tells us HOW to do it. He says we must fight. We must pray. There are things we must DO or we lose the spiritual battle, align ourselves with the devil, and face the wrath of God.

2. “It is all about my effort. Just do it. Just give me the list.”

Correction: The structure- command followed by the “how to” raises this problem of just doing a list of things. Get’er done! But as we look beyond the structure to the nature of the command we find that Paul tells us to be strong “in the Lord” and to pray “in the spirit.” We don’t put on our armor but we put on God’s armor. The things we must do are “spiritual” and therefore out of the realm of our abilities to just do it.

Paul calls us to action, but it is a humble and utterly God dependent action.

Context of Ephesians 6:10-18: It is the climax of the argument of the entire letter.

Notice that what comes before this passage are instructions on how to live in the various relationships we are all in every day of our lives. This fact puts the humdrum everyday life issues of loving your wife, respecting your husband, obeying your parents, lovingly instructing your children, being a good employee, and walking wisely that Paul has already spoken about in the book of Ephesians into a cosmic perspective. This is the grand battle between God and Satan and we are in the middle of it everyday. Paul is telling us that our mundane lives are NOT mundane! Every choice we make concerning how we live has cosmic significance and eternity hangs in the balance.

1. General command

10 Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might.

1. Let me state two obvious things here. Paul assumes that we are not naturally strong.
2. Paul wants us to put our efforts towards being strong in the Lord rather than in ourselves.

We are going to find out in this passage exactly how to do this. But what God has been teaching me about this is that if you are not constantly thinking about this; if you are not constantly seeking to humble yourself and recognize your own weakness and your desperate need for the infinite strength of God to fight this spiritual war, then you are in danger.

2. More specific command

11a Put on the whole armor of God

The whole armor is a complete set of weapons and protective clothing used for offensive and defensive warfare worn by a foot soldier. The emphasis on “whole” here and in 13a is to tell us that this spiritual war that we are in is so deadly that we must go out FULLY ARMED. We’ll talk more about the importance of putting this on in a few minutes.

3. Objective of the command

11b that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil.

There is a war on and you must stand rather than fall. There is a real devil that exists and you must stand against him rather than be defeated by him. I have two points to share with you here.

1. I believe in the devil as much as I believe in Jesus. He is as real as Jesus. That is very important. Jesus came to destroy the works of the devil. You cannot have a healthy understanding of, belief in, or relationship with Jesus unless you also believe in the devil. They are both equally real. But you must have a passionate hatred for the devil and a fear of the devil and a passion love for Jesus and a robust trust in Jesus.
2. I believe that we are in danger of falling (both into sin and falling away!). If you do not obey the commands of this passage you will be defeated by the devil. You must persevere. The way that you persevere is by being strong in the Lord and by putting on the full armor of God. Paul is commanding us because there is very real danger. Remember Paul lived with this danger in mind as well...1 Corinthians 9:24-29. Are you running the race? Are you strong in the Lord and daily putting on the whole armor of God? Or are you confident in your own strength and running your life on autopilot.

4. Reason why you should obey this command

12 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.

The reason we must be strong in the Lord and put on the armor of God, is that our adversaries, the devil and his demons, are so much more powerful than we are. I wish I could make you FEEL this. There are three things you must believe here.

1. You must believe that the devil is real
2. You must believe that the devil is powerful
3. You must believe that the you are so, so, so weak
4. You must believe that God is more powerful than the devil and that He is 100% for you.

5. Restatement of the more specific command

13a Therefore take up the whole armor of God,

This is the second command. It is something that we must do. Paul says it twice. He wants us to see this command as a responsibility that we **MUST** carry out. We are in danger if we don't.

The following story was in the news in Orlando January 15th 2007

“Two men are being held without bond after a Florida Highway Patrol trooper was shot and killed last week.

Sgt. X stopped a vehicle on U.S. Highway 27 near Lake Placid Friday afternoon. Investigators said one of the men inside shot the officer in the chest and took off, News reported.

His visitation was held Monday evening at the United Methodist Church in Lake Placid.

The officer was not wearing a bulletproof vest. Modern-day vests are designed to stop a bullet fired from a handgun, even at relatively close range, as happened on Friday.

But Florida Highway Patrol policy does not require that troopers wear the vest all the time.

Police and sheriff's deputies often say that it's best to be prepared for the worst on the streets because no traffic stop or arrest is routine.

According to the policy of Florida's Highway Patrol, body armor or bulletproof vests are not required.

"Members are strongly encouraged to wear issued body armor at all times," the manual says.

"Members who do not wear body armor shall have it available for immediate use." ***

"More times than not, the vest is going to save someone's life," said Sue Livoti of the Marion County Sheriff's Department.

Even so, we checked with every major law enforcement agency in Central Florida and found that almost all of them have bulletproof vest policies similar to the Florida Highway Patrol's.

*"They are issued a vest as part of their standard equipment, and if they choose not to wear on a regular basis, they are **required to sign a waiver******," Livoti said.*

In fact, every agency with this policy points to one major factor in creating it -- the environment and the fact officers must work outside in Central Florida.

*"Unfortunately, because of the weather, **how hot it gets around here ****...**"*

(<http://www.wesh.com/news/10754887/detail.html>)

1. Body armor will do you no good unless you put it on.
2. Having it "available for immediate use" will do you no good if someone is shooting at you. Spiritually speaking, Satan is ALWAYS shooting at you. Carrying a bible with you but not reading it and digesting it; Knowing about Christ, but not putting Him on or living a life of radical dependence on Him; knowing that you should pray but not getting down on your knees and crying out to God for forgiveness and strength, will do you NO good.
3. Putting on the vest is an inconvenience. Wearing it is hard. Many officers did not wear their vests because it was hot. How about you? What is your excuse? Are you too busy? Are you too happy- the sun is shining and you have too much fun to have this summer?

In order for these vests to do any good for the police officers, they must "TAKE UP" the bullet proof vests. They must put them on. They must put them on daily. If they don't put them on they are in massive danger. We must take up the armor of God every day, every moment. If we do not, we are vulnerable to Satan's attacks.

Are you living this way? Do you wake up knowing that you are in a war? Do you run for God's Word? Do you run to Him in prayer before you go into the battle each day?

6. Restatement of the Objective of the command

13b that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm.

The goal is to stand rather than fall. Again, this is a restatement. Paul not only thought it was important enough to say, but he said it twice! Let us hear him. It will take every ounce of effort from every one of us to be able to stand firm...to endure to the end. This is a battle that will entail you doing "all" or everything that you possibly can in order to withstand the attacks from the devil who wants you to join him in hell.

7. How to obey the command

v. 14-18

14 Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, **15** and, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace. **16** In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one; **17** and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, **18** 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 saint

Things we must put on to fight against Satan and his servants:

1. Truth
2. Righteousness
3. Readiness (Given by the gospel of peace)
4. Faith
5. Salvation
6. Word of God (Gospel)
7. Praying in the Spirit
8. Alertness with all perseverance
9. Praying for all the saints

We don't have time to unpack every one of these, although that would be greatly to our profit. But I will actually try to very briefly talk about seven of these. Truth, Readiness, Faith, The Word of God, Praying in the Spirit, Alertness with perseverance, and praying for the saints.

1. Truth

This refers both to the truth of God revealed in the gospel and speaking truth to one another. That is, living in and living out the gospel as it relates to truth. Are you telling yourself the truth about your sin? Are you telling yourself the truth about the Gospel? Are you telling other people about your sin? We must walk in the light by confessing our sins to one another (James 5:16) and to Christ. If we do not walk in this light, the light of truth, we will walk in darkness and the evil one will overcome us. Are you walking in the light by wearing the belt of truth? Are you confessing your sins to God and are you confessing your sins, your deepest darkest sins, to another believer who prays for you and with you?

2. Readiness (given by the gospel of peace)

This readiness is as shoes on our feet. I think the primary meaning of this readiness is evangelism. Look at a parallel in Colossians 4 and verse 6. It also comes after an exhortation to put on the new man and instructions on how to live as married people, parents and children, and slaves and masters. He writes, "Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person." This readiness of the gospel that is on our feet moves out into the world. Paul is exhorting us to live in a proactive evangelistic state. But I think it is more than that. I think this readiness is a willingness and a boldness to speak about Jesus to lost people and saved people. A willingness to pray with others in the name of Christ and a willingness to verbally proclaim the power of the Gospel.

3. Faith

C.S. Lewis writes, "You never know how much you really believe anything until its truth or falsehood becomes a matter of life and death. It is easy to say you believe a rope to be strong as long as you are merely using it to cord a box. But suppose you had to hang by that rope over a precipice. Wouldn't you then first discover how much you really trusted it?" (C. S. Lewis, A Grief Observed)

God has precious promises that we are not supposed to simply “be aware of.” We must TRUST or BELIEVE God for them. That is, we are supposed to feed our souls with these promises and lean on them daily. The promise I constantly lean on is Psalm 46:1-2...I step out doing what I am afraid to do fighting to trust God that He really is my VERY PRESENT strength. Then he removes fear.

4. The Word of God

Faith and the word of God go together. Read Scripture and memorize it. Get it into you. Not as some sort of ritual that you have to do or as something to make you better than everyone else, but as a starving man eats food or as a drowning man comes up for air. You need it and you will die without it. You hunger for it and you gasp for it. And then, just as I in weakness used this sword to conquer fear in evangelism with Psalm 46 and Matthew 28, you use it to conquer lust, greed, worldliness, unbelief, and you use it to enflame your heart towards the God you love and to commune with Him as you trust in His promises.

5. Praying in the Spirit

Paul is calling for real prayer rather than rote prayer. Praying in the Spirit means you pray as a broken sinner must cry out to God for help. Pray until you pray. Don't give up. If your heart is not broken; if your prayer times are sleepy or boring, then recognize that you are in grave danger. You are not fully realizing the war that you are in and Satan is about to eat you for lunch. Prayer is your connection with God and the channel through which you go to get help in the battle that you cannot win without His help. Pray, pray, pray.

6. Alertness with all perseverance

Here I think this is alertness to the danger and perseverance in the battle. It is very hard to be alert all the time, especially when trials and struggles and life just drags on. I love these commands to stay alert and to persevere because they make me aware that I cannot do it! I need God. It causes me to be strong “in the Lord”; depend on him and to despair of self. WAKE UP and STAY AWAKE! Enlist others to help you stay up. I remember many moons ago watching Nightmare on Elmstreet. The kids who were haunted in their dreams by the evil Freddy Crouger would burn themselves with lit cigarettes or cut their eyelids off to stay awake. They took extreme measures because of the extreme danger they were in. What about you? What are you doing to stay awake.

7. Praying for all the saints

If we are in a war to end all wars where heaven and hell hang in the balance, we must be praying for one another. Husbands and wives, are you crying out to God for one another? Are you begging God to come with power into each others lives so that you can live for Jesus rather than be destroyed by the devil? Children, are you praying for your parents, begging God to protect them from the schemes of the devil?

Conclusion

We are in a war. Our map is the Scriptures, and more precisely our map is the Gospel. WE ARE NOT TOURISTS. WE ARE SOLDIERS. The honor of our God and the eternal lives of God's people...of you and those sitting around you...hang in the balance. Get the map in your mind and in your heart. The enemy is fierce and far more powerful than you. Place all of your trust in the Lord Jesus who is mighty save. Believe in the power of His blood to cleanse you from ALL guilt and to overcome all sin in your life. Trust in his promises as you fearlessly proclaim the gospel of peace to a dying world. WAKE UP. Stay alert. Pray pray pray pray and pray. Pray for yourself and for each other.