

ARMY OF ONE!
Ephesians 6:10-20
Rev. Steven D. Spencer
14th Sunday after Pentecost

Grace, peace and mercy from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ, AMEN!

Please listen to a portion of our Epistle once again. *“Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places”*. So far the text!

Dearly brothers and sisters in the faith, if you haven't figured it out yet, Christianity is no picnic. It's not for the faint hearted. It doesn't guarantee a life of success and riches, nor of great fortune. It doesn't guarantee a life of peace and tranquility either. In fact, St. Paul in our reading is preparing the children of God for quite the opposite.

For each day we face a battle with the unholy trinity: The devil, the world and your own sinful flesh.

1. The devil, would love to do nothing more than to wrestle you away from your loving heavenly Father.
2. The world, wants your company in its misery and separation from God. Simply to justify itself with sheer numbers in an attempt to avoid seeing its own sinful guilt
3. And your own sinful flesh, wants what it wants when it wants it, no matter how much harm it may do to others or even to self.

So having preached repentance and forgiveness and living of the holy life to those Christians at Ephesus, St. Paul brings his letter to a close in a manner similar to our Lord's close of Scriptures in the book of Revelation—with a warning of what lies ahead and exhortation as to how to prepare to face it, by remaining steadfast using this 7 step process. Please listen carefully.

Starting with verse 13: *Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm. Stand therefore,*

1. *having fastened on the belt of truth,*
2. *and having put on the breastplate of righteousness,*
3. *and, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace.*
4. *In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one;*
5. *and take the helmet of salvation, and*
6. *the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God,*
7. *praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication.*

But here we need to remember some context. When St. Paul speaks of praying this should put us in mind of how Jesus taught us to pray—"Our Father . . ." Even when we find ourselves alone, we are to pray in a way that reminds us we are never alone. Our, plural not singular, our Father.

St. Paul is not writing this to any one individual. He's writing it to the Church at Ephesus, and also to the Church throughout the world and until the end of the age.

Just as he wrote in Ephesians chapter 4: *There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call—one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift. . . .*

... When Jesus ascended on high He led a host of captives, and He gave gifts to men." Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into Him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love. Ephesians 4: 4-7, 15-16

So Paul is not writing to prepare a bunch of separate, individualistic Rambos. This is not some Special Forces manual or Navy Seals team playbook.

There may be some of those: But It was Jesus, who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, But remember even those in Special Forces are never alone nor are they to function as if it were only them. Their purpose is not to be some super hero. By the way, that position has already been filled, in Jesus.

In Ephesians 4:11-14 St. Paul says that Jesus gave those offices: *to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up, until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. Then we will no longer be infants, tossed to and fro by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming.* Ephesians 4:11-14

No, there are no Rambos in God's army. So let us review once again the words of Christ's apostle with which we began today:

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.

Another apostle of our Lord, St. Peter, gives us yet another take on this spiritual warfare: *Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour.* 1 Peter 5:8

The devil looks for the weak, the strays those that have been separated from the flock. Warfare works much the same way—especially spiritual warfare. No wonder our Lord tells us through the letter to the Hebrews *"do not to neglect the gather of one with another, as has become the habit of some, but encourage each other, all the more as you see the Day drawing near."* Hebrews 10:25

Standing alone, even armed to the teeth, you are vulnerable. But amidst an assembled army, marching in step and formation, when the time comes that you may stumble, or you may drop a weapon, or lower a shield in a time of weakness or fatigue the ranks are there to lift you up and bear you up.

Apart from Christ, and His body the Church, you are vulnerable. But all thanks be to God, for you are baptized into Christ and that is the work of the Holy Spirit to keep you with Christ Jesus in His holy Christian church with all the saints who are the body of Christ on earth until the very end, the day He calls you to your heavenly home. We are here to work to together as God's servants. We are armed by God, fortified by His Holy Spirit and supported by one another as the church of God with Christ as the head.

We are indeed an army of One, not each one to ourselves to go it alone, but one in faith and one in baptism—one in the forgiveness of sins that gives us eternal life— one in Christ Jesus. For in Him alone is our victory. For by Him and through Him alone, all your sins are paid in full and you are forgiven. In the name of the Father, and of the + Son, and of the Holy Spirit, In Jesus name, amen and amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, AMEN.