

Freedom – Spiritual Warfare
Ephesians 6:10-20
Sunday AM

Introduction

Well, good morning church family. If I haven't had a chance to meet you, my name is Jeremy and I am the pastor over our adult ministries here at First Baptist. I want you to know that I consider it a great privilege to preach God's word to you and so I am always grateful for the opportunity to do so. I consider the preaching and teaching ministry of the word to be one way a Pastor or a church leader loves those under his care.

I do also want to say thank you as well today because as many of you know my father passed away last month, and so many of you reached out through texts or calls or meals or cards and I'm very grateful for your kindness and encouragement. So thank you.

Well today, we are continuing our Freedom series, and we will be exploring together the end of Ephesians. And in Ephesians chapter 6, a theme that has progressed through out the letter culminates here at the end. Ephesians is a rich letter that Paul the apostle wrote to Christians in Ephesus around 60 AD.

In this letter, Paul paints a cosmic perspective that shifts our outlook on life away from the mundane to the heavenly. But he also does not ignore the reality of the struggle of our earthly life. In fact, he wants us to understand the true nature of our earthly struggle from a heavenly lens. And here in 6:10–20 Paul writes to inform us of two conflicting powers, the power of the demonic and the power of God. But while God does have enemies, he does not have rivals. There is no spiritual power that successfully challenges God's power.

I want to give you an example that I think helps illustrate what Paul is teaching us here. During World War I, a significant technological shift took place. Warfare changed dramatically during the great war. Up to that time, castles had been a significant protective resource against invading enemies. But modern weaponry rendered those defenses useless. This was the first war where modern artillery was used in combat.

And many people were still depending upon their castles, but when the invading enemies began to fire unimaginable quantities of artillery rounds, they quickly realized that they were outmatched by their enemies' power and resources. Castles as a defensive resource quickly became a thing of the past.

In Ephesians 6, Paul warns us that **we face an enemy that outmatches us and will crush us. But, the good news that Paul has for us is that the risen Lord Jesus Christ offers us divine power to overcome our enemy.** And when we stand in Christ, we find that we are the ones with the artillery and the enemy is in castles.

But here's the main idea of this message today that I hope you walk away with: **we cannot enjoy a free and thriving life in Christ without actively engaging in the battle.** And Paul will show us how to do that.

So here's what we're going to do today. We will read the text and then I'm going to pray over our time together in God's word and then we're going to dig in to see what God has to say to us today.

Read Ephesians 6:10–20 and then pray.

1. We must stand daily in God's power (6:10–13)

As we look at these first few verses, we see several things clearly. For one, that we are not to operate in our own power as we live for Christ. Rather, we are to operate in the power of God. It's important for us to understand that this power comes from God. And it's measured by the level of power that he has.

The verb that Paul uses here when he says be strong is in the passive, which means the subject is receiving the action of the verb. Paul's audience both at the time he wrote and through the centuries are the subject of this verb. The strength that comes is not something that we muster up or conjure up in ourselves, but that we receive from God. God is the one doing the strengthening.

At the same time, Paul uses an imperative. It's a command, that we are to be strengthened by the Lord. What does that mean for us? It means that there's both an active and passive element here. We have to yield ourselves, surrender ourselves to God so that we might receive his power.

We do not do this occasionally, but on a daily basis, we stand in God's power. Paul says in the strength of his might, God's might. The level of power that's available to you and I as we surrender ourselves to God is unimaginable, it's unmatched. We've seen this power on display throughout Ephesians. It's the power of God to create the universe. The kind of power that can organize an eternally redemptive plan. The kind of power that can even raise the dead to life.

God's power is unparalleled and it's available to you and I every day. It's available for us to draw upon in our weakness, in our discouragement, in our weariness, in our battle with temptation.

We also see here that we are to operate in the resources of God, namely the armor of God. God offers us tools, equipment to use in our battle. We do see then that it's a battle against the devil. But Paul doesn't mention the devil until after he has mentioned God and his strength and his armor. The devil is secondary here, and God is central.

In verse 12, Paul clarifies our enemy. For one, our enemy is not flesh and blood. We are in a battle against spiritual beings and powers. And Satan is behind it all and is strategizing ways to destroy God's people.

Paul lists these different terms to capture the variety of powers and roles of Satan's legions. But Paul does not introduce this idea or these categories for the first time here. He has mentioned them in passing throughout the letter.

1:20: Paul references how God the Father raised Jesus who is God the Son from the dead and established him far above any competing power.

2:2: Paul explains, with a reference to Satan, that when we were dead in our sins, we were subject to the influence of the Prince of the power of the air. Satan has significant influence over unbelievers, and he looks for ways to gain influence in the lives of believers as well.

3:10: Paul says God's unfolding redemptive plan is being displayed before competing powers. He uses here the phrase, "heavenly places," which we also see in chapter 6. And it carries the idea of spiritual realm.

4:27: Paul warns that when we sin, we provide the devil with an opportunity to gain influence in our lives. This is also why it is important when we sin that we run to the Father in confession and repentance, depending upon Jesus Christ our advocate. Satan would love to keep us wallowing in guilt and distance from God rather than in confession and repentance.

5:8: Paul says that not only were we in darkness but that we were darkness. Paul uses this to characterize our very nature. And in our passage before us, we see that we are still facing enemies in this present darkness. But we are now light, just as God is light, and in him there is no darkness at all.

So now, as we come to this passage, Paul is laying before us the reality that we are in a battle. And we will either enter the battle each day armed or unarmed. We will either be in the castle or behind the artillery. But Paul says receive God's power and take up his armor, and you will be able to withstand evil. You will be able to stand firm.

2. We must allow the gospel and its implications to adorn our lives (6:14–17)

Paul does several important things here at verse 14. For one, the primary verb in this whole remaining passage is the word stand. The imagery that he's going to use that follows this verb unpacks the means by which we stand. That's important to maintain.

Paul is also using this armor imagery very intentionally. For one, while the armor of the Roman soldier was likely on his mind, the imagery of God as a divine warrior from the Old Testament was certainly on his mind.

Isaiah 59:17: Isaiah records how God was looking in Israel for those who were righteous, upholding truth, and acting justly. But instead, he found no one who was righteous, but only those who were doing evil and misleading the people. So he describes how God dons his armor and descends to bring about salvation himself.

Paul has also chosen this imagery at the end of the letter in order to tie together many of his primary teachings throughout the letter, and to reinforce the positional and practical outworking of the gospel in a memorable way.

For example, we stand by adorning ourselves with the belt of truth. Paul has taught us that positionally. We have the truth. Jesus Christ. But he has also challenged us to live the truth, walking in integrity and speaking what is true. He's saying positionally, before God, truth is what characterizes your standing. But you also must live it out. God has freed us to be people of truth as we follow the one who is truth.

Paul also says that we are to stand by putting on the breast plate of righteousness. Again, we are positionally righteous before God because we are clothed in the righteousness of Jesus Christ, who lived the righteous life on our behalf and died to free us from our sin. But, Paul has also challenged us to live righteously, to align our lives with God's will, his ways, and his coming kingdom. Positional and practical righteousness.

Then he moves to our feet. Our feet are to be adorned with readiness. We are prepared for the battle because we wear the gospel of peace. We have been reunited with God and given a relationship of peace with him. This is central to the gospel.

But this also should be working outwardly in our lives, where we increasingly live at peace with others, cultivating peace, both by viewing people the way that God views them, and by sharing the gospel of peace. Remember how Paul taught us in Ephesians 2 that God has torn down the wall of hostility, both between us and him and between us and other people.

Again, we stand by taking the shield, which is faith. Our faith equips us to combat the lies of the evil one. He will make assaults upon our lives, but when we are firmly trusting in the Lord and

walking in confidence in who he is, and who he has made us to be, we will not fall prey to the enemy's lies.

They are likewise to take up the helmet of salvation. Again, positionally we are saved. We have experienced salvation from sin, from death, hell, and the grave. We have already been raised with Christ and seated with him in heaven. Paul says you also must live it out. You are set free to live here as one who has been rescued.

We are also called and challenged to take into our hands, the Holy Spirit's sword, which is the word of God. This has to do with embracing and embodying God's instruction and teaching and communication to us of his will, his ways, and his kingdom. And we find this most clearly in the Scriptures, in the Bible.

And in fact, consider this. None of this armor stands alone. How can you live out truth, be a person of integrity and yet not be righteous? How can you live righteously and not be marked by the gospel of peace? How can you walk in confidence and faith yet not be adorned with the helmet of salvation? How can you wield the word of God without the rest of the armor?

You can't. All of this is connected. Paul has taught us about our truth, righteousness, faith, peace, and salvation positionally, meaning that these things are ours in Christ. But he has also taught us that we are to embody these things. It's who we are and it's what we ought to pursue. And again, by allowing the gospel and its implications to adorn our lives, we stand firm. This is where God's power comes from.

One last thing on this section. All of this requires our regular engagement in the Scriptures. Where else can we learn about truth? Where else can we learn about righteousness? Where else can we learn about faith and the gospel and our salvation? Vital to wearing the armor of God is abiding in the word of God.

So, Paul uses this imagery very intentionally. His goal is for you to remember what he has taught in this letter. He wants you to know who you are positionally in Christ, and he wants you to know how to live practically through Christ. And the armor is intended to help you visualize these truths.

This leads us to our last point.

3. We must position ourselves before God to receive power from God (6:18–20)

In this last section of our passage today, Paul shifts to talking about prayer. And what he does not do is describe prayer as one more piece of the armor imagery. Instead, he describes prayer as the underlining foundation of our life. For one thing, this is still another way of unpacking his charge

to us in verse 14 to stand. We stand by praying at all times. But prayer stands separate from these other instruments. It is our prayer life that enables us to commune with God and to experience the power of his presence in our lives in any circumstance.

And what is prayer? To put it simply, prayer is talking to God. Prayer is relational. It's about cultivating intimacy and alignment with God. Prayer is not ritual in the Christian faith as it is in many other faiths. Even Jesus combated this idea in his teaching on the sermon on the mount and the Lord's prayer. He taught his disciples how to pray, relationally and not ritualistically. But that doesn't mean that you can't pray the same prayers as part of your prayer life.

The difference is that ritualistic prayers are about coercing or manipulating God to operate on our behalf. Relational prayer is again about cultivating intimacy with God. So with that in mind, here's how I would describe prayer based off what I've learned from others in my life, particularly one of my mentors: prayer is an expression of our love and dependence on God. Prayer is how we position ourselves before God so that we receive his power.

There's another distinction in prayer that I learned from my mentor and that's the concept of reactive and proactive prayers. Unfortunately, what I've seen more often than not is that most Christians have an unbalanced prayer life. The majority of our prayers are reactive. Think about in the last month how many prayer requests you've heard that have been in response to a need or crisis or sickness. These are reactive prayers where something happens in our lives and then we turn to God in prayer over those things after they have happened.

And please hear me when I say that this is an important aspect of our prayer lives. God wants us and tells us to bring all our requests to him, all our cares and our problems before him, doesn't he?

But, when we look at the scriptures and the prayers we find there, most often the example that we have is of proactive prayers. Prayers for growth and depth in the knowledge of God, delight in God, righteousness and holiness in God. Prayers for courage to stand for Christ or to speak for Christ. Boldness to face opposition. Strength in the face of temptation. These are proactive prayers. These kinds of prayers are where we turn our hearts to God, not out of response to a crisis, but out of the daily desire for more of him in our lives and the lives of others.

We need a balanced prayer life that involves both proactive and reactive prayers. For my life groups and life group leaders, I want you to consider how you can build this into your life group. How can you pray for one another's spiritual growth and vitality in addition to the needs or issues that arise in life? That means we need to ask for these kinds of prayers. But life group leaders, even if no one asks for these kinds of prayers, lead them in this. Pray for your members proactively, for a deepening experience in their lives of God and power to stand and be who he has called them to be.

Looking back at our passage here, we see again as we said that prayer is to characterize our daily lives. Leveraging every opportunity. All kinds of prayers, prayer generally, but also supplication, which has to do with petitions, asking God for things.

Paul also describes prayer as a means of maintaining spiritual alertness and perseverance. And he challenges them to pray not only privately for themselves, but to pray with and for others.

Also think about the setting within which he's asking for prayers for himself. He's calling them to pray for one another. He's calling them to pray for himself. There's an urgency here because there's a battle raging. And Paul wants men and women who are adorned with the armor of God to be praying for him and for others because he wants prayer from people who God will listen to.

And look at what he specifically asks. Pray that God will give him an opportunity and boldness and will give him a word that he might speak the gospel, even though he's currently in chains as a prisoner for Jesus. If Paul, the greatest church planting missionary ever to live is asking other believers to pray for him, how much more do we need the prayer of others in our lives?

And Paul's asking for prayer that he might speak. That should tell us something about what Satan would like to happen. He would like for Paul to be silent, to be quiet. When God gives you the opportunity to speak the gospel, to point someone to Jesus and you feel like you want to rationalize away why you shouldn't speak or try to speak, that's almost certainly not the voice of God compelling you to be quiet. There are times when God compels us not to speak, but that's not what I'm talking about here.

Just last week I took advantage of an opportunity God gave me to speak biblical truth to someone who needed to hear it, someone far from God. But this week, I had an opportunity where I could've tried to speak the gospel to somebody, but I didn't. Instead, I remained quiet. I think what God wanted in that moment was for me to try, but either the world, my flesh, or the devil wanted me to be quiet. I too need your prayers that God would give me his word and opportunity to speak it and that I would do so boldly.

Conclusion

As we consider how to respond to this passage today, I want us to close in prayer. I want to invite you to come to the altar and pray. I want to encourage you to pray for yourself, for others, for your pastors and church leaders. Let's use this passage as our content and join together in prayer that God would help us to stand daily in his power, adorn our lives with the gospel, position ourselves before him in prayer, and proclaim the gospel when he gives us opportunity.