

Ephesians 6:10-20

I'd like to begin today by talking about **standing**. Standing is **easy**, but it is also very **complex**. Standing involves the control of many different **muscles**, combined with the use of **balance**. Standing is an ability which we don't **have at birth** - it's something which must be **learned**. When I think about **standing** as opposed to walking, running, hopping, skipping, or jumping; standing seems to be pretty **boring**. After all, standing involves very little **action** - and yet, it's still very **important**. Children need to learn how to **stand** before they can move on to learning more **interesting** actions. Those of you who have **toddlers** around the house realize that when children have learned how to **stand**, it opens the door to many **other** avenues for them. And that's **good**. After all, there's very little to be gained by **standing**, if that's **all** we're going to do. So, in our text today, the Apostle Paul exhorts us to **move ahead** - to make **full use** of our gifts and abilities and privileges. He says, **Don't Just Stand There - Do Something!**

In order to have a clear picture of where you want to **go** and what you want to **do**, it's helpful to know where you **are** when you **begin**. In other words, where do you **stand**? That's probably the first question people ask of **politicians** when they present themselves for public office. "Where do you **stand**? Where do you stand on the **gun control** issue? Where do you stand on **property taxes**? Where do you stand on **social security**? Where do you stand on the role of the **military**? Where do you stand on teaching **critical race theory** in our schools? Where do you **stand**?" These are **important** questions, because people want to know what your **perspective** is. They want to know where you are **coming** from. How politicians **answer** the question, "Where do you **stand**," can mean the difference between **election** and **rejection**.

The question is also important for us as **Christians**. Where do you **stand**? Listen again to the Apostle Paul, as he tells us where we **should** stand. "*Finally, be strong in the **Lord** and in his mighty **power**. Put on the **full armor** of God, so that you can stand against the schemes of the **Devil**. For our struggle is **not** against flesh and blood, but against the **rulers**, against the **authorities**, against the world rulers of this **darkness**, against the **spiritual forces** of evil in the heavenly places.*" We are to take our stand **in the Lord**, and **against** all the spiritual forces of **evil** - including the **Devil** himself. Starting out in the **Lord** is vitally important, because if we're not standing in the **Lord**, we have no **strength** - and we **need** strength and lots of it, because we are involved in a **difficult** struggle.

The word here which is translated **struggle** originally meant a **wrestling** match. But in **this** context it takes on an even **deeper** significance. In our text, Paul doesn't describe a mere **wrestling** match, he describes a **war** - an all-out, winner-take-all, life-and-death battle against **fierce** enemies wielding **deadly** weapons! God wants to be sure that we don't become **complacent** - either by **overestimating** ourselves, or by **underestimating** our enemies. Remember that the Devil is a **liar** and the **father** of lies, and that he will use his bag of tricks and deceptions to lead us astray in many different ways. He may try to undermine our **doctrinal** position, or relax our **moral** standards. He may try to overthrow our faith with a **bold** and **outright** lie, as he did in the Garden of Eden when he told Eve that she would not die from eating the fruit which God had forbidden. Or he may choose instead to **gradually** erode away our faith, a little **here**, and a little **there**. Satan has even succeeded in convincing some people that he, the Devil, doesn't really **exist**. That may sound **foolish** to you, but people who don't believe that the Devil **exists** also don't **guard** themselves **against** that **roaring lion** who seeks to devour them. Yes, the Devil is **tricky** - he is a **master** deceiver - and he is also a fallen **angel**. If he and his cronies were **flesh** and **blood** as we are, then we might stand a 50-50 **chance** against them in battle. But **angelic** strength is **superior** to **human** strength. So, don't think that you're **beyond** temptation - that you're **too smart** to be taken in - that you won't go **too far** - that you won't **let** it happen again. That's exactly what Satan **wants** you to think.

Instead, **stand against** the devil by taking the **help** which is offered to you. That help is described in our text as the **full armor** of God. Paul wrote, "*For this reason, take up the **full armor** of God, so that you will be able to take a **stand** on the **evil** day and, after you have done everything, to **stand**. **Stand**, then, with the **belt of truth** buckled around your waist, with the **breastplate of righteousness** fastened in place, and with the **readiness** that comes from the **gospel of peace** tied to your **feet** like sandals. At all times hold up the **shield of faith**, with which you will be able to extinguish all the **flaming** arrows of the Evil One. Also take the **helmet of salvation** and the **sword of the Spirit**, which is the word of **God**."* There you have it - the **full armor** of God - 6 pieces of equipment (5 defensive, 1 offensive) - equipment which is to be **put on** and **used** in the day of **evil**. Please note here that God isn't implying that there is only **one** day of evil. But rather, **any** day can be an evil day - a day of severe or special **temptation** for **yourself** or your **family**, for fellow members of your **church**, or even for people whom you have **never met**. It could come at any **time**, in any **place**, from **anywhere**. So, the only way to be **protected**, is to put on the **full armor** of God - armor which is provided to us at **no charge**, by Jesus our Savior. Allow me to **describe** that armor for you more fully.

The first piece of armor is the **belt of truth**. The belt, or **girdle**, is to be strapped around our waist to protect our **mid-section**. That's very **important**, because the belly is a **soft** spot. It has no **bones** to serve as a natural protection. Therefore, without the truth of God's **Word**, we would be extremely **vulnerable** - an open target for the deceptive lies of Satan. Be sure to **buckle up** with the belt of truth.

The next piece of armor is the **breastplate of righteousness**, and it provides added protection for our heart, lungs, and other **vital** organs. Today we might call it our bulletproof Kevlar vest. It consists of the **righteousness** which Christ has earned for us - and we will need it **often**. We will need it every time Satan reminds us of our **imperfections** - of our countless **sins** against God - of our deepest, darkest **secrets**. Satan doesn't waste any time beating around the bush, he goes straight for the **heart**, seeking to lead us to **despair**. But there's no **need** to despair, because **Jesus** has paid for all our sins in full. The righteousness of Jesus is there to **protect** us, and it's far more valuable and useful than an American Express card - so don't leave home **without** it.

Next come our **shoes**. Now I realize that shoes don't really sound very much like **armor**. Nevertheless, over the years, I remember many people telling me how **important** it is that you have the **right** shoes, that is, shoes which **fit** properly. A **soldier** spends many hours on his feet, and he needs to be sure that his boots won't let him **down**. It is the **Gospel** which provides us with a **solid foundation**, and with **sure-footed** comfort. The shoe of the Gospel fits everyone **perfectly** - so wear it with **pride**.

God has also provided us with the **shield of faith**. The shield of a Roman soldier was **big** - 4 1/2 to 5 feet long - and consequently, it protected the whole **body**. It was also **padded** with leather to extinguish **flaming** arrows. It is interesting that the threat to an individual is no greater with a **flaming** arrow than it is with a **non-flaming** one. Such arrows only become more dangerous when they strike something **flammable** - because then the fire will **spread** - and so will the **panic**. Satan likes to instill **panic** in our lives. He fires those little arrows at us all the time - convincing us to tell a **little** white lie, to harbor a **little** discontent, or to have a **little** too much self-pride. It doesn't seem like much of a **problem** to the individual, but then again, it only takes one little **match** to completely destroy an entire **forest**! Don't let **any** of Satan's arrows reach you. Use the shield of your **faith** for **protection**. Be **firm** in your faith, and **resist** the Devil.

Finally, our armor wouldn't be complete without a **helmet** for our **head**, and a **sword** for our **hand**. The helmet which protects our entire **communication** and **control** system - our **brain** - is the eternal **salvation** earned by Jesus. It's only fitting that Jesus would place **Himself** in charge of defending the **head**, for in reality as Christians, Jesus **is** our Head. And **last** of all, our **sword** is the Word of **God**. It is the only **offensive** weapon we have been given - but, that's because it's the only one we **need**. James said, "*Resist the Devil, and he will flee from you.*" Use God's **Word** against him, as **Jesus** did, and Satan will head for the **hills**. He has **no desire** to taste the cold, sharp **steel** of the double-edged **Word** of God.

So, here we **are** - **standing** on the battlefield, dressed for total **protection**, and **armed** to the teeth with God's **Word**. Our enemies have all **fled**, or have **fallen** in battle. So, what's **next**? That's where the **theme** for today's sermon comes in - **Don't Just Stand There, Do Something!** And what is it that God wants us to **do**? Well for **one** thing, in the final three verses of our text, God tells us to **pray**. Pray on **all** occasions - use all **kinds** of prayers - pray for the **saints** - pray for the spreading of the **Gospel**. That's what **Paul** did, and it's also what he asked the **Ephesians** to do. When Paul wrote this letter to the Ephesians, he was in **prison** - and Paul knew that in just a short time, he would be pleading his case before the Roman **Emperor**. But I find it interesting that instead of asking the Ephesians to pray for his **release** from prison, Paul asked them to pray that he would have the **courage** to boldly **proclaim** the **Gospel** - to the **guards**, to his fellow **prisoners**, and even to the **Emperor** himself.

That's what I would ask of you today - to **pray**. Pray for our **congregation**, and pray for **me**. Pray that we may have healthy **marriages** and **families**. Pray for all our Sunday School **teachers** and **students**. Pray for the members of our Church **Council**, and our church **committees**. Pray for the Lutheran Elementary School and High School **teachers** throughout our **Synod**. Pray for the instructors at our **Colleges** and **Seminary**. Pray for our Home and World **Missionaries**. Pray that **all** of us may boldly proclaim the precious **Gospel** of Jesus Christ. And thank God that through His **Word** and **Sacraments**, He will bring about a rich **harvest** of souls on Judgment Day - people who will **share** with us the eternal joys of heaven. Amen.