

# Resurrecting Church: The Armor of God

Pastor Mike Stern

**Big Idea:** Jesus has the victory

**Purpose:** To encourage people to engage in the life of the church in order to withstand the schemes of the devil

**Passage:** Ephesians 6:10-17

## Introduction

Well, does anyone know what passage of Ephesians we're talking about today?

We're in the last passage of the book! We have one more week in the series where Denise and John will interview Dr. Timothy Gombis about Ephesians generally, but today is our last passage in the series. I hope it's been good and enriching for you.

Personally, I love the book of Ephesians. It has played an important role in my story of faith, and I wouldn't be surprised if it has for you, too. When the teaching team was first exploring the idea for this series, I think everyone on the team said this book has played some kind of unique role in their journey.

When I was an undergrad, I took a class called Advanced Bible Study Methods. In that class, we spent the entire semester studying the book of Ephesians. Every assignment was about that book. It was my first in depth look at Ephesians.

Now I got a delayed start in school stuff, so I was in my late 20s at that time, but during that time I was questioning a lot of what my value was; my worth; what do I possibly have to contribute? Questions that maybe you've had to contend with at some time in your life.

*It was Ephesians that helped me to understand who I was in Christ and know that my worth was foundationally in the very real love that God has not only for me, but for everyone around me.* I can picture where I was walking, sitting, when I was thinking about it.

Later I got to work for the professor who taught that class and, under his supervision, I was able to teach that class for others, which just meant more time in reading and studying Ephesians, and a deeper passion for it as I taught it.

Then, in my third year of Greek studies, I was in a class called Greek Exegesis, which is just the details of Greek interpretation. In that class we also spent the whole semester analyzing Ephesians, but this time in Greek. I had to parse every word in the book; I had to diagram every sentence; I had to give interpretive thought and writing to each segment. And at the end, I had to write a 25-page exegetical paper on this passage that we're looking at today.

Even after all of that, I feel like there's still so much to learn, and there's still so much personal meaning and impact for me in this book. I've been reading the letter again and again throughout this series, and God is just teaching me and correcting me and loving me

through these words. *I hope that he has for you as well.* So, I'm excited to share with you today. I would love it if you would open your Bibles to Ephesians six so you can follow along and read for yourself.

But first, let's do some recap on what we've learned so far in Ephesians as we wrap up our series called *Resurrecting Church*, which has been focused on the vision that Ephesians lays out for who the church is and how we are to live as a result of that.

We've done this series at this time, because the last 15 months have been a weird time for church, and as we begin gathering back in-person again—and more and more people are coming every Sunday—**we want to be the church that God is calling us to be**, and the book of Ephesians can help shape that: who we are as a church.

We generally like to review where we've been in a series, *but we've been through a lot!* I don't want to summarize each sermon, so let's just look at some key words that we've seen throughout the series.

Blessed	Prayer	Love of God
Chose	Power	Walking worthy
Destined	Weakness	Holiness
Given	Unity	Light/Darkness
Lavished	Peace	Truth
Made known	Faith	Submission
Bring unity	Inheritance	<b>JESUS</b>
Apocalyptic	Mystery	
Bigger story	Wisdom	
Grace	Humility	

**Jesus is the most important.** Not just because he's Jesus, but in the book of Ephesians, Jesus is emphasized in a particular way. The overarching theme of the letter is that God is bringing "*unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ,*" (Ephesians 1:10). All things are being brought together in Christ.

The focus is very clearly on Jesus, the one who was raised from the dead and placed above all rule and authority. So, it makes sense that, as we come to our final passage in Ephesians today, we'll see that Jesus is still the central figure throughout.

Let's do our public reading of Scripture now. Kris is going to do our reading today. And you can follow along in Ephesians 6, starting in verse 10.

*Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. 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.*

*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. Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. (Ephesians 6:10-17)*

This is a really popular passage. It's well known, and it's near and dear to people. Sometimes it's hard to preach on passages like that because if you push on someone's understanding of the passage, it can cause some tension for people, because they love it so much. There are certain images and feelings this passage may conjure up for you.

Maybe it's something like the Army commercial from years ago, "The Army of One".

Maybe this passage makes you feel like you're in the military—*God's army; you're God's soldier, fighting the good fight; you are a soldier of one*—it's you and the Lord strengthening you for the battle.

Maybe you picture yourself in something like this suit of armor. This actually belongs to one of our Elders, Mark Rodgers. If you want to know why he has a suit of armor, you'll have to ask him. But he was gracious enough to let us borrow it.

Maybe you've seen images of armor like this related to this passage. There are lots of examples out there. Here's the helmet of salvation; the breastplate of righteousness, etc. And there is thorough explanation about how each piece relates to Roman armor.

Each individual piece protects a certain part of the body, and we need to employ certain ones at particular times depending on what our individual circumstances are.

Well, now that we've gone through all the time and energy of getting this here, ***I actually want you to disassociate this image in your mind from this passage.*** This is not quite the right image for what this passage is meant to convey. First of all, this is completely from the wrong time period. But secondly, ***the armor in this passage isn't something that you and I put on individually.*** It's not exactly *our* armor.

Let me explain that a little bit.

The book of Isaiah is one of what we call the Prophetic Books from the Old Testament. It's a long book, it's a lot to digest, but it's one of the New Testament authors' favorite books of the Old Testament. Just behind the Psalms, it is the second most quoted Old Testament book in the New Testament. The book has a lot to do with the judgement that Israel faces because they turn away from God in all sorts of ways, ***but it's also full of incredible hope that God offers to His people who will trust in Him.***



**He will redeem them.** And He will do so through His “Servant”. This Servant is someone who is going to suffer, He’s going to die, but He’s also someone who will live again and who will share in the glory and praise of Yahweh.

Now the lines blur a little bit sometimes on whether Yahweh Himself is doing something, or if His Servant is doing something, **but together they kind of form this image of a Divine Warrior**, and the description of this Divine Warrior or what He is saying looks something like this:

**In Isaiah 11**, the prophet is talking about the promised Messiah, the Servant in Isaiah. It says, *“Righteousness will be his belt and truth the sash around his waist,”* (Isaiah 11:5, Greek OT) **In Isaiah 49**, it’s written as if the Servant is talking about Himself. It says, *“He made my mouth like a sharpened sword”* (Isaiah 49:2)

**In Isaiah 52**, there’s a depiction of what people do when God begins to rule through His Servant. It says, *“How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who preach the gospel, who proclaim peace,”* (Isaiah 52:7) And finally, **in Isaiah 59**, there’s a description of Yahweh Himself as a Divine Warrior. *“He put on righteousness as his breastplate, and the helmet of salvation on his head.”* (Isaiah 59:17)

Is any of this sounding familiar to you? Look at it in comparison to Ephesians 6:

“Stand firm then, with the <b>belt of truth buckled around your waist</b> , with the <b>breastplate of righteousness</b> in place” (Ephesians 6:14)	“Righteousness will be his belt and <b>truth the sash around his waist</b> ” (Isaiah 11:5)
	“He put on <b>righteousness as his breastplate</b> ” (Isaiah 59:17a)
“and with your <b>feet</b> fitted with the readiness that comes from the <b>gospel of peace</b> ” (Ephesians 6:15)	“How beautiful on the mountains are the <b>feet</b> of those who preach the <b>gospel, who proclaim peace</b> ” (Isaiah 52:7)
“Take the <b>helmet of salvation</b> and the <b>sword</b> of the Spirit, which is the <b>word</b> of God” (Ephesians 6:17)	“and the <b>helmet of salvation</b> on his head” (Isaiah 59:17b)
	“He made my <b>mouth</b> like a sharpened <b>sword</b> ” (Isaiah 49:2)

Paul is describing the armor of the Divine Warrior depicted in Isaiah.

**Remember I said that Jesus has been the central figure in the whole book of Ephesians—**everything is being summed up in Him. So, when we come to the end of the book, we should expect that this is still the case. And indeed, He is the central figure of this passage as well.

**The armor isn’t my armor; the armor isn’t your armor; the armor is His armor—the Divine Warrior, Jesus.**

In verse 11 it says, *“Put on the full armor of God,”* (Ephesians 6:11). It’s God’s armor.

(Now, this suit of armor is not really my size. It's too big. Mark told me that this armor is made for someone who 6'6" tall. Now Mark is not 6'6", but he tried it on once and he said, "It was little too big.")

To take up the battle ourselves, to put on the armor ourselves **is a bigger task than we're ready for**. It's not a fight we can win. If we could have won it, humanity already would have. But we never could. God doesn't accomplish his victory through us—**it's Jesus who has the victory**. He is the one who has conquered the enemy; He is the one who is placed above every power and authority; He is the only one who was able to do it. This passage is solidly about who Jesus is.

But you say, "Mike, it says right there, '*Put on the armor of God.*' We're told to put it on!"

Well, okay, you got me. It does tell us to put it on—twice in fact, in verses 11 and 13. What does that mean then to '*put on the armor of God*'?

I think this is connected to another phrase earlier in chapter four. It says, "*put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness,*" (Ephesians 4:24). So, the armor of God isn't the only thing we're told to put on. We're told to put on *the new self* that is in the likeness of God.

This is actually a huge theological concept! To put off the old self is to disassociate—to un-identify—with Adam and death—the old humanity. **To put on the new self is to identify ourselves with the new Adam, which is Jesus (the new humanity), and to receive the life that He offers**. When we do that, we are "in Christ" and we are being formed into the image of God, which is in righteousness and holiness.

That phrase "in Christ" is one that we've seen several times in Ephesians. **It defines what our identity is as followers of Jesus.**

In Jesus ...

- we have every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies
- we are chosen by God
- we are adopted children of God
- we are redeemed and forgiven
- we bring glory to God
- we are included in the household of God
- we are sealed by the Holy Spirit
- we are given an inheritance
- we have resurrection power
- we are brought from death to life
- we are seated in the heavenly realms with Christ
- we are brought near to God
- we are the dwelling place of God with all other believers: Church

That's just chapters one and two of Ephesians!

Putting on the armor of God is about union with Christ. **When we put on the new self and identify ourselves with Jesus, we are wearing the armor of God *in Christ*.**

What is true of Christ becomes true of us.

He's the beloved of God; we are the beloved of God.

He is seated in the heavenly realms; we are seated in the heavenly realms.  
He is wearing His armor; we are wearing *His* armor.

If you want to feel secure in your identity and in your worth, you will find that “in Christ”. **Every other place you find your identity will let you down in comparison.** This is one of the things that had such a lasting, personal impact on me in college when I was studying Ephesians. When I realized that God saw me as He saw His beloved Son, Jesus, I was able to understand my life in different terms than how I was viewing it. I entered into a different and better story.

But there’s another layer to this as well. **We’ve pointed out in this series that this letter is not written primarily to individuals, but to the Church.** Everything is plural in the letter. **The things to which we’re called, we are called to do as a community in the church.** This is the point of chapters 2 and 4 in the book. God is bringing all people who have allegiance to Jesus together into one dwelling place for God. In chapter two, we’re compared to a temple with Jesus being the chief cornerstone. In chapters 1 and 4, we are called the **Body of Christ** with Jesus being the Head.

Are you picking up on the imagery here? What does armor go on? It goes on a body—it goes on Christ’s body, which is the Church.

**Jesus is the Divine Warrior who has the victory; it’s His armor that He is wearing, but—the Church is His body on which the armor resides. We are not in this battle as individuals—we are in this as The Church.** We are not an army of one; *that is mission failure.* **We are dependent upon each other and we are dependent upon Christ.**

That means, we as a church, are to exhibit the attributes of the armor that are mentioned here in chapter 6. This helps us see who we are as a church. The attributes also help tame the metaphor for us. If you think the life of the Christian is a militant life, just look at the kind of armor and battle we’re engaged in. We’ll get to the battle part in a moment, but first the armor.

The armor itself—or at least, what it represents—isn’t something new at this point in the letter. **It is a summary of what Paul has already written about up to this point.** *He’s reminding the reader of these important themes through the metaphor of the armor.*

**Truth** (1:13; 4:15-25; 5:9)

**Righteousness** (4:24; 5:9)

**Gospel** (1:13; 2:17; 3:6-8)

**Peace** (2:14-18; 4:3; 6:23)

**Faith/Trust** (1:15; 2:8; 3:12, 17; 4:5, 13)

**Salvation** (2:5, 8-9; 5:23)

**Word of God** (1:13; 5:18-19)

These aren’t the kinds of things you attack with. **These are aspects of living that life of the new self that we as a whole Church embody together.** The more we press into union with Christ, and the more we grow together in unity as a church, the more we will be a community of...

**Truth** – we live in the light and not in the darkness; we aren't a community of deceit but we are a community that shares the truth in love

**Righteousness** – we practice righteousness and justice in the way we care for others

**Gospel of peace** – we share that God has brought peace through Jesus and we live in unity with others in the church

**Faith** – we trust that God is good and we trust who we are in Christ

**Salvation** – we live in the victory that Jesus has accomplished

And we're attentive and obedient to the word of God But this isn't individual piety—this is who we are *together* as the people of God. Tim Gombis says of this: “*Our warfare, then, involves purposefully growing into communities that become more faithful corporate performances of Jesus on earth.*” And it's important that we know that and that we live that out together as a church because we're told that the armor is important, “*so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes,*” (Ephesians 6:11).

The passage goes on: “*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.*” (Ephesians 6:12)

Whoa, what is going on here?! **Not visible forces, but spiritual forces of evil.** There's an unseen realm, as one scholar has put it.

This reminds me of a news story I saw a couple of weeks ago. Did anyone see this? “*An Italian Artist Auctioned Off an 'Invisible Sculpture' for \$18,300. It's Made Literally of Nothing.*” That's just crazy in my opinion, but what Paul is writing about is not crazy. **There is activity and there are characters at play that we can't see or touch or sense, but that doesn't mean they aren't real and important.**

I wish I had three more hours so I could talk about the rulers, and authorities, and dark powers, and spiritual forces of evil, because there's a whole theology to explore there. But we have already touched on it a couple of times in this series. It ties in to what we've said about being a part of a bigger story What we see isn't everything—there's more there; there's more at play. The things and people who we think are our enemies are nothing compared to these

Whatever's happening in that spiritual realm, **it centers around the schemes of the devil.** The word for “scheme” has already been used in Ephesians:

*Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in their **deceitful scheming,*** (Ephesians 4:14)

**The primary thing that the devil does is deceitful; it's untrue; it's a lie; it's meant to trick us.** Which means that it's not an obvious thing to see. **The devil isn't an obvious enemy.** We won't always recognize his handiwork as coming from him. As Eugene Peterson puts it, “*Paul is calling us to be alert to the evil that, in fact, **looks like the good.***” And as Paul says elsewhere, “*Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light,*” (2 Corinthians 11:14).

What are the schemes, though? Well, without getting into a big biblical theology about it, **in the context of Ephesians, the best way to see what the schemes are is to view them as**

**the opposite of the things that Paul has been espousing in his letter.** He's addressing those things throughout. And even more directly, you could view them as the opposite of the armor in this passage. Both will end up being the same thing; and both actually line up well with what we see about the devil or satan throughout the Bible.

**If the armor of God consists of** truth, righteousness, the gospel of peace, faith/trust, salvation, and the word of God—then the schemes of the devil result in:

- deceit
- injustice
- disunity
- distrust of God
- separation
- disobedience

The results are identifiable, but what leads to them isn't always so identifiable—that's why they're called schemes: Truth is good, but it can be used to bring disunity. Righteousness is good, but it can be used to cause separation.

That's why it's important to understand that the armor isn't something that we use in specific battles that we have to identify, **but it is instead about who we are becoming. It's about our internal character, not our external activity.** Eugene Peterson says of this passage, "*The armor of God is the embodiment, the internalization of the life of the Trinity.*" (Eugene Peterson) **The best defense against the schemes of the devil is a life and community formed by God.**

Alright, let's wrap this up. Why is this passage here? Why is Paul communicating this? Let's look at the first verse in this section: "*Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power,*" (Ephesians 6:10) Jesus has achieved the victory over every scheme of the devil and over every power and authority out there, and yet we're told that we need to be strong. Why?

**Because we still live in the tension before our victorious King returns.** Paul's still in prison. Just a few verses later in verse 20 he'll say he is, "an ambassador in chains". We need to be strong...

Because the devil is still working his schemes.

Because life is still hard.

Because you're tired.

Because church life, community, is hard.

Because peace and unity is difficult. It's easier to write people off.

Because the hard things make us question if God is good.

So, we're told to be strong—**actually, more precisely, we're told to be strengthened.** It's a passive verb. Which means you don't grit your teeth & clench your teeth, but you reach your open hands to God and say, "Lord, strengthen me."

We experience that strength of the Lord through the armor, which is the character of Christ. **As that character is formed in us individually and as a church, we are strengthened for the difficult things.**

And we're able to *STAND*—a word that's used four times in this passage: once in verse 11, twice in verse 13, and once in verse 14. **This passage is about perseverance in the midst of the all the bad, evil, hard things that the church would face**, and that any of us individually would face us as well. Will we be a church that succumbs to the ways of the rulers, powers, and authorities—**which, remember, are schemes, so they look good**—or will we be a church that humbly follows Jesus and takes on His character?

We can do that—we can humbly follow Jesus—and not the ways of this world, because Jesus has the victory—the Divine Warrior has won. We don't need to win the battle.

What difficulties and challenges are you experiencing? Or in what ways have you fallen for the lies of the evil one? In what ways do you need to *stand*, to be strengthened, to persevere in your own life? If there's any lesson we've learned in Ephesians, **it's that you'll need the community of the church in order to stand**. We do it together as we wear the armor of God.

That important moment in my life when God used His word through Ephesians to strengthen me by showing me his love in Christ didn't happen in isolation. It happened in the context of community. If you're on the periphery of this church community, I encourage you to lean in. **Those in the periphery are like the weak points in the armor**. They're exposed.

If church for you is mostly about coming to the show on Sundays, **I encourage you to participate in this community, begin investing yourself in it**, *so that we're all stronger and able to stand in the day of evil*.

Many of you are watching online out of necessity, and I'm so glad we're able to provide this for you, **but if you're watching online out of convenience, come be a part of what's happening**. It's not that big dramatic things are happening here in person, **but it's that small, yet important, points of connection make us stronger together**.

**We're not an army of one; we can't withstand on our own; we're in this together. Let's lean in.**