

**“The Full Armor of God”
(Ephesians 6:10-20)
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Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen. “Christianity is often characterized by its disclaimers as a religion for the weak and unsuccessful in this world – people who cannot succeed here fall back on a nebulous hope for better conditions in a posthumous life. Some inside the church view Christianity as a nebulous, touchy-feely, stress-free experience without much substance. For others it is not much more than another resource for achieving riches, success, and temporal happiness.” (Concordia Journal, July, 2006, p. 323) These concepts aren’t even in the same ball-park as the genuine Christian faith.

St. Paul in today’s epistle says in Eph. 6:10: *“Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might.”* And verse 11 says, *“Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil.”* These words do not permit the Christian to conduct himself as an idle, easy-going person. Rather, the Christian is aware of the grim battle with Satan. The Christian is in a fight. You might say these words are a “call to arms.” You dear Christian are in a perpetual battle, one that rages 24/7. The Christian life is a fight against darkness.

The admonitions – to be strong (v 10) and to stand (v 11) – are in the middle voice and should be understood this way: you are being called to “stand” – the word does not mean just stand up or stand around – you are called to “withstand,” to “endure,” by the power of God giving you strength. You are active as God is active in giving you His Word and Sacrament. Through this communion with God, you are commanded to withstand, to go through a battle!

Why? Answer: Because the devil is real and his goal is to destroy your faith in Christ. And here we have arrived to one of the all-time stumbling blocks! “Come on! You actually *believe* the *devil* is real?!” Well, the Word of God takes his real existence seriously. Let us consider three passages that describe the reality of Satan’s power in human lives (the passages also mention demons/evil spirits that are fallen angels which followed Satan in his rebellion against God).

Mark 1:23: *“Just then a man in their synagogue who was possessed by an evil spirit cried out...”*

Mark 5:2: "When Jesus got out of the boat, a man with an evil spirit came from the tombs to meet him."

Mark 9:17: "A man in the crowd answered, 'Teacher, I brought you my son, who is possessed by a spirit that has robbed him of speech.'"

God's Word does not suggest that all ailments and maladies are connected to demon possession. The point, however, is that the evil spiritual realm is absolutely real and furthermore, affects the lives of people. Our epistle, however, at verse 13 states that there comes for all Christians when in the midst of your fight against the powers of the devil, the really big day comes, "the evil day." What will you do dear Christian when this "evil day" comes? It is a day of exceptional temptation; an amazing occasion of spiritual trial. Your faith will be rocked. How will it happen? For Job it happened through extreme weather, the loss of loved ones, his wife, diseases, and friends. Some of these will appear treacherous and ugly, others will be disguised bright and beautiful like an angel of light. It may be the death of a loved one, the sin of adultery, the loss of a job, a physical, mental or emotional ailment, it may be a divorce, a loss of property, bankruptcy, winning the lottery, going to a party that will change your life forever, a car accident, a promotion...but on this day, this evil day, your life will change and the evil one will have occasion to rock your faith, to rob you of your faith, to rip it out of your heart.

Think of life's battle as a boxing match and you are called to withstand during the entire match...to stay in the fight, but then in the ninth round you're hit with a left uppercut and it lands square on your jaw; then that overhead right comes and you're hit right on the temple, your legs buckle, and you are thrown back. This assault here is one way of describing the evil day. What will you do? Will it be over for you? Will you turn from God as the devil celebrates his knock out? No, that is not what the LORD wants for you.

His commitment in Christ is to protect you through the battle, and to instruct you so that you will be able to withstand and remain in the victory of Christ as He fights for you and fights in and through you! First, know your enemy: verse 12, not 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.*" Another way of putting "cosmic powers" is "cosmic tyrants." And these describe the *nature* of these things in the "dark world," a realm that contains active evil. And St. Paul goes on to say in verse 12 that these are "spiritual forces of evil" in the "heavenly places" = that is

in the supernatural, supra-sensible and transcendental world, the realm that we cannot see with our eyes (at least in accord with normal experience).

If you don't know what your enemy is, then the battle is over before it begins. People who don't believe in God, typically don't believe in the devil...and they're sitting ducks to evil spiritual influences. And the devil's goal is often to hide these evil influences or to make them seem attractive and harmless. When this happens then the ultimate goal is closer to being achieved: the removal of faith in the LORD Jesus Christ.

Since your battle is against spiritual forces, you need spiritual armor! So – as verse 13 says – in constant effort to withstand, put on the full armor of God (this is a command in which God is calling you to be active in getting it done/an “active imperative”). God has fed you with the Word and Sacrament, so now live in the power of God: get dressed with spiritual armor! What is it? There are three pieces of armor for PROTECTION; two pieces for DEFENSE; one piece for ATTACK.

I know that “protection” and “defense” seem practically identical, but think of it this way: the protection is preparatory, it puts you in the right position, frame of mind, discipline; it puts you in a position to succeed. Defense is especially in the midst of the battle; and attack is the offensive aspect you employ during the battle.

First, there are three pieces of spiritual armor for protection (the three “B’s” ...and I'm taking a little creative license so that you may memorize these): 1) Belt; 2) Breastplate; 3) Boots. The belt and breastplate are very similar in that they represent a life that is filled with God's way, speaking and doing what is according to righteousness, what is good, and what is beyond reproach. These represent living in a God-pleasing way in terms of striving for what puts you in a position to avoid as much as possible a guilt-ridden conscience. It is the enemy's goal in the battle to fill you with a sense of spiritual failure, to fill your heart and mind with guilt and shame, so that you will just give up and give in to all temptation. If the evil one can convince you that you've gone too far, done too much to ever be a “real Christian,” then he's nearly delivered the knock-out blow. But here's the thing: He lies.

Dear Christian, God commands me to tell you this morning: you have not gone too far! Hear me again dear Christian: you have not gone too far! There is no sin too deep, too high, too great for the divine and almighty blood of our

God and Savior Jesus Christ. Listen, every sin has been drowned by His blood. EVERY SIN! And all sin, all sin, your most wicked sins lead to death, but hear this dear Christian: Christ has conquered death! Our sins upon Him could not keep Him down! He is risen! Now live in the belt and the breastplate, speaking good works and doing good deeds...and Satan will lose opportunity to accuse you! But what of the boots? They represent what you take with you when you move around, when you go from place-to-place, from person-to-person in your busy life: take the boots that deliver "the gospel of peace," have God's Word ready in your mind, in your heart and in your speech...and as His Word comes forth, light pervades darkness wherever you go, with whomever you're with.

Now for the DEFENSE and the ATTACK in the thick of the fight: 4) Shield; 5) Helmet; 6) Sword. The shield is THE ONE you hold onto throughout your life: it is Jesus Christ who holds you! Satan delivers "flaming darts" trying to accuse you, trying to tempt you, trying to cause you to buckle, but lift up the Savior who holds you. Lift up your faith and return to Christ who loves you! Then there is the helmet! We all know how important it is to wear one on a motorcycle for example; without one, one can easily die in a crash. In the midst of the battle, it is possible to be confronted with hopelessness, with the feeling, "what's the point of it all?" there is no hope, there is nothing to look forward to! God will not allow Satan to get away with this deception. The Lord gives you a helmet. It is the helmet of salvation! It represents your hope that is certain and true, that is eternal and golden. You are ALWAYS in possession of hope and there is ALWAYS something to look forward to that is better than what we have today! Keep looking up, don't forget your hope and this in and of itself, protects you from profound discouragement.

Finally, there is our ATTACK weapon: the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God! From 1st Peter 5:9 and James 4:7 we read, "*Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world.*" And James 4:7: "*Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.*"

The Word enables you to resist, because it keeps you cloaked in Christ. This is why Luther wrote, "One little word can fell him." Satan must flee the child of God covered in Christ!

All of these are wrapped in prayer. It is called "praying...in the Spirit," because it is based on returning to Jesus Christ, the One whose Word the Holy Spirit testifies to: that is according to John 14:26 He leads you back to the Word

of Christ. Such prayer, drenched in the Word of Christ, is effective and powerful and God uses it to keep you in the armor.

The Christian life is not easy, in fact it is a fight, a battle, but the good news is undeniable: it is Christ's fight; it is Christ's battle; and He fights for us. This we experience in the armor of God. Let us remain in this armor so that we may withstand the attacks and grow increasingly stronger in our faith in Christ and our reliance upon Him!