

## **Ephesians 6:10-23**

Church planting is a spiritual battle

Some church planters are very aware of that, others haven't experienced that so much

Some of our cultures are more inclined to see everything as spiritual, other cultures see everything as material

Some church traditions are put more or less emphasis on spiritual warfare

But whatever our personal experience, whatever our culture, whatever our church tradition – this is reality – church planting is a spiritual battle. This isn't a side topic – sometimes in theological training and there's an optional lecture on spiritual warfare which sounds a bit quirky and fringe. No this is the climax of Paul's great letter on the Church.

Spiritual warfare is not weird – it's not marginal – and it's not individual.

I used to read this passage of Ephesians as about the individual Christian: I need to put on the armour. I need to stand. I need to wield the sword. I need to pray. But as we were preaching through Ephesians just before launching Grace Point Church in Kenya I became convinced that this is actually a message for the church.

You can't see it so easily in English translation but all the imperatives are second person plural – church be strong, church put on, church stand.

Paul has been talking the whole letter about the church. How God has chosen a people and sent his Son to die for a people, and sealed a people and he's uniting Jews and Gentiles in one new humanity in Christ – he's building a great and glorious building in which he will dwell by his Spirit. That's the big thing God is doing – that's God's agenda – and so Satan has the opposite agenda. If God's plan is displaying his glory in the church. What is Satan going to have in his crosshairs? What does he want to destroy?

The Church!

That is the war.

God is bringing all things under Christ – God is building his church<sup>1</sup> – Satan does not want the church to be built – he does not want church growth

God is choosing and saving and calling a people to be a holy, happy people to his praise and glory – Satan wants to bring unholiness and joylessness in the church

God is uniting people - Jew and Gentile in the church – Satan is seeking to sow division in the church - That's why it says in 4:27 – don't give the devil a foothold – because he wants to mess up what God is doing – he wants to go into God's art gallery, up to the Mona Lisa and throw paint at it and take a knife to it – Satan can't stand the Great Artist being glorified in his masterpiece

That's why church planting is a vicious spiritual warfare

But it's an unequal battle.

Twelve points...

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<sup>1</sup> In number not just in maturity (as [Andrew Heard argues from Eph. 4:16](#)).

## 1. We take our stand in Christ

This is the big point.

V10.....

*In the Lord*

This was formative for us as a planting team. We wanted to be a Christ-centred church but we saw from Ephesians 6 that we needed to be not just a Christ-centred church but an In-Christ church. Christ-centred could mean Christ is at the centre and there's some other stuff which is kind of related to Christ but increasingly distantly. But as a church we are in Christ and we want to be very consciously taking our stand In Christ.

Paul is actually saying basically the same thing when he talks about the armour – v11....., v13....

It is the armour of God.

This is not the armour of the Roman soldier.<sup>2</sup> I know it's fun to do the Sunday school thing of getting someone dressed up in Roman armour and go through all the pieces but when you look at the Greek words Paul uses he's not using the technical words you'd use for the equipment of a Roman soldier. He doesn't use the word you'd expect for sword. He doesn't use any word for boots or belt.

Instead he's alluding to the Old Testament. That's the right background. And when you go to the Old Testament we find that the LORD is the shield of his people. He is the Sword of his People. The LORD has a helmet and a breastplate. He has a belt of truth.<sup>3</sup>

We are to put on the Lord. Or in New Testament language, we are to put on Christ.<sup>4</sup>

A Puritan called William Gurnall wrote a book on the armour of God – 1700 pages – didn't read it all but I got this bit – he said, "By armour is meant Christ."

We are to put on Christ. Clothe yourself in Christ. Take your stand in Christ.

That is the gospel – Jesus is the Truth.<sup>5</sup> Jesus is our righteousness.<sup>6</sup> Jesus is our peace.<sup>7</sup> Jesus is our salvation.<sup>8</sup> And we are given him. All this armour – it's not something we create or work up in ourselves. We are given the armour of God himself. He are given Christ and we need to be in him.

Not just individually but as a church.

The LORD is a wall of fire around his people.<sup>9</sup>

This is great security – which is particularly powerful if you're in an Ephesian culture. I was particularly helped on thinking about Ephesians culturally by two guys - [Caleb Kim](#) – Korean lecturer

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<sup>2</sup> See <https://utumishi.net/2017/06/06/what-if-the-armour-of-god-is-not-about-the-roman-soldier/>.

<sup>3</sup> Genesis 15:1 (and in Psalms it says about 20 times that the Lord is their shield); Deut. 33:29; Isaiah 11:15; Isaiah 59:17.

<sup>4</sup> Rom. 13:14; Gal. 3:27.

<sup>5</sup> John 14:6.

<sup>6</sup> Jer. 23:6; 1 Cor. 1:30.

<sup>7</sup> Eph. 2:14.

<sup>8</sup> Luke 2:30.

<sup>9</sup> Zech. 2:5. Cf. Psalm 34:7; 90:1; 125:2.

at African International University Nairobi who's done a lot of work on witchcraft - reformed perspective but he's interviewed witch doctors in Zanzibar and he's very aware of realities on the ground – and Ray Porter – who was with OMF for many years and then started the world mission course at Oak Hill. And those guys pointed out to me that the Ephesians had come out of hard core occultist background of idol worship and witchcraft and spells and evil eyes and curses and ancestors and genies and all of that. Read Acts 19. They knew that the spiritual realm was very real and very powerful and very scary and once they're converted they are still living in Ephesus – still living a few hundred metres from a guy who everyone knows is a really serious witchdoctor and he doesn't like Christians. And they used to have magic amulets and scrolls to protect them from that guy and his hexes but now they've burnt them. And imagine how vulnerable they feel now.

But Paul says to this church – chapter 1 – there is a mighty power that has raised Christ from the dead and seated him above every spiritual power that can be invoked; chapter 2 – you have been raised up with him and seated with him above every spiritual power. And now chapter 6 – you can stand strong in the Lord, you have been given the full armour of God, you are safe. As a church – you are safe. Nothing can touch you. There is no divination against Israel (Numbers 23:23).

*A mighty fortress is our God.*

So don't just be Christ-centred but Christ-wrapped, IN CHRIST. And that is an active, conscious thing. Be Strong. Put On. Take Your Stand. Don't just put it on a vision document, as a church actively appropriate the gospel. Rejoice in it. Boast in it. Preach it. Live it out. That's what the rest of the passage is expanding on.

## 2. We don't fight people

V12.....

Before we get into how we stand and fight – we just need to clarify who we are not fighting.

Our struggle is not against flesh and blood. We need to hear that because so often we'll be tempted to think our problems are human-level problems. We'll be tempted to think people are obstacles we need to overcome. And we'll be tempted to fight people.

When you're planting at church there are disagreements on the team and there are obstacles and there is genuine opposition. There are people who want to stop the church. But people themselves are never the real enemy in this war.

Our struggle is not against the council. Our struggle is not against the difficult neighbour. Our struggle is not against the difficult team member.

Our struggle is not against atheists or progressives or conservatives or LGBT people or even against heretical bishops *in themselves*. It's certainly not someone in our ministry team who disagrees with us. It's never against people in themselves.

We need to remember this. Especially when we're online. Especially if we've got a strong task focus – and anyone who gets in the way we're tempted to mow down. Especially when you feel like you're being personally attacked – and your blood pressure rises and you want to fight fire with fire.

The enemy is the devil.

I sat next to a guy at St Augustine's and he said he'd been really helped by this truth when he had a family member who was being really hostile towards him and he just reminded himself – they are captive to the devil – they are like the female assassins in the Black Widow film (if you've seen that)

who are being controlled through a mind control chip by an evil villain and they might be trying to kill you but you need to free them rather than fight them.

So we're not in battle against people. We're in battle with the spiritual forces – how exactly:

### 3. We are ready with truth

V14a.....

We put on Christ and Christ is the Truth. And that is our great defence against the Devil because the Devil is the father of lies. He is the deceiver. His main form of attack, ever since the Garden of Eden, is to take captive by lies. Lies about what God is like, lies about sin, lies about eternity.

And the church is to be wrapped up in the truth.

Verse 14 says literally: *Stand firm then, having girded your loins with truth*. Girding your loins – meaning get ready for action. Tuck your shirt in and get set on the starting blocks.

The devil is not worried if we learn some theology and store it away on a shelf somewhere.

What worries him is when the church is ready with practical theology. A kind of battle-ready theology, at our finger tips, at the front of our minds, on the tip of our tongues – ready, loaded, with the safety catch off.

As a whole church – it's the ministry of 4:15 – every member speaking the truth in love – so the pastors and evangelists are doing the equipping but every member is a theologian – every member is a speaker to one another of truth.

So that we're not blown about by waves and winds of teaching.

YouTube is full of waves and winds. People can spend hours watching all sorts of crazy stuff and unhelpful stuff – that's non-Christians and Christians – consuming huge amounts of false teaching and lies. And we need whole churches that are thinking, discerning, theologically aware, rooted in the truth of Christ – not that everyone is going to be doing formal theological training (though you'll want to encourage a few in that direction) but everyone has good theological reflexes like

- The answer will be in the Bible
- The answer will have something to do with Jesus

They'll hear things that make much of man and make little of God and they'll think – that smells off.

They'll want to speak of Jesus and spiritual realities of heaven and hell and help each other see everything in life in relation to what is true.

### 4. We live as justified

V14b.....

We put on Christ and Christ is our righteousness. This is the armour of God we are given. We are given an alien righteousness. . It is not naturally ours it is imputed to us.

John Bunyan – miserable sinner and then a miserable moralist and then he was walking across a field and it struck him that his righteousness was Christ. So we can die tonight and know that we will go straight to heaven because we are clothed in the righteousness of Christ. A lot of Christians are not really clear on that.

But there are also Christians who are not sure how that makes any difference to how we live. But it says here that we have this righteousness as our breastplate.

On one hand this righteousness is seated at the right hand of the Father in heaven – but in another sense this righteousness is strapped to us. We stand clothed in it. And that does have an impact on our practical righteousness as a church.<sup>10</sup>

- If as a church we remember that we are all sinners justified only ever 100% by Jesus' righteousness and never by anything that we have done - then that radically humbles us and levels us off and enables us to forgive one another and listen to one another and work together. But if we start to forget we are justified only by Jesus then we start to create hierarchies and levels and competition and there is defensiveness and suspicion and very quickly we are divided and there is all sorts of politics and that is exactly what the Devil wants. He wants to spoil God's unified Church – and we stand firm by having the doctrine of justification very much in place.

Santhosh Thomas put it brilliantly in a sermon last Sunday. We're not theoretical sinners. We're actual sinners and we're not theoretically justified only by faith in Christ Jesus – that really is our only boast. If we can live as a community that really believes that then that produces a beautiful culture.

Maybe we should issue our whole church family with badges – like the baby on-board badges on the underground – justified sinner. How does that change things when we all have that breastplate in place?

#### 5. We are repentant and evangelistic

V15.....

We put on Christ and Christ is our peace.<sup>11</sup> Peace with God and peace with one another – that peace doesn't make us complacent – it energises us.

Verse 15 seems to be smashing together to two passages in Isaiah – chapter 40 and chapter 52 – which are both about the proclaiming of good news of from the mountain tops, good news of a coming Sovereign Saviour Lord, both talk about seeing God's salvation and both talk about a repentant preparation that needs to happen.<sup>12</sup>

I'm really struck by that combination of repentance and proclaiming good news. I wonder how often churches are marked by both together – and I wonder whether if you only get one without the other it'll be a distorted version of repentance and a distorted sort of evangelism.

But biblically they've got to go together. You see that in Isaiah. You see it particularly in Luke and Acts. Receiving Jesus as our Peace ends our being against everyone and curved in on ourselves and miserable and defensive – and turns us outward in honest repentance and joyful evangelism.

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<sup>10</sup> Paul has talked about our practical righteousness at Eph. 4:24; 5:8-9.

<sup>11</sup> Eph. 2:14

<sup>12</sup> Cf. the John the Baptist ministry of repentance – Luke 1:17 cf. 3:4-6.

The devil will want to kill a church's repentance<sup>13</sup> or our evangelism or both. He hates it when people hate their sin and go out with the message of Christ's victory over him. He wants to keep us loving our sin and keeping the good news to ourselves.

But if a church has Christ as our peace – what kind of gatherings will we have? – that are marked by repentance and confession and humility AND by an outward looking evangelistic concern?

## 6. We apply the Faith

V16.....

We put on Christ and that means the Christ of the Bible – the Christ taught by the apostles – the Christ who is not just a name but has form and content – or as they said in the early church – The Faith or the Creed

Literally v16 it says: *take up the shield of The Faith*

Garry Williams saying the creed is spiritual warfare: "If we say the Creed in the context of corporate worship then we do so in the particular presence of the omnipresent God, before the eyes of the watching angels who learn from the church... and in the teeth of Satan and the demons."<sup>14</sup>

This is something we do not just alone but together – because – chapter 3 there is "one body... one faith".

And we take up the shield of the faith specifically to "extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one" – which means we are applying The Faith to each particular incoming error that is coming from the evil one.

You know how people have pointed out that every century has its particular error – whether it's on the Trinity or the natures of Christ or the nature of salvation or hermeneutics or now it seems to be the doctrine of creation and biblical anthropology that's under attack.

The quote that is supposed to be by Luther but probably isn't but is a good quote, "If I profess with loudest voice and clearest exposition every portion of the truth of God except that ... point which the world and the Devil are at that moment attacking, I am not confessing Christ."

And the shield of the Faith is unchanging but we apply it to whatever the incoming flaming arrow is – so our church is somewhere people come in and they hear the sermon and they hear what we're talking about and they don't think – these guys are stuck in the 17<sup>th</sup> century or these guys are all hip and trendy but they're totally unmoored and making it all up on the fly – no – they think these guys are totally solid on something very old but they are applying it to completely contemporary realities I'm living in.

## 7. We glory in our salvation

V17.....

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<sup>13</sup> E.g. he won't want us to take sin seriously, he won't want there to be a culture of confession, he won't want us to preach Ephesians 4-5, he won't want there to be lives actually changing.

<sup>14</sup> [EN, Oct 2020](#).

We put on Christ and Christ is our salvation. Simeon holds Jesus in his arms and says, “My eyes have seen your salvation.”<sup>15</sup> We have Jesus as our salvation. But we need to consciously take up the helmet of salvation.

The helmet or literally the head-wrap is speaking of glory. Putting our salvation on our head is glorying in it – having it as our crown.

It’s a lot like the prayer in chapter 3 – Paul is praying for Christians who have Christ that Christ would dwell in their hearts. It’s a prayer for gospel renewal, gospel appreciation, gospel joy – that they would grasp the height and depth of the love of Christ – that they would glory in it.

And here with our salvation – take it up – glory in it – lift up your head in joyful expectation. As a church. In chapter 3 it was – that they may have power together with all the Lord’s holy people to grasp...

So here – as a church we glory in our salvation - hopefully we do that in our preaching – Piper talks about expository exultation – but perhaps most tangibly we do this in our singing and in our sacraments. Like Israel saved out Egypt and then singing: “The Lord is our strength... he has become our salvation.” It’s good to invest in our singing – that is part of our spiritual warfare. And the sacraments – taking the Lord’s Supper together, witnessing a baptism together – those are glorying in our salvation in a very tangible way.

#### 8. We preach the gospel

V17.....

The Word of God almost certainly means gospel proclamation – often it’s taken as “the Bible” – sword drill (who’s the first to turn to Obadiah) but the Word of God in the New Testament is used either of Jesus or more often preaching the message of Jesus.

It’s called the Word of God because it is God himself speaking. Paul says to the Thessalonians - you received our message not as just the words of men but the Word of God.

That’s why Paul is an ambassador – verse 20 - he doesn’t look a lot like one – but he’s an ambassador of the King – he is a herald - speaking on behalf of the King. The King is making his appeal through him. That’s your job – that’s my job right now. As we gather and preach from the Scriptures the King is addressing us as his subjects.

And the content is - end of verse 19 – the mystery of the gospel. Paul’s shorthand for opening the Scriptures and showing how Christ had to suffer and rise from the dead.

And that is the first mark of a Spirit-filled church. That the sword of the Spirit is being wielded - Christ is being preached from all the Scriptures and God is speaking and people are being cut free from the bonds of Satan as they see the light of the glory of God in the face of Christ in the pages of Scripture.

Satan doesn’t mind a church that enjoys Bible teaching as if it’s an art form. What he doesn’t like is a church that preaches the gospel from the Scriptures every week – to Christians and non-Christians – with the authority of God with urgency and conviction.

#### 9. We undergird everything with prayer

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<sup>15</sup> See also Isaiah 52:10.

V18.....

Plural imperative – pray. This is about praying as a church.

This is the second great mark of a Spirit-filled church – there is preaching in the Spirit and there is *prayer* in the Spirit.

This isn't really another piece of armour, it's what undergirds everything we do as a church. We pray on *all occasions* – in planning evangelism, when preparing to preach, before the service, during the service, after the service, as communicate with one another through the week.

*All kinds* of prayers and requests – as Paul has modelled through his letter - prayers for a spirit of wisdom to know God better; for open eyes to know the hope and inheritance and power; for gospel renewal – that we would grasp the love of Christ; for preachers to preach the gospel boldly and clearly; all kinds of prayers for God's great building project – the church.

We're alert – to needs and answers

We always keep on - persevering in asking the same things – Lord God please give us gospel renewal and gospel advance. Then meet up next week and pray the same things – please give us gospel renewal and gospel advance. And just persevering in that, week after week, because that is what we need.

For *all the saints* – meaning not just our local church but all those in every place who call on the name of the Lord Jesus. We pray for other churches, we have that weekly reality check of praying for brothers and sisters in places where it's far harder to be a Christian. Which flows onto the next point:

10. We partner with others

V21-22...

It's another part of being outward-looking. There is a danger a church can turn inward and forget there are other churches and other gospel workers. Devil would love that – because he's on a mission to discourage and divide

One of the big points of Ephesians has been to say: You're part of something much much bigger than your local church. You're part of this great, glorious, Jew-Gentile family.

Partnerships with those outside our plant - praying for brothers planting in other places, meeting up as clusters, meeting here, hearing from Scott and how things are in Wembley – are an expression of our unity as brothers and they are really encouraging – because we find our brothers throughout the world are going through the same trials and they are standing firm in the same Lord.<sup>16</sup>

Last two points very briefly:

11. We receive

V23.....

Blessing – which I might have said before – familiar in some cultures but not all of our cultures – not praying or preaching – its declaring over someone what is true with the desire that as those words are heard – along with them will come the very things that are being declared.

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<sup>16</sup> 1 Pet. 5:9.

And the point to notice is it's all top down blessing to be received – peace, love, faith, grace – are all coming down to you – to be received. You need these things as a church and they are coming to you – peace for a unified church, love for a holy church, faith for an expectant church, grace for a repentant, evangelistic, growing church.

From God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ – top down.

You are a receiving church. That's our posture. Dependence and thankfulness and giving glory to God for any good thing that happens among us because it's not us and our strategies – it's all gift.

And piece of spiritual warfare:

12. We love Jesus

V24.....

Great end to a letter. It's all about Jesus. We want to be a church that stands firm in Christ and *loves* Christ. I've been struck by what a great theme this is in the New Testament.<sup>17</sup> "Do you love me? Do you love me?" He first loves us but then we fight the spiritual battle by loving him. The devil's big aim is to seduce hearts away from a sincere devotion to Christ,<sup>18</sup> to pour cold water on our love for Him.

Let's be a church that talks a lot about Jesus. I suspect a lot of those in our churches find it easier to talk about 'the Bible' or 'the Christian life' or even about 'the gospel' but somehow it's quite hard to have a conversation about Jesus and how we're doing with him, what we're loving about him at the moment. It's like there's a block that we choke on. That is spiritual warfare. The devil doesn't want us to talk about Jesus.

More even than we talk about 'the gospel' let's make much of Jesus.

ALMIGHTY God, give us grace that we may cast away the works of darkness, and put upon us the armour of light, now in the time of this mortal life, in which your Son Jesus Christ came to visit us in great humility; that in the last day, when he shall come again in his glorious Majesty, to judge both the living and the dead, we may rise to the life immortal, through him who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, now and forever. Amen.

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<sup>17</sup> <https://utumishi.net/2017/01/18/i-love-thee-lord-jesus/>.

<sup>18</sup> <https://utumishicourse.blogspot.com/2021/02/the-great-contest-of-heaven-and-earth.html>.