

Prepared for Battle **Ephesians 6:10-17**

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

It's war out there, I tell you it's war! That is my opening message to you. I mean it too! It really is war outside these four hallowed walls. In fact, I would dare say that even inside these walls, war is going on. Are you prepared for battle? Are you armed for the conflict which rages day by day?

What do I mean? Let me tell you. When I was younger, I would sometimes dream about being a knight, I am sure some of you others might have had such fantasies. I can still picture myself in my dreams. I would be in full armor. It gleamed brightly as I sat astride my black charger (just a broom with a horse head made out of black construction paper stuffed with cotton balls). I dreamed of a sword at my right side and a shield upon my left (actually a yard stick and garbage can lid). I would ride boldly into battle and fight against the evil hordes that good might triumph. Our text for today from St. Paul tells us to be dressed exactly like that, in full armor, prepared to stand against Satan and his hordes.

My friends, it is war. Look around you in the world today. Muslims are killing people, beheading them, for believing in Christ. Gunman Chris Harper-Mercer singled out Christians during his shooting spree in at Umpqua Community College in Oregon.

Abortion on demand is the law of the land, and those who fight for the life of the child are labeled as haters of “the rights of women to do what they want with their own bodies.” States are now passing death with dignity laws – basically, assisted suicide has become acceptable. Morality in this country is in an abysmal state, sexual encounters with someone other than one's spouse is considered only a matter of choice between two consenting adults. And Christians who label just about anything as sin are under attack for being intolerant. Television comedies make their money by highlighting and making fun of things which are in direct opposition to Christian ethics, and society calls it humor.

Religious pluralism is also running rampant. We are told to let people believe what they want to believe. There is no one God who is better than any other. Instead, we are told that there are many paths to god, and someone else's choice is just as valid as yours. And, if you are a Christian, you are told that the one law you are to keep most on your mind is the law of love. God is love, we are reminded, and so we are to be tolerant and loving of any and every other religious expression that is out there. But it is OK to be intolerant of Christianity, and tell Christians they are not allowed to believe what they want to believe.

Our Introit said there is only one God who made heaven and earth, only one is Lord over all. He has stated what is right and wrong. He has stated who He is and what is acceptable worship of Him. He has stated that there is only one way to heaven, not many. And, if there are any doubts, pick up the book in which He recorded it all for us to read.

But, that reveals another problem. God's Word is supposed to be the norm that guides us in our

understanding about God, about what is right and wrong, what is acceptable and unacceptable to Him. But how many today would rather say, "I know what I believe, don't quote the Bible to me. If the Bible agrees with me, great – if it doesn't, I'll believe what I want to believe. I know I'm a Christian."

Really?

Look around you my friends. If we believe that Christ is God and that the Bible is the revelation of Him, then we are at war!

How has such a state come to be in the world? How did our Christian nation come to be in such sorry shape? How come pure Christianity is so maligned and hated? My friends, let me quote Paul: *Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.* (vv. 11-12)

It isn't society or people or ideas that are at war with Christianity. Satan is at war! It is his hordes against which we are fighting. And you my friends, what happens with you? Are you prepared for the battle? Are you ready for the attacks of Satan?

All those problems in the world make us put our armor away. We'd rather walk around the streets in plain peasants clothing. Let's not let anybody know what we believe or what we think, we don't want to get mixed up in the brew-ha! I don't want to sit astride a black charger in armor gleaming brightly in the sunlight - that'd make me a target. Let someone else fight the fight. Don't believe me? You already have your armor packed up and locked away in the closet.

How often have you fought the good fight, and how often have you tucked your tail between your legs and gone running? You know the saying, "don't discuss politics or ... religion. We certainly do not bring up religious issues in the family, someone might get offended. And you certainly better not call a son, a daughter, a father, or a mother to repentance. Better just to say nothing.

We excuse our silence and inactivity by saying, isn't God love? Maybe it isn't so bad to be a bit more tolerant of people or ideas that are a little bit different from what I was taught, even if I think it is from God's Word. Satan has gotten the world to preach that one pretty loudly, and many are those who claim the name of Christ who listen to that preacher.

In succumbing to these thoughts, we are beginning to lose the battle. We have taken off our armor, we decided to let someone else fight. Hopefully our God's work in our consciences won't let us rest. I prayer He moves us to think about what is right and wrong and whether or not we should take a stand. Should I have written to my congressman or senator in support of issues of biblical immorality? Will my silence harm others? Maybe I shouldn't find the sick humor of that television show funny, God's Word does say I am supposed to keep my thought clean and pure.

Then comes another problem – the guilt. Satan likes to attack and get us when our guard is down.

He likes to attack when the armor is off. He goes for the soft underbelly. You and I know that we are sinners, and so Satan likes to attack where we have doubts. Satan likes to creep up on us and make us feel the guilt of our sins. He thinks that, armed with our own conscience, he can get us to wallow in our guilt to the point of losing faith.

One place especially where Satan can run away with our minds is as we try to go to sleep. Luther used to tell of how he would go to bed, and the devil would approach him and present a whole catalog of sins with which to torment him. And Luther would say, "When I go to bed the devil is always waiting for me. When he begins to plague me, I give him this answer: 'Devil, I must sleep. That's God's command. Work by day. Sleep by night.' So go away.' If that doesn't work and he brings out a catalog of sins, I say, 'Yes, old fellow, I know all about it. And I know some more you have overlooked. Here are a few extra. Put them down as well.'"

My friends, that's the way to get a good night's sleep. You see, Luther was prepared for battle. He wore the whole armor of God at all times.

Girded with truth around your waist, you are aware of your sinfulness. In God's light, you fall far short of the perfection He demands. In sinfulness you haven't worn the armor of God at all times. You sinfully failed to confess your faith before men at all times, because we did not want to bring dissension to relationships with friends or family.

But, you also have the truth that His Son took upon Himself your sins. Christ took your sins and now you are freed from them.

Your heart is guarded by the breastplate of righteousness. God's peace, which passes all understanding, guards your heart in Christ Jesus. His righteousness is your armor that your heart may not be weighed down by the depression of this world and the guilt of your sin. Christ's righteousness, His perfect righteousness, is your armor, nothing can penetrate it.

Your feet are shod so that you may walk in the Gospel of peace. Boldly you stride to all places in your life, knowing that you are at peace with God. He has equipped you to walk through life confident in the peace you have with God which has been given through Christ Jesus. Peace comforts you, for you know that eternal life is yours and this world is not really your home.

Armed with the shield of faith, Satan can attack again and again, and you will escape unscathed. Your faith, God's gift of a shield, is able to withstand all attacks, for God promises not to let you be tempted or tried beyond what you are able to bear, and that He Himself will give you the strength to stand against the attack.

Salvation, your helmet, guards your mind. Christ, the very life of God is your salvation. He died that you might be saved for eternity. This confidence will keep your thoughts upon Him and the resting place He prepares for you in His eternal home.

Finally, you are given a weapon so that you are armed for battle. The Word of God is a two-edged weapon that cuts both ways, severing even to the joints. This weapon gets to the heart of the matter. Some claim it is Scripture, but all Scripture points to Christ. The Word of God is

Christ, the Word made flesh. That Word is a weapon against the most insidious attacks of Satan. That Word cuts to the heart of the matter for it speaks, "your sins are forgiven!" Guilt no longer assails you because armed with the Word, Satan is defeated. Christ, the Word has defeated Satan and so he no longer has hold on you.

My friends, I invite you to put on the whole armor of God, and to keep it on 24/7. In that armor, you are prepared by God Himself for the battle that wages even now. In that armor God has made you victorious in Christ Jesus. Amen.