

Ephesians 6:10-18, Spiritual Warfare

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In the materialistic world we live in there has always been wars and aggressive ambitious conquerors. From 335-323 BC, Alexander the Great exerted his will upon the entire Mediterranean world. He invaded Asia and won a series of battles against the larger armies of the Persian Empire. The Persians had terrorized the Middle East for over 200 years, but Alexander's small army invaded all their territory and took it. About 200 years later the Romans invaded and took it all from the Greeks. Fast forward to the 20th century and Hitler invaded Europe and took all the territory that was not his in order to make it his own. He usurped territory not his in pursuit of his own selfish ambitious agenda. In 1991, Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait for his selfish ambitious agenda. In both cases the USA intervened to repulse these attacks, and return the land to its previous owners.

Spiritually, Satan the adversary of God has done the same as Alexander, Hitler, and all the other ruthless evil conquerors. The adversary has invaded the whole world we live in, usurped God's authority, and led the world astray. God has responded and set up His beachhead in the world through the church. Satan is waging war everywhere in temptations, divisions, struggles, lies, and suffering. The obvious difference between Satan and the human conquerors is that Satan and his army wage spiritual warfare for the souls of people. Consider the history of this spiritual war—that it is like a great chess match. In Isaiah 14 we see that Satan was a beautiful angelic creature that God created before the earth was created, but he aspired to know what only God knows, to be like God, and have the power of God—thus in his rebellion he fell from heaven. God's move was to create His perfect creation on earth, but Satan's temptation in the garden corrupted it. God then created forgiveness through a blood sacrifice. Then Satan influenced Cain to reject it and kill Able. God then countered with the godly line of humans through Seth. In Genesis 6 we see Satan's counter move to entice the entire world into rebellion, so God destroyed the creation by flood, but saved the righteous Noah. The adversary's next move was with Nimrod who led the human race in rebellion against God at Babel. God then divided people by tribes and language and geographic location so they could not be so organized in their pagan idolatry. Then God called Abraham to become the father of a priestly nation to reveal God to the world. Satan countered with slavery in Egypt—we could go on and on, but you get the point. Spiritual warfare is a real historical fact, and we are involved in it even now. All through history it has appeared that evil is winning but Scripture consistently predicts that God's ultimate move will checkmate Satan, and all creation will know who has the right to rule. Now, during this last era we call the church age, we anticipate and we look forward to the Day of the Lord when we who have chosen God's side will experience the victory which has already been won by Christ's work on the cross.

Maybe you are asking "Since God is all powerful, why does He allow Satan limited rule on the earth? I think the answer is that God created us in His image, which means we have a free will able to make cognitive decisions. We have a choice, but without the adversary of God we have no choice, so God allows the choice. The next question might be, "Why the delay? Why doesn't Christ come immediately and crush the adversary?" 2 Peter 3:9 says that God is patiently giving everyone a chance to come to Him. When all who will come, come, then Christ will return and end the evil moves of the adversary.

How Can We Believe in What We Can't See?

The worldly people react and respond to only what they can see, feel, and hear. Paul says in 2 Cor. 4:18, "we look not at the things which are seen but at the things which are not seen". By this he means we are aware of the existence of the spiritual realm. This should not be so hard to understand since there is a whole sub atomic world out there that we can't see. 150 years ago no one knew that the microscopic world existed because they couldn't see it. Did that mean it wasn't there? We couldn't see it but now we know it was always there, and now the quantum revolution dominates technology, engineering, and computers. The length of a millimeter is just a dash like -. An atom is one ten millionth of a millimeter. The smallest thing we can see is about a millimeter but still the unseen world of atoms exists. In the same way there is another world we can't see—the spiritual world, but it is no less real. In Matthew 4, the devil, the adversary of God, tempted Jesus, and once Jesus resisted the temptations angels came to minister to Jesus. Peter warned in 1 Peter 5:8, "Be alert, your adversary the devil prowls about like a roaring lion seeking to devour someone". Don't forget the many encounters Jesus had with demons in all four Gospel accounts. These spiritual adversaries are not as we picture them in art or movies, but instead the Bible says they masquerade as angels of light, but are wolves in sheep's clothing. Who are we in fact dealing with? 52 times he is called Satan, which means adversary and 35 times the devil, which means slanderer. He is a fallen rebellious archangel who took one third of the angels with him. The enemy attacks us through the worldly influences and lies we all buy into like moral relativism, philosophies, humanism, peer pressure, and world religions. The enemy also attacks using the selfish lusts of our flesh. We all desire pleasure, riches, self acclimation, vindication, and power. If the critic says he believes only what he can see, I ask him to explain all the eruptions of wars that unexpectedly break out in different places. Before 9-11, who would

have predicted we would be in a huge war for 17 years in Afghanistan? What is there to fight about in that dump, rocks? Why can't we put an end to the drug trade? Why is pornography such a huge business? Why can't we stop child abuse? Etc etc. The secular humanist answers we need more legislation, education, technology, and social programs. To date we have spent trillions on all that to no avail. Passing more laws and throwing more money at it is like rearranging the chairs on the Titanic. They do not understand the essential problem lies below the surface unseen. Like the Titanic the danger in this world is the iceberg below the waterline unseen. Below the waterline of human awareness is a spiritual reality which Paul warns us about in Ephesians 6:10-17.

Be Strong in the Lord, Ephesians 6:10-12

The faithful Christian life is likened to a daily battle in a spiritual war, which we can't see or even imagine. We are to expect opposition and conflict, so we are encouraged to "be strong in the Lord". Our strength to overcome is rooted in our dependence on the Lord. We need to know that God has given us the defenses to withstand the attacks. Ultimately the church's battles are already won, the play has already been written, yet until Christ comes back we are in a war. Life is a struggle and this world is a battleground. We need an arsenal of weapons to stand up to the enemy. Our provision is the armor of God, and Paul commanded us to "Put on the full armor of God, that you may be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil". He used a military term here used to hold a critical position while under attack. One of the adversary's schemes is to discredit God through us. If believers prove to be a bad witness, then it makes God look bad or even nonexistent. The devil's attacks come through two channels—the world and our flesh. All the peer pressure in the world is persuading us to accept moral relativism and compromise on every level. Our fleshly desires are enticing us to seek pleasure in the wrong things, and to try and satiate our greed. We are hungry, thirsty, greedy, lustful, and seekers of pleasure by nature, so naturally the adversary will put those carrots out there as bait.

In Eph. 6:12, he explains who our real enemy is. We normally think the people and circumstances are causing us problems, but behind the scenes our real struggle is against the powers of darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the spiritual realm. These powerful evil forces are highly organized and have a mission to thwart God's wonderful plan for us of redemption. In order to overcome, we need to realize our need for help, and know that God is stronger and desires to give us the strength to win the war. John said it well in 1 John 4:4, "greater is He who is in you than he that is in the world".

Six Defensive Weapons and One Offensive Weapon, Eph. 6:14-18

The enemy's response to the Gospel is lies that the Bible is too difficult, contradictory, and only written by men, therefore you should trust your own feelings and experiences. The adversary of God has had great success leading the world to believe there is no absolute truth, and we should all just make up our own truth that works for us. Therefore Paul, the author of Ephesians wrote this letter to the church from prison in Rome. He was guarded by Roman soldiers, so the soldiers' outfit and armor would have inspired Paul to use the soldiers armor as an image of our defenses in spiritual war. In Eph.6:14 we are commanded to "stand firm", with the idea of holding a strategic position in battle. The soldier would prepare for battle by pulling up his tunic between his legs and wrapping it in his belt, thus girding his loins and protecting his sensitive area. Our protection that enables us to stand firm is the truth, and as Jesus said in John 17:17, the Word of God is the truth. We are committed to the truth of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The soldier also wore a breastplate that protected his heart and vital organs, and spiritually we are protected by the righteousness of God, which is imputed to us. In this way we have a clear conscience, and as the accuser seeks to make us feel guilty, we know the righteousness of God is ours.

As today's athletes all have special shoes designed for their sport, the soldier had boots with cleats to give him traction and stability. Our spiritual traction and stability comes from the "Gospel of peace". Christ has brought peace between God and man as Paul wrote in Colossians 1:19-20, "It was God's pleasure to reconcile us to Himself, having made peace through the blood of the cross...in order to present you holy and blameless and beyond reproach". No matter what the enemy does, we know and have confidence that God loves us and is with us. Possibly our most important defensive weapon in Eph. 6:16 is our "shield of faith". Paul uses here a great image of the enemy shooting flaming arrows or missiles at us that we are able to fend off with our shield of faith. We have a faith that we can walk through the fires of the troubles of life because God is with us protecting us every step of the way. In v.17, we have the "helmet of salvation", which is our great hope and expectation that in the future we will be resurrected and glorified in our heavenly bodies. In 1 Thessalonians 5:8, Paul tells us that our helmet is the hope of that salvation unto heaven and that keeps us going.

In Eph.6:17b, Paul uses the soldier's sword as the image of our only offensive weapon, which is the Word of God. He is here

speaking of the entire inspired Word of God from Genesis to Revelation. Much as Christ used specific passages to defeat the devil who was tempting Him in Matt.4:8-10, we also can use practical application of specific passages that relate to every situation we find ourselves in. The Scriptures are a guidebook for every road, and a medicine for every illness.

Prayer is the closing theme of Ephesians 6, as Paul tells us to pray at all times, which I think is to live in continual God consciousness. We maintain a deep awareness of God's presence and His love. We pray "in the Spirit", meaning in concert and harmony of the Spirit of God knowing that the Spirit intercedes for believers. Paul uses two different Greek words for prayer that we translate prayer and petition. Prayer refers to all the various general requests, while petition refers to more urgent and specific requests. Use of both words tells us to be involved in every kind of prayer. Prayer is closely linked to the "full armor of God" as it is the primary way we express our faith in God's provision. Prayer is to permeate our lives every day in a continuous fashion as is seen by the use of "all" four times in Eph.6:18.

There are two belief systems or world views. These presuppositions determine what you believe and how you perceive life. The naturalistic, materialistic, or scientific view says everything is subject to natural laws that can be tested and explained. The problem with this view is it never answers the ultimate questions of meaning, and purpose, and never gives any hope for the future. The biblical spiritual view is that there is another realm beyond the physical realm. This view is Biblically based and believes that there is one true God who loves us, and wants the best for us, so He has done for us what we could not do for ourselves. Yet God has allowed us freedom of choice to accept or reject His offer of salvation and reconciliation. This choice involves the spiritual warfare between God and the adversary of God, and all of us have to decide who is going to the door when the devil knocks. Martin Luther wrote that when the devil came knocking on the door of his heart, he would send the Lord Jesus Christ to the door and Christ would say, "Martin Luther used to live here but has moved out, I now live here".

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