

**Stand Firm in Love** We have come to the final passage of Paul's Letter to the Ephesians. Scholars believe that this letter – indeed all of the Apostle Paul's letters – were meant to be read and passed along to the neighboring churches of the area.

So, when in Eph 1:1 he writes, "To the saints who are in Ephesus and are faithful in Christ Jesus," he could be writing to the saints in Las Vegas, Monte Carlo, Rio de Janeiro, Portland or in Banks. Paul's theme is how the church is to conduct itself in the world.

In this discourse on the armor of God, we get a picture of a Roman soldier. The equipment is all in iron and bronze and leather – sometimes skillfully worked to be both functional and beautiful. This armor is for the protection of the warrior. It is not for attack, but for defense. The sword in this armor is the Word of God. The Jesus follower is not called to hack others up with this sword, but rather to be steeped in the character and presence of God in Christ, who is the "Word made flesh." (Jn 1:14) The sword is not an offensive weapon. Wielding the sword is taking up the Word of God in prayer.

Suppose you want to learn the sport of skate boarding. You purchase a well-balanced, sturdy board. You begin practicing just staying on the thing, never mind rolling on concrete. You start on the grass, maybe even on the carpet in your den. You've watched skateboarding in parks or competitions on YouTube. But, the challenge of riding a skateboard at a speed of maybe 20 mph. That's something different. How exhilarating! What fun! Well, I haven't mentioned perhaps the most important things about skateboarding: your helmet, your elbow and knee pads. Make no mistake, you will impact the ground – concrete most probably. Protection is vital. Think of the armor of God in this way. You are moving into the way of the Holy Spirit in your worship and devotion and service. You are out where the action is.

Annie Dillard (in her book, *An American Childhood*) wrote: "*On the whole, I do not find Christians... sufficiently sensible of the conditions. Does anyone have the foggiest idea what sort of power we so blithely invoke? Or, as I suspect, does no one believe a word of it? The churches are children playing on the floor with their chemistry sets, mixing up a batch of TNT to kill a Sunday morning... we should all be wearing crash helmets. Ushers should issue life preservers and signal flares; they should lash us to our pews. For the sleeping God may wake some day and take offense, or the waking God may draw us out to where we can never return.*"

Sadly, Annie Dillard has abandoned her faith in Jesus. But, about the power of the Creator God and ongoing heavenly warfare, she was absolutely correct. Do not be so foolish as to skateboard without helmet, knee and elbow pads, and with some respect for the hazards you face. In the same way, do not move into the service of Jesus Christ without the spiritual armor Paul describes. I pray you never give up on the life of faith. Ephesians chapter 6 is for equipping the saints to be ready for spiritual battle.

Paul reminds us that "our struggle is not against enemies of blood and flesh, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places." (Eph 6:12)

You say, "I'm not up to this kind of warfare." Paul agrees with you. Nobody is. We have nothing to bring to the battle except those wonderful tools Paul describes in vv 14-17:

The Belt of Truth

The Breastplate of Righteousness

Preparation to tell the gospel of peace (shoes)

The Shield of Faith

The Helmet of Salvation

The Sword of the Spirit, the Word of God

Each of these is a **gift** from Jesus – who in His humanity confronted the evils of this world. He was clothed in these qualities as the God-Man sent to defeat death and hell.

Paul teaches us to pray in the Spirit (v 18) – with the guidance of the Word of God. This is our soldierly duty – our service to our Commander, Jesus Christ. Paul asks his readers to pray for him, calling himself an ambassador in chains. That is a contradictory statement. How can an ambassador call upon heads of state – and move about representing the nation abroad if (s)he is in chains? Paul’s sphere of influence **appears** to be limited to his house and to be hemmed in by the constant presence of a Roman guard. It may be that Paul’s metaphor of the armor of God is inspired by the uniform of his jailors. He looks at the trappings of power and in his imagination transforms them into heavenly virtues. He knows that faithful prayer brings Christ’s power to any situation.

A priest named Father Bert White wanted to visit the Missionaries of Charity, so traveled to Calcutta. He decided to attend Mass at the Mother House. He went to the front door and was greeted by one of the sisters. “Thank goodness you’re here, Father, come on in!”

“How do you know I’m a priest,” he asked, since he was wearing a Hawaiian shirt and slacks. She answered, “The priest who usually says Mass couldn’t come, so we prayed for God to send us another.”

Paul knows – and we are learning every day that even though we do not see God’s strategy in the midst of our setbacks and troubles – we can be sure that our God is a strategic God. The outworking of God’s will cannot be overcome by any force of evil. Even in our weakness, we can pray in the Spirit. We can look clearly at the challenge and meet it in the armor of the Spirit.

You may feel that you are not doing anything at all – that you are helpless and alone. Good, that is just the moment when God can use you. You are a warrior in full armor. You are not passive, you are active, alive and in the presence of Jesus.

Ruth Bell Graham, wife of Billy Graham, wrote, “Pray for a tough hide and a tender heart.”  
Stand firm. Pray at all times.

“Men (*Others – my edit*) may spurn our appeals, reject our message, oppose our arguments, despise our persons, but they are helpless against our prayers.”

-- J Sidlow Baxter

Amen.