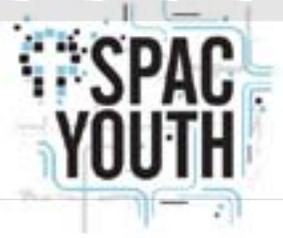


SHERWOOD PARK ALLIANCE CHURCH

E-100 SERIES—"PAUL TO THE CHURCHES"
THE ARMOR OF GOD (EPHESIANS 6:10-20)
DECEMBER 1-2



PREPARATION

- > **SPEND THE WEEK STUDYING EPHESIANS 6:10-20.** Consult the commentary provided and any additional study tools, such as a concordance or Bible dictionary available at *mystudybible.com*.
- > **DETERMINE** which discussion points and questions will work best with your group.
- > **PRAY** for our pastors and the sermon series, the upcoming group meeting, your teaching, your students and their receptivity to the lesson.
- > **FOR THE INTRODUCTION,** gather obstacles, blind folds, marshmallows, crumpled paper, and water guns.
- > **FOR THE NEXT STEPS,** provide copies of "Time Alone with God."

HIGHLIGHTS

- > **BIBLICAL EMPHASIS:** Ephesians 6 describes the reality of spiritual warfare and the supernatural realm all around us. It confirms the presence of evil in this world and challenges the believer to be prepared. The reader is challenged to take up the full armor of God just as a soldier prepares for battle. Christ's followers must be alert and ready for attacks from the forces of darkness.
- > **LIFE APPLICATION:** Life in this broken, sinful world is difficult. Often we blame people or circumstances for our difficulty, but fail to acknowledge that there is a force of evil intent on discouraging and crippling God's children. Satan longs to beat Christians down so that he will gain more power. However, believers find their strength and protection in Christ. The armor of God will help us stand firm each and every day in the victory of Christ. God has given us all that is needed to stand strong, and it is our responsibility to make sure that to make full use of what He has provided.

INTRODUCTION

TO BEGIN, direct all students to one side of the room and blindfold half of the group. As students stand quietly, place a variety of obstacles in the way (use care to select items that will not injure students). Explain that the goal of the game is for the blindfolded students to move across the room and to touch the wall on the other side of the room. State that this is not a race and there is no prize for getting there first. Inform students that attackers (the students who were not blindfolded) will be attempting to disrupt their progress (without making physical contact). As the blindfolded students make their way across the room, direct the "attackers" to spray them with water guns or throw small wads of paper or marshmallows at them. When all students have made it across the room, instruct them to remove their blindfolds.

- > **How did it feel knowing/not knowing who or what was attacking you?**

> For those who were blindfolded, would you have liked to have known about the obstacles?

> How would knowing about the obstacles in advance have helped you?

Lined writing area for student responses.

UNDERSTANDING

Explain that this lesson assures us that, spiritually, we will be attacked—it is not a surprise; we are engaged in spiritual warfare. However, we don't have to blindly enter into a dangerous zone like those of you who were attacked.

> INVITE A VOLUNTEER TO READ EPHESIANS 6:10-13 ALOUD.

> What did Paul instruct the church at Ephesus to do (v. 10)?

> From where would this strength come?

> What are believers to put on? Why?

Paul's letter to the believers in Ephesus had challenged them to know who they are in Christ and fulfill their purposes, to be unified with one another, to put off the old self and put on the new, to walk in the power of the Holy Spirit, and to be loving and submissive in all relationships. His final words let the readers know that these tasks would not be easy. Christ followers would need strength from the Lord. The full armor of God would be needed to stand up against the deception and difficulty from the Devil.

> What kind of a battle are we in as believers? Who or what is our enemy?

> Have you ever experienced a season of your life when you have felt the warfare and tactics of the enemy?

> What are some ways you've seen Satan distort the truth in your life and try to discourage you?

> Why should you take up the full armor of God? What does it do?

Paul explains who the enemy is and who is really causing the pain in this world. The Devil and his evil forces are the true enemy of God's people. He is the one who discourages, hurts, manipulates, and destroys. However, the forces of evil are no match for the Christian armed with God's strength. Taking up the full armor of God allows believers to prepare and stand firm against advances from the enemy. Just as a soldier would not go into battle unarmed, Christ followers must enter each day prepared to stand strong in the faith.

> INVITE A VOLUNTEER TO READ EPHESIANS 6:14-17 ALOUD.

Lead students to call out each piece of the armor of God identified in these verses and record them on a large piece of paper.



BACKGROUND

In Ephesians, Paul had presented the greatness of God's purpose in Christ, the glory of His high calling, and the pure and holy lifestyle that should follow from His call. He had established standards for believers' personal lives and for life in the church and the home. As the apostle concluded the epistle, he appealed to his readers to appropriate all that God in Christ had done for their salvation and their conduct. They must do this in the face of evil. Becoming a Christian marks the beginning of a life-long warfare in Christian living and service. What Christ accomplished by His death and resurrection has already assured the victory (Eph. 1:20-23). Nevertheless, Christians will continue to confront the forces of evil and engage in spiritual battle despite all the joy, peace, and happiness of the Christian life.

In the preceding sections of Ephesians, Paul had given instructions to specific groups. In chapter 6 he issued commands to all believers. First, he emphasized the necessity of putting on God's full armor in order to be strong and to stand in the battle against spiritual enemies. Then, he detailed the pieces of equipment that Christians must put on. Finally, he stressed the need for constant prayer and watchfulness.

Paul wanted to build his readers' confidence by reminding them of God's enabling powers. His spiritual resources would help them to maintain an appropriate lifestyle in the midst of a godless society and in the face of the powerful forces that lie behind it. He desired Christians to live fearlessly in the midst of a hostile world.

ADMONITION FOR SPIRITUAL STRENGTH (EPH. 6:10)

The power of God represents the Christians' chief necessity for spiritual warfare.

As Paul thought of the inevitable conflict believers would face, he reminded his readers that their position of strength was only in the Lord. The apostle charged them to be strengthened by the Lord. The wording suggests pouring power into an individual. Christians cannot strengthen themselves. They must be empowered constantly from an external source, the Lord Jesus Christ. The Greek tense of "be strong" indicates this is a continual strengthening. Believers' relationship to Christ, their union with Him, gives them access to His power. Apart from Him Christians can do nothing (John 15:5). In Christ they can do all things (Phil. 4:13).

The apostle further described the source of believers' strength as his mighty power. This accumulation of related terms—strength, power, and might—recalls Ephesians 1:19 where Paul described the exceeding greatness of the power of God avail-

able to Christians. The three words emphasize God's resources of abundant, triumphant, and energizing power. Christian soldiers can draw all the resources they require from Christ and His mighty power.

Paul reminded Christians they need more strength than they have within themselves to engage in spiritual warfare. They need the strength that only comes from God. God strengthens believers who rely on Him and His power.

PURPOSE OF GOD'S FULL ARMOR (EPH. 6:11-13)

Paul affirmed that God has provided protection for believers' spiritual warfare.

Believers need Christ's mighty power because they are fighting a spiritual battle with the devil. Paul urged his readers, therefore, to put on the full armor of God. Full armor (panoply) refers to all the equipment of the heavily armed Roman foot soldier. Full stresses the completeness of the armor that protects the soldier from head to foot. Under the Spirit's inspiration, the Old Testament description of the heavenly warrior also may have influenced the apostle (Isa. 59:17).

God provides the armor ready for use, but the Christian must put on this equipment. The verb tense of put on indicates urgent, decisive action.

God's armor enables believers to stand against enemy attackers. Stand is a more literal translation than "take your stand." Stand is the key word in this passage, for Paul repeated it two more times (Eph. 6:13-14). This military term indicates standing firm, holding one's position, resisting, not surrendering to the opposition but prevailing against it. A soldier who falls is a de-feated soldier. God provides what we need to keep standing.

Paul singled out the devil as the primary enemy, the chief of the opposing army. Believers have to stand against the devil's schemes. This language makes clear that the devil uses cunning and deceitful strategy designed to catch believers unawares. He deliberately tries to destroy the unity of Christ's body through false doctrine, conflict, and immorality. He is aware of our weaknesses, so we must be armored against his attacks.

With good military strategy Paul set out the nature of believers' foes. He did not want his readers to underestimate the strength and capability of the evil forces arrayed against them. Believers are engaged in a life-and-death struggle, not against flesh and blood, mere human enemies, but against the spiritual forces of evil. Though the enemies are not human, the spiritual powers

of evil may use human instruments. Our warfare, however, is against those evil forces that seek to victimize and de-stroy people. The word battle, literally “wrestling,” suggests a hand-to-hand encounter. This magnifies the personal nature of the fight for which we need to be prepared.

Paul used four terms to describe the invisible forces warring against God and His people. These words may depict different groups of evil forces. However, a better understanding may be that these are simply four terms used to describe these evil forces. Rulers refers to their power. Authorities suggests their having a certain limited authority in temporarily opposing the purposes of God. World powers of this darkness points to their control over a world rebelling against its Creator. The description of them as spiritual forces of evil in the heavens depicts them as an army of wicked spirits bringing their battle into the spiritual sphere of reality.

The spiritual nature and great strength of the opposition makes God’s armor absolutely necessary for believers. Although the opposing forces are fierce, the fact that the struggle occurs in the heavens should not pose a threat to believers because God has already seated them with Christ in the heavenly realms (Eph. 2:6).

This is why points back to the threatening character of the enemy. Such powerful foes require that we use all of the armor God has provided for adequate protection. We dare not enter the fray relying on our own devices. Instead, we are to put on the full armor of God. A different verb for put on is used here than in Eph. 6:11, “be clothed in.” Here, though translated the same in the NIV, the word used is take up. This common military expression for arming oneself suggests the divine armor lies at hand ready for use. Believers only need to utilize it. The tense of put on denotes urgency. Christians must take up the armor at once in order to be ready for any attack.

Christians need to take up the armor in advance so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground. The expression evil day may have both a present and future focus. A final time of intense evil will come at the end of history. Yet evil day more likely refers to days of special trial and temptation that come to every believer because of the devil’s schemes. Christians must be prepared for such evil days so they will be able to stand their ground and successfully resist every satanic attack.

After prepared believers have done everything, they will stand. The strong expression having prepared everything refers not to the preparation for conflict but to the end of the conflict, when believers have won the day’s battle. To stand speaks of the posture of victory. Well-armed believers will be able to hold their ground and yield nothing to the enemy.

Paul admonished Christians to use the full armor of God because of the spiritual nature of their struggle. Believers’ only hope for victory in the struggle with the forces of evil rests in using the resources God provides.

DESCRIPTION OF GOD’S FULL ARMOR (EPH. 6:14-18)

The apostle repeated the command to stand firm to emphasize the need for steadfastness in the face of a ruthless enemy (Eph. 6:11,13). He then detailed the armor God provides. This armor alone gives believers success. Paul listed the pieces of armor in the order in which the soldier would put them on.

First, truth like a belt around your waist indicates the soldier was prepared for action. Fastening the military clothing securely around the waist made rapid movement easier and was vital preparation for any vigorous activity.

Paul identified truth as the soldier’s belt. He probably was not referring to the truth of the gospel but truth as a quality of Christian character. Truth in this sense indicates integrity, faithfulness, loyalty, and sincerity. Christians consistently should display the character demanded by the gospel. Satan is the father of lies (John 8:44); Jesus embodies truth (John 14:6). We are to speak and live by truth in the Lord’s strength.

A second essential part of the Roman soldier’s equipment was the breastplate. This protected vital organs in the upper body. Righteousness is the believer’s breastplate. In this context righteousness stands for the ethical quality of uprightness instead of justifying righteousness (Rom. 3:21-26). Receiving God’s justifying righteousness, however, makes possible this personal righteousness that guards the heart. Regardless of inner or outer pressures to do wrong, Christians must rely on God to enable them to do the right thing and practice justice.

Paul did not refer directly to the soldier’s footwear. In the first century this was sandals with soles thickly studded with nails to enable quick and sure movement. Instead, the apostle spoke of the feet being fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. Isaiah linked the feet with the proclamation of the good news of peace (Isa. 52:7). Ephesians 6:15 has been interpreted in similar terms. However, the Holman CSB probably has captured the meaning here: readiness for the gospel of peace. Through faith in Christ, believers have peace with God. Knowing God as Father, believers need have no fear of the ene-mies of darkness. They stand confidently with His peace in their hearts, and they are ready and eager to march at His direction.

To cover all the rest, Paul named the shield of faith. The Old Testament used the shield as an image for God’s protection of His people (Ps. 28:7). The apostle was thinking of the large oblong shield that the Roman soldier held in front of him for protection. It covered much of the body. Faith is the protective shield for Christians. Faith means confident trust in God. It means reliance on Christ and His power to protect the whole person.

With the shield of faith believers can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. In New Testament times some soldiers often dipped their arrows in pitch and then set them afire before shooting them at the enemy. The shields, often

soaked in water, neutralized the power of the arrows. Utter dependence on God produces the firm resolve that douses anything the enemy throws at believers. The flaming arrows represent every type of assault devised by the devil, not just temptation to impure and selfish conduct but also false teaching, persecution, doubt, fear, and despair. Faith provides the power that enables believers to resist and triumph over such attacks because it brings them in touch with God and puts Him between the enemy and themselves.

Finally, believers must take the helmet of salvation and the only offensive weapon, the sword of the Spirit. Take literally means receive, accept, or welcome. God offers believers the helmet and the sword. Christians must receive them.

The helmet protected the head. Paul's language alludes again to Isaiah 59:17. For the apostle, what ultimately protects believers is their salvation. God has already rescued them from bondage to the ruler of the kingdom of the air and seated them with Christ in the heavenly realms (Eph. 2:2,6). To appropriate their salvation as their helmet, therefore, must mean that they take it in the sense of being consciously aware of it and thankful for it. Because they are saved, they have every reason to have confidence in the outcome of the battle. God's gift of salvation saves from the penalty of sin, and it also serves as His saving help to protect from the power of sin. Salvation includes also the hope of final deliverance from the very presence of sin.

For Roman soldiers the sharp short sword served as the crucial offensive weapon in close combat. The sword of the Spirit means that the Spirit either supplies the sword or gives it its effective, cutting edge. Perhaps Paul intended both ideas. The Spirit enables believers to use the sword, which is the word of God.

Some interpreters regard God's word as words given by the Spirit to meet the critical need of the moment. Others think word refers to the gospel. As believers take hold of and proclaim the gospel, God enables them to overcome in spiritual battle. The reconciling gospel conquers the alienating hostile powers and brings about God's saving purposes. Still other Bible scholars believe Paul's phrase refers to the use of the Scriptures as a mighty weapon in the conflict with evil. As Jesus used the words of Scripture to defeat Satan in His temptation experience, Christians too may utilize the words the Spirit has inspired to drive the enemy away. In this sense God's word serves as a defensive as well as an offensive weapon. Perhaps the term is broad enough to include all these views.

Paul combined standing ready for battle with prayer. Though prayer could be viewed as the seventh piece of spiritual armor, including prayer after the description of the Christian soldier's equipment may underline the spiritual nature of believers' combat. Putting on, taking up, and receiving God's armor all require an attitude of dependence on God. Through prayer God strengthens believers, helps them to appropriate His armor, and enables them to stand firm.

The apostle exhorted Christians to pray in the Spirit. This means prayer that is inspired, guided, and made effective through the Spirit. Believers are to pray under the Spirit's influence and with His gracious assistance.

Paul encouraged Christians to offer such prayer on all occasions. This suggests that believers should pray constantly in preparation for the battle as well as during the fight itself. Paul was not referring here so much to praying without ceasing as to crisis prayer—prayer on every occasion of conflict, prayer in the evil day. In such times Christians must turn to God with special intensity. He is, after all, the key to gaining spiritual victory.

The apostle also encouraged praying with every prayer and request. Prayer is a more general and comprehensive term describing prayer. Requests, narrower in scope, represents the petition aspect of prayer. Paul used both words here to add intensity to his thought.

To practice this kind of praying, Christians must keep alert. Alert literally means "to keep awake." In this context the word conveys the thought of never being caught off guard. Pray at all times literally translates as "with all perseverance and petition." Perseverance suggests persistency, never giving up. The apostle urged believers to persevere in interceding for all the saints. Christians should not think only of their own spiritual conflict. They should have concern for each of their brothers and sisters in Christ.

Paul described each piece of the full armor of God, the resources God has made available to Christians so they can be victorious against the forces of evil. Prayer makes these resources even more effective. Christians need to know the identity and purpose of each of the resources God has provided so they can use them to be victorious against the forces of evil. They also need to be alert in prayer as they engage in this warfare.

REQUEST TO PRAY FOR PAUL (EPH. 6:19-20)

Paul had asked the Ephesian Christians to pray for other believers. Now he asked them to remember him in their prayers as well.

Paul knew God had placed him in the forefront of the battle, even though he was in prison. He recognized his vulnerability. The apostle knew he could fulfill his God-given task only through God's resources. So he asked the Ephesians to pray for him, that "whenever I open my mouth, words may be given me." The Bible uses open my mouth as a common expression for proclaiming God's word (Ezek. 3:27). It also was a common first-century phrase for making a serious public address or a long defense. Paul always had an awareness of his great responsibility in being entrusted with the gospel of salvation. He wanted above all to have God's help whenever he had opportunity to speak that gospel.

The apostle desired God's gift of words so that he would

fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel. God had given Paul understanding of the mystery of the gospel. He needed continual divine power to enable him to proclaim it boldly. Perhaps Paul was thinking especially of his appearance before the imperial authorities—maybe even the emperor himself. Paul did not ask these believers to pray for his success or for his deliverance from prison, danger, or suffering. He desired boldness in proclaiming the gospel of God entrusted to him. Even as he awaited trial, he wanted to make the most of every opportunity to introduce others to Christ.

To encourage prayers on his behalf, the apostle reminded his readers that he was the gospel's ambassador in chains. Ambassadors officially represent their governments. Likewise, Paul in his mission to the Gentiles was acting as the God-authorized representative of the gospel. He recognized the dignity and importance of his position as representative of the King of kings. Ambassador in chains presents a contradiction in terms. Normally an ambassador has diplomatic immunity. Those to whom he is sent cannot imprison him. Paul, however, would appear in the imperial courts as a prisoner because of his faithfulness in preaching the gospel.

The apostle wanted to continue to pass on his message freely and openly even while a prisoner. He repeated the request that his readers pray that he might declare the gospel fearlessly, as I should. As I should suggests Paul wanted to speak with the boldness and confidence that became his high commission from the court of heaven. His request also shows his humility and fears. This corrects the view some hold that Paul was arrogant and had no fear when he faced opportunities to present the gospel.

Paul asked the Ephesian Christians to use on his behalf one of the powerful resources God has provided, prayer. This showed that he too needed and used the God-given resources. All Christians, regardless of how mature they are, need to use all the resources God provides so they can have victory over the forces of evil.

FINAL GREETINGS (EPH. 6:21-24)

Paul sent the Ephesian letter to the churches in the Roman province of Asia by Tychicus, dearly loved brother and faithful servant in the Lord (Eph. 6:21). Tychicus was an Asian, obviously a man of high character and reliability. The apostle considered him one of his trusted companions. Tychicus served as Paul's personal representative to the churches in Colosse and Ephesus as well as to the slave owner, Philemon. Part of Paul's purpose in sending Tychicus was that he might give accurate firsthand news to the recipients of the letter concerning the apostle's circumstances. This would comfort and encourage their hearts.

A prayer benediction served as Paul's closing farewell. He prayed that his readers might possess three great qualities of the Christian life that he had discussed in the letter—peace,

love, and faith. All these blessings come from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. The apostle's final prayer invoked God's grace on all who have undying love for our Lord Jesus Christ (Eph. 6:24). Thus Ephesians begins and ends with grace, the theme of the entire epistle.