

“PREPARED FOR SPIRITUAL BATTLE”
(Ephesians 6:10-13)

Today we come to the final section of the incredible book of Ephesians in which the Apostle Paul’s final exhortation for believers is to stand firm against the forces of evil that wage war against us. There’s a famous story told about General George Patton, whose success in battle was due in large part to his knowledge of his opponents. His main adversary in World War 2 was the German General Erwin Rommel, and years earlier Rommel had written a book called *Infantry Attacks* where he outlined his strategies and tactics for fighting wars.

SLIDE. In March of 1943 the armies of Patton and Rommel met in an epic battle in Tunisia, a battle which Patton’s army decisively won. During the battle, Patton looked out on the battlefield with his binoculars and saw his forces crushing Rommel and the Germans, and Patton yelled out, “Rommel,” and proceeded to use some vulgarities to describe Rommel... “Rommel, I read your book! You... I read your book!” By reading the book on Rommel, Patton knew what Rommel was going to do and was able to outsmart him.

As believers you and I are engaged in an epic spiritual battle, and in Ephesians 6 we get to read the book of our adversary, knowing who he is and how he operates. Beginning in verse 10 of Ephesians 6, the Apostle Paul writes... “Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand.”

When it comes to the idea of the devil and demons and spiritual battle, Christians tend to fall into one of two extremes. On one hand, some Christians give little, if any, thought to the fact that a spiritual war is even taking place. Most of our day is spent living in the physical world we see and experience, and we don’t think much about the unseen spiritual world. A survey by the Barna Group that showed that 60% of Christians don’t believe Satan is a real person, but a symbol of evil. That’s kind of mind-blowing, but it shows how much our western, naturalistic, scientific worldview has influenced how we think. The real world is the world we experience with our five senses – the world that we can see and feel and taste and smell and hear – and anyone who believes in an unseen supernatural world is either kooky or unenlightened. If we buy into this kind of thinking, Satan has already won and we are left vulnerable to his attacks.

While some Christians don’t think much about spiritual warfare, most sense that there is an increasing level of evil and darkness in the world. When someone walks into a school or shopping mall and starts shooting people randomly, something more than the natural world is going on. When corporations and government institutions and higher education aggressively advocate for abortion and changing God’s design for sexuality and gender, and society falls in line with it, you know that something bigger is going on than meets the eye. When, on a personal level, you face intense temptation, when you’re overcome with worry and despair, when you feel persecuted for your beliefs, your know there’s something going on behind the scenes.

The good news is that there has been an increased focus on the subject of spiritual warfare the past few decades, but along with this has come another extreme of focusing too much on Satan and demons, and attributing every sin, every conflict, and every problem to demonic activity.

Some Christians advocate for a very aggressive approach of confronting evil forces – rebuking and binding them. The danger in this approach is that we will go beyond the simplicity of what the Bible teaches about spiritual warfare and add to what God’s Word says.

We want to be biblical and the central passage on spiritual warfare in the Bible is found right here in Ephesians 6. Today we’re going to look at verses 10-13 where we are told two things: one, who our enemy is – who we’re fighting – we want to read his book; and two, what we must do to defeat our enemy. Let’s begin with understanding our enemy, and look at his profile, his army, his goal, and his strategy.

Our enemy, verse 10 says, is the devil – one of the many names for Satan. The Bible describes the devil as a real person – not just a symbol of evil, but a person who thinks, has a will, and possesses emotions. Satan first appears as the serpent in the garden who tempts Eve, but we know from Ezekiel 28 and Isaiah 14 that Satan existed before the garden as Lucifer – the chief angel in heaven created by God. When pride was found in his heart and he aspired to sit on God’s throne, he was cast down from heaven and became the ruler of this world.

God originally created Adam to rule over earth, but when Adam sinned, he forfeited his position of authority, and that authority was given to Satan. The Bible says he is ruler of this present world until Jesus comes again and establishes His righteous kingdom on earth. While Satan is presently the ruler of this world, his power was broken on the cross. When we come to faith in Christ, we are delivered from the kingdom of darkness and transferred into the kingdom of God. We are no longer under the grip of Satan. In the first three chapters of Ephesians Paul described how as believers we are seated in the heavenly realms with Christ with access to everything we need to win the spiritual battle. But as our passage today reminds us, until the Lord comes, we continue to live on Satan’s turf – we live as aliens in a hostile environment.

The Bible warns us that Satan is a powerful foe, but his power is limited. Unlike God, Satan is not all-knowing, all-powerful, or everywhere present. God has put limits on what he can or cannot do. When Satan wanted to afflict Job, God permitted him to do so to test Job’s faith, but he also put some specific limitations on what Satan could do to Job. God promises that he will not give us a temptation that is too strong for us to bear, but will make a way of escape for us.

If Satan cannot know everything, do everything, or be everywhere at once, then how does he wreak so much havoc in the world? The answer is that he has an army of demons to carry out his evil intent. Verse 12 says, “For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.”

Paul reminds us that our struggle is not against flesh and blood – in other words, the battle is not against other human beings we can see, it’s against spiritual powers we can’t see. It’s true that we face real-life human enemies that stand opposed to God and God’s people, but the real battle is being waged at a much deeper level. We tend to view Hollywood and politicians and media elites as enemies of the faith, but the real force behind them is Satan who dupes them into following his agenda.

1 John 5:19 puts it like this... “We know that we are children of God, and that the whole world is under the control of the evil one.” 2 Corinthians 4:4 says, “The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel.”

This explains all the turmoil we see in the world today – those who are opposed to God are under the sway of the evil one – they’re blinded to good news of the gospel. Rather than hate them and view them as the enemy, we should pray for them and seek every opportunity to share the gospel with them so that they can be delivered from the darkness.

In verse 12 Paul uses a number of descriptive phrases to describe the spiritual enemies we’re up against... “our struggle is against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.” This verse tells us that our enemy is powerful, organized, and evil.

Notice the plural words used in this description – against authorities_s, against the powers_s of this dark world, against the spiritual forces_s of evil. Satan uses a vast network of demons to carry out his evil intent. Demons are fallen angels who joined Satan in his rebellion against God. Revelation 12 hints that one-third of the angels fell with Satan, and they are at his beck and call, deployed around the world. Revelation 5 says that there are myriads and myriads of good angels – too many to count – so we can assume there is a vast number of fallen angels at Satan’s disposal.

Verse 12 seems to imply that Satan and his demonic army are organized and structured, just as good angels have various rankings and tasks. In the demonic army there are “rulers” and “authorities,” and demons under their command who do their bidding. We know from the gospels that while all demons are powerful, some are especially powerful. We also know from Daniel 10 that some fallen angels are assigned to specific geographical locations and kingdoms – Daniel 10 talks about a fallen angel who had authority and influence over the kingdom of Persia. We can’t speculate further on how demons are organized, only that they seem to be, and they are very effective in waging war – they’ve been at it for thousands of years and know what they’re doing.

Satan’s goal and mission on earth is simple: He wants to keep unbelievers from believing in Christ, and keep believers powerless in sin and ineffective in service for God. Since Satan cannot defeat God, he goes after God’s creation. In John 10 Jesus describes the enemy as a thief who comes to “kill, steal, and destroy.” He and his army are like a wrecking ball seeking to wipe out everything in its path. 1 Peter 5:8 says, “Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.” Like a lion, Satan is a predator who stalks his victims and seeks to destroy them.

He starts by doing all he can to keep people from coming to faith in Christ. He’s like the bird in the parable of the sower, who swoops down and snatches the seed of the gospel before it can penetrate the heart. Whenever the gospel is preached, or whenever you are sharing the good news of Christ with someone, there is opposition. You can sense it. The enemy wants to make the gospel look foolish to those who are perishing, and blind the minds of unbelievers so that they cannot see the glorious gospel of Christ.

When the gospel does break through and you come to faith in Christ, Satan doesn’t curl up and go away. He is committed keeping you in bondage to sin and ineffective in your Christian walk. He wants to keep you from enjoying and experiencing all the spiritual blessings you have in Christ. He wants to keep you from sharing the gospel with others. This is why nearly every book in the New Testament warns us to be sober and alert, so that we are not unaware of the enemy’s attack and caught off guard.

Satan's been at this for centuries and he has well-worn strategy to defeat you. Verse 11 says we need to take our stand against the devil's "schemes." The Greek word for schemes is *methodia*, from which we get the English word "method." Satan has a well-thought-out method and scheme to try to take us down. Next Sunday is the Super Bowl and this week both teams are watching hours and hours of film on the other team to discern any flaw, any weakness, any little thing they can exploit to their advantage... by the time Sunday afternoon comes they exactly where to strike their opponent.

In the same way, your spiritual enemy studies you – he watches to see where you are weak and vulnerable – and cleverly devises a scheme to take you out. Satan's main game plan revolves around deception. The KJV translates "schemes" as "wiles of the devil." Satan is wily and crafty. He doesn't come to you wearing a red cape with a pitchfork in his hand and say, "I'm here to destroy your life." He's the master of deception – he's cunning.

Two particular chapters in the Bible reveal how he operates. The first is Genesis 3 and the temptation of Eve. He comes to Eve as a beautiful serpent – in the Hebrew language the word serpent means "shining one." How interesting. Satan did not come as a creepy, slithery snake, but as a beautiful, radiant creature – someone Eve would not be afraid of.

2 Corinthians 11:14 says that Satan disguises himself as an "angel of light." He's doesn't come as the prince of darkness, but as someone who is good and wise, someone with your best interests in mind and wants to help you. Jesus said the same thing about false prophets – they come as wolves in sheep's clothing – they appear humble and innocent, but underneath the façade they are ravenous wolves.

The serpent first plants doubt in Eve's mind... "Did God really say you must not eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil?" He wanted her to think that God was withholding something from her – that He was restricting her from something good. The serpent then lied and said, "Nothing bad will happen to you if you eat, in fact good things will happen – you'll be liberated to decide for yourself what is good or bad." And like a fish attracted to the shiny fishing lure, Eve took the bait and fell prey to Satan's temptation. Satan's primary tactic is to make sin look enticing and good, and make God and His Word look restrictive and unenlightened.

We also see Satan use similar tactics in Matthew 4 where He tempts Jesus in the wilderness. He takes Jesus up high on a mountain and shows him all the kingdoms of the world and says, "It's all yours if you will bow down and worship me. You don't have to take the painful path to glory through the cross – you can have everything now." As with Eve, Satan appeals to the desires of the flesh, and the promise of instant gratification. He dresses sin up to make it look good and desirable, but hides the painful consequences that results from it.

The book of Hebrews says, "Sin is fun for a season." That's why so many people sin – it's fun and exciting and satisfying – but like a drug, the high eventually wears off and you're left in bondage to sin. David fell into the enemy's trap when he gave in to sexual temptation, and paid for it by losing his family and kingdom. Achan gave into his desire to steal the forbidden plunder of the enemy, and paid for it with his life. Samson who was lured into the arms of Delilah, and lost his strength as well as his life. These stories, and many more, are written to warn us to be spiritually alert lest we fall into the same trap.

Paul not only describes who our enemy is, but tells us how we can defeat him. Look again at verses 10-11... “Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes.” We defeat the forces of evil and the schemes of the devil by doing three things: being strong in the Lord, putting on the armor of God, and standing firm.

What stands out about these three actions is that they are primarily defensive, not offensive. We’re not commanded to go out and wage war on Satan, to rebuke him or try to bind him – we’re commanded to be strong in the strength of the Lord, put on the protection that God provides, and to stand our ground. The emphasis is on resistance.

The first command is to **be strong in the Lord**. To defeat the enemy we must recognize that relying on our own human strength is a recipe for disaster. Just ask David or Achan or Samson. 1 Corinthians 10:12 says, “Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall” (ESV). There’s never a time in the Christian life when we can relax and feel like we’re above the enemies’ attack. That’s when the enemy will pounce. We need to take heed, be sober and alert, and continually depend on the Lord’s strength to win the battle.

One of the humbling aspects of life is realizing how little power we have. Over and over in the Bible we read stories of men and women who lacked power – Moses felt inadequate to confront Pharaoh, Joshua stood helpless before the walls of Jericho, Gideon lacked courage to take on the Midianites – in the gospels multitudes of people came to Jesus with diseases, with leprosy, with blindness, with demon possession – all things they were helpless to overcome on their own.

In Ephesians 1:19 Paul prayed that we might know *the “immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe.”* It’s the same power, he says, that raised Jesus from the dead and exalted Him above all authority. As believers we have all of God’s power and strength at our disposal, and as Philippians 4:13 says, “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.” Our responsibility is to stand in the strength that we already have.

The story of David and Goliath perfectly illustrates this. While the Israelite army saw Goliath and quaked in fear at his physical size, but David recognized that his fight was not against flesh and blood – Goliath could only be defeated through the spiritual strength of the Lord. He said, “You come against me with sword and spear and javelin, but I come against you in the name of the Lord Almighty.” Without God’s strength, David vs. Goliath was a colossal mismatch, but when David stepped forward in the strength of God, he took down a giant.

Over and over in scripture we find the paradox that we are strongest when we are weak. Paul experienced this when God allowed Satan to afflict him with a thorn in the flesh to keep him humble and to demonstrate God’s power in his life. In 2 Corinthians 12:9 Paul writes, “But he said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.’ Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me.” Throughout the Bible, God delights in demonstrating His power in situations where human strength is lacking – it is only when we rely and depend on God’s power that we experience His strength.

The second command is: **Put on the full armor of God**. Next week we will look at verses 14-17 which describes six pieces of armor God provides, and the key to spiritual victory is standing in the divine protection we have been given.

Paul wrote the book of Ephesians while he was sitting in prison in Rome, and he no doubt observed the Roman soldiers guarding him and the protective armor they were wearing. Just as the armor of a soldier would ward off the attacks of the enemy, so too God has given each believer spiritual armor to enable us to stand against the spiritual forces that come against us – such as truth and faith and righteousness – all the spiritual blessings Paul has already talked about in the book of Ephesians.

Paul was also no doubt thinking of Old Testament references where God is pictured as a warrior fighting for His people – with many of the pieces of armor mentioned here. We are to put on what God has already put on for us, and stand strong in His power.

The third command we are given is **to stand**. Four times in verses 10-13 we are told to stand... “Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes... Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand” (vs. 11 & 13). To stand means to hold your position, to resist, to refuse to surrender ground to the enemy, and to preserve and maintain what has already been won.

When the day of evil comes – when we’re tempted and feel the pressure to conform to the world – the human impulse is to flinch, to give in, to shrink back and retreat. But when we rely on God’s strength and put on the armor of God, we are equipped to stand our ground and resist the enemy. The book of James says the same thing... “Resist the devil and he will flee from you” (James 4:7). The book of 1 Peter says the same thing when talking about Satan seeking to devour us... “Resist him, standing firm in the faith” (1 Peter 5:9a).

Resistance has the idea of endurance. We need to be strong in the Lord, put on the full armor of God, and stand firm to the end of this earthly life, so that we can say as Paul did, “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, and I have kept the faith” (2 Timothy 4:7).

As we gather around the Lord’s Table, we remember that it is only because of Christ’s work on the cross that we have spiritual victory. 1 John 3:8 says, “The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil’s work.” Colossians 2:15 says, “And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.” The irony is that when Jesus died, Satan and his evil forces thought they had won, but when Jesus rose from the dead, He declared victory over Satan and his power over those who put their trust in Christ. The whole message of Ephesians is that once we are in Christ, we have everything we need to experience spiritual victory.

Are you in Christ this morning? Have you been delivered from the kingdom of darkness and transferred to the kingdom of light? If not, you can do so right now by putting your faith and trust in Christ as your Savior from sin. If you have placed your faith in Christ, He invites you to partake of the bread and the cup, representing Jesus’ body and blood sacrificed for you – and it is by His death and resurrection that we stand in a position of spiritual victory.