

## Living For Christ Is Like A Battle

**Introduction:** Living for Christ in this world is like a battle. There are battles inside as we struggle with our own weaknesses and there are battles on the outside as we sometimes feel we are swimming against the tide of public opinion and fashion.

In the passage before us, St Paul teaches us what is important in this great battle. Quite appropriately he uses metaphors such as a soldier's armour to illustrate what we need.

Verses 10 and 11 introduce us to these themes.

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armour of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes.

This reference to the devil reminds us that there are evil forces behind so much that is horrible about this world. Paul calls them, 'rulers and authorities, powers of this dark world and spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.' We ignore these forces at our peril.

So, how can we fight *against* evil and *for* the good?

If we seek to do it in our own strength we will fail. We need the strength which God supplies and that is why we need to pray. Without prayer we are like an ancient soldier without armour or sword. That is why Paul concludes this passage at verse 18 by saying, '... pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests.' Prayer is the only way we can be strong in the Lord and know his mighty power.

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When we come to a passage such as this we must not get too side tracked by the illustration and miss the main points he wants to drive home.

Yes, he talks about the belt, the breastplate, the marching shoes, the helmet, the shield and the sword, but the key to this passage is to understand what they point to.

First, we need *truth*, verse 17, 'stand firm then; with the belt of truth buckled around your waste.' This could mean 'truth' as opposed to false ideas. If Paul means this, he is saying that our knowledge of God's word is an indispensable aid in our struggle against evil.

However he may mean, 'truthfulness'. That is to say we must seek to be people of integrity and honesty. Without truthfulness as a part of our armoury we are hypocrites. Whichever meaning was in Paul's mind, both meanings are absolutely true.

Verse 17 continues, '... with the breastplate of righteousness in place ...'. This could also have a double meaning. It could mean that in our battle against evil, we should endeavor to live righteous lives. How can we fight against unrighteousness if our lives are not consistent with what we say?

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On the other hand it could be referring to our standing before God as forgiven sinners. Paul describes this as being justified by faith, or made righteous before God because of Christ. If he means that then he is saying that before we can hope to stand against the evil of this world we have to be in a right relationship with God ourselves.

As with the word, 'truth', both ideas are true; right standing before God and right conduct are essential in our struggle against evil.

In verse 15 Paul makes a similar point; '... and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace.' How can we be ready to take on the forces of evil? It is only by accepting the gospel as the means of our salvation that we can be fit to stand against the devil's schemes and point others to God.

Again, related to this theme, verses 16 and 17 use the defensive parts of a Roman soldier's armoury, the helmet and the shield, to refer to what will help us withstand attacks from the dark side. Paul sees 'faith' as working like a shield and the reality of our salvation being like a helmet.

Concerning 'faith' as a shield, there could be a double meaning here also. Is it *our faith* that protects us like a shield or is it *the faith* (that is the things we believe) that will protect us? Whatever was in Paul's mind, it is fundamentally true that *both* meanings point to the protection we need to live for Christ and stand up for him in a hostile environment.

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If our faith in God's faithfulness is weak we may well succumb to pressure or give up. If our knowledge of God's word and his wonderful promises of help are unknown to us, we may struggle needlessly in difficult times, not knowing that help is at hand.

The solution to this problem is to read God's word, learn as much as we can about God's promises and then when we are faced with opposition or doubts, we will have the access to God's protective power like a shield and a helmet used to protect ancient soldiers in battle.

This all comes together in the last item of a soldier's equipment mentioned here; verse 17, 'take ... the sword of the Spirit which is the word of God.' The sword was both a defensive and an offensive weapon. Already Paul has mentioned words such as 'truth', 'the gospel' and 'faith' pointing to something outside of ourselves which can help us; that something is the word of God, described here as, 'a sword.'

When talking to unbelievers about our faith, we have no stronger weapon than the word itself, which Paul elsewhere said was 'the power of God unto salvation.' The writer to the letter to the Hebrews in 4:12 said: For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two edged sword, penetrating to dividing soul and spirit.'

## **Living For Christ Is Like A Battle**

As the Collect for the Second Sunday in Advent says:

Blessed Lord, you have caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning: Grant us to hear them, read, mark and inwardly digest them, that encouraged and supported by your holy word, we may embrace and always hold fast the joyful hope of everlasting life, which you have given us in our Saviour Jesus Christ.

It is by keeping watch for attacks, either from temptation within or by opposition from outside, and by keeping our eye on our saviour Jesus Christ, that, when the evil day comes, we will be able to stand our ground and after we have done everything, to stand.