

Pentecost 15B

September 13, 2009

Hymns: 541 - 459 - 474 - 192

**EPHESIANS 6:10-20**  
**STAND STRONG IN THE LORD**  
**\*Know What You're Standing Up Against.**  
**\*Know What You Need To Stand.**

May the words of my mouth and the meditation of our hearts be pleasing in Your sight, O Lord, our Rock ..... upon which we stand firmly against the evil forces of this world. Amen.

Dear Fellow Soldiers of Christ,

What does a Christian look like?! Is he tall? Is she lean? Is he strong? Is she weak? Here's what Paul wants you and me as Christians to look like: **(slide 1)** Impressive, huh? Literally, most of us couldn't look like this if we wanted to. Even if we could get into all the gear, we don't have the physic to fill out the costume. But figuratively, this is how we **MUST** be spiritually, if we are to stand up to the onslaught against our faith. This is what the Apostle Paul addresses in our text for this morning. In so many words, he is saying, **Stand Strong in the Lord!** **(slide 2)** Towards this end we have to both know and understand what we are standing up against. And, we have to know what we need in order to be able to stand.

What Paul tells us we need is **(slide 3)** *the full armor of God*. We need this in order to stand against the devil's schemes. Paul calls it a struggle not against flesh and blood. For sure, it isn't. He says **(slide 4)** **It's a battle against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.** "Heavenly realms" doesn't mean heaven as we normally speak of it. What the expression is saying here is that the devil and his wicked angels are above the wickedness found in men here below on the earth. In fact, it is the devil and his associates who put many men up to their wickedness. You shake your head at the wicked schemes men device?! Know that the devil's schemes are behind the wicked plots of mere mortals!

Here then is why we need to stand strong in the Lord. Any other armament than from the Lord is as so much straw against these foes. The forces of evil are expert at their craft. "Days of evil" Paul calls them, are sure to come upon us – repeatedly! Satan pounces upon his prey like the roaring lion Peter calls him. Peter should know. The formidable force of the temple guards sent to Gethsemane from the evil church leaders were more than enough to send Peter running along with the other apostles. Peter tried rallying himself and returned to follow Jesus into the court of the high priest. Remember the three denials in one evening that Peter was so sure he never would commit? Yup, that's exactly what Peter did. Years later Peter caved in from fear of what the Jewish Christians would think about him and withdrew from eating and other associations with the Gentile Christians. Paul let him have both barrels on that one!

Know that Satan is out to get you too. He's looking for the opening to bring you down good and hard. He knows you have a quick temper, or a loose tongue, an inflated ego, a penchant for taking what is not rightly yours, a lustful eye. In between strong temptations, he's always at work against you. He's chipping away at the foundation of your faith. **(slide – castles from bulletin)** An illustration of this is in the bulletin this morning. Creation is at the foundation of Christian faith. It is fitting that as we begin another Sunday School and Bible Class year, we base everything that follows in the weeks ahead on the foundation of the Bible's record of creation. It was taught today to children and adults of our congregation. If we surrender to the devilish claim that there was no six day creation, then all of the Bible is called into question. Then the devil can say regarding any historical fact, miracle, or doctrinal point the Scripture writers set down – "Did God really say that? Is that really true?" Sound familiar? Learn from the account of Satan and Eve!

The rejection of the Biblical six day creation leads ultimately to the humanism shown by the flag on the devil's fortress with the foundation "evolution." If there is no Creator God Who sets down His absolute truth

and makes the rules, then all of morality becomes relative. Divorce, shacking up, abortion, homosexuality, pornography, euthanasia (illustrated in the picture) – all become manifestations of the devil’s overtaking of our culture and society. The Christian in the fortress on the right rejoices to have shot down one of the balloons on the devil’s side. But the devil will just inflate another balloon to take its place. And all the time the devil’s forces are blasting away at the foundations of Christianity. In the case of the cartoon, creation is the foundation that has been greatly weakened. Can you see the walls of the Christianity’s fortress cracking? That’s very much what is happening in America today.

Pure Christianity is not very popular any more in these parts. Sin and grace, Law and Gospel are passé even in buildings that are still called “churches.” In many Christian circles as well as in the secular world, the theology of the cross is scorned and mocked. (slide Luther in bulletin) It wasn’t much different in the day of Martin Luther. The venerable college professor who had risen from the ranks of humble monks didn’t experience much respect among many of the intellectuals of the 16<sup>th</sup> century.

After a good run of Christianity in Europe and America, the devil is having his hey day again. Campaigning politicians - who know better! - take their stand away from basic Biblical moral principles in order to be politically correct. Athletes can be morally bankrupt and still idolized by their fans. Americans find comedy and drama titillating by its growing coarseness and violence. Prosperity theology and feel good religion dominates the TV screen and mega church landscape. Willow Creek Church might better be called Shallow Creek Church. Biblical ignorance abounds. And a little knowledge can be dangerous. In parts of Asia half a century ago, the United States was a leader in helping general populations achieve basic reading skills. We understood that ignorance fed communism. What happened? The atheistic communists began dropping leaflets from airplanes to take advantage of the limited education the people had acquired. Someone has correctly said, “A little bit of knowledge can be a dangerous thing.” The small child who knows how to start a power lawn mower or how to load and shoot a gun is a danger to himself and others.

How will you stand against the devil and evil? Paul tells you: ***Be strong in the Lord and in His mighty power....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!*** The full armor of God is the Word of the Lord. *Stand firm then with the belt of truth buckled around your waist.* Remember Jesus saying to Pilate, “Everyone on the side of truth listens to Me.”? What was Pilate’s response?! “What IS truth?!” Pilate didn’t truly know Who Jesus was and what Jesus meant for him and all the world. How much of that truth do you know?! Paul says, “Make sure you have *the breastplate of righteousness in place!* How many people who fancy themselves as Christians today really comprehend righteousness which stands before God? Let me ask you the question, “If you were to die today, and God were to ask, ‘Why should I let you into My heaven?’ – what would you say?” Would you say, “Well, I try to do what is right. I attend church quite a bit and give my share in the offering plate. I keep the laws of the land – most of the time. I don’t hate anybody and don’t have many enemies, if any. I pray to God every day.”

What if I told none of that counts for anything? What if Luther gave us his take on such thoughts of righteousness? He would call any and all works a big pile of dung. Can you quote me what the Bible says? Here’s one classic revelation of righteousness: ***Now a righteousness from God has been made known....***(Hmmm. I wonder where on earth that is made known?!) (slide of Bible) ***...to which the Law and the Prophets testify.*** What is “the Law and the Prophets?” Well, that is the Old Testament. But this quote is from the New Testament. Which book? I imagine you didn’t think there would be a test in the Service this morning?! ***This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe....freely by His grace*** (Romans 3). If you are going to stand before God’s judgment seat one day, much less against the assault of Satan, you better know that!

To know God and His salvation is to love God. What a gracious wonderful God we have! In love He created the world and brought each of us into being. In love He sent His Son to live the perfect life we could not live. In love the Son suffered hell on the cross for your sins and mine. In love the Holy Spirit called me and you to

faith. He washed our sins away in the waters of Baptism and claimed us for God and eternal life in heaven! In love God picks us up day by day, when we stumble and fall prey to the devil's schemes. Still God forgives us, restores us as His children, and strengthens us for our daily walk toward heaven.

So, ***take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one.*** Quite a graphic picture, isn't it?! And ***Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God.*** Ah! The Word! The Word! That's where it's really at if we are going to stand against the devil, in so? Many mock that conservative Lutherans worship the Word. No, but we worship the God in the Word. If they knew their Bibles better, they would know that one Gospel writer even calls Jesus, "the Word." God gave our first parents Adam and Eve His Word that He would send the world a Savior from sin. Through the Old Testament writers, God time and again reiterated His Word of a promised Redeemer. Jesus was the keeping of that Word – the Word made flesh! Do you remember which Gospel writer says that? Even if you do, there is much more to know. A little knowledge is indeed a dangerous thing. Immerse yourself in the Word!

And pray, says Paul: ***Pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints. Pray also for me, that whenever I open my mouth, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the Gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should.***

Soldier of the cross – Be alert to the devil's schemes! Study the Word and pray that you might be given the right words to proclaim fearlessly in the face of opposition that Satan will surely send your way. Stand strong in the Lord! - for your own sake AND for the sake of souls the Word can snatch from the jaws of the powers of this dark world and .....from the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Amen.

May our Lord Jesus Christ Himself and God our Father, Who loved us and by His grace gave us eternal encouragement and good hope, encourage your hearts and strengthen you to stand against the devil's schemes. Amen.