

Ephesians 6:10-15 NIV

“Is your Christian armor updated?”

“(10) Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. (11) Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes.

“(12) For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.

“(13) Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand.

“(14) Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, (15) and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace.”

You probably caught the contradiction.

- In our text, Paul emphasized war language—swords, shields, helmets—outfitting soldiers for battle.
- Paul frequently employed military terms.
“Fight the good fight of faith.”
“I have fought a good fight.”
- Yet Jesus taught non-violence.
“Turn the other cheek.”
“Love your enemies.”
“Blessed are the peacemakers.”

**Why did Paul use so many war references?
Why did he differ so greatly with Jesus?**

Not all seeming contradictions are in the Bible, of course.

I learned just the other day that a popular drink is called “Body Armor.”

Do you suppose peace-loving people drink that stuff?

You can tell me what you think later.

Let’s deal with the Bible’s seeming conflicts.

Why did Paul’s language apparently differ from what Jesus taught?

- When speaking to people, we talk subjects related to their circumstances.

You would not go to a Minnesota Viking or Kansas City Chiefs training camp and talk with beefy football players about growing exotic flowers in Denmark.

Beyonce could probably do it; I could not.

Neither would you likely hold their rapt attention by lecturing them on the mass weight of the universe.

- **We speak with people in accord with their interests and experiences.**

Does that mean the churches Paul wrote were militaristic?

Hardly, Paul often urged forgiveness, patience, and love.

So why did he use “war” language here?

I can think of two reasons.

1st, numerous Christians in Ephesus had learned war language in school.

Many of those Christian were Jews, who attended synagogue schools in their youth.

As adults they went to synagogue services every Saturday and heard Old Testament readings explained.

The prophet Isaiah described the Messiah:
“He put on righteousness as his breastplate, and the helmet of salvation on his head.”¹

¹ Isaiah 59:17 NIV

Almost for sure, Paul's readers knew the OT and were aware of this OT military verse.

Church people in Ephesus were likely familiar with that and other war language.

First century Christians were accustomed to military terms for another reason.

We rarely see armed airport TSA workers.

Unless they live near military installations, ordinary Americans seldom see military people in combat gear.

In 1980 Norma and I saw heavily armed Israeli soldiers all over Israel.

At certain areas of the Madrid airport in 2015, we saw heavily armed Spanish soldiers.

But, 1st century folks constantly saw men in full body armor.

The Romans placed soldiers all over the world.

Roman soldiers were the highway patrol, the constables, the marshals, the sheriffs, and the police of the day.

About 1000 troops were based in Jerusalem.

A captain (centurion) lived in Capernaum, meaning that 100 soldiers were assigned to the town where Jesus began his ministry.

Like modern marines, Roman soldiers stayed fit and ready.

Little boys probably admired them, and young girls thought them handsome first century style Rambo figures.

When Paul talked swords, shields, shoes, and readiness, his readers got the picture.

But here is the primary reason that Paul used military images.

Whether we know it or not, or even whether we want, we are all enmeshed in war.

Few seem to understand the magnitude of the conflict.

They rarely count the costs of this war.

But how can a Christian be warlike?

War seems alien to God's love.

Jesus taught love, forgiveness, compassion, gentleness and meekness.

How can believers even use war related symbols?

Here is what military leaders have said about war:

Admiral Bull Halsey,

"Hit hard, hit fast, hit often."

Does that sound like turning the other cheek?

General and later President Dwight Eisenhower,

"When you appeal to force, there's one thing you must never do—lose."

Shakespeare in "King Henry V:" (Far more eloquently, but with the same spirit),

**"In peace there's nothing so becomes a man as modest stillness and humility;
But when the blast of war blows in our ears, then imitate the action of the tiger.
Stiffen the sinews, summon up the blood . . .
Now set the teeth and stretch the nostrils wide, Hold hard the breath and bend up every spirit to its full height."**

If these describe war, can they be proper for Christians?

Misunderstanding what Jesus taught has led many Christians to march in the

streets—to picket, protest, boycott, and declare war in the name of Christ.

Jesus never taught his disciples to picket, protest, bomb, and be warlike.

So is war an appropriate Christian symbol?

It is, but only after we clearly identify three things.



We need to know first,

Who is the enemy?

Second,

What or where the battlefield is.

Three,

What the weapons are.

Until we clearly recognize all three facts, we shall always be confused.

1. So, who is the enemy?

U.S. Grant,

“The art of war is simple enough. Find out where the enemy is. Strike him as hard as you can and keep moving.”

Most of us see the enemy as some unreasonably ornery human being.

We find ourselves waging war on numerous fronts

In a single day, might be upset with????

Watch five minutes of news and we can get angry enough to battle with folks the world over.

We declare war on lots of different folks and organizations, don't we?

But other people are not the real enemy.

We tend to blame others for our problems.

We are almost never at fault, are we?

That’s what Adam did.

“It was that woman you gave me, Lord.”

Woman to minister,

When we do battle with and blame other people for our woes, we make a big mistake.

Our trouble is, we do not know who the enemy is; let alone where to fight him.

Our text identifies our great enemy: “Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes.”

Satan is the enemy, not our spouses and friends, neighbors, coworkers and members of the other political party.

As long as we war with other people, Satan wins and we lose, no matter how right or wise or smart we think we are.

Satan is our great enemy.

2. Where is the battlefield?

It is in your will and mine.

We keep wanting and insisting on doing things our way—as we see fit.



Paul struggled with his will:

“I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. . . 18 I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out.

“19 For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing.

20 Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it. 21 So I find this law at work: When I want to do good, evil is right there with me.”²

Paul knew the battlefield was his own will.

The devil never sleeps, does he?

The first line of the hymn, “Sweet Will of God” reads: “My stubborn will at last has yielded; I would be thine and thine alone; and this my prayer . . . my lips are bringing, ‘Lord, let in me thy will be done.’”³

As Paul had, Mrs. Morris resisted letting God take control of her will.

In his book *Iron Shoes*, C. Roy Angell described walking in late to a prayer

meeting at another church “the visiting speaker was already bringing his message; so I never knew his name. He was an elderly man with a long white beard, and snow-white hair. His face beamed with radiance. He closed his message with this incident from his life:

‘I was *minister* in a small church in the valley of Virginia and very happy, because the congregation and the finances were good. Then one Saturday afternoon I answered a knock at the door and found a colporteur, a young minister student. Pathetically he told me that he had not sold a book all week and he was without money and very hungry. He asked if I could let him sleep somewhere until Monday, when he would start out again. As I talked with him that night I realized that he was a choice soul filled with the spirit of Jesus. I invited him to preach for me the next morning, and then I made one of the biggest blunders of my life. I apologized to the congregation for him. I told them we must let these young

² Romans 7:17-21 NIV

³ Lyrics by Mrs. C. M. Morris.

preachers practice on us, and urged them to give him prayerful and sympathetic attention.

Then something close to a miracle happened. Hardly had he started preaching when we forgot he was there, for it seemed to all of us that Jesus himself was talking to us. On the way home I asked him, "How did you learn to preach like that?" His answer was a question,

"Have you surrendered your life completely to Jesus?"

'Of course, it offended me. How could I be the *minister* here without surrendering?

'He immediately apologized, but I knew that God had sent him to put his finger on my life. My surrender was not complete. That night I told my wife I wanted to stay up a while. I had something to talk over with God. My study was a battleground. In my anguish I actually got down on my face and tore the carpet up with my fingernails, but God and I won. I did not go to bed, and the next morning, when I looked into the glass, it seemed that my face had actually

changed. I don't know about my face, but the inside of me was changed.⁴

We have stubborn wills, don't we?

Our great enemy is Satan and the battlefield is our stubborn will.

Is God winning your struggles of conscience, honesty, and commitment to His ways?

3. How do we wage this war?

Jesus was talking about interpersonal relationships, not international relations. **Submit wills to Jesus.**

Humbly serve one another.

Greatness in the kingdom comes from our humble service.

A backslidden member of Dr. Phillip Brooks' church called at the study to request that his name be dropped from the roll. Dr. Brooks reminded him that the step

he proposed was a serious one and appealed to him to reconsider. However, the man was insistent.

Just then a poorly dressed boy entered the study with a note scribbled in pencil on crumpled paper. After Dr. Brooks read it, he challenged his visitor: "My friend, this note is from a poor, sick woman who is requesting that I visit her. I must go preach a funeral message in a few minutes. Would you be good enough to go along with this lad to his home and supply whatever his mother needs?"

"Certainly, Dr. Brooks, I shall gladly do that for you and for her," was the answer.

He followed the lad down the wide street into narrower streets and finally, into an alley. The boy stopped at a shanty whose half-open door, held by one hinge, led into an unlighted room. When the stranger stepped in, the half-blinded woman welcomed him, "Oh, Dr. Brooks, I knew you would come! You are God's man. You always come to the call of trouble. I am sick

and hungry, but first I want you to pray for me. Please pray.'

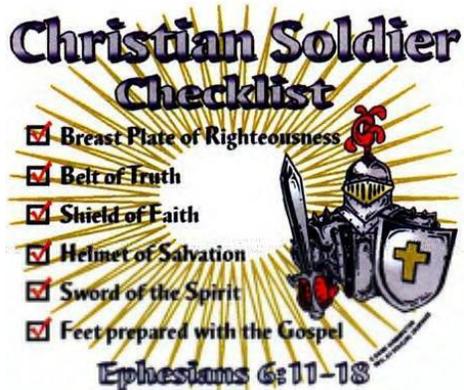
The backslider hadn't prayed in years. Should he tell her that he was not Dr. Brooks? While he was hesitating, she pleaded, "Oh, pray for me." His heart wouldn't let him refuse the request. He dropped on his knees. Following his first sentence, which was a petition for himself in his own backslidden condition, he prayed for her and closed the prayer. Then he explained, "My dear woman you have discovered by this time I am not Dr. Brooks. He is conducting a funeral and sent me to help you. Oh, how you have helped me! What do you need?"

She told him anything would be appreciated. There was no food, fuel, or medicine. Accompanied by the son, they went to a store, filled a basket with fruit and goodies which the lad carried home. He then ordered and charged to himself groceries, medicine, and coal to be delivered.

Hurrying back . . . the man, no longer a backslider, found Dr. Brooks in his study. Renewed in spirit, the man extended his hand and said softly, "Dr. Brooks, I don't want to be dropped from the roll: I'm all right now, sir; I'm all right."⁵

Be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. (11) Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes.

Spend some time before nightfall reviewing the quality and readiness of your Christian body armor.



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⁵ If my records are correct this incident was shared by Frank Sparkman, Sacramento, CA