

EPHESIANS

Part 13: “Spiritual War”

Ephesians 6:10-24

Sunday, December 2, 2018 (First Sunday of Advent Season)

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Scripture Reading

¹⁰ Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. ¹¹ Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. ¹² 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. 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. ¹⁴ Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, ¹⁵ and, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace. ¹⁶ In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one; ¹⁷ and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, ¹⁸ praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end, keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints, ¹⁹ and also for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel, ²⁰ for which I am an ambassador in chains, that I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak.

²¹ So that you also may know how I am and what I am doing, Tychicus the beloved brother and faithful minister in the Lord will tell you everything. ²² I have sent him to you for this very purpose, that you may know how we are, and that he may encourage your hearts.

²³ Peace be to the brothers, and love with faith, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. ²⁴ Grace be with all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with love incorruptible. ¹

“Almighty God, give us grace that we may cast away the works of darkness, and put upon us the armor of light, now [in this time of year when we remember that your] Son Jesus Christ came to visit us in great humility; so that in the last day, when he [will] come again in his glorious majesty to judge both the [living] and the dead, we may rise to [eternal] life; [we pray this] through [the name of] him who [lives] and [reigns] with [you the Father] and the Holy [Spirit], one God, now and forever. Amen.”²

¹ [*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Eph 6:10–24.

² The Episcopal Church, [*The Book of Common Prayer and Administration of the Sacraments and Other Rites and Ceremonies of the Church*](#) (New York: Church Publishing Incorporated, 2007), 159.

Introduction

At Redeemer Christian Church, we have been studying the New Testament book of Ephesians for several months, and today we bring that book to a close. It is a book in which the Apostle Paul explains the glory of the gospel of Jesus Christ and how that gospel applies to our lives. Ephesians is a truly wondrous book with some of the most profound, beautiful, and encouraging passages in the entire Bible. And because of that, it is easy to forget that this book was written in a damp, dark prison cell.

I find it absolutely amazing that as Paul the Apostle is in a place that should represent discouragement and defeat, his concluding thoughts in this letter are about the strength and victory of God. As he is surrounded by armored Roman soldiers and guards, he imagines the armor of God that is available to every Christian believer.

In the ancient world, it would have been easy for Christians to think only about the physical challenges before them. Persecutions were on the rise. Wicked men were at the helm of the government. To be faithful to the gospel was becoming more and more costly.

Likewise, today we may be tempted to look at the chaos of our national politics, global economies, and a surrounding culture that is becoming increasingly hostile toward biblical Christianity.

But Paul ends this letter by reminding us that God is stronger than we could ever imagine and that he wants us to be strong too. To be the church is not just a spiritual activity; it is an act of spiritual war. To live a gospel centered-life is an act of spiritual war. And it is that **“Spiritual War”** that we will talk about today, as we conclude the book of Ephesians.

Exposition

1.) The reality of spiritual war.

Paul wants us to know that our lives are a part of an unseen spiritual war: **“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”** (Ephesians 6:12, ESV). We live in a cosmos that includes not only God but also Satan and demons. Satan and demons are waging war against God’s people, and like a stealth war, it is a war we often can’t see until we are being bombarded.

It might surprise us, but The New Testament never once tries to convince us of the existence of demons. To believe in evil spiritual beings that deceive, tempt, and coerce humans was a normal, presumed part of the worldview of the first century.³

³ David George Reese, [“Demons: New Testament,”](#) ed. David Noel Freedman, *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 140.

But when we look at something like this, we assume we know better. We say to ourselves, of course ancient people thought demons were real, but we know that these people had superstitions at best and psychosis at worst.

We, after all, live in a post-Enlightenment age. Something is true only if it can be known by science. And whenever we run into a problem, we use our rationality, our scientific method, and our technology to control that problem.

And I certainly don't think science and rationality and technology are bad things. They can do a lot of good. However, they are powerless to explain and end the power of evil.

Did you know during the so-called age of Enlightenment, some thinkers suggested that one-day mankind would become so rational and scientific that all war would end? And do you know what happened at the end of the Enlightenment? We got to the twentieth century and had two World Wars, which killed more people in combat than any other event in history.

I know there are some of you who don't believe in something like demons. But I imagine you that you have experienced overwhelming temptation. I imagine you know what addiction feels like or what it means to be in bondage to a sin. I imagine you know what it feels like to fight a losing battle with evil despite your most rational thinking and most dedicated willpower. I imagine you know what it is like to feel like you have been attacked with fear. There is a spiritual reality around us, whether we believe it or not.

The Bible tells us about the reality of spiritual because God wants to awaken us from the sedation of going through the motions of in our very materialist world (cf. Rom. 13:12-14). God wants his people to be aware that we are part of a cosmic drama that is bigger than we could ever imagine. There is indeed more to heaven and earth than are dreamt of in our philosophy.

But do not let the reality of a spiritual war for one second frighten you. Our spiritual enemy is real. Our spiritual enemy is strong. But the good news I have for you today is that Jesus is stronger, and he wants us to put on his strength.

2.) The tactics of spiritual war.

The Bible teaches that there is a spiritual war that is more *real* than we think. But at the same exact time, the way the Bible teaches us to engage spiritual warfare is more *practical* than we think.

There are no magic spells or secret incantations. There are no rituals that need to be performed. You do not need to train on a far-away mountaintop in the mystical art of spiritual ninjutsu to fight the spiritual war.

When it comes down to it, there is only one method of fighting the spiritual war. According to Ephesians 6, what you need to do is simply "*stand*." In fact, that the word

“stand” (ἵστημι)⁴ or some variation of it is used four times in the first few verses of this passage: *“Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes 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 firm. Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth...”* (Ephesians 6:11; 13-14, ESV).

So before we dig into the meaning of the armor of God mentioned in this passage, we need to understand what it means to “stand” strong.

Firstly, *to “stand” is to stand in Christ*. This goes against the man-centered notion that spiritual warfare is something we can do in our own strength and willpower. Ephesians 6 doesn’t say be strong in your own strength, it says *“Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might”* (Ephesians 6:10, ESV). It doesn’t say take up the armor of you; it says take up the whole armor of God.

In fact, did you know that this is not the first time in the Bible that the armor of God is mentioned? It’s not. The first appearance of the armor of God is in Isaiah 59. The context is a vision of God as a mighty warrior, fighting on behalf of his people who are experiencing oppression and injustice:

“Justice is turned back, and righteousness stands far away; for truth has stumbled in the public squares, and uprightness cannot enter. Truth is lacking, and he who departs from evil makes himself a prey. The LORD saw it, and it displeased him that there was no justice. He saw that there was no man, and wondered that there was no one to intercede; then his own arm brought him salvation, and his righteousness upheld him. He put on righteousness as a breastplate, and a helmet of salvation on his head; he put on garments of vengeance for clothing, and wrapped himself in zeal as a cloak” (Isaiah 59:14–17, ESV).

Notice, in Isaiah 59, the armor of God is not something we put on. It is something God puts on as he goes to fight battles we could never win for ourselves. So, we might ask, why can Paul say we can now put on God’s armor? Because we are united with God in Christ, which (if you remember) is what Ephesians chapter 1 was all about.

To put on the armor of God is to put on Christ. As Paul says elsewhere: *“The night is far gone; the day is at hand. So then let us cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light...put on the Lord Jesus Christ...”* (Romans 13:12–14, ESV).

So the first key to spiritual warfare is to trust in the strength of God and rest in the promise of his ultimate victory.

Secondly, *to “stand” means we are to stand together as the body of Christ*. There are five imperative verbs all throughout this passage. These are commands that we are to

⁴ “to stand up against, resist” William Arndt et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 482.

follow. And do you know what is special about these commands in the Greek language? Every one of these commands is a second person plural verb. To translate that into Texan, this means *you* do not put on the armor of God – *y'all* put on the armor of God. This goes against an individualistic understanding of spiritual warfare.

How are we to “be strong”? Together. How do we “take up” and “put on” the armor of God? Together. How do we “stand” firm? Together. The armor of God is found on the body of Christ. Don’t let the enemy isolate you. We are meant to be in this together.

Finally, to “stand” means we are to stand in prayer. Look at verse 18: “*praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end, keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints*” (Ephesians 6:18, ESV). In this short verse, we are called to pray habitually and consistently. We are called to pray alertly and vigilantly. We are called to pray perseveringly, which means we don’t get discouraged when circumstances are not what we want them to be. We keep praying. And we are to pray not just for ourselves, but also for all the saints.

This is why this Advent, in partnership with *Refugee Language Project*, we are asking for our congregation to pray for refugees in our community by name. Several of these refugees are already our Christian brothers and sisters. However, through *Refugee Language Project*, we are engaging several Somali people in our community who are being exposed to the gospel for the very first time. You better believe we have been spiritually attacked because of this. So that is why we are asking for prayer. Prayer isn’t just something we do to make ourselves feel better. Prayer is how we stand and fight in our spiritual war.

This is how we stand and put on the armor God: we stand in Christ, we stand together corporately in the body of Christ, and we stand together in prayer. And it is in light of that that we can begin to understand what it means to put on the armor of God.

The first piece of the armor of God is “*the belt of truth*” ([Show 1Belt of Truth](#))(Eph. 6:14). In Roman times, a belt was the centerpiece of a soldier army. It was a thick leather strap, reinforced with iron that was to be worn at all times. While it might appear less impressive relative to some of the other parts of the armor, the main purpose of the belt was to hold the other piece of armor and clothing together.

So too, God’s truth must be absolutely central to us. Truth is what secures us, supports us, and holds us together. You might say, truth might often seem unimpressive, but without it, we fall apart.

The second piece of equipment in the armor of God is “*the breastplate of righteousness*” ([Show 2Breastplate of Righteousness](#))(Eph. 6:14). The breastplate was a metallic covering that protected a soldier’s vital organs.

So too righteousness guards our hearts and our very lives. We take on the breastplate of righteousness when we spur on one another to love and good deeds (cf. Heb. 10:24). But the truth is the breastplate is not something we could ever conjure, but rather it is

something imputed and given to us. The book of Isaiah says, our righteousness is filthy rags (Isa. 64:6), unable to defend from anything. But God's righteousness is an impenetrable breastplate (Isa. 59:17).

Then, we are to put on "*shoes*," which are "*the readiness given by the gospel of peace*" (Show [3Shoes of Gospel Peace](#)) (Eph. 6:15). In Roman times, soldiers would wear leather sandals that covered the feet and ankles. However, they were not ordinary sandals. They were equipped with cleated nails that would dig into the ground so that soldier wouldn't stumble when they marched and wouldn't fall back when they met resistance. In other words, a soldier's shoes made him stand with a sure footing.⁵

So too, in our spiritual battle, our ability to stand doesn't come from our ability to wage our own warfare. Rather, it comes from the fact that through the gospel Christ has made a way for us to have peace with God. Christ gives us a sure foundation so that we do not slip in battle (cf. Ps. 18:33). The gospel provides us with the ability to stand – not in what we have done – but what Jesus has done.

Next comes the "*shield of faith*" (Show [4Shield of Faith](#)) (Eph. 6:16). For a Roman soldier, the shield was not small. Rather, it was a full body iron shield, so thick that it was able to stop even flaming arrows.⁶

This is how faith works. Faith is knowing, understand, and resting in what the Bible says and promises to be true. Our faith at times may be weak, but the God who is the object of our faith is infinitely strong and able to overcome the attacks of our spiritual enemy.

Next to last is "*the helmet of salvation*" (Show [5Helmet of Salvation](#)) (Eph. 6:17). Just like a football helmet today, in ancient times a Roman soldiers helmet was designed to protect the head from blunt force trauma. Likewise, God's sure saving power protects our heads. It is because of God's sure and certain salvation that we can go into battle with confidence.

Lastly, there is "*the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God*" (Show [6Sword of the Spirit](#)) (Eph. 6:17). This is the one offensive weapon included in the armor of God, and it is a powerful one. The book of Hebrews says the word of God is "sharper than a two-edged sword" (Heb. 4:12), it is weapon used not only for defense but attack.

The word of God is the weapon that defeats deception with wisdom. The word of God is the weapon that defeats discouragement with comfort. The word God defeats distraction with the focus that comes from an eternal perspective. The word of God defeats death with the power of life.

Put on this armor of God. Put on Christ. Stand together in the body of Christ and be reminded in worship and community what is yours in Christ. And pray so that you

⁵ R. Kent Hughes, [Ephesians: The Mystery of the Body of Christ](#), Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1990), 232.

⁶ Ibid. 234.

might know the powerful reality of standing strong in the strength of Christ.

3.) The hope of spiritual war.

Again, I find it amazing that these powerful words were written from a dungeon. Paul is an ambassador of Christ, but as verse 20 reminds us, he is “*an ambassador in chains*” (Eph. 6:20).

Yet there is not a hint of defeat in Paul. He fully expects the church to endure. He gives marching orders to Tychius and blessings to the people of God in Ephesus (Eph. 6:21-24). When he asks for prayer, he doesn’t even say, “please pray that I would get out of prison.” He prays that he would have the ability to proclaim the gospel “*boldly*” whenever he opens his mouth (Eph. 6:18-20).

Why can he have such hope and confidence, even as a spiritual war rages all around him, and his circumstances make it look like he is losing?

Paul has an unflinching hope for the same reason we can have an unflinching hope today. We can stand firm and strong against our spiritual enemy because at the cross of Jesus Christ the battle was already won. At the cross, God took any claim that spiritual forces of darkness had against us and nailed it to the cross (cf. Col. 2:13-15). At the cross, our sin was killed and crucified. And today, if you believe in Jesus, Christ’s victory is your victory.

Now the full reality of Christ’s victory might not be seen or experienced us today. But make no mistake – the enemy has been fatally wounded, and the full consummation of Christ’s kingdom is coming.

A few years ago there was a missionary couple lived in a remote village deep within the Amazonian jungle. They gave their lives to loving and serving an unreached people group of Native Americans.

One day they discovered a massive anaconda had invaded and taken up residence in their home. The snake was deadly, and they knew they were unable to defeat it themselves.

So they found a man in the village that was famous for capturing and killing these snakes. They convinced him to come into their home to try and dispatch of the snake that had invaded. The man went into the house and after a short time came out of the house. When he came out of the house, the couple could hear the snake writhing and slamming into the wall and knocking over furniture. Initially, they thought the man had failed. But they were wrong. In fact, he showed them the head of the decapitated snake, which he had placed in a bag, and he told them to wait for a while for the snake to figure out that he was dead.

You see, the snake had already been defeated. The snake was still able to do some damage. The snake was still causing quite a bit of turmoil. But all the couple needed to

do was *stand* in the victory that had already been accomplished for them.

Our spiritual war is won in the exact same way.

Author Carolyn Arend writes, *“To be certain...there is an immeasurable amount of evil in our world. But compared with God's love and power, all the evil in the universe doesn't cover the head of a pin. Love wins. Satan doesn't stand a chance. Thus, though we wrestle with the brokenness that plagues the world, and ourselves, we do so not with grim resignation but with hopeful defiance. We face both our addictions and afflictions not with a faint, white-knuckled hope that someday we will be healed, but rather with an assurance that we are living slowly but surely into the healing already obtained on the Cross. There is still a waiting. In some cases the healing may not come in fullness until we are face-to-face with our Victor —but come it will. Guaranteed.”*⁷

So Redeemer Christian Church, in this Advent season, as we wait for, yearn for, and long for the King and his kingdom that is to come, let us stand firm in the strength of his might. Let us put on the whole armor of God, and having done all stand. AMEN.

Community Group Discussion Starters

- 1.) *In today's world it is easy to forget that “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” (Eph. 6:12). Why is it so important for Christians to remember the reality of spiritual warfare?*
- 2.) *To put on the armor of God is another way of describing what it means for Christians to put on Christ (see Rom 13:12-14). What do the various pieces of the armor of God teach us about being “in Christ” (cf. Eph. 1:3-14)?*
- 3.) *What practical truths does this passage teach us about prayer?*
- 4.) *As we conclude our study of Ephesians, what are some of the most helpful truths that you have taken away from this book of the Bible?*

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⁷Carolyn Arends. “Satan’s A Goner: a lesson from a headless snake.” Christianity Today. March 25, 2011. <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2011/february/satansagoner.html>

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