

“Preparing for Battle”

Ephesians 6:10-17

Pastor Dan Erickson

May 8, 2022

During the 1980's the best-selling author in Christian circles was Frank Peretti. His novels included “This Present Darkness,” “Piercing the Darkness,” and “The Visitation,” have been read by millions of people, including by some people in this room, and by some which have never gone to church. I remember finding the books to be interesting reads, though theologically a bit shaky. What attracted people to these books? For many, it was Peretti's choice of topic, spiritual warfare, the conflict between angelic and demonic forces which spill over into our world. I think some find this intriguing because it seems sensational and extraordinary. Others see these books as kind of Christian science fiction that they use to escape from the very predictable ruts in which they usually live.

Today, as we continue our journey through the book of Ephesians, we see that the apostle Paul did not view spiritual warfare as science fiction or any other type of fiction. Our text today is Ephesians 6:10-17. Here Paul describes conflict with demonic forces as a normal part of the Christian life. Now spiritual warfare may not be as sensational as it is often portrayed, but it is something that all Christians, including those of us in this room, need to be prepared to engage. The truth is, that even though we often don't realize it, all of us are in the mist of a battle. Folks, let's pause and pray the lord would help us to hear, understand, believe, and obey His word today.

How do we prepare for spiritual battle? This is the question we will explore today. In our text, the apostle Paul talks about four things we should do:

#1 We need to realize that there really is an enemy. **Ephesians 6:12 For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood (human beings), 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.** Those of us in this room who have grown up in evangelical churches may not realize how strange this sounds to many people. The Bible teaching, of which Paul is a big part, is that there are demonic beings, spirits, who possess what we would consider supernatural power. They are angelic beings, created by God, who apparently joined Lucifer in rebelling against

the Lord. We don't know when this happened, thought it obviously occurred sometime before the creation of Adam and Eve. We don't know how many fallen angels there are, though some Bible teachers have guessed that 1/3 of the angelic hosts rebelled against the Lord. Paul tells us these demons are active both in the spiritual realm and in our own world. They are our enemies.

Now you may be thinking, “Pastor Dan, you have got to be kidding! How can any intelligent person believe in a personal devil and demons?” Some people have decided that the “rulers, authorities and cosmic powers” to which Paul refers, must be evil political and social structures. Perhaps he uses this phrase to refer to the Roman Empire under Nero. Yet, as we look at this text, verse 11 for example, and other parts of the New Testament, we find no evidence this is the case. Paul believes in a personal devil and in the reality of demonic beings.

“But Pastor Dan, that just shows how superstitious Paul was.” I don't think so. I could spend the rest of our time talking about why I believe Paul is correct in his belief. I would simply say that neither science nor logic can prove that demonic forces do not exist. Can I prove they do? Certainly not to everyone's satisfaction. Yet, clearly Jesus, Paul, Peter, John and the rest of the New Testament writers teach that Satan and his demons really do exist. Dr. Billy Graham used to tell this story to those who insisted there is no devil. Once there was a boxer who was being badly beaten in a fight. Battered and bruised, he leaned over the ropes and said to his trainer, “Throw in the towel. This guy is killing me!” The trainer responded, “No, he's not. He's not even hitting you. He hasn't laid a glove on you.” The boxer replied, “Well, then you better watch the ref, because somebody is sure hitting me!” Friends, somebody out there is encouraging people to believe lies, hate what is good, and do the wrong things. The Bible says it is the devil and his angels.

Of course, today many folks believe in spiritual beings and spiritual forces but insist these are not evil. Some adherents of “Wicca” or so called “White witchcraft” claim Christianity has

defamed these spiritual forces, whom they insist are really benign and can be used for good. However, the Bible is clear. If the spiritual forces are not God's angels, if they don't serve and give homage to the triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, then they are evil and they are our enemy. As Christians, we really do have an enemy with whom we are in conflict.

#2 To prepare for battle, we need to recognize the nature of conflict in which we are involved. When we talk about spiritual warfare, many folks picture a scene from a horror movie, where demons manifest themselves by possessing someone and speaking in strange voices. Now I believe those types of things happen. I have heard too many stories to deny that. But I am convinced that is not the normal way demonic forces operate. The focus of the enemy's strategy is not an overt attack with cannons roaring and swords clashing. Rather, it is a covert operation, a subtle attack, what Paul calls in verse 11, "the schemes of the devil" or the King James Version says, "the wiles of the devil."

C. S. Lewis said the problem with some people is that "they don't believe in the devil, while the problem with others is that they believe in the devil too much." If someone doesn't believe in the devil, or forgets he exists, as Christians sometimes do, then our enemy is free to plan and practice his schemes without our resistance. Yet, some people believe in Satan too much and think he is greater and more powerful than the really is. This is where some sincere Christians make a big mistake. They suppose that Satan is equal or nearly equal to God. God is good, Satan is evil. They are comparable powers. Wrong! Satan is not the opposite of God! He is an angel, a created being. His counterpart may be Michael, Gabriel, or another arch-angel, but certainly is not the triune God. I think one of Satan's chief schemes is to confuse people about who he is. If you think he is an imaginary figure, or if you think he has powers equal to God, then you have fallen into one of his traps.

What are some other schemes of the devil? Well, I am not privy to any inside information, but certainly one of his schemes is to cripple Christian churches. Sometimes he does that through a direct, frontal assault. In communist, Muslim, and Hindu countries I suspect demonic forces are encouraging some of the violent persecution of

Christians that is occurring. When it comes to opposition to Christianity in our own country which seems to be becoming more prevalent, each day, I suspect there is demonic influence. In college classrooms, and in both the entertainment and news medias there are many people who "despise" Biblical Christianity and Bible believing Christians. I am not suggesting these folks are demon possessed or anything like that. I do fear however that these individuals need to **2 Timothy 2:26 come to their senses and escape from the trap of the devil, who has taken them captive to do his will.**

Yet, we make a mistake if we focus on this type of opposition as Satan's primary strategy against the church. I suspect often the greatest danger comes not from outside, but from inside the church. A few years ago, Os Guinness wrote a marvelous book called "the Grave Digger File." In it, he describes how modern idols such as secularism, materialism, and love of pleasure have infiltrated the church. Like caners they have begun to eat away at our spiritual well-being. For most of us in this room, the devil's scheme against us is not to try to turn us into bank robbers, atheists, or Hindus. Oh, he would not mind if that happened but he has more realistic goals. He will try to get us to be Christians who maybe show up for church occasionally on Sundays, but whose lives are so full of pride, selfishness, and complacency that we pose little threat to the kingdom of darkness. Maybe Satan's most subtle strategy is to keep us so busy doing "good things" that we don't have time for the best things, which are to love God, love others, and make disciples. I am convinced "distraction" is a key weapon in Satan's strategy. In being prepared for spiritual battle, we need to watch out, not only for Satan's obvious attack, but also for his quiet subtle, assaults. These are the devil's schemes or the wiles of the devil.

#3 In preparing for spiritual battle we need to put on "the whole armor of God." **Ephesians 6:11,13 Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil...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.** Paul goes on to describe "the whole armor," listing six aspects of the Christian life essential for protection from the evil one. He compares them to six pieces of equipment that Roman soldiers would wear in battle. Paul's analogy has captured

the attention and imagination of numerous Christian writers. William Gurnall, a 17<sup>th</sup> century Puritan wrote a book called, "The Christian in Complete Armor." It is a 1472-page commentary on these eight verse. Yet, the six pieces of armor are basic parts of the Christian life. Paul has already mentioned them in this letter, and they are talked about frequently throughout the New Testament.

Let's take a quick look at the armor. First is the belt of truth. **Ephesians 6:14a Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth.** I think Paul means both the truth of the gospel revealed in God's word, as well as truthfulness or sincerity in relating to God and others. Second, is the breastplate of righteousness. **Ephesians 6:14b And having put on the breastplate of righteousness.** The breastplate was probably the most important piece of equipment a soldier wore because it protected his vital organs. Our breastplate is righteousness. This includes the positional righteousness we receive as a gift, where God sees us as perfect because of Jesus' death in our place. It also involves the righteous living or obedience to God, which characterizes believers in Christ.

Third is our footwear. **Ephesians 6:15 And, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace.** This means Christians are ready to go and proclaim the gospel, the great news, to those who don't know Jesus. Fourth is the shield of faith. **Ephesians 6:16 In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one.** Roman soldiers would often have a shield that was maybe 4 ½ feet tall and 3 ½ feet wide. It was often made of wood or animal hide, but sometimes of iron. The shield was especially effective against arrows that had been dipped in pitch and lit of fire. Paul says the Christian has a shield of faith. It is not faith in ourselves or faith in faith, but faith that is focused upon and resting in Jesus Christ.

Fifth is the helmet of salvation. **Ephesians 6:17a And take the helmet of salvation.** The Romans wore large metal helmets with a sponge inside. The Christian's helmet is the salvation God has given us, is giving us and will give us through Jesus Christ. Sixth, the final piece of armor is the sword of the Spirit. **Ephesian 6:17b and (take) the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.**

This is really more of a weapon than armor. Roman soldiers would have a short sword that they used in hand-to-hand combat. The sword of the spirit is the word of God, the Bible. The Christian's weapon against the forces of evil is this book. God's spirit enables us to proclaim His word. And then He takes those words and penetrated the minds and hearts of unbelievers, bringing them to the truth of God.

These six pieces are the whole armor of God and there are some things we should remember about this armor. First, it if given to us by God. These are not things we can manufacture ourselves. That is why Paul says in **Ephesians 6:10 Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might.** Please note that none of the pieces of armor are sophisticated high-tech weapons. Sometimes people have the idea that being involved in spiritual warfare requires elite training and that there are some Christian Green Berets or Navy Seals that God will use to deal with the forces of evil. But no, God is not looking for a few good men. He wants every Christian, every man, woman, and child who is a believer in Jesus Christ to put on the whole armor of God. He wants each of us to be committed to the truth of God's word and to be truthful in our lives. He wants all of us to have the righteousness of Jesus as our own and seek to live like we do. Everyone of us should be ready to go and tell those around us about Jesus Christ. We should all be putting our faith, our trust in Jesus Christ. Each of us needs to truly experience God's salvation. And every single one of us needs to read, study, and meditate on God's word, and then share what we learn with others.

Second, we need to remember that every part of the armor is important. None of it is optional. Can you imagine a soldier going out with all of his armor except having nothing on his feet. The enemy soldiers would stomp on his toes. Friends, if any of these six aspects of the Christian life are missing from your life, then you have a problem. You are vulnerable to an attack from the evil one. It is often a valuable exercise for us to go through the list and make sure we have six pieces of armor on. David Bryant says that when he prays, he frequently puts on the spiritual armor. He says, "Lord, thank you for the belt of truth. Help me to cling to the truth Your word teaches. Help me to be truthful in how I deal with others today. Thank you also for the breastplate of righteousness. Help me to trust in the righteousness of Jesus

alone. Help me to treat others in the right way.” And he continues through the list. Brothers and sisters, if we are to be ready for spiritual battle, we need to make sure we have on the whole armor of God.

Okay, once we have on our spiritual armor, there is one more step before we are ready for battle. #4 We must take a stand against the evil one. **Ephesian 6:11, 13, 14a Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil... Therefore talk up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm. Stand therefore...**

I suspect that some Christians put on the whole armor of God, but then spend all of their time in the barracks. They never get out on the battlefield. They are like a football player who puts on pads, the uniform, pads, and helmet, but just sits in the locker room. Yes, the armor God gives us is important. But it is no threat to Satan if we are unwilling to stand against him in battle. How do we stand? First it means taking our Christianity outside of this room. Genuine worship and love for God is repulsive to the devil, but he is most concerned that it stays within the walls of the church. He really becomes troubled, I think, when we start taking our Christian faith out there. When we go home and our love for Jesus impacts our relationships with family members and friends; when we go to work or school and our love for the Lord causes us to be diligent at the tasks we need to do; when our faith in Jesus causes us to be kind even to those who are not kind to us, then the forces of evil may start to tremble.

Taking a stand against the evil one means we will not compromise the truth the Bible teaches even when it is not what we or the people around us want to hear. Taking a stand means we label as false any religion that denies that Jesus is the eternal son of God, no matter how nice the members if that religion might seem. Taking a stand involves speaking up about our faith in Christ in front of friends and family members or even strangers, despite knowing we may be laughed at. Taking a stand means we are unwilling to bow to the gods of money, sex, and power, which seem to dominate our society. Taking a stand means we are willing to “just say so” when friends invites us to get involved in abusing alcohol or drugs or in immoral sexual behavior. Taking a stand means reaching out and

show the love of Christ to someone at school or work who others have rejected. Taking a stand means saying, “I am sorry, I don’t want to hear it,” the next time a friend has some juicy gossip to share with you. Taking a stand involves rejecting any and all causes or philosophies that pull our loyalty away from Jesus Christ. We need to be willing to stand firm for Jesus Christ, and against the forces of the devil.

Friends, when you walk out the door today, you probably will not see any arrows whizz past your head or hear any grenades going off in the background. Yet, you are stepping into a war zone. You are in the midst of a battle. The question is: Are you ready? The first step is to make sure you are a genuine Christian, make sure you are really trusting in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. If you have not done that, you don’t have to worry about the devil’s schemes, because whether you realize it or not, you are already on his side. Of course, he will try to keep you there. When you put your trust in Jesus Christ, you move from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of light. That is a big loss for the forces of evil. If you are a believer in Jesus, then you need to realize you have a spiritual enemy. You need to remember his attacks against you will often be very subtle. You need to make sure you have on the whole armor of God and then you must be willing to stand against the forces of evil no matter when or where they attack. May the Lord help us to prepare for battle, so that by His grace we might experience victories for His glory each day.

