

May 31, 2015

The Church

"Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces in heavenly realms. Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything to stand. Stand firm then..." Ephesians 6:10-20



Most of us have heard many a lesson on this passage and most of those lessons have probably focused on the armor of God. Those pieces of armor are certainly important. Paul, who was probably chained to a Roman soldier in full armor even as he writes this, was talking from personal knowledge. He writes, *"Stand firm then with the belt of truth buckled around you waist, with the breast plate of righteousness in place, and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. And pray in the Spirit on all occasions..."*

Having the right equipment is essential in our spiritual battle. But if we are not careful I believe we can completely miss the Apostle's point in this part of his letter. His message up to this point has been about relationships; our relationship with God, our relationships with his church, our relationships in marriage and in the family, and our relationships in the work place. That being the case I am convinced that this portion of Paul's writing is also primarily about relationships.

How? We need to remember the Lord's words in John's gospel, *"By this will all men know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."* If the mark of our discipleship is found in our relationships then destroying those relationships would be Satan's primary target. By breaking our unity in the church, in the marriage, in the family, or in the work place Satan casts doubt on our discipleship and on our Lord.

In our spiritual struggle we need to understand that our enemy is seeking to divide us, to drive wedges between the parts of our relationships, and in doing that to ultimately destroy not only us, but our message. The Apostle's comments are not generic, but specific to our relationships as he addresses the schemes of the devil.

So, we put on the armor of God and take our stand to uphold our relationships with one another. We buckle on the belt of truth. What Paul has written about our need to submit to one another in all relationships is a major part of that truth. We need to take up the righteousness that comes from our Father when he, through the blood of Jesus, purifies our hearts.

We must be ready to take the gospel of peace to others. The confidence we have in our salvation and the protection we have in our faith are essential to that readiness. The Word of God is our foundation in all things, and when we are fully armored, and surrendered to that Word, we can then stand against the enemy who would destroy our relationships, isolate us, and destroy us with his schemes.

If you and I let those schemes ruin a single relationship, we let their author, the devil, win. Every time we let our own selfish desires, fanned and fed but the evil one, overwhelm our love for one another he wins. Every time a relationship is broken and splintered our Lord's reflection in this world is dimmed.

All of our relationships matter and our primary responsibility is, to above all, protect the unity of those relationships. ***"Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace."***

