

Home group study questions on Ephesians 6:10-23

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Sermon summary

We will be weaker as Christians and the struggle to persevere will be harder if we do not recognise that we are in a spiritual battle. God has rescued us from the devil's kingdom and seated us with Christ in the heavenly realms (2:6). The devil and his forces are opposed to us as a result (6:11-12). So, if we are to live out our calling and our new identity as God's people, a new humanity (2:15), we need God's strength and God's armour (6:10-11, 13-18). We cannot fight the battle in our own strength, but God gives us the very armour that Christ himself wore to achieve our salvation (e.g. Isaiah 11:3-5, 49:2, 50:4, 52:7 and especially 59:15-17).

We can stand firm when we arm ourselves with what God has provided. Most of these things – a knowledge of truth so that we are ready for the battle and see through the devil's lies, readiness to live by and hold out the gospel of peace, faith in God's promises, hope in our salvation, ability to repel the devil with God's word – come from being firmly grounded in Scripture. So God's word must be front and centre in our lives, set against the voices of the world and the devil, which seek to turn us away from God and makes sin seem attractive.

Equally, we need to pursue righteousness as something which guards us against the devil's attacks like a breast plate. Chapters 4-5 assume we will put on the new self, characterised by righteousness and holiness (like God himself, 4:22-24). Paul commands that we leave the old, unrighteous, futile ways of the world behind (4:17). But the more lax we are in pursuing righteousness, the more we will arm the devil with accusations to assault our guilty consciences, causing us to doubt God's love for us. Of course, we will never be free of sin in this life, so we also need to trust in Christ's perfect righteousness, which is ours by faith. That is our ultimate confidence when faced with the devil's accusations. But we don't help ourselves (or live out our calling!) when we tolerate sin. So we should flee from sin and be quick to confess it. We should also keep coming back to the Word, which renews our minds (4:23) by teaching us to hate sin and see the goodness of God's ways, so that we want to walk in them.

Finally, v.18, we should pray according to the Spirit's promptings and the priorities he has given us in the Word (which he inspired!). The armour is made effective through prayer. Equally, we shouldn't view putting on the armour and standing firm as something to be done individually. This is something we help each other with as we speak the truth in love (4:15), pray for each other (6:18) and encourage each other (cf. 6:22).

Questions

- 1) For most of us in the UK it seems hard to remember that we are engaged in a spiritual battle as Christians. Why is that?
- 2) How does Ephesians as a whole remind us of the spiritual dimension to God's purposes in the church? (e.g. 1:10, 19-23; 2:1-2, 6; 3:10-11; 6:11-12)
- 3) Where might you be particularly vulnerable to the devil's deceptions, discouragements and attacks because you are not prepared for battle?

- 4) In the sermon, we saw that most of the armour relies on having God's Word front and centre in our lives. The Bible contains the truth that makes us ready for battle, equipping us to see through the devil's lies (belt of truth). God speaks through Scripture to renew our minds and change our desires so that we grow in righteousness (breastplate of righteousness). In Scripture, God reveals the gospel of peace which shapes our relationships in the church and makes us ready to proclaim peace to others (gospel readiness). The Bible gives us God's promises as the basis for our faith (shield of faith) and unfolds the salvation which is our hope (helmet of salvation). Most obviously, it contains the Word with which we fight back against the devil (sword of the Spirit).

But using the armour isn't just about *knowing* the Word, it's how you *use* it in daily life. Take some time to think through how you could better use each part of the armour in daily life.

(N.B. remember none of this is just about 'me and my Bible' – God has given us the church family and the Word as it is read, preached, sung, prayed, tasted in the Lord's Supper and experienced in Baptism on Sundays to help us)

- 5) When we're lax in our personal righteousness and tolerate sin, it arms the devil with more sticks to beat us with. Where has Ephesians most challenged you to leave worldly ways behind and put on the new self, which is created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness (4:24)?

- Why do we always need to keep hold of Christ's perfect righteousness as our ultimate security, even as we seek to grow in righteousness ourselves?

(NB there should be no tension between Christ's righteousness and ours, so long as we remember that his righteousness is the ground for our salvation and ours is only the fruit, as his saving work is applied to our lives)

- 6) The armour of God is made effective through prayer (v.18). You'll see in the ESV that Paul is just carrying on the previous sentence here, so that prayer is inseparable from the rest of armour. Can you think of one concrete way that you could shape your prayer life to better reflect vv.18-20?
- 7) As vv.21-22 imply, putting on God's armour and standing firm is a collaborative project, not just an individual one. We can encourage each other within the church. Where would you most appreciate the support or encouragement of your home group in standing firm against the devil's attacks at the moment?