

Our Spiritual Warfare (1)

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 15 September 2021

Preacher: Rev James Maciver

[0 : 00] And reading again at verse 10. Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. Put on the whole armor of God that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil.

For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers and against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.

Well, it doesn't take much insight as you look around the world to realize that there is much of the forces of evil at work throughout the world.

That is a fact that's known not just by Christians, but even by the world itself. Even the world itself uses the word evil, not exactly maybe as we ourselves as Christians, knowing the Bible would use it.

But nevertheless, it's very evident that there are evil forces that work throughout the world, engaged in all kinds of activities involving human beings. Behind the turmoil and the chaos that you see in the world, you have the operation of these forces.

[1 : 14] Just as Paul is saying here, we are not wrestling against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, the authorities, the cosmic powers over this present darkness. And he doesn't mean by the word present, he doesn't just mean what was through in his own day.

The word present there really means for this particular final stage of history, right through to the Lord's coming, these forces are going to be active. And even although already in principle and firmly defeated by Jesus, by his death and resurrection, and even though they cannot prevent the Lord from actually adding to his church, nevertheless, you're very much aware yourselves of the presence and the power and the influence of those forces of evil.

And it's one of our concerns with regard to the likes of this massive pandemic. While we're praying that the Lord will use that to bring home to people their need of himself.

At the same time and alongside of that, we're very much aware that the devil has access to people's lives and can actually use that pandemic in a different way.

So as to put people off thinking positively at all about God or about God and his goodness. All of those things can actually be taken and manipulated by these evil forces.

[2 : 37] And sometimes even to the point of getting to our own Christian hearts and minds. So as to sow seeds of doubt and take us away from that nearness to the Lord that we desire.

So I want to spend some time for a couple of weeks or two or three weeks, maybe going through this passage. It's a wonderful passage, as the brothers in prayer mentioned.

A passage that we're very familiar with. A passage that's been preached from, I'm sure, in this congregation many, many times. But, you know, it's something we need to actually come back to visit again and again.

As Murdoch prayed that we need to remind ourselves to take up the armor of God, the whole armor of God, each and every day. It's something we deliberately must do.

And as he very rightly prayed, we all, I'm sure, are guilty of not doing that each and every day that goes by. But here's a passage that's really valuable for many reasons.

[3 : 35] And for that reason in particular, it lays out some very, very basic things that we need to come back to again and again. And Paul himself in his letters actually does that.

He again and again comes back to some of the things that he's here picturing as parts of the armor following the imagery of a Roman soldier, which I think he had in mind as he set out these verses. Because he mentions all the parts of the armor as aspects of our basic human, basic Christian experience as human beings. And therefore, we have to come back again and again to the same

kind of passage as this, to know these basic things, to remind ourselves, to expand our knowledge of them.

And the two things I want to just mention tonight before we go into the parts of the armor itself. We'll leave that for a later occasion, God willing. But on to tonight, just to look first of all at the source of the strength that Paul mentions here in verse 10.

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. And the source of the strength is really very much in these words, in the Lord.

[4 : 47] Because when we are in the Lord, when we're in Christ, when that is where our life and our whole way of life is anchored and rooted, it is there that we actually find the source of our strength.

Our strength comes from the Lord in whom God has placed us. So that from him and in the strength of his might, we actually come to be strong for the day of temptation.

So that we're able to stand against the wiles, the schemes of the devil. So that's the first thing, the source of the strength in the Lord. The second thing we can call the gathering of intelligence.

As you know, whenever there's warfare, in the ordinary sense of it, it's so important to gather intelligence that you can use in terms of facing the enemy and seeking to overcome the enemy, whatever enemy that is.

And there are three things that Paul sets out here by way of a necessity of knowing that really forms the gathering of intelligence. But I don't mean the gathering of intelligence just so that we begin the war with that.

[5 : 56] As you become a Christian, you're conscious of this warfare, conscious of this battle, you're conscious of it on a daily basis. But this gathering of intelligence goes on all the time.

Whenever a nation is at war, the gathering of intelligence is important as long as that war lasts, as long as the conflict goes on. The gathering of intelligence is very important.

And the gathering of intelligence here we can see in terms of how we need to know our enemy, how we need to know ourselves, and how we need to know our resources.

Our enemy, ourselves, and our resources that God has given us. But look at the source of the strength briefly there. He is addressing Christians, obviously.

He's addressing people who profess to know the Lord, these Christians, these professing Christians in the church in Ephesus. Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might.

[6 : 54] They already know Jesus and acknowledge him as the Savior, but nevertheless, they're engaged in warfare. The fact that they've come to know the Lord has not put them outside of having to wrestle with and battle with these spiritual forces.

That's, in fact, where they begin. One of the sound pieces of advice given to myself when, first of all, I made a profession of faith was by an elder in that congregation to say, Now, you are aware, he said, that if you're not already, you will be, that from this time onwards, you're going to be engaged in a warfare.

You're going to be engaged in it within yourself and also out with yourself as you meet different powers and forces that are set on your destruction. And, of course, that's so right because that's what the Bible is telling us.

In the spiritual war, it's so important to go back to the things that form the basis on which we stand spiritually. Now, Paul does that very often throughout his letters, really.

Remember, for example, in Colossians, where he, before he actually specifies their need to do certain things in their Christian behavior, he begins by reminding them where they're situated spiritually.

[8 : 10] In chapter 3, for example, since then, or if you've been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things that are above, not on things that are on earth, for you died and your life is hidden with Christ in God.

Put to death, therefore. You see, he's beginning with the spiritual basis, the foundation, they're in Christ. They're set in Christ at the right hand of God.

That's where their life is rooted and anchored. That's their status. They are children of God.

Therefore, he says, do this. Put to death what is earthly in you.

And he's doing the same kind of thing in pointing out this armor to the Ephesians. He is saying, be strong in the Lord. He's saying, never forget what it is that defines you, what it is that identifies you. What identifies you spiritually is not the family you've come from, not the congregation you belong to, not the person you're married to or related to, not who your children are, not who your elder is,

nothing of that.

[9 : 15] It's in the Lord that you are identified. That's what gives you your identity. As a person in Christ, that's really your badge. Your identity is there. And that's one of the things that the devil, that these forces will always seek to actually draw your attention from you, draw your attention away from.

He's an expert. These spiritual forces that the devil and his angels, his helpers, the authorities, everything that forms that whole scenario of darkness, they're experts at taking your mind away from the basic things, from the things that you must constantly go back to as are foundational in your spiritual life.

And that's the very thing Paul is doing at the very beginning here. He's taking them to the most basic thing of all, that they are to be strong in the Lord and in the power of his might.

He's taking them right back to the Lord himself, even beyond their faith, their prayers, their fellowship, back to the Lord himself. And you have to do that so often, and I have to do that so often.

And we have to remind ourselves on a daily basis that this is really our foundation. This is what identifies us. We are in the Lord. We are his people. And all the resources he gives us, he gives us as his people.

[10 : 41] And that's why the nature of the armor here, the pieces that are mentioned there, are themselves part of the very basic requirements and the basic truths that apply to Christians.

When he talks here about the truth, the belt of truth, the breastplate of righteousness, readiness given by the gospel of peace, the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation, the sword of the spirit, the word of God, they're all absolutely essential and basic to the Christian life and how you live it.

And so they are too against the enmity of these forces of darkness. So that's the source of the strength that he goes on to speak about.

And then the gathering of intelligence. The three things I mentioned there. First of all, know your enemy. That's one of the essentials in any time of war, even recently in Afghanistan, of course, and all the years that forces and others were there.

But in every case of war, you always have to gather intelligence to actually get to know your enemy. Because your tactics, spiritually as an army or a navy or an air force, whatever, it will have to be tailored.

[12 : 01] It will have to be set to actually meet the type of enemy you've got, the way that that enemy behaves, the kind of resources that enemy has. And it's the same spiritually.

You tailor your approach to living your life as a Christian in facing these spiritual enemies. You have to get to know them. And of course, you get to know them primarily through the Bible.

You get to know them primarily because God's word describes them for us. And that's where you really come to know the characteristics. And here, in a brief compass, Paul is actually describing these enemies and their characteristics in verses 11 to 12.

He's saying, He's telling them, Remember, your enemy is clever. Remember, your enemy has himself intelligence and access to your life.

Remember, your enemy is clever enough to go through various schemes in the way that he sets about his work. And so you have to know your enemy that he's a scheming enemy, that he's a cunning enemy, that he manipulates and diverts and turns things around to suit himself as far as the Lord allows him to do that.

[13 : 21] But you can learn more of that from the whole of Scripture. He goes on to speak there about, We don't wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, the authorities, against the cosmic powers, powers that range over the whole of the universe in this present darkness, over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.

You don't see them. You don't see them with your natural vision. You detect them because inside your soul, God has set a detection system for them.

Just like you find in the ordinary case of warfare, where you have all the technology that's able to detect incoming missiles or whatever it is, God has given you that detection, that ability of having a detection system, because you get to know what your enemy is like.

You get to know him, and therefore you know when he's coming to you, although he comes very often in disguise. But you learn that also from Scripture. Now, when you take account of the whole sweep of Scripture history, beginning in Eden, you're beginning in Eden to actually learn about your

enemy, the devil.

Because in Eden, before man fell, before Adam and Eve actually disobeyed God, there is the devil in the form of the serpent. And there is the devil in the form of the serpent coming to Eve and saying, has God really said, you shall not eat of the trees of the garden?

[14 : 56] You see, he's immediately seeking to inject an element of doubt. He's seeking to inject into the mind of Eve a doubt about the truthfulness of God.

Or that God somehow has kept something back that he ought to have actually revealed to them. And of course, you know what the outcome of that was. She yielded to the temptation and then went to Adam, and he also yielded to the temptation.

And they fell and they knew that they were naked. And they sought to hide themselves in the trees of the garden. You know the way that the account then proceeds from there. They're right at the beginning of human history.

And it is human history. I don't mind what the evolutionist tells you, that these early chapters of Genesis are just fables or myths or whatever. Jesus believed them. Jesus took them as real, factual, historical events.

And that's good enough for us. If he believed them, then so do we. and right there at the beginning you have the schemes the cunningness the power the ability of these evil forces and then you work through the bible and you come through bible history likes of Israel and Egypt for example look at the way that Pharaoh sought to destroy all the male children that were born to try and prevent the increase of these people of Israel look at then how they went through the desert on the way through the wilderness the many times in the old testament books that record that journey for you how you come to things that you can detect knowing what the devil is like from the definitions you're given there's a work going on there and trying to prevent these people moving forward trying to prevent them reaching the promised land that's not just the the people that meet them it's not just the various nations that meet them you've got the likes of Balaam who is a soothsayer an evil man hired by Balak but you know the power once you know your bible and you know your lord you know the kind of power that's moving in Balak's heart and Balak's mind because the idea behind it as the king of Moab Balak made clear to him come and curse me Israel that's the strategy of these cosmic powers seeking if at all possible that you will lose everything as valuable to you spiritually and that if you can't if he can't take it away from you thankfully he can't he can't take Christ from you he can't take your salvation from you he can't take your righteousness from you he can't take anything of these from you but he can take your peace from you he can take your comfort from you he can take your effectiveness from you and he can sow suspicion about your fellow Christians and about others and all of these things are part of his his schemes and you can follow that through the bible Nehemiah is another example uh the way that um these uh these powers set about using the likes of these enemies of Nehemiah when he was seeking to rebuild in Jerusalem and it doesn't take much expertise at all to actually see that there are evil powers moving there same in the book of Acts very similar to to Nehemiah's book where you find uh the church as it sets out met by various types of resistance sometimes the resistance of violence and persecution what's behind that what is moving these people to actually have that sort of attitude and action against the people of God this is what it is these are the evil powers that are working behind the scenes above the scenes on earth these spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places and you see it possibly more than anywhere else in the life of Jesus himself because you get to know your enemy through just reading how Jesus dealt with him take for example the temptation where the devil came to Jesus and tempted him these three times and the temptation was all about trying to get him to leave the path of obedience that he was on us the servant of the father and to actually accept the deprivations the difficulties the trials that that entailed such as hunger for example if you are the son of God command these stones that they be made bread and every time Jesus answered you go over the answers again carefully every time he answered he answered from the written word of God it is written you see Jesus himself used the word of God as it was then in the old testament scriptures

[19 : 51] as his foil against the devil as his way of attacking the enemy's approaches he knew him and you get to know him if you study the answers of Jesus you don't just begin by by studying the the the statements that the devil put to him you have to you have to first of all study the answer that Jesus gave because it's in the answer that you see what the devil was really getting to what he was trying to bring about and as you see the answer of Jesus you'll then see so that's what he was trying to do that's what the strategy was get to know your enemy and you get to know your enemy

not just from your spiritual experience but especially from what the Bible itself tells you what the word of God brings to you by way of his characteristics secondly you're gathering intelligence by getting to know yourself the devil is very skillful at taking your mind off Jesus and off the basic things and onto yourself and to get to know yourself you get to know the characteristics that make this armor absolutely indispensable for us to wear because as you get to know yourself you get to know your fallibility and your humanness and your weakness the very things that you didn't think of before the Lord showed you yourself and Lord showed you your weakness as a sinner and you need to depend on his his grace and his strength and you see that fallibility that belongs to ourselves as human beings just looking at our own humanity looking at our own weakness and respect of that you see how that's put side by side with the way that the enemy is described the one who is not flesh and blood we don't wrestle against flesh and blood even though flesh and blood in terms of human beings might be involved in it but they're not the real forces we don't wrestle against flesh and blood but against the rulers of the and the authorities the cosmic powers is he is saying remember that you're weak because this is the enemy you're facing and you cannot face that enemy in your own humanness in your mere humanness even as a Christian you cannot actually face this enemy without realizing that your humanness and my humanness even as believing human beings requires much more than the strength and ingenuity calculations that we ourselves can bring to bear on it that's why he's saying be strong in the Lord and in the power of his might and not only are you aware of your own fallibility and weakness you're also aware of what Paul especially calls the flesh and what Paul means by the flesh and one of the uses he makes he uses the word in different different meanings but one of the main ways that he uses it is to describe the sin that still remains in us as believers which you're aware of because there's that inside yourself there's that in your mind and your thoughts in your attitude sometimes in your actions that you know is actually contrary to the Lord that's in your life contrary to the Holy Spirit's direction think of the way that

Galatians puts it again words that we're very aware of this I say walk by the spirit and you will not gratify the desires or the lusts of the flesh a very strong word for the desires of the flesh and against the spirit and the desires of the spirit and against the flesh it's probably actually better in the older translation in this instance as well for the the lusts of the flesh and against the spirit or the way it's put the spirit lusts against the flesh lusts against the spirit and the spirit actually is opposed to that so you've got this very strong word of describing what's still here in our hearts and our lives as Christians the this remaining sin that still has its own active power and if left unchecked will actually take you in completely the wrong direction and he's saying remember that gathering intelligence means getting to know yourself as well as getting to know your enemy and very often the two are combined anyway because your enemy having access to your life can use those things of your weakness and those things in the strength of the flesh the remaining sin in your life to actually take advantage of that the gathering of intelligence thirdly as well as getting to know your enemy and coming to know yourself you also know your resources look at again verse 14 there where you find him saying stand therefore in other words he's saying the strength of his might is what actually you stand on and then you take these various parts of the armor and you put them on every day you know your resources now he's talking here about the strength of his might here in verse 10 which isn't exactly the same as to describe it as his mighty strength you might think it's just another way of saying his mighty strength well in a way it might be but I think there's more to it and putting it as the strength of his might because you think first of all when you see that phrase you think of the almightiness of God the might of God the power that God has in himself that's what the apostle is actually getting the Ephesians to to get their minds set upon be strong in the strength of his might think about his almightiness think about his his complete power and then from that he is able to actually give you the strength and his strengthening that you need that's the kind of might that Jesus has that Jesus has that God has and from that that he has his ability to strengthen you and to strengthen me against the schemes of the devil where do you see that strength of of God or of Jesus as well I'm going to mention a few bullet points really and just leave it at that for tonight you see the strength of God the almightiness of God or or in Paul's phrase the strength of his might you actually see it described in the Bible you see it first of all when Jesus cast out demons and it's interesting that that that's there in relation to what we're dealing with dealing with tonight when Jesus cast out demons he showed the strength of his might no one else could do it the way Jesus did it and the strength of his might was seen in the way that he spoke with authority and power to

these demons that inhabited some people and as soon as Jesus spoke they responded they had to respond they had no option in fact Jesus in Matthew 12 verse 28 used the fact of his casting out demons as evidence as evidence as he put it that the kingdom of God has come upon you if I cast out demons by the spirit of God then the kingdom of God has come upon you is what he said you see it in his casting out of demons you see it in the death of Jesus and in the resurrection of Jesus think in Colossians again of chapter 2 and verse 15 where you find him talking Paul talking about God disarming the rulers and authorities and put them to an open shame triumphing over them in him and Jesus or in it could mean the cross that he's been speaking of just before that he's talking here of putting these rulers these authorities disarming them putting them on display as defeated enemies how did he do it by his death by dying the death he died and it follows into his resurrection Ephesians itself tells us that in chapter 1 verses 19 to 21 where he says there in terms of the power the immeasurable greatness of his power towards us who believes he's talking about the same thing it's an immeasurable power immeasurable in our part but it's a power which is working actually working always towards us who believe according to the working of his great might what is this great power that's working in our lives towards us who believe well it's the might that he showed when he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places there's the power of his might you go to the resurrection of Jesus and to the cross of Jesus and to Jesus casting out demons that's the power working in your life that's what he's reminding us of as we approach this enemy as he approaches us remind him of where you're situated remind him of what your identity is and use your standing in Christ he's saying to the Ephesians in the strength of his might and that follows through into our regeneration of being brought back from spiritual death making us alive as he puts it in chapter 2 again of Ephesians verses 5 to 10 through there you can read them through again yourselves you're familiar with the words anyway I'm sure even when we were dead in our trespasses he made us alive he quickened us together within union with Christ by grace you have been saved and that follows then into our strengthening in these verses that we're looking at in chapter 6 but also in chapter 3 there's some wonderful words they're used in chapter 3 of Ephesians now passing over this very very quickly but you can see in chapter 3 there that he's saying in verse 14 for this reason I bow my knees before the father from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his spirit in your inner being what a dynamic sentence that is he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his spirit in your inner being so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith so that you being rooted and grounded in love may have strength to comprehend see it's all about strengthening about filling us with strength for every task that God allocates to us so there briefly as we begin this short study of the armor of God or our spiritual warfare there is the source of our strength be strong in the Lord and in the power of his might there's the gathering of intelligence you get to know your enemy you get to know yourself you get to know your resources and as you bring these three together so you're then in the position of what Paul is actually drawing to our minds the position that we need to occupy the ground that we need to occupy in facing the enemy to be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might and we trust God will bless his thoughts on his word to us this evening we're to conclude now by singing again to God's state his intensity throughout the ■ ».