

**MINISTRY BY MAIL**  
**Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship**  
[www.lutheranlccf.org](http://www.lutheranlccf.org)  
**Seventeenth Sunday After Trinity, September 22, 2024**

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)

Hymns: 402, 17:1, 54, 437, 40.

Lessons: Psalm 35, Romans 13:8-14, Luke 11:14-26.

Sermon Text: Ephesians 6:10-20.

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

No soldier would dream of going into battle without being fully prepared. You have seen pictures of soldiers dressed for battle. Some of you have even been in that situation. Listen as God tells us how we can be prepared for the battles we fight every day.

***“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.”***

When we listen to the familiar pictures from the catechism, it may seem so simple: We fight against the devil, the world, and our own sinful flesh. That simple picture is explained more clearly here. We’re not just fighting against another human being, like one boxer fighting against another in a roped-in boxing ring. The enemies of the Christian are to be found everywhere.

In addition to fighting our own sinful flesh, we are fighting against the rulers and authorities and powers of this world – the world of sin and darkness. We are fighting spiritual forces. As you heard last Sunday, the devil is a real being. The Apostle Peter warns us to ***“Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings.”*** (1 Peter 5:8-9 NIV) To resist him and to overcome him, we must

**“PUT ON THE FULL ARMOR OF GOD”**

- 1. God’s armor includes truth, righteousness, and the Gospel.**
- 2. God provides a shield of faith which allows us to deflect the flaming arrows of Satan.**

We know whom we are fighting – but the devil takes many outward appearances, many guises and disguises. He does not take the appearance of a comic-book devil. He takes many false appearances and assumed identities, to obscure the true character of what he really is. And so we don’t always recognize him.

He is a ferocious roaring lion trying to destroy people. He is not all-powerful, but he does have power. He is not simply some kind of funny human being with horns and wearing red clothes and carrying a spear the way he is pictured – even by little children – at the end of October. He is not just some character in a movie that makes people feel creepy or even laugh at him. He is a real spiritual being, with the goal of our eternal destruction. He knows he is damned eternally to unending punishment, and wants to get his revenge against God by taking everyone he can with him to eternal damnation. And everyone who does not believe in Jesus Christ as the only Savior from sin is the one of whom Scripture says ***“He that believeth not shall be damned.”*** (Mark 16:16, KJV)

God prepares us for battle against our enemies. God is the one who makes us fully equipped, fully armed, fully prepared. This is a battle we must fight every day, for there is not a single day that we are isolated from evil. How does God prepare us? With a complete set of defensive weapons and an extremely powerful offensive weapon, an all powerful weapon. ***“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.”*** Some days are more evil

than others. Some days we feel the tempter's power more than others. But every day is a day we must fight, and using God's weapons we will be able to stand.

Paul uses a picture familiar to his readers in Ephesus. He writes about the way a soldier would be dressed. ***“Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist.”*** This refers to the way a soldier or even a laborer in the first-century world would draw his long, loose-fitting garment up and tuck it into his belt so that he might run or work unhindered by the garment, which might otherwise cause him to stumble and be hurt or ultimately to be killed in battle.

Truth is the wide, strong belt that girds on other pieces of our armor, and is mentioned first. The plea of the Christian is the words of Jesus with which we often begin a sermon: ***“Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth.”*** (John 17:17 KJV)

Then the breastplate is mentioned, that which protects the heart and the chest. ***“Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place.”***

The righteousness of Christ, imputed and given to us by God, is a breastplate against the arrows and the attacks of Satan. Jesus' perfection, his sinlessness is his righteousness, which has been implanted in us by the work of the Holy Spirit creating and sustaining faith. It protects and strengthens the heart against all those who attack us.

Then Paul looks to the feet and legs. We are to stand with our ***“feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace.”*** You can't stand your ground or move forward on rugged paths, or in a fight wearing flimsy flip-flops on your feet. You need sturdy footwear, and well-built, carefully fastened sandals were common in the climate of Ephesus. That footwear comes from the gospel of peace.

We are reminded of the picture in Psalm 119 of the child of God running in the way of the Gospel. ***“I run in the path of your commands, for you have set my heart free.”*** (Psalm 119:32, NIV)

Jesus has walked in the paths we must take. He was tempted in every way, just as we are, and yet he fought and overcame the devil and all sin. These steps and the paths we take must come from a clear knowledge of the Word of God. If we don't learn from God's Law in Scripture the way, the path God wants us to take, we will be like lost soldiers, unsure of which direction to turn to fight the enemy.

***“In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one.”*** Faith is our ultimate protection at a time of temptation. Faith is like a shield, a defense in every way. We read in the letter to the Hebrew Christians ***“Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.”*** (Hebrews 11:1–2, NIV)

Faith relies on unseen objects, receiving Christ and the benefits of redemption, and in this way deriving grace and protection from him.

***“Flaming arrows”*** or “fiery darts” were arrows covered with pitch or tar and set on fire. They were then shot toward soldiers. Faith in a Christian's life produces a shielding effect that effectively deflects and extinguishes Satan's flaming arrows.

And, of course, ***“the evil one”*** is the devil, the wicked one. The arrows and darts Satan shoots at us include all the temptations by which the soul is set on fire by the powers of hell,

There are often times when we have terrifying thoughts about what Satan is doing in our lives. He is tempting us every moment of every day. Faith applies the word of God and the grace of Christ to our lives, and extinguishes the arrows of temptation.

Our final weapon of defense is a helmet. A soldier who had lost his helmet was in danger of receiving severe head wounds which would at the very least disorient him and render him ineffective, and at the worst, kill him instantly. Salvation must be our helmet. A good hope of salvation, a Scriptural expectation of victory, will purify the soul, and keep it from being defiled by Satan. Following up on this picture, we realize that a person who has no faith or has lost his faith has no assurance of salvation and cannot be bold in resisting Satan, in strengthening other believers, or in sharing Christ with unbelievers.

God provides everything we need for our defense against the devil, the world, and our own sinful flesh. God provides all this so that we may stand firm ***“when the day of evil comes”***. And when is not a day of evil! We are surrounded by days of evil. In this world we will have nothing but days of evil when Satan is trying to lead us

astray to our damnation. . Even if we were to live totally solitary lives, like a hermit, we would be engulfed by evil from our sinful flesh within us.

God provides these weapons so that ***“you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand.”*** These aren’t to be sort of last-ditch weapons or strategies. They are to be the things we do every day. God wants us to be able to stand up against Satan and all his allies. When we have used God’s armor and weapons we can and will stand against Satan and the world.

And God provides the weapon which will destroy the devil: ***“the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.”*** Especially as we celebrate the Festival of the Reformation at the end of October we will look at ***“the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.”*** That is the weapon, the only weapon with which we can overcome Satan, who daily seeks our overthrow.

God’s armor and weapon allows us to ***“stand firm”***. We can’t use human logic and wisdom. The devil and the world excel at using tools like wisdom and logic against God’s children.

And we must remember that we don’t stand alone in our struggle, our life-or-death fight against Satan and all his allies. Even though we may be a tiny group compared to the enemies of God, we know that there are others in his world fighting the same battle we are. We pray that we may be made aware of more of God’s people so that we may share the truth and purity of God’s Word.

The Apostle closes this section with the words, the encouragement, the admonition to ***“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.”***

Don’t be afraid to ask your fellow confessors of Christ for their prayers. Don’t be afraid to pray for all Christians, whether you know them or not.

And, of course, we pray for all mankind, that people everywhere may come to faith in Jesus Christ. We know that faith comes from hearing the Word of God. Faith grows and is strengthened by hearing and reading the Word of God.

Paul especially asked that fellow believers pray for him. ***“Pray also for me, that whenever I open my mouth, 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.”***

Paul knew his sinfulness. He knew some of his own weaknesses. He wanted every word he spoke to be words of God’s truth. He wanted to reveal the Gospel of Jesus Christ because he knew that is the only way to eternal life.

So as we are gathered together here today, we are praying that all of us be preserved unto eternal life in heaven. We pray for faithfulness first for today and then for tomorrow. We are asking for spiritual gifts for today, not just for “someday in the future”. It is easy to think about spiritual gifts as “long-term”. Yes, we want them for all our lives. But God gives them to us daily through his Word.

And so today our prayer is for all of us. We fight against the devil, against the world, and against our own sinful flesh. Jesus Christ won the ultimate victory, and gave us the weapons we need to win this victory in our lives. May God give us the grace, strength, and wisdom to use all of his weapons to his glory and to our eternal salvation. Amen.