

January 7, 2024

DO ALL TO STAND FIRM
Ephesians 6:10-24
(16 of 16 in a series through Ephesians)

Though we might not think of it this way, the Bible is very much a book of warfare. After Adam and Eve sin in the garden the Lord tells the serpent, “I will put enmity between you and the women, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel” (Gen 3:15). That glorious statement was a promise of our coming redemption, but it was also a threat to the serpent. And so from that point forward, the devil sought to devour the people of God and stop the work of this promised Messiah who would crush his head. It’s why we see Cain kill his brother Abel, Isaac persecuted by Ishmael, and Jacob warring with Esau. It’s why Pharaoh enslaves Israel, the Philistines attack them, and why Herod ordered the murder of all Hebrew babies two and under. But Satan failed. Jesus was born, lived, died, was raised, ascended back to the Father’s right hand, and perfectly fulfilled the redemptive mission given to him. Satan was thwarted and cast down, awaiting the day when he will meet his final judgment.

And yet, Satan, doesn’t wait for that day with resignation. Picturing the devil’s fury at having failed to stop the redemptive work of our Lord, John writes in Revelation 12:17, “Then the dragon became furious . . . and went off to make war . . . on those who keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus.” And this has been true every day since that moment, as Satan goes around like a roaring lion, seeking to devour the people of God, who will not be free of his assaults until the Lord returns, fully and finally defeats all of his enemies, and throws the devil into the lake of fire.

That’s the storyline of the Bible and the story of this world in which we live. And yet, in light of these last few sermons in Ephesians, it can feel very much like this is not the case. I mean, we just walked through Ephesians 5:22-6:9, dealing with how we can be better husbands, wives, parents, children, employers, and employees. That feels very practical, very earthy, and as if it is the furthest thing from being in the midst of a global assault by the serpent against the people of God. Surely, our responsibility is to ignore thoughts of satanic warfare and get on with just obeying God in these practical and earthly matters, right? Then we read Ephesians 6:10-24, and Paul makes clear that fighting to live as a godly husband, wife, parent, or employee has everything to do with this global warfare by the dragon against the church. He wants us to see that though we might understand what we’re supposed to do in order to obey Christ in our homes, church, and the world, it is not smooth sailing. Nor is the picture merely one of rough waters. Rather, it is one of a stormy sea with an enemy launching fiery darts into our boat, seeking to destroy us and keep us from reaching our destination in the heavenly city that awaits us.

Paul wants us to know that as we seek to obey our Lord in all the matters we’ve studied so far in this book, we have an enemy who is constantly trying to bring us down. And yet, Paul makes us

aware of this reality, not so that we might despair, but so that we might stand in faithfulness against every demonic assault that comes our way. That's what our text is about this morning.

Therefore, I want to walk through these verses this morning showing us the war in which we find ourselves, what is expected of us, and how we might stand firm in the midst of this satanic onslaught. So, let's first note the reality of our situation, namely, that we are at war against demonic enemies.

We are at war against demonic enemies

Paul begins our text by calling us in verses 10-11 to be strong in the Lord and to put on the whole armor of God. He takes this point back up in verse 13 and elaborates on it there, and so I'll take it up in a bit. First, though, I want to note why Paul exhorts us to be strong in the Lord. He says in verse 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."

Let's start by working through some of the details. Paul specifies that we are not wrestling against flesh and blood. By that, Paul doesn't mean that we have no human enemies. Of course we do. Throughout history as believers have shed their blood, it has been at the hands of other men. Those who stoned Stephen or had Paul beheaded were flesh and blood human beings. What Paul is saying here is that what is ultimately behind all of those human attacks and all other attacks are powerful and evil demonic forces.

Paul refers to them as rulers, authorities, cosmic powers over this present darkness, and spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. That is, in the invisible, spiritual world, there are all kinds of demonic entities who are at war with us, and all of them under the rule of the devil himself, which is why Paul launches into this description of these demonic forces after mentioning "the schemes of the devil" in verse 11.

Pulling this together, we can say that Satan hates the people of God, has sought to devour us and pull us toward hell from the beginning, schemes as to how he might do this, and then unleashes his hordes of demons to carry out this assault against us. That is why Paul says we are engaged in a fight against these invisible, dark, powerful, and evil entities.

But how do they carry out these schemes? Well, Paul doesn't go into particulars here, but we can gain some insights as we consider the rest of Scripture. It seems that the devil (and his demons), minimally, can suggest a thought to us or entice us with a thought. I say that because he's known as the accuser, and so surely that means that he suggests thoughts that we're condemned before God. Also, remember Acts 5 where Ananias and Sapphira lie about the proceeds from the land they sold and were struck dead instantly? Well, Peter said to Ananias in that chapter, "Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit? (v. 3). That suggests that Satan enticed him by suggesting the thought that he lie to Peter. And we know that the devil is the father of lies, as he's been a liar from the beginning. So it seems that one of

the key ways that the devil and his demons attack us is by suggesting thoughts that are sinful or would lead down a sinful path or by suggesting lies that we could believe contrary to the promises and truths of God's Word. We see this even in how he tempts Jesus.

We also know that he can attack us through lies or sinful thoughts brought through other people, as Jesus recognizes happens when Peter suggests that he shouldn't go to the cross and Jesus responds, "Get behind me Satan." And, finally (though we could say more), we see that Satan can take an area where we open the door for sin and get a foothold to bring greater destruction and sin into our lives as Paul warns against in Ephesians 4:27, telling us not to let our anger linger "and give no opportunity to the devil."

So one reason that we can walk out of here encouraged and motivated toward holy living on Sunday and then begin to struggle with contrary thoughts on Monday is because we have a relentless enemy, who is a liar and accuser, and wants to derail us from walking in faithful obedience to our Lord. And his onslaughts against us can be great. He'll help you recognize opportunities to sin, reason why sin isn't so bad, and then help you believe that you're hopeless when you have sinned.

And, yet, as much as I want us to see the power and evil nature of Satan and his hordes of demons that are against us, I don't want us to mistakenly think that we're mere victims when we sin. No, we make choices for which we will be held responsible. We cannot say, "The devil made me do it." The devil simply seizes on desires within us that we are giving into. But nor do I want you to miss that we have an enemy who is all too happy to appeal to our sinful thoughts, our doubts, and harmful attitudes that we can be prone to believe and give into. We have a ruthless enemy. What we sang earlier is true, this world is indeed filled with spiritual enemies who threaten "to undo us," and we are not Satan's equal in might or power. And this raises a question about how in the world we can overcome him if he's greater in power than us. And that's a question I want to answer. But, first, let me note exactly what we're called to do in the midst of this relentless demonic attack against us. We're called to stand in faithfulness.

We're called to stand in faithfulness

Paul doesn't highlight the war against us by Satan so that we might understand why we're hopeless or so that we'll sit by and await our destruction. He tells us this because he wants us to stand in the midst of these attacks. We see that repeatedly. In verse 11 he says, "Put on the whole armor of God, *that you may be able to stand* against the schemes of the devil." In verse 13 he writes, "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*." And then he begins verse 14, saying, "*Stand* therefore." It's clear that Paul expects us to stand and to withstand the devil's attacks even when they are most severe.

Now, I know that standing may not be the most exciting picture in the midst of a vision of warfare, but I want to note two things. First, the victory has already been won because of the work of Christ. Brothers and sisters, this victory is not in doubt. The fatal blow has been dealt to

our enemy at the cross. And when Jesus returns, the devil and his demons will be thrown into a lake of fire to be tormented forever. The victory isn't ours to achieve; Jesus has done that. But second, we are indeed victorious when we stand because Satan's mission is to get us to fall. You see, Paul uses this imagery earlier when writing to the Corinthians about how many Israelites fell in the wilderness and then noted that these things were written down for us so that we might not desire evil and follow the same path they did. Then, in telling us to be on guard against temptation, Paul writes, "Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall" (1 Cor 10:12).

That's the picture Paul wants us to see. It's as if Satan is unleashing every demon in an onslaught to see if God's people might be made to fall. And our call is to stand. We stand as we do not chase after sin. We stand as we are faithful husbands, fathers, wives, and mothers. We stand as we faithfully obey Jesus in fulfilling the great commission. We stand as we endure in faith and faithful obedience until our death or Christ returns. Every time a dear saint faithfully endures to the end, that is another reminder that our enemy will not ultimately win. We must stand. But how? How will we stand if our enemy is greater than us? Here's the answer: we stand by equipping ourselves with the strength of God's might.

We stand by equipping ourselves with the strength of God's might

In other words, though Satan is stronger than us, our Lord is mightier than he. And the Lord makes his strength available to us. That's what Paul is getting at when he says in verse 10, "Finally, be strong *in the Lord* and in the strength *of his might*." Then, Paul gives us a vivid picture of equipping ourselves with the strength of God's might by telling us in verse 11, "Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil."

So, we know that we need to equip ourselves with God's strength, which is greater than the devil's might, so that we might stand against the devil's schemes against us. Moreover, this is pictured in terms of us putting on the armor of God. But why does Paul use that imagery? Is it because he wrote this while sitting across from a Roman soldier in all of his armor? I don't think so. You see, this image of God as a warrior, armed with his glorious armor is pictured in Isaiah. For example, in Isaiah 11:4-5, the prophet writes of the Lord, "With righteousness he shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth; and he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked. Righteousness shall be the belt of his waist, and faithfulness the belt of his loins." Then, in Isaiah 59:17, as the prophet pictures the Lord coming and redeeming his people, he writes, "He put on righteousness as a breastplate, and a helmet of salvation on his head; he put on garments of vengeance for clothing, and wrapped himself in zeal as a cloak."

So Paul knows this image in Isaiah of God as our redeeming warrior, armed with righteousness, salvation, and faithfulness, and he tells us that we should arm ourselves with the very armor that characterizes our divine warrior and redeemer. Now, Paul will expand on the imagery given in Isaiah, mentioning a shield of faith, the sword of the Spirit, and the like. But this is where he's getting this imagery, and this helps us see what he's saying.

If we're going to stand against the devil's onslaught of lies, accusations, and enticements to fall into sin, we need to arm ourselves with God's armor, as Paul writes in verses 14-17, "Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness of the gospel of peace. In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one; and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God."

If we take these metaphorical pieces of armor and group them, we have truth, righteousness, the gospel of peace, faith, salvation, and the Word of God. So let's take them one at a time. To equip ourselves with truth seems that it goes two directions for us. First, we remember and apply what is true in our lives—that is what we know from the Word of God—in order to combat the devil's lies. And, second, we are truthful in how we conduct ourselves, even as our Lord speaks truthfully. In other words, we will not believe the devil's lies, and nor will we give in to becoming a liar, as he is.

Then, we arm ourselves with righteousness, which I think also goes two ways. On the one hand, we daily remember that we have been credited with the righteousness of Jesus Christ. It is no doubt true that the enemy will continually accuse us with suggestions that we are condemned, hopeless, and abandoned by our Lord who wants nothing to do with us in light of our sin. And our answer must be to remember that we are clothed with the perfect righteousness of Christ. We do not answer the devil's accusations by suggesting we're actually worthy of God's approval in and of ourselves but by pointing to the one who was perfectly righteous for us. Then, as those credited with Christ's righteousness, we live in righteousness, not practicing the unrighteous deeds that the devil entices us to pursue.

Next, we arm ourselves with "the readiness given by the gospel of peace." Now, this image also comes from Isaiah as the prophet tells us that the feet of those who share the good news are beautiful (Is 52:7), which is no doubt why Paul fixes the gospel to the image of putting shoes on our feet. And the idea seems to be that we arm ourselves with a readiness and willingness to speak the gospel to others. Moreover, the reason it is called the gospel of "peace" is because though we have an enemy in Satan, the unbeliever's main problem is that he has made himself an enemy of God, and in his unrepentance is storing up wrath for himself on the day when God will judge his enemies. The unbeliever will be thrown into the lake of fire on that day with Satan and his demons to be tormented forever. However, he can be reconciled to the Lord now—that is, he can have peace with God now. How? By of his sins and place his faith in the one who lived, died, and was raised for us. The gospel is a message of how we can have peace with God. That's why Paul calls it the gospel of peace, and we must arm ourselves with a readiness to speak that glorious truth each day. That's the third way we equip ourselves with the armor of God.

Then, we take up faith to extinguish the fiery darts Satan hurls our way. He'll sling lies at us such as suggesting that the Lord won't care for us or won't provide for us or will abandon us, and we quench those darts by trusting in God's promises to the contrary. And I think we all know that

this is where so much of the war is fought, which may be why Paul reminds us to take up the shield of faith “in all circumstances” (v. 16). Satan launches doubts and attacks (did God really say?), and we keep trusting in our Lord and his Word.

Next, we arm ourselves by remembering the salvation that is ours in Christ and that is ours at the coming of Christ. In other words, it’s not just that we have been saved—as glorious as that is. We also look toward the day when our salvation will be complete—Christ will return, we’ll get resurrected bodies, and we’ll no longer have to deal with our sins or Satan’s attacks. It’s easy to think Paul has this aspect in mind because when he writes to the Thessalonians, he speaks of putting on the “*hope of the helmet of salvation*” (1 Thess 5:8). By remembering our salvation to come, we strengthen ourselves to persevere when Satan tempts us to give up and give in.

And, finally, we take the sword of the Spirit, which is the Spirit-inspired Word of God. We learn from Jesus’ example and arm ourselves with God’s Word to counter the lies and temptations of the devil. Like the psalmist, we hide God’s Word in our heart so that we might not sin against him (Psalm 119:11). That’s how we equip ourselves for battle against the devil. We put on God’s armor so that we might stand.

But there’s one other element we must employ. We pray. Notice that in verse 18 Paul doesn’t tie prayer to a piece of armor. He just tells us to pray, constantly. Prayer is the constant means by which we do war against the enemy and equip ourselves for battle. Paul says to pray “at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication . . . [with] all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints.” We pray with the aid of the Spirit, exercising all kinds of prayers (praise, lament, etc.), persevering in it, and asking for grace for all our brothers and sisters. Paul even asks for prayer for himself, that he’d have an opening and boldness to preach the gospel. And if Paul feels that he needs prayer to resist Satan’s temptation to keep his mouth closed or fail to proclaim the truth as boldly as he should, how much more do we?

So, brothers and sisters, we are at war. The second we walk out of these doors (and before then!), a myriad of demonic forces will mount an attack against everything that we’ve heard and delighted in this morning. And if left to ourselves, we would fail. But we have the strength and might of our Lord, and we can arm ourselves with what he has given us so that we might stand, firm and strong, until the day that the Lord comes to get us. He’ll give us grace to that end, so let’s thank him now as we come to the table. Amen.