

“Armor of Grace”

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Providence United Methodist Church

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The text for today is taken from the 6th chapter of Ephesians, chapter 6, verses 10 through 20. I’m reading from the *Common English Bible*. Finally, be strengthened by the Lord and his powerful strength. Put on God’s armor so that you can make a stand against the tricks of the devil. We aren’t fighting against human enemies but against rulers, authorities, forces of cosmic darkness, and spiritual powers of evil in the heavens.

Therefore, pick up the full armor of God so that you can stand your ground on the evil day and after you have done everything possible to still stand. So stand with the belt of truth around your waist, justice as your breastplate, and put shoes on your feet so that you are ready to spread the good news of peace. Above all, carry the shield of faith so that you can extinguish the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is God’s word. Offer prayers and petitions in the Spirit all the time. Stay alert by hanging in there and praying for all believers.

As for me, pray that when I open my mouth, I’ll get a message that confidently makes this secret plan of the gospel known. I’m an ambassador in chains for the sake of the gospel. Pray so that the Lord will give me the confidence to say what I have to say. This is God’s word for God’s people. Thanks be to God.

Christ says he has provided us with all we need to stand by faith in all situations. He’s given us “. . . every spiritual blessing that comes from heaven” which is provision that comes to us because of the love of Christ. We have

forgiveness for our failures because of this grace that overflows in our lives. We have grace to obey and grace to receive. All we need is a willing heart.

You may have heard the saying, God's call or command is God's equipping. When God commands us to carry out Christ's will from the heart, God provides the power to achieve it. So we're already operating from a position of victory. Christ is our greatest resource for success during any battle—sometimes the battle rages within ourselves and other times it rages around us. With either scenario, our aim is to believe we're equipped with what God provides to withstand the battle.

As long as we're covered in this flesh, there'll always be opposition between the old nature and the new. The old nature wants what it wants, it's selfish, but the new nature given to us by God is full of love and wants to please our Heavenly Father. We need spiritual armor to deal with the world and how it can influence us. Our good intentions just aren't strong enough. We need spiritual armor to battle offensively; that's why it's important to know God's word. The enemy and the ruler of this world is constantly trying to pull us back into his control. Our adversary, Satan, wants to control us and dominate, but if we receive what's already been provided, we're equipped to respond in a way that brings success.

In the passage that was read, the apostle Paul uses militaristic images. Looking at the different pieces of armor, there's only one piece that's used offensively—the sword of the spirit—the word of God; this is the piece of armor I want to focus on this morning.

There's no doubt in our minds that we're dealing with evil forces in the world. The author tells us "We aren't fighting against human enemies but against rulers, authorities, forces of cosmic darkness, and spiritual powers of evil in the heavens." We're not fighting against people. Our enemies aren't people. We've got to see beyond people. People will persecute us, accuse us, lie and cheat to us, and

hurt us, but our real enemy lurks in dark places in the unseen world; it's not flesh and blood that is our enemy. People are involved, but they're not the real problem. Satan is the enemy.

God gives us the sword of the spirit—the word of God—this is our offensive weapon. Jesus Christ is the living word, the word that became flesh and he's the sword of the Spirit. Jesus spoke the word in the desert when he was being tempted by the devil. So we speak the word to the enemy, our adversary, the devil, the prince of the power of the air, the accuser of the brethren.

We speak the word of God to ourselves for we can be our own worst enemy. The sword of the Spirit is predominantly something we turn into ourselves. We battle the temptations of our flesh with the word of God. The book of Hebrews tells us that “The word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing until it divides soul from spirit, joints from marrow; it is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.”

A physical sword may cut, but God's word reaches deep down within our inner most being and accomplishes his will when we let it. God's word knows the condition of our heart, because it judges our thoughts and intentions. If our hearts are open to receive, we're exposed for who we are. But more importantly, for who we can become in Christ as we allow the word to change us. Nothing remains hidden, everything is laid bare, and we accept our vulnerability or we allow our hearts to stay callous, hard, and self-righteous.

When we're tempted to lash out at someone and allow anger to rear its ugly head, we battle the temptation by reminding ourselves what love is. Love—it disarms the enemy within, and this spiritual sword becomes something we turn into ourselves. Our aim is to be transformed; it starts within our heart.

The more you use a *physical sword* the duller it becomes. The more you use the sword of the Spirit or God's word the sharper it becomes, but we must *take* the sword by faith and use it. We must pick it up and use it. A physical sword kills and hurts others, but the spiritual sword is healing and gives life.

In the text for today, verse 10 begins by saying to "be strong." Any kind of strength in life doesn't happen overnight. The verb strong is in present tense and suggests an ongoing action. Additionally, it's *not* something we gather up out of our own resources or by our own talents. To "be strong" has connotations of "being made strong;" it's a continual process. We rely on God for our strength, but we also pursue a knowledge of God to become strong.

The strong Christian cooperates with God to be *made strong*, but it's God's grace that provides the power. We slay our fleshly passion, our impatience, our anger, our greed, and our desire for control. We hinder the work of Satan, we push back the enemy, and we read and speak God's word.

The enemy has a plan for our lives; it's crafty and it's far too difficult for us to handle on our own. The grace God pours down on us daily as we pray and read the Bible is one of our greatest resources to resist the enemy—one who seeks to pull us back into that kingdom of darkness. That's why we have the armor. So put it on, pick it up, and take that armor so that you're able to withstand the enemy. Be made strong and put on this armor of grace by knowing and saying the word of God.

Let's pray. Lord of Hosts, who has already won our victory, help us pick this sword of the spirit up and use it. The good news is that you provide what's needed and equip in this life to accomplish what you've called us to become. You are a merciful and faithful God, and we're never alone. You're always by our side praying for us. You sympathize with our weaknesses because you've been tested in

every way. Whatever we encounter, remind us that you are our greatest resource in a time of need. Amen.