

# CHURCH IMPROVEMENT: BUILDING A CHURCH THAT HONORS GOD AND LOVES PEOPLE BY A WARFARE LIFESTYLE

## Ephesians 6: 10-20

*Please review this week's catechism question.*

Did you meet anyone new after worship on Sunday?

### INTRODUCTION

Our government tells us that we, as a nation, are engaged in a “war on terror.” What impact does this have on individual citizens? What impact should this reality have on our lives?

*We are at war as a nation and each of us must live our lives knowing that we are at war. There is much work being done that is invisible to us. At times, the reality of the war breaks out when we hear of another suicide bombing or the grounding of an airplane. However, most of the time the war goes on without our noticing. Some of us will take a more active role by joining the military or another security force. All of us have a role to play in that war by living our lives and by being alert.*

This “War on Terrorism” is an excellent image of the greater war that has been going on in the world since the day Adam and Eve ate from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. A great, invisible world war has been raging on our planet for thousands of years. In this passage, the Apostle Paul is going to describe that battle and tell us how we are to fight it. Paul is telling us that when you relate to your spouse or your parent, when you go to work, when you decide what to watch on TV, when you talk with your co-workers, you are no less involved in a massive war than our soldiers in Iraq when they walk the streets of Baghdad. This passage is meant to arouse us to action, to prepare us for battle, to equip us to live authentic Christian lives. What Paul means to do in these eleven verses is what coaches do as they send their teams out on the playing field and what commanders do as they send their men into battle. Paul wants you to know that you

are in a war, regardless of how it appears to you. The good news is that the only way to lose is to not fight. The only way to be destroyed is to act as if you are not at war. The victory is assured, if you will fight. That is Paul's main point.

### STUDY

1. In vv. 10, 11, 13, & 14 Paul commands us to “be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power”, “put on the full armor of God”, “stand firm”. According to vv. 11-13, why do we need to put on the full armor of God, etc.?

*We are in a fierce war in which our enemies are not mere men but the devil and all his cohorts.*

2. Do you feel as if you are in a war right now? Why or why not?

3. What are we told about our enemies and the nature of our conflict in vv. 11-12? (NOTE: How is the devil's power described in Ephesians 2: 2-3?)

*The first thing to note is that these enemies are not merely human. The fight we are in is not against human foes. We are engaged in a fight against invisible, spiritual beings. The main point is that they are infinitely more powerful than we are. They cannot be resisted apart from God's power. (NOTE: Eph. 2: 2-3: He was our slave master. He rules over every human being from the moment of their conception. He is the one who is at work in every human in their disobedience. The only reason we are not under his power at the moment is due to the power of God giving us life and freedom from his tyranny. To think that any of us can successfully resist the devil apart from God's power is as ludicrous as a runaway slave thinking that he can outrun his master's bloodhounds and posse without any help. It is foolish as Jewish people in the Nazi concentration camps thinking they could become free from their oppressors without any assistance.) In verse 12 Paul is not trying to give us the inside scoop on Satan's organizational chart, as some suppose. Rather, he “now employs a variety of epithets, to make the reader understand that this is not an*

enemy who may be safely despised,” in the words of Calvin. The invisible enemy that stands behind this world of sin and suffering is fierce and formidable. These beings are world dominating, powerful, evil rulers.

4. To what do the “schemes of the devil” (v. 11) refer? (See Ephesians 4:13 where the same word is used and John 8: 43-44, 1 Timothy 4:1-4 & 1 John 3:8, 4:1-4)

In 4:14, Paul tells us that as we grow up into mature Christians we “will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming.” These are the only 2 verses in the NT where the word “scheme” is used. Paul is pointing to a reality that we dare not forget. The primary way that the devil enslaves humans and harasses Christians is through false teaching, through deception. Paul states this even more clearly in 1 Timothy 4:1-3. “The Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons. Such teachings come through hypocritical liars whose consciences have been seared as with a hot iron.” As Jesus says in John 8, Satan is a liar and the father of lies. His primary weapon against us to get us to believe false things. There are literally billions of people in the world held captive by Satan by false religious systems. This is why Paul can call the demonic hosts “world rulers of this darkness.” The darkness of sin, unbelief and error. It is literally true that Satan rules over the world of men by inspiring false teachers with demonic teaching of all shades and stripes. Don’t be fooled by the fact that you do not believe one of the grand deceptions like Islam or Hinduism or Mormonism. Satan’s strategies are subtle and insidious. It is not without reason that Jesus says that the deception of wealth sends people to hell or that the writer to the Hebrews says that we must watch out or our hearts will be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.

5. To what does “the day of evil” in v. 13 refer?

(See 1 Thess. 3:1-5, 1 Peter 4: 12-19, 5:8-10) He is the agent of all our evil days. Satan is the one who sent the Sabians to kill Job’s servants and steal his property, he is the one who sent the tornado that

killed Job’s children. He is the one who inspired Judas to betray Jesus and the one who inspired Herod to kill the apostle James. According to Peter in his letter, he is the direct cause to all the persecution and suffering of God’s people. His goal in all suffering and persecution is what he stated in Job. He aims to prove that God is not worthy of our trust. He aims to destroy our faith and confidence in the goodness, love and power of God. His purpose is that we hate God as he actually is and worship false gods of our own making. (Let me hasten to say what Job said about his suffering. While Satan is the direct agent of all the suffering of God’s people in the world, it is also true that “The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away.” What Satan intends for our harm, God intends for our good. Satan is on God’s leash and can only do what God wills for our good.)

**Authentic Christian living requires that we put up a fight because we have fierce and formidable enemies.**

6. How are we to “resist the devil’s schemes” or “stand firm in the day of evil”?

Paul commands us to be strong in the power of God or to put on the full armor of God. These are synonymous phrases. You are strong in God’s power when you put on his armor.

7. What does it mean to put on the belt of truth around your waist?

We put on the belt of truth when we determine to live a truth filled life. I am determined to only believe the truth and to only speak the truth. When I am honest with myself, with God and with others, I have put on the belt of truth. Calvin says, “The purity of the gospel ought to remove from our minds all cunning, and from our hearts all hypocrisy.” When you are a Christian, you have nothing to hide. Being a Christian means you have openly confessed that you are a horrible criminal. I have been declared pardoned and perfectly righteous by my Judge and claim him as my father. Therefore, I have nothing to fear from the accusations of the devil or the disapproval of man.

**8.** What does it mean to have the breastplate of righteousness in place?

*Paul does not mean by this the righteousness of Christ that is given to the believing sinner. Rather it is being and doing right as described in 4:1-6:9. It means that I live justly in my church, home, community and workplace. I live a devout and holy life.*

**9.** What does it mean to fit your feet with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace?

*The gospel has given me peace with God and peace with man. That is the message of 2: 11-22. The shoes are the readiness to live at peace with God and men that is given to us by the gospel. We are peacemakers, not trouble-makers. We are always ready to forgive, to die to our own desires, to not demand our own way in our relationships with others. One of Satan's primary goals is to destroy the church by division and dissension. The gospel of peace makes me a person who is always ready to reconcile, to acknowledge my faults and to seek forgiveness. I live with an absence of hostility and anger. We are prepared to live at peace with others in this troubled world.*

**10.** What does it mean to take up the shield of faith?

*Faith in the superiority of Jesus and all he promises is what will extinguish every flaming arrow launched by the evil one. The flaming arrows are the false promise of sin, the offer of a false god or pleasure, the hardship of suffering or persecution that threatens our faith in the love and power of God. Believing that Jesus will do what he promises to do, take me to heaven, and that what Jesus promises is better than the whole universe extinguishes these flaming arrows. Faith extinguishes the arrow of temptation by giving me greater pleasure in being loved by Jesus than by being angry with my child. Faith extinguishes the arrow of suffering by assuring me that belonging to Jesus is better than not suffering.*

**11.** What does it mean to take the helmet of salvation?

*Taking the helmet, which is salvation, means to fix my attention on the greatness of the deliverance I've been given, to enjoy the rescue that has already been obtained. We rejoice in the change that has occurred in our condition. We were dead, we were slaves to Satan and sin, we were outsiders but now, through the gospel we have been given life, set free from Satan's tyranny and become members of God's family. In this we greatly rejoice. Our minds are set upon Christ and his saving work for us and thus we are shielded from the blows aimed at our heads.*

**12.** What does it mean to take the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God?

*The Holy Spirit is the warrior who wields the word of God. He is the one who makes this word effective in defeating our enemies. This written word is our only offensive weapon in our battle against the devil and his demons. It is the word of God we must use if we intend to destroy Satan. Remember Jesus said that the gates of hell would not stand against Christ's church. The reason is that the word of God cuts through all the deception and schemes of the devil. This word creates and sustains all else, as it is the word that is directed by the Spirit. The word shatters hard hearts and overcomes stubborn wills. The word judges our thoughts and motives.*

**13.** Can you identify specific ways you are putting on these pieces of God's armor? What are some ways you are failing to put them on?

**Authentic Christian living requires that we put up a fight because we have God's armor.**

**14.** What is the connection between vv. 10-17 and vv. 18-20?

*Verses 18-20 are strongly connected to what precedes. Calvin says, "Having instructed the Ephesians to put on their armor, he now enjoins them to fight by prayer. This is the true method." Prayer is the means by which we put on the armor and when we have the armor on it is how we fight against the devil and all his schemes. As John Piper says, "The sword of the Spirit, the word of God, is the agent of salvation. Spirit filled prayer is the hand that wields the weapon."*

**15.** What instruction does Paul give us about prayer in these verses and what do these instructions mean?

*First, note that we are to pray in the Spirit. In other words, the same Holy Spirit who makes the word of God effective makes our prayers effective. There is no effective prayer that is not Spirit directed prayer. This means that our praying must be in accord with the will of God, it must align with the Holy Spirit's purposes, which are revealed in the Scriptures. Second, we are to pray at all times. The Christian life is a praying life. Our days are to be lived in a state of prayer. As the battle is unending, so must be our praying. We are always in danger and always in need and so we must be always at our prayers. Third, there is not just one kind of prayer that God will accept. We are to offer all kinds of prayers. There are to be hours spent just praying and then prayer as we wash the dishes. Fourth, our prayers are to be characterized by two things, alertness and perseverance. We are to pay attention to what we are praying. We are to be thoughtful and intelligent in our praying. We are alert to God's will as he reveals it in his word and we are alert to the circumstances of the battlefield. We are to be alert to the strategies of the evil one. Why would Paul need to tell us to persevere in our prayers? We are going to be in the war until the day we die. We will see victories along the way but the war will not be ended until Christ comes again. Therefore, we are to build disciplines into our lives that we can continue in for our whole lives. We need to find ways to pray daily that we will be able to continue all the days of our lives. Finally, notice that our prayers are in behalf of all God's people, not just our own personal concerns. Here, Paul is simply following the Lord Jesus when he taught his disciples to pray, "Our Father".*

**16.** What are Paul's circumstances according to vv. 19-20? What's the connection to vv. 10-18?

*He is in the midst of one of those evil days he referred to in v. 13. He is in prison for preaching the gospel. The world rulers of this darkness have conspired to throw Paul into prison in order to destroy his faith and the faith of other Christians.*

**17.** How is Paul putting on the armor and praying in the Spirit?

*First, notice Paul's truthfulness. He knows that he is a coward. His natural inclination while being thrown into prison for preaching the gospel is to not speak anymore. Being in prison is no fun and the easy way out of the dilemma is to stop preaching. He openly, without shame, declares his weakness and asks for prayer. Second, notice that his goal is to stand in the day of evil, not to be delivered from it. It is not wrong to pray for physical safety. In fact, in Romans 15 Paul asks to be protected from unbelievers. However, this is not the main thing. The main thing is that in this day of evil, he wants them to pray that he stand firm and use the word of God to do what it is meant for, vanquish Satan. He doesn't ask to be delivered from his circumstances but that he would be a Christian in these circumstances. Paul knows that there are far worse things than being thrown into prison. He knows that he is in a war against foul and fierce spiritual forces whose aim is to destroy his faith and get him to sin and betray his Lord and the people of God. He knows that his greatest need isn't being delivered from prison but to stand firm and fight for faith while in prison.*

**18.** How does Paul's attitude and actions in his "day of evil" compare with your attitude and action in your "days of evil"? What needs to change?

**Authentic Christian living requires that we put up a fight because we have God's help.**