# Ephesians

Ephesians 6:10-24

## Introduction

In this section we come to the closing teaching of the book of Ephesians and Paul’s final greetings. This is a bit of a ‘Columbo’ moment. Having established in the rest of the letter the importance of the church and our part within it, as well as behaviour appropriate to being members of the church, he says, ‘and by the way, you’re are part of a cosmic spiritual battle that is being waged in heavenly places’. This is why living as a Christian and being the church is not always easy. It is why, over the centuries, the enemy has done everything possible to try and stop the church: he has divided it, maligned it, corrupted it, and tried to destroy it, and yet on it marches because it carries within it God’s plan for the redemption of the universe.

During this talk, I am not intending to do an in-depth study on the armour of God – there are many great teaching resources out there on that. Rather, I just want to pick out a few important points before we bring the book to a conclusion.

## The Battle

Paul begins his exhortation to the church in this section by giving three instructions:

* Be strong in the Lord’s mighty power
* Put on the full armour
* Stand

This is similar to the instruction to any soldier about to go to battle whether then or now. We will look at each of these in turn.

### Be Strong

Firstly, Paul encourages us to be strong, but this is not in our own strength. Rather it is in the strength that God himself provides. It is similar to the instruction given to Joshua in Joshua 1:9, ‘Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go’.

The source of our strength is not in ourselves or in our human capabilities; Paul is not trying to rouse a sense of bravado. Rather he is saying, just as the Lord said to Joshua, that God himself is the source of our strength. It is the knowledge that he is with us that he is on our side that will give us the courage to face all that life throws at us.

Sometimes our courage may fail; sometimes we will feel weak and not strong; sometimes we may become low and discouraged. But our rallying point is always that the Lord is with us. ‘Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow I will feel no evil, for you are with me...’ (Psalm 23:4). Our assurance is that he is bigger and stronger than anything that confronts us and, if we put our trust in him, he will see us through. He doesn’t promise us that it will be easy, but he does assure us of victory. ‘God is our refuge and strength, an ever- present help in trouble’.

### Put on the Full Armour

The armour of God is our defence against the enemy and his tactics.

**The Belt of truth** – the belt holds everything together. In the same way the truth of the word of God is the foundation on which everything else rests. If we know the truth it will be the basis of our defence against the enemy. If we do not know the truth, our armour will be defective and we will succumb to his attacks.

**The breastplate of righteousness** – righteousness protects our heart. When the enemy comes to accuse us and tell us we are worthless sinners, we can stand firm in the righteousness that Jesus himself has provided. We are accepted, not on the basis of our righteousness, but on the basis of his righteousness, therefore the enemy’s accusations are false and cannot get through to would us if we stand on this truth.

**The shoes of the readiness of the gospel of peace** – we can walk knowing that the gospel of peace has saved us and that everywhere we go we can be at peace because of that salvation.

**The shield of faith** – the shield of faith is about trusting in the truth and affirming it when the accusations come. The enemy may accuse us with his flaming arrows, but I believe what God says about me more than what the enemy says. I will not receive those condemning words. I will trust in God and in his word.

**The helmet of salvation (hope)** – in 1 Thessalonians 5:8, Paul describes this piece of armour as ‘the helmet of the hope of salvation’. In other words, it is the confident assurance that in the end God will save us and raise us up again therefore, we need not fear anything the enemy may do to us. Even if we die, we have an expectation of greater things to come; therefore we can be at peace in the midst of the storm.

**The sword of the Spirit** – Paul identifies this as ‘the word of God’. We can wield it just as Jesus did when he was tempted. Instead of trying to defend himself, he simply said, ‘it is written...’ Our ultimate defence against the enemy – the source of our truth, the source of our faith and the source of our hope – is the Word of God. Know it; use it; take ground back from the enemy by wielding it.

### Stand

Paul then says, when you have sorted out your courage and when you have put the armour on, simply stand.

Sharpe's Eagle

 (The setting is Spain, 1809, the Napoleanic Wars. Richard Sharpe is a Lieutenant in the English army. He's been given the task of training the South Essex regiment, a badly trained unit, with an arrogant, ignorant noble for a commander.)

Richard Sharpe (Sean Bean): Those men who've fought in a big battle before, one pace forward. (no one steps forward) This place is called Talevara. There's gonna be a battle here tomorrow. You'll fight in it, maybe even die in it. But you won't see it. There's a lot of smoke in a battle. Our cannon, their cannon, our shot, their shell, our volleys, their volleys... You don't see a battle, you hear it. Black powder blasting by the ton on all sides, black smoke blinding you and choking you, and making you vomit. And the French come out of the smoke, not in a line, but in a column. And they march toward our thin line, kettle drums hammering like hell, and a golden eagle blazing overhead. They march slowly, and it takes them a long time to reach you. And you can't see them in smoke, but you can hear the drums. They march out of the smoke, and you fire a volley. And the front rank of the column falls. And the next rank steps over them, with drums hammering. And the column smashes your line like a hammer breaking glass. And Napoleon has won another battle. But if you don't run...if you stand until you can smell the garlic, and fire volley after volley, three rounds a minute, then they slow down...they stop...and then they run away. All you have to do is stand and fire three rounds a minute. Now you and I know you can fire three rounds a minute. But can you stand?

In that piece of dialogue, Richard Sharpe paints a vivid picture of a nineteenth century battle. The battle we are involved in is far more ferocious than that. It is a battle for our lives; it is a battle for the universe; it is a battle for the souls of men and women.

What he makes clear is that the tactic that would beat the enemy was not just being able to fight, but simply being able to stand without running. This is exactly what Paul is saying in this passage. You may have all the equipment, training and instruction that you could ever need, but when the enemy comes at you, you need to be able to stand.

In this passage, Paul says it four times:

* Stand against the devil’s schemes (v.11)
* Stand your ground (v.13)
* After you have done everything, stand (v.13)
* Stand firm (v.14)

To be repeated so many times in such a short passage means it is pretty important. What he is saying is when the attack of the enemy comes against you, whether accusation, or life’s circumstances, you don’t need to go on the offensive; you just need to stand. That may mean taking time out to be with God. It may mean actively speaking the truth into our situation. It may mean asking someone to stand with you. The important thing is just to stay standing. As soon as we turn and run (leave church, stop praying, disconnect ourselves let our hearts become cold) the enemy wins and we will find it harder to stand in future.

## Prayer

Having laid out the basis of our defence, Paul then turns to our offence. It is prayer (v.18) and he instructs us to ‘pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests’.

### Pray in the Spirit

So what does Paul mean by this phrase?

1. He means pray under the guidance of the Spirit.

When we pray, it is easy for us to come before God with our shopping list of items, deliver it to God, and then walk away. To pray in the Spirit is more than this. It means to come before God with those things that God has laid upon our heart and to wait in his presence as we talk to God about them. As we do so, His Spirit speaks to our spirit and prompts us how we should be praying about the various items.

1. He means pray allowing the Spirit to pray through you.

We see how this works in Romans 8:26-27. In this passage, Paul shows us that the Spirit can actually pray through us. It happens when we are interceding on behalf of something or someone and the desire to see God’s purposes fulfilled in the circumstance becomes a longing from deep within.

It is like being pregnant and coming to the point of giving birth. From deep within our spirit a groaning and longing can come forth which expresses the desire of the Holy Spirit at that point.

This is not something I have often experienced myself, but if you read the stories of any of the great intercessors of the past (Rees Howells, Praying Hyde of India, Hudson Taylor, etc.) you will read of such experiences.

1. He means pray in tongues.

In 1 Corinthians 14:14-15, Paul describes the experience of praying in tongues as ‘praying with the spirit’, i.e. with my spirit. When I pray in an unknown tongue, my spirit is communicating directly with the Spirit of God, and is using words that the Spirit of God has given it. It leaves my mind ‘unfruitful’, i.e. I do not know what I am saying, but I know that when I pray in tongues I am communicating with God, and my spirit is blessed and uplifted as a result.

Often in prayer I may be praying for things and will pray in English and then I will pray in my tongue. As I do this, I know that I am adding to my first prayer and often revelation comes to me about what I am praying for out of this combination.

### Pray on all occasions

The next injunction that Paul gives us is to ‘pray on all occasions’. This is actually a poor translation of this verse. The literal rendering is ‘pray at every time…’, or at all times. The emphasis is not on praying on all occasions, which suggests only at certain times, but on praying continuously.

If we want to develop in our relationship with God we should be those who pray all the time. This is not limited to our early morning or late evening ‘quiet time’, nor is it simply for when we come together. Paul’s emphasis is that our lives should be typified by unceasing prayer.

### Pray with all kinds of prayers and requests

Next, Paul emphasises that there are different forms of prayers and different kinds of requests. Whether our prayers are in English, in tongues, in liturgical form, spontaneous, the emphasis is on praying always win every way possible. It is prayer that will make a difference. It is prayer that will alter circumstances. It is prayer that will change lives.

Take every opportunity to pray in every way possible, and don’t forget to pray for leaders (v.19).

We will conclude with Paul’s benediction from v.23-24

Peace to the brothers and sisters, and love with faith from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Grace to all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with an undying love.