

# *Eastertide Series: Jesus Lives, Therefore!*

## **“Stand Your Ground”**

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**Digging Deeper**

*Eastertide Series: Stand Your Ground*

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### **Background Notes**

**Key Scripture Text(s):** 2 Samuel 23:9-12; Ephesians 6:10-20; 1 Corinthians 16:13; Philippians 4:1-3

### **Introduction**

At the close of Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians, he collected several concise instructions, as he was accustomed to do. One of them urged his audience to stay the course, stand firm, not give up, and endure to the end:

<sup>13</sup> Be on your guard; stand firm in the faith; be men of courage; be strong. <sup>14</sup> Do everything in love. <sup>15</sup> You know that the household of Stephanas were the first converts in Achaia, and they have devoted themselves to the service of the saints. I urge you, brothers, <sup>16</sup> to submit to such as these and to everyone who joins in the work, and labors at it (1 Corinthians 16:13-16).

Calling others to obedience receives immense support from the vivid examples of obedient persons who are worthy of imitation. In the text above, the “household of Stephanas” admirably reinforced the practice of “devoting” oneself “to the service of the saints.” Paul’s urging that the Corinthian Christians “submit to such as these” gains traction because such persons illustrate how we go about “joining the work and laboring at it.” There is “joining” but then there is “laboring.” Joiners must become doers in order to serve the saints. Stephanas undertook his effort as a “household,” an *oikos* where the truth of the gospel was lived out “in close quarters” and therefore transparently. Others got to see what “being on guard,” “standing firm,” “being courageous,” and “being strong” looked like. Paul left no doubt that these virtues remained firmly within the Christian gospel since by practicing them they were “doing everything in love (*agapē*)” and they were doing it together: “Standing together.”

The needs of the early church required the persistent guidance of the apostles who took seriously the ongoing training of the Christian disciples, in obedience to Jesus’ original command (see Matthew 28:18-20). When the church has historically honored the practice of apostolic instruction, disciples grow into fruitful followers of Jesus “who join the work and labor at it.” In yet another example, Paul speaks to the Philippian congregation with similar urgency:

Therefore, my brothers, you whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, dear friends! <sup>2</sup> I plead with Euodia and I plead with Syntyche to agree with each other in the Lord. <sup>3</sup> Yes, and I ask you, loyal yokefellow, help these women who have contended at my side in the cause of the gospel, along with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life (Philippians 4:1-3).

“Stand firm in the Lord in this way.” Here, then, is the *ardent* call “to stand your ground.” Paul the apostle does not bully his audience toward this achievement, for he writes out of love, longing, joy, and admiration toward them. He calls them “dear friends.” He “pleads” with two of them to mend their differences and to resume their place in the contest “at my side in the cause of the gospel.” Standing firm is about “fellow workers” and “loyal yokefellows.” It is about the advancement of the gospel through word and deed, through speech and example. We are more likely to “stand firm” when we “stand together.” Our immersion in the common life of the church fills the pores of our bodies with endurance to serve Christ and his kingdom for a lifetime. What if we were to turn to our brothers and sisters and ask, “Will you contend at my side in the cause of the gospel?” Would not the command “to stand firm” come into clearer focus with deeper fervor and higher purpose?

These are the matters which occupy our interest in this week’s study, as we grapple with some key scriptures which inspire us “to stand” our ground..

## “He Took His Stand ...” (2 Samuel 23:9-12)

<sup>9</sup> Next to him was Eleazar son of Dodai the Ahohite. As one of the three mighty men, he was with David when they taunted the Philistines gathered at Pas Dammim for battle. Then the men of Israel retreated, <sup>10</sup> but *he stood his ground* and struck down the Philistines till his hand grew tired and froze to the sword. The LORD brought about a great victory that day. The troops returned to Eleazar, but only to strip the dead. <sup>11</sup> Next to him was Shammah son of Agee the Hararite. When the Philistines banded together at a place where there was a field full of lentils, Israel's troops fled from them. <sup>12</sup> But Shammah *took his stand* in the middle of the field. He defended it and struck the Philistines down, and the LORD brought about a great victory (2 Samuel 23:9-12).

For this week, our planning team has chosen a short passage from 2 Samuel 23, which is guiding our thoughts for the current weekend series. As you will recall, the 23<sup>rd</sup> chapter as a whole, by way of summary, highlights the exploits of David's “mighty men,” near the end of his life and reign in Israel. In the present example, the overriding theme, what European scholars call a *Leitmotif*, appears in the recurring idea, “he stood his ground” or “he took his stand.” The language is patently military and applies to active combat situations where the enemy attacks. Philistine incursions into Israelite territory were common during David's reign which was largely consumed in bloody wars defending the homeland. Virtues for soldiers in battle scenarios tend toward the refusal to back down, to leave the enemy on the field, or to surrender the field to the enemy. Courage is woven with endurance, smartened by skill. In the present passage, Eleazar and Shammah both epitomize such virtues. By contrast are the soldiers who *retreated* or *fled the field*, only to return later to pick up the booty.

The verbs in the text tell the whole story: “struck down,” “froze to the sword,” “defended it,” and “struck.” The verbs speak of unrelenting commitment to the battle through the grammar of “standing.” *Stance* matters in pitched battle scenarios, as soldiers with their officers plant their feet firmly “in the middle of the field.” Equally sobering is the language of *abandonment*, illustrated by verbs like “retreated” and “fled.” The “field full of lentils” suggests harvest season when the “bean” crop neared maturity and became vulnerable to the Philistines who might destroy the field with fire or trampling. Shammah “defends” it for the sake of Israel's food supply. In each of these instances the threat from the Philistines hardened when they “banded together.” The writers want their audience to understand that men like Eleazar and Shammah are able to interrupt Philistine solidarity when they stand their ground and take their stand, having served previously “with David” their model, motivator, and mentor. Neither fatigue nor weakness hindered them. *Here were soldiers who fought beyond the weariness.* They remind us of the tireless efforts of Saint Paul who “labored and toiled and went without sleep” for the sake of the gospel:

<sup>26</sup> I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my own countrymen, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false brothers. <sup>27</sup> I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked (2 Corinthians 11:26-27).

Paul was a soldier of the cross, commissioned in the service of King Jesus, his metal tempered by devotion.

And so the linchpin of this brief memoir in 2 Samuel 23 lies beyond the individual valor of the two brave men when twice in the text we read the words, “Yahweh brought about a great victory” (23:10, 12). Tempting though it might be to glamorize the feats of these men by varnishing their valor with the form of the ancient classical heroes of Greece and Rome, the text resists such a move. Israel's battle stories in the Old Testament are shot full with the powerful recognition that the real Warrior and Hero of people and land, of officer and army, is Yahweh “the Lord of Hosts.” His people may well supply the human resources, like the five loaves and two fishes of Jesus' food miracle, but the Lord multiplies the efforts of men like the two highlighted in our text. Without His involvement, the valor would be lackluster, the stance uncertain, and the victory in doubt.

This conversation leads to the New Testament themes of spiritual warfare and of the battles inherent in following Jesus on the kingdom road. To that thick and meaty subject, we now turn in our study this week.

## The Battle (Ephesians 6:10-20)

<sup>10</sup> Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. <sup>11</sup> Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. <sup>12</sup> 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. 13 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. 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 saints, 19 and also for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel, 20 for which I am an ambassador in chains, that I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak.

The outline of the book of *Ephesians* has been aptly summarized with three words: Sit, Walk, and Stand. The *first* of these comes from chapters 1-3 and pertains to the *place* where the life of the Christian resides, namely, within the life of the resurrected Jesus with whom we are seated. From the *second* we derive the *ethics* of walking with him in the practice of holiness that is worthy of the Lord. *Finally*, we are *standing* among the *soldiers* of the cross, with Jesus our Lord as the supreme leader: he who is Christ the Victor. It is when we arrive at this third great movement of the book that Paul gathers together and sums up the predominant themes he has already developed. With the imagery of the "battle" the apostle reaches a triumphant conclusion of the whole *Ephesians* letter. Eastertide exults in the victory over sin and death, but then propels the Christian onto the battlefield effort that defeats every foe, lays claim to kingdom real estate, and advances the kingdom of God. We are the "church militant" on mission for the Kings of kings and Lord of lords.

What we would like to do, initially, is show the many ways Paul uses the *Peroratio*, that is the summation, of *Ephesians* to "weave into a summary" the several key ideas previously stated in his letter/sermon. If "a picture is worth a thousand words", then a rhetorically invented image like that of the soldier is worth at least more than a few. Paul does not slavishly try to make the image into a strict analogy, one that "walks on all fours", but instead by the powerfully suggestive portrait of *the soldier*, confront his readers with a new identity which they, the newly formed people of God, are asked to exemplify. After all, *they are* altogether *this soldier*, or at least "ought" to live like one. Here then is a simple table, collecting together the key constructions in the summation of 6:10-20, and then relating them to earlier passages in Paul's *Ephesian* letter.

### The Function of 6:10-20 as a Summary of Key Ideas in *Ephesians*

Passages and Ideas from Ephesians 6:10-20	Connecting Themes from Earlier Passages in <i>Ephesians</i>
<p>Be <b>strong</b> in the Lord and in his <b>mighty power</b> (6:10)</p> <p><i>Notes: The theme of power, strength, especially as they come from Christ's resurrection life, permeate Ephesians.</i></p>	<p>1:19-Incomparably great power and mighty strength of the God who raised Christ from the dead.</p> <p>3:7-Paul is a servant of the Lord by the working of God's power</p> <p>3:16-Paul prays for his readers that they would be strengthened with power in their inner being</p> <p>3:20-God is able to do far beyond our requests by his power that works in us.</p>
<p>Put on the full armor of God so that you can <b>stand</b> against the devil's schemes (6:11).</p> <p><i>Notes: There seems to be a conscious parallelism of posture: sit, then stand.</i></p>	<p>1:20-Christ is seated in the heavenlies at God's right hand.</p> <p>2:6-We are seated in the heavenlies with him.</p>
<p>Not a fight of blood and flesh, but of <b>authorities, dark powers, spiritual forces in the heavenlies</b> (6:12)</p>	<p>1:21-Christ has been raised far above all rule, authority, power, dominion and every title.</p> <p>2:1-Our past belongs to the ways of this world, to the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit at work in the sons of disobedience.</p> <p>3:10-The church proclaims to the rulers and authorities</p> <p>3:17-The church is rooted and established</p> <p>3:19-The church is filled with the fullness of God</p> <p>4:8-Christ takes captives in his resurrection and ascent to</p>

Passages and Ideas from Ephesians 6:10-20	Connecting Themes from Earlier Passages in <i>Ephesians</i>
	heaven. 4:9-Christ is higher than all the heavens. 4:18-Gentiles live in the darkness of this world. 4:27-Don't give the devil a foothold. 5:8-We were once darkness 5:11-We lived in darkness
<b>Put on</b> the whole armor of God, take your <b>stand</b> in the coming evil day, <b>be prepared to stand</b> (6:13)	4:12-Equip and prepare God's people for the ministry 4:17-No longer infants tossed here and there 4:24-Put on the new man (self, person, nature).
Belt of truth (6:14a)	1:13-Word of truth, the gospel 4:15-Speak the truth in love 4:25-Put off falsehood and speak truth to one's neighbor 5:9-Fruit of light is truth.
Breastplate of <b>righteousness</b> (6:14b)	4:24-The new self is created to be like God in righteousness and holiness 5:9-Fruit of light is righteousness
Feet having the shoes: the <b>Gospel of peace</b> (6:15). <i>Notes: Paul calls the Gospel "of peace" because of what it accomplishes, namely, the restoration of human beings, united into one family, both Jew and Gentile.</i>	1:2-Grace and peace from God 1:13-Gospel of your salvation 2:14-Christ is our peace by making the two into one 2:17-Christ preached peace to the near and far 3:6-Gospel treats Jew and Gentile as one 3:7-Paul a servant of the Gospel 4:3-Unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace
Take (receive) the shield of <b>faith</b> (5:16).	1:13-Having believed you were sealed 1:19-Power for us who believe 2:8-grace, faith, and salvation 3:12-Faith: approach God with freedom and confidence 3:17-Christ lives in the hearts of his people by faith 4:5-One faith 4:13-Unity in the faith
Take (receive) the helmet of salvation (5:17a) <i>Notes: Both this piece of equipment and the one which follows are said to be "taken" or "received" rather than "put on" by the soldier. The implication is that they are "gifts" of God, objects of His grace.</i>	1:6-7-Glorious grace freely given 2:8-By grace we are saved through faith, not of ourselves 3:7-Grace given to Paul is a gift from God 3:8-Gift of grace given 5:23-Christ is Savior of his body, the Church
(Take, receive) the sword of the <b>Spirit, Word</b> of God (6:17b)	1:13-Holy Spirit marks us with the seal of promise, our deposit and guarantee, having heard the word of truth. 1:17-Spirit of wisdom 2:18-Access to the Father by one Spirit 2:22-Church as Temple is dwelling of the Spirit 3:5-Mystery of God revealed by the Spirit to apostles and prophets 3:16-Strengthened through the Spirit 4:3-Unity of the Spirit 4:4-One Spirit 4:30-Spirit of God seals us 5:18-Filled with the Spirit 5:26-Washing of water by the Word
<b>Pray</b> in the Spirit on all occasions, with all kinds of prayers, for all the saints, with	1:16-Paul remembers his readers in his prayers by a continuous asking that they be enlightened about God's plan.

Passages and Ideas from Ephesians 6:10-20	Connecting Themes from Earlier Passages in <i>Ephesians</i>
alertness (6:18)	3:14-Kneels before the Father (posture of intense prayer) 3:16-Paul prays for strength 3:17-Paul prays for rootedness and power 3:20-Paul "asks" God 5:14-Wake up sleeper (that is, be alert). 5:20-Always give thanks to God the Father for everything
Pray for me, for my words, for the communication of God's <i>mystery</i> , as an <i>ambassador in chains</i> , declaring fearlessly (6:19).	3:1-Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus 4:1-Paul, a prisoner for the Lord 3:13-Don't be discouraged by Paul's suffering 3:3-Mystery revealed 3:4-Mystery of Christ 3:5-Mystery revealed to apostles and prophets 3:6-Mystery revealed through the Gospel

As this table reveals, the number of internal "back-connections" are impressive, as Paul gathers together his cherished themes and unifies them in the image of the *equipped soldier* who "stands his ground." By adding this section, Paul also fills out the "posture" metaphors he has employed since the first chapter. In particular, we observe his use of three:

1. **Sit** (1-3): Our position. We are seated with Christ in the heavenlies (1:20; 2:6)
2. **Walk** (4-6:9): Our practice. Most recent translations, following the dynamic equivalence principle, handle this word (Greek: *peripateō*, literally, "walk") with "conduct" or "live", but its basic notion is "to walk" (2:10; 4:1; 4:17; 5:2; 5:8; 5:15) and with several different applications: walk in good works (2:10); walk worthy of our calling (4:1); don't walk like the Gentiles (4:17); walk in love (5:2); walk as children of light (5:8); walk wisely (5:15). Taken together they comprise the main centers of Paul's ethical instruction to his reader.
3. **Stand** (6:10-20): Our protection. Having been seated with Christ and walking in his ways, the Christian is now urged to "stand" with him and for him against anything that would undermine and diminish God's work of building up His Living Temple in the world.

During Paul's various detentions in Roman custody, he witnessed first-hand the raw power and nobility of the Roman military. He showed a certain preference for military metaphors in his writings:

But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation (1 Thessalonians 5:8).

The night is far gone; the day is at hand. So then let us cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light (Romans 13:12).

by truthful speech, and the power of God; with the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and for the left (2 Corinthians 6:7).

3 For though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh. 4 For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds (2 Corinthians 10:3-4).

Share in suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus (2 Timothy 2:3).

As these examples show, Paul feels free to "mix and match" certain spiritual principles with various components of the soldier's armor. For instance, the "breastplate" in *Ephesians* is "righteousness", whereas it refers to "faith and love" in *1 Thessalonians*. "Truth" is connected with the "belt" in *Ephesians*, but in *2 Corinthians* is only generally associated with "the weapons of righteousness". In agreement, is the "helmet of salvation", both in *Ephesians* and in *1 Thessalonians*. The point is obviously not a slavish prosaic use of some table of equivalence for the armor of God. Instead, the same qualities which Paul urges his readers to embody elsewhere in his writings, he now incorporates into the equipment of the soldier. That is why he can offer a similar conclusion in this passage: "Be watchful, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong" (1 Corinthians 16:13), while confidently trusting that one day evil will finally be defeated: "The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you" (Romans 16:20).

No doubt Paul had occasion to talk with his Roman guards. He certainly had opportunity to admire their decorous appearance, imposing as it was. From several sources we glean the following portrait:

### **General Armor Issues**

A set of Roman armor would include one of a variety of body armor types (usually designed to be flexible but strong; a centurion's body armor differs from that of the legionary), a *shielders* and *turtlesith* a special design/decoration for each legion), leggings or greaves, an apron (for decoration and protecting the groin, mostly made of metal), marching sandals called *Caligae* (with studs on the sole), a coarse woolen tunic, a belt (showing a soldier's position/rank in the army), and lastly a helmet called *Galea* (with cheek, ear and neck protection). A helmet might have also held a crest if the Roman was an officer or of higher rank than a peer.

### **Personal Armor**

The *lorica hamata* is a type of chainmail armor used during the Roman Republic and Roman Empire as a standard-issue armor for both the legionaries (higher quality version of the *lorica hamata*) and secondary troops (*Auxilia*).

The *Scutum*, (Latin for shield), was the standard, rectangular, semi-cylindrical shield carried by Roman legionaries during the Principate. Republican-era *scuta* had the form of an oval

The *cingulum* was a military belt worn at all times, even without the rest of the armor.

### **Personal Weapons**

The *Pugio* was a small dagger.

The *Gladius* was the short sword, 18 to 24 inches long, used by Roman legionaries from the 3rd century BC until the late Roman Empire. It was primarily used for stabbing and thrusting. The *gladius* was made by Spaniards

The *Hasta* was a spear used by *triarii* in the times of the Republic, and also as the primary weapon of the *hastati* and *principes* in the early Republic.

The *Pilum* (plural *pila*), a specialized javelin that would bend after being thrown to prevent enemies from re-using it.

We also have the opinion of Flavius Josephus who lived during the zenith of Rome's military glory. Having been made a Roman citizen by Vespasian, he traveled with the Roman legions during the middle of the first century. Josephus was truly impressed with military discipline. He claims soldiers always carried their weapons with them, even in time of peace. Furthermore, practice in the proper use of their weapons never ceased. "Every soldier is every day exercised, and that with great diligence, as if it were in time of war, which is the reason why they bear the fatigues of battle so easily" (Josephus, *The Wars Of The Jews*, Book III, Chap. 5, 1).

The strong, fit, equipped and well out-fitted imposing figure must have left its impression on Paul, in spite of his own detention. Seeing such a specimen of human strength, Paul's Spirit-sanctified imagination paints broad strokes as he captures the vision of the fully equipped Christian, endowed by God, not the Empire, and ready to stand in the face of whatever onslaughts might be hurled against him. Had Paul not already told his readers that Christ "had given gifts to men" in the form of gifted persons whose purpose was "to equip the saints for the work of the ministry" (4:12)? Had he not envisioned the new humanity reaching its destiny as the "perfect man"? And does not that equipped "saint" now stand before us in chapter 6, belted by truth, shielded by faith, helmeted with salvation, breastplated with righteousness, wielding the sword of the Word, and marching in shoes of the Gospel, bringing peace?

But perhaps even more imposing, in Paul's mind, was the figure of another soldier, centuries before, having just inherited the mantle of leadership from Moses, the man Joshua, encamped on Canaan's soil and awaiting orders which now come from Yahweh:

5 No man shall be able to stand before you all the days of your life. Just as I was with Moses, so I will be with you. I will not leave you or forsake you. 6 Be strong and courageous, for you shall cause this people to inherit the land that I swore to their fathers to give them. 7 Only be strong and very courageous, being careful to do according to all the law that Moses my servant commanded you. Do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left, that you may have good success wherever you go. 8 This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success. 9 Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be frightened, and do not be dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go" (Joshua 1:5-9).

Nor could Paul have forgotten the figure of Yahweh Himself as "the Divine Warrior" of Israel:

14 Justice is turned back, and righteousness stands afar off; for truth has stumbled in the public squares, and uprightness cannot enter. 15 Truth is lacking, and he who departs from evil makes himself a prey. The LORD saw it, and it displeased him that there was no justice. 16 He saw that there was no man, and wondered that there was no one to intercede; then his own arm brought him salvation, and his righteousness upheld him. 17 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 in zeal as a cloak (Isaiah 59:14-17).

The writer of Isaiah 59 sees the sorry state of the world, including his own world, Israel, and then hears God speaking, unwilling to allow justice, truth and righteousness to fail. And so Yahweh arms himself, like a soldier, with righteousness and salvation, and wearing garments suitable for accomplishing His holy purposes. What does Paul glean from this Isaiah passage? Obviously some of its exact language, and certainly the "spirit of the times". For six chapters, Paul has poured out his heart to readers he does not know, but whose faith and life in Christ have come to him as a good report. He has reminded, deepened, cemented, and lifted up his readers from the commonness of earth to the heights of "the heavnlies", aided by words intended to "build up" the body of Christ. Paul's vision of the future is hopeful and grounded in the long-standing purposes of God to raise up a New Temple, filled with the Spirit, composed of living stones.

Still, once built, such a structure can only attract the hosts of hell whose own kingdom God has already defeated by the cross and the resurrection of Jesus. The battle has already begun for the hearts and minds of the Christ-followers. The Jewish leadership has opposed the Messianic community, tooth and nail, hauling its adherents from the synagogues and handing some over to the Romans for trial. Emperor Nero will soon implement his own pogrom against the Christ followers, exhibiting them as beasts in the arena and declaring himself to be god in the process. How will the readers of Paul's Ephesian letter/sermon respond when persecution sweeps Asia Minor? Paul's own colleague-in-the-faith, the writer of *Revelation*, will pull back the curtain on troubled times to come, as he sends his letters to the "Seven Churches in Asia Minor", the same audience Paul addresses in *Ephesians*. And so, as Paul frames the closing words of his *Peroratio*, his use of military imagery seems more than appropriate. In similar ways, inspired by 1 Corinthians 16:13, Isaac Watts asked this question:

"Am I A Soldier of the Cross?", all the time hearing Paul's words: "Be watchful, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong." That, too, is the burden of Ephesians 6:10-20.

### **Ephesians 6:10: Strength, Power and Might**

1. "Be strong in the Lord" comes from the Greek *endunamousthe*, used in this form only in *Ephesians*, and should be translated, "be strengthened". The notion of "power, ability", *dunamis*, is found in 1:19, 21; 3:7, 16, 20, while the verb, *dunamai* appears in 3:4, 20; 6:11, 13, 16. We take the voice to be passive, suggesting that God is the one who empowers His people: they do not empower themselves. However, they are invited by Paul to allow God to make them strong, as he wrote earlier, "by the Spirit" (3:16). By adding the phrase "in the Lord", Paul also makes this clear. "In" implies the sphere or realm where the strengthening takes place, namely, in relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ. Then, to reinforce his instructions "to be strong", Paul compounds two additional words: *kratos* and *ischus*.
2. *Kratos* invariably suggests the power of God, normally in terms of his dominion and rule over all things. Christ is said to be ruler over all the powers, as Paul explain in 1:19-23.
3. *Ischus* points to "inherent" strength, that which one has by nature and essence, as opposed to that which supports from some external source.
4. Put simply, whatever "strength" Paul encourages here must come from God Himself, the power inherent in Christ who rose from the dead and sits at his Father's right hand. It would be insulting to the gracious work of God to speak about Christians "mustering enough strength" when the power of God flows so freely from the Lordship of Jesus Christ.
5. In many ways, this is a fitting climax to Paul's letter/sermon. Has he not spent six chapters writing about the powerful work of God which has brought about our salvation? Is he not, in 6:10-20, simply calling on his readers to seize the opportunity afforded them by this salvation and take their stand in the world?

### **Ephesians 6:11: Put on the Armor of God**

Using the Greek word *panoplia*, Paul now writes about what we have come to call "the whole armor of God". Markus Barth, in his commentary on *Ephesians*, suggests translating this word, "the splendid armor", with

emphasis on the multi-faceted glory of this endowment--it's elegance, beauty and majesty (p. 761). The crux of this interpretation rests with the Greek word *pan* which commonly means simply "all or every". We are left to consider either the "fullness or completeness" of the armor or its "splendor and majesty" due to its variegated components. Hoehner stresses its use elsewhere denoting "full armor" the suit of armor of the foot soldier (pp. 822-823), and Lincoln agrees (p. 442). Wearing this armor, we are fully equipped, lacking nothing, to borrow a phrase from James 1:4.

This is God's armor, Paul tells us: His very own, not merely what He gives it to us; what He gives already belongs to His own panoply.

1. The language "put on" reminds us of Paul's earlier instruction to "put on the new man" and "put off the old man" (4:22-24). The expressions are parallel in form and in meaning. One is a "clothing" metaphor, the other is a "military" image, but the intent is the same. God has provided something new and powerful with which we are to clothe ourselves, and in this instance it is for battle to resist the devil in his efforts to take back "ground" already captured by Christ and given to us.
2. "to be able to stand against the devil's stratagems". Once more Paul stresses the "ability" (*dunamai*) God makes available to His own. The word "stand" is *histēmi*, implying the "stance" of the soldier, offering resistance to any "comers" in a lasting and stable way, not easily changed or deterred. Such a stance is not easily "pushed around", and denotes a defensive position, as in "holding one's ground". Through Christ God has gotten the victory over sin and death: in Jesus sin has met its match and "ground has been taken back" by God for His kingdom. At least "in the heavenlies", where Christ sits at the Father's side, there is no longer a place for the devil. We sit with Christ in the heavenlies, as Paul has already informed his readers, and so "the ground" is also ours. However, we are "on earth" where the battle continues to rage. Everywhere a Christ community forms and grows, the "ground" is secured for Christ and his kingdom. Paul counsels his readers to "hold the ground" and not (to steal a phrase from General Patton) "pay for the same real estate twice".

The *diabolos*, is "the one who opposes", who "hurls himself against" his enemies. A powerful scene in Revelation 12 provides insight into the early Christian understanding of evil personified as "the dragon" (12:3), "the ancient serpent", "the devil", "Satan", "the one who leads the whole world astray" (12:9). The writer of the *Revelation* describes "heavenly" battle scene in which God's good angels battle the devil and his angels resulting in the expulsion of Satan from heaven (12:8): "they lost their place". Consequent to this, heavenly voices cry "Rejoice, you heavens and you who dwell in them! But woe to the earth and the sea, because the devil has gone down to you! He is filled with fury, because he knows his time is short" (12:12). Against whom does this *diabolos* wage his war? It is against "God's woman", the people of God "who obey God's commandments and hold to the testimony of Jesus" (12:17). We have in the *Revelation* passage language compatible with Paul's view of evil and its role in the world. "Heaven" is God's realm where the victorious Christ sits at the Father's side and his people sit with him. "Earth", and the immediate "space" above it, is the realm for the conflict between Christ's church and Satan. God has raised up "on earth" the little colony of heaven, the Living Temple, both Jew and Gentile, redeemed by the cross and the resurrection of Jesus. *What God proposes, the devil opposes*, and that is why the word *diabolos* is used here in Ephesians 6:11.

Caird prefers the word "stratagems" rather than "wiles" when translating the word *methodos*. Paul used the term earlier in 4:14 in conjunction with Christ's gifts which prevent the "methods" of men from "tossing about like infants" the people of God. In that setting, it applied to human strategies, while here it refers to those of the devil. Included in its meaning are "procedure, process, and method", but does have connotations of "strategy. scheme". Elsewhere Paul writes about "not being outwitted by Satan, since we are not ignorant of his designs" (2 Corinthians 2:11), where "designs" is *voēma* and pertains to what the "mind" of Satan has prepared. Snodgrass notes:

Mention of the schemes of the devil reminds us of the trickery and subterfuge by which evil and temptation present themselves in our lives. Evil rarely looks evil until it accomplishes its goal; it gains entrance by appearing attractive, desirable, and perfectly legitimate. It is a baited and camouflaged trap (*Ephesians*, p.339).

Once more we look at Paul's other letters and find this telling passage:

4 For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. 5 We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ (2 Corinthians 10:4-5).

Since most of the devil's stratagems enter the battlefield of the mind, it is on that "ground" that we must take our "stand". Recall how Paul in *Ephesians* wrote about the "darkening of the mind" as belonging to the old life.

3. In the words of R.P. Martin: "The assaults of demonic powers require heavenly aid to repel, and it is the epistle's conviction, in true Pauline fashion, that God has placed at the Christians' disposal all that is needed to resist such an attack. In particular, the various pieces of armor are listed" (*Ephesians, Colossians and Philemon*, p.75).
4. "Power words" dominate verses 10, 11, 13, and 16. C.E. Arnold points out that these terms are rare in the New Testament but draw their energy from what Paul already said in 1:10. The high concentration of words about principalities, powers, and cosmocrats in 1:12 strongly infer the threats Paul sees facing his readers. No wonder he will instruct them throughout this passage to "resist", "watch", "pray", and "be alert"!
5. The Qumran community, associated with the Dead Scroll Scrolls, saw themselves as warriors in a coming battle between the "sons of light" and the "sons of darkness". Although Paul is not likely dependent on these writings, the so-called War Scroll (known as 1QM), dramatizes the eventual conflict in terms not unlike Paul's call to "put on the armor of God".

### **Ephesians 6:12: "Our Struggle"**

When Paul commences this next verse, he explains more fully the implications of a battle where we face down "the strategy of the devil". Obviously this is no ordinary conflict, as Roman soldiers might face, for instance, on the eastern borders against the Parthians or to the north against the Germans. Nor is it a resistance movement by Zealot Jews against the Romans in Galilee or Judea as would take shape within the decade. Though Christians belong to "another" kingdom, one that is "not of this world", they do not engage in armed conflict with the forces of "blood and flesh".

1. Paul's choice of words has raised some debate about whether "struggle", from *palē*, refers to an ordinary military engagement or to a wrestling match, since the word can be understood in the latter sense. Does Paul intend to imply "hand-to-hand combat" in his mixing of these images? How does wrestling imagery coalesce with soldier imagery? From the research of Michael Gudorf we learn that the term refers to a fully armored soldier who was also an accomplished wrestler, and as such better equipped to handle the "in-your-face" situations of close-hand combat (*Journal of Biblical Literature*, 117 (Summer 1998): 332-34). And so the blended symbolism is intentional. This is reinforced by Paul's use of the word *pros*, translated as "against", whereas the word actually means "toward" and even "face-to-face". We might literally translate this text as follows: "Because there is not to us the wrestling face-to-face with blood and flesh, but face-to-face with...", followed by various terms describing our wrestling partners. The word "us" is the Greek dative of reference and is not so much expressing "possession" as it is "relevance", as in "for us". We are "in this thing together", and the struggle is a shared one "for us all"--this seems to be the sense of the expression *hēmin hē palē*, "for us the struggle/wrestling event".
2. Who then are our opponents in this contest? Each word in a certain way recapitulates ideas Paul has previously raised in his letter/sermon. Christ's ascent to heaven, you will recall, signaled the defeat of the evil powers of this world, freeing certain aspects of the "heavenlies" from the devil's control. Our heavenly citizenship is in a place where the devil cannot enter; our earthly situation remains the battleground for our souls and our societies.
  - a. "rulers" from *archē*, which also appear in 1:21 and 3:10, simply means "ruler" or "leader". The later Gnostics would write about the "archons" who dominated the cosmos and controlled the outcome of worldly situations. The present text sees them in "dark" ways, the enemies against which we battle.
  - b. "authorities" from *exousia* (derived from *exestin*) pointing to "the freedom to act", by implication the "right to act", thus "authority". Elsewhere in the New Testament these two terms, rulers and authorities, appear together in the same context (Luke 12:11; 20:20; 1 Corinthians 15:24; Ephesians 1:20; 3:10; Colossians 1:16; 2:10, 15; Titus 3:1) but can be either human or non-human personages of power. The

present context rules out human beings ("not blood and flesh") and so points to angelic beings, the devil's partners, engaged in war against the people of God (once again, refer to Revelation 12).

- c. "cosmic potentates of this darkness" is probably the best translation of *pros tous kosmokratoras tou skotous toutou*. The word is sometimes rather anemically translated "rulers", *kosmokratōr*, is a Pauline invention found nowhere else in the New Testament. However, as Hoehner points out, there may be connections to "magical or astrological traditions", though these are attested from a later period. The pagan religions saw sun, moon and stars as occupying political roles within the cosmos, determining the fate of human beings. When extra-biblical Jewish writers spoke about such "spirits", they ascribed a demonic role to them. Wilhelm Michaelis, in the *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Volume III, p. 914), sees in them "the terrifying power of their influence and comprehensiveness of their plans, and thus to emphasize the seriousness of the situation". We might well have used other military language to symbolize their threat, such as, "they are the possessors of the true weapons of mass destruction, more deadly than nerve gas, anthrax or nuclear bombs". Ours is a deadly foe who is deadly serious about taking back the ground seized by the ascended Christ.
- d. "darkness" has been discussed earlier (see 5:8) where Paul contrasted it with the light of Christ. We have come out of darkness into the light of Christ's kingdom, but darkness now wages war against us and seeks to overwhelm us once again. We are also reminded of Paul's words to King Agrippa when recounting his own conversion and how his present mission to the Gentiles involves their "turning from darkness to light, from the power of Satan to God" (Acts 26:18). Fully aware of his formidable foe, Paul also writes in 2 Corinthians 4:3-6 that the "god of this world" (that is, the devil) has blinded the minds of human beings in an effort to hinder their knowledge of God, whereas the light of the Gospel shines brighter still. In Colossians 1:13 believers have been transferred from the "kingdom of darkness" to that of God's Son. The evil powers, ruled by Satan, seek to eclipse the light of God and cast darkness in the world.
- e. "spiritual beings of wickedness in the heavenlies". An expansive phrase further describing the Christian's foes, but specifically locating them "in the heavenlies". To review our understanding of the cosmos, Pauline-style: there is 1) the visible world, namely this earth and its meteorological environs (atmospheric and stellar heavens); 2) the invisible world, the heavenlies above, ruled by God and His Son, and home to glorified believers; the heavenlies below, ruled by "the prince of the power of the air" and his minions. In this passage, the word *pneumatikoi*, which occurs in 1:3 and 5:19 as well, simply refers to "spiritual things" when used by itself. Such realities are invisible but genuine. In this case, their association with "wickedness" (*ponēria*), a word indicating the defective nature of a thing, leading to connotative meanings of "sickness, depravity, wickedness, trouble, misfortune" and just plain "evil". The Greek uses the genitive case with the special emphasis on the essential character of these "spiritual beings", that is, they are wicked through and through.

The "in" does not imply that the conflict takes place in the heavenlies, but rather the spiritual beings occupy this realm. Plainly, the conflict is very much an earthly one, as Satan seeks to take back "ground" by undermining the work of God in the world and among His people. We may be assured that our position in Christ is one of victory in the heavenlies, but the battle on earth ranges for us. One day the devil and his angels will finally be defeated at the "coming" or *Parousia* of Christ (see Ephesians 1:10, 21; 1 Corinthians 15:24-28).

### **Ephesians 6:13: "Standing in the Evil Day"**

Repeating his call to "take up the whole armor of God (the *panoplia*)", Paul makes explicit reference to time through the use of the phrase in Greek *en tē hēmera tē ponēra*, literally, "in the day, the evil one". What "day" does he have in mind? The phrase reminds us of other references in the New Testament to an ultimate time of tribulation before the end of the world (see 1 Corinthians 7:26; 1 Thessalonians 5:2-4). Clearly the time in question is one in which believers are or will be present in the world, requiring the putting on of the armor. The form of the verb "to take up" (*analambanō*, used in the aorist tense) may suggest urgency, as one would expect of a soldier facing his foe. Scholars tend to see the "evil day" as referring to the "present age", awaiting the "age to come". Paul has already mentioned "evil days" in 5:16 and asked his readers to make the most of every

opportunity because of them. What makes a day "evil"? Since Paul uses the same word for "evil" to describe the spiritual powers in the heavenlies, he likely intends his readers to understand that it is these powers which hurl a world of woe on God's people, troubling their lives *and their days*. Not only are there the ordinary temptations of the devil which can afflict Christians regularly, but there are climactic moments when evil bursts forth with all its ferocity, bringing holocausts and disasters on the world. Both Revelation 12 and 1 Peter 5:8 teach that the devil is a "roaring lion" stalking the world, seeking whom he may devour. Can we easily forget the designs on Job in the Old Testament? Or the afflictions of Paul in 1 Corinthians 12:7 brought on by a "messenger of Satan", inflicting the so-called "thorn-in-the-flesh"?

Note: The Old Testament makes reference to "evil days" in conjunction with the onset of old age (Ecclesiastes 12:1). Jacob, the patriarch, reflecting on his life remarked that "few and evil have been the days of the years of my life" (Genesis 47:9), suggesting that even the normal course of one's life might be measured by the phrase. In Proverbs 15:15 the wisdom writer declares, "All the days of the afflicted are evil", but then contrasts this with "but the cheerful of heart has a continual feast". Evil, in this sense, may also imply calamity and trouble.

### **Ephesians 6:14: Belt and Breastplate**

What follows is a brief, but concise elaboration of the soldier's armor, each piece identified with its relevant spiritual virtue. Not every armor component is mentioned, but we hear about the critical ones. We have only touched on the special connection between each piece of armor and its significance. We noted that Paul associated certain virtues with components *different* from the ones in *Ephesians*, and that he was not bound to a stiff application of this metaphor. It is, after all, a figure of speech put to good use, to be sure, but a bit of imagery nonetheless. We can only imagine Paul, in chains, perhaps at times seated between two Roman guards. His constant association no doubt led to conversations about military life not only in the prisons but also at the frontier. No doubt the apostle learned a great deal about the demands on such men, and had occasion to ponder the discipline of their service as illustrated in the armor they wore. Roman soldiers did not always wear the full battle armor, especially if they were not in the field or on duty. Stone reliefs have been found showing soldiers without their full armor, still recognizable as members of the military.

Our first exposure to the *panoplia* comes in 6:14 where Paul once more urges his readers to "stand their ground" through the diligent endowment of their armor.

### ***Belt: The Waist Girded With Truth***

The verb form *perizōsamēnoi* comes from the verb which means "to bind around, to gird", and commonly applies to something placed around the "waist" or the "loins". Its Old Testament counterpart is the Hebrew *hāgar*. Used in the middle voice, this word suggests the readers are responsible for "girding themselves". The "loins" (*osphus*) or the "waist" refers to the middle portion of the torso, the place a belt or girdle is worn. The New Testament uses the metaphor of "loins of your mind" in 1 Peter 1:13 which must be "girded", presumably by truth. While sword belts and protective girdles have been proposed for this piece of armor, it is far more likely Paul intended the *cingulum*, an apron-like breech covering, made of leather, offering protection to the soldier's thighs. Barth points out the *cingulum* designated an officer or high official, a distinctive sign (p.767). The Old Testament applies this concept to the Messiah for whom "justice" and faithfulness are distinctive marks with which he would be "girded" (see Isaiah 11:5). Wearing this clothing, the soldier bore the insignia of supreme dignity, but for the Christian, Paul is saying that *all Christians* have this dignity, not just a special group of *officers*. The Old Testament also used the phrase "girded with strength" to denote what God makes available to His people, equipping them to be courageous, and *prepare for their work* (see also Psalm 18:32; 65:6; 93:1; Isaiah 45:5; Job 38:3; 40:7; Proverbs 31:17; Nahum 2:1; Luke 12:35, 37; 17:8; John 13:4, 5). Later church fathers extended the meaning to include "chastity", a protection against carnal desires.

In what sense is such a piece of armor appropriately applied to "truth"? Truth in what sense? Does Paul mean the kind he referenced in 4:25 where he counseled "speaking the truth in love"? Surely we cannot exclude such a meaning, since Paul's Ephesian letter/sermon uses this word in other settings (see the *Table* above). It could mean the objective truth found in the Gospel which Paul proclaims, offering salvation to both Jew and Gentile alike, and announcing the creation of the new humanity--all of which are certainly Truth in its foundational

sense. However, it could also apply subjectively, namely, to one's reliability, integrity and faithfulness. Since Isaiah 11:5 is the Old Testament background text for this expression, we should not overlook the close connection between the terms "truth", "righteousness" and "faithfulness". They are, on the face of it, *covenant* terms, that is, they describe the powerful relationship which binds Yahweh to His people, or, in this case, Christ to his body. Gathering up the various tangents converging on this idea, perhaps the best connotation of truth is simply the notion of *extreme reliability*, of preparedness to the highest extent. When a soldier is "girded", he is ready for battle, prepared for every contingency, and to be counted on by his fellows and his citizens. Thus for the Christian! Girded with truth speaks volumes about the constancy and firmness of our position. Here is the first and perhaps the most vivid image of *taking one's stand: girded with truth*. Lincoln remarks:

Here in Ephesians, the belt which provides support and braces the soldier ready for action is truth. Since in LXX [Greek translation of the Old Testament] Isaiah 11:5 truth referred to faithfulness and loyalty and what was said there of the Messiah is now applied to believers, it is likely that that is also the force of "truth" in this verse (p.448).

### ***Breastplate: Righteousness***

This is clearly an Old Testament image, drawn from Isaiah 59:17, applied to Yahweh's own armor. The Roman soldier wore the *thōrax* (Greek) or *pectorale* or *cuirass* (Latin), a metal plate covering a leather coat, usually made of brass, in order to protect the heart and vital organs. Additionally, the breastplate might be accompanied by a "coat of chain mail", the so-called *lorica hamata*. Essentially it protected the body between the shoulders and the loins. An additional background for the "breastplate" comes from the attire of the Jewish High Priest who wore the "breastplate of judgment" (see Exodus 28:15; 39:8 in their contexts), symbolizing his judicial role in divining the will of God. Mounted on this priestly garment were the twelve precious stones symbolizing Israel in its entirety. Hidden in a small pocket within it were the stones of judgment, *Urim* and *Thumim*, removed from time to time and manipulated in ways that they answered simple "yes" or "no" questions and were, thereby, employed to discover God's answers. To live righteously meant to do what God wanted, to be "straight" in one's conduct, and not "crooked". The righteous "arrow" was a straight and sure arrow, likely to find its mark and not disappoint the archer. Similarly, followers of God's commands, keepers of His holy covenant, walked in straight paths for their feet (Proverbs 29:27 correlates these terms).

The term "righteous" is virtually identical with the notion of "just", such that righteousness and justice are stand-ins for each other. The Hebrew word is rooted in the form *tzedek*, while the Greek word is *dikaisunē*. Commonly, justice indicates fair-handedness, rendering to each his due. In the law court setting, the purpose of the judge is "to make things right", not merely to pronounce on guilt and innocence. "Right the wrongs": this is the work of righteousness. Through Christ, Paul had consistently proclaimed, God's righteousness has accomplished just that, putting an end to false inequities, the painful separation of Jew and Gentile. Jesus, in his public instruction, proclaimed the righteousness of God through his own holy life and through such extended sermons as the one he gave "on the mount". Christ's own championing of righteousness was seen in his acts of kindness to the outcast, and acceptance of the sinner around the table of fellowship. Those whom others rejected, he embraced so as "to save them", like sick folk in need of a physician. Here is righteousness in action, and we can only assume that Paul meant his readers to see their own "breastplate" as the supreme protection of their own vital interests, but also of the whole Christ community. Righteousness always renders "service" to others in doing its work (see 2 Corinthians 3:9). Wearing the breastplate of righteousness symbolizes dignity, honor and acceptance by God who is the quintessential "righteous judge", as Paul himself affirmed near the end of his life (see 2 Timothy 4:8). When we render righteous judgments to others, we truly wear the breastplate of righteousness (see Deuteronomy 16:18 for an Old Testament parallel).

Where can the world look to see living examples of "just living" and "righteous dealing"? It ought to be the church, filled with Christ-followers, sporting the breastplate of righteousness, not as an ornament, but as their very way of life. Within the Temple of the Lord, rising up as the residence of God through His Spirit, human beings should be able to come and find crooked things made straight, and the rough places smooth (see Isaiah 40; also, Psalm 5:8; Proverbs 11:5; Acts 13:10, where righteousness is clearly the rectifying of the crooked thing). In a world where so many things are twisted, bent and crooked, the Christ-follower offers righteousness

as the divine alternative. Paul calls upon his readers to "take their stand" by the righteousness they exhibit in their lives and practice in their dealings with others. Be righteous in the midst of a crooked and twisted world, Paul counseled elsewhere (Philippians 2:15).

Covering the "heart", as it does, the breastplate "guards" the heart. This language appears in Philippians 4:7, and refers to the proper maintenance of "thoughts" that focus on true and righteous things. Righteousness is also a sanctifying experience for the Christian soldier, as Paul makes clear in Romans 6:13 and 14:17.

### **Ephesians 6:15: Feet Shod with the Gospel**

No actual word for "shoe" appears in the text, but rather Paul speaks about the "feet shod" with "the Gospel of peace". The word for "shod" (*hupodeō*) is actually a word referring to the "binding on" activity associated with putting on leather shoes or sandals having straps. Once again, the middle voice is used, implying this is something which the soldier herself is responsible to do. Roman legionnaires had heavy sandals called *caliga*, a kind of low, half boot constructed of multi-layered leather soles nearly an inch thick, studded with nails. Leather thongs tied these part way up the leg, and, in cold weather, were stuffed with wool or fur. These are not "running sandals", but instead foot-gear meant to "stand the ground", their "cleats" piercing the soil and braced against the enemy's assault.

Paul qualifies this foot-gear by speaking about "preparation" in conjunction with the Gospel of peace. Here is the soldier in a state of "readiness", the key idea behind the word *hetoimasia*, along the lines of a modern branch of our own military: "always prepared". The Old Testament equivalent is found in the word *kūn* which means "to establish" or "set up" (see Psalm 10:17), "make ready" or "prepare" (see Psalm 65:9; Nahum 2:3). The idea of "foundation" also lies behind the Hebrew notion (see Ezra 2:68; Psalm 89:14). The implication is that the right footwear strapped to the soldier's feet prepares him to stand his ground with a firm footing.

The soldier's "ability" to keep his footing rests with the Gospel, its true source. Already Paul has told his readers about the gospel of salvation (1:13) and the gospel which proclaims the union of Jew and Gentile in one body (3:6). We know the root meaning of "gospel" is "good news" (*euaggelion*), the royal proclamation that Jesus, God's Son, has died and risen (see 1 Corinthians 15:1-5). Its roots are in this text from Isaiah:

How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, who publishes peace, who brings good news of happiness, who publishes salvation, who says to Zion, "Your God reigns" (Isaiah 52:7).

When the soldier "take his stand" he becomes God's instrument for proclaiming the Good News that God is King and Jesus is Lord. Through the Gospel, the Christian is authorized to turn aside the onslaught of the enemy who threatens to overwhelm and seize ground once again. Within the context of the Roman Empire, this sort of imagery makes a great deal of sense. The Romans sought to maintain the *pax Romana*, rooted in the *pax Augustus*. By the time of Paul, the work of empire-building was largely finished; the major challenge was the maintenance of empire against Rome's enemies on the borders. Following this analogy, the Christian community, ruled from heaven by Jesus Christ, has already claimed the ground purchased by Christ's death and assured by his resurrection. It is up to the Christ followers to seize the power afforded by the message of the Gospel and, in readiness, face the challenge of the devil and his cohorts.

Consider also Paul's combination of "gospel" and "power" found in Romans 1:16-17:

16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. 17 For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, "The righteous shall live by faith."

In the context of *Ephesians* this means "power to stand".

### **Ephesians 6:16: Shield of Faith**

All of the armor thus far has been attached to the soldier's body. However, the shield (Greek: *thureos*; much like the Hebrew ideas *tsinah* or *magēn*) is something which must be "taken up", that is, received. To which Roman armament does Paul refer? The root idea of the Greek word is *thuros*, meaning "door", pointing to the shield which covers the whole soldier and shaped like a door: the Latin, *scutum*. This shield had a convex surface, roughly 2 1/2 feet by 4 feet in size, and was constructed from wood planks joined together and covered

with canvas and calf skins. Its edges were rimmed with metal to prevent wear from contact with the ground. At its center, a so-called iron "boss" repelled the glancing blows of stones and arrows. Because of its size, the *scutum* afforded protection to the whole body, covering the previous pieces of armor in the process.

Why the shield "of faith"? The word *pistis* (faith) is in the genitive form and likely means the faith which gives the shield its usefulness. We know from the Old Testament (Genesis 15:1; Psalm 5:2; 18:2, 30, 35; 28:7; 33:20; 35:2; 59:11; 91:4; 115:9-11; 144:1) that the shield was used metaphorically to describe God's protection of His people, and in which they placed their trust. Faith is, at its heart, trust in the faithfulness of God, that abiding confidence and receptivity to God's activity in our lives. In the words of A.T. Lincoln, "Faith takes hold of God's resources in the midst of the onslaughts of evil and produces the firm resolve which douses anything the enemy throws at the believer" (p. 449). Paul, in this passage, makes reference to the "fiery darts (arrows)" rained down on the soldiers by the enemy. These "missiles" were the ancient artillery, arrows dipped in tar, ignited and then shot into the air from which they fell into the midst of the opposing side. They were experienced as "terror from the sky", much like the spiritual assaults of Satan, "the prince of the power of the air" who rains down his opposition to the newly established kingdom of God on earth. He is called "the evil one" in this context for good reason (see also 2 Thessalonians 3:3; Matthew 13:19; John 17:15; 1 John 2:13-14; 5:18-19). The imagery of the "burning arrow" crops up in places like Psalm 7:13 and Proverbs 26:18. Nothing brings panic like a fiery arrow attack, an assault from heaven, arrows sticking to shields, even if they miss the body, and soldiers trying to shake them off, dropping their shields in the process. For this reason, soldiers soaked their shields in water prior to battle so as to "extinguish" these *ta belē tou ponērou ta pepurōmena*.

What sorts of fiery missiles fall from the devil's sky? Surely they include an array of misfortunes, including, but not limited to temptations, false teaching, persecution, doubt, and despair. Faith empowers the Christ follower to be victorious and shake off such assaults, quenching the fire by a well-prepared faith. Elsewhere, the Bible speaks of the "trial of faith" and offers guidance on coming through it successfully. Consider:

12 Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. 13 But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed (1 Peter 4:12-13).

2 Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, 3 for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. 4 And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing (James 1:2-4).

Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him (James 1:12).

6 In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, 7 so that the tested genuineness of your faith- more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire- may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ (1 Peter 1:6-7).

### **Ephesians 6:17a: Helmet of Salvation**

The final "arming" of the soldier involves putting on the helmet and taking up the sword. As the enemy approaches, the nearly equipped foot soldier seizes his helmet. Paul uses the Greek for *dexasthe*, perhaps translated "grab", as firmly but quickly, marking urgency. The word for helmet, *perikephalaia*, (Latin: *galea*) points to a simple head covering, but plainly in this military context, refers to the "helmet", made from bronze and placed over an iron "skull cap" lined with leather or fleece. By Paul's time, the evolution of the helmet included the feature that it extended down the back of the neck, resting on the shoulder. Its front had a bow-ridge, protecting the nose and eyes, with cheek pieces affording covering to the rest of the face.

Notice the order of the soldier's armament. At this point in his outfitting, he holds the shield in one hand, thus leaving a free hand to drop his helmet in place. He grasps "faith" just prior to receiving "salvation", as we would expect in the purposes of God. Salvation must be "received": it is not something that is "taken" as was true with the previous pieces of armor. Once more, Isaiah 59:17 is in Paul's sites, mentioning as it does the "helmet of salvation". Because of the "battle" context of both passages, it seems likely that the most basic meaning of "salvation" (*sōtēria*) as "deliverance" or "rescue" is intended, or as Hoehner suggest, "experiential salvation" (p.850), the kind delivering us from the attacks of the wicked one (see 1 Thessalonians 5:8).

### **Ephesians 6:17b: Sword of the Spirit, the Word of God**

Paul employs the Greek word *machaira*, implying a short-sword or dagger. Old Testament warriors used a *hereb*, the Hebrew term translated by the one Paul uses in *Ephesians*. The Romans called it the *gladius*, a Spanish sword with a double-edged blade some two inches wide and two feet long, a perfect weapon for in-your-face warfare, marked by cut and thrust actions.

Associated with "the Spirit", the sword receives its power from the Holy Spirit, the likely reason Paul names it as he does here. We find this in the Old Testament imagery as well, where Isaiah writes of the Messiah smiting the earth with the word of his mouth, having the Spirit of the Lord resting on him (Isaiah 11:5). Paul connects the Spirit's sword with the *rēma* of God, using the Greek word more likely associated with the "spoken word" or the more immediate and relevant form of communication, in contrast to *logos*, a title for Jesus himself, but also for the Word of God in its objective sense. The *rēma* may well refer to the word which confronts the evil one in battle, a word which comes from God, empowered by Him, adapted to the needs of the moment. Judging from Jesus' encounter with Satan (see Matthew 4:1-11 and Luke 4:1-13), it draws from the written word to gain its authority and content. Hoehner writes: "The spoken word of God is the 'instrument' of the Spirit" (p.853). It is interesting to recall that Jesus often silenced demons when they tried to speak, showing that the Word empowered by the Spirit trumps the word of the evil one who is, in effect, denied "the last word".

In a similar vein we read:

For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart (Hebrews 4:12).

Often in his confrontation with the religious teachers of his day, Jesus would expose the fallacy of their teaching and the hypocrisy of their lives. In a larger sense this is how the word of God, the Spirit's sword operates: it unmasks the enemy, revealing his sinister plans, and thwarting his plots and conspiracies. Appropriately, the one book of the Bible whose title means "unveiled" ("Revelation", *apokalupsis*), says much about the role of the word as striking down the enemies of God (see Revelation 1:16; 2:12, 16; 19:13, 15). By the "word of his mouth", Yahweh, in the Old Testament, slays His enemies (Hosea 6:5). The prophet's words are like a "sharp sword" (Isaiah 49:2).

### **Comments on the Previous Armor of God**

We have seen a soldier dressed for battle, placed in readiness, getting his stance, and handed his helmet and sword. What we must not lose sight of is that this passage is not about one solitary soldier, but rather about the equipping of a whole army: the army of God, the people of God. Martin Kitchen reminds the reader of Paul's letter/sermon that this metaphor has a corporate understanding (pp.119-126). Drawing from Bruce Malina's helpful research on "dyadic personality", Kitchen suggests a total understanding of the organism, the image of a corporate man who is complete, integrated and at one, both with his environment and with himself. This parallels Paul's earlier picture of Christ's followers as reaching toward becoming "the perfect man" (4:13), the "mature humanity" (p. 121).

Furthermore, in Revelation 19, the writer of the *Apocalypse* paints a grand picture of Christ, the armed horseman, mounted on a white horse. That portrait neatly summarizes much of the armor Paul depicts in Ephesians 6, applying it to the continuing work of Christ:

Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse! The one sitting on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war. 12 His eyes are like a flame of fire, and on his head are many diadems, and he has a name written that no one knows but himself. 13 He is clothed in a robe dipped in blood, and the name by which he is called is The Word of God. 14 And the armies of heaven, arrayed in fine linen, white and pure, were following him on white horses. 15 From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron. He will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty. 16 On his robe and on his thigh he has a name written, King of kings and Lord of lords (Revelation 19:11-16).

The armies following this mounted warrior are described as clothed in fine line, white and pure, and can be none other than the Christ-followers, arrayed in their resurrection bodies, equipped to follow Christ into battle.

Through this powerful image, the writer provides a helpful glimpse of the future, with the even greater encouragement that one day all kings will bow before this divine warrior.

### **Ephesians 6:18: Prayer as "Standing Watch"**

Scholars have debated whether what follows in 6:18-20 pertains to the armor of the soldier or represents a whole new section. It might be better to inquire whether this extended passage still relates to the military imagery of the soldier, and pertains to his "standing firm". The answer is "yes", and lies in the connection between "prayer" and standing "watch". We know, for example, from Jesus' experience in the Garden of Gethsemane, that he asked his disciples to "watch and pray" so that they would not be overcome by temptation, that is, by the attacks of the evil one (see Matthew 26:41 and Mark 14:38). In the ancient world the "watchtower", manned by its "watchman" was a critical component of any city's fortifications. Elevated above the city wall, the watchtower allowed the guardians sufficient vantage point to forewarn the approach of enemy armies or report unusual troop movements of a besieging army. The operative idea is "alertness" as evidenced by Paul's use of the Greek expression *agrupnountes*, the participle of a word meaning "be alert" or "be watchful". Falling asleep on watch, in Roman times, was a deadly misstep and could easily cost a soldier his life. Recall the watch of Roman soldiers at Jesus' tomb. In spiritual terms, Paul applies the metaphor to prayer, the principal means for the Christian to stand watch. Among the early Christians, "sleep" was connected to the spiritual darkness around them, and, as we saw in 5:14, the apostles frequently called on them to "wake up". Paul, when he was about to leave Ephesus, warned that "wolves" would likely muscle their way into the Christ community, threatening damage to "the flock of God". He meant, of course, false teachers who would take advantage of young Christians. Paul's instruction was simple: "be alert" (Acts 20:31).

Nor is the prayer Paul desires only private and personal. Instead he counsels, "for all the saints". In a real sense, prayer is a corporate, "group" activity, by means of which we support each other in our respective battles with the devil. No one lives alone; no one fights alone in the body of Christ. As we have stressed throughout this series, God is raising up a new community, the "God society", in the world. It is His holy Temple where he wants to dwell, composed of "living stones" which are the people of God themselves, built on the foundation Christ maintains. Prayer stands watch over the brothers and sisters. By means of prayer we stand watch with them. Equipped with the armor of God, we are also kept keen through prayer and watching out for the spiritual weaknesses of others, supporting them with various forms of prayerful communication:

1. "through every prayer and petition". Two words appear here (as they do in such places as Philippians 4:6). They appear together for the sake of intensifying the idea involved.
  - a. "prayer", that is *proseuchē*. This is the comprehensive word for prayer to the God of heaven, and assumes the form of a "supplication".
  - b. "petition", that is *deēsis*. This is literally a request, petition, or entreaty. Commonly occurring in courtroom contexts, this word points to the appeal of God's people to their covenant relationship with Him when they bring their requests to Him.
2. Paul also makes clear this is prayer "in the Spirit", an idea he previously expressed in 2:18 where he taught that we have "access" to God through the Spirit.
3. Devotion to such persistent and disciplined prayer keeps the Christ follower alert. The soldier fails completely in his mission if, fully armed and equipped, he falls asleep on the job. Not only does he fail his own assignment, he also lets down his unit. Together, Christians must carry the all-important responsibility of prayer together. Such exhortations to "persevere in prayer" appear in Romans 12:12; Colossians 4:2; Acts 1:14; 2:42; 6:4.
4. In light of God's gracious outpouring of Himself in all sorts of resources to live the Christian life, Paul urges his readers to assume responsibility and avoid spiritual complacency and fatigue, pursuing a life of prayer instead.

### **Ephesians 6:19-20: "Pray for Me"**

Consistent with Paul's skillful use of rhetoric to communicate his message to the Asiatic Christians, he closes this section on the Christian soldier with a direct request for himself: "prayer also for me" (Greek: *kai huper emou*, literally, "and on my behalf"). The rhetorical effect of this phrase is to show that even Paul needs prayer.

Though he is God's special agent, or as he calls himself in 6:20, "ambassador in chains", he still relies on God for the words he speaks and the manner in which he speaks them. He can do none of these things on his own. Having heard Paul say this, his readers would likely think to themselves, "Well, if Paul needs prayer, we certainly need it too!" By sheer force of example, Paul presses his *Peroratio* to its logical conclusion, filled with the powerful image of Paul, shackled with chains, kept in custody, awaiting trial. His readers could only imagine the pain this caused him, and the need he had to be supported by their prayers so that he, like they, might "stand firm", making known the mystery of the Gospel, and doing so without fear. Paul's case is also their case, he seems to be telling them. A certain swallowing of pride precedes our request for prayer from each other. Even soldiers need prayer, mighty and strong, equipped and ready though they be. A well-armed and fit soldier, sleeping at night, is at the mercy of the watchman. He is as vulnerable to the enemy as any weak-willed civilian, unless his fellow soldiers stay alert and keep watch. It is the same with the Christ followers. Apart from a shared and persistent experience of corporate prayer to sustain us, we fail to "take our stand" as we should. That is why Paul repeats the various words for prayer in this section: for emphasis. As Hoehner suggests, this shows "the thoroughness and intensity in regards to prayer. The adjective *pas* ("every, all") is also mentioned four times. As believers take up the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, they should pray *every* opportunity, through *every* prayer and petition, with *all* persistence and petition for *all* the saints..." (p.859).

## Conclusion

Impacted by Paul's words to the Ephesian Christians, we also listen to a more recent writer whose poetry expresses the powerful spirit of the apostle's message:

1 Am I a soldier of the cross,  
a foll'wer of the Lamb?  
And shall I fear to own His cause  
or blush to speak His Name?

3 Are there no foes for me to face?  
Must I not stem the flood?  
Is this vile world a friend to grace  
to help me on to God?

5 Thy saints in all this glorious war  
shall conquer, though they die;  
they see the triumph from afar  
by faith's discerning eye.

2 Must I be carried to the skies  
on flow'ry beds of ease,  
while others fought to win the prize  
and sailed through bloody seas?

4 Sure I must fight, if I would reign;  
increase my courage, Lord;  
I'll bear the toil, endure the pain,  
supported by Thy Word.

6 When that illustrious day shall rise,  
and all Thine armies shine  
in robes of vict'ry through the skies,  
the glory shall be Thine.

(Isaac Watts, 1724)

In summarizing the material for this week, our thoughts return to 2 Samuel 23 and Shammah's stand in the bean field. To help us once more to gather up the rich food from that story, we leave you with some insights from Ray Pritchard<sup>1</sup>.

*Victory Comes When We Stand Our Ground!* That's what Shammah did. Instead of running and hiding he decided to fight back. From a worldly point of view, what Shammah did was foolish at best. He dared to stand his ground amid challenges from every side. He did not compromise with the enemy, he not retreat from them, and he did not establish a "multicultural discussion team" to help iron out the differences between the Israelites and the Philistines. He stood his ground, striking down the attacks of the enemy, and the Lord brought about a great victory in that bean field. It has always been that way for the people of God. Victory comes when we stand our ground. Note the perfect balance between our part and God's part. What Shammah did required courage, faithfulness and initiative:

*Courage:* "He took his stand in the middle of the field"

*Faithfulness:* "He defended it"

*Initiative:* "He struck the Philistines down"

Then comes the *victory*: "And the Lord brought about a great victory." What made the difference? One man who refused to run away. One man turned the tide of battle and through him, God brought about a great victory.

*One question:* What's the hardest part of winning a battle like that?

*Answer:* Having the courage to take your stand in the middle of the field. If you can do that, the rest is easy. The hard part is not running away.

**To God Be the Glory! Amen!**

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.keepbelieving.com/sermon/1995-04-23-letters-from-the-bean-field/>