

## "Armed for Battle" Ephesians 6:10-20

### Introduction

- Between May 31<sup>st</sup> and June 2<sup>nd</sup> 1916, German and British naval fleets engaged each other in the [Battle of Jutland](#) off the Danish coast to determine naval supremacy of the North Sea. The British Grand Fleet was under the command of [Admiral John Rushworth Jellicoe](#), and the German High Seas Fleet was commanded by [Vice Admiral Reinhard Scheer](#). The first phase of the battle began when, at 3:48 PM, May 31, the battle cruisers and destroyers of [Vice Admiral David Beatty](#) made contact with a squadron of German battle cruisers. Both sides opened fire simultaneously, and the action lasted for 55 minutes.<sup>1</sup> Almost immediately, the *Lion* a heavy cruiser in Beatty's flotilla was hit by an artillery barrage and quickly sunk. Next the *Indefatigable* was hit and blown to pieces. Then the *Queen Mary* was sunk taking a crew of 1,200 sailors straight to the bottom. Over the three day battle, the British would lose 14 of 149 ships and 6274 men; casualties that far outnumbered the German losses.

### Transition

Unfortunately, too many Christians, like those British ships, are unprepared, unarmored for battle. You do know we are under attack, right? The warning sirens have sounded. The legions of hell have been trained and mobilized. Our enemy has targeted every fiendish weapon in his arsenal at you in order to remove you from the conflict. We are at war. There is a heavenly contest, a cosmic struggle for the souls of men and women. If you've never been told you're at war as a Christian, then consider today's message your call to arms. If you do realize we're at war, then it begs the question, how's the battle going? Let me say it a bit differently. What about the way you're living the Christian life demonstrates that you're at war? Most of the church, as evidenced by the testimonies of our persecuted brothers and sisters in Christ, is in the throes of battle. The question is why aren't we? What about our Christian faith is so lacking that we have no sense whatsoever of this battle raging all around? There really are only two options. Either we are nowhere near the battlefield so that the enemy needn't expend any effort defeating us or we have been so soundly defeated we've been left for dead. From the enemy's perspective, it doesn't matter which. Either case results in ineffectiveness.

Obviously God calls us to be effective and victoriously engage the enemy like our Christian brothers and sisters around the world. God wants us to be prepared to withstand the rigors of spiritual battle. This morning, I want to remind you how to do this.

### Proposition

- **In order to be effective in our cosmic battle we must stand firm**

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<sup>1</sup>"Jutland, Battle of," *Microsoft® Encarta® 98 Encyclopedia*. © 1993-1997 Microsoft Corporation. All rights reserved.

## Transition

Let me say that again because we must remember that we are not called to win the battle. The war is already over, finished, complete. That doesn't mean there isn't fighting left to do. There is. In fact, there's a lot is at stake. But the outcome has already been determined. We are simply called to stand firm, to be strong and hold our ground as the victors. This morning, I want us to look at Ephesians 6:10-20 because this passage speaks directly to the issue of our effectiveness in battle. May this passage bolster our wartime mentality and make us effective soldiers in the Lord's army.

## Organizational Sentence

- **Ephesians 6:10-20 gives three keys to standing firm and remaining effective in battle**

## Background/Setting

- One of the first things that should immediately jump out at you is how out of place this passage seems compared to the messages of previous weeks. We've been discussing the home and family, love, and marriage and, the pitter patter of little feet on the linoleum, and all of a sudden, WHAM!!, Paul jolts us awake and tells us we're at war. Why? In battle language, this section sums up everything that Paul has been trying to teach us. Ephesians is about God's new society that has been created through Christ. It's about spiritual riches procured for us by his death and resurrection. It's about life as the church and the "unity, diversity, purity, and harmony" that go with it. It's about ethical living, things that must be fleshed out in light of those great spiritual truths. Wonderful ideals. I love Ephesians because I'm an idealist. This book describes the way things ought to be at home and in the church. And what Paul wants us to realize is that in order to make the commands and ideals of Ephesians come to life at home and in our church, it's going to take a war. Folks, we are at war. We are engaged in a cosmic conflict, a tooth and nail fight. And what we are fighting over is our attempt to bring about life as Ephesians describes it. And Satan wants nothing to do with it. To live out this book in your personal life and here at church is to be at war with an enemy who is hell-bent on destroying you and the church. This passage describes how we are to be effective in light of an enemy pledged to destroy us.

## Transition

Let's look now at the **first key to being effective in battle**. Remember, three **keys to standing firm and remaining effective in battle**. Here's the first key. **Know your enemy**. Look at verses 10-13.

## Main Points

### I. **Know your enemy (6:10-13)**

#### A) Validation

- i) We are at war. Not against institutions, not against non-Christians, not against the culture, not against the media, not against your spouse, not against someone in this church, not against anything physical in this world. Our struggle is against a spiritual enemy of inconceivably evil proportions bent on destroying us. And we are called to action, we are called to arms, we are called to stand strong and be strengthened. We must fortify otherwise our formations will be shattered, the chinks in our armor

- pierced. Otherwise we await swift and complete defeat. We must know who we are up against.
- B) Explanation
- i) Our call to arms. Be strong. “The word means to stand and hold out in a critical position on the battlefield.”<sup>2</sup> IN THE LORD. In other words, be strengthened by God. Believers do not empower themselves. In the rest of the passage, Paul specifies how this is to happen.
  - ii) We are to put on armor of God. “The word was used as a military technical term describing the last preparation and final step necessary before the actual battle begins.”<sup>3</sup> Armor of God meaning it’s the armor that God supplies. The armor that God gives is his own! This passage must be understood in light of Isaiah 59:17 and 11:5 where God and his messiah are pictured as heavenly warriors who fights for their people. Here, in Ephesians, God fights for us now as the new people of God. GOD SUPPLIES THE ARMOR, OUR RESPONSIBILITY IS TO TAKE IT UP AND PUT IT ON. When Paul talks about putting on the new self, the new man, as he does in 4:24, is to don the armor of God.<sup>4</sup>
  - iii) Know the devil’s schemes. It is a struggle, a fight. Not against flesh and blood but against the heavenly forces of evil. The word fight refers particularly to hand to hand combat, to wrestling. “Wrestling was a fight characterized by trickery, cunningness, and strategy.”<sup>5</sup> We fight against the devil and his minions. The rulers, authorities, powers of this world. They are ruthless. Primarily our enemy’s tactic is one of trickery and cunningness. His stratagems and tactics are shrewd. He makes evil enticing, and desirable and legitimate. Stott says, “We must not imagine, therefore, that open persecution and open temptation to sin are his only or even his commonest weapons; he prefers to seduce us into compromise and deceive us into error.”<sup>6</sup>
    - (a) Nursing home ministry; how slick and subtle the enemy’s tactics are.
  - iv) Therefore, in light of our enemy, the goal is to keep our feet. Hold our ground, keep on standing. We must realize that the onslaught will be unending.
- C) Illustration
- i) In 1876 the army planned a campaign against the hostile Native Americans, then centered in southeastern Montana Territory. Custer's regiment of 655 men formed the advance guard of a force under General Alfred Howe Terry. On June 25 Custer's scouts located the Sioux on the Little Bighorn River. Unaware of the Native American strength, between 2500 and 4000 men, Custer disregarded arrangements to join Terry at the junction of the Bighorn and Little Bighorn rivers and prepared to attack at once. In the hope of surrounding the Native Americans, he formed his troops into a frontal-assault force of about 260 men under his personal command and two flanking columns. The center column encountered the numerically superior Sioux and

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<sup>2</sup> Reinecker, p. 541.

<sup>3</sup> Reinecker, p. 541.

<sup>4</sup> O'Brien, p. 462.

<sup>5</sup> Reinecker, p. 541.

<sup>6</sup> Stott, p. 265.

Cheyenne. Cut off from the flanking columns and completely surrounded, Custer and his men fought desperately but all were killed.<sup>7</sup> Not a single man survived.

D) Application

- i) Don't be naïve about the Christian life. If you go into it unprepared, you will not survive. It's not a pleasure cruise. It's not a walk in the park.
- ii) There's something to be said of the metaphor for the Christian life described by Tolkien in the Lord of the Rings. Life is a series of unending long drawn out battle sequences with the orcs and the goblins of the devil sent to do us in. Don't be foolish and think that you can beat this enemy on your own.
- iii) Remember, our fight is against spiritual powers. Not against physical institutions or people. So many Christians try to summarize the Christian life as a struggle against the media or against the government or against the culture. I can't tell you how many times I have heard this phrase recently. "We're losing the culture war." We're not at war with the culture.

## Transition

The **second key to being effective**. **Know your equipment**. Look at verses 14-17.

## II. Know your equipment (6:14-17)

A) Validation

- i) We are at war. And our enemy is overmatched. Outclassed and outgunned, he simply doesn't stand a chance to win. That is, when we're properly outfitted. Problem is, we don't realize the weapons at our disposal. And if we do realize the kind of weapons we have, many times we have no idea how to wield them properly. If we are going to make any kind of stand against our enemy we've got to know our equipment.

B) Explanation

- i) Having fastened the **belt of truth** belt of truth. For a Roman soldier, "this belt probably refers to the leather apron which hung under the armor and protected the thighs, rather than the sword belt or the protective girdle worn over the armor."<sup>8</sup> Isaiah 11:4-5 is referenced. "As believers buckle on this piece of the Messiah's armor, they will be strengthened by God's truth."<sup>9</sup> Flip back to chapter one. What this means is that one of our chief weapons against the enemy is rightly understanding the truth of the gospel and all that it entails.
- ii) Having put on the breastplate **of righteousness**. "The word denotes a piece of armor; scale or chain mail that covered chest and hips."<sup>10</sup> Drawn from Isaiah 59:17. Now the question we need to ask is this. Whose righteousness is in view? God's righteousness given to us through salvation or his righteousness made manifest in our

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<sup>7</sup>"Little Bighorn, Battle of the," *Microsoft® Encarta® 98 Encyclopedia*. © 1993-1997 Microsoft Corporation. All rights reserved.

<sup>8</sup> O'Brien, p. 473.

<sup>9</sup> O'Brien, p. 474.

<sup>10</sup> Reinecker, p. 541-2.

- lives as we live out the gospel. As we commit to being imitators of God and acting righteously in all our dealings, we are to be protected against the blows and arrows of our spiritual enemies.”<sup>11</sup>
- iii) Having **feet fitted with readiness of gospel of peace**. “It may refer to the strong and heavy shoe worn by the Roman soldiers. This shoe was thickly studded with hobnails to keep one from slipping.”<sup>12</sup> Drawn from Isaiah 52:7. In Romans, Paul applies this passage to those who preach the gospel. And so in this context, what Paul means is that we actually stand firm by being fitted, by being ready to preach the gospel of peace. This gospel is offensive. Ironically, we are at war and our chief offensive is the proclamation of a message of peace with God through Christ.<sup>13</sup>
- iv) Having taken up the **shield of faith**. “It refers to the large door-shaped shield in contrast to the small round convex shield. This large shield had an iron frame and sometimes a metal boss in the center at the front. Often the several layers of leather were soaked in water before the battle in order to put out the incendiary missiles of the enemy.”<sup>14</sup> Flaming arrows, arrows that were dipped in pitch and set on fire. Assaults will rain upon us by the evil one. “These arrows caused panic and tempted soldiers to throw down their burning shields, thus making them vulnerable to the spears of their enemies.”<sup>15</sup> What are the devil’s fiery darts? False guilt. Accusations. Doubts and disobedience. Lust, malice, fear. And so what we are asked to do in light of these incendiary bombs is to exercise our faith. In other words, exercise the shield that is our faith. They are one in the same. In other words, if our trust is in the Lord and his mighty power, these arrows will have no sway over us; we will be able to resist satanic attacks.
- v) Receive the **helmet of salvation**. “The Roman soldier wore a bronze helmet equipped with cheek pieces. This heavy helmet had an inside lining of felt or sponge which made the weight bearable. Nothing short of an axe or hammer could pierce this kind of helmet.”<sup>16</sup> Drawn from Isaiah 59:17. Again a genitive of apposition. The helmet that is salvation. We must work to understand the present reality of salvation to our lives and live in that heavenly light. Again, what this means is that one of our chief weapons against the enemy is rightly understanding our salvation and all that it entails.
- vi) **Sword of the Spirit**. “This refers to the short straight sword used by Roman soldiers.”<sup>17</sup> Drawn from Isaiah 11:5. This sword is, as the text says, none other than the word of God. As it says in Hebrews 4:12 *For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.* We take the offensive with the word of God. But it is the Spirit who gives the word its cutting power. What is in view here is not just the pages of scripture but actually the spoken word. What Paul has in mind is the proclamation of the gospel. As we proclaim the

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<sup>11</sup> O’Brien, p. 474.

<sup>12</sup> Reinecker, p. 542.

<sup>13</sup> O’Brien, p. 479.

<sup>14</sup> Reinecker, p. 542.

<sup>15</sup> O’Brien, p. 480 note 174, quoting Livy (*History*, 21.8).

<sup>16</sup> Reinecker, p. 542.

<sup>17</sup> Reinecker, p. 542.

truth of the gospel the Holy Spirit will use that exercise “to cut through people’s defenses, to prick their consciences and to stab them spiritually awake.”<sup>18</sup>

C) Illustration

- i) Most of you probably remember the classic Wendy’s commercial about the Russian fashion show. As the Russian model paraded out onto the runway the announcer, in a monotone voice, crooned swimwear, eveningwear.
- ii) What made that commercial so funny was that the large Slavic woman who waltzed down the runway wore the same bland communist outfit for each category in the fashion show. The only thing different was the accessory, the beach ball for the swimwear, the feather boa for the eveningwear.

D) Application

- i) Too many of us are just like the model in that Wendy’s commercial. The call has gone out to put on our battle gear and we come parading out in our civilian clothes, with one accessory. Some of you may have your helmet on, but not the rest of your armor. Some of you may exercise your faith but have neglected the proclamation of the word of God. Some of you have waltzed into battle with your drawers around your knees because you have forgotten the belt of truth. Put on the whole armor of God. Put on the entire thing. Not just one part.
- ii) Get to intimately know your equipment.

### Transition

The **third key to being effective**. **Know your limitations**. Look at verses 18-20.

## III. Know your limitations (6:18-20)

A) Validation

- i) We are at war. But the battle belongs to the Lord. He’s the one that strengthens us. It’s his armor. He helps us to stand as we stand with him. We must be completely dependent upon him to survive the war. One of the ways we can show we know our limitations on the battlefield is to pray. When we don’t pray we proclaim to God that we can fight on our own without his help. We must know our limitations and they must lead us to pray.

B) Explanation

- i) Prayer is vital to the success of the war. Prayer is given greater prominence than any of the other weapons listed in verses 14-17. In these three verses, the word “all” is used four times. “Most Christians pray sometimes, with some prayers and some degree of perseverance, for some of God’s people.”<sup>19</sup> Instead we are called to pray on all occasions, will all kinds of prayers, always being alert, praying for all the saints. As **Peter O’Brien** says, “Paul wants [you and I] to understand that prayer is foundational to the deployment of all the other weapons, and is therefore crucial if they are to stand firm in their spiritual struggle.”<sup>20</sup>
- ii) And we’re to pray in the spirit, with the Spirit’s help. We can’t even pray effectively without the aid of the Holy Spirit.

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<sup>18</sup> Stott, p. 282.

<sup>19</sup> Stott, p. 283.

<sup>20</sup> O’Brien, p. 484.

iii) Paul knew his limitations. In verses 19-20 he expresses how he's dependent upon God in order to be effective in his fight against evil. He prays for boldness and clarity, two things which you should pray that God would give every Christian pastor and teacher in your life.

C) Illustration

i) One of the things that is so sad to watch is a top, elite professional athlete, once at the top of his game, unable to come to grips with his own limitations. And so he puts himself out on the court or on the field only to be burned over and over and over.

D) Application

- i) None of us are superstars. Even if we were at the top of our game, it wouldn't be enough to carry the team to victory. We must be dependent upon God and that means knowing our limitations.
- ii) What does it take to become a person of prayer? Somehow you and I must get to the point where we realize that without God's help we are incapable of doing anything effectively for his kingdom. Let me say it differently. You cannot make a difference in God's kingdom working independently of him. He must be your preferred provider, your go-to-guy in everything if we are to be effective soldiers.

## Conclusion

- After losing so many ships in the Battle of Jutland, which I spoke to you of at the beginning of today's message, the British realized something about their ships. They discovered the reason they were being sunk so easily. There was a flaw in the design of their ships. Although their hulls were heavily armored, their wooden decks offered almost no protection against the German artillery shells dropped from above. Only after the British began to armor their ships on top as well as on the sides did they stop losing ships to German long-range artillery.<sup>21</sup> Have you armed yourself? Or are you still vulnerable to attack. [Machiavelli](#), in his classic book *The Prince* wrote, "There is no avoiding war; it can only be postponed to the advantage of others."<sup>22</sup> If we refuse to engage the enemy because we are not prepared, if we try to postpone the inevitable, we do so to the advantage of our enemy. This morning, as we reflect on the persecuted church, and our call to arms, let me leave you with the reminder that God gave Joshua before he set out to conquer the Promised Land. The Lord said to Joshua in Joshua 1:9 "*Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go.*" You are armed and dangerous because God is with you. Pray with me.

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<sup>21</sup> Citation: Ray Stedman, *Spiritual Warfare*; reprinted in *Men of Integrity* (July/Aug 2002)

<sup>22</sup> Niccolò Machiavelli (1469–1527), Italian political philosopher, statesman. *The Prince*, ch. 3 (1514).<sup>22</sup>