

### “Being the People of God - 3”

Bulleen 17/7/2011  
*Ephesians 6:10-20*

Do you sometimes listen to the local news and feel both upset and unable to change anything for the better?

Do you read the newspapers and feel the problems in the world are just so overwhelming that you almost despair of any good solution?

Do you sometimes hear yourself saying:

“I’m glad I have retired, because it’s now up to the young people to solve the problems of the world”?

Let’s read **Ephesians 6:10-20**

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We have here another wonderful passage that speaks of what it means to be the People of God.

When the Apostle Paul wrote this letter to the believers in Ephesus he was a prisoner in chains in Rome. Every aspect of his life was controlled by those who considered him an enemy, or a pawn in a larger social or political game.

Though he carried the message of hope and new life in all he said, nevertheless he had been seized, victimised and abused. Paul was in a situation in which he was considered to be totally powerless.

Have you ever felt totally powerless?

The question has to be asked, ‘How can this be an example of a victorious Christian life?’

Let’s face it, as the People of God, are we to live as powerless victims in a world dominated by so much evil, corruption and greed, or are we meant to be living power filled lives, always in control and always on the high ground?

Now, as followers of Jesus, while we may like to hear, that we are powerful, always in control and always on the high ground, the reality is often very different.

As Paul described in many of his letters, as well as in his own life witness, being the People of God does not mean we come from a position of excellence, having all the answers.

So often, Being the People of God means that we are called upon, by God, to live ordinary, ordered, pure and righteous lives in the midst of a world in chaos; a world that is filled with so much hate, mistrust, selfishness, and compromise.

In reality, **so much of the power of the Christian life is not power over situations and other people, but the power to endure** and just keep keeping on.

In this passage in Ephesians 6, Paul challenges us, as the people of God, not to withdraw and hide away from the issues of life, but to confront them in a way that reflects our unique and wonderful relationship with God.

We also read of this attitude, when confronting the evils and inequities in the world, in verses such as Romans 12:2:

***‘.. do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.’***

In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul used the imagery of a soldier going out to battle, to describe how we are to be transformed as God’s people in the world today. **Of first importance, Paul urged that we do not live for God in our own strength.**

The power of positive thinking, and the focus on self-actualisation, or looking inside oneself, may be the mantras of the world today, but they hold no currency or value with God.

Our true strength and courage comes not from within, but from God. As we read in Philippians 4:13: ***‘I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.’***

In truth, a vital and personal prayer connection with God is at the heart of who we truly are, and it is this that is the basis of any lasting good that we can achieve.

Then, in vs.11 Paul commands us to put on armour. In life we enter into many kinds of battles and struggles, and we need to protect and defend ourselves. But, the armour we are to put on is not ours. It comes from God, and God alone. We are to pray on the armour of God, if we hope to succeed in all of life’s struggles -whatever they may be.

Paul then identifies **the real source** of the struggles we will face. In vss.11&12 he identifies them **not** as human or natural. The real source of all the problems and difficulties we face in the world today are of a spiritual origin. Make no mistake, the evil one is real and powerful, and hides behind the outcomes of his evil schemes.

Poverty and hunger in the world is not the result of a lack of money or food. It is a consequence of selfishness, greed, manipulation and corruption. In the same way, most of the world's other problems today stem from the evil one, because mankind has chosen to listen to the seductive voice of wealth, fame and power.

I like Paul's description in vs.12 when he describes our true enemy as - **spiritual hosts of wickedness.**

Having exposed the true nature of the enemy of God in the world, Paul repeats in vs.13 what he wrote in vs.11: **'take up the whole armour of God, that you may be able to ... stand.'**

In vss.14-17 Paul then describes in detail, not just the nature of the armour, but its purpose and worth.

**vs.14**

Gird your waist with truth

Put on the breastplate of righteousness

**vs.15**

Shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace

**vs.16**

Take the shield of faith to quench the fiery darts

**vs.17**

Take the helmet of salvation

Take the Spirit's sword, the word of God

As the People of God, our armour is not like the armour of the world, which is often expensive, heavy and cumbersome. The armour we wear costs us nothing and is not burdensome.

It is, however, very adequate and efficient.

Each day, when we prayerfully dress ourselves with the Lord's armour, we are ready to face all the struggles and difficulties of life, and this includes all the enemies of God at work in the world.

Have you heard of Israel Gaither? He is the national commander for the Salvation Army in the USA.

Four years ago, when he was asked about his habit of beginning each day with prayer, he responded,  
“I serve in a world weakened by sin. That’s the context in which I serve, and I have to ask God to protect me — my mind, my thinking, and my behaviour.”

The Lord’s spiritual armour is for both defence and attack. For our protection and defence we have: God’s truth (waist-belt); righteousness (breastplate); faith (shield); and salvation (helmet).  
By contrast, our weapons to advance and break through the lies and distortions sown by the evil one are the gospel of peace (shoes) and the word of God (the Spirit’s sword).

Now all this may sound like interesting rhetoric, but is it real? The enduring testimony of the church throughout the ages is one where the People of God have been established and grown in the face of enormous trials and difficulties.

The work of ‘going’, to take the message of Jesus to people who have never heard has always transformed lives.

In more recent times we have seen this in China, and today we are hearing that it is happening in places like Cambodia and Burma. Small groups of believers are gathering in secret to make the Lord Jesus first in their lives. They are laying aside their useless fetishes and calling on the one true God of heaven and earth.

Now, you may say to me, ‘But Bruce, I can’t do much any more’, to which I will say, ‘You can pray’.

As Paul encouraged in vs.18, as God’s People, we can be part of the Lord’s good work by adding our voices in persevering prayer. Yes, one of **our** most powerful weapons is when we pray the word of God, not only into our lives, but into the lives of other believers, regardless of where they are.

Every morning and every evening, you can join with the People of God in battle, when you pray. You can do this as couples, or as individuals, by using pictures of people, or places, to focus your prayer requests. You can read the scriptures or listen to scripture songs.

However creative you may want to be, the focus should be to let your adoration, praises and requests be made known to the Lord.

Every effort, no matter how great or small, will add strength to those at the forefront of the battle. Being a part of the People of God means being a part of something far greater than anything this world can conceive.

As I close, let me tell you this story.

In Dec. 2004, in the middle east, an American soldier asked a question of the visiting U.S. Secretary of Defense; “Why do we have to dig through local landfills for pieces of scrap metal and compromised ballistic glass to up-armor our vehicles?” The soldier clearly felt he was being sent into battle without proper protection.

As followers of Jesus, we don’t have that fear. Our Supreme Commander generously equips us with the belt of truth, the breastplate of Righteousness, the gospel of peace, the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit. But it’s up to us to put them on and put them to use.

(Jim Bennett, “Troops Ask about Lack of Proper Equipment”)

May the joy of the Lord be yours in full measure as you put on the armour this week and step out for the Lord. Amen