

Home Group Leaders Discussion Guide

Ephesians 6:10-18

As we consider the idea putting on the “full armor of God” that *“our struggle is not against flesh and blood”*, and the call to *“stand firm”*, it is important to keep an eye on the larger perspective of Scripture. From this passage in Ephesians alone it’s possible to come away thinking that we’re on the defensive in this battle. So let’s keep Jesus’ words from Matthew 16 well in mind, *“...on this rock I will build My church, **and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.**”* (Matt. 16:19) Think about that image for a moment...specifically that of a gate. A gate is something used for protection, it’s defensive in nature. From this picture, Hades/Hell is on the defensive.

So, yes, we are in a battle. Yes, we will take our shots and be hurt in the process. And, yes, we may lose some battles...but the war has already been won. In this continuing struggle, we (followers of Jesus) are on the offensive. Let’s never forget that. And the safest pace to be in this battle is on offensive...let the enemy react to us, not us to him.

Speaking of our enemy, Paul mentions, “authorities” “powers of this dark world” and “spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms” (NIV)...other translations might use “principalities” “powers” “rulers of the darkness of this world” and “spiritual wickedness in high places”. So, what is Paul referring to?

The personal, and powerful, evil that is Satan gets embodied in structures and systems of this world. These structures and systems are neutral by themselves, but when they are not subject to Christ they become evil and are used in Satanic rebellion, which cause all kinds of oppression, injustice, tyranny, cruelty, and chaos in our world. We must remember the point of the Gospel...that everything will eventually be submitted to one Head, Christ. These powers and principalities are evil when they resist and rebel against Jesus. In the visible realm, these powers can take the form of government, business, media, entertainment, education, even religion...anything that resists/rejects the authority of Christ. We, the Church, are called to remind them, and all people and all creation—seen and unseen—that Jesus is the rightful King. We do so both in word and deed.

But Satan, and all who follow him or are under his rebellious influence (like the powers and principalities) don’t appreciate being reminded that they are under authority. They tend to act out on those who remind them (that’s us). How do we fight them? The same way Jesus did. By the Cross. We embrace the way of humble, sacrificial, service and self-giving love...even to the point of suffering and death in necessary. This is what it means to be “Christian”.

Putting on the “full armor of God” is a metaphorical way of saying utilize all the gifts, blessings, and resources God has given us for the task He has called us to. Paul’s list of “armor” is not an exhaustive list of all that God has made available to us. Nevertheless, let’s consider the list that Paul offered. (As a helpful hint, we can look back to earlier uses of these words in the letter to get an idea of what Paul had in mind.)

Belt of Truth: From 1:20b-21 *“...He raised [Christ] from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come.”* We need to remember the truth of who Christ is (the high and exalted one, ruler of everything) and who we are in Him.

Breastplate of Righteousness: Righteousness has to do with right relationships. Due to Christ, we now can have a right relationship with God and our fellow humans. From 2:15b-16 *“His purpose was to create in Himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace, and in this one body to reconcile to Himself both of them to God through the cross, by which He put to death their hostility.”* Having such right relationships is both a protection from the enemy and a reminder to him of his ultimate demise.

Gospel of Peace: Peace naturally flows from righteousness. This is good news...news to be taken to others (thus the image of feet...it's by our feet that we move, taking the good news to those who need to hear it.) Again, you can see how this can be viewed more offensively than defensively...with our feet we march, we advance...carrying the banner of Christ's victory that brings peace.

Shield of Faith: In 3:12 Paul states, *“In Him and through faith in Him we may approach God with freedom and confidence.”* And 3:17a Paul prays *“so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith.”* The nearness of Christ, the indwelling of Christ, is our shield. As Paul said elsewhere, *“If God is for us, who can be against us?”* (Romans 8:31b)

Helmet of Salvation: The fact that we are a saved people ought to give us confidence, peace of mind, as we live out our lives.

The Sword of the Spirit/The Word of God: Now we need to understand that Paul was not referring to the Bible here. We can think of the Word of God as the expressed will of God. The Word of God created the cosmos. The Word of God gave us the Law. The Word of God brings healing, judgment, salvation. Ultimately, the revealed will of God was a person, Jesus. In this context in Ephesians, the Word of God refers to the proclaimed Gospel message. (For more on the Word of God, check out John 1:1-5, 14 and Hebrews 4:12-13)

Prayer: We're going to pick up on prayer next week...

Going back to the metaphor of armor for a second, it has been observed that there is nothing covering our backside. Two thoughts come to mind from that observation. First, never turn your back on your enemy. Second, we're not in this alone...we have each other. One of our problems as 21st century Westerners is we view everything through the lens of individualism. We can't help ourselves...we were conditioned to do so. So we naturally read “put on the full armor of God” and “stand firm” as something we do individually. This is a communal letter, and these are communal instructions/exhortations. So let's try to think of them along those lines.

- Q. What do you think/feel about the idea that we're in the midst of a war?**
- Q. What evidence can you point to confirm the idea that we're in a war?**
- Q. If someone were to ask you to explain all the evil and suffering in the world, how would you respond?**
- Q. Brainstorm the evils in the world that you can identify. Which of these are of human making? Which are beyond that? How does an understanding of "principalities and powers" help explain what we observe/experience?**
- Q. A main reason for the "armor of God" is that on our own (individually and even corporately) we do not have what it takes to stand firm or advance the Kingdom. What piece of armor, which gift/resource from God are you neglecting? (Try answering that both on an individual basis and on a communal basis.)**
- Q. HOW do we "be strong in the Lord and in His mighty power"? How do we "put on" the full armor of God?**
- Q. How (or in what ways) are you tempted to fight against flesh and blood (people) as opposed to the larger picture of what's going on?**
- Q. How did Jesus "fight"? How is that instructional for us?**
- Q. The Queen Mary (Google it) was a luxury ocean liner (think modern day cruise ship). But during WWII it was converted into a troop transport ship. All the "luxury" items were stripped and it was bare bones, ready for war. Similarly, we could ask the question: are we "war ready"? Or are we holding onto all the luxuries, conveniences, comforts of peace time? How does it change our outlook on life if we think of ourselves as battle-ready soldiers versus people who want to be on perpetual vacation? Which is a closer to a Biblical image of life? What changes in life might God be inviting you to make along those lines? (Lent is a good time to explore that question—taking the 6 weeks of Lent to draw closer to God and allow Him to speak into our lives are we prepare ourselves to celebrate the greatest victory the world has yet seen...the resurrection of Jesus!)**