

**Discovering our purpose
Christian warfare
(Eph. 4:12ff)**

Intro: The Christian life is not a playground, but a battleground. As believers, we have been incorporated into the army of the Lord. As our commander in chief, he calls us first to “attention” and then “contention”.

As Christians we are in a great war for truth and right. We fight not only for ourselves, but also for others that we love (and even the great mass of men that we should love as fellow-human beings). Every soul won lost for Christ will spend eternity separated from God in eternal pain and anguish. Every soul won for Christ will enjoy His presence with joy forever. Let these pictures burn in our hearts. Our soul is at stake; the souls of others are at stake. God has a plan for us as soldiers in his spiritual army.

The good news is that we can be victorious in this great battle. Paul tells us in this text several things necessary to be victorious!

Know the enemy!

Paul is referring to Satan and a host of wicked spirit beings, v. 12.

Our enemy though invisible is real. Satan and the wicked spirit beings who follow him are not personifications of evil or mythical figures from an uneducated world. They are as real as God, Christ, the Holy Spirit and the angels of heaven.

Our enemy is not merely human (“flesh and blood”) but wicked spirit beings who move “in the heavenlies”. These enemies reside in the unseen realm above us and they fight for their master with a unified purpose to destroy mankind and defeat the purposes of God.

Our enemy is very powerful! Only when we truly know the enemy can we see how helpless we are in the face of them. Just a couple of reminders of the malevolent power of our enemy.

This enemy had the power to marshal the force of nature against God’s people. Consider how Satan was able to use his power to destroy all that belonged to Job.

He had the power to deceive the great Roman empire into a bitter persecution of Christians. In the same way he has the power to marshal the sentiment and value systems of whole societies in the direct opposition direction of the truth of God.

He has the power to turn one brother against another until the unified and formidable people of God are but a scattered and bickering band who are ineffective at saving the lost but great at biting and devouring one another!

But see that wherever Satan goes and works there is nothing left but rubble! He does not build anything of lasting worth or value.

Our enemy is not indifferent, but scheming!

Paul warns of his “wiles”, the word from which we get “methods”.

Bruce insightfully comments: “One of the devil’s wiles has already been mentioned in this letter: it is his readiness to exploit strained relations and angry feelings between believers so as to damage their personal or corporate welfare and witness (Eph. 4:27).”

Interestingly, Paul mentions another: It is holding an offender hostage to his past failings rather than confirm our love for him and forgive him (2 Cor. 2:8-11)

Knowing the enemy ought to move us to take the next step!

Wear the equipment!

Put on the full armor of God, v. 11! Paul models his description after the accouterments of the Roman soldier.

Gird the loins with truth

To gird the loins is simply to tie something around the waist. Sometimes the figure is based on the custom of pulling up one’s robe and tying it around the waist with a belt to free the legs to move with agility, to run, etc. In the case of the soldier it may refer to the belt that he wore upon which he hung his sword and dagger.

Our first defense is truth.

It may refer to the knowledge of what is right. We are in a war of ideas! If we don’t know the truth we are victims of Satan’s false teaching. We are in a spiritual tangle that will make us fall!

It may refer to personal integrity and sincerity in doing what is right.

Put on the breastplate of righteousness

Next to the body the soldier wore a breastplate that protected the vital organs of the body. It was either a coat of mail or some kind of scale armour.

Our second defense is the practice of what is right.

Knowledge by itself is not enough. Truth must be applied to day to day life. Some of the world’s greatest infidels could quote the Bible profusely and many preachers with mastery of the Scripture and oratory have fallen in weakness because the word that came from their lips was not really hidden in their heart. Let us all beware! “Righteousness” must be close to our hearts. We must be serious about living what we preach!

Having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace

The soldier's footwear was a laced boot with conical spikes to give him a firm footing in battle.

The Christian's footwear is the preparation of the gospel of peace--a suggestion that we are able to speak the truth when called upon! Day by day we have opportunity to counter religious error and ethical misinformation through simple proclamation of what is right! Are we ready? Do we know the truth? Do we know how to say it? Could we tell another person why he needs to become a Christian and how to get started?

Take up the shield of faith

The Roman shield took various forms (oval, rectangular). Sometimes large shields were joined by Roman soldiers to form the ancient formation of the phalanx, where a wall of soldiers would march or stand side by side, shoulder to shoulder against the enemy and ward off any attack. The shield was often used to simply catch and extinguish the flaming arrows sent by the enemy. Satan is constantly firing destructive arrows of false teaching toward us. He is constantly bombarding us with appeals to do wrong. Only faith can put these out.

Faith affirms that God's word is always right. Jn. 17:17

Faith affirms that God's way is always best, that buying into temptation will only lead to inevitable heartbreak.

The helmet of salvation

The helmet of the soldier protected his head. It was cleverly designed to provide the maximum protection from the blows of the enemy.

The Christian is protected by "salvation". The Christian knows that by continuing in faith he cannot be defeated. Salvation is often in Paul used of the eternal condition of escape from God's wrath. Since salvation is ours, we do not merely fight for victory, we fight from victory. In God's view we have already won!

The sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God

For the Roman soldier the sword or dagger was the most versatile offensive and defensive weapon.

As Christians, who know the word, we hold in our hearts the most powerful defense and offense against the wiles of Satan. It is called "the sword of the Spirit" because it His weapon to capture souls into the army of God. The Holy Spirit uses the word of God as a mighty tool against evil in our lives and in the lives of others.

We may forget how truly powerful the words of God are when wielded by the Holy Spirit. Cf. The creation when God spoke and the Spirit of God moved upon the surface of

the waters to create the world in all its power and complexity.

Such power is available to us through the word of God to change men!

Such power is available to “withstand in the evil day”. Paul is thinking of that time when the forces of evil seem to have the upper hand in society and it is difficult to serve God.

God’s word will strengthen us to stand. Watch the people who quit studying personally and who quit attending the Bible classes and see where they end up!

Appropriate the energy!

By knowing the enemy and wearing the equipment we declare our own need for God’s help in this war with Satan. We cannot win by ourselves.

“Without me you can do nothing” It is God who empowers us.

Be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might!, v. 10 “Greater is he who is in you than He who is in the world”.

Stand firm!, v. 14 Did you notice that no Roman soldier had any protection for his back!? When we turn around and run we are totally vulnerable. We need to “stand” and face the enemy with courage and conviction.

We must appropriate the power by prayer to God.

Pray at all times

Pray in the Spirit

Pray with the battle in view

Pray for fellow-soldiers

We must alert and persevering

Every prayer reminds us of our dependence upon God for his help and his strength. This is the key to a powerful life!

We must do all we can!

Someone will say, “Well, I prayed about it”. Good! What are you going to do about it?

“Having done all...” You can relinquish the battle when you can say, “I have done I can to set things right.”

This takes real courage to act upon conviction and resist evil. It will bring opposition and even persecution. Being open-minded can be a mask for a spiritual cowardice that does not engage the enemy! “We don’t want to drive them away” may mask a real disinterest in risking personal rejection in teaching the truth. Notice that there is not one item in the Christian’s arsenal for the BACK!

Conclusion: Paul makes no attempt in this paragraph to define particular doctrines or practices. He simply addresses them all in one imperative! In whatever quarter error or sin appears (whether radical conservatism that binds personal opinions or progressive liberalism that takes liberty with the authority of Scripture, whether the evil is religious or moral, whether the false teacher

wears clerical garb or stands holding a guitar) the answer is the same “Stand firm”.

Never did the church need more courage or conviction than today. We need to put some starch in our faith, speak out against error and for truth, and put up some active resistance in the areas where Satan has made inroads in our own lives! Because, that’s God’s purpose for the church.