

Ephesians 6:10-17

Playground or battlefield. When you think of these words what comes to mind? Playground. Children playing. Slides, swing sets, tunnels, towers, swaying walkways. Laughter. Joy. On the otherhand, a battlefield, one might think of some of the streets of Chicago, Illinois. 367 homicides in 2018 as of last week. But lets move closer to home. Battlefield. Jacksonville, Florida. A Madden video gaming tournament. A young 24 year old man loses in his attempt to be a champion. He pulls out a gun and shoots and kills 3 people, wounds 11 and then kills himself. Who would have ever thought Jacksonville, Florida would be a battlefield.

Playground or battlefield. A battlefield speaks of violence, death, destruction. A playground speaks of fun, laughter, and young life. But my friends, I want to emphasize that some people don't really understand these two words. Most people think of a battlefield overseas somewhere, or in an inner city neighborhood in Miami. They think of a playground as being a secure fun place where children play. In addition, they look upon the lifestyle in the Villages as a playground. But this morning I would like to change that perspective. Life in the Villages is a warzone. It is a warzone worse than the nighttime streets of Chicago, Illinois. You are in a life and death spiritual conflict right now where your eternal welfare is at stake. Trying to survive this fight with Satan dressed on our own is like going into a firefight with a homemade "bullet-proof" vest made out of cardboard. It might look like the real thing, but the first bullet to tear through its flimsy exterior will prove otherwise. So Christian, time to arm up. We are not to be concealed carry Christians. Rather let us "Be An Open Carry Christian!"

As we begin our preparations, we need to know who the enemy is. We need to understand the enemy, how the enemy works, so we can prepare ourselves. The enemy we are up against is our own sinful flesh, the world we live in, and the Devil himself.

It's incredible, but our FLESH, our old nature, FIGHTS against the Spirit of God, against the things of God in our life! Your sinful nature and mine, always wants to be right. My way or the highway. If someone challenges us, we get defensive and want to attack back. Our sinful flesh really would rather do something fun than do service to others in the church or the community. The sinful nature wants you to believe you know enough about God's Word, no additional education is really necessary. Your old sinful nature would rather spend money on something that benefits you, rather than giving it to someone else.

Then there is the world we live in. It's not the physical globe... but this society, this system that is separated from God. The world system and all it's trappings are our enemies. We're bombarded with PICTURES & PRODUCTS, there are ADVERTISEMENTS & ENTICEMENTS, no rules, anything goes, satisfy yourself, and don't worry about the consequences. The world is teaching us things all of the time... world's novels, world's TV shows, soap operas, world's movies, world's music, the teachers in many of our public schools. The world is indoctrinating us with its values and beliefs.

Finally, there's the PUPPET MASTER Satan Himself pulling all the strings. · The Accuser, the Tempter, the Destroyer It's AMAZING but true... Many people DO NOT BELIEVE in Satan. "Oh you don't believe in that red suited, horn headed, little creature do you?!" According to a 1999 Gallup Poll, more than 86% of Americans

believed that there is a God. Some polls have that as high as 95%. But only 63% of American's believe there is a devil. And he likes it that way! In Scripture the devil is compared to a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour. Picture the king of beasts stalking his prey through the tall grass. The helpless antelope cannot see him or hear him until the last second. By then it is too late. It is the same way with the devil. He is a spiritual being and covers his approach very well. He's an expert hunter. Like a lion, the devil sometimes hunts in prides or packs. He has many evil angels assisting him in trying to achieve our destruction. Do not underestimate them.

The day of evil is coming folks. Maybe it has already come for you. Life is going along smoothly, then comes a crisis, a particularly evil day when your faith is tested. Catastrophe, Great loss, Some alluring sin that gets a hold of you. Job had his catastrophic day. Joseph had a Home alone scene with Potiphar's wife. David had his porch view of Bathsheba bathing. Peter had his day in the courtyard, where he denied Christ 3 times. Friend, your day is coming or already has come. Don't sit back without any protection. Put on the Armor of God. Be An Open Carry Christian!

What exactly is this armor? The first armor you want to put on is the Belt of Truth. This kind of belt protected a Roman soldier's intestines, not just from sharp weapons but from injuries like hernias and slipped disks. You sometimes see weightlifters and Home Depot workers wearing big belts around their midriffs. Just as a belt holds your pants up so that they don't fall down around your ankles where they will be a tripping hazard, the truth of God's Word keeps us from stumbling over Satan's lies. Satan says nice people go to heaven. Satan says all churches give the same basic message. You just need to find one that makes you feel good inside. Satan says that this world was came into existence on its own. And therefore you're really nothing more than an intelligent animal and not a moral being who will have to answer for your deeds someday. When you die, that's it, says Satan. There's no heaven, no hell. Or if there is a hell only really bad people go there. So you might as well squeeze the most out of life that you can. Do whatever feels right to you. The Scriptures have some mistakes in them. Satan says, Life does not begin at conception. A woman has a right over her own body. One lie after another. And people believe the lies.

But Christians need to have the truth of God's Word on their lips and in their hearts. Nice people who don't believe in Jesus as Savior do go to hell. Christians are to test the spirits, to see if they are really from God. Beware of false prophets. God created this world in 6 24 hour days. God knew me when I was in my mother's womb. God knit me together. My body belongs to him. The belt of truth is important for the church. If we speak only the truth to each other, we strengthen our unity. Openness and honesty gird us together; misunderstanding and hidden motives divide. The belt of truth protects the church.

The next tool of protection is the Breastplate of righteousness. Why do we need a breastplate of righteousness? .” Often when we think of righteousness, we think of what God demands of us. He demands that we be holy – sinless. If that were the case, we would not have a very strong suit of armor – for our sin has put many holes in our righteousness. But here Paul uses the word “righteousness” in its other sense. He wants us to put on the righteous verdict God has spoken upon us because of Jesus' perfect life and death. This righteousness covers our breasts so that the devil cannot

accuse us with past sins and try to get us to think we're not worthy to be saved. We are! We are worthy to be saved because of the righteousness Jesus Christ has won for us! Have there been times, when you feel yourself being crushed by the guilt of your own short-comings? Are there memories in your past where you did things that you know were detestable to God? Do you sometimes wonder if you are indeed God's treasured possession?? Put on the breastplate of Righteousness. You have a Savior who lived a perfect life on this earth for 33 years. This Savior went to a cross and died for all your messups and mine. You and I now stand righteous before God. We now wear the breastplate of Christ's righteousness. We are protected from our sinful shortcomings and the guilt that comes along with them.

Ok, we've protected our mid-section, what about our feet? Soldiers need to be sure footed and have on a good pair of shoes. Imagine taking off your shoes and walking through a swampy area in Florida. Not smart. Snakes or other critters could bite your feet and you could end up dead.. Bare feet make it difficult for soldiers to fight well. Army boots take the fear out of sharp rocks and river bottoms. They make you feel more secure about moving forward When the Lord convinces you that he does not hold even one of your sins against you because of Jesus, you have a peace in you, a security similar to having your feet protected. You see when we're wrapped in the promises of God's love and forgiveness through Jesus, we can approach any situation with confidence. We can speak to those who have hurt us and offer them forgiveness. We can speak to those who have suffered a loss and offer Jesus' promise of eternal life. This footwear allows us to stand firm when the world is falling into chaos around us because we have the peace of knowing that our Savior is still in charge.

Modern soldiers might hide behind a wall or walk behind a tank, but they don't carry shields. A Roman soldier's shield was big enough for him to hide behind. It was made of two layers of wood, it was covered with canvas and then had a leather covering on the outside. They could soak this shield in water, which made it harder for flaming arrows to burn them up. Faith is the same thing as trust. God gives us faith as a gift so we can believe his promises. When Satan tries to set our lives on fire with all kinds of problems, our faith remembers God's promises and extinguishes our doubts. "God promised to work this out for my good. I'm going to watch and see how this comes true." It tells me in Psalm 91:4 says, "He will cover you with His feathers, and under His wings you will find refuge; His faithfulness will be your shield and rampart". Will Christ give us situations which are designed to tear us away from Him? Never. Will the Lord make us go through hardship so He can have pleasure in our pain? Of course not. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 10:13 that "God is faithful; He will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, He will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it". When the shield is in place any flaming arrow will go out quickly. Faith in the promises of God will pour cold water on those flaming arrows.

BE STRONG in the Lord. When you are busy in the Word, you will not have time to get into the spiritual mischief where the devil wants to lead you. The sword of the Spirit – the Word of God is the best offensive weapon available. With it we can put the devil to flight with his tail between his legs. Ok. Soldiers, put on your helmets its time for combat. Salvation has been won for us by Jesus Christ. Keep that in your helmet. **WE** are conquerors. Use the Sword of the Spirit to cut his arguments into pieces! Use that Sword to draft more soldiers. **Be An Open Carry Christian! Amen.**