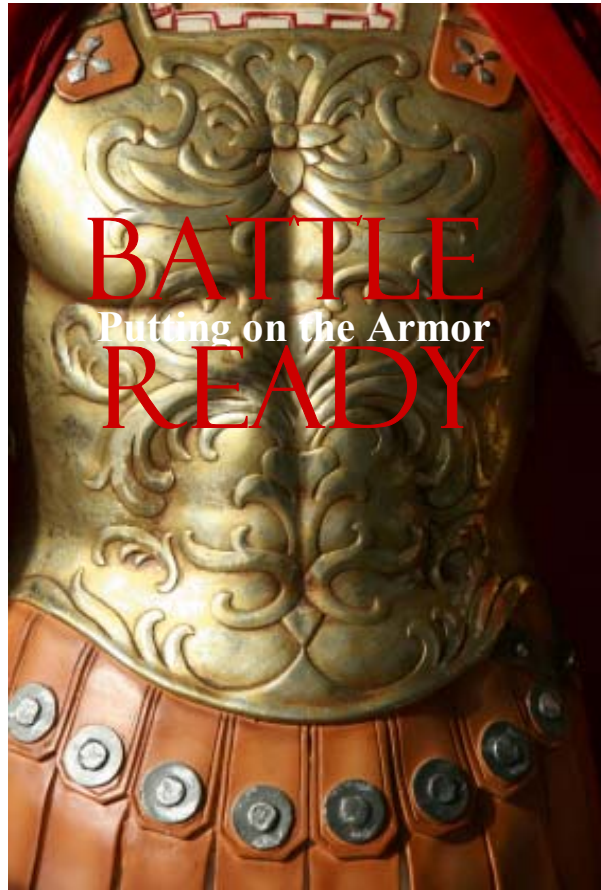


*The Covenant Pulpit*



***"Fit for the Fight"***

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There have been some colossal military blunders in history. Some have been devastatingly tragic. Others have been downright ridiculous. But, in the annals of silliness, nothing tops what the Russians did in World War 2.

The Soviet Union was reeling under the assault of the German blitzkrieg. Hitler's war machine was gobbling up huge chunks of Russia. Within days they had captured or killed over a million Russian soldiers. It seemed that Moscow would fall within weeks. Leading this blitzkrieg were the Panzers, the pride of the German army. Those sleek tanks swept across the steppes of Russia like chariots of fire, leaving devastation in their wake. The clumsy and antiquated Russian tanks were no match for this hi-tech juggernaut.

These were days of panic and despair in the Kremlin War Room. How could they stop the dreaded German Panzers? A hot-shot young commissar came up with a novel idea: *dog bombs*! His plan was to train dogs to run under the advancing German Panzers with bombs strapped to their backs. The fact that the Soviet high command bought into this wacky strategy shows that they were desperate to try anything.

The dogs went through a quick, but intensive, training program. The day came to enact *Operation Dog Bomb*. The Russian and German tanks were massed across from each other. Russian trucks rolled onto the battlefield. Hundreds of dogs jumped out of the trucks, bombs strapped to their backs. Their trainers pointed the dogs toward the Panzers and blew their whistles.

The Germans looked on in astonishment as this huge pack of canines charged their lines. Suddenly the dogs stopped, looking at both ways in confusion. Then, they turned tail and ran toward the Soviet battle group and up under their tanks. Within minutes Russian tanks were exploding. The Soviet battle lines collapsed in chaos as the tank drivers tried desperately to escape the pursuing *dog bombs*.

In one of the most bizarre battles in the history of warfare, a pack of dogs routed a division of tanks.

What happened?

The boys from the Kremlin made a slight miscalculation in their preparation. They trained their dogs using *Russian* tanks.

History is replete with military blunders. Too many battles have been lost because of poor preparation. The best *dog bombs* in the world will never work if their training is done on the wrong tanks. Napoleon Bonaparte wrote, "Soldiers are prepared for battlefields on training fields. It is there, on the drilling fields, long before the battles that the fate of wars is decided." St. Paul would agree that we must be battle ready before we are ready for

battle. In his great manual on spiritual warfare he gives us a principle that is critical to both survival and victory:

**Victories won in the heat of battle  
are forged in the discipline of preparation.**

We are talking about life-and-death issues here. Spiritual warfare is not an option. You *are* in a battle for your very soul. The only option is whether you will do everything to win, or become a casualty of war. St. Paul writes in Ephesians 6:13&14, "...and after you have done *everything* to stand, stand firm then..." This is life-or-death business that requires *everything* you have. Nothing less than your eternity hangs in the balance. This world is littered with the shipwrecks of those who thought life was a pleasure cruise.

John Lennon of the Beatles spoke for us all when he sang, "Give peace a chance." I long for a hassle-free life without conflict, a soft couch, the remote control all to myself, and an easy retirement playing golf in Naples. But warfare is inevitable for followers of Jesus for three reasons:

1) **We live in a fallen world.** An Old Testament prophet summed up the condition of humankind in Jeremiah 6:14: "'Peace, peace' they say, but there can be no peace." Since the year 3600 BC, there have been 14,650 wars in which some four billion people have been killed. Plato wrote, "Only the dead have seen the end of wars." Ever since Eve's firstborn son killed his brother in a fit of rage, humanity has been marching inexorably toward Armageddon. It is the nature of sin-twisted people to turn every inch of this fallen world into a battle zone.

2) **Jesus calls us to a life that conflicts and collides with the values of this world.** Jesus said to his disciples in Luke 12:51, "Do you think I came to bring peace on earth? No, I tell you, but division." Christ's world-life view is so radical that, if we dare live it out, we will become a threat to the status quo. We *will* stir up trouble. Even those we love *will* hate us. Persecution is inevitable when the followers of Jesus come out of the closet.

3) **We have an enemy who is out to destroy us.** Peter 5:8&9 say, "Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith..." We have an implacable enemy who has an awesome stockpile of weapons at his disposal. But we are called to fight back. More than that, we are called to tear the gates of hell down and triumph in this war of the ages.

St. Paul says in verse 13, "Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you will be able to take your stand." He wants us to be battle ready for battles *yet* to come. Victory is not snatched out of thin air. It is forged now, in the day of preparation. Are you preparing yourself and your family for the "day of evil"? The stakes are too high not to

respond to this clear and present danger with utmost urgency. Paul gives us seven strategies for gearing up for spiritual battles:

### **1. Never forget that spiritual warfare is inevitable.**

Verse 13 is brutal in its honesty: the “day of evil” *will* come. St. Paul doesn’t say, “...*if* the day of evil comes...” but “...*when* the day of evil comes...” Jesus gives us some insight into that day when he tells us to pray to our heavenly Father, “Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.” The day of evil is when the Evil One shows up.

The Enemy of our soul comes when we least expect him. Or someone else comes in his stead. He has millions of demons at his disposal, all the dark forces of this world, all the lusts of this life, all those tragedies and disasters that cause us to doubt and despair, and even our own capacity to shoot ourselves in the foot. The cartoon character, Pogo, was right when he said, “We’ve met the enemy and he is us.” Satan may use members of our family, and even the most pious people in the church, to visit his evil upon us.

Job was minding his own business when the “day of evil” came crashing in on him. When Satan came like a thief in the night, Job lost his fortune, his children, and his health. Within days, he was reduced from being the Bill Gates of his day to the most miserable creature on earth.

Peter bragged in the Upper Room that he would follow Jesus all the way to the Cross. Our Lord replied in Luke 22:31, “Peter, this very night the devil has asked for you. And my Father is handing you over to him that you might be sifted like wheat.” Peter wasn’t ready to stand. He was so impressed with his own strength that he forgot to put on his spiritual armor. Before that “night of evil” ended, he denied Jesus three times.

King David was taking a pleasant walk in the rooftop gardens of his palace when the “day of evil” came. He looked across to another rooftop and saw Bathsheba taking a moonlight skinny dip. She might have been ravishing, but she was also another man’s wife. Where was David’s breastplate of righteousness when lust struck a fatal blow at his heart? It was gathering cobwebs in the closet of forgetfulness. As a result, his life careened out of control, his family was devastated, and his nation was destroyed.

The “day of evil” has visited me often in my life. The last time I preached a series on spiritual warfare was in this church five years ago. As if to test (and perhaps mock) me, evil crashed in on me. I remember those nights as I held my weeping wife in my arms, and wondered whether my ministry would survive. Those weeks were the toughest of my life. I thank God that I was geared up for the battle. I faltered, but I didn’t fall. I am stronger today (and so is our church) for those battles. I never want to forget during the “good times” that the “day of evil” is always at the doorstep.

Too many pastors are like the Marine recruiter who sees an aimless kid slouching against a wall, taking a drag on a cigarette. "Hey," he says to the kid. "How would you like to become a Marine?" Then he cranks his sales pitch into overdrive. "We will train you to be a lean mean fighting machine, give you skills for a high-paying career, and send you to foreign countries for free. Not only that, the girls will love you in your Marine dress uniform."

The kid excitedly signs on the dotted line, ready to grab all the goodies promised by the slick recruiter. Several months later, his legs have been blown off by a car bomb explosion in Iraq. As the life oozes out of him, he remembers the promises of that Marine recruiter. "He told me about the girls, and the dress uniform, and the foreign trips for free. But he didn't tell me about this!" The truth is: no one wants to hear about "days of evil" yet to come. But Jesus was always upfront about the cost of discipleship. It may not be a happy message, but spiritual warfare is inevitable. So, gear up for it now.

## **2. Focus on the Lord rather than the enemy.**

Notice that Paul doesn't begin his talk about spiritual warfare by focusing on the devil or demons. Instead, he begins with these words in verse ten: "Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power." There is grave danger in miscalculating the immense power of spiritual darkness. But there is equal danger in becoming obsessed with Satan and demons.

When Goliath came against the Israelites he was terrifying. He stood nine feet tall and wore over 200 pounds of armor. When he roared, the Valley of Elah shook (and so did the hearts of the Israelites). For forty straight days, the giant came out snorting and strutting, cursing and challenging. Every day the Israelites watched in shock and awe. Every night they talked about him around their campfires. When they went to sleep, Goliath dominated their nightmares. By the end of those forty days, he was probably 27-feet tall in their imaginations. Is there any doubt that imagination is the biggest nation of all? By focusing on the bigness of Goliath, the Israeli soldiers lost heart.

A little shepherd boy by the name of David took a radically-different approach. He wrote the giant off as "that uncircumcised Philistine." While the rest of the Israelites were fixated on the size of the giant, David focused on the bigness of God. St. Paul says, "...be strong in the Lord..." David wrote in Psalm 27:1, "The Lord is the strength of my life; whom then shall I fear?" The Israelites said, "Goliath is too big to hit." David said, "That boy is too big to miss." It's all about perspective. Battle ready warriors focus on the infinite bigness of their God rather than the relative bigness of giants.

One of David's descendants was King Jehoshaphat of Israel. He faced an overwhelming enemy army. So he resorted to the strangest strategy in military history. He called in the temple choir and sent them singing ahead

of his vastly outnumbered army. As this choir sang praises to the Lord, angelic forces swooped down from heaven to rout the enemy. Do you want to overcome the forces that assail you? You won't do it by moaning and groaning about the danger you are in, or complaining to others. Enemies only grow bigger when you focus on them. Instead, praise and worship your Lord so that you might grab hold of the hope in 1 John 4:4, "Greater is he who is in you than he who is in the world."

### **3. Don't leave home half-dressed.**

St. Paul goes on in verse eleven: "Put on the *full* armor of God so that when you take your stand..." He repeats it again in verse thirteen: "Therefore, put on the *full* armor of God..." The verb "put on" in the original Greek is an imperative command. This is something we must do. Not only that, it is in the continuous active tense. It is something we must continually do. Notice the other words: "Put on the *full* armor of God. You can't neglect one part of this armor. Each part protects something vulnerable. You may have all the rest of the armor on, but if you miss one piece, our crafty enemy will find it and deliver a fatal blow.

We are going to devote an entire teaching to each of these pieces of armor. We are going to show you what each piece means, what it protects, and how to put it on. At this point you simply need to know that *all* the armor has to be put on. You also need to notice here that no one else can put the armor on you. Paul is crystal clear: you have to put the armor on yourself. Your pastor can't put it on you. Nor can your spouse, or your parents, or your friends. Nor can you put the armor on anyone else. Each person must go through the discipline of dressing themselves. I put my armor on every morning before I go out of the house. But the truth is: on those "days of evil" when the battle rages hot and heavy, I sometimes have to put the armor on minute-by-minute. Sometimes, even at night as I toss and turn in bed, I have to redress myself in the armor. May I warn you: this is one sermon series where you don't want to neglect or slumber through any of its parts.

### **4. Know how your *real* Enemy operates.**

In verse eleven Paul says, "Put on your whole armor so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes." In 2 Corinthians 2:11, St. Paul wrote, "I do not want you to be unaware of the devil's strategies." We spend a lot of time strategizing on how to do well on *Wall Street*, or how to correct a bad golf swing, or trying to figure out our spouses, our children, or what the future of the world is. The truth: there is only one enemy who ultimately matters and one issue that has eternal value. Will we defeat the Enemy of our soul and hear the words of our Savior, "Well done, good and faithful servant." Sun Tzu wrote in the *Art of War*, "The first rule of war is to know your enemy." While we don't want to obsess about the devil and demons, we need to study biblical passages that talk about satanic attacks. Next week we will study a short biography of Lucifer, and learn how he operates.

## 5. Don't waste yourself on the wrong enemy.

Verse twelve is clear: "For our struggle is not against flesh and blood..." A husband and wife are in conflict. They think that other person is the enemy. They wear themselves out trying to out-argue, out-shout, out-think, out-smart, and out-manipulate each other. Feelings are hurt, walls are erected, and the marriage grows bitterly cold, and often ends in divorce.

If only we would remember that our struggle is *not* against flesh and blood. She's not the enemy. Nor is he. Instead of fighting, why not grab hold of each other's hand, get down on your knees, and pray together. Pray against the spirit that has caused the tension: jealousy, insecurity, pride, fear, or a thousand other emotions. Pray *against* the Enemy of your souls. Find unity by coming against a common enemy. The same thing could work with children and parents, and for conflicts in the church. The enemy isn't the Republicans or the Democrats. Don't waste your time getting worked up over politicians, judges, abortion doctors, Hollywood movie producers, or that next door neighbor who's driving you nuts.

Get on your knees and battle the dark forces in invisible realms that pull the strings behind the scenes. If we would pray more, we would see more breakthroughs. Tragically, most of us are banging our heads against the wall in a losing battle of the wills. Fight the *right* battles, against the *real* enemies, using the most *potent* weapon of all: passionate warfare prayer.

## 6. You either advance or retreat, but never stand still.

Four times, in verses 11, 13 & 14, St. Paul repeats it in staccato fashion, "...stand...stand...stand...stand..." God expects you to win your battles. He doesn't want you to cut and run. If you study the armor, you will notice that all the weapons are made for offense. The Roman soldier was trained to be a killing machine. The armor was designed to protect only his front so that he could move forward toward the enemy battle line in order to destroy the adversary. For instance, the Roman breastplate covered only the front of the soldier, not his back. If he cut and ran, he had no protection.

This is an inviolate principle of life: You are either moving forward or backward, but never standing still. When St. Paul repeats that command, "stand" he is saying that standing requires forward movement. When the going gets tough, everything within us wants to cut and run. The older we get, the harder it is to take the criticism and stress. When General Douglas MacArthur addressed a joint session of Congress, after he was fired by President Truman, he ended his speech with these words: "Old soldiers never die, they just fade away." How different are the words of another old soldier, St. Paul, who wrote in 2 Corinthians 3:18, "We are being transformed into his likeness with ever increasing glory." When you read the Scriptures, you are depressed to see how many spiritual heroes were defeated by sin in

their old age. Old soldiers in the Lord's army can never retire, run away, or fade away. Instead, old dogs learn new tricks. Like 90-year-old Caleb, they strap on a sword and march out to battle with Joshua. And when that 90-year-old man saw a mountain in the land of Canaan he cried out, "I want that mountain." And the old geezer took it from the enemy.

There are still rivers left to cross over, mountains still to take, and cities yet to conquer. There are no "rest homes" for old soldiers in the Lord's army. Ours is a fight to the death. Jesus said in Matthew 16:18, "I will build my church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it." He is saying that we are called to march forward against the gates of Satan's kingdom of darkness, until we rip the gates of hell down, and then go in and conquer. That is our destiny as battle ready warriors.

### **7. The battle is not made for *Lone Rangers***

If there is no armor protecting your backside, then who covers your back? The answer is simple: your comrades in arms. This battle is too fierce to go it alone. Paul ends by saying in verse 18, "And pray..." At the end of verse 18 he says, "...be alert and keep on praying for all the saints." In short, be on the alert for what your brothers and sisters are going through.

How do we cover each other's back? Remember this is not a battle against flesh and blood. It's not going to be won by complaining, or trying to change one another, or rebuking each other, or trying to straighten everyone else out. This battle isn't won by church committees with strategic five-year plans and impressive vision statements. It's not won by sermons from the pulpit. It's won on our knees as we pray fervently for one another.

Do you want your spouse, or your children, or your pastor, or your president to do better? Then get on your knees and pray for them. In verse 19, St. Paul says, "Also pray for me." He's at the end of his life, in Nero's prison under a death sentence. But he still hasn't given up the fight. He has more mountains to take. So he says, "Pray that I will fearlessly make known the gospel." In battle, the enemy always tries to shoot the officers first. Kill the generals and the army is in disarray. Your pastors are always the first target of Satan. We are quick to cluck our tongues in judgment when pastors fall, but how many hours do we spend on our knees praying for them? Or, for that matter, all the leaders in our lives?

Paul is encouraging us to stand. So we need to encourage one another. We are in this battle together. If one person falls, we are all weaker for it. So let's link arms and hearts, remembering that, if we train well together, we will all share the fruits of victory.