

In the name of our Triune God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

¹⁰ Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. ¹¹ Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. ¹² For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.

¹³ Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. ¹⁴ Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, ¹⁵ and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. ¹⁶ In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. ¹⁷ Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. ¹⁸ And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints.

¹⁹ Pray also for me, that whenever I open my mouth, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel, ²⁰ for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should. **This is God's Word for our meditation.**

Dear Christian Soldiers,

The final words of Paul's letter to the Ephesians can be summed up in two words: **Fight** and **Pray**. We would expect to be encouraged to pray, but is Paul really encouraging us to fight? Is that really what God wants us to do – to fight? That doesn't seem like the Christian thing to do and yet there are battles the Christian can't avoid – battles the Christian must fight. As we consider this portion of scripture, we want to take a closer look at what this fight is all about and how the encouragement to pray fits together with this section.

I. This letter to the Ephesians – the whole letter – is all about God's saving grace. We all know that God's saving grace makes us part of God's family of believers, but did you know that another effect of God's saving grace is that it makes you part of God's army? God's saving grace makes his people willing to contend or fight *for* the faith and *against* evil.

If a soldier wants to be successful in battle, he must train and practice. He has to be prepared. It helps if he has the best equipment and if he is big and strong. We have the best equipment supplier as we go into battle. Paul tells us, **“Let the Lord and His mighty power make you strong.”** He tells us to use the **“full armor”** of God. This armor is complete. It provides everything that we need. It comes to us with God's power and his protection as we take a stand against our enemy, the devil and all his schemes.

A lot of times when we think about our problems, we attribute them to specific people or circumstances. A lot of times we don't realize where these problems really originate. They are part of Satan's schemes against God's people. There certainly are evil and perverse people in this world who take delight in causing us trouble, but those folks are only instruments that Satan uses to attack us. That's why Paul points out that our struggle isn't against flesh and blood but against spiritual forces.

He then lists examples of these forces: **“the rulers, the authorities, the powers of this dark world and the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.”** This list tells us that Satan has a well organized kingdom. There are leaders with subordinate evil spirits who have authority to use their cunning and might to the best possible advantage against believers. There are the powers of this dark world who are those ruled by sin and the ways of the world. And we also have the spiritual forces in the heavenly realms who are the evil angels who know our weaknesses. Paul gives us these examples to try and help us understand that we are no match for them on our own. That’s why he directs us to **“Put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground.”**

You might think the **“day of evil”** is Judgment Day, but it is really is not a specific day. It is any day when our faith is tested. **Job** had his day of evil when catastrophe struck him and his family. **Joseph** had his day when Potiphar’s wife tried to entice him to commit adultery. **David** had his day when he saw Bathsheba bathing on her roof. **Peter** had his day when he was standing in the courtyard and denied Christ 3 times and we too will have our days.

It might be when we hear the doctor tells us cancer has invaded our body. It might be when a loved one dies suddenly or we might watch a loved one suffer through an incurable disease. It might be when a spouse or parent tells you the marriage is over – divorce is looming at the door. It might be when your boyfriend or girlfriend invites you to move in together without the benefit of marriage. We all will have our own “day of evil” when our faith is tried and tested. This isn’t something that might happen. Paul says to prepare yourself because it will happen.

Prepare yourself then by putting on the full armor of God. Listen to the description of this armor. We have the “Belt of Truth.” The soldiers belt protected the midsection and held everything in place. When Paul calls this a belt of *truth* it reminds us of some words from the Gospel of John, **“Jesus is the way and the truth,”** (John 14:6) and **“Thy Word is truth.”** (John 17:17). The belt is a defensive weapon and the truth of God’s Word defends us against the lies of the devil.

Then we have the “Breastplate of Righteousness.” We might think of this as our ‘bullet proof vest.’ It protects our heart where we hold onto the righteousness Christ won for us on the cross. The very same righteousness he gives us in exchange for our sins. The righteousness that comes to us through faith in Jesus as our Savior and brings us the gift of salvation.

This suit of armor also includes war sandals to protect our feet so that we can walk the path of faith. God’s Word contains the map for our walk. It describes the path for us and as we follow the path God has laid out for us, His Word brings us true peace. Paul then tells us to pick up the “Shield of Faith.” Not one of those small round shields but a big shield – big enough for us to hide behind as those flaming arrows of temptation fly in our direction. Once again, it is faith in Jesus our Savior, that extinguishes those flaming arrows sent to destroy us.

Our armor isn’t complete without protection for our head – the helmet of salvation. The knowledge that salvation can be found in no other name under heaven (the name Jesus Christ). This salvation gives us complete protection against a fatal attack from Satan. As you consider all

these weapons you might have noticed that they are defensive weapons, but we also have an offensive weapon – the Sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God.

The Word of God is an effective weapon against the schemes of the devil. He cannot stand up to it because it proclaims the truth which Satan is trying to destroy. This Sword of the Spirit – The Word of God – is the strength of our arsenal. It completes the “Full Armor of God.” So that we can march forward proclaiming the “Good News” about Jesus our Savior. As we go into battle, equipped with the Full Armor of God, Paul encourages us to pray.

II. Prayer comes naturally from a heart filled with faith. In the same way that faith prompts us to stand up for the Gospel and fight against the temptations of Satan, so that very same faith prompts us to pray.

Prayer, in a way, is our “Battle Cry,” as we point to God, the source of our faith and our strength. Prayer is our “Battle Cry” as we ask God to carry us through our struggles. Paul points out that we are able to approach God with all kinds of prayer because the Spirit of faith is in us. God himself encourages us to pray in many parts of scripture. **“Call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you will honor me.”** (Psalm 50:15). **“Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you.”** (Luke 11:9). **“Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.”** (1 Peter 5:7) and **“Pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.”** (1 Thess. 5:17-18). There are many reasons to pray and God has promised to hear and answer our prayers and He does.

But when we pray, don’t just come making requests for yourself. Paul encourages us to pray “for all the saints.” He’s talking about our fellow Christians. Pray for a friend – for God to help them with whatever problem or temptation you know they are struggling with. And pray for the Gospel and those who are sharing it so that they may do so boldly and faithfully. Remember that **“The prayer of a righteous [person] is powerful and effective.”** (James 5:16). Don’t forget this powerful tool that God has added to our arsenal.

These final words of Paul in his letter to the Ephesians are short and sweet – fight and pray. Fight for your faith and Fight against temptations that would harm your faith and destroy you. Use the full armor of God found in the sword of the Spirit – that is in God’s Word. Hear it and study it so you are always ready to use it. Let prayer be your battle cry as you pray on all occasions and with all kinds of requests and prayers.

Use what God has given you. Amen.