

Main Street

UNITED METHODIST CHURCH



Ephesians 6:10-20 **“Full Battle Dress”**

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(3rd Sunday in Lent)

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“Following Christ From City Center!”

EPHESIANS 6:10-20 "FULL BATTLE DRESS"

Endure In Face Of Hostile/Intrusive Culture

1) v.10 SUMMARY COMMANDMENT ON COMMUNAL STRENGTH.

Military Address, Peroration (Review)

10a Finally, be strong* (empowered) **Call To Arms! Read Aloud To Inspire// General To Troops, Arouse Emotions, Disdain Enemy**
 in the Lord ***7 Imperatives (vv.10a, 11a, 13a, 14a, 17a, 17b, 18:a), 3:7, Exhortations Begin At 4:1// Col. 1:11**
 b and 'in the strength **In the Lord = 2:21, 4:17, 5:8, 6:1, 21, To Church As A Body, Not Just To Individuals**
 of his might.' **Military Mindset, Call For Valor, "Onward Christian Soldiers, Marching As To War"**
Is. 40:26 (LXX), Command: Strength In Him & His Might, God Has Superior Equipment
Victory Over Powers (1;21. 2:2, 3:10). Synonymous Parallelism For Emphasis (a-b//a'-b')

2) vv.11-13 HOW TO BE STEADFAST BY TAKING UP THE FULL ARMOR OF GOD.

Strategy Presumes A Warfare World View, *panopla* = full armor

a) v.11 Command To Put On The Whole Armor For Enemy Attack.

Wis. 5:17-23, Battle = Philosophical Language

11a Put on* **the whole armor of God**, 4:24// Is. 11:5, 59:15b-18, Ps. 18:1-3, 28:7 **Command To Don Whole Armor Of Foot Soldier**
 b that you may be **able to stand** against the wiles (craftiness/methods) of the DEVIL. //2:2, 4:14, 4:27, *Devil Is Sing.; Wiles*
stand (vv.11b, 13b, c, 14a), Rom. 13:12, Romans Were Not To Retreat But Stand In Interlocked Ranks

b) v.12a Wrong Enemy: Who Is Not Our Foe: Other Human Beings.

//2 Cor. 10:3-5

Many Ephesians Used Magical Practices To Deal With Powers

12a Because we are not contending against blood and flesh (i.e. other human beings), **Reason For Armor: "For"**
Gen 32:22-32; Dan 10:10-21, Combat With Astral Power, Lower Regions Of Air

b') vv.12b-e Right Enemy: 4 Multiple Spiritual Powers And Colonized Creational Structures.

Later Misused By Gnostics: Light/Soul Trapped In Flesh By Evil Creator

b 1) but against the rulers, **archons/exhousia (1:21, 3:10) // 2:1-3, Opposing Powers In 4 Categories, 2 Cor. 10:20**
 c 2) against the authorities, **2 Possible Groups: Principalities/Powers, Or High/Lower Fallen Angels**
 d 3) against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, //5:8, 11, **Pagan Deities: Sun/Moon, Fallen Age**
 e 4) against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. "spiritual beings of wickedness"

Possible Rank Ordering From High To Low// Jub. 10:3-13, 1 Enoch 15:8-12, T. Sim. 4:9

a') v.13 Command To Put On The Whole Armor Of God To Be Able To Stand In The Evil Day.

Inclusion

Fully Armed With Ethical Virtues = Protection Against Evil

13a Therefore, take* **the whole armor of God**, **Emphasis On Whole Armor, Conclusion By Rehearsal, //Romans 13:8-13**
 b that you may be **able to withstand (stand firm)** in that evil day, //5:16, **Evil Day = This Current Age Before The Kingdom/Now**
 c and having done all, **to stand** **Do Not Give Away Ground Or Retreat, Keep Your Position In The Ranks**
Image Is Not Of Aggression But Of Preparation And Resistance

3) vv.14-20 SIX PIECES OF ARMOR SPECIFIED: ALLEGORY OF ARMOR, VARIETY OF PRAYER.

a) vv.14-17 Command To Stand: The Allegory Of The Armor: Individual And Aided Preparation.

Receive God's Armaments, One Who Donned All Was Making A Statement = Readiness For Combat

14a **Stand** therefore,* **Wherever You Are Is Your Post, Command To Stand**
4 Participles All, Two Groups Of Three? 1-3, 4-6

Sequence/Action

Armor

Christian Resources//Fruit Of Spirit/ Virtue

b 1) having girded your loins with (the belt) (of) truth, 1:13, Is. 11:5, **Apron Under Armor**
 c 2) and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, Is. 59:17, **Leather/Metal**
 15 3) and having shod your feet with the readiness of the gospel of peace:// 1:10. 3:10, Is. 52:7

16a 4) besides all these, taking the shield (long) of faith, Wisdom 5:17-23, **Wet, Armor + Note**
 with which you can quench **Verbal Assaults**
 all the flaming darts of the **EVIL ONE**.

17a 5) And take* the helmet of salvation, Is. 59:17, **From Attendant**
 b 6) and (take)* the sword of the Spirit, which is the word (*rhema*) of God. **Close Combat, Armor + Note**

b) vv.18-20 Command To Prayer As Additional Resource: Armed Soldier To Suffering Apostle.

//Col. 4:2-4, **Command To Pray** **Communication With Commander, 7th Weapon Expanded**

18a 7) Pray at all times in the Spirit,* **Spirit (vv.17b, 18a), Prayer (1:15-23, 3:14-21)**
 with all prayer and supplication. **Different Forms Of Spirit-Prayer, Open To Gifts/Guidance**
 b To that end keep alert with all perseverance, **all (2x [v.16]+4x [v.18]), Military Language For Watches, Mk. 14:38**
 c making supplication for all the saints, **Heroic Example Of Apostle, General Intercession For The Whole Army**
 19a and also for me, **Specific For Key Leaders, Col. 4:3, Paul As Example Of Soldier**
 b that utterance may be given me/ in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel, //1:9, 3:3-4
 20a for which I am an ambassador in chains; Lev. 26:13, **Philemon 9, 2 Cor. 5:20, Wretched Prisons, Col. 4:4**
 b that I may declare it boldly/, as I ought to speak. 3:12, **Characteristic: True Philosopher: Bold/Frank/Fearless**

A Brief Treatment Of Ephesians 6:10-20

The *peroration* (summary and emotional appeal) of Ephesians is 6:10-20 and is followed by the formal closing (6:21-24); it ends the paranesis begun at 4:1. *Finally* (Gk. *tou loipou*), signals the concluding appeal (v.10a). The larger thought unit has three parts: 1) v.10, an imperative, *be strong in the Lord*, and a supportive quote, *in the strength of his might* (Is. 40:26 LXX); 2) vv.11-13, a second imperative to *put on/take* the whole armor of God and a clarification of who the enemy isn't (v.12a) and is (v.12b); 3) v.14a, a third command, *Stand therefore*, is followed by a series of six pieces of armor (3a. vv.14-17) with *prayer* as a climactic seventh (3b. vv.18-20). There is a martial tone throughout, and some suggest it has affinities with a general's charge to his troops before battle. Seven commands (vv.10a, 11a, 13a, 14a, 17a, 17b, 18a) and the image of being fully armed against multiple adversaries (v.11b) strengthen this idea. The word *evil* (Gk. *poneros*) is used three times (vv.12b, 13b, 16a), *stand* and its cognate *withstand* (vv.11b, 13b, c, 14a) four times at strategic points (the inclusion of v.11/v.13[2x], to begin vv.14-17). *Spirit* serves as a bridge between vv.17b and 18a. Six uses of *all* (vv.13c, 16a, v.18[4x]) as well as the *whole armor* (Gk. *panoplia*) are comprehensive in intent. The focus of evil is given two titles: *Devil* (vv.11b), *The Evil One* (v.16)

Logically, the opening imperative– the assertion on which the exposition is based– might have stopped with the phrase, *Finally, be strong in the Lord...* But, to ground it in Isaiah from whom the armor of vv.14-17 is soon to be drawn, Paul adds a quick echo of Is. 40:26 (LXX), *and in the strength of his might*, thus generating a step parallel (a-b//a'-b'). The power for resistance is not self-generated as courage or bravado; it is derivative from our relationship with the Lord himself; it is a gift of *his might*.

The first developmental paragraph (2. vv.11-13) has a clear 4:2 concentric structure (a. v.11, b. v.12a // b' v.12b, a' v.13) with *the whole armor of God* (v.11a/v.13a) and *stand/withstand* (v.12b/v.1b) as inclusions. The foe to be resisted without retreat is *the devil* (Gk. *diabolos*, slanderer) and his nefarious schemes as aided by four levels of angelic ranks according to current categories of Jewish angelology; and note that all are plural (*rulers, authorities, powers, forces*), so the hierarchy (or lowerarchy!) of the opposing realm is complex and layered. The modifying phrases attached to the last two: *of this present darkness* and *of evil in the heavenly places*, indicate their mission and character. The astounding statement is not that the Devil (v.16) and his rebel accomplices are our foes but that humans (i.e. *flesh and blood*) are not! Those who do not follow our Lord and may do us wrong are in the grip of powers they do not understand. If our prison is of bars– as with Paul, theirs is made of lies and confusion. So do not make them your focus; rather, resist the one and ones in whose thralldom they lie! Our warfare is not against people caught in webs of deceit and evil; the deeper conflict is just beyond sight. All people are misshapen by forces they do not understand, and some of these are thoroughly wicked. The section ends as it begins, with a call to *take the whole armor of God* and to take a firm stand without retreat (v.13). Dig in!

The armor is put before us (3. vv.14-20) in a series of six– and then seven– related implements, and the first (v.14b) sets the three part pattern: 1) sequence and action (*having girded your loins*), 2) armor (*the belt*), and 3) virtue (*truth*). The phrase *besides all these* (v.16a) breaks the six into two groups of three. The first four use participles indicating past process, the last two imperatives for current action (*take*). Three virtues are simply stated (*truth, righteousness, salvation*); two are modified (*the gospel of peace, of faith with which you can quench...*); the last is not a virtue but the person *of the Spirit* whose sword of Scripture we wield. The allegory is not consistent, but the intent is clear: Be prepared! All but *the shield of faith* (Ps. 18:3, Wis. 5:19) have echoes in Isaiah (cf. Appendix); correlation with Roman armament is secondary. The seventh implement, a variety of prayer to communicate with our Lord on behalf of each other (v.18ff.) leads to a paradox. Paul, our strategist, is in jail; even here he leads his troops and asks for prayer that he may continue bold in his role as Jesus's ambassador. What fight! What a leader!

FULL BATTLE DRESS

“For we are not contending against flesh and blood....”

The real battles are not with the people we think of as our enemies.

EPHESIANS 6:12

One of the things about being a kid is that you don’t know much. Adults are larger than life. You know little of the forces shaping life and nearly nothing about the long march of history in which you stand. You’re being shaped and molded by powers beyond your knowing. We absorb as children; we reflect like mirrors as adolescents; and then— if maturity accompanies age— we sort it out as adults: what to keep, what to toss. It’s a messy process.

So with me. Mine was a mid-century southern rearing with a Palmetto spin, full of the themes of chivalry and honor with a certain martial tone and misguided nostalgia for the great lost cause of The Great War of Northern Aggression.¹ And by *martial* I mean military, from the Latin *martialis*, meaning *of Mars*, the Roman God of war. Martial law is military law; martial music is military music, and martial virtues are the character qualities of a good soldier: duty, discipline, courage, skill, obedience, readiness, teamwork, loyalty, honor, chivalry— a deference to women, in other words an upgraded version of the Boy Scout code which I quote to this day. A second hand version of martial virtues was downloaded without my permission; it was the air I breathed, and the two that go deepest are *competence* and *duty*. You better know your stuff, and you should always do your duty. It’s my DNA.

¹ For analysis, see Matthew Speiser, “Origins of the Lost Cause: The Continuity of Regional Celebration in the White South, 1850-1872,” www.essaysinhistory.com/articles/2011/6; Caroline Janney, “The Lost Cause,” www.encyclopediaofvirginia.org/Lost_Cause; Mark Silk, “The end of the South’s Religion of the Lost Cause,” religionnews.com/2015/06/23.

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My family was full of World War II veterans; my uncles were fighter pilots, rear gunners on B-17s, sub-mariners, force *recon*, my dad a naval navigator. A great uncle served on Eisenhower's Operation Overlord staff. I wondered what it was like for my grandmother's youngest brother Harvey, then a light colonel, to unroll a map in a room with Eisenhower as cables came in from Washington and No. 10 Downing Street. A demonic, cancerous evil in its Nazi, Fascist, and Imperial Japanese forms, had to be defeated. Go back, as I did this week, and listen to Churchill's speech of June 4, 1940 before Parliament the week after Dunkirk. Only twelve minutes long; its rhythms and rhetoric are riveting.² It saved an island people, and maybe us as well.

I remember as a teenager pulling my Uncle Jim Hord aside at a family reunion. He worked for the DOT and had a small farm outside Shelby, NC. I pulled him aside because I didn't want anyone to hear my question, "Uncle Jim, what was it like as a tail gunner when an FW190 or ME109 came into range?"

"Well, Son," he said in his laconic way, "It was just me and him. If you saw black smoke, your twin 50's had pierced his engine block, and if he quickly spiraled, you hit the cockpit. A 50 cal does a lot of damage to a man. You wouldn't want to see it, but later on you wonder about his family. Did he have a wife and children? Was he ideologically a Nazi, or just a German flyboy? You live for another mission, but it's his last."

"Were you scared?"

"No," he smiled, with a calloused hand around my shoulder, "I was too scared to be scared. Let's go get some of that fried chicken."

I didn't just read about heroes; they were all around me. In civilian life they kept the martial virtues and did not put up with foolishness. They understood the code and quietly measured other men by the standard. It shaped a culture; it shaped me. I grew up in a land of giants.

A faith that does not appreciate the martial virtues and the toughness they bring is going to grow weak and flabby, ineffective and undisciplined; and that is where we are now as United Methodists. We can't even discipline our own

² www.youtube.com/watch?v=iwaPHDxzrms.

bishops and clergy when they deliberately violate our ethical and theological standards, and that is sign of advanced decay of the spine. And if the generals don't hold one another to account, a general sense of lassitude steals into the ranks, uncertainty about our integrity and mission.

Much is at stake. Shall we maintain our identity as biblical Christians in continuity with John Wesley and behind him the early church, or shall we— like other of our friends in the experiment that was liberal Protestantism— collapse into the arms of the culture and its current obsessions with gender fluidity and erotic variety? Do what you will, I say, but please do not call it Christian. It is incompatible with classic Christianity and a Wesleyan view of holiness as a deeply changed and newly disciplined life. Others— and I do not doubt their sincerity— make a case based on human rights, sacred individual choice and supposed new knowledge. This is a full blown battle that will— one way or the other— encompass us all. Votes will be taken; there will be winners and losers. We will regain internal discipline, or we will divide because our positions are genuinely incompatible. And while recent skirmishes have gone in our direction, the war— and that is what it is— is yet to be decided; the next two years will tell.

So when Paul, likely from prison in Rome, writes like a commander, “Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the Devil... and have done all, to stand,” his tone is *martial*; he invokes the biblical imagery of God as Warrior from Isaiah and invites a comparison with the outfitting of a Roman legionnaire.³ And why? Because there's a war going on, and unless followers of Jesus in Ephesus understand the armor God gives, they will not stand against the incessant pressures of a pagan culture. And for all our concern about militant images of the faith and how subject they are to

³ The classic description of the kit of a Roman soldier is that of Polybius. See "The Military Institutions of the Romans," in *The Library of Original Sources*, Oliver J. Thatcher, ed. (Milwaukee, WI: University Extension Co., 1901), 172-186, www.shsu.edu/~his_ncp/Polyb1. Paul's analogy is likely based on the model of Wisdom 5:17-23 which is modeled on Isaiah, as is Paul's list in vv.14-17. The armor is God's; the allegory can be flexibly adapted to the audience, e.g. Paul adds *belt* and *sandals* to the four shared with the Wisdom quote: *breastplate, helmet, shield, sword*. There is no standard correlation of armor piece and virtue.

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misuse and abuse in crusades of one form or another, when such imagery is marginalized and ignored— as it has been in our ranks recently— something vital is lost. We begin acting like safe civilians who live far behind the front lines, and if Paul is right, that’s a dangerous blind spot. You are a moral and spiritual battleground; I am. There are powers arrayed against us we do not see. And what is true of you is true of your family, your culture, and your world. Everything you care about and everyone you value is contested ground.

Now while I am not a veteran, I have put on the armor four times: the first humorous, the second painful, the third life changing, the fourth dangerous. Our Cub Scout Den once put on a play for that year’s Blue and Gold Banquet about the knights of King Arthur’s round table. We took the big round ice cream containers, scrubbed them out, cut two eye slits, added cardboard visors, painted them silver, and made them into helmets. Our shields were cardboard, painted gold with heraldic crests, and our broad swords plastic. I was *Sir Phillip the Fearless* and my comrade *Sir David the Daring*. We slew dragons, rescued maidens, defended the poor and needy, and gave honor to our king as we ate (without manners!) at his great round table with great tankards of sparkling mead (actually Canada Dry ginger ale!). It was the worst of drama and the best of dreams, and I remember it for two reasons: the inside of my helmet smelled like stale chocolate ice cream, and it touched something deep in my heart, a dream that lay dormant for years until Jesus Christ reawakened it on July 5, 1972 when I surrendered after a great wound. An inner voice said to me, “I can use someone like you,” to which I replied, “Where do I sign?”

The second time I put on armor looked a lot like Pee Wee and then JV football. Things did not go well. I never reached my secret goal of a date with a cheerleader, and in the process had a major leg break and later a severe concussion that ended my career; the doctor would not relent, “Another blow like that could damage you forever,” so now you know I have *dain bramage!* I remember the feel of putting on the pads and treating the other team with as much controlled violence as my hundred and thirty pounds could muster. Scouting and football are venues for the cultivation of the martial virtues.

The fourth time was for real. As a police chaplain in Charleston for four years, I did lots of *ride-alongs* at night, and for those you had to wear body armor

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in the form of a Kevlar vest. I was given one of the old ones that tied on the side. And when I ask about shots from the side, the sergeant said, “Then you die.” It went under your shirt and made me look a lot hunkier than I was, and in the summer it itched terribly. When the sergeant dropped a steel plate in a pocket just over the center of my chest, I asked, “What’s that?” He smiled, “It’s to harden the kill zone over your heart.” I remember thinking, “I wish *Sir Philip the Fearless* was here. And Charleston, especially the North Area, was a war zone in the mid-90s. Drug killings, beat up prostitutes, hostage negotiations, domestic violence, and— what came to be my specialty— suicides and death notifications. It’s a good thing to see the dark underside of your town; it’s a cure for naivete.

Now if you’ve been counting, you know I left out the third, but it was for a reason. The three I’ve mentioned are over, and though they left the mark of memory, it is the third that continues to this day. Now what happened to me that July and several months afterward is that I was invested with a new type of armor, not exterior as with the ice cream helmet, the football helmet and later the Kevlar; this armor was interior.⁴ You could not see it with the unaided eye, but to other new recruits it was known. It meant relying on the new truth I was learning as if it were a wide leather belt that held everything in place; it meant trusting more in what Christ thought of me than what I thought of me, not my rightness but his righteousness; it meant always being ready to give my testimony if called upon, *the readiness of the gospel of peace*; it meant monitoring my weak spots and shielding myself against the fiery darts that always left scars; it meant guarding and guiding my thoughts beneath a helmet of salvation; it meant learning to memorize and mediate on God’s Word so when I found myself on the front lines my sword was ready for a thrust. These combat metaphors point to the truth that on July 5, 1972 something big happened in my little corner of the world. I joined with Christ at his invitation and took up the battle for my own soul. I became a combatant in my own life, and that is why I depend on this specialized armor, a gift from my commander, each day. When

⁴ For pastoral treatments of the armor, see A. Scott Moreau, *Essential Of Spiritual Warfare* (Wheaton, ILL: Shaw, 1997), Chapter 11, “Putting On God’s Armor,” 137-152; David Powlinson, “Chassical Mode,” Chapter 2 in James K. Bielby and Paul R. Eddy, editor, *Understanding Spiritual Warfare: Four Views* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2012), 89-128.

I neglect a single piece of the full array, I soon know it because that's where the next assault comes from an ever-observant foe.⁵

For years I've been moved by a quote from the Greek novelist Nikos Kazantzakis, author of *Zorba the Greek*. The quote is from his book *The Saviors of God*, and it sums up what it must have been like to be one of the twelve on patrol with Jesus, or so I imagine:

“My prayer,” he writes, “is not the whimpering of a beggar nor a confession of love. Nor is it the trivial reckoning of a small tradesman: Give me and I shall give to you. My prayer is the report of a soldier to his general: This is what I did today, this is how I fought to save the entire battle in my own sector, these are the obstacles I found, this is how I plan to fight tomorrow. My God and I are horsemen galloping in the burning sun or under the drizzling rain. Pale, starving, but unsubdued, we ride and converse. ‘Leader,’ I cry. He turns his faces towards me, and I shudder to confront his anguish. Our love for each other is rough and ready, we drink the same wine in this low tavern of life.”⁶

This is the effect Paul is after. Scholars tell us his rhetoric bears similarities to the speeches of ancient generals to their troops,⁷ and so he starts with where strength comes from, not by digging deep within but by leaning deep into a relationship, “Finally, be strong *in the Lord*,” then a quote from Isaiah, and “in the strength of his might.” Whatever life dishes out, you can always borrow strength from Jesus and the Scriptures. Then these words, first a command, “Put on the whole armor of God,” then the reason, “that you may be able to stand

⁵ I vouch for the words of Ray Stedman, “Effective armor is a crucial element in spiritual warfare too. If you leave anything unprotected, the enemy will find a way to exploit that chink in your armor” (*Men of Integrity*, July/Aug 2002).

⁶ Quoted in Reuben P. Job and Norman Shawchuck, editors, *A Guide to Prayer* (Nashville, TN: The Upper Room, 1983), 116.

⁷ Andrew Lincoln, “Stand , therefore.... Ephesians 6:10-20 as *Peroratio*,” *Biblical Interpretation* 3 (1995), 99-114

against the wiles and strategies of *the devil*.”

Paul presumes interaction, not with some cartoon character, but a now-evil fallen angel of high rank who hates God and all God made— including you, whose origin is hidden and who lies and deceives to keep people within his realm of influence, an angel of light who knows where to make his appeal and who delights to be the source of inspiration for the great butchers of history: think Hitler and Stalin, Mao and more recently ISIS, all the way down to the local level in all forms of corruption and vice. This is more than sin mixed with power; this is *Evil with a Capital E*, and no mere political explanation is sufficient for its scope and sticking power around the world. And each of you know his voice— or more likely one of his underlings— whispering that the faith is foolishness, the Bible a pack of fables, the church a band of hypocrites, that a better life is available apart from Jesus and all his restrictions.

A few verses on another of his names, *the Evil One*, is invoked, and in verse 12 we gain insight into the ranks of beings under his leadership. That they are plural within each rank, and that there are four rankings, perhaps from higher to lower authority, means the kingdom of darkness is organized with internal communications.⁸ *Rulers, authorities, cosmic powers of this present darkness, spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places*. These are the forces behind the forces that distort human life, and until the end they have a certain freedom to tempt and harass and torment, even indwell persons and governments and social structures. A large part of Jesus’ work, if the gospel are our guides, was taken up with exposing and defeating them one after another.

You live in a different world than you thought, and when I forget who the enemy is, I start mistaking it for people, which is precisely why the first half of verse 12 is one of Paul’s most revolutionary insights, “Because we are not contending with flesh and blood,” meaning that people, no matter what they say

⁸ On the disputed issue of cosmic level spiritual warfare, see C. Peter Wagner and Rebecca Greenwood, “The Strategic Level Deliverance Model,” in Bielby and Eddy, *Understanding Spiritual Warfare*, 73-215. On angels good and evil, see Michael Patella, *Angels and Demons: A Christian Primer of the Spiritual World* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2012).

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or do, are not the real enemy. The deeper enemy is the one behind them, the one who twists and deceives and in whose lies they live. This is why martial language, rightly understood, does not lead to violence but to discernment and insight. We see beyond and behind people to the dark one in whose sphere of power they operate. They are accountable for their actions before the law, but in and through them other forces work. It is our job to call them out, to name them, to expose them to the light and to the alternative path of Jesus Christ. This is what it means to *stand* and to *withstand in the evil day*, or, as our second baptismal vow makes clear, “Do you accept the freedom and power God gives you *to resist* evil, injustice, and oppression in whatever forms they present themselves?”⁹ So what are you pushing back against? What evil are you naming and taking a stance against, starting with yourself?

When it comes to listing the six and then the seventh piece of armor, keep three things in mind. It’s more about the whole than the parts; they all work together. Secondly, that the mental picture of a well armed ancient soldier, Jewish or Roman, is a memory tool for moral armament, with each piece linked to a gift from God, because, as Paul said not once but twice, “Put on the whole armor of God.” In Isaiah it’s the armor of God the warrior, the one with strength and power to save his people. And thirdly, the armor is not about civilian safety in the rear area but engagement with our enemy in all his forms and disguises.

And just as there is an order to your daily dressing— we do the same things in the same order out of habit, Paul arranges the armor. First, lift up your long outer garment and cinch it with the belt of truth. Is Jesus true? Yes! Then strap on the breastplate of righteousness to protect your vital organs. A right relationship with Christ based on trust in his faithfulness is what righteousness is all about. Do I trust him? Yes. Then the rugged sandals that allow me to march to wherever my next assignment is, and when challenged by other ideas, not to retreat from the good news about Jesus. Will I go where sent? Yes.

I now take my long wooden shield down from the wall and soak its canvas and cowhide in water to extinguish the fiery darts that will soon come my way: greed, envy, pride, lust, sloth, deception, slander and all over vices. Do I expect

⁹ *The U.M. Hymnal*: 34.

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them? Yes. And do I have a plan ahead of time not to let them burn me up? Yes, and this is faith, not a warm, fuzzy feeling but a plan to stay faithful to God. Next on is the helmet of salvation to protect the place where every battle begins: in the thought life, in the imagination.¹⁰ Do I wish to keep my thoughts submitted to Christ and guided by him? Yes. And finally, the short sword in the scabbard at my right flank, not for slashing but for jabbing, and here the guidance of the Spirit as our combat instructor is highlighted. The Word of God, for us the Holy Scriptures, are not so much our sword but the sword of the Spirit which we deploy as led. The quotation or reading of Scripture, when guided by the Spirit and motivated by love, cuts to the very depth of a person. Am I willing to study Scripture in private and deploy it in public? Yes, and I look for its effects. This is what a well-equipped Christian looks like. It's not that they are aggressive; it's that they have a disciplined approach to using the tools God gives, and the way you know you're not well covered is by asking a question: Where am I taking hits? The bruises of battle are expected, but where are you giving the enemy an easy target? Is it anger? Is it sloth? A neglect of prayer or Scripture or fellowship or service? A lack of love? A judgmental spirit?

But the six are not the complete armory. So a seventh is added, and that is constant communication, "Pray at *all* times in the Spirit with *all* prayer and supplication." A soldier under fire is not hesitant to call in air support. Prayer is a steady conversation with your commander about how it's going at your part of the front, what you see, what you need. And then two more *all*'s: "To that end keep alert with *all* perseverance, making supplication for *all* the saints."

The oddest thing happened Wednesday morning. A man who gave me a hard time in my first appointment came to mind. I'd long ago forgiven him for his love of the "n" word. I'd not thought of him in twenty-five years. But he came to mind; I saw him in my mind's eye, where he sat in the congregation,

¹⁰ Commenting on John Wesley's "Of Evil Angels" (Sermon 72), Thomas Oden writes, "When an evil thought occurs without any obvious or reasonable connection with a previous thought, there is reason to suspect the work of evil angels" (*John Wesley's Teaching, Volume 1* [Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012] 145). Wesley's thinking is aptly summarized in the above volume, "Spiritual Creation: Of Good Angels, Of Evil Angels," 139-147, 157-169.

then I let the image go, thinking, “That was odd!” That afternoon I received a facebook post to pray for him after a severe heart attack, and I did, with a keen urgency since I’d received an alert that morning. Prayer, as a tool of warfare, is two-way. You speak, and you listen. The seventh piece of armor is a cell phone connected to God’s earpiece; every believer has the private number.

Now I take a risk. I tell a story from the front lines that happened twenty years ago to illustrate what Paul is talking about. There’s a war going on, an invisible one with visible consequences, and it’s everywhere all the time. You pay attention to the whole armor everyday; you do not know when an engagement will break out; the only way to get prepared is to stay prepared. Now most of my work has been safely behind the front lines, most of my time spent preparing for teaching and preaching and caring for God’s people as a training and logistics officer, not a Green Beret. I hear the thump of artillery and see the distant flash of explosions in the night, but only occasionally have I been at the front or else had the front come to me in hand to hand combat.

It must have been 1996. I was at St. Mark in Charleston and had a staff member– let’s call her Jane, as a part time Christian educator. She had a college friend- let’s call her Dawn– coming for a visit and asked if I’d be willing to pray with her. “Yes,” I said, “what’s going on?” She was divorced, had come through cancer, now had lupus, and was attending a United Methodist seminary in the mid-west. That was quite a load, but since we were teaching a class on praying for the sick, I agreed because, frankly, I needed the practice.

I was introduced by Jane after the Sunday service, and Dawn had the look of illness. Sallow skin, visible frailty. I was warm, but when I said, “Can we schedule a time for Jane and I to pray with you?” her response was unusual, a bit snarky, “Only if you want to.”

It felt like a push-back, and in reply I said seriously, “If you ask me for the time, we will pray for you, but you have to ask.”

“O.K.,” she said weakly, and I felt a check in my spirit, a whiff of discernment. Jane had told me a bit of her friend’s history, something about being a *spiritual seeker*, so I printed out a spiritual inventory I’d created which lists Scripture on a range of practices, occult and personal, that are forbidden for

believers and can lead to bondage.¹¹ It would give me a clue to what her *spiritual seeking* involved and shorten the interview before the prayer. We agreed to meet back at the office at 3:00pm.

They sat on the couch and me in a simple chair in front of them. When she handed me the sheet, fifteen of the twenty-two items were checked, and as I scanned them I had two thoughts, “Is she baiting me?” and “I’ve never seen anyone with this many checks.” She then shared an outline of her history, and I asked if she was prepared to turn away from all the practices she’d marked, to which she said, “Yes,” and so I let her in some simple prayers of confession, forgiveness, and renunciation. No fireworks, at least not yet.

When it came time to pray for healing, Jane stayed on the couch; Dawn moved the chair with me standing behind her. Jane held her hand, and I asked, “Can I put my hand on your shoulder to pray? to which he said, “Yes.” “I’m going to invite the Holy Spirit to come and guide us and then pray for your medical issues, and if we are silent for a time, it’s OK. We’re still praying.” And that’s just what I did, very straightforward, very calm. “Come Holy Spirit,” I said aloud, “and bring down to our friend the healing riches of Jesus Christ.” Then, as I prayed silently and in the Spirit, an odd name kept coming to mind, the name *Ron*, and it would not go away, so I asked, feeling a bit foolish, “Does the name Ron mean anything to you?” “Yes, that’s my father name. How did you know?” “Well, I’m not quite sure; call it a *holy hunch*.” I was nearly as startled as she was that the quiet, insistent thought was accurate. There were some issues around her father, and we led her in prayers of forgiveness and release. Standard stuff. Round one.

Then I prayed again, thanking God for the Spirit’s gift of knowledge and

¹¹ Samples are found in Francis McNutt, *Deliverance from Evil Spirits* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker/Chosen, 1995), 161-183; James S. Wallace, *The Occult Trap* (Colorado Springs, CO: Wagner Publications, 1994), 211-230; Cindy Jacobs, *Deliver Us From Evil* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 2001). It is important to rule out medical and mental health issues before moving to spiritual diagnosis. I have found that leading people through confession, forgiveness, and the renunciation of alien spiritual bonds is often enough.

a forgiven relationship. But as I prayed in silence the name *Ron* kept coming, and I remember saying, “No Lord, we just did that one,” but the name would not stop, so I sucked it up and asked, “Is there another Ron?” to which she replied, this time in a quivering voice, “How did you know?” It then came out. Years before she’d had an abortion, and the doctor’s name was Ron. Being a woman of consistent convictions, she decided that if she had one, the best way to defend her choice was to get a job at the same clinic in Kansas City as a procedure assistant, which she did. I was feeling dizzy. She’s participated in, by her count, over 300 procedures, making sure nothing was left inside. Mass murder. I took a deep breath, pushed down the nausea and rage, and asked, “Are you aware of the evil you’ve been involved in?” and she began to cry.

I then did the oddest thing. Several months before I’d taken a class with a renowned Greek Orthodox professor on the art and theology of iconography. I’d purchased an icon of Jesus to hang on my office wall and remembered how Dr. John Breck told me Orthodox priests did confession. They place an icon of Jesus in the hands of the seated penitent and have them confess their sins directly to him while they stand behind them supporting them in prayer and asking questions. So I took down the icon of Jesus, put it in her lap and invited her to tell him what she’d done. It was agony to hear, and when she was finished the crisis was mine. Would I announce absolution to her, the forgiveness of Jesus for all who confess and repent? I swallowed hard and launched out in faith, “Dawn, Almighty God have mercy upon you, forgive you all your sins through our Lord Jesus Christ, strengthen you in all goodness, and by the power of the Holy Spirit keep you in eternal life. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.”

What was happening here? Hand to hand spiritual combat with the Holy Spirit sending in secret communications. Somehow I knew it was not yet over, and I could not quit. There was a holy presence with us, and since I knew his name and claim to follow him, I could not cut and run.

I was hoping there was not a third Ron, but I bowed my head as I stood behind her and prayed again. What happened startled, then disgusted me. My mind was flooded with the lewdest images you can imagine, and I immediately began to repent, “What a slime ball I am, Lord,” but then a hunch came, “It’s not

you, it's her." So how do you handle that? With the two Rons having hit the mark, I asked gently, "My mind is full of awful imagery. Does that mean anything to you?" to which she replied for a third time, "How did you know?" to which I said, "Jesus showed me, I think he loves you and is here with us to do some surgery." Her ex-husband used her in videos, and again I felt dizzy and disoriented. I led her in yet another round of confession and pardon, again with the icon in her lap. We asked the Lord to cleanse her of all defilement, and she surrendered herself, body and soul, to him. I then felt a surge of authority and commanded spirits of death and murder and perversion to leave her in Jesus' name.

Then it was quiet; I sensed the session was over. We took a few minutes to debrief one another, thanked the Lord for his presence and released one another to him. When they left, I sat alone for perhaps half an hour in silence. Then another *holy hunch* in the form of a piercing thought, "This is what it looks like on the front lines. Are you ready?" My answer? "Only if you go with me."

I could not tell Lori what happened for several days, and the next morning I was sore all over, like I'd been in a fight, and I had. When I saw Dawn the next day she looked different. She smiled and looked more alive, as if the lights in her life had been turned back on. The three of us prayed again, very simply this time, no warfare, and she left for the airport with my recommendation she visit a Vineyard Church in Kansas City because they knew how to do followup with cases like hers. Her seminary apparently did not, and it makes me wonder how much spiritual pain a solely academic approach misses.

I am not lying. I am not trying to impress. I have told the truth as an eye witness. Such encounters have been rare for me, but they still happen from time to time when I stumble in a battle zone. So when I speak of the putting on the armor, it's not a luxury but a necessity.

I will never forget what I learned that day; it has emboldened me in the twenty years since to lean into Jesus for the needs of broken people. There really is a war going on. This faith is not for our entertainment; it is for our survival and our victory. When's the last time you checked your armor?

The Multiple Backgrounds Of Paul’s Imagery Of *The Armor Of The Lord*

Wisdom of Solomon 5:17-23 contains a sequence of five weapons with virtues: “The Lord will take his **zeal as his whole armor**, and will arm all creation to repel his enemies; he will put on **righteousness as a breastplate**, and wear **impartial justice as a helmet**; he will take **holiness as an invincible shield**, and **sharpen stern wrath for a sword**, and creation will join with him to fight against the madmen.” Thus Paul had a prior Jewish literary model; he adds *belt* and *boot* and pairs all but the breastplate (Is. 59:7) with different virtues.

Item Of Armor + Associated Virtue	Old Testament Scripture	Roman Soldier (Polybius 6:23)
6:14, “ girding on the belt of truth ” (“having girded your loins ”)	Is. 11:5 (LXX), “Righteousness shall be the girdle of his waist, and faithfulness the girdle of his loins .” Is. 11:1-12 portrays the Messiah as a Davidid.	Girdle/belt: Ties up the loose fitting tunic for mobility. Binds the other pieces of armor together.
6:14, “the breastplate of righteousness ,”	Is. 59:17 (LXX), “He put on righteousness as a breastplate , and a helmet of salvation upon his head; he put on garments of vengeance for clothing, and wrapped himself in fury as a mantle.” See also Wis. 65:18 above. Is. 59:1-21, the Lord comes fully armed. Messianic.	Breastplate: Only centurions had a metal <i>cuirass</i> (breastplate); foot soldiers had a leather corselet with leather shoulder pieces.
6:15, “shoes for you feet ” that express “the gospel (good news) of peace .”	Is. 52:7 (LXX), “How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good tidings , who publishes peace , who brings good tidings of good, who publishes salvation, who says to Zion, ‘Your God reigns.’” In Is. 52:6-10 it is the Lord who returns to Zion. Messiah.	Heavy military sandals (<i>caligae</i>): Made of several layers of leather and studded with hollow nail heads for traction. Often lined with fur or cloth and fastened to he feet and legs with thongs.
6:16, “taking up the shield of faith ”	Ps. 18:1-3, “I love thee, O LORD, my strength. [2] The LORD is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer, my God, my rock, in whom I take refuge, my shield , and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold. [3] I call upon the LORD, who is worthy to be praised, and I am saved from my enemies.” Wis. 5:19 above, “holiness as an invincible shield .”	Shield (<i>scutum</i>): 4 x 2.5 feet, convex, 2 sections of wood glued together and covered with canvas, then cowhide with edges bound with wrought iron/bronze. Hand grip in the center. Used together in the “turtle” formation as a barrier to arrows, spears, flaming darts. Shin pieces later optional.
6:17, “and take the helmet of salvation ”	Is. 59:17 (LXX), “He put on righteousness as a breastplate, and a helmet of salvation upon his head; he put on garments of vengeance for clothing, and wrapped himself in fury as a mantle.” Wis. 5:18, “impartial justice as a helmet.”	Helmet: Bronze, fitted over an iron skullcap lined with leather or cloth.

<p>6:17 “the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.”</p>	<p>Is. 49:2, “He made my mouth like a sharp sword, in the shadow of his hand he hid me; he made me a polished arrow, in his quiver he hid me away.” Wis. 5:19, “sharpen stern wrath for a sword.”</p> <p>Is. 49:1-13 (Messianic vision)</p>	<p>Sword (<i>gladius</i>): Doubled-edged, 2 ft. long, 2 inches wide. Carried in scabbard at right hand. A stabbing rather than a slashing instrument. In tandem with 2 javelins, 2 daggers.</p>
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[17] He put on **righteousness as a breastplate**, and a **helmet of salvation** upon his head; he put on garments of vengeance for clothing, and wrapped himself in fury as a mantle.

[18] According to their deeds, so will he repay, wrath to his adversaries, requital to his enemies; to the coastlands he will render requital.

[19] So they shall fear the name of the LORD from the west, and his glory from the rising of the sun; for he will come like a rushing stream, which the wind of the LORD drives.

[20] "And he will come to Zion as Redeemer, to those in Jacob who turn from transgression, says the LORD.

Wisdom 5:17-23
Revised Standard Version (RSV)

17 The Lord will take his zeal as his **whole armor**,
and will arm all creation to repel his enemies;
18 he will put on **righteousness as a breastplate**,
and wear impartial justice as a **helmet**;
19 he will take holiness as an invincible **shield**,
20 and sharpen stern wrath for a **sword**,
and creation will join with him to fight against the madmen.

21 Shafts of lightning will fly with true aim,
and will leap to the target as from a well-drawn bow of clouds,
22 and hailstones full of wrath will be hurled as from a catapult;
the water of the sea will rage against them,
and rivers will relentlessly overwhelm them;
23 a mighty wind will rise against them,
and like a tempest it will winnow them away.
Lawlessness will lay waste the whole earth,
and evil-doing will overturn the **thrones of rulers**.

We believe sanctification is the work of God's grace through the Word and the Spirit, by which those who have been born again are cleansed from sin in their thoughts, words and acts, and are enabled to live in accordance with God's will, and to strive for holiness without which no one will see the Lord.

Entire sanctification is a state of perfect love, righteousness and true holiness which every regenerate believer may obtain by being delivered from the power of sin, by loving God with all the heart, soul, mind and strength, and by loving one's neighbor as one's self. Through faith in Jesus Christ this gracious gift may be received in this life both gradually and instantaneously, and should be sought earnestly by every child of God.

We believe this experience does not deliver us from the infirmities, ignorance, and mistakes common to man, nor from the possibilities of further sin. The Christian must continue on guard against spiritual pride and seek to gain victory over every temptation to sin. He must respond wholly to the will of God so that sin will lose its power over him; and the world, the flesh, and the devil are put under his feet. Thus he rules over these enemies with watchfulness through the power of the Holy Spirit.