

This Tuesday is Veterans Day, a national holiday to commemorate the armistice ending World War I in 1918. This is a day in which we officially honor all the veterans of the armed services; however, we should thank them each and every day for their contribution and sacrifice to our great nation. Many of you have served in the armed forces, and many of our loved ones have made the ultimate sacrifice by giving their lives so that we can enjoy the freedom to worship as we choose this morning. This morning there are men and women serving all over the world and some in harm's way to maintain this freedom. Today whether we are Democrat or Republican, liberal or conservative, I hope that we can all agree that the men and women who have answered the call to service for our country should be honored.

But did you know that we are all veterans; that we are all soldiers in a war? We may not have worn the uniform of the Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines or Coast Guard, but today we are wearing the uniform of a Christian. And whether you realize it or not we are all soldiers for Christ in a battle against the forces of evil in this world. So what does this uniform of a Christian look like? Let's see how the Apostle Paul describes it in the sixth chapter of his letter to the Ephesians, verses 10-18.

Read Ephesians 6:10-18

As Paul closes his letter to the Ephesians, he reflects on the magnitude of the struggle that lies ahead. Undoubtedly life back then was even more threatening and terrifying for those early Christians than it is for some of us today. There was a common belief that evil spirits filled the air and were determined to do them harm. The words that Paul uses – powers, authorities, world-rulers – are all different names of different classes for these evil spirits back then. Thus, Paul sees the whole universe as a battlefield.

Do you believe that there are evil forces in the world today? Do you believe in evil, the devil? In a survey conducted that by the Barna Group, it was noted that two-thirds of Americans do not believe that the devil exists. *The New York Times* reporting on this survey called it “a result of fundamental, long-term shifts in the nation's religious culture.” Now I have even met some people, including preachers, who said that they did not believe in the devil. Of course, I find this extremely hard to understand, especially for the pastors, since the Bible repeatedly refers to the devil and his constant opposition to God. In addition, the Gospels record that our Lord and Savior Himself was tempted for forty days in the wilderness by the devil. Believe me, the devil is the natural adversary of all who confess Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior and who try to live the Christian life. Whether we realize it or not, the battle between the followers of Jesus and the devil is waged each and every day.

Now in the ROTC classes that I took at Clemson, we were taught that whenever you go to battle, you need to know who you are fighting against – your enemy. Paul discusses our adversary, the devil, noting that he is both dangerous and deceitful. The devil studies us and determines our weaknesses; then he tries to use them against us. It may be our addictions, our love for alcohol and gambling, our obsessions, low self-esteem, a gossiping tongue, negative attitude, greed, ego, pride, temper, or anything that separates us from God.

We can be sure that the devil, in effect, has a file with each one of our names on it, and that he has developed a strategy for our own personal downfall. The devil has various strategies such as discouragement, frustration, confusion, moral failures, temporary success, an inflated ego, and theological misconceptions. He knows our weakness and he aims for it. If he cannot disable us by one approach, then he will try another, and then another; he never gives up until he has separated us from God and destroyed our life. 1 Peter 5:8 says: “Keep alert. Like a roaring lion your adversary the devil prowls around, looking for someone to devour.”

Every true Child of God soon learns that the Christian life is a daily battle, a warfare of the soul as we try to follow the teachings of Jesus Christ and do God’s will. The hosts of the devil are committed to hinder and obstruct the work of Jesus Christ and to knock His individual soldiers out of the battle. The more effective and dedicated a believer is to the Lord, the more he or she will experience attacks from the devil. The devil does not waste his time or efforts on lukewarm, inactive Christians or churches. Instead, he focuses on those individuals and churches that are doing God’s will.

So how do you fight such a committed and deceitful adversary? Paul gives us some excellent advice in this morning’s text. First, he tells us to be strong; in other words have the right attitude. Paul Harvey told the story of a certain soldier in the Civil War who, wanting to play it safe, dressed himself in a blue coat and gray pants and tiptoed onto the battlefield. He was shot from both directions. Are we tempted to compromise our faith or beliefs? Will we stay strong or try and wear both blue and gray? Be strong in the Lord and rely on His strength.

Second, the Apostle Paul tells us that we should take our stand. This term has military overtones, referring to resisting the enemy and holding a critical position in the battle. As Christians, we should stand as in the military sense of standing watch at a military post. We must not yield to the devil’s enticements and assaults, but stand firm and oppose them. To stand against the devil means we must take a stand against sin. Resist him and he will flee. Give in and he will gain ground.

Paul is telling us that as Christians we are called to take up arms against the sins and wrongs of this world. The war that we are called to wage in the name of Jesus Christ is not one of revenge

and oppression. Instead, the challenge we face is to carry forth a message of hope and love in a world that is desperately in need of it now more than ever before.

Now all this talk of war and battles can be confusing when we remember what Jesus said in the Beatitudes in Matthew 5:9 – “Blessed are the peacemakers for they will be called children of God.” However, in our scripture text, Paul seems to be urging aggressiveness. Thus, our minds immediately conjure up images of dueling gunslingers at the OK Corral or ancient armies swinging massive swords and flinging spears until one side or the other has been defeated as in the movie *Braveheart*. How do we equate this challenge by Paul to don armor and swing a sword with Jesus’ call to be a peacemaker?

An old Kenny Rogers county western song shared the story of “The Coward of the County.” For years, as a product of his father’s teaching, a gentle man backed off from every insult and confrontation. Ultimately, the person nearest and dearest to him was terribly abused and the “coward of the county” faced up to the toughest and most evil men in the county. Despite the urge to back off, the “coward” found that there are times when one must be aggressive, not in revenge, but out of certain knowledge of what is right. Our passage reminds us that sometimes we can obtain justice only by facing up to the oppressor with courage.

The key point is that we do not stand alone and unprotected. God has provided us with the necessary armor for the battle. A recent magazine article described the modern high-tech body armor used by our armed forces which was quite similar to the equipment Paul listed in Ephesians. New form-fitting, bullet-resistant fabrics to protect the chest and back, video-display goggles and headgear, a wrist-mounted weapon pod, and so forth are simply modern versions of what the apostle saw on the Roman soldier guarding him while he was writing this letter from prison.

Paul encourages us to put on the full armor of God. Paul is influenced by the battle dress of the Roman soldier assigned to guard him. He may have also been recalling the prophet Isaiah’s description of the armor that God wears. The Christian warrior is invited to employ the spiritual armor by which God Himself is clothed as He does battle with the devil. Today’s text advises us that when we go into battle for the Lord, we must be fully equipped from head to foot, for each piece of armor is an extension of God’s own might.

Okay, let’s examine this armor starting from top to bottom. First, we have the helmet of salvation. The devil cannot harm, in any permanent or ultimate sense, those who are genuinely born again, protected by the Spirit and have the ability to resist his temptations to sin.

Next is the breastplate (bullet-proof vest) of righteousness. Righteousness denotes moral integrity and protects us from the tricks of the devil. The breastplate shields the heart. According to 2 Corinthians 5:21, every believer is clothed with the righteousness of God.

Someone has said: “When a person is clothed with righteousness, they are indestructible. Words are no defense against false accusations, but a good life is.”

The belt of truth referred to in the 14th verse has to do with building our lives on the truth contained in the Bible. The belt secures all the other pieces of armor and is therefore the first one mentioned in Paul’s list. We must apply it to our daily lives, by setting aside time each day to read and study God’s Word. As we test everything by the truth of the scriptures, we can find strength and protection for the battles of each day.

Next is the shield of faith that extinguishes the flaming arrows. Roman soldiers would soak their leather shields in water to protect against flaming arrows. Today these are not really arrows, but false accusations, rumors, unjustified criticism, and downright gossip. When you walk in faith with the Lord, these modern arrows bounce off you and don’t pierce your heart because you are called to serve and please God and not the little-minded people who sling them. When you focus on pleasing God, you really don’t care what these kinds of people say or do.

Next are the boots, equipping your feet with the proclamation of the gospel. When you think of ancient footwear, you probably think of those sandals. The Roman soldiers wore strong sandals that not only protected their feet but also allowed them to stand in a slippery place. It is peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ that enables us to stand firm in difficult places and move swiftly in opposing the enemy.

Having put on these defensive pieces, we are now ready to take up the Sword of the Spirit – the Word of God – our main offensive weapon. This is the key weapon that Jesus used when He encountered the devil in the wilderness. Each time the devil tempted Him, Jesus quoted the Word of God to ward him off. If we are reading our Bibles every day, finding verses to meet the conditions and needs of our daily lives, and claiming its promises, the devil will become discouraged with us. He can’t do much damage to those who keep stabbing him with the Scriptures.

The Word of God, however, is not our only offensive weapon against evil. This passage identifies a second essential weapon – “Prayer in the Spirit.” This is our communication gear which allows us to stay in contact with our real Commander-in-Chief, God, and not get isolated or cut-off. Through daily or even constant prayer, we get the encouragement, guidance, and peace of mind that we need for the daily battle.

By now some of you may be thinking, Reuben has been watching too many John Wayne war movies. What’s all this talk about warfare, armor, and battles? This is scary stuff. Unfortunately, this is not a movie or a TV show, this is life! However, we don’t have to be scared. There’s a story in 2 Chronicles 20:15 where the Israelites were threatened by a mighty

adversary. The Lord sent this message to the people through His prophet: "Do not be afraid or discouraged because of this vast army. For the battle is not yours, but God's. Take up your positions; stand firm and see the deliverance the Lord will give you. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged. Go out and face them tomorrow, and the Lord will be with you." God delivered the Israelites that day, and like the Israelites, God is on our side and we have nothing to fear. As Romans 8:31 states: "If God is for us, who can be against us?"

But you may also be thinking that since the battle is the Lord's, all we have to do is to sit on the sidelines and watch the game. Unfortunately, it does not work that way. In this war, you are either on God's side or you are a victim of the devil. There is no middle ground in this battle, no safe haven. You must either choose to fight for the Lord or give in to the devil and his tricks. God has provided the necessary armor for each of us; all we have to do is put it on. Put it on by accepting salvation, studying God's Word, walking with the Lord in righteousness and truth, and spending time in prayer.

The 19th chapter of the Book of Revelation describes two very different suppers or meals. The first one is the heavenly banquet that we referred to last Sunday during communion; the one that all believers, followers of Jesus Christ are invited to partake in. However, in the other one, the non-believers, those who reject Jesus Christ and join the army of the devil are defeated and become the meal itself for the birds of the air. Now I for one would rather be invited to a meal than be the actual meal. As I read this chapter, it became very clear to me that if it was not for Jesus Christ, I would have been in the wrong army and ultimately defeated. But because of our belief in Him we have victory. So the question for you this morning; are you a veteran, a soldier of Jesus Christ? If so then take up your position, stand firm, and see what God is going to do. The battle is His and we are in His army. Amen