

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

The one thing I hate most but have come to expect on any trip I take is that I'm going to forget something. Maybe it's socks. Maybe it's my toothbrush or my razor. Maybe even it's the map or food or some extra cash. Every trip, without fail, I forget something. And maybe you're the same as I am.

Wouldn't you agree it's important to make preparations before a trip, so you'll make sure you have everything you need? Well, how much more important if it wasn't a leisurely trip, but instead going into battle? Then it's not so much a matter of convenience. It's a matter of life or death. You wouldn't want to be caught in the midst of a gunfight unprepared, without a gun, or your helmet, or your Kevlar vest.

Paul's words to us this morning, from Ephesians, depict our lives as a battlefield, and he knows the dangers of going there unprepared. But here's the good news. God's Gift of Grace Prepares You for the Fight!

As the apostle Paul finishes up his letters to the Ephesians, that's his final encouragement, the same encouragement to you and me. That God's gift of grace prepares every single one of us for the fight. Do you know what fight I'm talking about? It's a fight every one of you is involved in, every day of your lives. It's a spiritual battle. Your New Man versus the Old Adam. It's the battle against sin and temptation...the intense battle against Satan.

But if you read these verses again, and maybe even out loud, you see there's no worry or fear in Paul's words. There's no need for panic. Instead, "be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power."

Everything Paul's written up to this point, about what God's gift of grace means for our lives, how it's saved us, and now, these past few chapters, talking about our response to that gift of God's grace, and now his final encouragement. "Be strong in the Lord."

Everything comes back to God. In this fight, this spiritual battle, we can only look to the Lord and his power and his might and his strength, look to that to be our power and might and strength. Because you see, where our verse says "be strong," the Greek, the original language actually uses a passive verb here. We aren't the ones carrying out that action. We can't. God does that. God is the one who strengthens us.

And...God is the one who prepares us for that fight. Again, our verse says "put on the full armor of God," but, according to the Greek word, it's God who's doing the equipping, putting that full armor on us. It's God who gives us the protection we need for battle.

So, what are the preparations needed for battle? What makes up our armor? Paul lists the hardware needed...the belt of truth for our waist...breastplate of righteousness...feet fitted with readiness that comes from the gospel of peace...the shield of faith...and the helmet of salvation.

Do you know what the significance behind all of these pieces is? I mean, we could go piece by piece, and try to be specific about each part, but there is one commonality between all of these pieces of armor. Do you know what it is?

Let's see, the truth, righteousness, gospel of peace, faith, salvation. Not surprisingly, they all relate to Jesus and to what he has done for us. The gospel, the message of peace, peace between us and God because of Jesus, the way, the truth, the life, the object of our faith, who has won salvation for us through his life, death, and resurrection, all of that, so his perfection, his righteousness could become ours. You and I, in our lives, we need to be fitted, equipped, completely covered with Jesus.

Do you understand how important this armor is? Can you see why we need it, why we need Jesus? It's because you and I are entrenched in a fight. Every day. The Christian life is always a struggle. Paul makes that very clear, and not just here, but in many other places in the Bible. Like where he says, "The sinful mind is hostile to God...does not submit to him." Or, where he says, "The sinful nature wants what is contrary to the Holy Spirit...they are in conflict with each other."

And really, do you need Paul to give you the proof we're involved in a constant struggle? Just take a look at your own life. How many of you face temptations every day? I definitely do. How many of you fall prey to those temptations and sin every day? I definitely do.

You and I are involved in an intense battle here on earth throughout our lives, and you want to know what's scary? The battle, it's really not against flesh and blood. It's not against other human beings. It's against the heavenlies, enemies of the spiritual realm. Do you know who I'm talking about? Spiritual enemies. Day after day, you and I are fighting the devil, the world, and our own sinful natures.

The world, society which is telling us we are behind the times, following an old-fashioned God, who just isn't relevant any more. But times are changing, society should be dictating rules for life, like who can get married, what kind of language is acceptable in everyday talk, or what the whole new code of ethics for businesses should be, lying your way to the top, doing whatever it takes to get the sale, whether right or wrong.

And you very clearly know how your own sinful nature works, how it lies to you, comes at you time and time again with such alluring temptations, bombarding you with so many you can't help but give in and sin.

God tells me he wants my worship and praise. But sleeping in, or going out with friends instead of going to church, that constitutes worship, right? Or God wants me to give my concerns and my anxieties to him. But I lose so much sleep at night because I'm worrying about money, health, my job. I feel like I have to take care of these, not God. And how easy our sinful nature makes it for you and me to knock God down our priority list.

So, can you see the importance of this armor of God? And not just parts of it, but all of it...the entire suit, the full armor of God?

Because I haven't even gotten to our greatest enemy, Satan. If we aren't fully equipped with the armor of God, don't for one second think that Satan can't and won't look for that chink in our armor, for our weakness. Like the soldier who thinks, I can lighten my load by getting rid of the armor covering my back. I won't get shot there." And where he ultimately ends up getting shot and killed? In the back.

Satan is an expert marksman. He will find our weakness, and he will take aim there. And he's shooting to kill, to kill you and me for eternity. And if we aren't prepared, he's going to hit his mark.

You know, Satan's also a superb strategist. Since the day we were born, he's been scheming how to bring us down. His attacks can be surprising because he's not coming at you in a massive invasion, with enemy after enemy bearing down on you. No, most times, the devil, the wolf, comes at us dressed in sheep's clothing, deceiving us, getting us to doubt God and his promises.

He's cunning. He's crafty. And if we think we're good, we don't need God or his armor, that we can handle it on our own, we are only deceiving ourselves. Because we can't. The only thing we'd be able to do is wave the white flag, surrender, and be taken captive to the prison of hell.

Thankfully, it just so happens, that as brilliant of a strategist that Satan is, he's going up against the greatest leader of all time, the one with an ever better plan, the one with a flawless record, God.

Do you know what that plan was? We just need to go back to the beginning of Ephesians to see it. Do you remember these words? "He chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will...In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with God's grace."

God's plan for you and me, even before we were created, was to save us, his gracious plan of salvation. The Scriptures lay out God's amazing strategy as it unfolded throughout history.

Adam and Eve, soon after creation, fell into sin. Looked like Satan won, right? Nope. God countered with the first gospel promise, "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers. He will crush your head, and you will strike his heel."

Time after time in the Old Testament, the Israelites, God's own chosen people, fell away from him, continually walking into Satan's traps. So God forgave them, and continued to bless them, which the greatest blessing was the birth of a baby boy, from their line, born to a virgin mother and a carpenter father. His name was Jesus, because he was going to save his people from their sins. And he did. Jesus lived the perfect life, deflected every attack Satan threw his way.

But that wasn't even the most impressive thing Jesus did. No, that happened at the cross. It was there where Jesus took our failures, our mistakes, our sins, all of them, and he bore them for you and me. Not because he had to, but because he needed. Because Jesus, true God, was not satisfied with us surrendering to the devil. Satan would not win. And Jesus' death was Satan's defeat. His death covered over all our sins and forgave every last one of them.

And then his final act to save us, his resurrection, on Easter, the sure sign of his victory over Satan and our victory over Satan as well.

That was God's plan to save us from our spiritual enemies, to win our struggle for us. His plan of grace, of underserved love. And it was carried out, in perfection, by Jesus through his life, death, and

resurrection. But while our sins have all been forgiven, God knows we are still fighting against those enemies every day. So he graciously prepares us to fight.

And you know how he does. He equips us with his armor. He clothes us with Christ. We've talked about some of those pieces, the belt of truth, the breastplate of righteousness, feet fitted with readiness that comes from the gospel of peace, the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation.

But you know, in our struggle, God doesn't just expect us to sit back and let the fight come to us, that we always have to be on the defensive against Satan and all his evil attacks. God's gift of grace also prepares us to fight back. Looking at our verses, you might notice that not all of this armor is defensive. God also gives us the sword of the Spirit, that is, his Word. God gives us the Bible to fight back. When we're tempted to sin, we're not left to wonder what we should do. We have God's Word to fight temptation, to show us the way to go, to win that battle.

Do you know why God does all of this? Why he's saved us? Why he equips us for our daily battles? Yes, of course, because he loves us. Yes, because of the gift of his grace.

But also, his end goal is for us to stand. Not just that we're able to stand up in the battle and able to fight. But when all's said and done, when the battlefield is cleared and the dust has settled, that we are still standing. That when this life is over, we will be left standing, because of God, victorious.

On our own, we'd have no chance. But God's gift of grace prepares us for the fight. He's already won it for us. And now, he equips us to live this life. He gives us everything we need to succeed in living for him. He works through us and for us to fight those battles against sin and Satan. Now, you and I are prepared for war. And with God on our side, we won't lose. Amen.