

MBC - 3/4/2018 - Pastor Doug Thompson
Spiritual Warfare pt. 1
“How Do we Fight This Enemy?”
 Ephesians 6:10-12

This passage is the most complete instruction in the entire Bible on spiritual warfare: who we are up against, and how we are to fight—

- Ephesians 6:10-17 ¹⁰Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. ¹¹Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. ¹²For 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. ¹³Therefore 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. ¹⁴Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, ¹⁵and, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace. ¹⁶In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one; ¹⁷and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God,

Intro - Hell’s Angels vs. Heaven’s Angels

Satan loves to confuse and deceive people about spiritual warfare: what he’s up to and how to fight against him and his demons. There’s no end to the nonsense you can read about dealing with the devil.

- A few years ago Peter Wagner, a prominent professor at Fuller Seminary, began teaching that we can’t really share the gospel until we identify and *bind* the ‘territorial spirits’ over the area we are trying to reach. I.e., Satan has assigned certain demons to have authority over different regions. Really? Can you imagine the demon assigned to Lake County: “Hey, what did I do wrong?”
- In 1990, a man named Larry Lea organized a rally of Christians at Candlestick Park - you might remember this - and the purpose was not to pray to God, but to rebuke the devil and speak to him to “bind and expel his ‘territorial spirits’ over San Francisco.”

News flash - *that* didn’t work!

The passage we just read gives you what you need to deal with Satan and his demons. But before we look at it, there is another aspect to spiritual warfare that is very encouraging that I hardly ever read about, and that’s the fact that God’s holy angels are on our side and at our service in this battle. And remember we saw last week that they outnumber Satan’s demons by 2 to 1! The writer of Hebrews said this—

- Hebrews 1:14 ¹⁴Are they not all ministering spirits sent out to serve for the sake of those who are to inherit salvation?

Did you know this? If you are a Christian, God continually sends His angels to serve you and me! We have no idea how many times they keep us out of sinful situations, or keep us safe going over St. Helena. You’ve got to figure that Jason’s angels qualify for overtime! The Psalmist said—

- Psalm 34:7 ⁷The angel of the LORD encamps around those who fear him, and delivers them.

This isn't just metaphor. It actually happened to the prophet Elisha. The wicked king of Israel sent out an army to capture the prophet, but this is what happened—

- 2 Kings 6:15-17 ¹⁵When the servant of the man of God rose early in the morning and went out, behold, an army with horses and chariots was all around the city. And the servant said, "Alas, my master! What shall we do?" ¹⁶He said, "Do not be afraid, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them." ¹⁷Then Elisha prayed and said, "O LORD, please open his eyes that he may see." So the LORD opened the eyes of the young man, and he saw, and behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha.

Those were God's holy angels, sent out to protect Elisha! John G. Paton was a missionary who went with his wife to preach the gospel to the cannibals in New Hebrides in the late 1800's. Listen to this account of what happened to them—

- On a dark night, the Patons found themselves surrounded by cannibals intent on taking their lives. That terror-filled night they fell to their knees and prayed that God would protect them. Intermittent with their prayers, the missionaries heard the cries of the savages and expected them to come through the door at any moment.
- But as the sun began to rise, to their astonishment they found that the natives were retreating into the forest. The missionaries bravely continued their work. A year later the chieftain of that tribe was converted. As the missionary spoke with him, he remembered the horror of that night. He asked the chieftain why he and his men had not killed them. The chief replied, "Who were all those men who were with you?" The missionary answered. "Why, there were no men with us. There was just my wife and myself." The chieftain began to argue with him, saying, "There were hundreds of tall men in shining garments with drawn swords circling about your house, so we could not attack you."

Maybe it was the same angels who protected Elisha! One more story closer to our time—

- In 1956 during the Mau Mau uprisings in East Africa, a band of roving Mau Maus came to the village of Lauri, surrounded it, and killed every inhabitant including women and children, 300 in all. Not more than three miles away was the Rift Valley Academy, a private school where missionary children were being educated. Immediately upon leaving the carnage of Lauri the natives came with spears, bows and arrows, clubs, and torches to the school to slaughter everyone there.
- In the darkness lighted torches were seen coming toward the school. Soon there was a complete ring of terrorists around the academy, cutting off all avenues of escape. Shouts and curses could be heard coming from the Mau Maus. They began to advance on the school, tightening the circle, shouting louder and louder, coming closer. Then inexplicably, when they were close enough to throw spears, they stopped. They began retreating and soon were running into the jungle. The army was called out and captured the entire band of raiders.
- Later, at their trial, the leader was called to the witness stand. The judge questioned him: "On this particular night, did you kill the inhabitants of Lauri?" "Yes." "Well, then, why didn't you attack the school?" The leader of the Mau Maus answered, "We were on

our way to attack and destroy all the people and school . . . but as we came closer, all of a sudden, between us and the school there were many huge men, dressed in white with flaming swords and we became afraid and ran to hide!"

According to God's Word, if you know Christ, they're working for you too! Now I want to show you the plot, the plan, and the power.

I. The Plot.

- Ephesians 6:12 ¹²For 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.

There is an incredible battle going on in this universe, a battle that exists in the realm of the spirit--in another dimension. It's intangible and invisible - but it's just as real as the chair you are sitting on.

- If you are a believer, you are involved in this warfare - there are no exceptions or exemptions. Paul compares it to a wrestling match. Don't think of Olympic wrestling. This isn't a sport. It's a battle to the death. It's hand to hand combat against an enemy who knows everything about you. Think about that! You might not know much about him, but he has everything on you, so it's personal.

We need to understand this battle! We tend to think that our battle is against abortion, pornography, or false religions and cults. But ultimately our battle is against the *powers* behind the people: powerful spiritual beings who exert a supernatural influence way beyond the intelligence of mere mortals—

- I don't believe there's any other way to explain the twisted, sick sexual perversions in our world - or the unspeakable cruelty of sociopaths like mass-murderer Nikolas Cruz; or the Turpins who tortured their 13 children for years, kept them chained up, withheld food and wouldn't let them bath or go to the bathroom. I believe demons were behind that couple.
- And I believe they are behind groups like ISIS, Planned Parenthood, Antifa, and on and on. And apart from demonic influence I don't see otherwise normal, intelligent people could believe the nonsense of cults like Scientology, or Mormonism. How can so many be so blinded? It's because they are "*following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience*"— Ephesians 2:2

If you know Jesus Christ, you have been delivered from Satan's kingdom! Jesus set you free. Satan has no authority over you, and you cannot, ever, fall back under His rule and reign. He can't possess you - I'll talk more about that next week - but he can mess with you, big time, if you don't know what he's up to. There are three main ways he attacks God's children—

1.) He tempts us to doubt God's promises.

God's says it's true, Satan whispers: "Don't count on it . . . Did God really say . . .? Maybe He's changed His mind." And his favorite temptation is to tempt you to doubt God's grace and forgiveness: He whispers: "God is so disappointed in you for what you've done! He won't use you now. He doesn't hear your prayers. And don't kid yourself, He won't forgive you this time."

Sometimes he *shouts* it.

And then, while we are sad and feeling sorry for ourselves, ordering balloons and cake for our pity party, we forget that doubting God's Gospel promises to us in Christ - is calling Him a liar! That's sin. He kicks us when we're down. This is why you need the helmet of the hope of your salvation.

2.) He tempts us to disobey God's commands.

To sin. And he does this a thousand different ways: he will tangle some bait in front of our eyes; he will use the seductions of the world; and remember we saw that he can actually put thoughts in our minds to tempt us to: steal, defraud, cheat, lie, slander, gossip, withhold forgiveness, withhold compassion, to vent our anger, to play lustful thoughts in our minds, sensuality, greed, envy, abusing food, alcohol, drugs, pornography - he whispers. . . , he tempts us to laziness and lethargy, to be critical, harsh, legalistic, prideful. . .

He dangles the bait, but hides the hook: "Do it!" And you're thinking, "Where did that come from?" And then—

3.) He puts trials and difficulties in our path to weaken us so that we give in to these temptations.

- Acts 10:38 . . . Jesus of Nazareth . . . went about doing good and *healing* all who were *oppressed by the devil*, for God was with him.

The devil can afflict people with illness - he can make you sick! Even Christians? Well in Luke 13, Jesus healed a woman who was bent over and couldn't straighten up, and He called her "a daughter of Abraham whom Satan bound for eighteen years." So yes. He sure knocked Job around, didn't he?

He can bring persecution, and suffering and stress into our lives because he knows that we're more vulnerable when we are weak, sick, exhausted, anxious. It's harder to resist what he whispers in our ears, isn't it? He gets us to feel sorry for ourselves so that we make excuses for giving in: "I can't take anymore. I've reached my limit. I deserve a break! I deserve some happiness."

- *And in those times, sometimes victory is just holding your ground. Refusing to give in. God isn't calling you to do great spiritual exploits, just to keep standing. I was talking to Ron this week. He's a brother who has suffered a lot over these last 10 years with his Lyme disease. And we agreed that sometimes in this battle, perseverance = victory! Just standing. And that leads us to—

II. The Plan.

So what is our objective in this battle? You might be surprised—

- Ephesians 6:11 ¹¹Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to (Cast out demons? Bind the devil? No: "stand against the schemes of the devil."

Stand - The word means to stay in your place, to be established, firm, fixed - not to move! And he repeats himself—

- Ephesians 6:13-14 ¹³Therefore take up the whole armor of God, *that* (i.e., here is the purpose) you may be able to *withstand* (just a stronger version of the same word) in the evil day, and having done all, to *stand firm*. ¹⁴*Stand* therefore . . .

So 4 times Paul repeats our marching orders in this battle from hell: What is our objective? What does victory look like? To *stand* against the devil. To resist him. What exactly does that mean? It means two things: When the smoke of the battle clears - **1.) Your faith is still intact.** You haven't succumbed to doubt. You are still trusting God and His Word. And **2.) You have resisted temptation to sin.**

That's what it means to *stand firm*, to *withstand* in the evil day - which is any day you meet demonic attack. You resist doubt and you resist temptation to sin. There are only 2 other passages of Scripture in the NT that instruct us as to how to fight against Satan and his demons, and they all say the same thing—

- 1 Peter 5:8-9 ⁸Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. ⁹*Resist him* - same word = 'stand' - firm in your faith . . .
- James 4:7 ⁷Submit yourselves therefore to God. *Resist* the devil, and *he* will flee from *you*.

Now I want you to get this because I would wager that most Christians have never heard this—

- We are never told to take the offensive against Satan and his demons; we are never told to go on the attack; we are never told to cast out demons; rebuke demons, order them into the pit; or bind the devil. The only command given to Christians is to stand! We don't run and hide, we don't give in to his temptations, we don't doubt God and His Word; Peter said that you “resist the devil” when you remain “firm in your faith.”

And when you do that, who runs from whom? The devil will run from you!!

I realize this doesn't sound very glamorous. Maybe you were hoping to hear some formula for casting a demon out of your closet. But let me ask you how many times, just in this last week, did you give in to temptations? How many times did your faith give way to doubt and despair? And how different would your week have been if you had held your ground, and resisted the devil? Beloved, this battle is real, it is relentless, and to be able to “withstand in the evil day” - is everything!

I want to be as clear as I can. This is spiritual warfare: When you resist doubt, you have resisted the devil. When you resist temptation, you have resisted the devil. And he will flee from you.

*You don't need to speak to a demon—

- Wayne Grudem in his Systematic Theology gets really nutty in his section on Satan and demons: He says that when we are dealing with a person with a problem we can't figure out, “We might ask, “Do you think an evil spirit may be attacking you in this situation?” or “Would you mind if I spoke a word of rebuke to any evil spirit that may be a factor in this?”

Can I give some pastoral advice: Don't talk to demons! And don't listen to demons either! Talk to God about the demons! Right?

*And let me take a minute to talk about this: There are no instructions or commands in Scripture for you and me to perform exorcisms. None. If Paul wanted believers to do that, this would have been the place to say it, but he didn't. So what do you do if you encounter a demon-possessed person? And maybe you have. I think I have. How do you deal with this person? It's really simple: *You proclaim the gospel to them! You announce the good news that Jesus Christ has defeated Satan and his demons by His death on the cross, and you call on them to repent of their sins and receive Christ as Lord and Savior!*

If they do that, they will be set free from that demon and they will be free indeed! Amen? And if they will not repent of their sins, you've got nothing else to offer them.

- And even if you could cast a demon out of an unbeliever who isn't ready to repent and turn to Christ, what good would it do? In Mt. 12 Jesus said that old demon will just return with 7 rowdier demons and move back in!

Jesus Christ is Lord over all demons, and when a person is saved, that house has a new owner, and the door is locked against those old demons! You deliver a person from demons by leading them to Christ.

So our spiritual battle is up close and it's personal, but we are not the offensive. Jesus Christ has already defeated our enemy. This is a mop up operation and our order is to stand firm and not give in. And beloved, that is *not* passivity - not hardly! Standing against these monstrous spiritual powers is like an oak tree staying rooted in the middle of a hurricane. Demonic forces will throw everything they've got at you to tempt you to sin, to doubt, despair, depression, or just to give up.

And you and I know how powerful those temptations can be! It can feel like your bones are being pulled out of their sockets. It can take all we've got just to stand our ground.

But that is victory! We're not commanded to go around like sanctified ghostbusters looking for trouble. Just stand. *"Resist in the evil day, and having done everything, stand firm."* That's plenty!

III. The Power.

Finally, for this morning I want us to look carefully at the source of our power in fighting this intense, spiritual battle against Satan and his demons—

- Ephesians 6:10 ¹⁰Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might.

Notice it doesn't just say "be strong," it says *"be strong in the Lord* - that's Jesus Christ - *and in the strength of His might.* i.e., "Continually allow Christ to empower you for this battle." And when he tells us to put on our spiritual armor in v.13 he says, "take up the whole armor of God!" We fight with *His* power, clothed in *His* armor.

God never meant for you to fight this spiritual battle in your own power. And if you do, you will quickly find out that you are outgunned! There is a funny story in Acts about some men who tried—

- Acts 19:13-16 NLT ¹³A group of Jews was traveling from town to town casting out evil spirits. They tried to use the name of the Lord Jesus in their incantation, saying, "I command you in the name of Jesus, whom Paul preaches, to come out!" ¹⁴Seven sons

of Sceva, a leading priest, were doing this. ¹⁵But one time when they tried it, the evil spirit replied, "I know Jesus, and I know Paul, but who are you?" ¹⁶Then the man with the evil spirit leaped on them, overpowered them, and attacked them with such violence that they fled from the house, naked and battered.

"Who ya gonna call?" Not these guys!

Just because you're a Christian doesn't mean you have spiritual "super-powers" to face-off with demonic powers. They will clean your clock. You must be strong *in the Lord and in the strength of His might*. Paul uses 3 different Gk. words for power here, and they're the same 3 words he used when he *prayed* that the Christians in Ephesus would grasp the power that was theirs in Christ-

- Ephesians 1:18-20 . . . that you may know what is the . . . immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might [How great?] ²⁰that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places.

Dynamite, resurrection power is at our fingertips. You might feel like a little David up against a Goliath, but if you are strengthened with God's power, you have divine stones in your sling!

But what does it mean to be strong in the Lord? How do we do that? Let me quickly give you 3 ways you draw on God's strength to stand against the devil in the evil day—

1.) Know your position.

You have to know where you stand - to stand there! Know who your God is! Know who you are in Him! Do you know where you stand with Him? Do you know what He has promised you? Do you know your spiritual resources in Him? Because, "*If God is for you, who can be against you?*"

You say, "Where do I find this information?" The answer is in your hands. God's Word is the sword of the Holy Spirit in this battle. What did Jesus do when he met the devil in the wilderness: He spoke God's Word: "It is written, it is written, it is written!" And the devil left. And let me be really specific: read, and re-read, the first three chapters of Ephesians, and even more specific: the first 14 verses of chapter one. Memorize it. It's a steel cable that will keep you lashed to the mast when the devil's temptations come. Pray it into your heart and mind. That's how you stand.

- When Erroll and I go to the Philippines this May for a conference of 18 different churches - I'm going to preach this section of Ephesians because it tells us where we stand and who we are in Christ!

Do you know where you stand, in Christ, this morning? Martin Luther wrote this advice to a friend: "When the devil throws our sins up to us and declares we deserve death and hell, we ought to speak thus: "I admit that I deserve death and hell. What of it? Does this mean that I shall be sentenced to eternal damnation? By no means. For I know One who suffered and made a satisfaction in my behalf. His name is Jesus Christ, the Son of God!"

2.) Talk to your Commander.

Pray! Spiritual warfare is fought on your knees. After Paul describes our spiritual armor, what does he say next?

- Ephesians 6:18 ¹⁸praying 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,

Ask - and you shall receive! Seek - and you shall find! Knock - and the door will be opened! Are you doing that? Are you? This is the Lord's battle, and prayer is like your wartime walkie-talkie in the midst of the battle. Go to your Commander-in-Chief for encouragement, for strength, for wisdom. And this isn't just some cutesy illustration, it's deadly serious. When you are tempted and tried, cry out to Jesus!—

O how the world to evil allures me!
O how my heart is tempted to sin!
I must tell Jesus; He will enable
Over the world the vic'try to win.

I must tell Jesus! I must tell Jesus!
I cannot bear my burdens alone;
I must tell Jesus! I must tell Jesus!
Jesus can help me, Jesus alone.

Just hours before He went to the Cross, Jesus knew that the devil would do everything in His power to keep Him from finishing what He came for. None of us will ever be tempted the way Jesus was tempted in that Garden of Gethsemane. And what did Jesus do? He prayed - until blood came out of His pores, He prayed. He told Peter, James, and John, "*Pray that you may not enter into temptation!*" But while Jesus prayed, they slept. Jesus went to the cross and accomplished salvation for His people. Peter denied Jesus three times. Prayer is everything in this war.

Will you commit yourself to pray, every day: "Lord Jesus, lead me not into temptation - and deliver me from evil."?

3.) Trust and obey.

Now listen, you can know God's Word, you can be on your knees, but you have to trust - you have to obey. *You* have to remove yourself from that tempting situation. *You* have to say 'No' to going there, clicking on that link, sending that text, hanging out with those people. *You* have to control your tongue. *You* have to speak the truth and not lie. *You* have to forgive and not hold a grudge. *You* have to live by your faith instead of your feelings.

- "Let go and let God" No. You aren't some marionette waiting for God to pull your strings. You are a child of God, a new creature in Christ, indwelt by the Holy Spirit, armed with the Word of God; you have all the spiritual resources you need to obey Him and resist the devil. You are responsible to do it. So do it. There is no resisting the devil without obedience. And that's *hard*. And that's spiritual warfare.

But doesn't it say to "be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might?" Yes, but God's power is released when *you* step out in obedience.

*I want to talk to you as your pastor who loves you and prays for you: For some of you, this is the missing piece of the puzzle in that sin that has a hold on you; that temptation that you can't seem to resist - you are praying that God will take it away the craving, or overwhelm you with some supernatural power to say no. Nothing in Scripture promises that will happen.

Or maybe you are waiting to hear that one pithy, profound sentence that will take hold of your heart and your mind and the battle will be over. "Tweet me, Lord Jesus!"

The truth is, you've heard it this morning in this passage. You know what to do. You know what to stop doing. And by the grace and strength of Christ in you, you can do it. The next move is not God's - He's spoken! The next move is yours!

* * *

I want to encourage you this morning if you feel like your Christian life is a constant battle--congratulations! Fighting is not failing--fighting is success. God hasn't called you to be a hero--Jesus is the hero in this story--He just calls you to be faithful, to stand, resist the devil--and he will flee from you.

Someone wrote this--

- "In heaven we shall appear not in armor but in robes of glory; but here this armor must be worn night and day; we must walk, work and sleep in it, or else we are not true soldiers of Christ. The saint's sleeping time is Satan's tempting time."