
Armor of God Bible Study

Ephesians 6:10-20. 4 sessions of about 45 minutes, or one longer session. For small groups and personal study.

The armor of God is Paul's picture, in Ephesians 6:10-20, of how Christians stand firm against the devil. It has six pieces: the belt of truth, the breastplate of righteousness, feet ready with the gospel of peace, the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. Then Paul calls for prayer at all times. The armor comes from God, and the goal is to stand.

READ TOGETHER: EPHESIANS 6:10-20

¹⁰ Finally, be strong in the Lord and in His mighty power. ¹¹ Put on the full armor of God, so that you can make your stand against the devil's schemes. ¹² For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this world's darkness, and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. ¹³ Therefore take up the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you will be able to stand your ground, and having done everything, to stand. ¹⁴ Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness arrayed, ¹⁵ and with your feet fitted with the readiness of the gospel of peace. ¹⁶ In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. ¹⁷ And take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. ¹⁸ Pray in the Spirit at all times, with every kind of prayer and petition. To this end, stay alert with all perseverance in your prayers for all the saints. ¹⁹ Pray also for me, that whenever I open my mouth, words may be given me so that I will boldly make known the mystery of the gospel, ²⁰ for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may proclaim it fearlessly, as I should.

Scripture from the Berean Standard Bible (BSB), public domain.

BACKGROUND

Where the passage sits in Ephesians

Ephesians spends three chapters on what God has done in Christ, then three on how the church should live in response. The armor passage is the last instruction before Paul signs off. Tyndale's study notes sum up the moment: believers "are warned to take on God's armor to protect themselves from the devil (6:10-20)."

Nothing in it is new to the letter. Christ is already seated "far above all rule and authority" (1:21), and Paul uses the same pair of words for the powers in 6:12. The church has been told to "put on the new self" (4:24) and not to give the devil a foothold (4:27). Truth, righteousness, peace, faith and salvation have all come up before. The armor gathers them into one picture.

A prisoner describing a soldier

Paul calls himself "an ambassador in chains" (6:20). Acts 28:16 says that in Rome he lived with a soldier guarding him, and Easton's Bible Dictionary notes he was chained to one. Tyndale's notes say the letter may come from prison in Rome or in Ephesus. Either way, armed soldiers were part of his days, and his readers in the Roman province of Asia knew the gear on sight.

The armor belongs to God first

Paul's list is not only Roman. Several pieces come from Isaiah, where God himself, or the king he promised, wears them. Commentators widely note these echoes. They explain the name: it is "the armor of God" (6:11) because God gives it, and because it is the armor God wears.

He put on righteousness like a breastplate, and the helmet of salvation on His head; He put on garments of vengeance and wrapped Himself in a cloak of zeal. (Isaiah 59:17)

Righteousness will be the belt around His hips, and faithfulness the sash around His waist. (Isaiah 11:5)

How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, who proclaim peace, who bring good tidings, who proclaim salvation, who say to Zion, "Your God reigns!" (Isaiah 52:7)

Standing, not charging

The verb Paul repeats is "stand". Make your stand (6:11), stand your ground and, having done everything, stand (6:13), stand firm (6:14). Tyndale's notes point out that every item except the short sword is defensive: "There is no picture here of Christians attacking the devil."

The commands are also plural. Paul is writing to a church, so the armor is put on together, by people who pray for each other (6:18).

THE ARMOR, PIECE BY PIECE

Six pieces, each joined to something God gives. Prayer follows, and Paul treats it as the way the whole set is worn.

Belt of truth (6:14)

A soldier's belt held the rest of his gear in place. Ephesians has already called the gospel "the word of truth" (1:13) and told the church to speak the truth in love (4:15) and to put off falsehood (4:25). Some read the belt as the truth of the gospel, others as a life of honesty. In this letter the two belong together.

Breastplate of righteousness (6:14)

The breastplate covered the chest. In Isaiah 59:17 the Lord himself wears righteousness this way. Some read it as the right standing with God that believers receive in Christ, others as upright living. Ephesians 4:24 holds both: the new self is "created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness."

Feet ready with the gospel of peace (6:15)

Good footing is what lets a soldier hold his ground. Isaiah 52:7 praises the feet of those who bring good news and proclaim peace. In Ephesians that peace is first something Christ made: "He Himself is our peace" (2:14), between people and God, and between Jews and Gentiles. Readiness may mean being prepared to share that news, or being steady because of it. Either reading fits the picture of feet planted firmly.

Shield of faith (6:16)

Smith's Bible Dictionary describes the ordinary shield as wood covered with leather, and notes that in Scripture the shield usually stands for God's protection (Psalm 3:3). Faith here is trust in God, and it puts out "all the flaming arrows of the evil one." Paul does not say what the arrows are. Temptation, accusation and fear are common suggestions.

Helmet of salvation (6:17)

The helmet guarded the head, and Isaiah 59:17 supplies this piece too. Ephesians speaks of salvation as already given: "by grace you have been saved" (2:8). In 1 Thessalonians 5:8 Paul calls the helmet "our hope of salvation." Salvation protects as something received and as something still to come.

Sword of the Spirit (6:17)

Paul defines the sword himself: it is the word of God, and it belongs to the Spirit. Easton's Bible Dictionary lists Hebrews 4:12 and Revelation 1:16 as other places Scripture uses the picture. When Jesus was tempted he answered each time with Scripture (Matthew 4:1-11), and many readers see the sword at work there. In 6:19-20 Paul asks for words to proclaim the gospel boldly, so speaking the message is part of it too.

Prayer at all times (6:18-20)

Paul does not list prayer as a piece of armor. In Greek, verse 18 carries on the sentence that begins with "Stand firm" in verse 14, so most readers take prayer as the way the whole armor is worn. Paul asks for prayer at all times, in the Spirit, for all the saints, and for himself.

SESSION 1 OF 4

Be strong in the Lord

Read Ephesians 6:10-13. See who the struggle is with, and where the strength comes from.
Also read: Ephesians 1:19-22; Ephesians 3:16; Ephesians 4:27.

Observe: what does the text say?

1. Count how many times verses 10 to 13 say "stand" or "stand your ground". What does that tell you about the goal?
2. Verse 12 names four opponents. List them. Who is ruled out?

Interpret: what did it mean then?

3. Read Ephesians 1:19-22. Where is Christ seated, and what is he above? How does that change the way you read the rulers and authorities of 6:12?
4. Paul says to be strong "in the Lord and in His mighty power." Compare 3:16. Where does the strength come from?
5. If the struggle is "not against flesh and blood", how should Christians treat the people who oppose them?

Apply: what does it mean for us?

6. Where are you most tempted to treat a person as the enemy?
7. Ephesians 4:27 warns against giving the devil a foothold. Where could one form in your life this week, and what is one step to close it?

SESSION 2 OF 4

Truth, righteousness and peace

Read Ephesians 6:14-15. See that the armor is God's own, and what the first three pieces are made of. Also read: Isaiah 59:17; Isaiah 11:5; Isaiah 52:7; Ephesians 2:14-17; Ephesians 4:24-25.

Observe: what does the text say?

1. List the first three pieces and what Paul joins each one to.
2. Read Isaiah 59:17 and Isaiah 11:5. Who wears this armor first?

Interpret: what did it mean then?

3. What difference does it make that believers wear armor God wears himself?
4. Is the belt of truth the truth of the gospel, personal honesty, or both? Look at 4:15 and 4:25 before you answer.
5. Ephesians 2:14 says Christ "is our peace." How does that shape what "the gospel of peace" means in 6:15?

Apply: what does it mean for us?

6. Which of the three feels thinnest in your life right now: truth, righteousness or peace?
7. Who do you know who needs to hear the gospel of peace? What would being ready look like with them?

SESSION 3 OF 4

Faith, salvation and the word

Read Ephesians 6:16-17. See how trust in God, the gift of salvation and Scripture protect a believer. Also read: Ephesians 2:8; 1 Thessalonians 5:8; Hebrews 4:12; Matthew 4:1-11.

Observe: what does the text say?

1. What does the shield do, according to verse 16? What does Paul say the sword is?
2. Read Matthew 4:1-11. How does Jesus answer each temptation?

Interpret: what did it mean then?

3. Paul does not say what the flaming arrows are. From the rest of Ephesians, what might they include?
4. How does salvation work as a helmet? Compare Ephesians 2:8 with 1 Thessalonians 5:8.
5. Why might the sword belong to the Spirit rather than to the soldier?

Apply: what does it mean for us?

6. What passage of Scripture do you want ready the next time doubt or fear comes?
7. Choose one verse to learn by heart as a group before the next session.

SESSION 4 OF 4

Pray at all times

Read Ephesians 6:18-20. See why the passage ends in prayer, and pray together.
Also read: Colossians 4:2-4; Acts 28:16-20.

Observe: what does the text say?

1. Find every "all" and "every" in verse 18. How far is Paul stretching prayer?
2. What does Paul ask the church to pray for him? What does he not ask for?

Interpret: what did it mean then?

3. Why might Paul end a passage about armor with prayer rather than a seventh weapon?
4. Paul was a prisoner, yet he calls himself an ambassador. What does that say about how he saw his situation?

Apply: what does it mean for us?

5. Which believers could you pray for by name this week?
6. Spend the last ten minutes praying for each other, using what you studied in the first three sessions.

ONE-SESSION PATH

The whole passage in one evening

Read all of Ephesians 6:10-20. About 45 to 60 minutes.

Observe: what does the text say?

1. Count how many times the passage says "stand" or "stand your ground". What does that tell you about the goal?
2. Verse 12 names four opponents. List them. Who is ruled out?
3. List the six pieces and what Paul joins each one to.

Interpret: what did it mean then?

4. Read Isaiah 59:17. Who wears this armor first, and what difference does that make?
5. Read Ephesians 1:19-22. How does Christ's place above every power change the way you read 6:12?
6. Why might Paul end with prayer rather than a seventh weapon?

Apply: what does it mean for us?

7. Which piece feels thinnest in your life right now, and what would it look like to take it up this week?
8. Close by praying for each other, and for one person who needs to hear the gospel of peace.

FOR THE LEADER

- Read the whole passage aloud at the start of every session. It is short, and hearing it again shows how the pieces belong together.
- The "you" in these verses is plural. Paul is talking to a church. Keep pointing the group to what they do together, especially in session 4.
- Do not spend the session on Roman equipment. A few sentences of background are enough. Paul chose each piece for what he ties it to.
- Some people in your group may come from churches that talked about the devil all the time, and some from churches that never did. Both can make this passage hard. Keep coming back to verse 10: the strength is the Lord's, and Christ is already seated above every power (1:20-21).
- If someone is frightened by verse 12, point to the posture. Paul asks the church to stand, not to go looking for enemies.
- If someone asks what praying "in the Spirit" means, Christians answer in different ways. The common ground is prayer that relies on the Spirit's help (Romans 8:26-27). It does not need settling to finish the study.

- If someone shares something that needs more than a group discussion, follow up with them privately and involve your pastor.

WHERE CHRISTIANS READ IT DIFFERENTLY

Is the armor what God gives, or how we live?

Some readers take the pieces mainly as gifts: Christ's righteousness counted to the believer, the truth of the gospel, salvation already received. Others take them mainly as a way of life: honesty, upright conduct, steady trust. Ephesians holds both. The armor is God's, and believers are told to put it on. Most commentators keep the two together.

Who are the rulers and authorities?

Most readers take verse 12 as real spiritual beings opposed to God, which is what "spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms" says. Some also see those powers at work through human systems and institutions. The passage gives no names, ranks or territories, and a study is wise not to add them.

Is putting on the armor a daily prayer?

Many Christians pray through the pieces each morning, and that can be a good way to remember them. But the passage gives no ritual and no set form of words, and nothing in it suggests the armor works by being named. Paul describes what is true of believers in Christ and calls them to live in it, with prayer that depends on God. Putting on the armor looks like trusting God, telling the truth, living rightly and praying.

Is the Christian life mainly a battle?

Paul gives this picture a few verses at the end of a letter that is mostly about grace, unity and ordinary relationships. Tyndale's notes put it plainly: "Though the devil's opposition is to be taken seriously, Paul's view of the Christian life does not center on spiritual warfare in an aggressive or offensive sense." The passage asks the church to stay alert. It does not ask them to be preoccupied with the devil.

SOURCES

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Tyndale Open Study Notes, Ephesians. Tyndale House Publishers. CC BY-SA 4.0. Background on Ephesians and its spiritual war theme, quoted with attribution.

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Smith's Bible Dictionary (1863): Shield. William Smith. Public domain. How ancient shields were made, and the shield as a picture of God's protection.

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