

# BATTLE CRY

## SERIES: EPHESIANS: THE MYSTERY OF CHRIST



Catalog No. 20220403  
Ephesians 6:10-20  
Final Message  
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April 3, 2022

### *Ephesians 6:10-20*

The war in Ukraine has gotten our attention, and rightly so, even though it is half a world away. Indeed, the stakes are high. The apostle Paul in his letter to the Ephesians insists that all of us are in a worldwide war and that battles are being fought right here where we live. The stakes are eternal.

We are at war with the devil and his demons. What is their objective? What are their tactics? And how do we fight them? By the way, if you're a follower of Jesus Christ, you're a warrior whether you like it or not. Our enemy takes the fight to us, and we must fight back and even take the fight to him. Ephesians 6:10-20 constitutes a battle cry.

Some may be uncomfortable with warfare language being applied to the spiritual life, but the language matches the seriousness of the stakes.

Today, we come to the end of our study of the book of Ephesians, which we've called "The Mystery of Christ." As we have seen, the mystery involves the unification of humanity and even the unification of heaven and earth. The mystery, however, is not yet complete. Until it is, we have a war to fight.

### **Stand firm**

#### **Ephesians 6:10-13:**

**Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. 11 Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. 12 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. 13 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.**

The words translated "Finally" would be better translated "From now on": "From now on, be strong in the Lord . . ."

To be strong in the Lord means to be strong in "the strength of his might." Insofar as we are strong, we are not strong in ourselves or in the strength of our might. Our strength comes from the Lord. We appropriate the strength of the Lord by putting on "the whole armor of God," which is laid out for us verses 14-20.

Paul identifies our enemy as the devil, also called Satan, an unseen, evil being, who leads armies of unseen, evil beings called demons. Our war is against the devil and his demons, against "the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places." The heavenly places are the unseen realms.

Moreover, we don't wrestle against flesh and blood—that is, against humans. In some respects, fighting humans, whom you can see, is easier than fighting the demons, which you can't see. The devil devises and implements wicked "schemes" against us. Paul's insistence that we do not wrestle against flesh and blood but against spiritual forces of evil liberates us to obey Jesus' command to love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us (Matthew 5:44).

The objective of the devil and his demons is to lead people in "the course of this world," into "disobedience" to God (Ephesians 2:2-3). To achieve their objective, they put lies into people's heads and they keep the truth from getting into people's heads. People walk in the course of this world and disobey God, even if they don't know they're doing so, because they believe that it is advantageous to do so.

Our objective is to "stand against the schemes of the devil." With the whole armor of God, we can "withstand the evil day"—that is, whenever the devil attacks, which could be any day, because as Paul says in Ephesians 5:16, "the days are evil." If we have "done all" by appropriating the whole armor of God, we will be able to fend off the devil's attacks and "stand firm."

During a pro-war rally in Moscow on March 18, Russian President Vladimir Putin, who identifies as a Russian Orthodox Christian, invoked the words of Jesus to inspire his country and his troops in his ungodly war against flesh and blood: “Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends” (John 15:13).

Assuming he believes what he says, he’s deceived. I suspect that the man has made himself wide open to the schemes of the devil, who has demonstrated a proclivity for misinterpreting the Scriptures (see: Matthew 4:1-11).

So, how do we stand against the schemes of the devil?

## Put on the armor

### Ephesians 6:14-20:

**Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, 15 and, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace. 16 In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one; 17 and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, 18 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, 19 and also for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel, 20 for which I am an ambassador in chains, that I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak.**

Once again, Paul instructs us, “Stand . . .” Again, our objective in spiritual warfare is to “stand against the schemes of the devil.” We do so by putting on the whole armor of God.

In order to stand against the schemes of the devil and “withstand in the evil day,” when the devil attacks, we must put on the whole armor of God prior to the evil day. A warrior doesn’t put on his armor while entering battle; no, he puts on his armor prior to entering battle. Only then will he be protected.

Therefore, gear up, so to speak. Get ready. Get ready to fight the enemy. You need to be protected. What does it mean for us to put on the whole armor of God?

## Embrace the gospel

What are we to make of the armor?

First, Paul draws on Isaiah’s description of the armor of the Lord and his Messiah (Isaiah 11:4-5, 49:2, 52:7, 59:17). God makes his armor available to us. We are strong in the strength of his might.

Second, the pieces of armor are not necessarily to be connected with the parts of the body that they protect.

Paul instructs the Ephesians to put on “the breastplate of righteousness,” but he instructs the Thessalonians to put on “the breastplate of faith and love.” Moreover, Paul instructs the Ephesians to take up “the shield of faith,” but he instructs the Thessalonians to put on the breastplate of “faith.” Furthermore, in Ephesians Paul connects the belt with truth. However, Isaiah connects the belt with righteousness and faithfulness (Isaiah 11:5).

Therefore, instead of trying to figure out, for example, how the breastplate of righteousness protects the chest or the heart or the vital organs, it is better to figure out what Paul means by “righteousness” and appropriate it as a piece of armor, so to speak.

Third, the pieces of armor are connected elsewhere in Ephesians with the gospel. Note especially how five words in Ephesians 1:13 are later used in connection with five pieces of armor: “In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit.” [The verb translated “believed” is connected with the noun translated “faith.”]

Therefore, putting on the whole armor of God concerns embracing the gospel in all its aspects.

So, what is the gospel? Putting together both the Hebrew Scriptures and the New Testament, and especially what Paul says in Ephesians, the gospel is the story and announcement of the victory of God over evil in the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ, which includes, but is not limited to, the forgiveness of sins and eternal life for individuals (Isaiah 40:9, 52:7-10; Mark 1:14-15; Romans 1:16-17; 1 Corinthians 15:1-5). As we have seen in Ephesians, the gospel is cosmic in scope, redeeming and uniting humans and even creation. The quintessential gospel announcement is “Jesus is Lord.” Caesar isn’t Lord. Jesus is Lord.

Although we wrestle against the devil and his demons, God has already defeated them in Christ has given Christ to us as “head over all things” (Ephesians 1:20-23).

Why then is there still a battle to fight? Because God’s victory over evil in Christ has not yet been fully implemented. The reign of God has been inaugurated but not yet consummated. The kingdom of God has come but it has not yet been established. On the one hand, Paul can say that God has “put all things under” the feet of Christ, but on the other hand he can say that Christ “must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet” (Ephesians 1:22, 1 Corinthians 15:25).

In spiritual warfare, we implement the victory of God. Insofar as we appropriate the whole armor of God, we have the advantage.

## **The desire to compete**

Tom Brady is a fascinating person, isn’t he? Finally, earlier this year, at the age of forty-four, he retired as the most decorated professional football player in history. Forty days later, he unretired. Why does he keep playing? One of the reasons is he loves to compete. He says he has “unfinished business.” One former teammate called him the most competitive person he’s ever met. Another former teammate called him a “psychotic competitor.”

I have often wondered about my own desire to compete and the desire to compete I see in so many others. I grew up with so many other guys competing on the field and in the gym. Insofar as we want to compete, why is that?

I think God made us to compete. I think he made us to fight the devil. The desire to compete gets channeled in all sorts of ways, some healthy and some unhealthy, but in its purest form, the desire to compete, I believe, is a God-given desire to fight the spiritual forces of evil in heavenly places.

## **Aspects of the gospel**

What aspects of the gospel do the different pieces of armor represent, and how do we go about appropriating these aspects? Each piece armor represents a call to belief and/or action.

One piece of armor and one activity are especially emphasized, evidenced by the word “all”: the shield of faith and prayer. We are to take up the shield of faith in

“all” circumstances, and we are to pray at “all” times, with “all” prayer and supplication, with “all” perseverance, making supplication for “all” the saints.

We fasten on the belt of truth by believing that the gospel is true, by speaking the truth of the gospel to each other and by speaking truthfully, not deceitfully, manipulatively, or coercively to one another (Ephesians 1:13, 4:15, 4:21, 4:25). Simply speak truthfully, and let God do with that what he will.

We put on the breastplate of righteousness by saying no to sin and yes to Jesus and his ways, putting on the new self, which has been “created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness” (Ephesians 4:24).

We put on shoes, or the readiness given by the gospel of peace, by believing that the gospel grants us peace with God and peace with others in Christ and by being peacemakers (Ephesians 1:2, 3:6, 2:14-17, 4:3, 6:23).

We take up the shield of faith by believing in the Lord Jesus Christ and giving our allegiance to him (Ephesians 1:13, 1:15, 2:8, 3:12, 3:17). Faith in Christ enables us to “extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one”—that is, all the lies of the evil one.

We take the helmet of salvation by believing that God has saved us, is saving us, and will save us from Satan, sin, and death, and by acting on that belief (Ephesians 1:13, 2:5, 2:8, 5:23; 1 Thessalonians 5:8).

We take the sword of the Spirit, defined as the word of God, which is the gospel message, by speaking the gospel, the good news of God’s victory in Christ, especially to those who do not yet believe it (Ephesians 1:13, 5:26).

The charge to take up the shield of faith highlights some important aspects about spiritual warfare. Roman soldiers would hold their shields partly over the men next to them to create an interlocking wall of protection as they advanced against an enemy stronghold or walled city. The wall of shields would protect them as their enemies rained down “fiery darts.” This imagery demonstrates first that spiritual warfare involves offensive, not simply defensive, aspects and second that it is a communal, not just an individual, effort.

## **Pray at all times**

In verse 18, Paul drops the warfare metaphors and writes straightforwardly. To stand firm against the

schemes of the devil, we must pray. We must pray “at all times”—that is, at any time, not just regular times of prayer. We must also pray “in the Spirit,” as the Spirit leads and empowers. We must pray “with all prayer and supplication,” with different kinds of prayers, from laments to praises.

Praying in the Spirit requires us to “keep alert with all perseverance,” being aware of what’s going on around us so that we are ready to pray at any time. Especially, we must be ready to make “supplication for all the saints,” interceding in prayer not for all believers at any time but for any believer at any time.

## **Paul’s prayer request**

Specifically, Paul asks that the Ephesians intercede for him. He has already told them, “I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers” (Ephesians 1:16). Now, he asks that they pray for him.

As Paul writes to the Ephesians, he’s in prison, but he doesn’t ask them to pray for his comfort or even for his release. No, he asks that they pray that God would give him both words and boldness to do what he has done in this letter: “proclaim the mystery of the gospel.”

Because Paul is in prison because of the gospel, as an “ambassador in chains,” perhaps he could be tempted to shrink from proclaiming the gospel or to water it down in some way. He therefore asks for prayer that he may “declare it boldly.”

The mystery of the gospel, as Paul has defined it, involves the bringing together of Jews and Gentiles and even heaven and earth in Jesus Christ, the Lord of the world. That’s a message that’s gotten him in trouble with both Jews and Romans.

## **Fight for yourself**

Once again, the objective of the devil and his demons is to lead people in “the course of this world,” into “disobedience” to God (Ephesians 2:2-3). To achieve their objective, they put lies into people’s heads and they keep the truth from getting into people’s heads.

First, then, the spiritual war is for the hearts and minds of men, women, and children, beginning with our own hearts and minds. We fight to know the truth and believe the truth and act based on the truth. The truth is this: everything we need is found in Christ and the ways of Christ. We think and pray according to the truth.

To think according to the truth, we speak it to ourselves. This is what the psalmists did in Psalms 103 and 104, where they repeatedly say, “Bless the Lord, O my soul.” To pray according to the truth, we ask for God’s help to believe the truth. This is what the grief-stricken father did when he said to Jesus, “I believe; help my unbelief” (Mark 9:24).

We think and pray according to this truth: everything we need is found in Christ and the ways of Christ.

The devil wants to convince us that at least something we need is found outside of Christ and the ways of Christ. For example, the devil has convinced many people, and many people who name Christ, that they need a certain individual or a certain political party to be in power. Again, Caesar isn’t Lord; Jesus is Lord.

Elsewhere, Paul writes, “But I am afraid that as the serpent deceived Eve by his cunning, your thoughts will be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ” (2 Corinthians 11:3). All of us have battles to fight, often based on personal tendencies.

Do you struggle with being single? Fight well.

Do you struggle with being married? Fight well.

Do you struggle with addiction? Fight well.

Do you struggle with pride, the first of the so-called seven deadly sins, and maybe the worst of all the sins?

Do you struggle with envy, anger, laziness, greed, gluttony, or lust, the other deadly sins? Fight well.

Do you struggle with fear? Fight well.

Do you struggle with anxiety? Fight well.

Do you struggle with mental illness? Fight well.

Do you struggle with feelings of condemnation? Fight well.

Whatever you struggle with, fight well. Think and pray, speak to yourself and ask for God’s help, according to this truth: Everything you need is found in Christ and his ways.

Moreover, don’t fight alone. Enlist the community to fight for you. Don’t keep what you’re going through to yourself. Share it with others in the church. Ask for their prayers.



## Thrown into the gap

In the World War II film series *Band of Brothers*, the Allied forces move swiftly eastward after the successful landing in Normandy on D-Day. But the Nazis made a sudden counterattack that became known as “The Battle of the Bulge.” The decimated U.S. Fourth Army retreated from the key Belgian town of Bastogne, which had to be held if the retreat were not to become a disaster.

The men of the 101st Airborne were thrown into the gap. As the circle of German tank divisions tightened around the town, the company received a last delivery of ammunition. As the lieutenant driving the supply truck prepared to leave, he said to the “Band of Brothers”: “A panzer division has cut off the road to the south. It looks like you’re going to be surrounded.”

Looking at him, the captain of the company said, “Lieutenant, we’re paratroopers. We’re supposed to be surrounded.”

If life feels like a struggle, as if you’re facing stiff opposition, well, it’s supposed to be a struggle. We’re warriors. We’re supposed to be surrounded.

## Fight for others

First, fight for yourself. Second, fight for others, that they may believe that everything they need is found in Christ and his ways. We do not wrestle *against* flesh and blood; no, we wrestle *for* flesh and blood. We fight both for those inside the church and those outside the church, that all may believe that everything they need is found in Christ and his ways.

Sometime around the year 1934, an elderly woman named Clara Frasher was sitting on her front porch not far from Gainesville High School in Gainesville, Texas, a small town about seventy-five miles north of Dallas. She watched the kids walk by and felt burdened for them. They seemed aimless to her, so she began praying that someone would rescue them. She enlisted several other women to pray with her every Monday morning.

Six years later, a young seminary student by the name of Jim Rayburn came to town with a vision to minister to teenagers. He was in town for about a year before he heard of the women’s prayer meetings. When he heard about them, he joined them.

Thus began the ministry of Young Life, which went on to become a worldwide ministry to reach teenagers

with the gospel of Jesus Christ. “They prayed every Monday morning for six years, long before I ever heard of Gainesville, Texas,” said Rayburn, the founder of Young Life. “That was the thing the Lord used to start it.”

The apostle James writes, “The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working” (James 5:16). If that’s true, who knows what the Lord will do with our prayers? Can you imagine what it will be like to see the Lord face to face in the new creation and also see what our prayers accomplished?

There are multiple opportunities for you to engage in the prayer ministry of this church, from praying regarding the war in Ukraine, to praying for our college students, to praying for people after the worship services. See [pbcorg.churchcenter.com/people/forms/352420](http://pbcorg.churchcenter.com/people/forms/352420). Pray also for our Good Friday and Easter services, as we take up the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God: the gospel of Jesus Christ. And pray for me as I preach on Easter Sunday, that words may be given me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the gospel.

## Find Christ in the fight

Fight well, both for yourself and for others, and find Christ in the fight. If everything you need is found in Christ, find Christ in the fight. Even if you don’t think the fight is going well, find Christ in the fight. Especially if you don’t think the fight is going well, find Christ in the fight. Don’t let the devil lead you astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ.

As I look out upon the people of Peninsula Bible Church, I see an army of men, women, and children who are fighting well. So many of you have been through so much. So many of you are going through so much. So many of you are fighting for yourselves and for others.

If you feel as if you’re losing, if you find Christ, you win. The victory you want (triumphing over whatever) may not be the victory you need (finding Christ). The victory you want will come in time, if not in this world, where we see Christ in a mirror dimly, then in the new world, where we see Christ face to face. Until then, fight well, and find him in the fight.

## Be encouraged

**Ephesians 6:21-24:**

**So that you also may know how I am and what I am doing, Tychicus the beloved brother**

**and faithful minister in the Lord will tell you everything. 22 I have sent him to you for this very purpose, that you may know how we are, and that he may encourage your hearts.**

**23 Peace be to the brothers, and love with faith, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. 24 Grace be with all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with love incorruptible.**

By preaching through Paul's letter to the Ephesians, we have aspired to do for you what Paul wanted to do for the Ephesians: encourage your hearts. May the grace of God be with you all.