

Spiritual Warfare

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[0 : 0 0] Ephesians 6 verse 10. 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 and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace.

In all circumstances, take up the shield of faith with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one, and take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, 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, and also for me, that words may be given me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel, for which I'm an ambassador in chains, that I may declare it boldly as I ought to speak.

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

[1 : 4 8] Amen. Peace be to the brothers, and love with faith, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Grace be with all who love our Lord Jesus Christ, with love incorruptible.

Amen. This is the word of God. Heavenly Father, we bow in your presence. May your word be our rule, your spirit our teacher, and your greater glory our supreme concern, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen. We Christians are at war. We may be at peace with God, but to be at peace with God means that his enemies are now at war with us.

What's at risk is our faith, our freedom, and our very humanity. It's not a physical war such that we take up arms. It's not a political war such that we forge strategic alliances.

It's not even a religious war such that we pursue dominance over other views. It is a spiritual war against unseen enemies who are ingenious in their hatred of us.

[3 : 0 7] We Christians are at war. The great lie we tell ourselves, of course, is that we're not at war, and there's no need to fight.

The deadliest kind of war is one we don't know is being waged against us. But having read these verses in Ephesians 6, none of us need doubt that having become believers in Jesus Christ, having become members of God's church, we're in a fight.

But likewise, it's a fight none of us need to doubt that we'll be victorious in. The Christian life isn't all sweetness and light. It is often filled with sweat and with tears as we struggle against our enemies, sometimes losing a battle.

But we will always win the war. It's been this way since Satan tempted Adam and Eve to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Since then, the children of God have been mercilessly persecuted by the children of the serpent.

On the cross, their hatred climaxed as they put to death the Lord of life himself. Jesus said, if they hate me, they will hate you also.

[4 : 23] We may be dearly loved, but you know we're also deeply hated. We Christians are at war, and what's at stake is our faith and our freedom and our very humanity.

Now, in this passage, the Apostle Paul, who knew all about being hated by Christ's enemies, after all, he's writing this letter from prison on account of his being a Christian, tells us two things.

First of all, we have an enemy from verse 10 to 12, and secondly, we have the victory from verse 13 to 20. Of all the aspects of life in God's new society, the church, this is the one we most conveniently choose to ignore.

We Christians are at war. First of all, from verse 10 through verse 12, we have an enemy. We have an enemy. The letter to the Ephesians, as I hope we've all grasped, proclaims to us the all-encompassing love and grace of God through Jesus Christ.

Like a musical symphony, it draws us from the depths of human sin to the heights of God's salvation. It proclaims to us the mystery of God's glory in joining together, Jew and Gentile, as one society, dominated not by human barriers which divide us, but by the love of Jesus Christ, so that ultimately, God's new society shall resound to the praise of the glory of God, and Jesus Christ shall have his purified bride with him.

[6 : 07] But in our Christian experience, there's an enemy against whom we must fight. He is the devil. He is mentioned both in Ephesians 2.2 and Ephesians 4.27, but is now revealed to us in Ephesians 6.11 as the enemy against whom we must take our stand, against the schemes of the devil.

When we become Christians, we instantly earn his hatred. We must take our stand against him, for he has declared war upon us just as he declared war upon the Christ whom we serve and whom we love and to whom we are united by faith.

We have an enemy in our fight for faith and for freedom and for humanity. He never tires. He never lets up. He will seize every opportunity to destroy our faith, and when he can't do that, he'll try to destroy our churches, marriages, and families.

He's trying to seek a way into this place today, disturbing our unity in Christ and our worship of the name of Christ. He is the devil, and he is our enemy.

To wrestle with him and be victorious over him, we need to be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. We need to put on the whole armor of God so when that day of evil comes, we may stand.

[7 : 40] Briefly, Paul tells us four things about him. He is unseen, first of all. He is unseen. We do not wrestle, Paul says, against flesh and blood.

Our fight isn't against anything we can see or touch. Our enemy is spiritual. He's unseen. Because he is unseen, he has successfully convinced most that he does not exist.

You know, it's easy to fight against an enemy we can see, but against an enemy which is entirely spiritual. We need spiritual wisdom and spiritual weapons. But even though our enemy cannot be seen, the impact of his actions can be seen.

We see them all around us in the breakdown of communities, in wars between people. What are we seeing in the Middle East today but the devil at work? In the destruction of the most vulnerable, abortion, euthanasia.

In false religion. In the loosening of all moral values in our society. Behind all these is the unseen hand of an unseen enemy. This is who we fight against.

[8 : 55] Because he is unseen, we cannot tell where he and his spiritual allies are. And churches are one of his favorite targets. Against this enemy, we need spiritual wisdom and spiritual wisdom.

The second thing Paul says is that he's strong. Strong. Rulers. Authorities.

Cosmic powers. Verse 12. They are strong enough to twist even the strongest of men to do their will. If only their strength was that which is presented in Hollywood movies, we'd have nothing to fear from them.

But their strength is more powerful still. They are strong enough to deceive the entire human race and enslave us all in a prison of despair, destruction, and death, all the while disguised in their prison as a bastion of hope, equality, freedom, love, and life.

If any should presume to stand against the devil in his own strength, although, why would they? they shall be utterly destroyed. To take our stand against such a powerful enemy requires spiritual wisdom, spiritual weaponry, and to stand in a power stronger than his.

[10 : 18] The third thing about our enemy is that he is evil. This present darkness against the spiritual forces of evil. We're not allowed in our society today to say that anything is evil.

He is evil. He is utterly wicked. There is no good at all in the devil. It is all darkness. There is no light in him.

There's no common ground between him and God. There's no compromise between them because as he is the darkness, God is the light, and where he is evil, God is good. Every human being, however depraved, is capable of doing some good, of loving his family, of being loyal to his nation.

But our enemy is wholly evil and incapable of showing any good at all. He is incapable of loyalty, love, mercy, or compassion.

In the Lord of the Rings, a besieged King Theoden asks the question despairingly, what can men do against such reckless hate?

[11 : 34] Indeed, without the goodness of the God in whom we stand, we shall utterly fall before the devil. And then fourth, he's very clever.

He's very clever. In verse 11, Paul talks about the schemes of the devil. He has ingeniously cunning methods in his fight against us as Christians. We've already seen one to deceive us into thinking that he doesn't exist.

Listen, spiritual compromise is another one into which he has lured countless churches in our day which were once faithful to the apostolic gospel in a crucified Christ, but have now watered down their preaching so that what they say from their pulpits is no longer good news from heaven, but a reflection of the warped views of a darkened society.

That's the devil. Another is the cunning mixture of truth with error. God is love. All love is love.

See where I'm going. So many deceitful schemes. The devil is more intelligent than any human being or any computer or any artificial intelligence.

[12 : 54] He often enters as a wolf in sheep's clothing into the church. Oh, we need wisdom and weaponry from God to defeat him.

Now, my aim is not to cause anyone any anxiety, but simply to point out the truth from Ephesians 6 that as Christians we're at war with a formidable adversity. And what's at stake is our faith, our freedom, and our humanity.

But even more so, what's at stake in the spiritual war we're fighting with the devil as Christians? What's at stake is the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ in the life of his new society, the church.

Is the glory of Christ not worth fighting for? If Jesus Christ should have bled and died for us on the cross, should we not be willing to take our stand for him here?

If the blessed captain of our salvation is now ours, let's stand under his banner, our captain, our head, our master and friend, Jesus Christ.

[14 : 02] We have an enemy. Well, secondly, we have the victory. Not we can't have the victory, or we may have the victory, or we might have the victory.

We have the victory, verses 13 to 20. As the church, we are assured victory over the devil. Our king and captain, Jesus, has already fought and defeated him on the cross.

And as we, his people, stand firm in his victorious gospel, we too shall overcome. God's new society so hated by the world because it so it first hated Christ, we will stand in him.

Paul instructs us in these verses how we may live as a victorious church and as conquering Christians. Between verses 13 and 20, he gives us four commands, four imperatives.

The first is this, be alert. Be alert. The second, stand your ground. The third, put on the whole armor of God.

[15 : 06] The fourth, pray. Be alert, first of all. In verse 18, the apostle says, keep alert. As Christians, we must never let down our guard lest the devil grasp the opportunity to attack us.

Just like the British army invests millions of pounds on early warning surveillance systems so let's ensure that we're always on the lookout for the attack. It can be a direct attack in that the devil will place a sinful thought in our minds, a thought of jealousy, hatred, lust, or anger.

It can be a more indirect attack in that he uses other people to draw us away from our faith in Christ. Many Christian young people are drawn away from the faith of Jesus Christ when they meet a rather attractive non-Christian with whom they form a romantic relationship and almost inevitably the Christian falls away.

The devil's cunning. He is ingenious. He never attacks us in an exorcist style of Hollywood movie. If he did it would be far too obvious.

We'd know it was him. We would resist him. In Ephesians chapters 4 verses 6 the apostles detailed how being a member of God's new society is to be lived out in the context of church, marriage, parenthood, childhood, and the workplace.

[16 : 40] Chances are the devil will attack us in one of these areas. That's how to recognize the devil's attacks. Is our work demanding so much from us that we're beginning to sacrifice our families and our children and our church life?

Could it be that the devil is using our work to draw us away from our faith? Is there conflict in our marriage? Are we demanding too much from our spouses? Are we being selfish in the demands we make from them?

Could it be that the devil is sowing discord in our marriages to draw us away from our faith in Jesus? The devil often appears as an angel of light. So could it be that in the church a form of doctrine is being taught that might sound worldly wise, but is actually diminishing the glory of his gracious salvation on the cross, or that waters down the continuing demands of the moral law in the life of the gospel Christian?

You can live any way you like. You can be with whoever you like. It doesn't matter. God will still love you. That's the unseen devil using Christians. Could it be that in the church there's an overformality, a lovelessness, a distance?

There's the devil sowing his wicked seed. We must be alert and watchful for even before the close of this service, I guarantee the devil who never gives up his fight against us will doubtless attack.

[18 : 06] second imperative. Stand your ground. Stand your ground. Paul's words in verse 13 have challenged me ever since I first read them 36 years ago when I became a believer.

Therefore, take up the whole armor of God that you may be able to withstand in the evil day and having done all, having done everything you possibly can, stand firm. Withstand the evil one.

Stand firm. There's not even a hint of that pietistic teaching here which says let go and let God. Stand firm against the devil in our marriages, in our families, in our workplaces.

It requires strenuous effort. Withstand him and having done everything you possibly can, keep standing. It's quite hard to resist the devil's cunning temptations, so, so hard not to say that hateful word to a person who hurt us.

It's so hard not to let selfishness get the better of us, so tough to unsee an infectious pornographic image, so tough.

[19 : 19] Because everything within us wants us to indulge our sin, nurse our vengeance, and take pleasure in our pettiness. But at times like this we must remember the apostolic command, withstand.

And having done everything you can, stand. Stand, even though you have to do it through gritted teeth, because that temptation is temporary, but the strength God will give you is always.

And suppose everything we know to do to withstand temptation is exhausted. Dry something else. We must do all within our power not to give in.

Stand firm. It may mean involving others in our struggle. One of the reasons that we love membership in the church is because it allows us to confide in others, one or two perhaps, and ask them to help pray for us so that we may stand strong.

a Christian friend of mine, a very senior minister, has asked me to hold him accountable for his use of the internet late at night after his family goes to bed.

[20 : 33] No one here, just in case you're wondering. Perhaps we could all have such accountability partners in whom we confide and who can pray for each other and fight with each other.

Fight, struggle, and never, ever give up because your enemy won't. Stand firm. Third, command, put on the full armor of God.

Put on the full armor of God. The armor of God is one of the most famous images in the Christian life. The Puritan Richard Gurnall wrote a huge tome on the subject.

I have one in my study at home. Each page of which is tightly packed with solid Christian experience as to how we may stand our ground against the devil. Paul writes in verse 11, put on the whole armor of God.

Then in verse 13, take up the whole armor of God. We want to be as aware of the devil's schemes as we want to be determined to stand our ground.

[21 : 40] But to stand firm against him, we need to put on God's armor. Notice the precise wording of verse 13. Take up the whole armor of God that you may be able to withstand in the evil day.

It is God's armor that gives us the ability to stand strong in that evil day when the devil comes against us to destroy our marriages and our families and our churches.

soldiers. Now, Paul's writing this at a time when everyone was familiar with what Roman soldiers wore. Strong belt, breastplate, shoes, shield, helmet, sword.

The Roman soldier carried everything he needed to fight a battle. In 1982, during the Falklands war, I remember this very well, British soldiers marched or yomped as they call it.

Remember that word from the past, yomping? 56 miles over rough terrain from their landing zone to the outskirts of the capital city of the Falklands, Port Stanley. Every soldier carried 80 pounds of weight on their back.

[22 : 52] Everything he needed to be well fed, warm, and at the end to fight. Ammunition, weapons, grenades. This is what Paul's telling us to do.

Take up your kit. It is everything you need in order to fight and to stand firm against the enemy. Now, it would be well worth coming back at some later stage to each piece of this armor and examining it in more detail, but I think it's better at this stage we look at it as a whole.

Truth, righteousness, peace, faith, salvation, and the Spirit. Paul's talking here about the whole gospel. The whole gospel. The gospel he has proclaimed between chapters 1 and 3 of Ephesians.

All the various pieces of armor are spoken about there. The truth of Christ to which he has enlightened us. The righteousness we have through Christ and his cross.

The peace we have with God through the blood of Jesus. The faith God gives us to believe in Jesus. The salvation which Christ has won for us by giving himself on the cross for us.

[24 : 02] The Holy Spirit whom he's given us to strengthen us so that we may win through all the struggles of life. And Paul's saying this armor, it's the gospel. And put it on, he says.

Use it in your fights against the devils. Let me give you a couple of examples of how we may use the gospel, practical examples of how we may use the gospel to fight against the devil.

The name Satan means accuser. That's what his name means, accuser. He accuses us by telling us your sins are so ugly, your sins are so disgusting that even God can't forgive them.

Ever told you that one? Your sins are so ugly that even God can't forgive you. That's a lie from Satan. Because the truth of the gospel is that the blood of Jesus is sufficient, more than sufficient for the forgiveness of every sin, even the ugliest of sins, most disgusting.

So when we hear that voice in our ears telling us that God can't forgive us because of the bad things we've done, we fight against him by taking him to the cross. where Jesus died to take all our sins away.

[25 : 17] Or again, the devil comes to us with a counsel of despair, meaningless, telling us this life is all there is.

You only live once. Your faith is in vain. It's all worth nothing. When you die, you die, and that's it. The truth of the gospel is that Jesus died on the cross to give us eternal life.

Life forever. So when we hear that voice in our ears telling us that there's no heaven, there's no hell, there's just the grave, and that's all that it is, that our faith is in vain, we fight against him and stand firm by going to the cross where Jesus died to give us eternal life.

The gospel in all its fullness is our armor, God's strength by which and through which he gives us victory.

If we want to stand firm in our faith, we need to be gospel Christians who recognize that the strength of the fight doesn't come from within us, but from God himself through the cross of his son on which he died.

[26 : 31] This is the armor of God, the gospel. Put it on, Christian. Use it, Christian. Fight against the devil with the gospel and you will be victorious.

The last command, pray, pray. Verses 18 through 20 are almost wholly taken up with Paul urging the Ephesians to pray.

Pray at all times with all supplications for all the saints. Pray always. The Christian who wants to stand firm is to be a Christian who prays. I love running beside the canal in the west end of Glasgow, that canal which joins the Firth of Forth on the east and the north sea with the river Clyde and eventually the mighty Atlantic on the west.

Prayer is the canal that joins the ocean of God's infinite gospel power with the sea of our emptiness and need. Prayer is the means by which the peace and joy and hope of the gospel becomes ours.

It's the canal through which God supplies us with strength necessary to stand firm against the devil and all his schemes. Without that power we'd be helpless to fight but with the power of God acquired through prayer we can stand and be victorious against the devil.

[28 : 00] It's in prayer the healthy Christian stays healthy. It's in prayer the unhealthy Christian may become healthy. many mature Christians have applied this passage by saying every morning they put on the whole arm of God piece by piece praying that God would reinforce to them that day the truth peace and joy of the gospel so that they may stand in holiness and love for him that day.

So they pray Lord put on the shoes of the gospel of peace on my feet today Lord put the helmet of salvation on my head today the blood of your son shed for me on the cross and so on.

We can try that too and come together as Christians in our prayer meetings on a Wednesday at 2.30 and 7.30 to pray for each other that God's infinite strength would beat our emptiness and need that we may stand firm against the devil.

We Christians are at war our enemy is a snake he is highly dangerous but through Christ and his cross we have victory. Though the world may hate us God loves us dearly and he will not let us fall he will hold us fast to himself.

The letter of Ephesians this magnificent summary of what it means to live as the church in God's new society concludes with a Trinitarian blessing from Father from Son and from Holy Spirit and what he promises us as the church striving for faithfulness is this his peace his love and his grace this is the victory of our faith to which we cling in the gospel this is the life and health of our church the arms of God himself reaching over us in blessing as he promises this church I will be with you always that is where we end our series in Ephesians with the arms of God's blessing reaching out over us saying I will be with you always I'll give you my peace and I'll give you my love and I'll give you my grace and I'll give you my power well one last question what side are we on in this war because there are only two sides there are no neutrals in this war it's time for those of us who've been sitting in the fence to come down on one side or the other are we on the side of Christ that is gospel peace, love forgiveness and hope or on the side of Satan the snake if we're on Christ's side if we believe and trust in Jesus as Savior and Lord and I know many of us do here it's time to run our flag up the pole and declare our loyalty and well we'll get opposition but at least we know where we stand it's time for us not just to become

[31 : 05] Christians but time for us to become members of God's new society the church just think just think of the glory and praise you bring to the name of Jesus Christ by doing this one thing let us pray our Lord and Father what privileges are ours that though we may face the most formidable enemy we have the victory we have it because your son died on the cross and was victorious over Satan and we're in him and so we too are more than conquerors how we thank you for these things in Jesus name Amen