

# The Fight of Faith

by George Duncan

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*This sermon emphasizes the importance of being prepared for spiritual warfare by putting on the whole armor of God and relying on God's faithfulness and salvation.*

**Duration:** 41:47

**Scripture:** Matthew 6:33, 2 Corinthians 10:4, Ephesians 6:10, Ephesians 6:12-13, James 4:7, 1 Peter 5:8

**Topics:** "Faith"

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## Description

In this sermon, the preacher begins by describing a scene where a man is wrapped in the Union Jack and the Stars and Stripes, symbolizing protection and courage. The preacher then introduces the concept of putting on the whole armor of God, which is explained as putting on Christ and finding protection against the devil. The preacher acknowledges that sometimes the devil seems to get through, and suggests three possible causes for this. The sermon then focuses on the passage from Ephesians 6:10-12, where the apostle Paul encourages believers to be strong in the Lord and put on the whole armor of God to stand against the wiles of the devil. The preacher emphasizes that as believers, we are engaged in a spiritual war and need to be prepared for the counterattacks of the enemy.

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## Transcript

Due to interference from a nearby electrical appliance whilst this recording was being made, there is a continuous crackle in the background which cannot be eliminated. We hope and trust that it will not spoil your appreciation of this message. Now let us hear the Word of God.

Let us turn to the New Testament Scriptures, to the letter that St. Paul wrote to the church at Ephesus, chapter 6, and we begin reading at verse 10. Ephesians chapter 6, reading at verse 10. Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of his might.

Put on the whole armor of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. Wherefore, take unto you the whole armor of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.

Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness, and your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace. Above all, take ye the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked, and take the helmet of salvation,

and the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God. Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints.

Amen, and may God add his blessing to the reading of his Holy Word. Now may we bow in prayer for a quiet moment, and may we use that moment individually to seek the promised help of the Holy Spirit as our teacher and guide. O God our Father, we bow before thee, and ask that in mercy and in grace, thou art now in a very real and wonderful way, fulfill the promise of thy Son, concerning the teaching ministry of the Holy Spirit, that when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth.

May he be our teacher and guide now, taking all our minds and thinking through them, thy thoughts, my lips and speaking through them thy word, all our hearts and inclining them in obedience to thy perfect will, and this we ask through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. We come now to the final message of any length in the ministry of this week at Filey, and I wondered very much what might be God's word for us as we face what lies ahead.

And I found this particular passage that we read together lay very much on my mind when I slipped into the prayer meeting that we have, the speakers and council and other helpers. It was a little late, but it was just in time to hear a prayer being offered that as we faced the challenge and the attacks of the devil in the coming days, we might know what it is to be encouraged and strengthened by the grace and power of Jesus Christ. And I felt my heart strangely warmed as I heard that prayer.

Earlier on the day, I'd met somebody just chatting in the camp, and he was saying how strange it was that whenever he was attempting something especially for the Lord, the devil seemed to get active in attacking his life. I want us to realize that we're in for trouble after Filey. Every single one of us is in for it, and we might just as well be ready.

And I felt the words of St. Paul here were wonderfully assuring words. Put on the whole armour of God that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. The great Dr. Alexander White of Free St. George's Edinburgh, I suppose possibly the greatest preacher that Scotland has ever seen, a man born in poverty whose parents were not married, who preached to one of the most fashionable and influential congregations of the capital of Scotland, a man who strangely enough was followed by two brothers of the name Black, Hugh Black and James Black, concerning which they said the two Blacks never made a White.

The great Dr. White knew the human heart and the sinfulness of the human heart very, very well indeed. And one time one year a young fellow came back from Keswick with his face all aglow, there was no Filey in those days, and it was quite obvious that as far as he was concerned everything in the garden was going to be lovely. Come into real blessing and he was just full of it.

And the great Dr. looked at his glowing face and said, well laddie, I found that the Christian life is a serfecht, a sore fight, a hard battle, and I want us to realise that there is conflict ahead. Paul calls the Christian life in his first letter to Timothy the fight of faith, indicating the aspect of the battle, a good fight of faith. In 1 Timothy 2.12 in his second and last letter to his younger brother and son in the faith, Paul was able to say, I have fought a good fight.

The note of conflict is found everywhere in the New Testament. We are told to be good soldiers of Jesus Christ. Paul writes elsewhere, I fight not as one that beat at the air.

When we're in a place like Filey we lose touch with the world, don't we? And the events and things that are happening in the world. I wonder how many of you remember what last Sunday was here in Filey? Oh I know it was the first day of ministry in Filey. I wonder how many of you know what last Sunday was? Battle of Britain Sunday.

Did you remember? Some of us are old enough to remember that incredible decisive battle of World War II, and to recall the remarkable deliverance that God gave to us as a nation, given ultimately I believe by God himself but more immediately by that incredible tiny but valiant Royal Air Force that routed the whole vast strength of the German Luftwaffe. A victory which gave birth to that immortal phrase by Winston Churchill, never was so much owed by so many to so few. We do well to remind ourselves that the Christian is engaged in war, that there is a war on.

And when you and I move away from Filey we're going straight into battle. And in every fellowship in every church we talk about the winter's work. It's not the winter's work, it's the winter's war.

And so it is that as we leave Filey with all the wonderful memories of what God has revealed to us of his truth concerning his son, I want us to remember we're heading straight for the front. I want us to look at this not so that we may be disheartened, but so that we may be prepared. The big difference between World War I and World War II, and you can see the difference in the casualty lists on the war memorials in our country, the big difference was that in World War I the battles were fought by ill-equipped troops.

In World War II, under the leadership of Montgomery, he always waited until he had the weapons that ensured victory, and then he moved, and then he won. God wants us to know that we have the weapons that ensure victory. And it's with that in mind that I want us to look at this passage of scripture.

First of all I want us to note what I've called our involvement with the enemy of God. Our involvement with the enemy of God. If there is a battle, if there's a conflict, if there's warfare, there must be an enemy.

Indeed one of the axioms of warfare, if it's to be crowned with success, is know your enemy. And I want us to note in this passage two things. First, the person this enemy is.

In verse 11 Paul commands the Christian, and it is a command put on the whole armor of God that he may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. There he is, unmasked. The devil himself.

And in this warfare he does not stand alone. Arrayed under his command are spiritual forces, evil powers, of which Paul goes on to write in verse 12, we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high place. What an incredible array.

If that sounds a little bit strange in its vocabulary, J.B. Phillips translates it in our more modern language. Our fight is not against any physical enemy. It is against organizations, powers that are spiritual.

We're up against the unseen powers that control this dark world, and spiritual agents from the very headquarters of evil. I said you were in for it. So am I. Fancy going into battle against that.

For a long time modern man in his sophisticated pride and conceit laughed at and ridiculed and ignored this aspect of New Testament truth. A devil? Hordes of evil spirits? What utter nonsense. And I don't think modern man today would be inclined to do the same so glibly.

The resurgence of involvement with the occult, which is characteristic of our day, has provided man with too much evidence of the reality of the forces of evil for anyone to treat the matter lightly. Most of us are rather like the little boy who was told there was no devil, to which he replied, well then who's doing all his dirty work? There is a devil. There are unseen forces of evil.

The Christian who looks to the Bible for divinely revealed truth, there's never been any doubt about it. C. S. Lewis in his screw tape letters put the devil back on the theological map, but that impression faded in time. If you've never read the screw tape letters, buy it and read it.

Forces that are led by Satan himself, forces that are spiritual, immensely powerful, innumerable, described by our Lord in Matthew 25 for as the devil and all his angels. Our involvement with the enemy of God is no less than this, a declaration of war between us and the devil himself. Mind you, I don't think the commander-in-chief will deal with ordinary rankers like you and me.

He'll send somebody else to deal with you and me, but deal with us, he most certainly will. The person this enemy is, the purpose this enemy has, and we can glean at least two of his purposes, or more accurately, precisely, possibly, something about his tactics and something about his objective. Paul writes about the wiles of the devil in verse 11, and in verse 16 about the weapons when he speaks of the fiery darts of the wicked one, the evil one, as the RSV and NEB translate the wicked.

What do we glean from these two references? First, that his purpose, his strategy, his tactics, are always to deceive. Christ called him in John 8, 44, a liar, and the father of it. And right from the very first temptation, he lied, and he always does lie.

You remember what he said to our first parents? Ye shall not surely die. That was a lie. You remember the other lie? Ye shall be as gods.

That was a lie. They didn't become like God, they became sinners. And he always lies.

He's a liar, and the father of it. And he will do his utmost to deceive. In Revelation 12, 9, he is described as that old serpent which deceiveth the whole world.

Someone has said that in war the first casualty is truth, and the weapon that destroys truth is untruth, and the weapon the devil uses is the weapon of the lie. He will come to you as he came to our first parents, he will come to me and hold out the promise of impunity, ye shall not surely die. He will hold out the promise of great gain, ye shall be as gods.

And both are lies. What's his ultimate purpose? It's much more than just to deceive, it's to destroy. The fiery doubts speak of this.

The flaming arrows with the flaming tips were shot by the enemy into the citadel and stronghold in order to set it ablaze and to destroy it. And the enemy of souls is out to destroy. Now he can't destroy your soul if you're a Christian, but he can destroy your peace, he can destroy your joy, he can destroy your testimony, he can destroy your usefulness.

He's out to destroy. And to help him achieve these purposes he has under his authority and under his control a vast force of evil spirits. Our involvement with the enemy of God.

So we're for it, let's face it. If you think that life's going to be easier when you get down from Philae, I want to submit to you that you may find it's going to be harder than it's ever been before. Simply because whenever there's an advance made in warfare, there's always a counter-attack.

If you have advanced in the will of God, in the truth of God, you may be quite certain there's going to be a counter-attack to drive you back from the ground you've gained. And to rob you of the truth that has become so precious to you since you came here. Our involvement with the enemy of God.

The second thing that I glean from these verses, this passage, is that we learn here not simply of our involvement with the enemy of God, the person this enemy is, the purpose this enemy has, but we see here and learn here of our equipment from the armory of God. Put on the whole armor of God. Verse 11.

Verse 13. Take unto you the whole armor of God. I wonder how many of us have read and have come to love Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress.

I was most interested in reading, and I love to read, the writings of Malcolm Muggeridge, that cynic of cynics who, under the transforming grace of Jesus Christ, has become one of the most gracious and lovely of Christian people. I would say this about Malcolm Muggeridge's writings because some of you may read in some of his books some things that sound a little bit peculiar. Note always the date at the end of anything written by Malcolm Muggeridge or said by him.

There's a whole lot that's published, particularly in his book Discovering Jesus, which is pre-conversion. The first time Malcolm Muggeridge confessed his faith in Christ was when he preached in St. Giles Cathedral in Edinburgh that incredible sermon called Another King. That was when he made his confession of faith.

That was in 1968. Anything prior to that, his writing not as a Christian but as a seeker. His book Jesus Rediscovered, I think, should have been titled Rediscovering Jesus.

That's what it's all about. If you've never read that sermon or if you've never heard it, then read it or hear it on tape. You can get it on tape from the Church of Scotland offices in Edinburgh.

The BBC said that that sermon preached in St. Giles Cathedral might well prove to be the sermon of the century. I've never heard anything like it. Tremendous.

And yet this sophisticated man loves Pilgrim's Progress. Loves it. Did you read it? Do you remember what happened when Christian came to the house beautiful, provided for the pilgrims? Before he left it, we read, they took him and had him into the armory where they showed him all manner of furniture which their Lord had provided for the pilgrims, such as sword, shield, helmet, breastplate, all prayer.

And I like this, there was enough here of this to harness out as many men for the service of their Lord as there be stars in the heaven for multitude. And then later on we read, and I like this and I hope this is going to be true of every one of us here at Farley, they harnessed him from head to foot with what was of proof, lest perhaps he should meet with assaults by the way. Wouldn't it be fantastic if you and I went from Farley armed from head to foot, harnessed in the armor of God.

I want us to note two things as we think of our equipment from the armory of God. First of all, the obligation that we face here, and the obligation is to know precisely the nature of the armor provided. And I want us to notice something that I find commentators note and then neglect, and it bothers me.

I don't like to disagree and differ from the really great classical commentators of the word of God. It is called the whole armor of God. Now I just don't understand how so many commentators in their explanation of the various parts and pieces of the armor described go on to explain these in terms of human attributes and human and spiritual attainments that are going to impress men.

We're not dealing with men here, we're dealing with the devil. He's not going to be impressed by anything in me. It's the whole armor of God.

Therefore the truth with which my lawyers are to be girt about is not my sincerity or integrity, it's the truth of God. A friend of mine, David Reed, who's minister of a Presbyterian church in New York, was taken prisoner at the very beginning of the war at Dunkirk. He was a chaplain.

He was in an officer's camp throughout the whole war, and all they heard during those years of imprisonment was the German view of what was happening. When the day came when they were relieved and released by American troops, one of the American officers went up to one of the British officers and said, how did you keep sane? How did you keep hoping when all the time, all you heard was London destroyed, the Allied forces defeated? How did you keep hope? And the officer walked over to a bookcase and took a book and handed it to the American officer. He said, that's the answer.

The American officer opened it. It wasn't a book, it was a wireless set. And the British officer said, sir, every day one of our fellow prisoners was given the task of listening into the news from London.

So although we were being assailed mentally, psychologically by the truth from the German radio stations, every day it was countered by the truth from London. Your loins girt about with the truth of God, absolutely soaked in it. God's truth about sin, about life, about Christ, about man, about salvation, about death, just soaked in the truth of God.

Your loins girt about with divine truth. Therefore, the righteousness which covers and protects my heart is not a righteousness that I might have achieved and might display. It is Christ's righteousness.

When the devil comes to me as the accuser of the brethren to depress, I don't say, see what a wonderful Christian I am. If all my righteousness is even as a Christian or as filthy rags in the sight of God, that's not much of a weapon to protect me from the accuser of the brethren. No, the righteousness of Christ.

I'm accepted in the beloved. Christ is my righteousness. So the devil can come and tell me anything he likes about me, but he can't penetrate through that protective piece of armor, the breastplate of divine righteousness.

Therefore, the peace which enables me to stand firm is not a peace in my heart. Your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace. How terribly important footwear is.

If you're going climbing, you've got to have the right shoes, boots for it. You're going to stand firm. You've got to make certain that your foothold is secure.

What's my foothold? It's peace with God that is mine in the good news of Christ crucified and dying for my sins. What about the shield of faith? I used to think that that was the shield of my faith, my trust in God. But if the armor is the armor of God, then it's not my faith at all.

And my faith is such a feeble thing, I'm quite certain the devil could get past that anytime he wants. The word translated faith is the word that equally validly can be translated faithfulness. It very often is.

And if it's the armor of God, then it's not my faith, it's God's faithfulness that shields me. And what a fantastic shield that is, to have this great shield of the faithfulness of God to his words, to his own, so that when the devil comes to destroy me, I'm protected not by a feeble little faith that somehow or other is reaching up to God. I'm not setting aside, of course, that, we'll come to that in a moment, but I'm protected and covered by the faithfulness of God.

The helmet of salvation, what is salvation? It's simply Christ, the sword of the Spirit, the word of God, to wield. That saintly Bishop Hanley Mole makes this point, and then to me, quite beyond my understanding turns from it, but this is what he writes, he says, we can never too clearly remember that the armor is the armor of God. The inmost thought all through is that the man really is using his Lord.

Or as Jerome remarked much, much longer ago, by the whole armor of God, the Savior is to be understood. Put on the whole armor of God. These words recall Paul's where they were quoted in one of the songs, Romans 13, 12, put on the armor of light, verse 14, put he on the Lord Jesus Christ.

When we are clothed in the armor of God, we are clothed in Christ himself. What protection. Somebody has told the story of Charles Spurgeon, that on one occasion he was preaching and he referred to an incident in the bygone days when Britain and America were forces to be reckoned with, more than they are possibly today, and a British citizen had been arrested in Spain and had been sentenced to death.

The consul representing Britain and the one representing the United States were convinced that this man did not deserve to die, and they made every representation they could without any effect. The day dawned when the man was to be shot. The consuls asked leave to be present at the execution, and they were granted leave, and when the prisoner was brought out to be shot, both consuls went forward, and both consuls took out of their pockets their national flag.

The Union Jack and the Stars and Stripes were wrapped around the man, and then the consuls turned to the squad and said, shoot if you dare, put on the whole armor of God, put on Christ. What protection. The obligation that I face, the explanation that I find here, because why is it that sometimes, in spite of that, the devil seems to get through? It would seem to me that there are three possible causes.

The first is that we don't put it on, and that means we either forget what we have, or we fail to make use of what we have. The second cause would, in all probability, be that we haven't put on the whole armor of God, we're only partially dressed for battle, in which case the enemy will have sense enough to attack us where we're unprotected. If you and I don't have the shield of God's faithfulness, we're unprotected.

If you and I aren't girt about with God's truth. But the third cause might well be that we're running away from the fight. I wonder whether you've noticed that there isn't a single bit of armor to cover the back, not one.

That's why a backslider, a person who's running away from the will of God, has a fearfully rough handling from the devil, because he's totally unprotected. The devil can get at him anytime, anywhere, any way he chooses. I wonder if there's a Christian here, and you've had an appalling time recently as a Christian, because you've been running away from the will of God.

All I can say, it's your own fault. God hasn't given any armor for the backside, none at all. The rebellious, the unrepentant Christian hasn't a hope against the enemy of the souls of men, the enemy of God.

Our involvement with the enemy of God, our equipment from the armory of God, and finally our enjoyment of the victory of God. One other remarkable impression, and it just came home to me recently when I was reading over these verses, a remarkable impression one gets reading these verses, that there's no thought of either defeat or retreat. Never even, never enters Paul's mind somehow or other.

There seems to be no doubt at all about the issue of the battle. Equipped from the armory of God, our involvement with the enemy of God causes no concern. Why is this? Well it seems to me there are two words that hold the key.

One comes at the beginning, the other at the end of this section. The first speaks of a confidence that is unshakable. Be strong in the Lord and in the power of his might.

What a wonderful word that is, the power of his might. J.B. Phillips translates it, in the power of his boundless resources. The New English Bible speaks of his mighty power.

We're only strong in the Lord, and the secret of that strength lies in the limitless resources he has. I was in Switzerland for a fortnight of informal Bible study conference, just a small little gathering at the Hotel Rosa at Chateau Gay. I was responsible for the ministry the first week and the second week, Dr. Alan Redpath.

And I asked him just tonight, I said, have you spoken in this hall before? Did you use this illustration that you gave us at Chateau Gay? He said, no, but I'm going to use it tonight in the stadium. I said, right, well I'll tell the folk where it comes from. I'm not going to claim this illustration myself, but he tells a delightful story about a man who was living in South Africa who had bought a Rolls-Royce and he was very, very proud of it.

But he was very curious as to the exact amount of power that lay beneath that sleek and polished radiator. How much really was there? He tried to get the information out of the agent in South Africa and he didn't get much satisfaction. So finally he wrote back to the Rolls-Royce people themselves in this country and said, would you please tell me exactly how much power there is in the engine in my car? And he told them the kind of car it was.

The answer came back in one word, adequate. Adequate. And that's just exactly what it is.

Be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. His might. How this note rings out in the New Testament, I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me and all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved.

Confidence in the power of God unshaken. Leads Paul again and again here to speak of the ability of the Christian to cope with all the attacks of the enemy. That little word able comes three times.

Able to stand, verse 11. Able to withstand in the evil day, verse 13. Able to quench all the fiery doubts of the evil one.

The ability of the Christian through the adequacy of Christ. That's it. A confidence which is unshaken.

A Christian standing immovable, unconquerable, while wave after wave of the enemy forces surge against him. And he stands. One of the great preachers of Scotland who's long since now gone to glory was

Alexander Fraser.

He had a wonderful phrase describing Simon Peter, to whom the Lord gave the promise, thou art Simon, thou shalt be the rock. And he used to say, the rock. And to him that conjured up the picture of a massive rock rising from a river bed with a river in flood, or as he would say in the Scottish vernacular, a river in spate.

And the waters of the flood surging down against this rock, standing there. And then I remember the phrase he used which I've never forgot. Standing and splitting the floods it could not dam back.

A Christian standing, splitting the floods, could not dam back but not moving. The ability of the Christian. A confidence that's unshaken.

A dependence that's unbroken. The first word at the beginning was the word power. The second word at the end is the word prayer.

Praying always with all prayer. The lines of communication kept open all the time. Those lines along which requests for help would be sent and supplies for battle would return.

We had a book in our bookshelves at home when I was a boy. I never read it but I knew the title. Fifteen Decisive Battles of the World.

I refer back to the Battle of Britain but I wonder if there was one battle more decisive still during World War II. I think there was. It was called the Battle of the Atlantic.

The battle for those lines of communication that in the early days of the war linked the supplies that were in America to the need that was in these islands. Germany knew that that was the decisive battle and so the U-boats, the pocket battleships, the armed merchantmen concentrated on destroying the lines of communication. That's why prayer is difficult.

I can pick up any book in my home except my Bible without any difficulty but try and pick up your Bible so that God can speak to you immediately the attack's on. Plan to set aside some time for prayer. It's the most difficult thing to find.

You can only get time with an iron discipline. So we read in Pilgrim's Progress that Christian had to learn the importance of another weapon called all prayer. Praying always.

So that prayer becomes so unbroken that it simply is not so much an activity but an atmosphere in which the Christian lives. When he's in constant touch and supplies are continually flowing. Our enjoyment of the victory of God.

Our involvement with the enemy of God. The person he is, the purpose he has. Our equipment from the armory of God.

The obligation that we face here to find out exactly what the armor is. The obligation we face here and the explanation we find here. If there's been failure you haven't maybe had the bit of armor on that you needed.

You haven't put on the whole armor of God or you've been running away. Our enjoyment of the victory of God. God means us to win.

He doesn't plan for our defeat does he? And we'll never win unless we have put on the whole armor of God. Unless we've put on Christ. Until Christ has just become part of us we are, if I could use the phrase, saturated with Jesus.

So that he's literally permeating every part of us. Our thinking. Our walking.

Our looking. Clothed with the armor of God. And so like Christian in Pilgrim's Progress, in a sense we've been at the house beautiful during these days.

I wonder whether it's going to be true of you and true of me that we are going to go out harnessed from head to foot. That's the only hope we have. But isn't it wonderful to think we can go out that way to the factory to the office to the classroom to the ward to the home wherever it is.

Harnessed from head to foot with the armor of God. It's all his and now it's all mine. So we're for it.

You ready? In Christ? I trust we are.

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