

Ephesians 6:10-17

I'd like to begin today by talking about **standing**. Standing is **easy**, but it is also very **complex**. It involves the control of many **muscles**, and the use of **balance**. Standing is an ability which we don't **have** at birth - it must be **learned**. When I think of standing as opposed to walking, running, hopping, skipping, or jumping; standing seems pretty **boring**. After all, standing involves very little **action** - yet, it is still **important**. Children must learn to **stand** before they can move on to more **interesting** actions. Those of you who have **toddlers** around the house realize that when children are able to **stand**, it opens the doors to many **other** avenues for them. And that's **good**. After all, there is very little to be **gained** by standing, if that's **all** we are 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 - **Take Your Stand**.

In order to have a clear picture of where you want to **go** and what you want to **do**, it is 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 **abortion** issue? Where do you stand on **property** taxes? Where do you stand on the **welfare** system? Where do you stand on **education**? Where do you **stand**?" That's an **important** question, 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 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 of **evil** in the heavenly realms.*" 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 are 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, does not 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 - a 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 are **beyond** temptation - that you are 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, "*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, with the **belt** of truth buckled around your 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 all the flaming arrows of the evil one. 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 breast plate 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 is **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 is 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 - **Take Your Stand!** Stand up for **Jesus** in the way you live your life. Stand up for **Jesus** in the way you **talk** about Him to others. And when you have **trouble** standing up for Him, remember to **pray**.

That's what God tells us to do in the final three verses of our text. 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 his 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 Parish **Planning** 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.