

## You're in the Army Now 8-7-05

### Ephesians 6:10-17 (NIV)

<sup>10</sup> Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power <sup>11</sup> Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes <sup>12</sup> 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. <sup>13</sup> 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. <sup>14</sup> Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, <sup>15</sup> and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. <sup>16</sup> In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. <sup>17</sup> Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

The church has been focusing on the things we have in common with other churches and denominations for the sake of unity. But occasionally, as the under-shepherd of this flock, I feel it is my God given duty to issue a warning about popular but unscriptural beliefs. Elders are admonished to adhere to sound teaching and refute those who oppose it. (Titus 1:9) We are told to reprove, rebuke, and exhort whether it is convenient or not. (2 Timothy 4:2)

There are two very different gospels proclaimed in the world today. One seems to be gaining a wider audience and is often more readily welcomed. It is no wonder, for it is the good news that Jesus has come to solve all your difficulties and heal all your afflictions. It encourages you to dream big dreams and know that you have a great destiny to fulfill. A bigger house and a better car are just waiting for those who will believe. This gospel says if you will believe all things are possible for you. Just visualize it and it will come to pass. Verses from Scripture are quoted that seem to back up these statements. (Mark 9:23) The love and blessing of our heavenly Father is emphasized. What can possibly be wrong with that? How could anyone deny that God wants the best for you?

As I listened to some of these preachers, I noticed a very careful balancing act. While never quite saying God is there to serve you, it sure sounds like that is why He exists. I guess it depends on our understanding of what is best for us. Nothing is really said about denying self to take up the cross. (Luke 9:23) Trusting, believing, worshipping, are all mentioned, but not dying to self to serve Him. (Galatians 2:20)

The real Gospel is the one proclaimed by Jesus and the Apostles. That is the one that teaches that salvation is more than saying the magic words, "Jesus come into my heart." (Matthew 10:32-33 James 2:14) The Biblical Gospel teaches the Lordship of Jesus Christ. (Romans 10:9) It begins with the death of the old selfish ways and teaches us to be a slave of righteousness. (Romans 6:18) Jesus declared that if you try and save your life, you will lose it. (Matthew 16:25) Last week we saw that He promised to those who left all 100 times as much in this life and eternal life. (Matthew 19:29) We could read that with the mindset of either gospel. Does that mean the house I forsook for

**Commented [notes1]:** <sup>9</sup> He must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it.  
Titus 1:9 (NIV)

**Commented [notes2]:** <sup>2</sup> preach the message, be persistent whether it is convenient or inconvenient, reprove, rebuke, exhort with complete patience and teaching.  
2 Timothy 4:2 (NET)

**Commented [notes3]:** <sup>23</sup> said unto him, If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth.  
Mark 9:23 (KJV)

**Commented [notes4]:** <sup>23</sup> Then he said to them all: "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.  
Luke 9:23 (NIV)

**Commented [notes5]:** <sup>20</sup> I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.  
Galatians 2:20 (NIV)

**Commented [notes6]:** <sup>32</sup> "Whoever acknowledges me before men, I will also acknowledge him before my Father in heaven. <sup>33</sup> But whoever disowns me before men, I will disown him before my Father in heaven.  
Matthew 10:32-33 (NIV)

**Commented [notes7]:** <sup>14</sup> What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him?  
James 2:14 (NIV)

**Commented [notes8]:** <sup>9</sup> That if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.  
Romans 10:9 (NIV)

**Commented [notes9]:** <sup>18</sup> You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness.  
Romans 6:18 (NIV)

**Commented [notes10]:** <sup>25</sup> For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it.  
Matthew 16:25 (NIV)

**Commented [notes11]:** <sup>29</sup> And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or fields for my sake will receive a hundred times as much and will inherit eternal life.  
Matthew 19:29 (NIV)

God is going to bring me a house 100 times as valuable? Or does that mean that the homes of my brothers and sisters in Christ are available to me? We have only to look at the lives of the men Jesus spoke that to in order to see the correct interpretation. Nearly every one died as a martyr. I never read about one of their mansions. I did read about their mansions in glory. (John 14:2)

The call to follow Jesus is a call to turn our hearts and minds away from this world and to fix them on Jesus. (Colossians 3:1-2) If an affliction helps us do that then do you really want to be freed from it? The psalmist said it was good that he was afflicted so that he could learn God's statutes. (Psalm 119:71) The other gospel says that no affliction is God's will. I wonder then why Jesus walked by all those sick folks at the pool of Bethesda to heal that one man. (John 5:3-6) I wonder why He told Paul his thorn in the flesh caused him to rely on the power of God?

Paul wrote, <sup>7</sup> *To keep me from becoming conceited because of these surpassingly great revelations, there was given me a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me.* <sup>8</sup> *Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me.* <sup>9</sup> *But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me.* <sup>10</sup> *That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.* 2 Corinthians 12:7-10 (NIV) His thorn was a weakness in his physical body. Many speculate that it was an affliction of the eyes as he wrote in large letters. Some ministers would like to change that last verse to something like this, "That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in strength, in applause, in ease, in acceptance, when everything is going great, for when things are terrific, I'm strong."

We must understand that God is more concerned about your eternal good than your temporal happiness! Thank Him for that. If illness or poverty or troubles will draw you closer to Him, then that is best for your life, and you should thank Him for it. Why do you think the Scripture says that in everything we should give thanks? (1 Thessalonians 5:18) Paul said that whether he had a lot or a little he learned the secret of contentment. (Philippians 4:12) The other gospel says to have faith for more things and for health so you can become content. Paul preached that Jesus in us is more than enough to find contentment in every situation life throws at us. He called us "overcomers" in the midst of persecution, famine, nakedness, dangers and sword. Note that he said IN not OUT of. (Romans 8:35-37)

When you came to Christ you joined the Lord's army. Our brother Stephen signed up years ago to be a Ranger. When he did, he was under no illusions that life would be easy or enjoyable. At no time could he say, "I really don't like this. It is harder than I thought. I thought the pay and the food were going to be better, and besides, I never really wanted to fight." I'm afraid some of you didn't realize that when you became a Christian you became a soldier. Before you became a soldier you were a captive of the enemy of your soul. (2 Timothy 2:26) You were defeated. But when you opened your heart to the Captain of the Hosts, you entered the ranks of the redeemed soldiers of God. (2 Timothy 2:3-4) You can stand up in your trench and say, "I really don't like dying to self." But when you do, the enemy aims at your head.

**Commented [notes12]:** <sup>2</sup> In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. John 14:2 (KJV)

**Commented [notes13]:** <sup>1</sup> Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. <sup>2</sup> Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. Colossians 3:1-2 (NIV)

**Commented [notes14]:** <sup>71</sup> It is good for me that I have been afflicted; that I might learn thy statutes. Psalms 119:71 (KJV)

**Commented [notes15]:** <sup>3</sup> Here a great number of disabled people used to lie--the blind, the lame, the paralyzed. <sup>5</sup> One who was there had been an invalid for thirty-eight years. <sup>6</sup> When Jesus saw him lying there and learned that he had been in this condition for a long time, he asked him, "Do you want to get well?" John 5:3-6 (NIV)

**Commented [notes16]:** <sup>18</sup> give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. 1 Thessalonians 5:18 (NIV)

**Commented [notes17]:** <sup>12</sup> I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. Philippians 4:12 (NIV)

**Commented [notes18]:** <sup>35</sup> Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?

<sup>36</sup> As it is written: "For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered." <sup>37</sup> No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. Romans 8:35-37 (NIV)

**Commented [notes19]:** <sup>26</sup> and that they will come to their senses and escape from the trap of the devil, who has taken them captive to do his will. 2 Timothy 2:26 (NIV)

**Commented [notes20]:** <sup>3</sup> Endure hardship with us like a good soldier of Christ Jesus. <sup>4</sup> No one serving as a soldier gets involved in civilian affairs--he wants to please his commanding officer. 2 Timothy 2:3-4 (NIV)

When they called Stephen back up, he had nine months left on his contract. He couldn't say, "But I like civilian life!" When you joined the Lord's Army, the contract is for life. The battle will end one day in total victory. There is an exit strategy. You can read it in the last few pages of the book. Our only other option is to be the enemy's slave for eternity. Stephen has to finish out his tour of service and so do you.

Did you know that one of the common names for God in the Old Testament is the Lord of Hosts (Jehovah Tsaba)? (1 Samuel 1:3a) Some translators render that as the Lord of the armies of Heaven. As our opening text reads, our *battle is not against flesh and blood but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realm*. You better get suited up! We are in the Lord of Hosts army fighting along side heavenly angels.

Do you think Stephen would walk into a hot zone without his body armor and helmet? No way! The Apostle Paul is telling us that this world is a hot zone. The Prince of this world is Satan. (John 14:30) We are taking back his territory, and Paul is saying you better suit up! You might think it is too much work to suit up, but then God allows a reminder to come your way. Zing! A few near misses and you reach for that helmet of salvation.

Do you see the difference between these two gospels I'm referring to? One says that life is all about you and what you want even if it does say it ever so subtly. The other says the battle is raging, but you are a soldier on the winning side. In spite of the rough conditions, or even because of them, give it your whole life. It is a cause worth dying for. There are eternal rewards. One says riches are God's plan for you. The other says they are a minefield; walk carefully through them. (1 Timothy 6:9) One says "blessing" means physical health and wealth. The other says that we must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God. (Acts 14:22)

I am asking you to please discern when you hear these preachers and teachers that make you feel God exists to bless you. Hold their teaching up alongside the life of Jesus. He is our ultimate example. Having nothing, He possessed all things. (2 Corinthians 6:10) He was despised by men but chosen and precious to God. (1 Peter 2:4) He came not to live His life, but to give His life. His family rejected Him throughout most of His ministry. He gave His life a ransom for many. (Matthew 20:28) He was a failure in the world's eyes but the Victor over sin and death. He was healed, but only after a brutal and torturous death. Now put what those preachers say alongside the life of Jesus and discern the truth. If it was good enough for Jesus, it is good enough for us. Jesus own words to His disciples were this, "If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you!" (John 15:20)

Stephen can tell you that when he reports for duty that he can expect to receive orders. If he has whims and desires, he has to set them aside. He is expected to obey. The Apostle Paul echoes those conditions for the soldier in the spiritual army of heaven. No man who wars entangles himself in the affairs of this life, so that he can please Him who called him to be a soldier. (2 Timothy 2:4) Jesus said, "the worries of this life, the deceitfulness of wealth and the desires for other things come in and choke the word, making it unfruitful." Mark 4:19 (NIV)

**Commented [notes21]:** <sup>3</sup> And this man went up out of his city yearly to worship and to sacrifice unto the LORD of hosts in Shiloh.  
1 Samuel 1:3a (KJV)

**Commented [notes22]:** <sup>30</sup> I will not speak with you much longer, for the prince of this world is coming. He has no hold on me,  
John 14:30 (NIV)

**Commented [notes23]:** <sup>9</sup> People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction.  
1 Timothy 6:9 (NIV)

**Commented [notes24]:** <sup>22</sup> strengthening the disciples and encouraging them to remain true to the faith. "We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God," they said.  
Acts 14:22 (NIV)

**Commented [notes25]:** <sup>10</sup> sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; poor, yet making many rich; having nothing, and yet possessing everything.  
2 Corinthians 6:10 (NIV)

**Commented [notes26]:** <sup>4</sup> As you come to him, the living Stone--rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to him--  
1 Peter 2:4 (NIV)

**Commented [notes27]:** <sup>28</sup> just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."  
Matthew 20:28 (NIV)

**Commented [notes28]:** <sup>20</sup> Remember the words I spoke to you: 'No servant is greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also. If they obeyed my teaching, they will obey yours also.  
John 15:20 (NIV)

**Commented [notes29]:** <sup>4</sup> No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life; that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier.  
2 Timothy 2:4 (KJV)

Do you think that in the Lord's army, our Commander expects less than the commander Stephen will be under? He deserves our utmost attention and obedience and sacrifice, especially since the battle has to do with the setting of other captives free like we were set free, and keeping us free to the end. We are freed to serve on the side of truth, not just do our own thing.

The Biblical picture is clear. We are in a war! You can choose to reject it, but you do so at your own peril. Once you've realized the danger you are in, you will want to take heed to Paul's admonition to suit up. He tells us to put on the whole armor so we can stand against the Devil's schemes. The Devil is scheming to hit you in your weakest area. (2 Corinthians 2:11) You probably know what that is for you personally. The Roman soldiers had set of gear that together made up all they needed to fight. It was designed to cover each weak area. Each soldier was trained to hold a square meter of ground. If he could hold his ground the enemy would be defeated or give up. The ground you have taken with the help of God is a life in Christ. You are expected to have this armor on to hold that ground.

<sup>14</sup> Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist... Speak the truth in love. (Ephesians 4:15) Christianity is about truth, eternal truth. We know that truth is more powerful than a lie, even if people don't want to hear it. We know the word of God is truth. We know the truth sets us free. (John 8:32)

...with the breastplate of righteousness in place... We hold our lives to a high standard. Right living is our only choice. God said that we are to be holy as He is holy. (1 Peter 1:15-16) We know that only is possible through the blood of Christ. Once we receive it, we are then obligated to live it by the power of the Holy Spirit.

<sup>15</sup> and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. We are prepared to go wherever we are sent to share the Good News; peace with God is possible. The world is hungry to know how they can be free from guilt. Are your feet fitted with a readiness to share with them the answers? (1 Peter 3:15)

<sup>16</sup> In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. We are constantly under attack. Most of these attacks are aimed at our head, our thought life. When doubts and discouragement come our way, we lift our shield of faith. We have soaked it in the water of the word. Those pitch coated flaming arrows are extinguished by our shield of faith. Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God. (Romans 10:17)

<sup>17</sup> Take the helmet of salvation... Cover your thoughts with the reality that Christ has redeemed you. You are a child of the King. This was the one thing the enemy threw at Jesus, "If you are the Son of God..." (Matthew 4:3) Don't you think if he tried to get Jesus to doubt that he will try to get you to doubt that you are God's child? Strap your helmet on tight!

... and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. We have one offensive weapon, but it is the ultimate weapon. Our Lord demonstrated how it is used in Matthew 4. We let the Spirit direct us to which verse at what time and that helps us

**Commented [notes30]:** <sup>11</sup> in order that Satan might not outwit us. For we are not unaware of his schemes. 2 Corinthians 2:11 (NIV)

**Commented [notes31]:** <sup>15</sup> Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. Ephesians 4:15 (NIV)

**Commented [notes32]:** <sup>32</sup> Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." John 8:32 (NIV)

**Commented [notes33]:** <sup>15</sup> But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; <sup>16</sup> for it is written: "Be holy, because I am holy." 1 Peter 1:15-16 (NIV)

**Commented [notes34]:** <sup>15</sup> But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, 1 Peter 3:15 (NIV)

**Commented [notes35]:** <sup>17</sup> Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ. Romans 10:17 (NIV)

**Commented [notes36]:** <sup>3</sup> The tempter came to him and said, "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread." Matthew 4:3 (NIV)

wield it with accuracy. The author of Hebrews says it is alive and powerful and very sharp. (Hebrews 4:12)

One of my favorite verses that I carry with me into battle is this, "*The Lord is with me like a mighty warrior.*" (Jeremiah 20:11) Whenever the battle gets too hot and looks like I will be overwhelmed, I remind myself that God and one are always a majority. If I am serving at His command, He is with me like a mighty warrior. A thousand will fall at my left and ten thousand at my right but it will not come near me. (Psalm 91:7) As long as He is with me, I need not worry or fear. He will see me through whatever comes. This is the most encouraging thing we can hear; He is with us!

He told Isaac, "I will be with you." (Genesis 26:3) When Jacob was afraid, he heard the same expression. (Genesis 31:3) When Moses was sent to deliver Israel, God's reassurance was "I will be with you." (Exodus 3:12) When Joshua had to face the giants in that new land he needed to hear "I will be with you." (Joshua 1:5) Before Gideon faced that vast army of Midianites, what did he need to hear? You guessed it, "I will be with you." (Judges 6:16) Seven times in the Old Testament God told His people not to fear because, "*I am with you.*" Before you go into battle against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms you need to hear the same thing, so listen. The very last thing that Jesus said as He ascended into heaven was this, "*Surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.*" Matthew 28:20 (NIV) He is with us! Whatever you face in life you can deal with, because He is with you. You can't do it on your own, but He is with you! He can do it. He can see you through. He is with you like a mighty warrior!

Wait a minute, doesn't that sound like that other gospel. Here is the difference, if I am a soldier with no rights of my own, here only to serve my Commander, I can count on His presence, power and guidance. The victory I envision is not physical wealth or health, but staying faithful unto death in His service. The reward I seek is a crown of life, not a big house or better job or success in the eyes of man. I live to hear, "Well done, good and faithful servant. Enter into the joy of your Lord." (Matthew 25:21) I live for Him who died for me and lives in me to enable me.

You can see how easy it is to slip from one gospel to the other. Here is another guide you can use. Does it require me to die to myself? If it doesn't, look out. Warning flags should go up. If it does, it is probably of God. Test it against the life of Jesus and the Word of God.

We are going to pray together for Stephen this morning, but as we do, I would like you also to consider praying this prayer for one another, realizing we are all in a great battle. We are all soldiers fighting for our Commander and His Kingdom. Let us begin by saying Psalm 121 over Stephen and then a few of us will pray for Him.

**Commented [notes37]:** <sup>12</sup> For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.  
Hebrews 4:12 (NIV)

**Commented [notes38]:** <sup>11</sup> But the LORD is with me like a mighty warrior; so my persecutors will stumble and not prevail. They will fail and be thoroughly disgraced; their dishonor will never be forgotten.  
Jeremiah 91:11 (NIV)

**Commented [notes39]:** <sup>7</sup> A thousand shall fall at thy side, and ten thousand at thy right hand; but it shall not come nigh thee.  
Psalms 91:7 (KJV)

**Commented [notes40]:** <sup>3</sup> Stay in this land for a while, and I will be with you and will bless you. For to you and your descendants I will give all these lands and will confirm the oath I swore to your father Abraham.  
Genesis 26:3 (NIV)

**Commented [notes41]:** <sup>3</sup> Then the LORD said to Jacob, "Go back to the land of your fathers and to your relatives, and I will be with you."  
Genesis 31:3 (NIV)

**Commented [notes42]:** <sup>12</sup> And God said, "I will be with you. And this will be the sign to you that it is I who have sent you: When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you [  
Exodus 3:12 (NIV)

**Commented [notes43]:** <sup>5</sup> No one will be able to stand up against you all the days of your life. As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will never leave you nor forsake you.  
Joshua 1:5 (NIV)

**Commented [notes44]:** <sup>16</sup> The LORD answered, "I will be with you, and you will strike down all the Midianites together."  
Judges 6:16 (NIV)

**Commented [notes45]:** <sup>21</sup> lord said unto him, Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord.  
Matthew 25:21 (KJV)