

## **Trinity 13, Sunday 25 Aug, 2024**

### **Ephesians 6:10-20**

10 Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his power. 11 Put on the whole armour of God, so that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.

12 For our struggle is not against enemies of blood and flesh, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.

13 Therefore take up the whole armour of God, so that you may be able to withstand on that evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm. 14 Stand therefore, and fasten the belt of truth around your waist, and put on the breastplate of righteousness.

15 As shoes for your feet put on whatever will make you ready to proclaim the gospel of peace. 16 With all of these, take the shield of faith, with which you will be able to quench 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 Pray in the Spirit at all times in every prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert and always persevere in supplication for all the saints.

19 Pray also for me, so that when I speak, a message may be given to me to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it boldly, as I must speak.

End.

## The Whole Armour of God (Eph 6:10-20; 25 Aug, 2024)

*May I speak in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, Amen*

In Ephesians, Paul is writing from prison (ambassador in chains v20) to a young church under pressure. These are Paul's last words, spiritual truths (who they are in Christ) and practical rules for living the Christian life.

Two weeks ago I spoke of 3 rules for this new life: 1) tell the truth; 2) forgive each other; 3) imitate Christ – and last week Alison said that '*making the world a better place*' starts with us.

Today, we come to the end of Ephesians and as is typical of Paul, he summarises what he has just said. But before we start, a health warning: *there are **military images** and a **spiritual dimension** to this sermon.*

It's about **putting on armour**. Now most of us would rather not talk about conflict, but that is today's subject. Secondly, it's **spiritual**, not physical. Paul says this conflict *is not against flesh and blood*, but against *spiritual authorities & cosmic powers*.

It is a description of spiritual conflict, teaching the Ephesians on:

- the power of hostile spiritual forces (10-12);
- how to stand against them (13-17); &
- the priority of praying together (18-20).

## First, the power of hostile spiritual forces

V's 10-12 say: *'put on armour to stand against the devil, the rulers, the authorities, the cosmic powers. Hostile forces* are described as 'the devil', 'rulers', 'authorities', 'cosmic powers', and later, 'this present darkness'.

This is vivid language, but it is not new. In Chpt 2 the Ephesians *'followed the ruler of the power of the air'*, Other New Testament writers talk of the devil: Peter says: *'the devil prowls around like a roaring lion'*; in James, *'resist the devil and he will flee from you'*. And in the Gospels: *Jesus was tempted by the devil.*

Now many of us struggle with this idea of a **devil**, and our minds often go to a red cartoon character, pitchfork in hand, whispering in our ear. The writer C.S. Lewis suggests that this cartoon image is *actually* one of the devil's tactics, so we do not take him too seriously.

Personally, I find Paul's language of *forces, rulers and authorities*, a bit easier to grasp. But the point is not how we understand evil but **that** we accept its reality. And that evil – or the devil - is active in human fear and greed, in individuals and groups.

Many, when looking at history, are convinced about evil - **and** if we understand it as a *spiritual thing* – *not just flesh and blood* – we will not treat it lightly.

So Paul's 1<sup>st</sup> point is **beware** hostile spiritual forces.

***Paul's 2<sup>nd</sup> point is you can deal with these hostile spiritual forces by putting on the armour of God***

In V13 he says, *'take up the whole armour of God, so you will be able to withstand on that evil day.'*

Paul borrows **armour of God** language from the OT, when it is *God* who *puts on armour*. Why? because *justice is in retreat and truth stumbles in the public square* (Isaiah 59). God is unhappy because no-one intervenes, so God himself puts on armour: *a breastplate of righteousness & a helmet of salvation*.

Here in Ephesians, we get even more armour: including *a belt of truth, shoes of peace, a shield of faith and the sword of the spirit*. I can't comment on all of these, but I do want to comment on the shoes, chosen to *'make you ready to proclaim the Gospel of peace'*.

Just as we might choose the right shoes for Church, or the garden or a hike, Paul says put on *shoes of peace*. Make decisions and choices that will lead to peace. The goal of this spiritual conflict is peace.

We all make choices all the time. At this time of year (GCSE results) many young people make key decisions on careers, courses, jobs. Paul is saying *'make choices that make you ready to proclaim the Gospel of peace'*.

Putting on these shoes and this armour will help us *withstand evil - and having done everything, to stand*. ***Paul's 2<sup>nd</sup> point is put on the whole armour of God to deal with these hostile spiritual forces.***

***Paul's 3<sup>rd</sup> point is the priority of prayer together.***

Now any self-respecting soldier, Christian or not, will be quick to say that while standing firm with good armour may defeat hostile forces, we will also need supplies.

Paul addresses this in v18 when he says: '*pray in the Spirit at all times, be alert and persevere with all the saints*'. To keep standing and alert, we must rely on all the saints and must *always pray in the Spirit*.

Paul emphasises what the Ephesians have learned. This new spiritual life *is* personal, but it is also corporate. Something we do together, something we call Church. As its true in physical warfare - we are better together – it is true in spiritual warfare.

So a Church without a vision, or having different visions, is a defensive line without supplies and the centre cannot hold. This is the importance of prayer, the importance of a Church profile and the importance of a Mission Action Plan.

As spiritual warriors, prayer is not only a personal resource, it is a community resource. Maintaining our supply lines is achieved through personal prayer and community prayer.

***So Paul's 3<sup>rd</sup> point is the priority of praying together.***

## **So in conclusion:**

At the end of Ephesians, Paul reminds them - and us - of the spiritual conflict. Of who they are in Christ, and how they must live in community.

In today's verses he talks of

- the power of hostile spiritual forces;
- how the armour of God helps us stand;
- and prayer as a personal and corporate resource.

*But let's be honest – who just wants to stand?*

I'm not sure I do. Don't get me wrong – it's good to stand, to be faithful, especially when *justice is turned back; and truth stumbles in the public square.*

In Isaiah, God puts on armour, and in Ephesians, Paul teaches the Church to put on this armour of God: *'finally, be strong in the Lord, put on the whole armour of God; fasten the belt of truth, put on the breastplate of righteousness; shoes that deliver the gospel of peace, a shield of faith for flaming arrows; the helmet of salvation and the sword of the spirit'*.

Dressed like this we will not only stand, but when the Spirit of God leads, we and the wider Church can go on the offensive.

And when we do - to borrow a promise from elsewhere - *the gates of hell shall not stand against us.*

*In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, Amen.*