

“Put on His armor!” Ephesians 6:10-20

“Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. For 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. Therefore, take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm. Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace. In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one; and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints, and also for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains, that I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak.”

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ!

Look around! What do you see? Anything unusual, anything supernatural? In the 2 Kings Chapter 6 we can read an eye-opening story. In fact, it is a story about the opening of eyes. You probably have heard it. The king of Syria was told that the prophet Elisha is to blame for his failures in war against Israel.

What do you do, if you know that someone messes up your war plans? You try to take them out. That's what the king of Syria thought too. He said to his spies, “Go and see where this Elisha is, that I may send and seize him.”

At that time Elisha was in Dothan. The king sent horses and chariots and a great army to Dothan, and they came by night and surrounded the city. When Elisha's servant rose early in the morning and went out, behold! an army with horses and chariots was all around the city.

The servant said, “O, master! What shall we do?” But Elisha replied, “Do not be afraid, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them.” Those who are with us...? Then Elisha prayed and said,

“O LORD, please open his eyes that he may see.” The LORD opened the eyes of the servant, and he saw, and behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha.” What do you say about that?

Things visible and invisible... as we confess. Powers and authorities, angels and demons. Most of us don't see these realities of the heavenly realms, or we sometimes call them spiritual realities, even if there are people who do.

Because most people don't see them, many doubt their existence. Even many Christians are skeptical about it. What about you? However, the Bible speaks about these things as surely as about this world that is accessible to our senses. And Paul the apostle writing to Ephesians instructs them regarding the true nature of our Christians life.

He speaks about Christian life as a battle, where we all are involved. And so, we need to know who the enemy is, if we want to have any chance to stand against him. Who is the enemy of the Church, of God's people?

Paul is clear. **"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."**

That's what our enemy is. It is not unbelievers, nor our fellow Christians. The rulers, the authorities, the cosmic powers of this present darkness, the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places! Paul is clear about this and we need to be clear too.

The Church, the Kingdom of God is not simply a gathering of like-minded people, who share some religious sentiment and like to get together on weekends to perform their communal rituals. That's how the world sometimes thinks about us, and that may be what some Christians think too.

Paul paints this picture of a cosmic battle. We all are soldiers in Christ's army. We are not to battle against people, but against the true enemy. Yes, but we can't see them! What can we do? How can we wage this battle?

Today it may appear that we are losing it. The pressure is so great. From outside and inside. Hostility from the rulers and authorities of this age escalates. False teachings keep destroying the Church from within. The whole created order with marriage as its foundation is falling apart, we can't tell man from woman anymore.

It doesn't look promising. But listen to how Paul instructs us, and what an encouraging instruction it is! **"Be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. Put on the whole armour of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil... and having done all, to stand firm."**

Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace. In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one; and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God."

So, what do you say? Let's try to understand this. Are you excited about the idea that you need to go to war, to fight the invisible and very powerful enemy? Most of us will say "no, thank you!" And that's good, for we don't need to do that.

Yes, we are Christ's army, but it works the other way around. Our God doesn't send us to fight for Him. He fights for us! He does all the fighting. Remember, the Exodus? Who defeated the Egyptians? God Yahweh did.

Israelites were so afraid of their enemies. Pharaoh had sent his elite soldiers to catch them. But Moses simply said: **"Fear not, stand firm, and see the salvation of the LORD, which He will work for you today... Yahweh will fight for you."** (Exo 14:13-14) Similarly with us, it is Jesus Christ who has put all enemies under His feet and has received all the authority in heavenly realms and on earth.

We are not sent to seek for the enemy, the enemy will attack the Church. Inevitably. We can count on that. He does. We need to stand. Paul paints the picture of soldiers standing in

guard, protecting their post. What is our post? Our marriages. Our families. Our workplaces. Our congregations. Those responsibilities and relationships, where God has placed us. This is where we are to stand firm. But how do we do that?

Not in our power. Not by our knowledge or wisdom, but as Paul says – in the Lord and in the strength of His might. And then Paul describes what armour our victorious Lord provides for us. And remember, this is not our armour, this is God's own armour that we are to put on. Our Father's armour.

Even more, as we are putting on this armour, we are putting on God's own power, we are putting on Christ, we are being clothed by Christ. As members of His body, as living stones built into Him, now we stand in God's own power.

“Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth.” Every one of these pieces of God's armour also helps us to understand how the enemy, the devil schemes and attacks us. Thus, he attacks the truth, for he is a liar and the father of lies.

Jesus gives us the truth. He is the truth, and He reveals the truth to us in His Word. And by sending the Spirit of truth into our hearts He enables us to see the truth, to know the truth and to speak the truth. How important it is today! Lies corrupt and destroy, the truth sets us free, and enables us to live in Christian freedom.

“Having put on the breastplate of righteousness.” Do you know what righteousness means? It means being and living as we are created to live. But here, it is not about our righteousness that we achieve, it is about the righteousness that Jesus gives us.

The enemy will try to attack our righteousness. He is so good at tempting us to sin, and he often succeeds. And then he is even better in accusing us of what we have done. He stirs up our guilt and shame, he teaches us how to excuse our sin.

On our own we are done. But we put on Jesus' righteousness. His Word of forgiveness restores and renews us and makes us who we are created to be. When He says to you, “I forgive you all your sins, I make you good again”, He does what He says, and we can have good conscience and firm assurance that our Father sees us as good and worthy of His love, even if this is not how we may see ourselves.

“And, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace.” The gospel of peace. Remember, in the Bible ‘peace’ means so much more than simply the absence of war. It describes Paradise.

The wonderful state of perfect well-being for which we are created, which we will enjoy in the New Heavens and New Earth. Put on this Gospel! For the enemy wants to steal it away. He wants to rob us of our ultimate eternal hope.

Therefore, put on the Gospel! Be reminded that the Triune God has chosen you before the foundation of the world. That He has called you and has made you His child, that He has bound you to Himself by His Spirit indwelling in you.

Be reminded that you are so worthy in His eyes, that He was ready to pay the ultimate price for you. That He loves you unconditionally. And that He will dress you in a new resurrected body, designed and fitting for everlasting life in His presence. Put on this Gospel and never take it off!

“In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one.” The shield of faith, it makes such a difference, for the evil one won't cease to shoot his flaming arrows at us.

He does it through people. And we often fail to see the true enemy. He uses people to say things or to do things that penetrate our hearts as flaming arrows and cut deep and cause much pain and suffering.

Without the shield of faith, we are so vulnerable, we take too many things to heart, and besides, we may turn against those who hurt us thinking that they are the enemy. They are not, they are captives of the evil one, used as his tools.

The shield of faith gives us peace, that peace that surpasses our understanding. With the eyes of the faith we can see the truth, the true enemy, and having this shield we can stand firm and the flaming arrows will not hurt us that badly.

“Take the helmet of salvation.” This is about our ultimate destiny. About our fate after this age. About eternity. We can't make it on our own. And the enemy will do as much as he can to sow doubts in our hearts, to take away the assurance of our salvation, to lead us into despair or apathy.

Your baptism. That's your assurance. That's where the Father adopted you into His family and spoke to you, “You are my beloved child, with you I am well pleased.” This is where He gave you His promise, which He will never revoke.

We wander, we fail, get deceived, we fall, but His Word endures forever. These heavens and earth will pass away, but His promises will remain forever. This is how sure your salvation is. So, put on the helmet of your salvation!

“And [take] the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.” The last piece of armoury, the sword of the Spirit, the word of God. O how much the enemy would love to take away the Word! How much he does to take it away. He schemes and lies and deceives, so that only we wouldn't receive it.

The Word of God that He Himself speaks to us in His book, or through His people, this Word always comes together with the Spirit, and the Spirit creates life, true life, eternal life, the life that will never end. We need to hear our God speaking to us, we need to keep receiving His Spirit, for that is how we remain standing in truth, victorious over all the dark forces, and authorities. For they stand no chance against God's own sword.

You see, we are given more than we can comprehend. We have more power than we realize. You are more powerful than you can imagine. Because this is not our doing, this is God's own power given to us, used for our sake, so that we could stand and remain standing, until we meet our victorious general Jesus.

So, what did we learn? First, know your enemy. Your true enemy. Then, know your power, your true power. God's power that is given to you. And finally, the encouragement – put on the whole armour of God, don't let it just lay somewhere.

We can't afford the luxury to be slack and sleepy. We need to use everything that our victorious King has given us, for the days are evil, and the enemy doesn't stop scheming, and we need all that there is to stand fast. And it all is, indeed, given to us. Praise be to God!

Amen.