

## God's Provision for Victory Eph. 6:10-20

### The bigger picture of our struggle vv. 10-13

*Ephesians 6: <sup>10</sup> Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might.*

*<sup>11</sup> Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. <sup>12</sup> 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.*

*<sup>13</sup> 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.*

In Victoria we have heard quite a bit of warfare language recently. You and I, we are told, are on the frontline of struggle with a deadly, invisible and cunning enemy, in a battle to protect our healthcare system and our lives. It's a war in which we each have our bit to play – wearing masks, washing hands, keeping our distance, restricting our movements – to both protect our own health and the health of others.

It's taken quite a shift in our thinking to live aware of an unseen enemy, and quite a change in our behaviour to combat it with whatever resources we have, and now we live with the stress of the struggle and anxiety about the outcome, stress and anxiety that focus our energy and attention on just getting through this moment

But God's word in Ephesians 6 tells us that the struggle of this moment is just part of a bigger struggle with a greater and more cunning, more malicious enemy, a bigger struggle that goes on throughout our lives. It calls us to step back and see our present experience, the experience of each day, as part of that bigger struggle. At the same time it assures us that our God provides us with all the resources we need to engage in that struggle and to ensure our success. The outcome is not in doubt – and that is good news for what is at stake in this struggle is not our health, but our present relationship with the living God who rules over all things, including our health, and our eternity.

*We are called to stand against the schemes of the devil. <sup>12</sup> 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.*

The thought that we are wrestling against spiritual powers who can effect our lives, even take us captive, was not a new one to the Ephesians.

They lived in a world populated by gods whose favour you had to seek by sacrifice and ritual, gods like Artemis whose temple was central to Ephesian life. There were also astral powers, and spirits of the underworld who could be manipulated for or against you by magic.

So if your crops failed or your business did not prosper.

Your child got ill, or you weren't feeling so well yourself

It may be because the gods were angry with you, or it may be that someone had enlisted malevolent spirits to harm you

These were not quaint ideas, but their reality. You heard in Acts of the magic books the believers burnt, books which were serious investments in power and protection – 50,000 pieces of silver, which is 50,000 days' worth of a labourer's wage – that is about 142 years' worth of the basic wage, or about three and half million dollars. They got rid of those books not because they came to believe these spirits and gods did not exist. It was because the Ephesian believers became convinced of Jesus' power. These new believers had abandoned appeasing these gods and spirits, but they still lived conscious that they existed and could act in their world, conscious that these powers Paul describes them as having once served when they 'followed the prince of the power of the air, the spirit now at work in the sons of disobedience' 2:2 were opposed to them, hostile to them. It mattered to them to know how they could live safe from their influence, be kept from being overwhelmed by their power.

This consciousness of spiritual powers active in the world is still part of the worldview of animist peoples, people like the Mien in Northern Thailand that Daniel and Tamami having been working amongst. Amongst the non-Christian Mien the village shaman, the one who can contact and manipulate the spirits, has great power and influence.

But you say – that world view is not our world view. In the West we don't live, or most of us don't live, in a world populated by spiritual powers. We are free of that, believe that the only conscious agents in this material world are we humans, and it is only human evil we must worry about.

If you believe that then you have blinded yourself to Scripture's teaching, and also to reality of the working of malicious evil in the world. From chapter three of Genesis we see a being at work in defiance of God and seeking to enslave humanity to itself. Today we may not see the kind of demonic activity we see in the gospels, but Our Lord Jesus locates the devil's work particularly in lies and murder, and we know that fruit of his work amongst us every day. [John 8:44] Behind the claims of idolatrous governments Revelation 13 portrays the work of the devil, and such governments arise with great regularity in history. The epistles see the devil at work in false teaching in the church whose 'servants can disguise themselves as servants of righteousness' [2 Cor. 11:14-15], says false teachers 'devote themselves to deceitful spirits and the teaching of demons' [1 Tim. 4:1, 1 John 4:1-3, 2 Tim. 2:26]. More, hypocrisy, selfish self promotion, immorality and hatred and anger are all seen as the work of the evil one and his servants [1 cor. 7:1-5, Acts 5:1-6, James 3:14-16, 1 John 3:9-12, Eph. 4:26-27]. And the devil is particularly opposed to the work of the gospel, snatching the gospel seed away before it can bear fruit and blinding the minds of unbelievers to Jesus' glory [Mark 4:15, Matt. 13:39, 2 Cor. 4:4]

It is a measure of the devil's cunning that in a world awash with lies and violence, and in a society where gospel progress is so opposed and the church has been hollowed out by false teaching, by hypocrisy, self serving and immorality that so many deny the existence of the devil and the spiritual forces of evil. Even some who say they believe the Bible give only lip service to Scripture's teaching, giving no real credit to their activity in daily life, while others seem to overlook those areas where Scripture says the devil is most at work in the church – false teaching and immorality – and become pre-occupied with demonic activity, even falsely claiming that believers in Jesus can be demonised.

We must hear and take seriously the teaching of God's word. We are facing the scheming of the devil, we are engaged in a wrestle with the spiritual forces of evil.

We should recognise that, not to be made fearful, but so that we hear what God says hear about how the devil's work can be resisted, and to make sure we respond in the way God calls us to, the way that will ensure safety and victory.

**The Response called for vv10-11, 13 [Isaiah 59:15b-19]**

*Ephesians 6: <sup>10</sup> Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might.*

*<sup>11</sup> Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. <sup>12</sup> 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.*

*<sup>13</sup> 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.*

We are told to be strong. We are not to blind ourselves to the threat, not run away in fear and abandon the fight. We are to be strong.

But we have no power or wisdom in our selves for this fight. We are of a race easily deceived by the evil one, easily snared by his enticements.

We are to be strong – in the Lord, who in his ministry by his casting out demons showed he is the one who can plunder the evil one’s possession effortlessly [Mk. 3], and who in His death has defeated the evil one once and for all on the cross.

The Lord provides us with the strength of his might, the might that raised our Lord from the dead, that broke the power of the devil, the power of death, the might that has judged the devil and cast Him from heaven. This is strength the devil has no power to overcome

And we come to enjoy the strength of His might in our struggle with the devil by taking on what the Lord provides, the Lord’s own armour, the armour of God.

In the Old Testament, in Isaiah 59, the LORD is portrayed as a mighty warrior who is victorious over all those who oppose Him

*Isaiah 59<sup>17</sup> He put on righteousness as a breastplate,  
and a helmet of salvation on his head;  
he put on garments of vengeance for clothing,  
and wrapped himself in zeal as a cloak.*

*<sup>18</sup> According to their deeds, so will he repay,  
wrath to his adversaries, repayment to his enemies;  
to the coastlands he will render repayment.*

Paul is about to portray God’s provision for our struggle through the picture of an ancient warrior’s equipment. In speaking of this provision as God’s own armour the Lord is assuring us that in our struggle with the His enemies, the

spiritual enemies of His people, we are equipped by Him with what will ensure victory, what has been proven to triumph.

### **The assurance given v. 13**

<sup>13</sup> *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.*

It is with this armour that we can stand against the schemes of the evil one, that we can *withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm.*

Standing your ground may not seem like victory to us, but it is complete victory.

Modern armies are mobile.

But Paul is creating a picture from ancient warfare.

Ancient wars were about the great battle and holding your ground on the battlefield. You would have one army in its camp on one side, and the other army in its camp on the other side, and the ground between them.

On the day of the battle the two opposing armies, often tens of thousands of men, would advance towards each other and then join in combat with a great clash and shock. The winner was the one who held his ground. In that warfare to turn your back and flee was to invite certain death. The ones left standing on the battle field at the end of the day were not grim survivors, but victors – the field was theirs.

So Paul is telling believers how they can be victors when the day of evil comes. The day of evil includes testing times now, but it especially refers to the last day, the great day of death and judgment at the end. Paul is telling us how we should live now to be victors at the end, to be still standing in the faith on Jesus' side, the winning side, on the last day.

But to stand on that day we must use the armour God has provided. There is nothing else that will give us victory on that day. Our opponents are not flesh and blood. They can't be seen – they cannot be fought with ordinary weapons – knives and guns, or with any weapons of human invention. We don't have reliable intelligence about them to devise our own new weapons

TO be victorious against this enemy we must use what God provides.

We are about to look at this provision of God for our victory, but before I do let me ask **Are you convinced this struggle is your struggle?**

That you are engaged in a life and death struggle with the devil and his servants, beings so much more powerful than you?

### **Are you convinced this struggle is your struggle?**

If you are – you will gladly take up this armour, each day, with enthusiasm, knowing it will protect you from enemies who are too great and cunning for you on your own.

But if not – you might hear what comes as good advice on the Christian life, but something you can take or leave

Be ill equipped, easily deceived, in danger

So what is this provision, the only provision that will do the job, give us the victory?

*Ephesians 6: <sup>14</sup> Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, <sup>15</sup> and, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace. <sup>16</sup> In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one; <sup>17</sup> and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, <sup>18</sup> 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, <sup>19</sup> and also for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel, <sup>20</sup> for which I am an ambassador in chains, that I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak.*

## **God's Provision – the armour of God**

### **Truth**

We start with truth, the belt of truth. By belt Paul is referring to a leather apron that was worn under the armour and protected the thighs.

What is our basic protection against the cunning of the devil? Truth

The Truth we have come to know in the gospel, which is the word of truth [1:13], the truth which is in Jesus [4:21] – known, believed, expressed, clung to.

*[Ephesians 1:<sup>13</sup> And you also were included in Christ when you heard the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation. When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit,*

*Ephesians 4:<sup>21</sup> when you heard about Christ and were taught in him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus.]*

In particular for the Ephesians those aspects of gospel truth Paul has emphasised in this letter, the love and power of Jesus.

In their old life they had thought that grace, favour was something you bribed the gods to show you by what you did for them – the sacrifices and offering you made. The gospel has taught them, as we learnt in chapters 1 and 2, that grace is God’s gift to them, given out of His great love and mercy, given to them before the foundation of the world, given to them in Christ. Freely given this grace that saved them was secure. Trials and hardship did not mean they had lost God’s favour.

And Paul has stressed the power of Jesus “who has been seated at God’s right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion and above every name that is named not only in this age but also in the one to come” 1:20-22, prayed that they would know this power, and reminded them that the Jesus who is exalted over all things is the head of the church, His body. Gospel truth tells believers they are joined to the one who rules over all things. For Ephesians conscious that they lived in a world populated by powerful spiritual forces this is a truth they always had to keep close to them, that freed them from fear.

And don’t we need to live always conscious of this gospel truth. That we are loved with a love we have not earned but is freely given to us in Christ, a love that has brought us forgiveness through the death of our Lord, and so whatever hardship we might be facing is not because we have lost God’s favour or He is punishing us in anger. He is treating us as loved children.

And that our Saviour is over all, more powerful than viruses or governments, more powerful than destructive lies. We need to keep gospel truth close to us each day, the power and love of Jesus that Paul has prayed we would know more and more of.

### **Righteousness**

Above the belt of truth we must put on the breastplate of righteousness. The breastplate was the essential piece of protective equipment that covered all the vital organs like your heart and liver and lungs.

The righteousness Paul speaks of here in Ephesians is the righteous behaviour that is to be characteristic of the new self in Jesus, *created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.*

Eph 4:24, Eph. 5:8-9

*[Ephesians 4:<sup>24</sup> and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.*

Ephesians 5: <sup>8</sup> For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light <sup>9</sup> (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth) ]

Right living, the way of life described in Ephesians 4-6, will protect us in our struggle with the devil. It will stop us from being sucked into the world of darkness, the world that wants to shun God's light.

If, for example, we follow the instruction in Ephesians 5 about sexual purity [vv. 3-6], we will be kept free from sexual guilt and shame that distances us from God.

If we control our anger and our tongues, not letting the sun go down on our anger, we won't create a space, a foothold, for the devil's work of nurturing bitterness, division and hatred.

And consider how vulnerable we are to the devil's schemes when we allow ourselves to keep doing something Jesus says we shouldn't.

Our confidence can be eroded by a sense of being a hypocrite, or we can be distanced from God by a sense of shame, or worse – we can become so in love with our sin that we harden our heart to God's word, don't want to hear the word because it makes us feel uncomfortable about continuing our sin, the word that sustains our relationship with Christ.

You are protected from the devil's plots and schemes by living Jesus' way, living his way even when no one else sees you, when you are isolated in your own home.

Righteousness gives vital protection.

### **Readiness given by the gospel of peace**

And then Paul goes to a most important piece of clothing – your footwear.

We may not think about shoes as that important. But for the Roman soldier what was on your feet meant the difference between life and death. You see, there was a lot of pushing and shoving in ancient warfare, and if you were driven backwards your formation would be broken, and you would be vulnerable.

And blood is slippery. If you fell over you would most likely die, trampled by your own side, or unable to defend yourself against the other side.

So Roman soldiers had a special kind of shoe, the caliga. It was a half boot with a studded sole, good for marching and fighting.

It gave both stability and mobility.

What gives the Christian stability and mobility in our struggle?

The readiness that comes from the gospel of peace and readiness with the gospel of peace, taking our stand on the gospel and being prepared to share the gospel.

The gospel of peace is the message of Jesus that He has brought us peace with God and each other, reconciling us through His death. This is the message Jesus preached in preaching the good news of His death and resurrection to us through His apostles. Eph. 2:17

*[Ephesians 2: <sup>17</sup> He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near.]*

Believing the gospel brings us peace with God – and that gives us stability. Whatever happens, whether hardship or opposition, at peace with God we know He is treating us as His loved children, not His enemies. The gospel of peace gives us stability in all the ups and downs, the successes and trials, of life.

But Paul is not just talking about believing the gospel.

He is talking about being ready with it – being ready to share it with others.

We journey through life securely by being always ready to relate to the world, not as our enemy, but with the message that seeks peace and brings peace, a message that keeps them and us focused on the big realities – God, death, judgment. [not our privileges and rights]

### **The shield of faith**

*<sup>16</sup> In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. <sup>17</sup> Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.*

God in His generosity provides us with more.

There is the shield of faith. Romans soldiers had a large leather shield that they soaked in water before a battle as their enemies would try and discomfort them, force them to flee, by shooting flaming arrows at them.

The devil seeks to shoot flaming arrows at us.

They might be trials like sickness that cause us to doubt God's goodness.

Or the opposition of family or persecution by the state

Or the remembrance of past sins – saying to us God could never forgive that

Or it could be the temptations of loneliness,

or at this time just plain weariness that leaves us feeling no joy.

There are many ways the devil will try and unsettle us and drive us from the field.

The answer to all of these is faith, faith in the promises God gives us in the gospel, faith in the One who gives us these promises.

Faith in the promises that trusting Jesus we are forgiven, we are adopted as God's children, we are at peace with Him, that He will work all things for our good.

And faith that the Lord Jesus is for us the One He is revealed to be in His word. We have seen a little of who He is in Ephesians – the one who reigns at God's right hand over all, and so the one who can protect us from all.

The one who is our peace 2:14

The one who is our Saviour 5:23, 5:25-27

The bridegroom of His people who is determined to take us to Himself

Faith both protects us from and extinguishes the devil's attacks by saying, like Jesus in His temptations – it is written

Faith in the gospel says – the Lord Jesus is my saviour, He loves me, He is able to keep me.

### **The helmet of salvation**

And put on, says Paul, the helmet of salvation. A helmet was vital to an ancient soldier. It protected your head and allowed you to look up, to keep a level gaze in the face of approaching danger. It allowed you to see the standard, to orient yourself on the battlefield, to know what your commander was doing.

What allows you to do that in our spiritual battle, allows you to keep a steady gaze ahead and to stay in touch with your commander's plans?

It is the hope of salvation, knowing that Jesus is a mighty Saviour now and He will bring you to all He has promised you.

Paul has already prayed that the Ephesians would know their hope. Eph 1:18

[Ephesians 1: <sup>18</sup> I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people,]

Now we see how important that prayer is.

We should be aware of all that God has promised us, conscious that it is a sure and certain hope because of Jesus' victory. We need to keep our eyes on that goal, the end of our race, the new heaven and earth where there will be no pain or crying or mourning, and God will wipe every tear from our eyes. We should keep our eyes on the plan of God for His creation to unite all things in Christ [1:10].

That will protect us, allow us to meet times when our human hopes are thrown into disarray with confidence that God's plan is sure, and our lives serving Him purposeful.

### **The sword of the Spirit**

And Paul now comes to the one offensive weapon God has equipped us with – the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. Roman soldiers had a short sword for close combat. It could do a lot of damage. God’s word, known, spoken, proclaimed, cuts through the devils lies. In the gospels we see Jesus use the Word in temptation to turn away the devil’s attack.

The word will be says the Psalmist a lamp to our feet, a light to our path – it gives us safe movement, secure progress.

And the well wielded sword makes the enemy withdraw, and it takes ground. Jesus has said that the gospel will bring conviction to the world of their sin, bring light in darkness, turn people from Satan to God.

We need to know the Word, to be able to discern truth from error ourselves and to expose the lies others believe.

### **Prayer for all the saints and Paul**

And there is one final piece of provision that Paul wants to stress. He doesn’t draw any parallel here with an ancient soldier’s equipment, but the Roman soldier never went into battle by himself. Their success, their strength, was in acting together. Here we are reminded that we are in it together.

*<sup>18</sup> And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord’s people.*

*<sup>19</sup> Pray also for me, that whenever I speak, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel, <sup>20</sup> for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should.*

Praying in the Spirit is not tongues. It is having our prayers shaped and moulded by the Spirit to pursue the Spirit’s priorities, as the Spirit helps us become more like Christ. It is praying with the Spirit given assurance that God is our Father.

Did you notice the repetition of the word ‘all’?

When – all occasions

How – all kinds of prayers

For whom – all the saints, and especially for the gospel preacher.

This is a Great encouragement to pray – for each other, for all kinds of concerns – nothing is too great or too small, no-one should be excluded from our prayers.

The danger is drowsiness – of having but not using because it does not seem urgent, because life has become routine.

But a Christian who is not praying is like a soldier who lets himself fall asleep at his post because nothing seems to be happening. Ours is a cunning enemy, who is always seeking an advantage, even when we are unaware.

We are to stay alert, and always keep on praying for each other.

That is important at this time. The reason we do the devotion is to help you pray for each other, those precious three names at the end of the devotion. And if you don't have the habit already, it will also help you develop the habit of spending time in God's Word. That regular reading and prayer is one of the ways to experience the strength of His might – so if you need help with that, or want to start praying regularly for your brothers and sisters – email the office

And especially we should be praying for fearlessness in making the gospel known. We should be praying that for each other, and especially for those gifted and set apart for the work of the gospel. There is always a temptation to self censor, to take out or make less prominent those parts we think will offend our audience – whether it is about sin and judgment, or Jesus being the only Saviour, or our dependence on His grace not our works.

Can you imagine the strength of that temptation when like Paul you are in prison, in chains, and your release hangs on whether your judge likes the message or not.

Yet Paul prays for boldness – that he would be faithful in making clear the gospel in its entirety, no matter the response or the consequence for his personal welfare. If Paul needed prayer to be faithful and fearless how much more do we. So pray for us.

### **All we need**

This is God's armour, and it is all we need to stand in the evil day, to win the field at the end. It looks so ordinary. There is nothing spectacular here, no

special gifts. It is gospel truth and life, godliness that has at its heart love [Eph. 4:32-5:2]; it is faith and hope, the word and prayer.

What we need for victory is all there in the gospel. We don't need techniques for casting out demons, secret knowledge, dependency on spiritually powerful people

It is the armour our almighty saviour gives to every believer

But it must be used

### **A call to act**

There are so many verbs in this passage

Put on v. 10,

Take up v. 13

Having fastened, having put on v. 14

Having put on v. 15

Take up v. 16

Take v. 17

Pray v. 18

God is asking us to do something, to hear this word and act

Don't think you can win without, will have final victory where you ignore God's provision.

And there are no excuses for not using it, all of it. What would you think of

A soldier who went into battle without some of his equipment – who left his helmet or rifle behind – but said 'It's ok, I've got my boots'.

Or of A soldier who thought he could substitute some item of equipment – thought the standard boots were too heavy, or lacked style, and so went into battle in his nike sneakers –

Or of a soldier who actively sabotaged the equipment provided, jamming the mechanism on his rifle or cutting his webbing

I guess you would think they were lazy, or foolish, or overconfident in their own abilities

You wouldn't think them likely to survive.

So as believers we shouldn't feel safe where we believe the truth but neglect righteousness, or want to substitute listening to popular Christian preachers or reading Christian novels for our own study of the word, or refused to pray

Our confidence has to be in God, not in ourselves, and we show that by using what He has provided, all of it.

**Recognise your reality and use what God has provided.**

This talk has three goals – that you would Know and own this struggle with the devil's cunning as your own, even if it means a shift in your thinking

That you would Understand God's provision

And that you would Use it, even if it means you have to change your behaviour

It has those goals for this is God's provision to you whatever your trials, whatever lies you meet, whatever hostility you endure, no matter how powerful your opponents, to share in His victory at the last day, to rise with Christ to eternal life.

So Every day remind yourself of the truth of the gospel, of the love and power of Jesus

Every day commit to living a godly life, as if your life depended on it

Every day be ready with the gospel, have it in your heart and on your tongue

Every day grow in faith by exercising faith, trusting your Lord to be for you all He has said He is

Every day remember the goal of our salvation, to rise to life with our Lord

Every day read the word

Every day pray

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