

**“Spiritual Warfare”**  
**Ephesians 6:10-20**  
**June 21, 2015**

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**INTRODUCTION:**

We come today to the climax of Paul’s letter to the Ephesians, and many commentators are of the opinion that this section is not just a conclusion, but the whole point Paul has been getting to. That is, everything he has brought up so far has been for the purpose of preparing his readers for the spiritual warfare he speaks of here.

The thought of a fight has a way of getting our attention, especially if we know we will be combatants in the fight. Several years ago, Wendy and I were asleep one night when she thought she heard a noise in our house and asked me to investigate. The possibility of an intruder gets your attention, increases your heart rate and activates your adrenal glands. As it turned out, there was thankfully no intruder that night. Paul warns us in this passage of an intruder who is present, who is powerful, and who is intent on destroying us. Though we don’t need to fear this enemy, we must fight him. The word Paul uses for this fight is well translated in our versions by the word “wrestle.” This is no long distance drone strike, but hand-to-hand fighting with all our energy. And the stakes could not be higher, because we are fighting the one who Jesus calls a “murderer.”

There is a well-known story of the Protestant reformer Martin Luther throwing his inkwell at the devil. Luther was confined to the Wartburg Castle for his own protection, and he was working there on a translation of the Bible. He was so aware of the devil’s fight against him that he is reported to have thrown his inkwell at the devil. Though the story is probably just a fictional legend, Luther clearly took to heart Paul’s warnings about the devil. His well-known hymn, “A Mighty Fortress Is our God,” features a stanza that says, “And though this world, with devils filled, should threaten to undo us, we will not fear, for God hath willed his truth to triumph through us. The prince of darkness grim, we tremble not for him; his rage we can endure, for lo! his doom is sure.”

Whether you realize it or not, you are in a fight with the devil. If you don’t realize it, I can assure you that you are losing that fight. Have you ever considered the possibility of the spiritual dimensions of this life, that one of the reasons things may be falling apart in your life is the existence of malicious and evil creatures who are working to destroy you? Paul assures us here that such creatures exist and that they are in fact seeking to destroy you. Let’s prepare for them by taking to heart what Paul says about this fight and the promises God gives to us in the midst of the fight.

## I. The Enemy We Fight

The fight Paul has in mind here is not **“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”** (v. 12). These rulers, authorities and cosmic powers are Paul’s words for the devil and his forces. His purpose is not to educate us about the different ranks of demons and evil spirits among Satan’s minions. Rather, it is to remind us that there are armies of demons who work in concert under the devil’s leadership to do all they can to destroy God’s image bearers, especially those who love Jesus.

Paul says that the devil is a planner who is scheming against us. Remember that he has had thousands of years to perfect his craft. He has that combination of cleverness, hard work and much practice that make him such a formidable enemy. Thankfully, we don’t have to be ignorant of his schemes, because God tells us what they are. Let’s sample a few of the things the Bible reports of Satan’s activities and efforts. We learn in the book of Job that he is able to bring sickness and natural calamity that leads to death, as he did in the case of Job and his children. Paul reports in 1 Thessalonians 2:13 how Satan hindered his intentions to visit the Thessalonian church. He can disrupt the travel plans of God’s servants as they go about the work of the ministry. In Revelation 2:10, we read these words in the letter to the church in Smyrna: **“Behold, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison.”** Several stories in the gospels speak of the devil’s ability to afflict people with sickness. In 2 Cor. 11:13-15, we read that he infiltrates the church with his false teachers, who pose as **“servants of righteousness.”** False teaching is one of his primary schemes, and according to Colossians 2:9-21, legalism is one of the main false teachings he uses. Legalism is the idea that we can improve our status with God by certain righteous behaviors. And in our passage, we learn that one of Satan’s primary efforts is to disrupt the primary relationships of life, particularly marriage. That’s why this section occurs right after the section on household relationships. Satan intrudes on our most intimate relationships in an attempt to destroy them.

We also learn from this passage that Satan’s efforts come in waves. Paul speaks of withstanding him in **“the evil day”** (v. 13), by which I understand him to mean the season of Satan’s attacks. I believe that our church is in the midst of one of these seasons right now. I mentioned last week the four deaths that have occurred within the past two weeks. I did not mention other evidences of Satan’s attacks that I have seen, including one suicide attempt, several cases of severe depression that have led to threats of suicide, battles with drugs and alcohol, and numerous and serious marital struggles. On top of

that, there are other things that I can't even mention because of the need for confidentiality.

The application of the reality of our enemy is not to fear him, as we are going to see in our next point. Rather, the application is to take heed to this warning. In particular, I want to warn those of you who seem oblivious to your danger. You are the most vulnerable. Satan relies on deceit and subterfuge to entrap us. The very nature of a trap requires disguise if it is going to work. Imagine a field you have to cross that is seeded with buried mines designed to kill you. The person who buried those mines didn't put a flag on each one saying, "Here's a mine, don't step here." Rather, just like Satan, he will attempt to disguise those mines as best as possible. Paul is telling us here that life is a minefield designed by a clever, evil creature. If you don't take this into account, you very likely will not make it. Martin Lloyd-Jones said it like this: "I am certain that one of the main causes of the ill state of the Church today is the fact that the devil is being forgotten. All is attributed to us; we have all become so psychological in our attitude and thinking. We are ignorant of this great objective fact, the being, the existence of the devil, the adversary, the accuser, and his 'fiery darts.'" Let's consider next how we are to fight him.

## II. The Weapons for the Fight

Before looking at the weapons themselves, it is important that we notice how Paul introduces the individual weapons. If you don't understand the context of Paul's discussion of these weapons, you will not know how to use them. Notice that he says we are to **"be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might"** (v. 10). That verb is actually in the passive voice and has the idea of being strengthened or being made strong. And then notice that it is the strength of *his* might by which we are strengthened. That's why he refers to this as God's armor. So the idea behind these weapons is that God is actually the one who fights Satan, and the weapons are those things that allow us to trust God. Technically, then, our fight is a fight to trust God in the fight against Satan.

Notice one more thing about this context before we look at the weapons themselves. Our goal in the fight is to stand. Four times in this opening section Paul emphasizes this goal. Notice in particular verses 13-14, where he tells us to take up the armor, **"that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm. Stand, therefore."** To stand doesn't mean merely to survive, but to hold to our confidence in the Lord. It means to continue to hope and trust in God even when things look to be very bad indeed. Its opposite is to lose all hope and give up, falling into despair.

John Bunyan has a good illustration of this in his classic allegory, *Pilgrim's Progress*. When Christian reached the Valley of Humiliation, "he espied a foul

fiend coming over the field to meet him,” whose name was Apollyon (one of the biblical names for Satan). “Then did Christian begin to be afraid, and to cast in his mind whether to go back or to stand his ground. But he considered again that he had no armour for his back, and therefore thought, that to turn the back to him might give him greater advantage with ease to pierce him with his darts. Therefore he resolved to venture, and stand his ground.” If we stand firm against Satan, keeping our confidence in the Lord, it is impossible for Satan to prevail.

So as we turn to the armor itself, the point to be grasped is that it is God’s armor, not ours. We put it on by learning to trust and depend on God. The fight is not first against the devil, but against your own tendency to trust yourself. Bryan Chapell says it like this: “The spiritual disciplines and godly practices of our lives are not what protect us against Satan; they are the means of grace by which God builds within us greater understanding and confidence in him, so that we will stand on his promises and provisions when the day of battle comes.” Every piece of this armor is just an extended metaphor to talk about the gospel. The way we defeat Satan is by remembering the gospel, that God is for us and not against us because of Christ. So when he talks about the belt of truth, it is the truth of the gospel. When he speaks of the breastplate of righteousness, it is the righteousness that comes to us in the gospel, that righteousness of Christ.

Many of Satan’s “fiery darts” are his accusations against us. He seeks to bring discouragement and defeat by keeping us in our guilt. We answer him with gospel truth and remember that God is for us. Another story about Martin Luther illustrates this. When the devil once tried to discourage Luther by making him wallow in guilt as the devil rehearsed his sins, Luther purportedly said, “Think harder, you must have forgotten some.” So the devil thought harder and listed more sins. Luther then said to the devil, “Now, with a red pen write over that list, ‘The blood of Jesus Christ, God’s Son, cleanses us from all sin.’” The devil could offer no response.

So we fight and use these weapons as we learn to trust God. We fight to trust as we stand firm and rest in the victory of God over Satan through the gospel. Are you familiar with the story of Dick Hoyt and his son, Ricky, who is confined to a wheelchair because of his cerebral palsy? Ricky once asked his father if they could run in a race, with Dick pushing his son’s wheelchair. His son told him after the race that when they were running, he didn’t feel handicapped, though it was his father doing all the work. So Dick decided to begin training in earnest, aiming to compete in triathlons, including some ironman triathlons. He had a special float built for the swimming portion, and he would swim with a rope pulling his son. He had a special bicycle built, with a seat up front for his son, but no pedals since Ricky couldn’t pedal. They completed six ironman competitions in this manner. We fight in the same way, depending on our heavenly Father for all the power and strength.

### III. The Principle Activity of the Fight

Paul's concluding request for prayer is not disconnected from his remarks about spiritual warfare. Prayer is the practical expression of our dependence on God in our warfare with Satan. Prayer illustrates two things about dependence. First, we pray out of humility and dependence. We know that we lack the power ourselves, so we go to the one with the power and ask him to act. Paul was demonstrating this humble trust in his request for prayer.

But there is something else here too. Paul believed in the defeat of Satan through the gospel. So he asked for prayer that he would be able to proclaim the gospel boldly. There's more, though, and this helps me greatly to trust in God. Did you notice that Paul refers to himself as an **"ambassador in chains"** for the gospel? Though Paul was sent by God and authorized to represent God, he was in prison. Satan was clearly behind this. Paul had proven himself a bold and effective witness and Satan wanted desperately to silence him. What better way, or so he thought, than to confine him behind bars. It's hard to plant churches from prison, and Paul was at the time of writing this letter in a Roman prison. What ended up happening, though, was that Paul was able to proclaim that gospel to an audience in Rome to whom he would never have access otherwise. As Paul prayed and trusted God, he was able to defeat Satan not just in spite of Satan, but because of him. It was Satan's efforts that led to Paul's imprisonment, and through that imprisonment that Satan was freshly defeated. God is completely sovereign over Satan.

Perhaps there's an area in your life where you have received a blow from the evil one. Stand firm, pray and see the salvation of God.

### **CONCLUSION:**

We are like the children of Israel in the days of King Jehoshaphat, when he was attacked by a coalition army from Moab, Ammon and Syria. He immediately called for a prayer meeting and confessed to the Lord, **"We are powerless against this great horde that is coming against us. We do not know what to do, but our eyes are on you"** (2 Chron. 20:12). God then told them essentially the same thing he is telling us in Ephesians 6. **"You will not need to fight in this battle. Stand firm, hold your position, and see the salvation of the Lord on your behalf"** (v. 17). They believed God, and the next day as they went forth to fight, they put the choir on the front lines. They weren't there to fight, but to praise. God won the victory as they trusted him and praised him. That is precisely our situation as well.