

Strength for the Fight

Ephesians 6:10-13 (NKJV)

Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual *hosts* of wickedness in the heavenly *places*. 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.

For two years now we have been looking at the book of Ephesians.

Paul has been clear throughout this letter that Jesus—the King—is on the move.

- That Jesus has come to save us from living lives separated from God by our sin and rebellion.
- That through the work of Jesus on the cross we are now adopted by God as His kids.
- And that Jesus has brought us all together as God's own Family—we are God's Kingdom Family.

And God's purpose in bringing everything under Jesus is unfolding just as he planned.

- The church is central to what God is doing.
- We are invited into this new life TOGETHER—WITH God.

We've seen over the last few weeks how this new life in Jesus changes EVERYTHING:

- Marriages are changed by the Gospel.
- Parenting is changed by the Gospel.
- Our professional relationships in business and at work are all changed by Jesus!

We are NEW CREATIONS in Jesus living NEW LIVES in a NEW WAY.

Now in the final section of this letter, Paul exposes a real danger that we all face—**We are at war!**

- It may not always seem like it, but there is an enemy of God who OPPOSES this new work from becoming a reality in your life.
- **YOU—WE—ALL OF US—are at war.**

There are literally thousands of books on warfare and strategy.

- People have been writing on the subject for centuries!

Sun Tzu, a 5th century BC Chinese General, military strategist and philosopher, wrote a wildly influential ancient book, ***The Art of War***:

“All warfare is based on deception. Therefore, when capable, feign incapacity; when active, inactivity. When near, make it appear that you are far away; when you are far away, that you are near. Offer the enemy a bait to lure him; feign disorder and strike him. Pretend inferiority and encourage his arrogance.”—Sun Tsu

“All warfare is based on deception... as true today as in Sun Tzu's 5th c BC... & the 1st c AD...

In our text Paul says we must “stand firm against all wiles—scheming of the Devil.”

- **“Wiley Coyote”**—he's, “sly, cunning, devious, displaying a lack of candors, concealing his aims & means.
- A Wiley foe requires a heavy hand to defeat...

General Dwight Eisenhower once said:

“War is a terrible thing. But if you're going to get into it, you've got to get into it all the way.”—Dwight Eisenhower

Civil War Union General William Tecumseh Sherman admitted that:

“War is cruelty. There's no use trying to reform it. For the crueler it is, the sooner it will be over. War is hell.”—William Sherman

Likewise, Paul closes his letter to the Ephesians with this section about the reality of the spiritual war that is raging around us.

- He is saying that we have an enemy who engages in deceit and scheming.
- The Devil is a wiley, dirty dog and using deceptive, deceitful and destructive tactics.

Paul is warning us that God's eternal plan in bring all things together in Jesus WILL be opposed.

God's plans for YOUR LIFE will be opposed.

- God's plans for your marriage and family and job and overall health and happiness...
- **all of these areas where God is at work in us and around us—ALL face VIOLENT opposition.**
- Satan HATES what God has done for us in Jesus.

- He HATES what God is doing in us as His new creations in Jesus.
- He HATES that you want Jesus' work of revival to restore and revive your marriage and your family and your friendships!
- Satan is actively moving to undermine the work of God in each of us and in Church.
 - **And his destructive, deceitful, deceptive plans MUST BE EXPOSED and OPPOSED.**

In our text today, Paul says that we **MUST** respond to this opposition in 3 ways:

1. **We must recognize the nature of our battle.**
2. **We must recognize the nature of our enemy**
3. **We must use God's resources to STAND FIRM in the battle.**

1. First we must recognize the nature of our battle:

Ephesians 6:12

For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual *hosts* of wickedness in the heavenly *places*.

- Paul is plainly saying that we are in a spiritual battle against Satan.
- We have an enemy who has all kinds of cunning strategies, who will attack us in surprising ways.
 - AND that we are not be able to withstand these attacks on our own.

We are in a battle, and we must be prepared!

- This is a timely reminder because we can forget that we are actually living in a war-zone.
 - Here at Reality Ventura we like to talk about church as a family—God's Kingdom Family.
 - It is also common to think of churches as hospitals where spiritually sick people can heal.
 - BUT it is more rare to hear about the spiritual battle that we are all engaged in.

So it can be easy for us to forget that there is a battle RAGING all around us.

One of Satan's schemes is to lull us into complacency so that we forget there is a battle.

- This fight is different from what I think of when I think of a "normal" battle...
- The word that Paul uses is a word meaning "struggle"—It's actually a wrestling term.
- **We are in a face-to-face struggle with an enemy who has singled us out and is sneak-attacking us and taking us down to the mat!**

When I think of battles these days, I think of wars with guided missiles and all kinds of technologies.

- That's not the type of war Paul talks about.

The type of war we're engaged in is hand-to-hand combat.

- We are hand to hand with evil—face to face with it.
- Like two wrestlers locked in a contest...

And who does Paul say we are struggling with?

- Not flesh and blood.
- It's not that we don't encounter human opposition, but Paul says that the struggle goes much deeper than that.

He says our struggle is with, **"principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual *hosts* of wickedness in the heavenly *places*."**

- This is a SPIRITUAL battle...
- against SPIRITUAL forces...
- **who are willing to sneak, scheme and BLIND-SIDE us in the physical world that we live in.**

2. We must recognize the nature of our enemy.

- **Our REAL enemies are not human, but demonic.**

We don't know as much as we'd like to about what Paul describes here...

- Is he referring to different ranks of evil spirits??
- We simply can't know that...

English theologian and pastor John Stott noticed that these opponents have three characteristics:

○ **Our enemy is powerful.**

- They are rulers and authorities...
- They are powers and forces of evil.
- They do have power.

Remember when Satan tempted Jesus, claiming that he could give him all the kingdoms of this world, Jesus didn't argue.

- **In fact, in John 31 Jesus calls Satan him “the prince of this world”.**

We know that Satan was defeated, but he is unwilling to concede defeat, and has not yet been destroyed.

- So Satan does not have all power, but he does have some power.

○ **Our enemy is wicked.**

- Paul says they are the powers of this dark world, forces of evil.
- Jesus said this about Satan:

John 8:44

He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth because there is no truth in him. Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own *nature*, for he is a liar and the father of lies.

- Peter warns us of Satan like this:

1 Peter 5:8

Be of sober *spirit*, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.

This is a nasty enemy!

- If we hope to overcome this enemy we need to remember that they—Satan and demons—have no moral principles, no code of honor, no higher feelings.
- They recognize no Geneva Convention to restrict or civilize the weapons of their warfare.
- They are utterly shameless and ruthless in the desperate pursuit of ANY victory...
- They are a WICKED enemy.

○ **Our enemy is devious.**

They rarely attack openly—they try to catch us when we are not expecting it.

- Remember—he's like a sneaky lion crouching in the tall grass...
- He is a liar—twisting and contorting any bit of truth he encounters...
- But he also PRETENDS TO BE GOOD:

2 Corinthians 11:14-15

Even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. Therefore it is not surprising if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness, whose end will be according to their deeds.

Satan and demons do not attack us openly...

- They like to lull us into complacency or discouragement or into error.
- They wear us down with discouragement and ½ truths...
- They dupe us into thinking we are right when we are not.
- Or dupe us into thinking that we are NOT loved and saved and forgiven and empowered

In C.S. Lewis' The Screwtape Letters, the fictional demon Screwtape writes:

“Our policy, for the moment, is to conceal ourselves.”—Screwtape Letters, C.S. Lewis

These forces are powerful, wicked, and devious—This is the face our battle!

In chapters 1-5 of Ephesians Paul has outlined God's purposes for humanity and the Church...

- **And now in chapter 6 he reminds us that there is a POWERFUL, WICKED and DEVIOUS opposition to these purposes—a REAL enemy opposes the work of God.**

Starting next week we will start to look at HOW we respond to this opponent.

But for today we pause here to be sure we've grasped the fact that we are part of this battle against these wiley, deceitful, and powerful forces of evil.

- On one hand we should be careful to not give Satan too much credit...
- But on the other hand we must not forget we have an enemy who is desperately assaulting us!

Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones wrote:

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'. And, of course, because we are not aware of this we attribute all temptation to ourselves. So in this the devil in his wiliness will have succeeded admirably. We become depressed and discouraged, we feel that we are failures, and we do not know what to do...

So Paul says in this passage that we need to recognize that we are in a spiritual battle...and SO **...We must recognize the nature of our battle. FINALLY:**

3. We must use God's resources to STAND FIRM in the battle.

Ephesians 6:10-13

Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil...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.

This battle can seem pretty intimidating... and you'd be smart to be intimidated by all this...

- You'd be smart to even be a little scared at the idea that we are in a spiritual battle.
 - ...that we're in hand-to-hand combat with spiritual powers that are powerful, wicked, and devious!
- NOT because God can't handle Satan and his demons, but because left to ourselves, we're both overpowered and outmaneuvered.**
- On our own we don't stand a chance!

But Paul reminds us that we haven't been left to our own resources.

- We are not on our own.
- We are NOT left unarmed.
- We are not left powerless in the face of a powerful enemy.

He says,

...be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armor of God...

Paul gives us an image for the whole Christian life as spiritual warfare.

And the way we live this life is to PICK UP and PUT ON the Lord's resources!

- We lean on the Lord's strength—not our own.
- We trust in HIS power.
- and the Lord's armor.

God supplies all that we need for this battle, and it's more than enough!

- Paul says to, "Put on the full armor OF GOD"
- LITERALLY means, "God's armor"

Whose armor is it that we put on?? GOD'S ARMOR.

This is not simply armor that God has for us...It seems MUCH more significant than that.

The prophet Isaiah gives us a fascinating picture of God...

- He is is offended by injustice and evil...
- He looks around to see if anyone is able to do anything about it, but there is no one...
- So here is what God does:

Isaiah 59:15b-17

Now the Lord saw, and it was displeasing in His sight that there was no justice.

And He saw that there was no man, and was astonished that there was no one to intercede;

Then His own arm brought salvation, and His righteousness upheld Him.

He put on righteousness like a breastplate, and a helmet of salvation on His head;

And He put on garments of vengeance for clothing and wrapped Himself with zeal as a mantle.

This is amazing—God himself puts on armor and goes to battle against his enemies!

What does this mean?

- In the OT the Jewish people came to understand that God himself would intervene in this world and on behalf of his people.
- God himself would come and win victory over evil.

And that's exactly what happened. God himself came in the person of Jesus Christ.

From the cross, Jesus struck a fatal blow against the rulers, authorities, and cosmic powers of "this present darkness."

Paul tells us in Colossians that Jesus:

Colossians 2:13b-15

He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions, having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us, which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross. When He had disarmed the rulers and authorities, He made a public display of them, having triumphed over them through Him.

Jesus now sits in VICTORY at God's right hand...

- having struck a fatal blow against Satan and all evil powers.

But –this is important– Satan is fatally wounded, but he's not dead yet.

- His defeat has been accomplished, but he's in his dying throes.
- He still continues to send his flaming arrows our way.

It's like a hockey match with the clock running out...

- The losing team may have NO real chance of winning, but they're aggressive...
- Fights break out in those final minutes of the game.
- Again, there's no way the losing team can win, but they make it miserable.

Satan is like that.

- He's been defeated—doesn't stand a chance!
- But he's still fighting in the dying minutes of the game.

So, Paul says, we must be STRONG—KEEP UP OUR GUARD—PUT ON GOD'S ARMOR!

- When we put on God's armor we take our stand with what God has already done for us in Jesus!
- When we put on God's armor we stand in VICTORY—even though we go through the motions of spiritual battle...
- **We must recognize the nature of our battle as we use God's resources to fight...**

Today some of us may feel overwhelmed.

- It has been a DIFFICULT season for so many of us.
- It has been all some of us can do to survive the last few months.
- So the thought of now having to engage in some spiritual battle sounds unbearable—impossible even...

This is why Paul says to stand firm in THE LORD and strong in THE LORD.

This is why we are to function in the strength of HIS might.

- We can't rely on ourselves—If we do, we're dead.

American theologian & pastor Jack Miller wrote:

“What we sometimes fail to see is that reliance on people, their capabilities, their keeping their promises, is a demonic faith, a cooperation in heart with the powers of darkness.”—Jack Miller

- When we stand alone and we choose to NOT rely on the promises of God to fight on our behalf...
- When we become too busy for prayer and spiritual preparation...
- When we are so focused on our performance that we forget about Jesus' perfect performance...

Every moment that we stand in our own strength is a moment spent aiding our enemy!

We join in with the enemy when we fail to rely on the promises of God to move on our behalf.

- In fact, Satan's strategy is to get us to rely on ourselves—or other PEOPLE—and lose confidence.

And so today Paul reminds us to stand against Satan and relying on **God's** power through Jesus.

HOW—“Be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Put on the armor of God...

- **We must recognize the nature of the battle that we are in...**
- **We must recognize the nature of our enemy**
- **We must use God's resources to STAND FIRM in the battle.**

****invite up CC...**

Few things are more important than understanding the nature of the battle face every day...

- AND few things are as important as knowing and understanding the resources we have in the Lord.
- **JESUS is our resource and our armor!!**
- **JESUS enables us to STAND and RESPOND and FIGHT!**

This is why the Gospel is VITAL for every day of our life!

- We must remember who Jesus is and what He has done for us.
- We must remember who we are in Jesus.
- We must remember the strength and victory and confidence and the hope we have in Jesus!
- We must remember that we have TREMENDOUS resources and power and strength in the Lord!

Christians, Be strong in the Lord!

- Understand what we're part of: we're part of what God is doing in uniting all things in Christ.
- Realize that this will not go un-opposed.

Be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power.

- Stand and FIGHT together in the Lord's strength!

We fight a DEFEATED foe—stand in the power of JESUS' strength and FIGHT!

****prayer****

****Gospel****