

Armor  
Ephesians 6:10-20  
Colebrook Congregational Church  
August 23, 2015 / Ordinary 21

Last week, we heard the Second Exhortation in the Epistle to the Ephesians, which was concerned with the new standards to which converted Christians are to hold themselves; and this week is the Fourth Exhortation of the same epistle, using the metaphor of armor to encourage the believers to stay strong in the face of spiritual attacks and to pray often.

To briefly recap from last week: Ephesians is a very general letter that is more like a treatise of Paul's theology than an actual letter. It was probably written in the last third of the first century, and it wasn't even given the name of "to the Ephesians," until the mid-second century. The intended audience is a completely gentile church, with no knowledge of Christ's Jewish roots or identity, and was meant to help guide new converts in their transition from pagan Greek or Roman into an active and participating Christian.

The first half of Ephesians is concerned with the cosmic matters and theology, as well as the church's place in that setting. The second half has four exhortations: First, on the unity of the church and how a diversity of gifts is a good thing; second, to do away with pagan ways; third, on household relations; and finally, on the individual's relationship with the spiritual, which is our selection, the very last part of the letter before the valediction.

It starts off, telling us to "be strong in the Lord," but the exegesis of this passage suggested that a more accurate translation of the verb is in the passive form, "be made powerful." I looked up the original Greek, and that suggestion checks out. I like that choice, considering some of the other word choices that follow in verse twelve, so remember that, how we, through God, are made powerful.

Verse eleven evokes the imagery from the Greek version of Isaiah, chapter 59, describing how God is dressed in the armor of righteousness and salvation, but in this case, it is armor that God provides *for* us. "The wiles of the devil" became a term later used by second century Christians to describe

the tortures inflicted upon martyrs, as well as the many temptations to unbelief, to sin, or to conform to the pagan world that they live in.

Now verse twelve tells us how this is a spiritual conflict, not an earthly one. It lists the opponents as powers, principalities, and rulers, the spiritual host. Traditions hold that there are different types of angels and spiritual beings, good or bad, like seraphim, cherub, archangel, and others., and the english words for some of them are: powers & principalities. This is why I like that alternative translation in verse ten. It seems more fitting that when speaking of spiritual conflict, to describe us with a divinely spiritual attribute.

The next four verses is a description of the spiritual armor, and it uses the equipment of the Roman legionnaire, something that would be familiar to anyone hearing this epistle, as the model, minus the javelin. We are to equip ourselves with truth, with righteousness, with the gospel of peace, with unassailable faith, with salvation, and with the Spirit. Most of this is self-explanatory, but I want to make note of one part. Back then, arrows were routinely dipped in tar and loosened, in the hopes of causing things to catch fire and generally cause a ruckus. The shield technology at the time, to counter the attempt to cause a flaming ruckus, consisted of layers of wood covered in canvas, which was then covered in hide that would cause the arrows to burn themselves out. So our shield of faith protects us from flaming ruckuses.

These spiritual conflicts or temptations can be big or small. The small ones can actually be more damaging, though, in some cases, I think. A lot of little conflicts can build up and change a person, burrowing through their spiritual armor. Like how a bear who attacks a beehive easily shrugs off one or two bees who want to discourage the bear from its homewrecking activities, but the bear cannot shrug off the whole swarm.

Later today, I will be attending a New England Steampunk Meetup in Worcester. At the last meetup, the group went to have dinner at a sports restaurant. The glass my drink came in was a very nice tumbler with an embossed apple tree along the side and an apple etched into the bottom. I love apples, so I spent some time admiring it, and eventually expressed my

wish to have a glass like that. Someone suggested that I just take it when we leave. They wouldn't notice with all the meal stuff on the table. Go on!

I was tempted. Very tempted. But I knew that it was not right, and I could not. A look from a friend helped fortify me in pushing away that desire to just take it with me. I then asked the waitress about the glass, where they got it, and if I could buy one from them. She just gave me the glass. We all had a laugh at that, and that friend who helped fortifying my spiritual armor, leaned over and asked, "This is gonna end up in a sermon, right?"

So, we are all equipped with the spiritual armor from God, ready to face the spiritual attacks that beset upon us everyday. The selection ends with the exhortation that we pray in the Spirit. To do that, we must aware of things, and pray constantly, making supplications to God.

In the Middle Ages, monks took that exhortation to pray constantly very literally, and some of them would spend every moment in prayer. I think that is taking things too far. We are also called to be active in our communities and to serve one another, and we cannot do that if we are constantly on our knees and praying, so I do not believe that is what we are being exhorted to do.

But we can pray frequently throughout the day. And they don't need to be long or formal. God knows our hearts, so even if a prayer is clumsy, God gets it.

I pray frequently everyday, and outside of Lent, it does not follow a set schedule. It depends on what is happening, on what I am seeing or hearing. During the Prelude, I pray for a calm heart. A speeding lunatic passes me on the highway, I quickly pray for that person's safety, and the safety of those around that person. I pass an accident, or a fire, or any other emergency, I pray for those involved. Mean customer, I pray that I keep my cool and pray that the other person finds what they need to be nicer. These are all quick prayers. O God, please keep them safe from harm, and others from being harmed, amen. Quick easy, move on, and keep eyes open for others who need prayers.

As we live our every day lives, we will face temptations, and reasons for prayer. It would be easier to just give in to the temptations or to pass by with a blind eye. But that is not *our* Calling. We are Called to put on God's armor, to protect ourselves, and help keep ourselves righteous. And we are also Called to remember our prayers.

Amen.

## Prayers of the People

[PAUSE]

O God, we hold up the needs of our neighbors as dear to us as our own needs. Loving our neighbors as ourselves, we offer to You our thanksgivings and our petitions on behalf of our church, our community, and the world.

We thank You for Your blessings, and for the lessons You teach us. We thank You for those You have sent to help us in our daily lives. And we thank You for the opportunities to serve You through serving others, seeing to their needs.

We pray for the forgiveness of our missteps. We pray for your guidance to live our lives in more loving ways.

We pray for those who are unwell of mind, of body, or of spirit. We pray for their recovery, we pray for their caregivers, and we pray that you move us to help them in any way our gifts allow. We pray for those who are lost, so that they may find guidance. We pray for those who protect us, please keep them safe as they have kept us safe. And we pray that you help us to be instruments of your divine love.

We especially pray for:

Safety for refugees all over the world, comfort for the families of the victims of violence in Kabul & Bangkok, Peace between the two Koreas, Calm over the chaos across our country, the end of wildfires and drought out West, and thankfulness for the end of the ebola epidemic in Sierra Leone.

Hear our prayers, O God, and through the ministry of your Son, free us from the grip of distraction, that we may be of service to others in your name in our lives and proclaiming your saving deeds to all the world. Amen.

Ephesians 6:10-20

6:10 Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his power.

6:11 Put on the whole armor of God, so that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.

6:12 For our struggle is not against enemies of blood and flesh, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.

6:13 Therefore take up the whole armor of God, so that you may be able to withstand on that evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm.

6:14 Stand therefore, and fasten the belt of truth around your waist, and put on the breastplate of righteousness.

6:15 As shoes for your feet put on whatever will make you ready to proclaim the gospel of peace.

6:16 With all of these, take the shield of faith, with which you will be able to quench all the flaming arrows of the evil one.

6:17 Take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

6:18 Pray in the Spirit at all times in every prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert and always persevere in supplication for all the saints.

6:19 Pray also for me, so that when I speak, a message may be given to me to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel,

6:20 for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it boldly, as I must speak.