

**Ephesians 6: 12b; “The Heavenly Prize”, Sermon # 6 in the series –  
“The Whole Armor of God”, Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall  
On September 16<sup>th</sup>, 2012, in the Afternoon Worship Service.**

We wrestle against spiritual forces of wickedness, it says, “in the heavenly places”. En Tois *Επουρανιοις* (Epouraniois in the Greek)– “In the heavenlies.” This phrase does indeed show us the location of our spiritual enemies, but there are a number of reasons for us to consider it as meaning, “in heavenly things”. I have consulted not only William Gurnall about this, but also Matthew Poole, John Trapp, Thomas Goodwin and Phillip Doddridge who all acknowledge the validity of this phrase being applied this way, if not translated this way. In other words, it would read – “We wrestle with spiritual forces of wickedness – over heavenly things”. There is a prize to be fought for and won by every true Christian, in wrestling with the forces of wickedness. We wrestle not for small or trivial things, but for heavenly things, yea for heaven itself, says Oecumenius. Chrysostom calls them – “The heavenly things of God”. The word “Epouraniois” is translated “things” almost 20 times in the New Testament and is translated in the heavenly “places” a number of times even in Ephesians. But John 3: 12 uses the word this way – “If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you heavenly things?”

So as we consider the spiritual battle, let us understand that it is with our adversary the Devil and his hosts of spiritual wickedness; it is over the disputed territory of spiritual things, and the prize is that we might really know, experience, and enjoy all the spiritual blessings purchased for us by our Lord Jesus Christ. It is God the Father’s intention that we who believe really be made over into the image of His Son, Jesus Christ; that we might really receive the eternal inheritance. Where, then, do we find this battle taking place over these spiritual things? We find it in three arenas of our lives. We find the battle taking place 1<sup>st</sup> of all in the arena of our nature. We find it 2<sup>nd</sup>ly - in the arena of our labors. And 3<sup>rd</sup>ly – We find it in the arena of our hopes.

**1<sup>st</sup> of all – We find our spiritual battle taking place in the arena of our nature.**

The Christian’s nature is heavenly. He has born from above, and he is travelling through this life, on his way to heaven. And since this great change has taken place in his nature through regeneration, holiness and obedience to God are the great aim of his life. The precious life of Christ now resides within his heart, and the beauty of holiness is what he meditates upon. Turn with me to Isaiah Chapter 35, verse 5. It is speaking here prophetically about what God will do for each one who believes in Jesus Christ our Lord during the whole church age, and also more specifically what He will do for the whole nation of the Jews when they are converted in a coming day. “Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped.” “Then the lame shall leap like a deer, and the tongue of the dumb sing.” “For waters shall burst forth in the wilderness, and streams in the desert.” (The

waters and streams here, are a picture of mighty grace of Christ conveyed to the believer's heart by the Holy Spirit. Our hearts, before we come to Christ are a parched ground and a thirsty land.) Verse 7 - "The parched ground shall become a pool, and the thirsty land springs of water; in the habitation of jackals, where each lay, there shall be grass with reeds and rushes." "A highway shall be there, and a road, and it shall be called the Highway of Holiness." "The unclean shall not pass over it, but it shall be for others." "Whoever walks the road, although a fool, shall not go astray." You and I who believe in Jesus are walking on the King's Highway; the Highway of holiness. What a great road it is. Our blind eyes have been given spiritual sight, our ears have been opened to the truth. We have been given by grace the Lord so that our heart has become a pool of living waters springing up to eternal and everlasting life. It used to be that we were in the habitation of jackals. You know how jackals are; they are crazed creatures that are always laughing at everything. The King James translates it – dragons. The picture here is that of where the Christian used to be in his heart. He used to laugh and mock at the idea that he needed God's grace to save him. He used to laugh in the face of adversity, thinking that there would be no judgment to come or a hell to follow after this life. He was content to live in the dragon's territory; not believing in the Devil; not seeing that he really lived in his kingdom. But then grace came and translated him from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of light. The blindness was taken away, and the chains were broken and the believer went free. Satan cannot take away this reality. He cannot now bring the believer in Jesus Christ back into his kingdom to deceive him again concerning the great reality of his salvation. We are kept by the power of God for a salvation which is ready to be revealed in the last times. In this we greatly rejoice as it says in 1 Peter 1: 6, even though we are grieved by various trials.

You see, Satan cannot take away this reality of our having this life from Jesus Christ, but he will try to destroy the progress of this new life in the soul of the Christian if he can. Satan himself was created holy and beautiful, but he fell because of his pride. Now he will try to ruin and destroy what he himself once was; what he himself once had; especially everything related to the formation of the image of Jesus Christ in the believer's life. Our Lord Jesus is the Pre-eminent One, the Holy One, the One who receives the worship and praise of His people, Satan craves for himself. You, dear believer, are a saint; you are a holy one of God if you have faith in Jesus Christ, because you have been born from above. You have been given the power from God not only to be born again to this living hope, but you have been born again to overcome the world, the flesh, and the Devil. This reality Satan hates; this he cannot endure, and so we wrestle against him for the establishment of holiness in our lives. "Satan would rob us of all that which makes us like God himself." He never did like the idea of man being raised up above the angels through Jesus Christ. He is full of hatred toward our Lord. So he will oppose the formation of the image of Jesus being impressed upon our souls.

William Gurnall says this: "The soul is the face whereon God's image is stamped, holiness is the beauty of this face, that which makes us, indeed, like God." "Satan knows that God loves this holy beauty, and the saint is careful to cultivate and guard it." "Therefore Satan labors to wound and disfigure this face bearing God's image that he may glory in the Christian's shame, and that he may pour contempt upon God whose image has been defaced." I would like you to turn over with me to 1 Samuel 11, verse 1. Have you ever read the story of King Saul and his righteous anger at the audacity of Nahash the Ammonites proposal to him and to all the people of Jabesh? Here it is: "Then Nahash the Ammonite came up and encamped against Jabesh Gilead; and all the men of Jabesh said to Nahash, "Make a covenant with us, and we will serve you." And Nahash the Ammonite answered them, "On this condition I will make a covenant with you, that I may put out all your right eyes, and bring reproach on all Israel." "Then the elders of Jabesh said to him, "Hold off for seven days, that we may send messengers to all the territory of Israel." "And then, if there is no one to save us, we will come out to you." "So the messengers came to Gibeah of Saul and told the news in the hearing of the people. And all the people lifted up their voices and wept." "Now there was Saul, coming behind the herd from the field; and Saul said, "What troubles the people, that they weep?" "And they told him the words of the men of Jabesh." "Then the Spirit of God came upon Saul when he heard this news, and his anger was greatly aroused." The Christian by nature is a peacemaker with other men. These men of Jabesh realized that Nahash and his forces were stronger than they were. Therefore they sought to come to terms with him who had the greater forces. "Make a covenant with us, and we will serve you," they said. Now, this Nahash is a good type of the Devil in regard to our study this afternoon. Look what he says to them. "On this condition I will make a covenant with you, that I may put out all of your right eyes, and bring reproach upon all Israel." This is what the Devil would like to do with Christians. He will leave them alone; he will leave them in peace and not molest them if he can at least partially blind them, and if he can thus bring reproach upon the whole Church; that God's work in their lives might be discredited. We should be very indignant, as Christians at this proposal, and we should resist the Devil's notion that we will not have peace unless we come out to him and let him gouge our spiritual eye out. But this is what the Devil is doing with many in our day. Many Christians think that they will have peace in this spiritual warfare if they will not resist the Devil, but rather cave in to his demands that they be weak in spiritual knowledge and insight. But Saul was a good picture of the indignation that a Christian should feel at such a thought. I am not saying that Saul was a true Christian, for he later proved himself never to have been converted, but at this particular point, he acted as the Christian should act. Act like a man, and be courageous against him.

The battle with Satan is a battle over who we are and what we will become. The prize is holiness. William Gurnall says again: "The face is not so deformed that has lost its eye, as the soul is that has lost its holiness." "And no peace is to be expected from Satan unless he deprives us this holiness." Caesar – when he addressed his

troops to quell the uprising of the Roman citizens, he told them to “strike at their face”. “These citizens, he said, love their beauty; if you mar that, you will mar all.” When you and I will not resist Satan’s schemes, when we are not careful to protect preserve, and develop the image of God in a careful obedience to the Word of God, then we are open to our face (that is our soul’s face) being disfigured, because our holiness is our beauty. And reproach comes upon God’s people when they surrender too easily to Satan’s demands that their eye should be gauged out so that they may have a worldly peace with him. I hope that you can see, this afternoon, that our battle, our wrestling, is with Satan and his hosts over what we are by nature, and what we will become by God’s grace. “But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image, from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.”

**Now 2ndly – The 2<sup>nd</sup> place of spiritual battle is found in the arena of man’s work, or labor in spiritual things.**

A Christian is a spiritual tradesman; he must be about His Father’s business. The Christian’s trade is heavenly. The things which the believer pursues are related to his calling, which is a heavenly calling, it is a holy calling. He works at his heart’s devotion to God, his obedience to God’s commands, and a love toward others, with a sincere desire for their spiritual welfare and their salvation. A worldly person, an unbelieving person, is not concerned with these things. He does not make time for prayer and Bible-reading in secret, and each of us should understand that it is this which is the power and delight of the Christian life. If a person is worldly, he does not read his Bible often, and when he does, it is only for a short time, perhaps to encourage himself that all is well. He can rest easy, If he knows certain truths, it is enough. But my friend, it is not enough. Knowledge without devotion, knowledge without worship, knowledge without meditation, knowledge without obedience to God’s commands is disobedience to God’s will. James 4: 17 says – “Therefore, to him who knows to do good and does not do it, to him it is sin.” This is where Satan focuses some of his greatest schemes. If he can just get a person to have knowledge only – without devotion and obedience – he will see him become proud as a peacock, self-righteous as a Pharisee, and so selfishly smug that he is of no use to God at all.

Satan doesn’t want Christians to labor for Christ and be righteous in all of their behavior. He doesn’t want us to read our Bibles, pray, study, obey, or think of others and their spiritual welfare at all. And if they do witness to others in that worldly condition, what will it produce? A Christian like themselves – weak, worldly, proud, but knowledgeable. No, let us pursue hard after devotion and obedience to God’s commandments, without becoming arrogant. Let us really bring Christ into our private times. Let us study to please Him. Let us study to promote real spiritual concern for what makes for godliness, and not just to know certain things. We do want knowledge – We want everything God has revealed as true and right to impact us so much that we will labor well for Him. Let us not study to be rich, let us not study to have it easy, or to be thought of as great or witty. Let us study to know God, and what God would have us to do. At the judgment we will not be asked what we

knew, but what we did with what we know. The prize that we are looking for is Christ saying to us, “Well done, good and faithful servant.”

**And then 3rdly – The 3<sup>rd</sup> place of spiritual battle is found in the arena of the Christian’s hopes.**

The Christian’s hopes are heavenly and spiritual in their nature. It is not as though the Christian does not have hopes for many things in this life. But the good things that the Christian hopes for, he wants to receive them in God’s time and God’s way. Satan’s way is to so work against the Christian’s faith, that he will not be able to hope in God at all. The Christian is the lover of what God gives, and what God makes, and he knows that the way that God does things is often much different than the way man does things. This is because God’s ways are not our ways, neither are His thoughts our thoughts. The Lord knows what we need even better than we do ourselves. The Devil’s strategy focuses on his enhancing our frustrations and dissatisfactions with the way that the Lord has ordered things in our lives. The Lord has said that He is a Sun and a Shield, that he gives grace and glory; that no good thing will He withhold from those who walk uprightly. How blessed is the man who trusts in Him. Satan says, “The Lord has providentially made things dark and difficult for you, O Christian. He won’t give you what you need when you need it, so you might as well go ahead and get it for yourself in the way and the time that you want it. This is the reasoning of the flesh, and it may work with ungodly and even for God’s people for a time. But what God is looking for from you and me is that we might hope in Him continually and wait for Him to give us the best things in His way; for Him to do His greatest works in His time. Think of David in 1 Samuel 26. He had been anointed king over Israel by Samuel, yet King Saul was chasing him around the countryside trying to kill him. The Lord had shown David that he should not try to kill Saul to establish himself in the kingdom. But one night his commitment to do so was tested. David sent out spies to see where Saul had camped. When he found out; he and Abishai went down to see for themselves. They found Saul and all the fighting men were sound asleep. It would have been easy to kill him, and Abishai urged him to do it. But David said this: “Do not destroy him; for who can stretch out his hand against the Lord’s anointed, and be guiltless?” He would not take matters of justice into his own hands, but Satan would love to have each one of us do that very thing. Here was wisdom being seen in David; he knew how to defeat and overcome the Evil One in this situation. In winning this victory, all of David’s hopes to glorify God were established.

Let me say this in closing. If we will live by this principle of holiness, we will thereby prove to ourselves that living to ourselves and for ourselves is truly not the best thing for us. We will come to learn that the Devil’s intent is to destroy our hope. We will learn one of the greatest of lessons; that impatiently pursuing all of the best earthly things, while we neglect or despise spiritual and heavenly things, such as God’s counsel and His will which is found in the Bible, is the worst, the most damaging, and the most God dishonoring thing that we can do. We must learn to await the Lord’s time, and hope in Him continually in the best and worst of

circumstances. Holiness will involve your consciously depending upon God's wisdom being given to you in relation to other people. Satan will try to get you to trust in your own wisdom and strength. Think of King David and what is said in 1 Chronicles 21: 1. See here how he lost a spiritual battle. "Now Satan stood up against Israel, and moved David to number Israel." So David said to Joab and to the leaders of Israel, 'Go, number Israel from Beersheba to Dan, and bring the number of them to me that I may know.' "And Joab answered, 'May the Lord make His people a hundred times more than they are.'" "But my lord the king, are they not all my lord's servants?" "Why then does my lord require this thing?" "Why should he be a cause of guilt in Israel." But David ordered it done anyway. You can see here that David fell to the Devil at this point because he was tempted, and he succumbed to the temptation, to think that it was the numbers of fighting men that would allow the nation to remain strong. The Lord was displeased with David over this thing, it says in verse 7, and "He struck Israel." He diminished their numerical strength by 70,000 men. What is the lesson for us? Let us not be moved by Satan's strategy toward our church, thinking that great numbers will be the means of our obtaining spiritual victories. No, our strength, and the hope of success in furthering His kingdom and His glory will be found in our being Christ's servants and our being faithful to live according to His Word, realizing our dependence upon the Holy Spirit; that will be the means of our victories.