

EPHESIANS 6:10-20
ST JOHN'S, 26.8.18, 9.30 am
ST JOHN'S, 26.8.18, 4.00 pm

INTRODUCTION

As Paul comes to the end of his letter, his last major instruction to the church in Ephesus is *be strong in the Lord* (v 10). Christians need to shape up, to be ready for the battles which we'll be facing. Paul points out that *we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places* (v 12). We need to be *strong in the Lord* to *stand against the schemes of the devil* (v 11).

We can't face all these schemes, rulers, authorities, cosmic powers and spiritual forces of evil without protection. Just as a Roman soldier wouldn't go into battle dressed in only his tunic, we also need protection: we need the *whole armour of God*. Paul uses the pieces of Roman armour as pictures for the things which will enable us to battle in this spiritual war.

The first piece of armour Paul says we need to *fasten on* is *the belt of truth* (v 14). The belt held the soldier's tunic in place so he didn't trip up. We know that Jesus is the truth: he prevents us from tripping up or stumbling through our lives. The belt wrapped right round the soldier. As we go into battle, Jesus goes with us, wrapped around us, giving us his love, care and support.

Next Paul says, we should make sure we've *put on the breastplate of righteousness* (v 14). The breastplate protected vital organs, especially the heart and lungs. 'Righteousness' in the NT means two things: firstly the righteousness which God gives to us, which has nothing to do with us and everything to do with God's loving-kindness. God's righteousness protects us like a breastplate, and keeps our hearts safe for him. Secondly, 'righteousness' in the NT means our own behaviour. If we always try to do what we know is right in God's sight, and if we always say sorry when we know we've gone wrong, then we're protected from guilt and worry.

Next, Paul tells us *as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace* (v 15). Shoes protect our feet. The soldier's shoes would have nails in the soles to help them to grip on slippery ground. Again, there are two possible pictures here. The first is that our 'gospel boots' give us support and help us not to slip and slide as we go about battling the evil around us. The second picture is that our 'gospel boots' take us to people and give us the readiness to tell them the good news about Jesus.

Paul says that we're to *take up the shield of faith* (v 16). A shield provided the soldier with protection from arrows, swords and spears. When soldiers were just about to go into battle, they'd soak their shields in water. It meant that if the enemy attacked with flaming arrows, the shield wouldn't only stop the arrows, it would put out the flames. As Paul says, *the shield of faith* allows us to *extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one*. Our faith in God gives us protection from

spiritual attack, for example when bad things happen to us, or when we do something bad and we're tempted to think that God can't possibly love us any more.

Next, Paul tells us to *take the helmet of salvation* (v 17). The helmet protected the soldier's head. We have been saved from the penalty of sin. We are being saved from the power of sin. We will ultimately be saved from the presence of sin. God's saving power is the only hope we have in this battle for our souls. Again, there's another picture here: the helmet protects our heads. Sometimes, we need to protect our minds, maybe from what we see on TV or in a computer game, or maybe from what we read in book or magazine.

The final piece of equipment which Paul mentions here is *the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God* (v 17). We need to make sure we're getting to know our Bibles better each day, because the only piece of equipment we have for attack is *the word of God*. If we have Scripture stored up in our hearts and minds, it means that it's there for us to call on both when we're tempted, and when we're sharing the good news with our family or friends. The writer to the Hebrews tells us that *the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword* . . . (Hebrews 4:12). It's our responsibility to know our Bibles, so we can indeed take up *the sword of the Spirit*.

Finally, we need to remember that soldiers don't go into battle on their own; they don't decide for themselves when, where or whom they're fighting. Soldiers are under orders from the superiors, and they wait to

receive those orders before they do anything. Just as soldiers must listen to their commanding officers, so we must listen to God in prayer. Our relationship with God is much closer than the relationship between a soldier and his superiors: we need to spend time talking to God and listening to him, so that we know our orders, and can fight as he commands us. As Paul says, we're to be *praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication* (v 18).

Be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might . . . stand firm (vv 10,13). We have the spiritual equipment to obey Paul's command here; let's make sure we use it!