How to Win the Spiritual Battle

(Put on the full armor of God)

Ephesians 6:10-24

Key Verse: 6:11 “Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes.”

 In the previous chapters the Apostle Paul taught us how to live as mature Christians, as children of light, and as people of God. He urged us to make every effort to make the unity of love with forbearance and humility. We must serve the Lord with one heart, one faith, and one spirit so that we can build up the body of Christ, the church. Paul also taught us to submit to one another out of reverence for Christ. At home a husband and wife must love and respect each other, and at work we must work hard for the glory of God. How wonderful and beautiful we are when we become mature and influential Christians who reveal the glory of God in our lives!

 However, we often experience troubles and confronts obstacles in following the Lord’s teaching and in growing in his image. Our real enemy Satan, who is jealousy of our blessed life, always disturbs our way to maturity and tempts us to destroy our unity. Paul saw all this through God’s point of view. He believed that our struggle is the spiritual battle against our enemy Satan. In today’s passage Paul teaches us how to win the spiritual battle against our enemy and how to live victorious lives every day. May God grant us understanding and wisdom when we hear His words. Amen.

First, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. (10) When the Israelites crossed the Jordan River to conquer the Promised Land, the Lord commanded the general Joshua, saying, “*Be strong and courageous, because you will lead these people to inherit the land I swore to their ancestors to give them. Be strong and very courageous*…” (Jos 1:6,7a) The Lord God encouraged Joshua to be strong and courageous through his trust in God, who would give him victory in the conquest war. In the same way, Paul encouraged the saints in the Ephesian Church to be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power.

 To fight against our enemies, we need power. Where can our power and strength come from? Psalm 121:1,2 says, “*I lift up my eyes to the mountains-where does my help come from? My help comes from the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth*.” Our help and power come from the Lord Jesus. Jesus Christ is the source of power. This does not mean that Jesus is a big and tough guy like a heavy-weight gladiator. His power comes from his meekness and weakness. His power comes from his obedience and humility. His power comes from the grace of salvation. His weakness makes us strong and courageous. Paul understood this very well. He had many things to boast about, but boasted instead of his weaknesses. He suffered greatly from a thorn in his flesh. Three times he pleaded with the Lord to take it away from him. But the Lord said to Paul, “*My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weaknesses*.” (2 Co 12:8,9) Jesus’ grace made Paul strong and enabled him to overcome his weaknesses. Whenever he was in pain from the thorn in his flesh, he remembered Jesus who suffered and died on the cross. Jesus’ suffering and death on the cross made Paul strong and courageous. So, he said, *“I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong*.” (2 Co 12:10)

 The power of Jesus comes from his love. While serving the Lord, Paul went through many hardships, persecutions, sicknesses, and dangers of death. He must have been discouraged and intimidated by all these. He must have been tempted to give up his life of faith and his mission. But, he received strength and power from the love of Christ Jesus. When he remembered the love of Jesus, he overcame all these hardships and sufferings. He confessed in Roman 8:35-37, “*Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?...No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us*.” When I was a young Bible student, I confronted hardships due to my sin problem. Satan accused me and tempted me to deny Jesus and to give up my life of faith. At that time, I became very weak spiritually in self-condemnation. But the love of Christ empowered me to repent and restore my strength to come back to Jesus. When I remembered how Jesus loved me and sacrificed his life for me on the cross, I no longer had fear of anything on this earth. If Jesus loves me, nothing really matters to me such as my weaknesses, mistakes, sinfulness, future, and so on. I became strong again in my weakness and restored my faith through the love of Christ Jesus.

 The power of Jesus comes not only from his weakness, but also from his resurrection. Jesus died for our sins on the cross, and God raised him from the dead and made him conquer the power of sin and death. The resurrection of Christ liberates us from the fear of death and the slavery of sin. In 1 Corinthians 15:31 Paul said, “*I die every day (I face death every day*)” How could Paul face death every day? Where did such power and courage come from? They came from the power of resurrection of Christ Jesus. Paul said, “*Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?” The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ*.” What makes people most fearful? It is death. We are afraid of death. If we are not afraid of death, we are afraid of dying. We are afraid of losing our life, our relationships, our loved ones, our possessions, and many things on this earth when we die. We are afraid of dying a great and slow, painful death. We are afraid of our young children and their security and safety if we die early. But the resurrection of Christ takes away all these fears and anxieties of death. The resurrection of Christ assures our own resurrection when we die. In this way, the resurrection of Christ Jesus enables us to overcome fear of death and power of sin. For the last two weeks, I attended two funeral ceremonies, one in Chicago and the other in St. Louis. People didn’t call it a ‘funeral ceremony’, but a ‘home-coming ceremony.’ They have hope for eternal life of those who had passed away. They also have hope for their own resurrection. In this way, we become strong and courageous when we remember our own resurrection and eternal life in the glorious kingdom of heaven. Amen

Second, put on the full armor of God (11-17). To fight for a spiritual battle, we need to wear the full armor of God. We cannot fight wearing T-shirts and sandals with bare hand. This is good for marathoners, but not for soldiers. Soldiers need full armor which protects their whole body from head to toe. They also need weapons to attack their enemies. Paul drew a picture of the armor from the Roman soldiers who guarded him in prison. Look at verse 11. “***Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes.”*** Here the word ‘stand’ (*stete*) is repeated four times. The word ‘stand’ is a military term for holding on to a position so that soldiers can be ready for next move. Paul used the same word in 1 Corinthians 15:58, ‘*Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, stand firm. Let nothing move you…*”

 The enemy whom we must stand against are not hostile people like ISIS, or other threatening country like North Korea, but the devil. Paul said, “…*so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes.*” Devil, Satan, is our real enemy. Therefore, Paul said in verse 12. “***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***.” In this world, there are many kingdoms, nations, and countries. But in the spiritual world there are only two kingdoms: the kingdom of God and the kingdom of Satan. Satan works against the kingdom of God. In fact, Satan rebelled against God and was expelled to this world. Satan temped the first men in the garden and let them sin against God. Satan continues to tempt us; to destroy us and our relationship with God and with other people. Jesus said that the purpose of Satan is to kill and destroy. Satan is a tempter, liar, and murderer from the beginning.

It is impossible for us to stand against Satan by our own strength. We need the help of God and the power of God. Above all, we need to put on the full armor of God. What is the full armor of God? Look at verses 13-17. “***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, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate 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***.” A belt is the first and most important equipment of armor to wear. A belt tightens our bodies so that we may be ready to fight. A belt holds together other pieces of armor. It also has holes or hoops to hold daggers or swords. What is the truth? Truth is Jesus Christ himself. Jesus said, “*I am the way and the truth and the life*…” (Jn 14:6) Truth is the word of God. In John 17:17 Jesus prayed for his disciples saying, “*Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth.*” Truth is to learn and hold Jesus’ teaching. Jesus said in John 8:31-32, “*If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free*.” Therefore, Jesus Christ himself is truth. We must take the belt of truth, who is Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is the source of our power and wisdom. We must take the belt of Jesus Christ before we fight our enemies.

Second, the breastplate of righteousness. Breastplate protects our heart. We can survive if our legs are injured. We can survive when we lose our arms. But when our hearts are pierced by swords or bullets, we die on the spot. The breastplate of righteousness protects our heart and identity as children of God. We cannot be righteous before God. Righteousness comes from faith in Jesus Christ, who died in our place for our justification. When we take the breastplate of Jesus Christ, we overcome all kinds of Satan’s accusations and condemnations. This is the reason why Paul said, “*The righteous will live by faith*.” (Ro 1:17)

Third, the foot fitted with readiness of the gospel of peace. The boots of a Roman soldier were made with strong and thick leather. The soldiers had no problems with long walk because their boots protected their foot from thorns or sharp stones. The Roman empire built the Roman roads for controlling the world. But God used the Roman roads to deliver the gospel of peace to the whole world. The foot fitted for the gospel of peace will guide our path and give us direction each day. Paul said in Romans 10:15, “*How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!*”

Fourth, a shield of faith. Look at verse 16 again. “***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 shield is a defensive weapon. Shields block all harmful attacks such as arrows, swords, spears, and so on. Abraham was afraid of his enemies who could attack him anytime. The Lord appeared to Abraham and said, “*Do not afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your great reward.*” (Ge 15:1) King David also said, “*The Lord is my strength and my shield; my heart trusts in him, and he helps me*…” (Ps 28:7) Absolute faith in God is our strong shield.

Fifth, a helmet of salvation. Helmets protect our head. Our enemy Satan attacks our head so that we can lose control and finally lose our lives. Taking the helmet of salvation means holding the hope of salvation and the kingdom of God in all situations. As long as we have hope of eternal life in the kingdom of God, Satan’s attack is nothing but threatening, beating in the air, at most striking our heels or butt. Our salvation comes from Jesus Christ, who is the head of our family and our church.

Lastly, a sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. A sword is our main offensive weapon. Paul said that the word of God is our spiritual sword, with which we can attack and pierce the heart of our devil, Satan. So, the Hebrews says, “*For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.*” (He 4:12) Jesus defeated the Satan’s temptation with the word of God. (Mt 4:4, Lk 4:4) This is the reason why we must study the word of God diligently, meditate deeply, memorize thoroughly, and obey them absolutely. The word of God is our only offensive weapon, we must be fully equipped with the words of God in our spiritual battle. Before the Israelites started their battle to conquer the land, the Lord commanded them to obey the law which Moses gave them. They must not turn from it to the right or to the left. The Lord said, “*Keep this Book of the Law always on your lips; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it.”* (Jo 1:8) If someone asks you with very complicated and difficult questions, answer them with the word of God saying, “The Bible says….” I thank God for our book reading fellowship during this summer break under Michael’s leadership. Our students and young adults have been equipped with the word of God through this meeting so that they can answer many difficult questions and protect their faith and the truth of God on campus.

Third, pray in the Spirit on all occasions (18-20) Prayer is like launching missiles in modern war. In the movie, “Hacksaw Ridge” American soldiers fought to conquer an invincible fortress of Japanese soldiers. Before the infantry soldiers advanced toward the Japanese camp, American war planes and artilleries bombed the Japanese camps so that the American soldiers could advance easily without any resistance. Our battle is not against flesh and blood, but against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil. In a word our battle is a spiritual battle against Satan. So, in this spiritual battle prayer is the most powerful weapon to defeat our enemy Satan. Those who pray are the Christian soldiers who shoot missiles. We shoot our missiles of prayer on all occasions to destroy our enemy Satan. When we shoot missiles of prayer, God will destroy our enemies. In the book, “Kneeling Christians”, those whom Satan fears most are not those who do many good things for churches. Satan is not afraid of those who preach the gospel 24/7. The books say that those whom Satan fears most are those who pray. When we pray, we bomb the camp of Satan. In modern war, missiles are more powerful than sword and bullets.

 Paul knew the power of prayer. So, he asked the saints to keep praying for the Lord’s people. He urged them to always pray. Look at verse 18. “***And pray in 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 Lord’s people.***” Paul was a spiritual giant and great servant of God. We know how he fearlessly and diligently preached the gospel during his missionary journeys. He said, “*I can do all this through him who gives me strength*”. (Php 4:13) Still, he humbly asked for prayer support from his coworkers for his ministry. Look at verses 19-20. “***Pray also for me, that whenever I speak, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should***.” Those who pray win the spiritual battle. In Exodus 17 Joshua led his people, the Israelites, to fight against the Amalekites. Moses took his staff and stood on the top of the hill. When Moses held his hands up, the Israelites won. When Moses’ hands grew tired and he lowered his hands down, the Amalekites won. (Ex 17:11) Moses’ prayer determined the result of the battle. Their battle was going on both in the field and on the hilltop. This is the reason why we need to keep praying for our oversea missionaries and brothers and sisters in other places. When we hold up our hands and pray, God will grant them victory. Amen. Remember this, too. When things are going well with us and when we are winning our spiritual battle, remember that there are many prayer supporters and servants of God who are praying for us behind the scenes.

 Paul finishes his long letter with final greetings. (21-24) He sent Tychicus, a faithful servant of Christ, with his letter so that the saints in the church might know how diligently Paul was serving the Lord. Paul blessed them with peace, love, and grace which comes from the Lord Jesus Christ. In conclusion, Paul urges us to be strong in Jesus, and to put on the full armor of God as good Christian soldiers. Above all, Paul wants us to win spiritual battles through prayer. May God help us keep on praying for the Lord’s people and fighting against our enemy Satan so that we may experience one victory after another in our spiritual battle. Amen.