

WITHSTAND ATTACKS WITH CHRIST EPH 6:10-20
FOURTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST AUG 30, 2015

¹⁰ Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. ¹¹ Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. ¹² For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. 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.

When we recently visited son in Singapore, we felt very safe.

It is a beautiful, peaceful place with is very little crime,
But one thing he showed us in his apartment is bomb shelter,
small reinforced room with heavy steel door,
which every apartment is required to have.

Constant reminder this tiny country with politically volatile
neighbors could be attacked at any time.

We, too, live in relatively peaceful and safe country,
yet, every time we go through security at airport
or find the doors locked in a school building
or use a password or pin number,
we are reminded that we are vulnerable to attack
from criminals, terrorists and angry people.

Paul, as he wrote this letter to the Ephesians
was in Roman Jail because of accusations of Jewish leaders
Among few people he saw were Roman soldiers guarding.
He surely remembered also being imprisoned & beaten
when he was in Ephesus because of riots
by local businessmen who thought Christianity
hurt sale of gold statues of the local god.

But what he wanted small group of believers to keep in mind
as they faced pressures and threats on every side,
physical, religious, economic, political, commercial,
social, military, etc. is...

SEE THAT WE FACE A SPRITUAL STRUGGLE
STAND FIRM ON THE VICTORY OF CHRIST
SPEAK BOLDLY ABOUT THE GOSPEL OF PEACE

SEE THAT WE FACE A SPRITUAL STRUGGLE

¹¹ Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand
against the schemes of the devil. ¹² For we do not wrestle against flesh
and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the
cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces
of evil in the heavenly places.

Last week a top general testifying before congress said
he didn't believe battle with ISIS could be won by US troops
because, he said, it is an ideological battle.
and sending in US troops simply reinforces recruitment claim
that they are fighting against foreign crusaders.

I am not here to talk politics and there may be other leaders
who disagree with this general, but what he is saying
is what Paul is saying about our real crusade,
that is, the battle we are involved in as Christians.

We have seen gunmen shooting down people in churches,
drugs and alcohol destroying families and individuals,
politicians and Supreme court honoring gross immorality,
doctors that kill babies and sell the body parts,
online businesses that promote adultery & pornography,
entertainment media that glorify it all
and even church leaders that find ways to justify it.

But as Paul sat in prison for preaching gospel and recognized
that those guarding him were not the enemy,
it is important for us to see that people,
whether politicians or businesses or entertainers,
or religious figures or even criminals are not enemy.
although they may be hostages or refugees
or those caught in crossfire with real enemy, Devil.

When we forget or lose sight of this,
fighting our battles in the wrong way simply plays into
his scheme of portraying us as mean and hateful.

Like the terrorists, internet hackers, pirates & drug lords,
the Devil is an enemy who is shadowy & slippery.

His main tactic is lying, even and especially
to those who work on his side.

Most never realize he is the kingpin behind their work.

What he loves to do is convince people he doesn't even exist,
that he is just straw man actually created by Christians

So we do need to be careful about what we do,
like doctors trying to attack the disease
without killing the patient.

In similar verses, Paul concludes 1st letter to Corinthians (16:13

Be on your guard; stand firm in the faith; be men of courage;
be strong. ¹⁴ Do everything in love.

It is essential to both stand firm and be loving.

How can we manage to do this?

STAND FIRM ON THE VICTORY OF CHRIST

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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.

In v. 10, original Greek says not just “be strong in the Lord”
but “be strengthened in the Lord and strength of his might.”
which emphasizes that taking up the armor we put on
is not about something we do
but receiving what God has done for us.

We rely not on our strength but on his.

Four times in these verses, Paul repeats the word “stand”
we stand our ground on territory Jesus already conquered.

Both O.T. and gospel readings for today are reminders
to simply stick with what God has given us without thinking
we can improve it by what we add ourselves.

Our battle is with all the forces of evil is defensive because
he has already won the final victory, even though
skirmishes continue for now because the devil denies it.

So key piece of armor is breastplate of righteousness.

Breastplate protects the heart.

That is what Satan is after. Goal of temptation is not just to trick us into doing wrong with our hands but to get us to love the wrong things and ultimately to get us to lose heart by thinking because of what we have done

God doesn't love us any more

This is why we need protection of righteousness, not getting in habit of doing those wrong things, but most important, putting on Christ's righteousness, which covers all our sins because of what he did.

The helmet of salvation is similar.

You have to protect your head or you are dead.

Without salvation we are done for.

It is essential that we always keep in mind the assurance that we have been saved by Jesus death for us.

This is what gives us life and is why we live as we do.

So in all circumstances we need the shield of faith.

to extinguish the Devil's flaming arrows.

There is no way we can dodge all his temptations so we have to hold firmly to faith in what God has done for us and his promises of what he will do.

Roman shields were made of leather that could be soaked in water to extinguish attacks with fire.

Our faith is strengthened by being constantly soaked in our baptism, where God claims us as his children and constantly washes away our sins.

Holding everything together, Paul says, is the belt of truth.

Belts hold things in place so you don't trip over your own clothing.

Sticking to the truth, the truth God tells us, is what keeps us from getting tripped up by our own contradictory words and ideas.

That truth is revealed in his word, the sword of the Spirit.

Just as when Jesus was tempted in the wilderness, our defense against the devil is always:

"This is what God says"

God's powerful, creating, life giving, forgiving word is the only power that can defeat the Devil.

This one weapon which is offensive as well, the word of God, which is the sword in our hand,

Paul also pictures on our feet, shod with the
readiness given by the gospel of peace.
Although we might overlook it, any soldier with battle experience
can tell you how important the right shoes are.
If we are going to stand firm, it is essential that we have
the gospel of peace, the wonderful good news
that in spite of the smoke of battle all around us,
Jesus' ultimate victory has given us peace.
But also, like the Spiritual sword of God's word,
this is what we also use to move forward,
retaking lost ground as we

SPEAK BOLDLY ABOUT THE GOSPEL OF PEACE

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 mystery of the Gospel: even in the midst of ongoing war
is that we have the message of peace.

Because Jesus has won the victory over sin
by perfect life, defeating every temptation
and by his innocent death and resurrection,
defeating the power of death and hell,
He has now declared amnesty for all of us.

Here at end of letter to Ephesians, Paul reminds us battle is
against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic
powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces
of evil in the heavenly places.

but this reminds us of what he wrote at very beginning of letter,
that Christ is "seated in the heavenly places, far above all rule
and authority and power and dominion, and above every name
that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come.

Christ has won the war, all we are struggling to do
is remember and declare the victory.

In Korea, where the war has never been declared over.

North continues to suffer because of refusal to admit defeat.

South Korea fights by blaring messages across border,
while North Korea lobs explosives at the speakers.

But the finally renewed truce because they will do anything
to stop the words. Words of truth are powerful.

Satan continues to fight because he can't stand the words
of the gospel of peace.

So we fight with words, not just with words to others
but words of prayer to God,

The same way Jesus victoriously fought the devil
in the Garden of Gethsemane and before.

Note connection between prayer and evangelism.

I suspect one reason we don't talk to people about God
as much as we should is we don't
talk to God about other people as much as we should.

There are military battles today which cannot be won
without the power of air support.

On important reason for boots on the ground is not
what they can do with their own fighting but their ability
to identify targets and call in air strikes.

Paul calls on his fellow believers for prayer support,
that is targeting the enemy by calling for help from above.

This is one of most important and valuable things we can do
in the spiritual battles we face .

Like Paul, we do need to open our mouths and speak boldly
not just hard words of truth against the Devil's lies
but the powerful gospel of peace, spoken in love

But everything depends not on what we can do
but on the great power of God at work for us.

SEE THAT WE FACE A SPRITUAL STRUGGLE

not against people around us who are just goons & stooges
but against the devil himself,

and not just against specific sins,

but against the death and despair that is his goal.

STAND FIRM ON THE VICTORY OF CHRIST

because we are able to stand only in his strength,

covered with his righteousness and his salvation,

and equipped with his word and his truth as we...

SPEAK BOLDLY ABOUT THE GOSPEL OF PEACE

which he has already won for us

which is why we speak confidently to him in prayer

asking him to help us speak with courage & compassion
about the peace he gives us now and forever.