

SERMON: A SOLDIER'S STRATEGIC STANCE (A VETERANS DAY SERMON)

Ephesians 6:11-17

(11) Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. (12) For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. (13) Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. (14) Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness. (15) And your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace; (16) Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. (17) And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

Introduction

Today, we are going to dip out buckets into an old well and bring up some fresh cooling water. If I may be redundant with my synonyms, water from this old well is pure, unpolluted, and uncontaminated. This passage, the old well to which I refer, is familiar to most of us. We have studied it in Sunday School, Bible Class, and yes, in Vacation Bible School. Since a picture is worth a thousand words, many teachers have displayed a poster of a Roman soldier arrayed in full combat armor when explaining this important passage.

There are two key verbs in this passage: stand and put on. Paul saw many Roman soldiers in his lifetime. At this time, he was chained by the wrist to a Roman soldier. The soldier's armor suggested a picture to him. Christians, too, have armor. Item by item Paul took the armor of the Roman soldier and translated it into Christian terms.

Because of the weight of the armor or the heat from marching or other physical activities, some Roman soldiers were tempted to not be fully dressed for combat. It is similar today when seat belts or motor cycle helmets are sometimes not used because

of the physical discomfort or inconvenience. We must be fully equipped at all times. The enemy is trained to look for the vulnerable, unprotected spots.

Paul also knew that Roman soldiers made extensive use of a battle formation called the phalanx. It was essentially a closely packed block of heavy infantrymen with files several ranks deep. It was borrowed from the Greeks. As the enemy moved closer, the front rank of soldiers would move in toward each other and lock shields. In doing so, each soldier protected the soldier on the left. The row behind were closer together, with only about three feet between each soldier. If a soldier on the front row were killed or slipped and fell, the man immediately behind him would step forward and take his place. The fallen soldier whether dead or alive would be trampled, and the phalanx moved. Each soldier had to have a particular stance depending upon his position in the phalanx. A somewhat similar thing in our culture is the stance of football players just before the ball snaps. Again, Paul used this formation to point to spiritual principles. Just as the Roman soldier must stand in formation and must exert every effort to remain afoot, so must Christians stand against the trick, tactics, and strategies of the evil one. Even after the initial volley and the phalanx had disintegrated, the soldier must stand or get trampled.

This passage refers to the battle between good and evil, between truth and falsehood, between right and wrong, between greed and generosity, between duty and desire, and between love and hate. It also tells us how we can personally stand, despite the works of the evil one. We are more than conquerors. We must stand when life disappoints us. Let's exegete this text and see how we can prepare to stand for that which is right.

Exposition

1. Get The Right Equipment.

(Helmet Of Salvation.)

(Breastplate Of Righteousness – Protects Vital Organs.)

(Belt Of Truth - Had Pockets To Hold Food, Water, And Utensils.)

(Shoes With Cleats For Stability.)

(Shield Of Faith.)

(Sword Of The Spirit - The Word Of God - The Only Offensive Weapon.)

(The Word Was The Weapon Jesus Used Against Satan.)

(Matthew 4:1-11.)

2. Be Realistic About the Enemy.

(He Is Vicious And Ruthless.)

(He Hurls Fiery Darts.)

(These Darts Will Both Pierce You And Burn You.)

(He Does Not Adhere To The Ideals Of The Geneva Conventions.)

(He Is Well Organized.)

3. Develop And Display Relentless Endurance.

(Be Ready For Hand-To-Hand Combat.)

(Stand When It Seems Impossible To Stand.)

(If You Fall, You May Get Trampled By Your Own Fellow Soldiers.)

Closing Thoughts

I will close with the lyrics of an old-school hymn:

“Standing On the Promises Of Christ My King,
Through Eternal Ages Let His Praises Ring.
Glory In The Highest, I Will Shout And Sing,
Standing On the Promises Of God.
Standing, Standing,
Standing On the Promises Of God My Savior
Standing, Standing,
I’m Standing On the Promises Of God.”

End Notes

1. The term wrestle is the Greek word, *pale*. It can mean several things depending on the context, but all are similar. It can mean the sport of wrestling in the arena; it can mean to struggle, or to tussle. In this context of battle with soldiers who are dressed in battle armor, it means hand-to-hand combat. It means eyeball-to-eyeball confrontation. This was the last and most vicious stage of a battle. All of the arrows have been shot. All of the javelins have been thrown. The men of the cavalry have dismounted. This lets us know how serious our daily lives can become. Just remember Jesus gives us joy in the midst of sorrow and conflict.

2. One remnant of the Roman phalanx is the protocol of drilling or parading soldiers and marching bands. They lead with the left foot. This gave the Roman soldiers in the phalanx greater thrusting power on his right side to manipulate his sword or hurl his javelin.

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