

WEEK 1

THE INVISIBLE ENEMY (EPHESIANS 6:10-13)

* Much of the info in this message is adapted from: "Spiritual Warfare" by Tim Keller, "This is War" by JD Greear & "Spiritual Warfare" by David Jeremiah

In 1864, a physician named Ignaz Semmelweis stumbled onto a theory we now call "germ theory." You see, in those days no one understood where germs and sickness came from. So, doctors would go from working on a corpse to delivering a baby – all without washing their hands – which is why death rates in hospitals were so incredibly high.

But Ignaz Semmelweis began to suspect that they were carrying germs with them in small particles that were invisible to the human eye. He didn't know what to call them, so he called them "microbes," which literally means "little pieces of flesh."

So, he tested his theory by having only the interns wash their hands before delivering babies and the death rates among their deliveries went down dramatically. But even then, other doctors would not accept his theory because they simply couldn't believe that all this death and destruction was caused by something they couldn't see.

So, at a conference, he famously pleaded with other doctors by saying, "Gentlemen, for God's sake, please, just wash your hands!" And that seems so obvious to us today, but nobody listened to him for nearly *two more decades*. Even his own wife didn't believe him! In fact, he died in a mental institution.



Can you imagine the entire medical world being so naïve about the unseen enemy of germs?

But many Christians are equally naïve when it comes to the unseen enemy of their soul. They simply can't believe that all this death and destruction in the world is being caused by something (or someone) they can't see.

But, can't you look at what's happening in the world and see evidence of demonic activity everywhere? Don't get me wrong, you won't find

evidence of Satan by looking through a microscope, but you *can* see evidence of his existence by looking in the rearview mirror of your life. For example, can't you look back and see how...

- Certain temptations were too *perfectly timed* and *specifically tailored* to be mere coincidence in your life.
- The wrong person was put into your life at just the right time.
- Just the right doubt was planted in your head to throw you off track with God.
- How the right suspicion about God's character came into your heart at *just* the right age.
- Or how that wedge was driven between you and your parents at a pivotal time in your life.

You see, Satan couldn't care less whether you believe in him or not, because he's not after your *recognition*; he's after your *destruction*! He's an unseen enemy, leading an unseen army, in an unseen war against God and His creation.

But God has not left His people defenseless against the devil and his schemes. Christ has given us the armor of God, and in the weeks ahead, we're going to take an in-depth look at each piece of that armor.

But tonight, let's begin by getting some details about the battle we're facing...

Ephesians 6:10–13 "Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. ¹¹ Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. ¹² For 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. ¹³ 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 let's us know three details about this invisible war...

1. WHO we fight.

Verse 12 tells us: *We do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against spiritual forces of evil.*

Keep in mind: when Paul says we don't fight against "flesh and blood," he's NOT saying that evil doesn't take flesh and blood form. After all, Paul struggled against wicked men who beat him, imprisoned him, stoned him, and left him for dead. What he IS saying is that we ultimately wrestle with the unseen enemy BEHIND those flesh and blood people. In other words, the evil we SEE originates with the evil we DON'T SEE – the unseen enemy behind the scenes.

Let me give you an example...

Matthew 16:21–23 “From that time Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised.”²² And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, “Far be it from you, Lord! This shall never happen to you.”²³ But [Jesus] turned and said to Peter, “Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me. For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man.”

Why would Jesus look at Peter and talk directly to “Satan”? Because Jesus knew that Satan was the unseen enemy influencing Peter at that moment. And Peter was completely ignorant of the fact that Satan was trying to use *him* to sabotage Jesus' mission to the Cross.

But many people refuse to believe in this type of demonic activity. They don't believe in a real devil. Instead, they say the problem is...

- **Psychological** – if people were raised right, they wouldn't do bad things.
- **Educational** – if people were educated right, they wouldn't act that way.
- **Social** – if people had access to the right social systems, they wouldn't do bad things.
- **Financial** – if people just had financial stability, they wouldn't act that way.

But Christianity says, YES these external factors can *aggravate* the corruption within the human heart, but those factors don't *create* the corruption. That corruption (sin nature) was passed down to us from Adam, and the devil uses those external factors to agitate the sinful tendencies already within us.

Illustration: If you open up the top of a piano and sing a note into the piano, the string that's attuned to your note will resonate with your voice and vibrate. Your voice will "agitate" the string that's attuned to your voice. And that's how the devil works in our life. He can't put evil in you – he simply plays on the evil that is *already* in you. So, he speaks different lies and deceptions into your life and the one that's attuned to your sinful craving will resonate and then he knows how to tempt you.

You see, WE are responsible for our own actions, but Satan is the master of finding your weak spots. And it's not just the devil. Luke describes Satan as the "prince" of demons (11:15), which are described in verse 12 when Paul says, "We do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the *rulers, authorities, and spiritual forces* of evil." This is describing Satan's spiritual army – a third of the angels who rebelled along with him.

In the Greek language, those terms are referring to organized rankings of demons – *rulers, authorities, and spiritual forces*.

So, these are not unorganized, undisciplined "thug" angels. They were originally created by God to be highly organized and highly disciplined, but they rebelled and now they use their unholy gifts and talents to war against God and His people.

2. WHAT we fight.

Verse 11 says we fight against the "**schemes**" of the devil. It's the Greek word "methodeia" which is where we get the word "methods." Paul is describing the various *methods/schemes/strategies* that Satan uses to lure and ensnare people.

2 Corinthians 2:11 [Paul says] "So that we would not be outwitted by Satan; for we are not ignorant of his designs."

Let me give you some examples of how this works. The devil wants to lure us into two opposite errors about himself – two faulty ways of viewing him...

He wants us to UNDERESTIMATE his power.

The word "wrestle" in verse 12 is a term used for hand-to-hand combat.¹ Later, Paul will tell us that we need armor for the devil's flaming arrows – shot from a distance – but here Paul is describing hand-to-hand combat

¹ MacArthur, J. F., Jr. (2006). *The MacArthur study Bible: New American Standard Bible*. (Eph 6:12). Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers.

which is up close and personal. You see, it's one thing to fight an enemy from a distance, but it becomes much more deadly with hand-to-hand combat.

And considering the fact that Satan comes only to kill and destroy; this is clearly not a game to him! You see, this is a fight that you CANNOT win in your own strength, which is why verse 10 tells us to "be strong *in the Lord* and in the strength of *His* might." In fact, in this battle your strengths are more often liabilities because those are the places you forget to depend on God. So, his first tactic is to get you to underestimate his power. But also...

He wants us to OVERESTIMATE his power.

In verse 13, Paul says if we utilize the armor of God, we *will* be able to withstand in the evil day. In other words, you don't have to be afraid. We can be like the Prophet Elisha when a massive Syrian army surrounded him and his servant...

2 Kings 6:15–17 "When 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?"¹⁶ [Elisha] said, "Do not be afraid, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them."¹⁷ Then 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."

Elisha understood the invisible war that was going on around him. He was teaching his servant not to *underestimate* the devil's power, but also not to *overestimate* the devil's power.

"When it comes to the demonic, people usually fall into one of two errors—Either they take him altogether too seriously or they do not take him seriously enough." – C.S. Lewis

So, he uses two forms of deception about HIMSELF – getting us to *underestimate* or *overestimate* his power.

But the devil also wants to lure us into two opposite errors about ourselves – two faulty ways of viewing ourselves. And he does this by using *temptation* and *accusation*²....

² These are from a book by Thomas Brooks (17th Century Puritan) "*Precious Remedies Against Satan's Devices*"

He uses TEMPTATIONS.

With *temptation*, the devil lures you to have too HIGH a view of yourself. So, you're convinced that *you* know what is best for you, causing you to do things that you shouldn't.

With *temptation*, the devil highlights the LOVE of God and blinds you from the holiness and wrath of God.

So, let me give you some examples of how this plays out practically in your life. I'll give you the temptation of Satan and the things you'll say to yourself...

- **He'll show you the bait, but he hides the hook.**
 - "This will bring me lots of pleasure without any long-term misery."
- **He'll get you to rationalize sin as a good thing.**
 - "I'm not greedy, I'm just thrifty."
 - "I'm not really nosy, I'm just concerned."
 - "I'm not really addicted, it just helps take the edge off."
- **He'll show you the sins of Christian leaders.**
 - "He did it too. Nobody is really that pure. So, it won't matter if I keep doing it."
- **He'll make you bitter over suffering.**
 - "I've suffered so I *deserve* this."

Illustration: This is why many powerful people have affairs. They say, "I've worked hard and sacrificed more than most, so I deserve this."

- **He'll highlight the seemingly good lives of bad people.**
 - "They do whatever they want and look how happy they are. I might as well do it too because playing by the rules obviously doesn't pay off."
- **He'll get you to compare one part of your life to another.**
 - "I know *this* is bad in my life, but look at all the good I do over *here*."

He uses **ACCUSATIONS**.

By *accusation*, the devil lures you to have too LOW a view of yourself. So, you hate yourself, which also causes you to do things you shouldn't (harming yourself, suicidal thoughts, telling yourself you'll never amount to anything, etc.).

With accusations, the devil will highlight the WRATH of God and blind you from the love of God.

So, let me give you some examples of how this plays out in your life. I'll give you the accusation of Satan and the things you'll say to yourself...

- **He'll cause you to look more at your sin than at your Savior.**

- "There is no way He could still love me after what I've done."

Advice: For every 1 look at your sin, take 5 looks at your Savior. Jesus is much better at *saving* than you are at *sinning!*

- **He'll convince you that your suffering MUST be punishment from God.**

- "This wouldn't have happened unless God is mad at me."

- **He'll cause you to doubt your salvation.**

- "If I was a real Christian, I wouldn't struggle with these thoughts and desires."

Recognize any of these? The devil is playing you. He speaks *temptations* and *accusations* into your life and the one that's attuned to your sinful craving will resonate and then he knows how to tempt you.

3. HOW we fight.

Verse 13 says, "Take up the whole armor of God that you may stand firm." You see, we face a *spiritual* army, therefore our weapons have to be *spiritual* weapons. We face a spiritual *army*, therefore we have to put on spiritual *armor*. And beginning next week, we'll take an in-depth look at each piece of that armor!

Small Groups