

Standing Against the Enemy, Part Two

Ephesians 6:10-17

Imagine a stunning Spring day. The sun is warm after a frigid winter, and there's just enough breeze to be stimulating. You are out strolling leisurely through a beautiful meadow. Everywhere you look the world is coming back to life. The grass is greening, the trees are budding, and you are surrounded by gorgeous wild flowers. The clouds are fluffy, the birds are singing, the bees are buzzing. You stop and take a deep breath, grateful to God that you are alive. And that, my friends, is a wonderful picture of the Christian life, right?

NO! The Christian life is not a walk through a daisy-filled meadow, is it? So if it's not that, then what is it, exactly? Well, if we are to believe what God says about it, the Christian life is a never-ceasing fierce war. It is a conflict which is fought on a spiritual plane, and therefore, we need spiritual weapons and protection. For that reason, we need to "*be made strong in the Lord, and in His mighty power,*" as we read in Ephesians 6:10. Our strength may be impressive against human foes, our ingenuity at times may be enough against the trials of this life, our genius may be able to solve some of our difficulties, but when we are fighting a spiritual war, we need spiritual resources. We need spiritual weapons; we need spiritual strength.

As we said last week, there are two primary mistakes 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 problem 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.

But these are not playful, fantasy-like little creatures that pull impish 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 be, to prevent you from breaking through to a deeper level, a more abundant life, a richer experience with the Lord Jesus Christ. So we've said that first of all, we need the strength Christ provides, and secondly, that we are in a fierce war. That leads us to our third truth about standing against our enemy.

3 We need to know our enemy, vv. 11-12, v. 16

One elderly lady was known for always having a positive word to say about others. So one day a friend challenged her, "You are too nice. I bet you could find something positive to say about the devil." The lady thought for a moment and said, "Well, he is always on the job."

Yes, the devil *is* always on the job. And one of his most effective strategies, as we've already pointed out, is deception.

One good example of deception comes to us from nature. The Portia spider is a master predator whose chief weapon is deception. The spider looks like a piece of dried leaf or foliage which has been caught in another spider's web. When it attacks other species of spiders, it uses a variety of methods to lure the host spider into striking range.

Sometimes it crawls onto the web and taps or strums the silken threads in a manner that mimics the vibrations of a mosquito caught in the web. The host spider marches up for dinner and instead becomes a meal itself! The Portia spider can actually tailor its deception for its prey. It imitates something its intended victim finds attractive. With a type of spider that keeps its home inside a rolled-up leaf, the Portia dances on the outside of the leaf, imitating a mating ritual. It even uses trial and error to discover the kind of signal that the victim spider would respond to. And it's all based on deception.

Like the Portia spider, Satan's weapon of choice is deception, and he tailors it for every one of us. He or one of his demons have watched us closely enough or listened to us closely enough that they know the things that we might fall for. He imitates something we might find attractive, such as power, or wealth, or love, or acceptance, or meaning, or advancement. The Bible tells us in 2 Corinthians 2:11 that Satan can outwit us if we are ignorant of the way he works. There have been periods in my life when I allowed Satan to deceive me, and the result always brought pain and grief to my heart. I fear that there are too many Christians in our age who have been deceived. Paul said there that he was not going to put himself in a position where Satan would have an opportunity to gain the upper hand with him. He said, "I am not unaware of his schemes." Paul was saying, "I'm onto Satan and the way he works. He's not coming into my life. I'm not going to open a door and allow him to have access."

There are some things about our enemy that this passage teaches us. First,

a. Our enemy is stronger than we are, v. 10

That's why God's Word tells us to "*be made strong in the Lord and in His mighty power,*" v. 10. That's why God's Word tells us to "*put on the full armor of God,*" vv. 11, 13. When you face an enemy which you know is stronger than you are, you make sure that you are fully prepared, fully equipped, fully alert at all times. Have you ever seen a television show or a movie where the bad guy is trying to kill the good guy? After a fierce battle, the good guy finally conquers the bad guy. The bad guy is lying there, covered with blood, eyes closed, and apparently dead. The good guy hugs the beautiful girl that's always with him, and relaxes. You think the movie is about over. But what happens? All of a sudden, there is the bad guy again, coming after them! That's the way it is with sin. You may think you've got it conquered, but it

will always be there, and we must always be alert. As long as we are breathing, it is not going away, because our enemy is stronger than we are.

But while we remind ourselves that our enemy is stronger than we are, we also need to remind ourselves that Satan is not omnipotent. He is not all-powerful as God is. While he is stronger than we are, he still has to bow before the power of Almighty God. The Scriptures tell us *“Greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world.”* We need to know that our position in Christ is one of victory. We can win. We have been united with the risen and living Christ. We have been given a new life, a new heart, a new nature. It is no longer our nature to sin. Our inner nature delights in God’s laws. God tells us that sin no longer has dominion over us. No matter how stubborn or deeply entrenched our sinful habits, the reign of sin has ended. Sin’s power is broken. Sin’s final destruction is guaranteed. In the meantime, though, we must know that our enemy is stronger, and we must always be on alert.

b. Our enemy is smarter than we are, v. 11

Verse eleven tells us that we are to put on the full armor of God so that we can take our stand against the devil’s “schemes.” Other versions use words such as “wiles,” “tactics,” “strategies” or even “evil tricks.” One paraphrase of the Bible sums it up by saying, “everything the Devil throws your way.” They all basically mean the same thing. In fact, the word Paul used here gives us our English word “method.” And you don’t have to be a Christian for very long before you realize that Satan has a lot of methods!

The main idea behind the word Paul used, once again, is that of deception, and that seems to be the main weapon our enemy uses. His entire strategy is based on getting us to think or feel or believe in a way that is contrary to the truth. The Bible tells us that Satan is a liar and a murderer, that sometimes he even disguises himself as an angel of light, appearing to be something he is not.

That’s exactly what he did with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, in implying that God had lied to them. All the centuries which have passed since then have proven that Satan is still using the same old tactics. Do you know why? They work! Our problem is that our sight is so limited. We focus on the things we can see, but Hebrews 11:1 tells us that *“faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.”*

One woman was married to a miserly man. She had to fight for everything she got. One day, she told her husband she was going window shopping. He said, “Okay, but don’t buy anything!” A few hours later she came home with a new dress. “What is this?” the husband fumed. “I thought I told you to look but not buy!” “Well,” she explained. “I saw this lovely dress and thought I’d try it on, and when I did the devil said, ‘It sure looks good on you.’” The

husband yelled, “Right then you should have told him, ‘Get thee behind me, Satan.’” The wife answered, “I did, but when he got behind me he said, ‘It sure looks good from the back, too.’”

Satan has all sorts of weapons in his arsenal, and he is not stingy in their use. We are constantly being bombarded by doubts and temptations and lusts and fear and pride, to just name a few of them. It would be wrong for any of us to say that because we have sinned in any of those areas, that it is not our fault. We do have responsibility in this area. It is true that the hosts of darkness fire all kinds of missiles in our directions, but we should never stand up and say “Here I am! Take your best shot!” providing a target for them to use! We should each identify the areas in our lives where we are weak, and do everything we can to shore up the defenses, so that we are not open and vulnerable to attack.

c. Our enemy is invisible, v. 12

Verse twelve tells us that our battle is *“not against flesh and blood.”* This is spiritual warfare, and we must be spiritually equipped. Now, since we can’t see them, the human tendency is to find someone we *can* see, and lay the blame at *his* feet. He may indeed have been used by the enemy in the current battle we’re in, but he’s just a decoy. The real enemy is not flesh and blood. Did you hear that? The real enemy is not flesh and blood. Don’t focus so much on the people around you who may be causing you problems. The real enemy is not your evil neighbor, a co-worker, your boss, the government, people of another race or country, or anyone else who might be causing you difficulty. Recognize where the real source of the problem is.

Someone might say, “Well, I don’t believe in anything I can’t see!” Then you don’t believe in microwaves, x-rays, radio waves, or even the air around you. And don’t forget that you’ve never seen your own brain or your own heart! And you certainly don’t believe in God the Father! None of those are things we can see. To say you don’t believe in it because you can’t see it is to succumb once again to the deceptive schemes of the devil.

d. Our enemy is more numerous than we are, v. 12

Verse twelve also says that the real enemies are the rulers, authorities, powers, spiritual forces of evil—these are powerful forces. Bible scholars are not agreed as to what the different descriptions mean here, but the idea is that “they are a great and ancient multitude,” (MacArthur) organized into a highly sophisticated hierarchy of evil. We are outnumbered!

So because our enemy is stronger and smarter than we are, and because they are invisible and because we are outnumbered, we definitely need the strength of the Lord to be victorious in this battle. Don’t ever make the mistake of thinking that you can do this on your own. The spiritual battlefields of history are littered with the corpses of those who tried to do it on their own, only to discover in the end that they were deceived.

4 We need each other, v. 10

Think back just a little. After having addressed them in smaller groups—wives, husbands, children, fathers, slaves and masters—Paul now brings them back together. The KJV and the NKJV both read, “*Finally, my brethren...*” He’s addressing the entire group. He’s not just saying that the men need to be strong in the Lord, but both men and women; not just the fathers, but the children as well; not just the slaves, but the masters, too.

Let’s point out something here. None of the other versions use the word “brethren” or “brothers,” but if you have another version, don’t be too concerned about it. Scholars tell us that the oldest and best manuscripts do not include the word for “brothers,” but the concept is definitely there. We may not see it in English, but Paul used plural pronouns throughout this passage.

For example, in verse eleven, we read, “*Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes.*” “You” and “your” are both plural, and we find the same thing when we get down to verse thirteen. In verse twelve, he refers to “*our struggle.*” Okay, so why is that important? It’s important because Paul is telling them **all** that that this is something they **all** need to do together. He wasn’t just saying to a select few of them that they needed to be engaged in spiritual warfare, while the rest of them watch. He was telling every one of them, “This is a war, and you’re soldiers, and you need to do what soldiers do.”

So this battle is not something we can do on our own or alone. Even in verse sixteen, when Paul writes, “*Take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one,*” he is describing an action that was done in concert with other soldiers. We’ll talk about it in more detail when we get there, but the shields of the Roman soldiers were designed in such a way as to be most effective when placed next to the shield of another soldier. Even the Roman soldiers needed one another!

In fact, the idea that we can be self-sufficient in this war, that we do not need one another, is one of Satan’s schemes. He delights in separating us from one another, and he doesn’t care how he does it. He may do it through our own thought processes, such as “well, I’m quite capable of worshipping God on my own, or studying the Bible on my own. I don’t need to be at the church building to do those things.” He may do it through hurt feelings: “Well, no one up there at that church likes me anyway.” Sometimes Satan separates us from one another through our own personal convictions: “I don’t like the way they do things down there at the church. Things are not going to suit me.”

The end result of this is that Satan has effectively separated one soldier from the rest. Any soldier will tell you that it is not good to be alone on the battlefield. I believe that is why, after Paul outlines the various pieces of the Christian’s armor, that he went on to say in verse

eighteen *“be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints.”* Then he went on to plead for their prayers for himself in verse nineteen. There is even some evidence in the list of armor that there was an element of “togetherness” even on the battlefield, but we’ll get into that later. It is vital that in this battle that we are in, in which we are fighting an enemy stronger and smarter and more numerous than we are, and to top it off, one which we can’t even see, that we understand that this is something we must be in together.

Yes, folks, the war is real, and we must be prepared to fight it. We’ve got to know our enemy, and we’ve got to realize that we really do need each other in this warfare. If you’ve never committed your life to the Lord Jesus Christ, now is the best time to do so. If the Lord has been speaking to you about your relationship to Him or to others, or about your orders as a soldier of the Lord, then you also know that it’s time to “gear up.” Now.