

Standing Against the Enemy, Part One

Ephesians 6:10-17

In April of 1943, the world was embroiled in war. The Allied armies by that time were turning their attention to mainland Europe, and recognized that the occupation of the island of Sicily was strategic if they were going to win the victory. The military strategists of the British army soon recognized that if they were actually going to invade Sicily, they had to deceive German intelligence, to make them think the Allies were invading the Balkans instead. So they devised a plan of deception, and called it “Operation Mincemeat.” Their objective was to make the Germans believe that they had, by accident, intercepted highly classified documents detailing future Allied war plans, and part of Mincemeat's success lay in the unusual nature of the operation: the plans were attached to a corpse deliberately left to wash up on a Spanish beach.

The deception was highly detailed in every way. The corpse was given the name of Acting Major William Martin. On the body were a photograph and love letters from his fiancée, whose name was Pam. There was even a letter from his father expressing dissatisfaction with his son's choice of a bride. To complete the ruse, they also provided a set of keys, theatre stubs for a recent performance, a statement from his club for lodging in London, and so forth. The “deception specialists,” as they were called, decided to insinuate the man's careless nature by including overdue bills and a furious letter from a bank manager at Lloyds Bank regarding an overdraft of more than seventeen pounds.

It was a lot more complicated than this, but the deception was highly successful. Hitler and his generals swallowed “Operation Mincemeat” whole, and diverted much of their defensive equipment and troops elsewhere. The attack on Sicily began on July 9, with the Allies meeting little resistance. The conquest of Sicily was complete by August 9 of that year, and even led to the successful coup against Mussolini on July 27. Rightly so, “Operation Mincemeat” has been called “the most successful strategic deception in the history of warfare.”

Deception has been a common wartime strategy since the first battle was fought. So it should not surprise us that in our warfare with the forces of darkness, there should also be much deception and trickery. And while this example of deception resulted in many lives being saved, that's about where the parallel ends. The major difference is that while Operation Mincemeat was successful, we who are covered by the blood of Christ have our own intelligence operation, one which will help prevent us from falling for the devil's schemes.

Let me remind you that Ephesus was the center for a lot of idol worship and therefore, demonic activity. We've covered some of that in previous messages. The Christians in Ephesus were not

suddenly transported to some type of paradise just because they became believers in Christ. They were still surrounded by a lot of darkness and deception and pull backwards to their old lifestyles. As we've seen, that's why Paul wrote much of what he did in Ephesians. And if we actually do the things Paul has been telling us to do, then we are going to encounter opposition in one form or another. Let your mind trail back to some of the territory we've already covered thus far on our tour of the Grand Canyon of the Scriptures. If we have *"put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness,"* as we read in 4:23, if we are walking worthy of our calling, in humility rather than pride, in unity rather than divisiveness, in love rather than lust, in light rather than darkness, in wisdom rather than foolishness, in the fullness of the Spirit rather than the drunkenness of wine, and in mutual submission rather than self-serving independence, then we can be absolutely certain we will have opposition and conflict.

When Paul first went to Ephesus, as we read in Acts 19, he immediately began to preach the gospel. He led some disciples of John the Baptist to saving faith in Jesus Christ and spoke three months in the local synagogue and then in the school of Tyrannus. *"And this took place for two years, so that all who lived in Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks. And God was performing extraordinary miracles by the hand of Paul"* (Acts 19:10-11). Many Jews and Greeks came to the knowledge of Christ through Paul's ministry there. Those who had practiced magic burned their books, and *"the word of the Lord was growing mightily and prevailing"* (vv. 17-20). But from the beginning he faced opposition. He was run out of the synagogue by unbelieving Jewish leaders (vv. 8-9), mimicked by apostate Jewish exorcists (vv. 13-16), and threatened by Demetrius and his fellow silversmiths, whose idol-making business was suffering because of Paul's ministry (vv. 23-40). In fact, in Ephesus Paul nearly lost his life as the result of a two-hour riot led by those who opposed him.

It often happens that where there is the greatest spiritual challenge there is also likely to be the greatest danger and opposition. Paul explained to the believers at Corinth in his first letter to them that he was determined to stay a little longer in Ephesus because *"a wide door for effective service has opened to me, and there are many who oppose me"* (1 Cor. 16:8-9). Where the Lord's work is being done, Satan will not fail to oppose it. As believers in Jesus Christ, we are not only God's children but also His soldiers—and a soldier's job is to fight the enemy.

(MacArthur) We modern-day Christians need to get our heads out of the sand and acknowledge that Satan is indeed alive and well on planet earth.

The passage before us today teaches us several truths about standing against our enemy.

1 We need Christ and His strength, vv. 10-11, 13

This is the most important truth we could share today. It's foundational to everything else. Paul told them in verse ten, "*Be made strong in the Lord and in His mighty power.*" The thought was continued in verse twelve when he told us to "*put on the full armor of God.*" Pay attention to this. Back in 4:24 we were told to "*put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness,*" and here in 6:11 we are told to "*put on the full armor of God.*" Is he talking about two different things here? No! The "*new self*" and the "*full armor of God*" are one and the same. We have come full circle.

You see, God does not expect us to go off out into this new life without His help! God has made it possible for us to have protection in this warfare. He says to us, "*Be strong in the Lord and in His mighty power.*" God is telling us that this strength is something that is given to us, not something we manufacture on our own. My strength, your strength, is not enough. We have to depend on Him and His strength. Remember Philippians 4:13? "*I can do all things through Him who strengthens me.*"

This becomes even more obvious when you do a quick scan of Ephesians, and look for every occurrence of the phrases "in Christ" or "in Him." In the NIV, I counted 23 times those two phrases occur in only six short chapters of Ephesians. Just think about a few of them in the first chapter. Ephesians 1:3 says that we have been *blessed* in every spiritual blessing *in Christ*. We also learn in that chapter that God has wonderful purposes toward us *in Christ*, that we have placed our hope *in Christ*, that we were *included in Christ* when we heard the word of truth, that we have been *chosen in Christ* from before the foundation of the world. And we learn that "*In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace*" (1:7)

The whole concept is that in Christ, and only in Christ, do we receive the blessings of this life God offers us, and only in Christ do we have the strength we need to do the things which are required of us as believers. We are up against something bigger than ourselves, and we can't do this alone! God provides us with strength to face anything that the devil throws at us! And this is a good thing, because...

2 We are in a fierce war, vv. 10-17

Everything about this passage points to a brutal and vicious conflict. Everything lines up that there is a war going on, and that we are soldiers in that war, and that we have duties as soldiers of Christ. It is a war which has been waged since before the foundation of the world. It is a war which involves every one of us at some level or another. It is a continual war, one from which we can never let up or back down. We need to be prepared and equipped and trained for this war.

In verse ten we are told to “put on the whole armor of God,” which means that we are not to leave anything out. Put **all** of it on! Make sure that we are completely equipped, that we take advantage of everything God has provided for us in this battle. We’re going to cover the different pieces of armor in another sermon, but for now focus on the fact that the word Paul used here is an imperative, one of several in this passage. An imperative is a command, and the whole passage has a sort of “military snap” to it. The command is given, and the soldiers respond in prompt obedience. Put on your armor! There’s a battle to be fought!

That agrees with what we read in another passage. Listen to the military metaphors in 2 Corinthians 10:3-5--*“For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.”*

We tend to make two primary errors when it comes to spiritual warfare. One is that we over emphasize it, so that we blame every sin, every health issue, every relationship problem or conflict, every difficulty as a demon that needs to be cast out. The other error is that we completely ignore the fact that there is a spiritual realm, and that we are engaged in a spiritual war. I fear that we fall into this category most of the time. We ignore the fact that the Bible plainly tells us that our battle is against spiritual powers. The truth is somewhere in the middle; as I have said often, I don’t believe there is a demon behind every bush, but I do believe there are demons behind some bushes!

But these are not impish little beings that pull mischievous little pranks and then run off laughing. These are hellish beings, angels who rebelled against God Himself and whose sole purpose is to contaminate the entire human race with wickedness. They never have our best interests at heart. They are determined to destroy what God has created. Their passion is to prevent you from becoming what God intends for you, to prevent you from breaking through to a deeper level, a more abundant life, a richer experience with the Lord Jesus Christ.

Yes, we’re engaged in warfare. The battle is very real, and it’s fierce. But let me remind you of the words of Scripture: *“Greater is He that is in you, than he that is in the world.”* Paul told us *“Therefore,”* in other words, on the basis of this great and terrible enemy we face, *“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.”* Don’t allow Satan to make “mincemeat” out of you. Commit your life today to following Christ with everything you’ve got.