

# THE GOSPEL PROJECT – CHRONOLOGICAL LETTERS TO GOD’S PEOPLE THE GOD WHO CHANGES US *Once Weak – Now Strong*

As Christians, we face three enemies - the world, the flesh, and the devil. The **world** refers to the system around us that is opposed to God. The **flesh** is our old nature that we inherited from Adam, a nature that is opposed to God and can do nothing spiritual to please Him. The third enemy, the **devil** aka Satan is the prince of the power of the air as described by Paul in *Ephesians 2:2*. All three of these enemies can be defeated by God’s children when we stayed dressed in the armor of God.

When Adam and Eve ate of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, the first thing they noticed about themselves was that they were naked and exposed before God their Creator. In order to cover their nakedness, the Loving Father shed the blood of an animal to provide for their covering. That covering was perishable. Then, centuries later on the cross at Calvary the Son of God shed His own blood for the purpose of covering our sin so that our sin and nakedness will not be exposed before a Holy God. Along with that covering that provides for our salvation, we have been provided the necessary covering to fight in the Lord’s army against the world, the flesh, and the devil.

If you have been a Christian for any length of time, you most likely have realized there is a spiritual battle going on – a battle that our enemy, Satan, is waging to capture souls, destroy the joy of God’s children and to hinder and/or prevent our work for the Lord.

In order to successfully engage in this ongoing spiritual warfare, we must understand the tremendous nature and importance of the battle we are fighting. We must be **strengthened to stand against the enemy**.

*Read Ephesians 6:10-12 (ESV)* <sup>10</sup> Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. <sup>11</sup> Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. <sup>12</sup> For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.

Modern society is striving to do everything humanly possible to protect against physical danger. It has been made law that we must wear seatbelts in a moving car and new cars are equipped with air bags. We must walk through scanners at the airport and other public buildings. There are cameras everywhere. The safety list is endless.

In this letter to God’s people we find Paul telling us to *be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might*. This is the way that we are protected from spiritual danger not by our own strength but in HIS STRENGTH! Just as the police and military have guns, bullet proof vests, grenades and whatever for physical protection, the

Lord's army is provided with the armor of God. It is our responsibility to put on His armor and be armed for spiritual combat.

Irish pastor David Legge points out, "Sadly today the church seems to have sanitized itself. It has gone a long way to popularize its message; it no longer sees itself as an army but an institution; it has replaced the fight with fun; it has substituted entertainment for artillery; it has substituted comfort for the conflict. It would have to be said that those on the sidelines, the observers of our war, perhaps see us as clowns in a circus rather than gladiators in an amphitheatre fighting for the cause of God today in our world.

The word Satan is the transliteration of the Hebrew word for adversary. The word Devil comes from the Greek word for slanderer. Satan was originally a high angelic creature but he rebelled against God even before man was created

You cannot fight a battle if you do not recognize the enemy. To deny the existence of Satan and his demons is to reject God's Word. Beginning in Genesis, God's Word speaks of Satan. You can run references and look up the numerous passages for yourself. I will give you one that comes with a warning. **1 Peter 5:8-9 (ESV)** <sup>8</sup> *Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.* <sup>9</sup> *Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world.*

Be advised that the devil works in areas where we least expect to find him. A spiritual battle is being fought wherever a pastor is genuinely proclaiming the Word of God, wherever a church is standing for the Word of God, whenever a group or individual goes out for ministry in the name of the Lord. That is the place the devil wants to destroy, and that is the place of the spiritual battle. As followers of Christ, we are the Lord's army placed directly in the midst of this spiritual battle.

### **Strengthened to stand firm in spiritual battle.**

**Read Ephesians 6:13 (ESV)** <sup>13</sup> *Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm.*

Paul used the garments of a physical soldier of Rome to help his readers visualize the attire needed to battle spiritual warfare. Paul would have been familiar with the garb of the Roman soldier if for no other reason than the number of times he was incarcerated in prison. Let's examine separately each piece of the armor of God.

**Read Ephesians 6:14 (ESV)** <sup>14</sup> *Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness,*

**(1) BELT OF TRUTH** – It is appropriate that the belt of truth is the first item on the armor list. **John 14:6 (ESV)** <sup>6</sup> *Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. Satan likes to attack us with the idea that Jesus being the only way to heaven is too narrow. 'There are so many religions who is to say what is right– we're all going to get to heaven to somehow.'* This is the

devil's lie. Without being anchored in the Truth we become prime targets for attack. **Ephesians 4:14 (ESV)** <sup>14</sup> *so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes.*

**(2) BREASTPLATE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS** – The breastplate protects our hearts. We do not have any righteousness of our own. **Isaiah 64:6 (ESV)** <sup>6</sup> *We have all become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment. We all fade like a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away.* This sad state of our life is changed when we receive the righteousness of God. **Ephesians 4:24 (ESV)** <sup>24</sup> *and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.* As we wear Christ's breastplate of righteousness, we begin to develop a purity of heart that translates into actions. Be aware that we need to be careful of our breastplate. The ways to abuse it are countless: carelessness, disobedience, tolerating sin, refusing to forgive to name a few. Keep in mind that some as innocuous as earthly concerns can crowd out our time for an intimate relationship with God. This minimizes our breastplate's power to protect us.

**Read Ephesians 6:15 (ESV)** <sup>15</sup> *and, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace.*

**(3) SHOES OF PEACE** – In warfare, you need to be able to run. You sure don't want to be wearing flip flops or high heels, or even cowboy boots. To engage in spiritual warfare, you would need to be fitted in your best running shoes. **Isaiah 52:7 (ESV)** <sup>7</sup> *How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, who publishes peace, who brings good news of happiness, who publishes salvation, who says to Zion, "Your God reigns."* We need to be ready and prepared to share the gospel with those who do not know and those who need encouragement. Also wearing the shoes of peace will help us stand firm in our own faith. **1 Corinthians 16:13 (ESV)** <sup>13</sup> *Be watchful, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong.*

**Read Ephesians 6:16 (ESV)** <sup>16</sup> *In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one;*

**(4) SHIELD OF FAITH** – The Roman shield was as large as a door and would cover the warrior entirely. Such a shield was not just defensive but could also be used offensively to push opponents and was especially helpful to protect against arrows launched from the walls of cities they were attacking. Shields, often made of wood and then covered in hide, when wet, could extinguish flaming arrows. Focusing on God's faithfulness can block accusations, doubts, and temptations. **Romans 5:2 (ESV)** <sup>2</sup> *Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God.* The shield of faith is the piece of armor that will cause our suffering not to faze us. We can keep on keeping on. When we stand behind the shield of faith, the things that Satan uses to cause us to drop out of the Lord's army become tools in the hands of the living God. **1 John 5:4 (ESV)** <sup>4</sup> *For everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith.*

**Read Ephesians 6:17 (ESV)** <sup>17</sup> *and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God,*

**(5) HELMET OF SALVATION** – The helmet of salvation protects our thoughts. The assurance of our own salvation is our defense against anything the enemy throws at us. Jesus said in *Matthew 10:28 (ESV)*<sup>28</sup> *And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell.* We must hold fast to the helmet. Satan wants to attack our mind – our feelings. Because of the power of the cross, Satan has no hold on us. Satan knows this but he also knows that when we fail to live like **we know it**, we become an easy prey to attack.

**(6) SWORD OF THE SPIRIT** – This is the only place in the Bible that the sword of the Spirit is mentioned. This is a weapon that belongs to the Holy Spirit. When Jesus was tempted by Satan in the wilderness, Christ used the sword of the Spirit and defeated the enemy. Recall how Jesus said three times, *“It is written.”* Satan quoted scripture too. But, remember this - Satan misquotes the Word of God and that is the reason we need to KNOW it for ourselves. People as Satan’s emissaries will try to prove their points by the Bible. When we know the Word ourselves, we won’t be deceived. This is the reason the soldier in the Lord’s army needs proper training.

Wiersbe makes the wonderful point that the whole armor of God is a picture of Jesus - Truth, Righteousness, Peace, Faithful, Salvation, and the Word of God. This is why Paul said in *Romans 13:14 (ESV)*<sup>14</sup> *But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.*

**Strengthened to prevail in prayer.**

*Read Ephesians 6:18-20 (ESV)*<sup>18</sup> *praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints,*<sup>19</sup> *and also for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel,*<sup>20</sup> *for which I am an ambassador in chains, that I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak.*

Wiersbe explains that prayer is the energy that enables the Christian soldier to wear the armor and handle the sword. When our pastor preached recently on the LORD is My Banner – Jehovah-Nissi, he spoke of when Amalek attacked Israel. Moses went to the mountaintop to pray while Joshua used the sword down in the valley. It took Moses' prayer of intercession on the mountain with Hur and Aaron joining together to lift the arms of Moses to strengthen him in prayer and it took those arms lifted in prayer to strengthen Joshua's use of the sword in the valley. We cannot fight the battle in our own power, no matter how strong or talented we may think we are. Prayer is the power for victory. I wish these three verses were in one separate lesson but they are not. So, I will just say that we need to pray always, pray all kinds of prayers, pray in the Spirit, stay alert in our prayers, keep on praying and pray for all of the saints.

The mystery of the gospel has been revealed in Christ and that revelation is the revelation of salvation for those who turn to Christ in faith. Paul in prison called himself an ambassador in chains. Even as Paul sat in physical chains, he stood firm in the spiritual realm. He had on the armor of God and he used it. And the results of the battle he waged through the power of the Holy Spirit are still touching souls today. Let’s use the armor of God we have been provided so whether we are praying on the mountaintop or fighting in the valley, we are prepared and ready to do the Lord’s work at a moment’s notice!