

We have been working our way through Paul's letter to the Ephesians, and we have come now to his final exhortations in Ephesians 6:10-24. I will spend the next three weeks unpacking this famous passage where Paul calls the church to stand against the unseen, spiritual powers that seek to wreak havoc upon the Lord's Church. This morning we will begin by looking at vs.

10-13. Please stand and let us read the Word of the Lord:

10 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.

My message falls under three subheadings: 1) The Battle is Real; 2) The War Has Already Been Won; and 3) What We Must Do to Stand in the Evil Day.

I. The Battle is Real

Here at the end of his letter, having proclaimed the good news of the Gospel of grace, having celebrated what Christ accomplished when He broke down the walls of hostility and made Oneness possible in the Lord's Church, having instructed the believers to live in a manner worthy of their calling, Paul now concludes with a sobering word that pulls back the curtain.

Finally, writes Paul, we need to know that our battle...our wrestling...is not a matter of morality or trying to find ways to become "better people" or better spouses or better parents or better employees...or even better Christians. Our battle is not against those people who oppose our faith or oppose the Church. In fact, our ultimate battle really isn't against people at all. Paul makes it clear in vs. 11: our battle...our wrestling...our hand-to-hand combat in this evil age is "against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places." These spiritual forces of evil answer to the devil, who is constantly employing strategies to disrupt, distract, and destroy every good thing that belongs to God. Our battle is against abject evil, and the battle is real.

Now, evil can take the form of systems, governments, and any variety of expressions. People can embrace evil and even promote evil, and when that happens we do need to physically and consistently resist that evil in the flesh. We should not hear Paul saying here that the only evil in the world is spiritual, nor should we look for a demonic cause behind every difficult person we encounter. We must also remember that Christianity does not promote a Platonic, dualistic worldview of complete distinction between the physical and the spiritual. We are always both, and so we always fight evil on the physical and the spiritual plane. That said, the physical is that which we can see, but Paul would have us remember that behind the curtain of the physical realm, there is indeed a malevolent, personal evil.

Now, I suspect that some here today find this kind of supernatural language to be both uncomfortable and unnecessary. Perhaps you are of the mind that any talk about the devil or demons or the "cosmic powers of darkness" belongs in movies and fantasy literature. You may be of the mind that such notions of supernatural evil have long been debunked by the findings of

psychology, psychiatry, and the brilliant observations of modern science. I will admit that as a student at Princeton Seminary, I was often tempted to think such things as well. The truth is that a large number of psychiatrists and clergy in the world think themselves too sophisticated to believe in the existence of the devil. If you are such a person, I suggest you pick up a copy of Scott M. Peck's *People of the Lie: Toward a Psychology of Evil*. Peck was a noted and respected psychiatrist who set out on a quest to scientifically define evil in the early 1980's. When he began his work, he did not believe in supernatural evil. However, his journey led him to fully embrace the reality of the devil; even to document cases of demonic possession and consequent exorcisms. Should you read Peck's testimony and you still remain skeptical, I encourage you to do some further research on your own. Read everything you can find about the holocaust beginning with Jonathan Freeland's book entitled, "The Escape Artist." Read about the bloodshed of Mao, Stalin, and Pol Pot in the name of Communism. Spend some time researching the statistics regarding human trafficking in our own country...even in our own city. Listen to the stories of women who were sold by their own parents, forced to service 20 men a day for decades beginning at the tender age of 7 and the horrors of being sold like cattle. Please do not be so ignorant as to assume that modern science has in any way "debunked" the existence of evil. On the contrary, as much as we may want to reduce human evil to mental illness or hurtful cultural norms, historical events such as the Holocaust, the American slave trade, the Communist slaughter of millions in the 20th century, and the horrific industry of human trafficking in the 21st century point to a much deeper reality of evil that is both individual, systematic, and corporate. Evil is not hard to find if you have the stomach to go look for it.

Should you spend some time in India amongst those tribes that worship idols, you will witness firsthand what happens when someone is possessed by demonic spirits. I spoke to a pastor friend in India this week who has been bringing the Gospel to an unreached tribe in northern India. The people in that village worship idols and make sacrifices to their idols. When the Christian team came into the village, they met a woman who was angry and even dangerous. When they began to speak the name of Jesus, the woman picked up furniture and hurled chairs and other items at the team. She growled and screamed and was literally out of her mind until finally, by the power of Jesus' name, the demons left her. She is now fully sane, liberated from evil, and a wonderful servant of that small church in her village. I heard many similar stories when I was training church planters in India over the course of four visits to that country, and several of those stories were told by the people who were delivered. Should you travel beyond the West you will find that the vast majority of the world's population believes in the reality of supernatural evil, and they remain quite concerned about it...as should we all.

Paul was a classically trained Pharisee. He was fluent in multiple languages and studied under notable teachers of the Greek and Jewish academies. Yet Paul is not the least bit apologetic about what he writes here in Ephesians 6. The battle is real, but the battle is not simply against flesh and blood. The unseen battle is against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realm.

Paul begins by acknowledging the devil as the leader and instigator amongst those spiritual forces. The devil is always scheming or strategizing against the Christian. The devil, or Satan, is pictured by the Apostle Peter as a prowling lion looking for someone vulnerable to attack (1 Peter 5:8-10). Jesus speaks plainly of Satan in John 8, referring to him as a liar and the

father of lies, who was a murderer from the beginning. He refers to Satan as “the Evil One” and “the Enemy” (Matt. 13:38-39) and “the prince of this world” (John 12:31) that He saw “fall like lightning out of heaven” (Luke 10:18). Jesus acknowledges that Satan has a kingdom (Matt. 12:26), that he has angels, and that eternal fire has been prepared for Satan and his angels (Matt. 25:41).

Given what Jesus revealed, we should not imagine that Satan’s strategies often involve obvious, full-frontal attacks against Christians and Christian families. Jesus makes it clear: Satan’s primary weapon is the deceitful, enticing, plausible lie. And that lie is often religious in nature. As the serpent whispered to Eve in Genesis 3, “Surely God did not say....” Satan whispers doubt into our hearts about the authority of scripture. Satan whispers compromise into our Christian character. Satan whispers that it was all our fault, or that none of it was our fault...either lie will suffice. Satan’s most effective lie, of course, is simply this: “Satan does not exist.” Dr. Lloyd-Jones laments: I am certain that one of the main causes of the ill state of the Church today is the fact that the devil is being forgotten. All is attributed to us; we have all become so psychological in our attitude and thinking. We are ignorant of this great objective fact, the being, the existence of the devil, the adversary, the accuser, and his ‘fiery darts’.¹

George Barna wrote in 2004: “The notion that Satan, or the Devil, is a real being who can influence people’s lives is regarded as hogwash by most Americans. Only one quarter (27%) strongly believe that Satan is real, while the majority argues that he is merely a symbol of evil.”²

If you have not done so already, I strongly encourage you to read *The Screwtape Letters* by C.S. Lewis, or perhaps you might go and see a dramatic presentation of *The Screwtape Letters* that will be here in Kansas City on November 18th. Satan is a masterful liar, and if you don’t believe that, you have already fallen victim to his first and most powerful lie.

Paul then acknowledges ‘the rulers’, ‘the authorities’, and the ‘cosmic powers’ over this present darkness. Some writers see these three categories of spiritual enemies as a hierarchy of demonic authority, but I think Paul is saying the same thing but using different terms that his diverse audience would understand. Whereas the Jewish converts might immediately recognize the evil spirits as “rulers” or “authorities,” the Greek and Roman converts would immediately recognize the word Paul uses here as “cosmic powers”. All three titles point to the spiritual forces of evil who serve Satan and wreak havoc upon the earth in this evil age...or as Paul writes, “this present darkness.”

Church, evil thrives in darkness, and we live in an evil age where darkness is yet allowed to reign. Why? Why does God still allow evil and darkness to have so much influence in the world? The Apostle Peter answers that question in 2 Peter 3:9-10: The Lord is not slow to fulfill His promise as some count slowness, but He is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance. But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed.

¹ Lloyd -Jones, *Warfare*, p 292. Quoted from J. Stott’s commentary on Ephesians, p 265.

² Barna Research Group, Ltd., *Religious Beliefs Vary Widely By Denomination*, June 25, 2001; [Barna Research Online](#).

In these days that God patiently waits for the world to repent, all of us as Christians will have to battle against the schemes of the devil and the spiritual forces of evil...that's a fact. Jesus very honestly stated, "In this world you will have trouble..." (John 16:33). The Christian should never be surprised or overly disillusioned by the reality of evil...we have been thoroughly warned in scripture, amen?

So where do we expect to encounter evil? Evil thrives in the dark, right? Evil thrives in secrecy. Evil thrives where the Light of the Gospel has not yet been revealed. Evil thrives in acts of injustice. Evil thrives where lies abound. Evil thrives in the abuse of power. Evil is cultivated wherever idols are worshipped. Evil has all kinds of roots that lead back to the love of money. Evil dominates those who refuse to forgive or to ask for forgiveness. Evil finds its way into our hearts and minds through books, movies, music, games like the Ouija Board or the use of Tarot Cards. Intentionally or even unintentionally exposing ourselves to the spiritual forces of evil is quite dangerous. Such is why Paul has been emphatic that we as believers are to live a disciplined life, 'giving no opportunity to the devil.' We are to walk in the Light as Children of Light. That means we walk as those filled with the Holy Spirit...as those set apart. That doesn't mean we ignore or avoid those who walk in darkness...God forbid! On the contrary, Paul is calling us to STAND against the darkness and all the spiritual forces of evil, as well as those systems, governments, and policies that promote evil. That call to stand is both for our own defense but also to push back the darkness in order to bring the light of the Gospel to those who are in captivity. You'll notice our mission statement here at Colonial is not about playing defense, it's about playing offense! We are called to be the Light of Christ IN a hurting culture...not in a safe church building.

Now, I know what you're thinking: how in the world are we supposed to do battle with an enemy we can't see? Are not the spiritual forces of evil much stronger than the average human being? Well...yes...they are. You might remember the story of the Sons of Sceva that Luke records in Acts 19:13-17. If you recall, seven sons of the high priest were so bold as to approach a man possessed by a demon, demanding it to depart in 'the name of Jesus that Paul proclaims' without themselves knowing the Jesus whose name they employed. The demon acknowledges the authority of Jesus, but then jumps on and thrashes the exorcists. The men end up running for their lives, naked and wounded.

So...how do we defend ourselves against the spiritual forces of evil? How can we possibly hope to stand against forces that are infinitely stronger than we are? Hear the good news of the Gospel...

II. The War Has Already Been Won

I don't know about you, but college football gives me tremendous anxiety. In fact, I'm going to make my confession: I rarely watch a Wake Forest football game without first knowing who won! I know, that's lame, but I get so upset when my team throws an interception or drops the ball, and the very thought that I am going to burn up three hours of my life only to discover that we lose in the end is more than I can bear! So, I wait until the game is already decided, look up the score, and then I'll watch the game if I know we win in the end. Don't judge me...I'm saved by grace.

Now, here's my point: in this evil age, we are going to have trouble. In terms of our day-to-day existence, the game isn't over yet. We have an Enemy who is powerful, cunning, and evil. We are going to experience trials of every kind. Our bodies, minds, and souls are subject to the consequences of evil, and that hurts. The battle is real, but here's what we know: the *war* has already been won! We know the final score, and Satan loses...big time. In fact, if you think about it, the whole first chapter of Ephesians is Paul proclaiming the victory of Christ and what that means for those who believe! Nowhere is this more pronounced than in Ephesians 1:19-23 where Paul rejoices in "...the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe according to the working of His great might that he worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. And God put all things under His feet and gave Him as head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all."

Church, hear the good news of the Gospel: Jesus has overcome our Enemy! All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Christ our Lord (Matth. 28:18). God has put all things under His feet (1 Cor. 15:27) and has given His Son as head over all things...**TO THE CHURCH!** Don't miss this: the victory over Satan and the spiritual forces of evil was accomplished in Jesus who makes that victory accessible and transferrable **TO THE CHURCH!** So how do we, as the Church, participate in our Lord's victory over the spiritual forces of evil? I'm so glad you asked.

III. What We Must Do to Stand in the Evil Day

Over the next few weeks we will unpack Paul's teaching about spiritual warfare in depth, but here at the outset of this thought unit, Paul states the goal and then provides three mandates. The goal is stated three times in vs. 11-13: "that you may be able to stand against" the Enemy; "that you may be able to withstand in the evil day"; and that you may "stand firm." If that wasn't clear enough, he'll say it again next week in vs. 14, "Stand, therefore..."

The picture here is that the Church, if properly prepared and tethered to Christ, will be able to defend herself against the attacks and lies of the spiritual forces of evil. We will not be knocked down; we will not be defeated; we will not fall victim to the devil's schemes...we will stand firm as those who have been rescued, empowered, and equipped by the Champion of Heaven who gives us strength to overcome the schemes of the Enemy.

So, how are we to stand? Paul provides three mandates: 1) Be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might; 2) Put on the whole armor of God; and 3) Take up the whole armor of God. Let's look briefly at each mandate.

First, Paul instructs the believers to "be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might." The imperative here that the ESV translates as "be strong" is a passive imperative, which means Paul is literally saying, "be made strong" in the Lord. You hear what he's saying, right? He's saying in no uncertain terms that our strength...the necessary strength to withstand the Enemy...is a strength that we *receive*. In our flesh, we have absolutely **NO** defense against the spiritual forces of evil...none. Flesh and blood cannot fight a spiritual battle. That is not to

say that every battle with evil is a spiritual battle, but Paul wants us to recognize that our spiritual enemies are those who can only be defeated by the power of Christ.

Church, this seems obvious, but we so often forget that our most important battle is ultimately a spiritual battle. Our true Enemy is a spiritual enemy, and we are no match for him on our own. Our strength comes from being connected in relationship with the Lord, and it is ultimately HIS strength, HIS victory, and HIS authority that defends us from the Enemy. The word Paul uses here for “the *strength* of His might” is the Greek word *kratos*, which literally means power and dominion. It is the “dominating power of HIS MIGHT”...not ours...that will win the day. Everything that follows here at the end of chapter six falls under this first and primary command: be strong in the LORD and the power of His might.

Next, Paul writes, “Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil.” Now, the first thing we must note is that Paul previously used this verb *enduow* (“put on”) in Ephesians 4 when Paul instructed the believers to no longer walk as the Gentiles do. Having acknowledged that the unbelievers are “greedy to practice all kinds of impurity,” he writes in vs. 20-24: But that is not the way you learned Christ!—assuming you have heard about Him and were taught in Him, as the truth is in Jesus, to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.

We should not think that Paul is saying something altogether different here in chapter six when he commands the believers to “put on the whole armor of God.” In fact, we should assume that Paul is actually saying exactly the same thing, but this time he is leveraging warfare imagery to emphasize what is at stake. As believers, we must be renewed in the spirit of our minds. Pastor Tony Evans states, “The brain is to the body what the mind is to the soul.”³ Our minds determine how we see the world; how we see ourselves; and how we understand and apply truth. Our minds are the battleground for righteousness and holiness because what we think determines what we do. As we work through “the whole armor of God” next Sunday, you’ll notice that what we are called to “put on” has everything to do with the renewing of our minds because that is where our ultimate battles are going to be fought. As Paul writes in Romans 12:2, we are to “be transformed in the renewing of our minds”...that is what it means to “put off of our old selves”, to “put on our new selves”, and “to put on the whole armor of God.” We’ll dig deeper into this concept next Sunday, but this morning I want you to appreciate that Paul is calling the Church to prepare! We don’t run out into battle without armor, right? That would be foolish, and the outcome would be both brutal and predictable. The battle is real...the battle is coming...the evil day is upon us...we need to be prepared. We must be intentional about what we “put on.”

Finally, in vs. 13 Paul orders the church to “take up the whole armor of God.” Paul isn’t simply restating that we should “put on” the whole armor of God; he’s stating something quite obvious and quite different here in vs. 13. The whole armor of God is given to the Christian...but we must *take it up!* We are not passive recipients of the Holy Spirit’s gifts and the critical virtues of the Christian life. We must “take up” these things if they are to be of any use to us in the great battle of our age!

³ I heard Dr. Evans make this statement in a sermon that he gave on this text at Dallas Theological Seminary.

Imagine if you will that our city is under attack by an invading enemy. Invaders from Minnesota, dressed as Vikings, are storming the metro! Seriously...imagine that a horde of invaders are pressing down upon your home, your family, your neighbors, and your friends. Alarms are blaring, the skies are filled with enemy aircraft, and the leaders of our city call for the residents to take up arms in defense of our city. What are you going to do? Most of us would have no idea what to do, right? We count on our military and our first responders to defend us. We are not trained how to fight a battle against invaders. Most of us don't have the proper weapons, and even those of us who do have weapons may not be very adept at using them. We have been caught unaware, unprepared, and under-resourced.

This is precisely the scenario that Paul is trying to communicate to the Church. The evil day is coming for us all. A time will soon come when all the powers of hell seem to be invading your life, your circumstances, your health, your family, your finances, and your work. Satan doesn't play...he hates you and wants to destroy you and your Christian family. That's the bad news. The good news is that, as a Christian, you have been given the whole armor of God which consists of the spiritual gifts and virtues necessary to defend yourself and your people from the attacks of the Enemy. But do you even know that you have that arsenal of weapons? Do you know how to use them? Have you ever tried on the armor to see how it fits and learned how to walk in the armor of God? Have you ever wielded the sword of God's word to cut through the lies of the Enemy?

Church, it is not enough that we "have" the whole armor of God; we must take it up! We must put it on! We must practice our sword play and learn how to walk as those who have been equipped, trained, and prepared for the battle that is real...and very costly.

So many Christians are going through their days as though we are in peace time. Our lives are comfortable if not a bit boring. We are content to fritter away the hours watching Netflix, playing video games, going fishing, and working our 9-5 jobs so that we can take a vacation every now and then. We have become soft, presumptuous, and increasingly unaware of the battle that rages all around us...which is to say, we have believed a lie. We are going through the motions of the Matrix, but our comfortable Western lifestyle looks nothing like the dramatic picture of reality that Paul paints here in Ephesians 6. In our comfort-induced coma, we serve as no threat to the gates of hell; nor are we prepared for the evil forces that seek to destroy our souls.

Ruth Paxson writes: God has no place for a spiritual pacifist. Every Christian is conscripted for both defensive and aggressive warfare. He calls every saint to arms. "Not into a religious playground or sports field, but into grim, terrible, bloody conflict are we called."⁴

Church, take up the whole armor of God, and put it on! Be strengthened, equipped, and empowered by the dominating power of Christ living in you! That is Paul's message, and it is as urgent today as it was in the first century Roman Empire. Life isn't going to get easier. The evil is not going away anytime soon. Billions of souls are slaves of the Enemy. They are walking in darkness with no hope of rescue, nothing to live for, and nothing to die for. They are lied to day and night, and they are defenseless against the spiritual forces of evil.

⁴ Ruth Paxson, *The Wealth, Walk and Warfare of a Christian*.

Not so with you! You are the light of the world because Christ lives in you, and it's time that we pushed back the darkness and challenged the gates of hell, amen? It's time to get off the couch, take up the whole armor of God, and stand in the gap for those who cannot defend themselves. It begins with the renewing of our minds...and that comes about when we have a relationship with the victorious Christ. Our relationship with Christ begins with discipleship...and discipleship begins by following Jesus and doing what He commanded. So let us pray. Let us repent for allowing that armor to sit there in the closet gathering dust. We will dig deep into the armor of God next week, but as we prepare to step back into the world, let us commit ourselves to take up arms, for the battle is real. Evil is coming. It is already here.

Pray with me Church.