

The Whole Armor of God

Our Spiritual Warfare

Ephesians 6:10-12

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Our Spiritual Warfare

Scripture

Today we begin a new sermon series in Ephesians 6:10-24 that I am calling, “The Whole Armor of God.”

Commentators note that Paul’s letter to the Ephesians may be divided into two major divisions: Ephesians 1-3 are *doctrinal* and Ephesians 4-6 describe our *duty*. However, some commentators suggest, not without merit, I would say, that there is a final division which may be regarded as a separate section. Ephesians 6:10-24 describes our *spiritual warfare*.

So, let’s read about our spiritual warfare in Ephesians 6:10-12, although for the sake of context, I shall read Ephesians 6:10-20:

¹⁰ Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. ¹¹ Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. ¹² For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. ¹³ 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. ¹⁴ Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, ¹⁵ and, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace. ¹⁶ In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one; ¹⁷ and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, ¹⁸ 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,¹⁹ and also for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel,²⁰ for which I am an ambassador in chains, that I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak. (Ephesians 6:10-12)

Introduction

If you have watched movies that involve battle scenes, you sometimes see the leader addressing his troops before going into battle. He gives a rousing speech designed to bolster his troops as they are about to engage in battle.

This, it seems to me, is what the Apostle Paul is doing in the final section of his letter to the Ephesians. He wants the believers in Ephesus—and, indeed, all believers everywhere—to understand that they are engaged in spiritual warfare. He wants believers to understand what is involved in the battle in which they are engaged. Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones says that our text is “a stirring call to battle....Do you not hear the bugle, and the trumpet?...We are being roused, we are being stimulated, we are being set upon our feet; we are told to be men. The whole tone is martial, it is manly, it is strong.”¹

I have in my library a book by the Puritan minister William Gurnall that runs to nearly 1,200 pages of double-columned print that is an exposition of just these eleven verses in Ephesians 6:10-20. The title of Gurnall’s 1665 book is *The Christian in Complete Armour*. Its sub-title, however, is typical of Puritan sub-titles and describes very well the author’s intent: *The saints’ war against the Devil, wherein a discovery is made of that grand enemy of God and his people, in his policies, power, seat of his*

¹ David Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *The Christian Warfare: An Exposition of Ephesians 6:10–13* (Edinburgh; Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 1976), 16, 22.

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empire, wickedness, and chief design he hath against the saints; a magazine opened, from whence the Christian is furnished with spiritual arms for the battle, helped on with his armour, and taught the use of his weapon; together with the happy issue of the whole war. Regarding the armor of God, Gurnall writes, “In heaven we shall appear not in armour but in robes of glory; but here they [that is, the pieces of armor] are to be worn night and day; we must walk, work and sleep in them, or else we are not true soldiers of Christ.”²

Dr. D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones has written two volumes on these same eleven verses in the last century that add up to 736 pages. The titles of his volumes are *The Christian Warfare* and *The Christian Soldier*.

Clearly, teachers in former ages understood the importance of our spiritual warfare. We live in an age in which so many pay so little attention to our spiritual warfare.

Lesson

Ephesians 6:10-12 teaches us that every Christian is engaged in a great spiritual battle.

Let’s use the following outline:

1. Our Preparation (6:10)
2. Our Provision (6:11a)
3. Our Enemy (6:11b)
4. Our Battle (6:12)

I. Our Preparation (6:10)

First, let’s look at our preparation.

² William Gurnall, *The Christian in Complete Armour*, Volume I, (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1987), 67.

No soldier goes in to battle unprepared. When I went in to the South African Air Force I spent 15 weeks in preparation, called “basic training.” In our first week of basic training, we could not march in sync with one another, we were unfit, we did not know how to handle our weapons, and we did not know how to dress properly in our uniforms; in short, we were unprepared for what lay ahead. But, 15 weeks later, we were prepared, well-trained, and ready for battle.

Paul writes in verse 10, **“Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might.”** It is vital that we understand what Paul is saying here. Tony Merida says, “Do not look in the wrong place for strength. Our strength is not in our resources and ability, in how long we have been Christians, in how much we know about the Bible, or in how long we have been in ministry. Our strength is in our union with Jesus Christ and His mighty power (1:19).”³ This is key to our preparation for our spiritual warfare.

When I became a Christian, which was during my time in the South African Air Force, I used to think that I would be able to fight the devil in my own strength. How wrong I was! Paul does not say, “Finally, be strong and rely on the strength of your might.” No, he says, **“Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might.”** As John MacArthur says, “The cardinal reality presented in the book of Ephesians is that, as believers, we are in Christ and are one with Him. His life is our life, His power our power, His truth our truth, His way our way, and, as Paul goes on to say here, His **strength** is our strength.”⁴

³ Tony Merida, David Platt, and Daniel L. Akin, *Exalting Jesus in Ephesians* (Nashville: B&H, 2014).

⁴ John F. MacArthur Jr., *Ephesians*, MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press, 1986), 337.

It is important also to remember that Jesus' war with Satan has already been won by Jesus. To be sure, there are ongoing battles, and there will be until Jesus returns. But, the ultimate victory has already been won by Jesus by his crucifixion and resurrection (see Romans 5:18-21; 1 Corinthians 15:56-57; Hebrews 2:14). When a person becomes a Christian, he is united with Jesus in his victory. Knowing that he will be ultimately defeated, Satan continues to wage warfare against the people of God, and the battles are fierce, sometimes very fierce. But, believers—who are united to Jesus by faith alone in Jesus alone by God's grace alone—have no reason to be afraid. So, as MacArthur says, “appropriation of [the Lord's] **strength** comes through the means of grace—prayer, knowledge of and obedience to the Word, and faith in the promises of God.”⁵

So, our preparation means that we understand our union with Christ and that we appropriate his strength in our spiritual warfare.

II. Our Provision (6:11a)

Second, let's note our provision.

One commentator says that while Paul was writing (or, more likely, dictating) his letter to the Ephesians he was chained to a Roman soldier. That gave him the imagery for our spiritual warfare. And so he wrote in verse 11a, “**Put on the whole armor of God...**”

The Greek word for “**put on**” (*endusas*) carries the idea of putting on, once and for all. In other words, believers **put on the whole armor of God** when they become believers and

⁵ John F. MacArthur Jr., *Ephesians*, 337.

never take it off again. As MacArthur says, “**The armor of God** is to be the Christian’s lifelong companion.”⁶ When I was in the South African Air Force, I would take off my uniform after hours. Or, if I went home for the weekend, I would wear civilian clothes while I was with my parents. However, Paul wants believers to know that **the whole armor of God** must be worn at all times and in all places.

Paul will describe in detail in the upcoming verses **the whole armor of God** that must be **put on**. Suffice it to say here that Jesus has provided us with **the whole armor of God** which he has enabled every believer to **put on** and to use in our spiritual warfare.

III. Our Enemy (6:11b)

Third, let’s observe our enemy.

Paul writes in verse 11b, “...that you may be able to **stand against the schemes of the devil.**” Our enemy is **the devil**, also known as Satan.

It is helpful to keep in mind that all people in the world are born into Satan’s army, as it were. Of course, people do not know it, but all people are initially under the dominion of Satan. No one, you see, is born a Christian. However, at some point in a person’s life, God convicts that person of sin, righteousness, and judgment. That person realizes that in his present state he is bound to spend all eternity in hell. He cries out to God for mercy. And, in God’s amazing grace, he regenerates that person, and enables him to repent of his sin and to believe in Jesus. Jesus then rescues that person from Satan’s army and drafts him, as it were, into his own army. He enables that new

⁶ John F. MacArthur Jr., *Ephesians*, 338.

believer to put on the whole armor of God so that he is now **able to stand against the schemes of the devil**. And because the believer has switched sides, **the devil** is furious and immediately engages in a lifelong battle against the believer. In fact, the Greek word for **schemes** (*methodeias*)—in **“the schemes of the devil”**—carries the idea of craftiness, cunning, and deception. MacArthur notes, “The term was often used of a wild animal who cunningly stalked and then unexpectedly pounced on its prey. Satan’s evil **schemes** are built around stealth and deception.”⁷

In his preface to his classic book titled *The Screwtape Letters*, C. S. Lewis makes the following oft-repeated observation, “There are two equal and opposite errors into which our race can fall about the devils. One is to disbelieve in their existence. The other is to believe, and to feel an excessive and unhealthy interest in them. They themselves are equally pleased by both errors and hail a materialist or a magician with the same delight.”⁸ The fact is that **the devil** is a real being. He was originally an angel, but, along with a number of other angels, he rebelled against God. So, God cast out of heaven all these rebellious angels, and they are now known as demons. The chief of these demons is simply here called **“the devil.”** In Scripture, **the devil** is called “Satan” fifty-two times, which means “adversary,” and is called **“the devil”** thirty-five times, which means “slanderer.”

Keep in mind, that **the devil** is a created being. Some people mistakenly think that **the devil** has equal power to God. That is simply not true. It is not true that there are two equal and opposite deities in the universe: God and **the devil**. As a

⁷ John F. MacArthur Jr., *Ephesians*, 338.

⁸ Lewis, C. S., *The Screwtape Letters: Annotated Edition* (Kindle Locations 416-431). HarperOne. Kindle Edition.

created being, **the devil** is subordinate to God and only has as much power as God grants him. True, he has great power, but it is a derived power and it is nowhere near the sovereign and supreme power of God.

We should never be preoccupied with **the devil** nor be deceived that he does not exist. He does exist, and he is engaged in spiritual warfare against believers.

IV. Our Battle (6:12)

And fourth, let's examine our battle.

The devil is not omnipresent. That is, he is not everywhere at the same time, as God is. The devil is only in one place at one time. That is why he uses his vast army of subordinate demons to carry out the battle against believers. So, Paul writes in verse 12, **“For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.”** John MacArthur rightly notes, “Our greatest enemy is not the world we see, corrupt and wicked as it is, but the world we cannot see.”⁹ As believers we must wake up to the truth that we are engaged in spiritual warfare. It is serious, and it is intense. In fact, the Greek word for **wrestle** (*pale*) carries the idea of grappling, wrestling, and hand-to-hand combat.

Next time we shall explore in greater detail who are **the rulers, the authorities, the cosmic powers, and the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places** against whom we are engaged in our spiritual warfare.

⁹ John F. MacArthur Jr., *Ephesians*, 340.

Conclusion

Therefore, having analyzed our spiritual warfare in Ephesians 6:10-12, let us equip ourselves for our spiritual battle.

The apostle Paul recognized the reality of spiritual warfare. That is why he wrote about it at the conclusion of his letter to the Ephesians. No Christian is exempt from spiritual warfare. No Christian gets a deferment from spiritual warfare. No Christian gets a furlough from spiritual warfare.

Sabine Baring-Gould wrote a hymn text in 1865 for a children's procession for Whitsuntide (Pentecost) in the village of Horbury Bridge, England. It was published later that year in *Church Times* under the title "Hymn for Procession with Cross and Banners." However, we know the hymn as "Onward, Christian Soldiers." The hymn captures the imagery of believers engaged in spiritual warfare that is described in Ephesians 6:10-20. Listen to the words of the hymn:

Onward, Christian soldiers, marching as to war,
with the cross of Jesus going on before:
Christ the royal Master leads against the foe;
forward into battle, see, his banners go.

[Refrain]

*Onward, Christian soldiers, marching as to war,
with the cross of Jesus going on before.*

At the sign of triumph Satan's host doth flee;
on then, Christian soldiers, on to victory:
hell's foundations quiver at the shout of praise;
brothers, lift your voices, loud your anthems raise.

[Refrain]

Like a mighty army moves the church of God;
brothers, we are treading where the saints have trod;
we are not divided, all one body we,
one in hope and doctrine, one in charity.

[Refrain]

Crowns and thrones may perish, kingdoms rise
and wane,
but the church of Jesus constant will remain;
gates of hell can never 'gainst that church prevail;
we have Christ's own promise, and that cannot fail.

[Refrain]

Onward, then, ye people, join our happy throng,
blend with ours your voices in the triumph song;
glory, laud, and honor unto Christ the King;
this through countless ages men and angels sing.

*[Refrain]*¹⁰

Believers in Jesus, you are in Christ, and you have his strength for our spiritual warfare. Let us understand what our equipment is for the battle in which we are engaged.

If you are not a believer in Jesus, know that you are presently a soldier of Satan. If you do not change sides, you will perish with the devil and all his demons, and be condemned to hell for all eternity. I urge you to repent of your sins and put your trust in Jesus alone. Do it today and join our happy throng, and blend with ours your voices in the triumph song. Amen.

¹⁰ Paul Eckert, *Steve Green's MIDI Hymnal: A Complete Toolkit for Personal Devotions and Corporate Worship*, Electronic ed. (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 1998).

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and membership in his church family,
develop them to Christlike maturity,
equip them for their ministry in the church
and life mission in the world,
in order to magnify God's name.*

Sermons by Rev. Freddy Fritz

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