

If you go to the store to buy or rent a video or DVD, on most new films, you have two options. You can either get the full screen version or the wide screen version. If you choose the full screen, your whole screen will be filled with the movie. The down side, as widescreen enthusiasts will tell you, is that you don't get the whole picture. The things that happen way out on the edge are lost in the full screen version. If you want to see everything that was originally taped, you have to go with the widescreen version.

Paul begins our text by giving us the widescreen version of our world. Most of the time when battles spring up in our life, we are focused right on the problem at hand. Our immediate struggle fills the entire screen. What Paul does is reminds us of the things we might see if we had opened our eyes to what is going on at the edge of the screen. Paul tells us that our real struggle isn't against flesh and blood. In other words, our battle is not against our neighbors, our siblings, our moms, our dads, our spouses. Rather Paul says that our battle is against Satan himself. He tells us that our struggle is against spiritual wickedness in high places. Yes, the stuff that is going on the edge of the screen is the kind of stuff that we feel we are too civilized to truly believe. Paul is saying that in all reality a cosmic spiritual battle is raging all around us. As we go about our everyday life, there is a battle being fought. Satan and his angels, the demons, are warring with God and his angels. And we are more than spectators; this world is the very turf in which they battle. Oh to be sure, the winner of this war is already determined, but it doesn't stop the war from going on. As the scriptures put it, "Satan prowls around like a roaring lion seeking to devour anyone he can." And God wars back against such attacks with his truth.

Probably, the worst thing we can do as Christians is ignore the fact of the battle. We need to realize that when temptation comes, when struggles arise, when the battles in our life commence, it is more than just an inconvenience in our lives. It is very much the struggle between God and Satan for our souls. If we do not realize this fact, we can tend to not be vigilant in the fight. When we don't see that our momentary struggles are part of a battle that has raged since the Garden of Eden and will continue until Christ returns, we can begin to not worry about winning all the battles. But when we see that our struggle is an important battle in the war between God and the devil, we are more likely to fight the good fight.

Any good boy scout can tell you that the key to life is being prepared. Legendary football coach Bear Bryant used to tell his players, "It's not the will to win, but the will to prepare to win that makes the difference." No doubt any good soldier must take that advice to

heart as well if he wishes not only to fight in a battle but to stand, to win the battle itself. Furthermore, as the generals of the United States army have often reminded us in this war in Iraq, the right equipment is essential when fighting an enemy that is not afraid to use any sort of weapon. And that is exactly the type of enemy we have. Our enemy is the father of lies ready to try anything to grab us away from the victory which is in Christ.

So our text reminds us too that we must be prepared for battle. Actually, it reminds us that not only should we be prepared, but we are prepared. If only we take up the armor granted to us at our Baptism, we are more than prepared for the battle ahead. As Paul tells us, we simply need to put on the full armor of God, and having done so we will stand. We are to hold our whole armor together with the belt of truth, the truth revealed to us by God in word in the bible and in the person of Jesus Christ. We are to place the on the breastplate of righteousness, the righteousness of Christ granted to us in our Baptism, that righteousness which shines forth from us in the form of good works every day. Our feet are to be covered with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. As people who know that our lives are in God's gracious hands, we are free us to focus less on ourselves and more about other people. We are to take up the shield of faith, with which all the flaming arrows of temptation, frustration, and attempted annihilation which the devils sends our way are snuffed out. We place the helmet of salvation on our head as the sure defense against any attack. As ones saved by the almighty God, nothing can deliver a crushing blow to our head, because the crushing blow has already been delivered to Satan's head on the cross. And finally we are encouraged to take up our most valuable weapon, the sword of the spirit, the word of God. We wield the promises of God against the lies of Satan. We stand firm against his attacks. This armor is perfect in every way. Amazingly, this armor is not only God's in the sense that He gives it to us, but also in the sense that it is the same armor He wears ever day. We are prepared for battle as He places his armor on us.

There are two things that can get us in killed in battle. First as I mentioned, we can forget that there is a battle altogether. Secondly, we can be ill-prepared for battle. If we forget that we are in a war zone, we will likely get attacked when we least expect it. And if we place down any piece of our armor, we are likely to be wounded. If we decide that the worlds wisdom is better than the truth of God, our whole armor is likely to fall off. If we decided that we no longer need to be about doing righteous things, our chest is left exposed. If we don't allow the gospel of peace to free us, we will be like a soldier stuck in the mud with the enemy fast approaching. If

we place our confidence in any one or anything other than God, the arrows of the enemy will find their mark in our flesh. And lastly if we place down our sword the word of God, if we do not spend time learning, studying it, and placing it into our memory, we are like soldiers going to battle without a weapon.

Is your armor on as tightly as it should be for the battle? Remember the war is not just against those you see with your eyes, but against Satan's and his powers and his demons. Are you prepared for battle?

If the word of God has revealed to you that your armor is not placed around you quite as snugly as it should be, it is time to seek again the forgiveness of our victorious General. It is time to kneel before his throne and admit our faults. Thankfully, he will not punish, but rather forgive. He will forgive, restore, and prepare us once again for battle.

The General knows the outcome of the war. He proved that victory was his when not even the cross or the grave could fatally wound him. The "He is Risen" that rang out from believer's mouths on Easter morning was the sure announcement of His victory. Oh yes, the battle rages on until the General returns. But the victory is his. When he returns he will cast the devil and all his followers into hell forever, thereby ending the battle forever, granting to his people an everlasting peace free from the devil's influence. But until then we are engaged in battle. So, we prepare ourselves by dressing up in the General's armor. And so wonderfully and perfectly clothed, we stand firm. For as God's children we are prepared for battle. Amen.