

Prepared for Battle

We are fighting a battle right now at my house. It's me and my husband against a massive army of Leaf Cutter Ants. They have stripped the leaves off numerous bushes in our yard. Thousands of them follow their tiny ant paths long distances across the grass. We've watched them work. The "empty-handed" ones leave the hole, following the one in front of them. When they arrive at their destination, they deftly snip out a big semi-circle of green foliage. Then weighed down with the fruit of their labor, they return to their hole.

We have a large yard, a long growing season, and the desire to enjoy the beauty of God's creation in our own space. Yet, as we work to realize this summer dream, the persistent cutter ant works to destroy it all. So, I just finished doing some online research to find out how we can defeat this enemy. Armed with a list of tactics, I'm now ready to do battle!

God has prepared us, equipped us, and provided everything we need to realize His purposes for us as individuals and as the local church. Meanwhile, the enemy constantly works to derail, discourage, and defeat us. But that won't happen unless we allow it. We must be prepared to battle the scheming ways of Satan and our own sinful desires.

Wrapping things up

Before we consider how we can equip ourselves to stand firm, let's do a brief review. This is our last lesson together in Ephesians. God has taught us many wonderful truths through the study of His Word. Here are some of the things we've considered:

- God has given us every spiritual blessing we need to reach our full potential in Christ.
- The same power that raised Jesus from the dead is living and working in us in the presence of the Holy Spirit.
- Our salvation is an eternal demonstration of God's marvelous grace.
- God has a purpose for your life and He fashioned you to fulfill it.
- God strengthens us for trials and works through them for His purposes.
- God calls us to love, unity, and spiritual maturity within the church family.
- We have a unique place of service in the church that God designed us to fill.
- Conforming our thinking to God's thinking will produce Christ-like behavior.
- When we follow God's design for our relationships we will find joy, peace, and fulfillment.

Which of these truths above have impacted you the most? Why?

Know Your Enemy

Read Ephesians 6:10-20.

Paul begins the conclusion of Ephesians with a call to arms. In his letter, Paul has beautifully shown God's glorious purpose for His church and for us as individual believers. God has given us everything we need to fulfill His purposes but we must be prepared to meet the opposition. We can "be strong" in God's purposes for us by "putting on His full armor" so we can "stand against the devil's schemes."

Based on verse 12, write a description of our enemy.

Read 2 Corinthians 11:14. Will Satan and his activity always immediately appear to be evil? Explain.

Sin (and Satan) is attractive and enticing. At least at first. He baits us, draws us in, tempts us with things that *seem* fun, harmless, and even fulfilling. That's why we must "suit up" for protection. Twice Paul uses the term "full armor of God." This phrase is translated from one Greek word, *panoplia*. According to *Vines Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*, the *panoplia* was the complete equipment used by heavily armed Roman infantry.

Paul's audience would have been familiar with the *panoplia*. His description of God's armor would have conjured up a picture of every offensive and defensive piece – even the ones Paul did not mention. While Paul gives his readers a sampling of the spiritual weapons we have at our disposal, his intention is that we employ "every spiritual blessing" in our struggle against the devil. God's "incomparable great power" is available to us who believe. Let's not leave any weapon in its sheath. Like the Roman soldiers, let's cover everything. Leave no part of the body vulnerable to attack.

What have you learned about these pieces of armor from our larger study of Ephesians?

- ***Truth (see 4:21):***
- ***Righteousness (5:8-9):***
- ***Gospel of Peace (2:14-18):***

- *Faith (1:15, 2:8):*
- *Salvation (1:13-14):*
- *Sword of the Spirit/Word of God (1:17, 3:16, 5:18-19):*
- *Prayer (1:15-21, 3:14-21):*

Arm Yourself, Together

Paul's imperatives in this section are plural. Although also relevant for us as individuals, God's call to arm ourselves for battle is communal, to the church. Like Roman soldiers who were considered virtually invincible when they stood together in full armor on the battlefield, the Christian "whole" is stronger than the individual parts.

Also, our call to battle preparation closely reflects God's own in Isaiah 59:17. Just as we are to "be imitators of God" (Eph 5:1) by living a life of love we should also imitate Christ when we "stand against the devil's schemes."

Read the following passages and draw a line to the corresponding way that Jesus fought Satan's temptations.

Matthew 4:1-11

Pray, watch for God's activity, guard against Satan

Matthew 16:21-25

Rebuke, Submit our will to God's will

Matthew 26:36-41

Know the truth of God's Word and stand on it

Reread Ephesians 1:19-23. How can we be certain that victory is ours?

Closing Request & Remarks

Paul has been praying for the believers in Ephesus “ever since he heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus.” Paul battled in prayer for his fellow believers. Now he asks them to do battle on his behalf.

Read Ephesians 6:19-20. List the specific ways Paul asked them to pray for him.

God calls us to pray for each other. My fellow Christians need me to pray for them. I need them to pray for me.

Do you have one or more Christians who pray for you on a regular basis? If so, do you give them very specific requests? List some ways you can ask others to pray for you:

Read Eph 6:21-23. Compare verse 21 with Colossians 4:7-9. What similarities do you find?

This is some of the evidence that shows Paul wrote both letters from prison very close together. Tychicus was Paul’s representative to these two churches and delivered both letters. I would love to hear the additional news Tychicus shared about Paul and their ministry with the churches. Wouldn’t you?

As we close our study together I would like to say Paul’s benediction to the Ephesians over you – my fellow sojourners of God’s Word.

Good-bye, friends. Love mixed with faith be yours from God the Father and from the Master, Jesus Christ. Pure grace and nothing but grace be with all who love our Master, Jesus Christ.
Ephesians 6:23-24, The Message

Weekly Challenge

Find a prayer partner. Share specific requests with them. Ask them for specific requests. Meet regularly. Be real!