



Ridgedale Baptist Church

EPHESIANS: MESSAGES OF HOPE • GOD'S PLAN FOR VICTORY • EPHESIANS 6:10-24 •
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MAIN POINT

Christians can be prepared to resist whatever evil might come.

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

What proportion of this week's news, by your estimate, is about bad things?

How well equipped do you feel to meet the evil that you encounter day by day?

Do you think most Christians are prepared to fight spiritual battles? Why or why not?

We take the time and effort to prepare for many events. We may have learned the hard way the consequences of being unprepared. But often we fail to give much thought to our spiritual preparedness. In this study, we will talk about being prepared and equipped to handle spiritual challenges. Many people long to be physically strong, but Paul knew that even the strongest people on earth could not be strong enough on their own when it comes to our spiritual battles. Christians must rely on the incomparable strength of God.

UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

| HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ EPHESIANS 6:10-13.

What is the difference between relying on our own human strength and ability, and trusting in the Lord's strength? Do we always fail when we trust our own strength?

Why did Paul say it would be dangerous to fight spiritual battles in our own strength?

Why is it important to recognize our own inability to stand spiritually? What happens to us when we think we have the ability to withstand temptation in our own power?

What have you seen that affirms Paul's teaching that our battle is not against flesh and blood? How should that awareness influence how and who we fight? How would you face each day differently if you recognized you were always under attack?

How would you describe the hostile, evil spirit-beings at work in our world? According to what Paul wrote, what do you think they are capable of doing?

What did Paul tell Christians to put on? What did he say would happen when we do that?

Perhaps as Paul saw the armor of his Roman guards, he thought about the spiritual battle we face as Christians. When we are equipped with God's armor we will be able to stand up against whatever the Devil may hurl our way. We need to understand that our battle as believers is not against unbelievers, or against other denominations, but against hostile spiritual beings. It is a contest we cannot win in our own strength. We must rely upon the power God supplies to withstand spiritual attacks.

| ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ EPHESIANS 6:14-17.

As we consider Paul's fine object lesson on the armor of God, we must not become so focused on the object that we miss the lesson. The point is not being able to name all the pieces of armor worn by a Roman soldier. There is perhaps more value in reflecting on how righteousness is like a breastplate, or salvation like a helmet. But these verses list for us the spiritual resources God has granted to equip us for the battle at hand, to the end that we may confidently stand.

How does God provide these pieces of armor for us? How do we receive it or take them up?

How are we transformed when these qualities or possessions infuses our lives? How does these pieces of our armor protect us against the assaults of the enemy?

How might putting on the pieces of God's armor be inconvenient? Why would it be foolish for a Christian to neglect putting on even one piece of armor?

Our armor does not consist of physical objects but spiritual realities. Abstract realities (truth and righteousness, for example) become inner qualities (truthfulness and righteous behavior) when we "put them on." Still, it is in God's strength, not in the power of our own Christian character, that we are called to stand. The emphasis in the illustration of the full armor of God is on being

prepared. We must first be aware of the battle that is going on around us. Then we must avail ourselves of the resources God has provided as we stand firm against the attacks of the enemy.

| HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ EPHESIANS 6:18-20.

What does Paul's emphasis on and repetition of the words "all" and "every" in verse 18 communicate to you?

How can we pray all the time? Why is remaining alert in prayer a challenge? What helps you remain alert as you pray?

Prayer is how we stay in touch with God, communicating our needs to Him, and hearing the guiding of the Spirit. We should pray regularly and expectantly for one another. We can and should make our prayer needs known to our fellow Christians.

| HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ EPHESIANS 6:21-24.

What kind of encouraging news did Tychicus bring the Ephesians? How does news of other believers' well-being encourage you to stay prepared to resist evil?

What are some ways we can hear encouraging news of how God is working in and through other believers? Why would living in Christ's grace and expressing undying love for Him prepare us for all spiritual victories?

How does being with God's people encourage you? How does it prepare you to go back out and fight the battle?

APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

How could you give a higher priority to times of testimony, and to ministry and mission reports in your church? How might these become a source of real joy to you?

What can you do to ensure that the four bedrock Christian qualities of peace, love, faith, and grace take root in your own life, and in the life of your church?

PRAYER

Thank God for providing us with spiritual resources that equip us to stand firm under attack from the enemy. Pray that each learner would grow in strength and conviction, depending on the Lord in prayer, and seeking to live for His glory.

COMMENTARY

| EPHESIANS 6:10-24

6:10. Paul's concluding teaching challenged believers to recognize their spiritual weaknesses and to draw on the Lord. We cannot strengthen ourselves. We need power from outside. The Lord Jesus is the One who supplies spiritual strength. Paul had already used the phrase "His vast strength" in Ephesians 1:19 to refer to God's active power in the lives of believers.

6:11-12. The full armor of God is required not only because we are weak but also because our spiritual enemies are strong. Our strongest adversary is the devil. We should never doubt that the devil is a real, supernatural person. He opposes God and His people with tactics, a term suggesting how wily he is. The believer's responsibility, once clad in God-given armor, is to stand. We need not flee the devil, but rather we are to boldly hold the fortress of our own souls. We do not face a physical army (flesh and blood, human beings). We face a spiritual army. Paul listed some of these evil beings. Evidently there is a hierarchy of evil spirit-beings in hostile opposition to God and His people.

6:13. For the second time, the apostle urged believers to use the full armor of God—the complete kit of spiritual equipment. God the heavenly Warrior-King wears such armor (Isa. 59:17). He has now shared it with His people. In this verse, the verb "take up" is parallel to "put on" in verse 11. Both verbs suggest intentional action. "To resist in the evil day" means during the days until Christ's return as the conquering King.

6:14-15. Paul likened the three pieces of equipment Roman soldiers put on at the beginning of a day to God-given character traits we believers are to build daily into our lives.

"Belt." This wide leather strap kept a Roman soldier's undergarments from getting tangled and also held his sword at the side of his body. By application, the belt stands for truth. Many Bible students believe this refers to a Christian's sincerity or integrity of speech. For believers to lapse into intrigue or dishonesty is to fall into the devil's own game.

"Armor on your chest." The metal breastplate was standard for a battle soldier; it protected his vital organs during combat. For the believer, it stands for righteousness. Since Paul had Isaiah 59:17 in mind, he meant uprightness of character (godliness or Christlikeness). To neglect developing our character according to God's standard of virtue is to give the devil a gaping hole through which he may attack us.

“Feet sandaled.” The Roman soldier’s hobnailed (cleated) shoes kept his feet from slipping. In the analogy, it stands for a Christian’s readiness for the gospel of peace. The meaning is probably the steadiness that comes to us because we have received the good news of Christ. Without assurance that we have peace with God through the gospel, the devil will gain a great advantage, throwing us into doubts of all kinds.

6:16-17. Paul went on to speak about three more pieces of equipment. Understanding these pieces shows us actions we can take when we face spiritual battles.

“Shield.” The Roman shield Paul had in mind was probably a long, oblong leather-covered device that covered much of the body during active battle. It was effective at dousing flaming arrows. In the analogy, this stands for a believer’s faith—active day-to-day trust in God to provide the strength to resist onslaughts that the evil one sends. Faith looks to the power of God when there is temptation.

“Helmet.” The soldier’s metal headgear provided both protection and decoration. Paul had written to the Thessalonians to put on “a helmet of the hope of salvation” (1 Thess. 5:8). So what is the salvation Paul had in mind? Probably he meant our hope or expectation of future deliverance when we receive full salvation at last. Confidence that we will be with Christ forever and that we will enjoy a future resurrection with Him provides believers strength to endure all devilish assaults.

“Sword.” The Roman short sword was used for both defense and offense. It was efficient in hand-to-hand combat. It stands for God’s Word. On the one hand, this refers to the entirety of the Scriptures, which has been inspired by the Spirit and is His gift to God’s people. On the other hand, it refers to the specific biblical message that is apt for the need at hand. (Ps. 119:11; Heb. 4:12).

6:18. Four times in this verse Paul used Greek forms for “all” or “every.”

“All kinds of prayer.” There is more than one way to talk to God. Here, the apostle used both a general term (prayer) and a specific term (request).

“All times of prayer.” There is no wrong time to pray! Morning prayers, mealtime prayers, bedtime prayers, and battle-time prayers are all acceptable. Yet they are to be motivated by the Spirit, not just become a ritual or something perfunctory. Believers are to stay alert in prayer.

“All perseverance in prayer.” Prayer is to be continual. Jesus Himself made this clear in the parable of the persistent widow (Luke 18:1-8).

“All objects of prayer.” Believers should pray for each other—all the saints—knowing that they are also experiencing spiritual warfare in their own lives.

6:19-20. Paul wanted the Ephesians to include him in their prayers. He too was engaged in spiritual battle. Perhaps as a prisoner he was tempted to be silent about his faith. He did not ask to be set free; rather, he prayed for two qualities that would enable the ministry of the word to blaze forth. First, he wanted clarity. When he spoke, he wanted the right message to be given. Second, he wanted boldness, not shrinking from delivering what God had entrusted to him—which he recognized as the mystery of the gospel. Earlier in the letter, Paul had called himself a “prisoner ... on behalf of you Gentiles” (3:1) and “the prisoner in the Lord” (4:1).

Now he called himself an ambassador in chains. As an ambassador, he was the accredited representative of Jesus Christ; and he would represent Christ before the emperor’s court. Even so great a Christian as Paul wanted prayer that he would be bold enough in Him to speak.

6:21-22. Paul’s friend Tychicus was apparently the letter carrier, not only for this epistle but also for Colossians (Col. 4:7). He later continued serving as Paul’s messenger (2 Tim. 4:12; Titus 3:12). Paul’s high regard for him could not be concealed. He was a dearly loved brother (his horizontal relationships with others) and he was a faithful servant in the Lord (his vertical relationship to God). Paul put in writing a statement of his confidence in Tychicus to verify that oral news about Paul (“how I am and what I’m doing”) was reliable. When they received an update on his situation, it would encourage his readers. Even today, congregations need news about God’s work around the world, especially from people they have commissioned. This will encourage them to continue in their work for the Lord.

6:23-24. The apostle’s formal conclusion to his letter became a benediction for his readers’ welfare. He heaped up great Christian terms to pray that God would bless them with heavenly virtues. In many ways, these terms summarize the message of the entire letter: peace (see Eph. 1:2; 2:14,15,17; 4:3; 6:15); “love” (see 1:4,15; 2:4; 3:17,18; 4:2, 15,16; 5:2); “faith” (see 1:15; 2:8; 3:12,17; 4:5,13; 6:16); “God the Father” (see 1:2,3,17; 4:6; 5:20); “Lord Jesus Christ” (see 1:2,3,17; 3:11; 5:20); and “grace” (see 1:2,6,7; 2:5,7,8; 3:2,7,8; 4:7,29). Thus Paul’s last word was for the believers to experience grace and to love Jesus forever.