

Five pieces of armor: Belt of truth. Breastplate of righteousness. Feet of readiness. Shield of faith. Helmet of salvation. Did you notice something? Of all that armor, how many are for defense? All five. What about offense? There's just one piece left: *"Take...the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God."* What's our sword? What's the only weapon God gives us? God's Word. As we face the attacks of Satan and those who follow him, God's people are never to react with violence. Never with weapons. In our struggle with Satan, God's people aren't to resort to gimmicks. We have one weapon to use against the devil: God's Word. If we lose that Word, we've got nothing left. Christians only fight with God's Word.

I want us to think about this for another minute. There was an ancient Greek philosopher named Plato. He lived even before the time of Jesus. This brilliant man didn't like one of the new inventions of his day—paper. Plato didn't like paper. Do you know why? He was convinced that the more people could write on paper, the more foolish they would be, because they wouldn't have to remember anything. So what would Plato think of smart phones and computers...? When was the last time you memorized a phone number? We don't have to remember anything at all! Here's a caution. You have the Bible in your phone. You have the Bible at your home. But do you have God's Word in your heart and on your mind? Be prepared. God's promise is that when you take God's Word and make it part of you, his Word will give you strength to face the devil and his temptations. If we have God's Word, then like the hymn says, "One little Word can fell him."

So who's your greatest enemy? There's a battle raging that's bigger than us. We have an enemy—the devil—who is so much stronger than us. There is only one thing we can do: *"Be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power."* I love the way our verse of the week puts it: *"You, dear children, are from God and have overcome them, because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world."* "The One who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world." The answer to the devil isn't to deny that he exists. It's not to pretend that he's innocent or harmless. That couldn't be further from the truth. Instead, *"be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power."*

I don't know of any greater reason to pray—a lot. That's how Paul finishes: *"And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints."* Pray for everyone. Pray for yourself. Pray for your family. Pray for those you love. But as you pray, reflect in your prayers your understanding of what the stakes are. Don't just pray for health or safety or success at school, because our greatest enemy isn't cancer or criminals or mosquitoes. Pray that God would guard and keep those you love from the devil and his schemes. Pray that when the day of evil comes, you by God's grace may be able to stand your ground. Pray that you may be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Amen.

**Ephesians 6:10-18**  
**Pastor Nathan Nass**

**Pentecost 15**  
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**<sup>10</sup> Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. <sup>11</sup> Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. <sup>12</sup> 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. <sup>13</sup> 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. <sup>14</sup> Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, <sup>15</sup> and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. <sup>16</sup> In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. <sup>17</sup> Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. <sup>18</sup> And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints.**

#### **"Who's Your Greatest Enemy?"**

Who is your greatest enemy? That's probably not something that you like to think about, but who's your greatest enemy? For many Minnesotans this weekend, it's the Pittsburgh Steelers. They're playing the Vikings, so they're the enemy! Who's your greatest enemy? Some of my enemies have showed up again at our house—mosquitoes. Are they back at yours too? That's something we can all agree on: Mosquitoes are the enemy! Who's your greatest enemy? For a lot of us, one great enemy is named Microsoft Windows 7 or 8 or 10 or whatever you have. Why is it so slow? If those things—football teams or mosquitoes or computers—are our greatest enemies, we are incredibly blessed!

I know, of course, that there are bigger enemies. Who's your greatest enemy? Maybe you would say North Korea. Who knows what they're going to do! I heard that nuclear weapons today are 3,000 times more powerful than the atomic bombs in World War II. Can you imagine that? Who's your greatest enemy? Maybe you would say cancer. It's claimed too many loved ones. Maybe it's after you now. Who's your greatest enemy? Sadly, for a lot of people, maybe even for you, it's someone in your own family who has caused you so much pain—maybe a spouse or a parent or a someone you thought was a friend. There are enemies around us—even in Saint Peter, MN.

But none of those is really our greatest enemy. God today wants us to realize the greatest danger in our lives. We're told, *"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."* Our greatest enemy is not North Korea. Not cancer. Did you catch it? It's the devil. Do you realize that every day, the devil and his demons are trying to destroy your faith in Jesus?

I know a lot of people are skeptical about that. The devil...demons, really? In 2017? Notice what the Bible says: *“Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes.”* In some places, the devil’s scheme has been to overpower and scare people into despair and unbelief—that’s what Jesus faced. But here in America he’s found a better scheme: He convinces people that he doesn’t exist. In an interview last week, the leader of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) was asked if there’s a hell. “There may be,” she said, “but I think it’s empty.” Too many people are listening to false teachers like that. Only about 25% of American Christians believe that Satan is real. And the devil is smiling! The devil knows that when people don’t think about hell, when they don’t think about the devil, when they don’t think about sin, whom else won’t they think about? Jesus! Do we really realize who our greatest enemy is?

If God’s Word is true—and we believe it is!—then the devil and his demons are real enemies who have the goal of little by little driving you away from Jesus, so that one day you won’t have faith in Jesus and will be in hell with them. When you have troubles in your marriage, the enemy ultimately isn’t your spouse. Don’t make your spouse the enemy. The enemy is the devil who wants to push you apart so that he can push you both away from God. When there is tension over race or between nations, the enemy isn’t the people who look different. The enemy is the devil, who fills us up with hate so there’s no room for Jesus. When false teachings spread—like the mosque that’s opened here in Saint Peter—it’s not a group of people who are the greatest enemy. It’s the devil, who leads people away from God. God wants us to understand this: *“Our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world.”* The devil will not be content until you and I and our families suffer with him in hell.

Are we protecting our families from our greatest enemy? Here’s one example: Moana. Have you seen it? It’s a Disney movie. Here’s the plot: Moana, the daughter of an island chief in the Pacific, is chosen by the ocean itself to reunite a mystical relic with a goddess. So Moana sets sail in search of Maui, a demigod, and together they run into lots of gods and spirits before saving Moana’s people. What do you think? Sounds normal, right? That’s what we’re used to. A “family-friendly adventure for the ages.” Except, what are our families learning? Demons and gods are bumbling, funny, and harmless, able to be conquered by teenagers on surf boards. Here’s the problem: It’s real. Not Maui and Moana. The devil is real. Demons are real. They are as real as Jesus and his angels. You can’t believe in one without the other. If a robber were to break into your house, you would do something! The devil sneaks into our lives without us noticing. Who’s your greatest enemy?

So what do we do? The apostle Paul tells us, *“Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes.”* What do you use armor for? War! That’s what we need to expect—war. As Paul wrote this, he was sitting in prison. He saw soldiers every day. So he couldn’t help but think of a Christian facing each day like a soldier going into battle. It would be foolish for a soldier to enter a war without armor. God wants you to put on his armor so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes.

So *“stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist...”* As a Roman soldier finished getting dressed, he buckled his belt around his waist. That belt that holds everything together. For us, it keeps our pants up and our shirts tucked in. What’s the belt that holds everything together? Truth. So what does the devil always attack? Truth! He lies. Remember his first temptation to Eve? *“Did God really say...”* (Genesis 3:1). Does he still do that today? Yes! He attacks God’s truth again and again. So Jesus says, *“If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples, then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free”* (John 8:31-32). The truth of the Bible is the belt that holds everything together.

Next, God tells us, *“with the breastplate of righteousness in place...”* The breastplate was often the hardest piece of armor. Why? What does a breastplate cover? Your heart. Those ancient soldiers made sure they were protecting their hearts—like a bullet proof vest today. What is it that protects your heart? *“The breastplate of righteousness...”* There’s this beautiful verse in Romans, *“In the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last”* (Romans 1:17). What is it that gives you peace inside here? It’s believing that you are righteous—forgiven and saved—by faith in Jesus.

Then your feet will be *“fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace.”* Before the hurricanes these past two weeks, what did the officials emphasize over and over again? Be prepared! When the storm strikes, it’s too late. Be prepared! God’s wants your feet to be fitted with readiness. The temptations are going to come. The persecution is going to come. Now’s the time to prepare. How? *“With the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace.”* In every situation, may the peace of God that surpasses understanding guard and keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. This is our armor: God’s truth. God’s righteousness. God’s 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.”* A Roman shield was two pieces of wood glued together and covered with leather. Before battle, soldiers would soak the shields in water to protect them from burning arrows. What’s your shield? Faith. The devil’s greatest attacks are always his accusations. “You aren’t worthy. You are too sinful. God doesn’t love you. God won’t forgive you.” Flaming arrows flying at us every day. What’s the only way not to fall into despair? The shield of faith. I am a Christian! Jesus loves me. Jesus forgives me. Jesus saved me. When the devil shouts, “You’re not good enough!”, hold up your shield: I am a Christian! “God can’t forgive you!” I am a Christian! The shield of faith against every attack.

And to top it off, God gives us the *“helmet of salvation”*—it makes me think of God’s promise in Revelation: *“Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life.”* (Revelation 2:10). How can a soldier already have a helmet of salvation? Because the battle’s already won! There are still daily skirmishes with the devil, but the real battle’s over. Jesus defeated the devil when he died on the cross and rose from the dead. We are forgiven. We are saved. Wear your *“helmet of salvation,”* because it’s not about you and me and our strength. It’s about Jesus. *“Be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power.”*