

# The Real Enemy

INTRO: Today we come to one of the most famous passages in the book of Ephesians - the passage on spiritual warfare. Because the passage is so famous, I might skip over some of the parts that are generally considered common knowledge to pull out some other ideas that often get missed. Somehow, especially for men I think, we hear warfare and get all excited! Finally! Something manly on the Bible! Where's my helmet, where's my sword? I'm in! Just point me toward the battle!!!

But there is more here than just the idea of warfare. In fact, I am going to start with a broad concept that many of us miss about this passage. Then we will dig in more specifically. By the end of the message, my hope is that this passage brings courage and comfort for all of us about our lives in Christ.

Ephesians 6:10-20

- I. We are involved in a struggle
  - A. Allow me to read directly from one of the commentaries, on by N.T. Wright
    1. Read page 73
  - B. Have you ever thought like that? Like, "Yes, we struggle. It's hard to forgive, it's hard to find time to grow in the faith, etc."
    1. Yet somehow, we don't seem to connect our smaller struggles with the greater struggle
    2. We don't seem to see that the struggles we face affect the rest of the war
      - a) When we are struggling, not able to stand firm, that affects those around us
      - b) These are not isolated incidents, they are all a part of a larger strategy to keep the people of God from advancing on the kingdom of darkness
  - C. We need to reset our minds to understand that we are engaged in a great battle with spiritual forces
    1. We need to learn to stand firm
    2. And we need to learn how we protect ourselves - and that is what our current passage is set to remind us of
- II. The structure of the passage is interesting
  - A. There are three imperatives
    1. "be strong"
    2. "put on the full armor of God"
    3. "Stand"
  - B. All of the rest of the passage is explaining how to do these three things
  - C. Also, the imperatives are plural in the original
    1. That is hard to show in English

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2. But what that means is that these commands are directed to the church as a whole, not to individuals
- III. Be strong against evil - v. 10-13
- A. Paul opens up with the word, “Finally”
1. So Paul is beginning a summary of all of what he has said throughout the letter
  2. It is similar to a closing argument, or the end of a speech from a great orator in which you rally the troops to a cause
- B. This first imperative, “be strong” is passive
1. That means that the action taken is being done to us
    - a) It is not something we do to ourselves
    - b) It is not some way of mustering up all kinds courage for the battle
    - c) It is God that is strengthening us
  2. It is also in the present tense
    - a) That means that the action is continual
    - b) It is not a quick fix
    - c) It is a manner of life
  3. What this also assumes is that God is eager to provide strength
    - a) When we lack strength, it is because we are not seeking Him
  4. It also assumes that the empowering is not automatic
    - a) When I said passive and that God strengthens us, I did not mean that we sit like lumps, and do nothing
      - (1) We read God’s Word
      - (2) We build our relationship with Him through prayer
      - (3) We are strengthened by being with our church family
      - (4) But it is God that is strengthening us through all of that
  5. I want you to stop and think about all the ways in which our nation strengthens itself by defensive measures
    - a) Radar, varied crafts for war, military personnel, training
    - b) We drive defensively, keeping alert, watching for hazards
    - c) Why all this talk of defense?
      - (1) The rest of the passage is about defense
      - (2) And, defense is a part of strength as well
      - (3) So Paul is about to lay out a plan for be strong in a defensive manner
- C. The words for “His mighty power” are the same as the words in 1:19 for “His mighty strength”
1. Paul had prayed in chapter 1 that we would know His mighty strength
  2. Now He implores them to use this power that God has provided
- D. In verse 11 we see the command to put on the full armor of God

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1. It brings us back to another idea Paul used earlier in the letter - “put on the new self” from ch. 4
2. The armor itself can be understood as
  - a) Armor God provides
  - b) Armor that God wears
  - c) Or even God is our armor
3. In studying, I found two commentators disagreeing with each other - one saying it is the armor God provides, and the other saying it is God’s armor
  - a) Personally I don’t think they are mutually exclusive
  - b) God is the One providing the armor
  - c) And yet the armor is also characteristic of God Himself
    - (1) In this sense we are fulfilling the directive, “Be imitators of God”
    - (2) In fact, the OT background for this is in Isaiah where the armor is worn by God
  - d) So basically, the armor is a means in which we are identifying with God and His purposes
- E. The reason we put on the full armor is to be able to stand against the devil’s schemes
  1. This is the first use of “to stand” - we will see in 3 more times
  2. It is a key concept in the passage
  3. I want you to notice the mood of this verse - Does it seem as if it is written from a place of fear? - NO
  4. The whole passage is hopeful in outlook and leaves us with a feeling that Satan can be defeated
- F. Who is the real enemy?
  1. Spiritual forces
  2. This is a verse that gets people side tracked a lot
    - a) Many try to rank or associate these various titles for spiritual forces
    - b) As Paul has demonstrated time and time again, he is heaping up synonyms for the same thing
    - c) The point is that our battle is not against humanity
    - d) Our battle is against Satan and the spiritual forces
  3. So lets talk about what that battle looks like according to Paul
    - a) Many people go off the deep end about demon possession and all that the demons can do
      - (1) They name various demons as “the spirit of alcohol” or the “spirit of lust” or “the spirit of anger”
      - (2) However, the Bible NEVER does that - that is humanity reading into the Bible what is not actually there

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- b) In the context of Ephesians, what Paul is saying is all of these temptations I have been talking about
    - (1) Sexual immorality, greed, inappropriate speech, mistreating family or slaves
    - (2) All of those things are spiritual forces pushing us where we should not go, and a place in which it is displeasing to God
    - (3) This explains why Paul starts this section with “Finally”
      - (a) It connects to all else before it
    - (4) This explains why we take a defensive position so as not to be pushed back by these spiritual forces
      - (a) Why we have the shield of faith to extinguish the devil’s flaming arrows
  - 4. The other problem with this huge side track of Satan, demon possession and the like is what the rest of Ephesians has been telling us - Christ is enthroned ABOVE the powers
    - a) The movies that portray priests or Christians as wimpy, and paltry against Satan have it completely backwards
    - b) I challenge you to read the gospels this week
      - (1) Check for every time Jesus seems to be afraid of the Devil or the demons
      - (2) It is ALWAYS the other way around - the demons are scared to death of Jesus
        - (a) And that was before He was enthroned above them in the fullest sense
    - c) READ: N.T. Wright p 75-76
- IV. The armor of God - 6:14-20
- A. Stand firm, having fastened the belt of truth
    - 1. In Greek the command is to stand firm.
      - a) All of the pieces of armor are a description of what it means to stand firm
      - b) In other words, if you want to stand firm, don’t fight naked
    - 2. The OT background is Isaiah 11:5 where it declares of the Messiah, “With righteousness shall he be girded around his waist, and with truth bound around his sides.”
    - 3. The belt is best pictured in the leather belt that the Roman soldier would wear to protect his thighs
      - a) The rest of the clothes were gathered up for vigorous activity, secured by the belt
    - 4. The truth we are talking about, in context of Ephesians, would be the truth of God revealed in the gospel

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- B. Having put on the breastplate of righteousness
  - 1. The OT background is Isaiah 59:17 - “He put on righteousness as His breastplate...”
  - 2. The breastplate was the leather or metal piece that protected the soldier’s midsection from sword blows or arrows
  - 3. Some regard the righteousness referred to as ethical righteousness due to the context of Ephesians
  - 4. Others see the OT background the stronger draw for analogy, in which case, putting on the breastplate of righteousness is like putting on the new self, and being imitators of God
  - 5. Either understanding is acceptable
- C. Having fitted your feet with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace
  - 1. Again, drawn from the OT - Isaiah 52:7 - How beautiful are the feet of them that bring good news
  - 2. This is a peculiar expression here in Ephesians
    - a) The word translated “readiness” is only found here in the NT
      - (1) It is found in several places in the LXX
      - (2) But not in Isaiah 52
    - b) It can mean firm footing, or steadfastness
    - c) Usually it means readiness or preparedness
    - d) In the bigger picture, you can see how each definition seems to fit the context, however, most scholars lean toward readiness
  - 3. The other part that makes this difficult to understand is what does “of the gospel” refer to
    - a) Is it the peace that we experience and have put in place in our lives that comes from the gospel? Our motivation so to speak.
    - b) Or is it a willingness to share the gospel?
    - c) The answer is we don’t know for sure
      - (1) However, if we have experienced the peace that comes from the gospel
      - (2) It seems only reasonable that we would want to share that peace with others that do not know it
- D. The shield of faith
  - 1. Most of us have seen enough period pieces to know what the shield looked like for a Roman soldier
    - a) A large wooden shield about 4 feet by 2.5 feet covered with leather and reinforced with metal at the sides
    - b) These were quite effective at stopping flaming arrows when soaked with water

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2. Again, OT imagery is helpful - In the OT the shield was used as an image of God's protection
    - a) "He's a shield to those who take refuge in Him" (Prov 30:5)
  3. The shield of faith is considered to be a "genitive of apposition" (which I don't expect you to remember) but what that shakes out in the real world to mean is the shield is our faith
    - a) Not in the sense that we have to believe harder to have a large or strong shield
    - b) It is who our faith is in, not our power or ability to believe
  4. Practically, it means to hold the promises of God, and trust in them for our behalf
    - a) 1 Peter 5:8-9
    - b) It is firm faith that will resist the devil
  5. It is that faith that will allow us to quench the flaming arrows of the evil one
    - a) Those flaming arrows are as wide ranging as can be
    - b) Doubtless, Paul has in mind all of the areas of sin previously mentioned in Ephesians
- E. Take the helmet of salvation
1. We are now back to imperatives (commands)
  2. Again, OT, Isaiah 59
  3. The helmet is salvation itself
    - a) The phrase could read "take up the helmet which is salvation"
  4. To me it is interesting that our salvation protects our heads in Paul's metaphor
    - a) The truth of God's salvation protects our minds
    - b) It is the gospel, our salvation that protects us - thinking rightly about what God has done for us
- F. The final item for the soldier is the sword
1. This is the sword of the Spirit, the Word of God
  2. It is the Spirit that makes the sword effective
  3. Often times people tend to take the phrase "word of God" to mean the Bible
    - a) First of all, Paul was not a Bible carrier - the Bible as we know and understand it today was not even complete - Paul is writing part of it called Ephesians
    - b) Second, in Paul, the phrase usually refers to the gospel
    - c) Third, there are two words in Greek for "word" - logos and rhēma
      - (1) Rhēma usually refers to the spoken word and that is the Greek word used here

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- (2) So, it appears as if the word of God that Paul is referring to is the gospel, focusing on its power to penetrate
4. I am guessing there are some that might want to argue with me on this, and that is fine - so for you, you can, in all sincerity say that the Word of God here, by extension, does refer to the Bible because the Bible is God's revelation of the gospel
- G. Finally we reach the last paragraph - v. 18-20
  1. The mistake we make because of our English Bibles is to view pray as a command - it is a further explanation of what it means to stand (v.14)
  2. Paul underscores the importance of prayer for the ones going to stand by the repetition of the word "all"
    - a) Pray at all times, all prayers and requests, always keep on praying, for all the Lord's people
  3. Beyond just that, Paul shows again the importance of prayer by asking for prayer for himself
    - a) He wants to declare the message of the gospel fearlessly
    - b) The word for fearlessly is "openness" or "boldness"
    - c) Ever notice that it takes a lot to ask for prayer for yourself
      - (1) It takes humility
      - (2) It takes an understanding that prayer is a powerful weapon in the Christian arsenal
- V. Application
  - A. The spiritual foe and evil forces
    1. This would be a matter for a whole series unto itself, but allow me to summarize what the Bible says about the spiritual world, and why
    2. First, the Bible is clear that there is a spiritual world that does influence the physical world
    3. Second, Satan and evil are defeated enemies
      - a) Every place you look in Scripture Satan has already been defeated
      - b) The chains of evil are broken by God
    4. Third thing the Bible makes clear, because the chains are broken, we should not get caught up in evil's schemes
      - a) That has largely to do with not understanding the lies that Satan dupes people into believing
        - (1) He is a master at it
        - (2) He is so subtle and convincing in his lies
      - b) The remedy for falling victim to his lies is to know the truth of the gospel revealed in the Bible
    5. Some people are very concerned about demons and what they can do to people, etc.

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- a) Personally I am not so concerned about the demons or Satan in that kind of a fashion
  - b) I am more concerned about my own depravity
  - c) I can frighten myself with how quickly my heart can take off after ungodly things
  - d) All the more reason to be walking a life focused on Christ
6. I could say a whole lot more, but that basically summarizes what the Bible says
- B. The real enemy
1. Verse 12 contains a key statement that is so basic that we often forget about it - "our struggle is not against flesh and blood"
  2. The struggle we face is really not with other human beings
    - a) Yes, we have struggles with other human beings
    - b) But the reason we struggle is the spiritual forces behind the problems
      - (1) Spiritual forces that tempt people to hold onto their pride
      - (2) That tempt people to do things that are harmful
      - (3) The problem is not flesh and blood, the problem is our own sinfulness and the spiritual forces that convince us that our sinful responses are better than God's righteous path
  3. So in practical terms:
    - a) When respond to an issue like abortion, the struggle is not against flesh and blood - it is a spiritual problem
      - (1) We should respond to the people involved in the issue with love, grace, mercy and compassion
      - (2) Our struggle is not with them but with the spiritual forces behind them
        - (a) Which should change the manner in which we pray for issues like that as well
        - (b) It is not praying against people - but against the spiritual powers that drive their behavior
    - b) One of the current issues of our day is gay marriage and homosexual behavior
      - (1) Let me say at the outset, that I still believe that homosexuality is just as God says it in Scripture - it is sinful
      - (2) But we have to remember that there are people involved - people that deserve kindness, love, mercy, grace, compassion, etc.
        - (a) Rom 2:4 "It is the kindness of a loving God that draws us to repentance"
      - (3) It is the spiritual forces that blind people to God's truth that we pray against

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(4) Because our struggle is not against flesh and blood - but against those spiritual powers

## C. The Christian armor

1. The picture that Ephesians is giving us is one of defending our position
2. God has given us the pieces of armor to use for the battle
3. However, we have to be proactive in strengthening our understanding of the armor, and how that connects into our relationship with God
4. For example: If we have accepted Christ as Savior, we have the helmet of salvation
  - a) It is incumbent upon us to better understand that salvation that protects us
  - b) If you are in the military, you want to understand the equipment that is protecting you
    - (1) What it is capable of
    - (2) What it is not capable of, etc.
  - c) We should always be seeking to better understand our salvation
  - d) In the process of doing so, we draw deeper to our Savior - the One who will bring an ultimate end to this battle for us all, some day

## D. Prayer is key to understanding how to stand firm

1. We need to pray in the Spirit which means really engaging God and moving beyond our personal wish lists into the things that break the heart of God as well
2. Prayer needs to become a way of life for all of us so that through those prayers, God will push back the forces of evil
3. There is a whole lot more that could be said on prayer, so I will have to look into doing a series just on that

## E. Finally, we represent Christ

1. If you are "in Christ" you represent Christ
2. The way we prove our role as Christ's representative is in living in relation to Christ - we act in accordance with His character
3. Paul, as Christ's representative, was concerned that he would rep Jesus well in sharing the gospel
  - a) He asked for prayer to do so - to be bold and clear in sharing the gospel
  - b) Honestly, that should be our desire as well - boldness to tell it like it is (in a loving manner) and clear so that people understand the message

CONCLUSION: I encourage you to review this passage, even do a deeper study for yourself. It is a great passage, filled with things we need to understand.