

Spiritual Warfare

By Kevin Morkassel

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Salem

Ephesians 6:10-15

INTRODUCTION:

As Americans, we are in the middle of a war...

- Brandon, last week, was telling me about his first experience in Iraq and how the Allied troops systematically cleared out enemy forces from every home in particularly bad pockets of Iraqi cities...
- He helped me to understand a little better some of what really goes on during a time of war.
- It's hard for us to imagine what it would be like without actually being there and in the middle of it all.
- This is why it is so important for us to pray for our troops... especially Mark (Afghanistan) and Brandon (Soon in Iraq.)
- This most certainly is an issue that is on the hearts and minds of this congregation.
- As Americans, we are in the middle of a war...

One thing that we need to remember however... is that as Christians, we are also in the middle of a war.

- We are soldiers striving to bring peace and safety to millions of lost souls.
- The Bible quite frequently refers to our lives being a war...
- I can think of times in my life, when every day seemed like a battle.
- Times when I was faced with an internal struggle to do God's will.
- I remember wanting to please Him, but was weak enough that I allowed my own desires to win out.
- Many of you can probably think about the last 5 or 10 or 20 years of your life and pick out a phase of your life in which you were losing spiritual battles.
- A time when you allowed yourself to give in to sin.

These battles will continue until the day we depart from this earth.

- We will always face these hardships and life changing decisions.
- Please turn quickly over to **2 Timothy 2:3-4**...
- As Christians we know that we are supposed to be humble and meek, and loving and kind, but take a look at how Paul refers to Timothy.
- Also take note of the two pieces of advice that Paul gave to Timothy.

3 Suffer hardship with me, as a good soldier of Christ Jesus.

4 No soldier in active service entangles himself in the affairs of everyday life, so that he may please the one who enlisted him as a soldier.

Paul calls upon Timothy to be a soldier of Christ Jesus!

- You know?... Paul always tends to **“say it like it is.”**
- He doesn't ever try to **“sugar coat”** the truth by telling Timothy that being a Christian is going to be easy!
- He points out that being a soldier will involve hardships.
- He just tells him outright to **“Suffer hardship with me!”**
- The 2nd half of **Verse 4** says that God **“enlisted him as a soldier”**.

We, likewise have been **“enlisted”** by God to be soldiers!

- Whether we like it or not, we are right smack in the middle of a war that is far more important than the war with Al-Qaida or Osama Bin Laden!

- We are all facing a spiritual war which is going to last until our number is up or until the Lord returns.
- We therefore need to be prepared to do certain things in order to avoid becoming a casualty of war.
- Nobody can win your spiritual war for you.
- In the end, it is your own decisions that determine whether you won or lost.
- Our text says that, *“No soldier in active service entangles himself in the affairs of everyday life, so that he may please the one who enlisted him as a soldier.”*

The two pieces of advice Paul gives couldn't be any clearer here:

- As soldiers, we need to first avoid getting entangled in our worldly lives, and second, we need to strive to please God.
- Let me ask you today, How are you going to prepare for your spiritual warfare?

When we are threatened by war, we immediately take steps to prepare:

1. We need to know who their enemy is.
 - We take action to identify his strengths and weaknesses
2. We also try to understand our own strengths and weaknesses.
3. We make sure we are properly equipped for battle.
4. We train ourselves to be disciplined and submit to our commanding officers.

The main focus of our text today comes from **Ephesians 6**...

- We want to first identify who our enemy is and then examine his strengths and weaknesses.
- Let's find out what we are up against... Let's read **Ephesians 6:12**... *“For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places.”*

“The spiritual forces of wickedness” sounds kind of scary, doesn't it?

- Satan and the evil forces that are portrayed on television and in the movies tend to have these extraordinary magical powers.
- They can cause knives to jump up and fly across the room at you.
- Or they can kill you in your sleep like Freddie Kruger in **“Nightmare on Elm Street.”**
- Does Satan have these kinds of powers?
- Is this a realistic image of our enemy?

Before we can accurately understand Satan's power, we have to look at his limitations.

- Many people view the devil as being like God except that he's evil.
- Satan is not an evil god; he is merely a fallen angel.
- He does not possess any more power than what God allows.
- We are given a glimpse of the devil's power in **Revelation 20:1-2**... *“Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, holding the key of the abyss and a great chain in his hand. And he laid hold of the dragon, the serpent of old, who is the devil and Satan, and bound him...”*

It is interesting to note that it didn't take an army to subdue Satan.

- It wasn't even an angel of great authority.
- When God uses high ranking angels to proclaim a great event, they are named.
- God didn't send Gabriel who carried God's message to Mary when she was told she would be giving birth to Jesus.
- He didn't send Michael the Archangel.

- God sent an angel of average stature to bind the so-called “**mighty**” Satan.

We also see that demons (or fallen angels) fear God’s judgment.

- In **Luke 8**, Jesus encountered a man possessed with a legion of demons who begged Him not to send them to the abyss but pleaded to enter a herd of swine.
- In **Matthew 8** we also see demons crying out and asking Jesus if He has come to torment them before the time.
- Satan (and those who fell with him) know that they will be judged.
- They know that they have a limit to what they can do and a short time to do it.
- There is an appointed judgment and all angels are subject to God regardless of which side they are on.
- Satan may hate God, but he also knows where his boundaries are.
- He is never referred to as having power in the Bible beyond the ability to deceive those who are willing to believe his lies.

Now that we have looked at the limitations of Satan, let’s look at his power.

- To understand Satan’s powers, let’s take a closer look at **Ephesians 6**.
- **Verse 11** tells us that we need to “*stand firm against the schemes of the devil*”.
- The devil is cunning, deceitful and tricky.
- It is very important that we grasp this principle.
- Deceit, seduction and lies are the powers of Satan. No more, no less.
- Satan does not have the power to physically harm you.
- He is a caged lion that seeks to devour.
- He can only devour those he can convince to come into his territory by submitting to him.
- There is no such thing as “**the devil made me do it.**”
- There is no such thing as an evil spirit which can physically harm a physical being.
- Satan and demonic forces only have the power that a man or woman submits to them.
- That is why Satan is the father of lies.
- **John 8.44** also says that he “*...does not stand in the truth because there is no truth in him.*”

Throughout scripture we are warned over and over to both equip ourselves for the battle and to not be ignorant of Satan’s schemes.

- The power of Satan is his ability to convince you to act contrary to God’s will.
- If you can recognize his deceptions and choose to surrender yourselves to God, Satan’s powers are completely deflated.

What, then is Satan’s greatest tool that he uses against us?

I would like to submit that the best tool he has at his disposal is our own selfish desires.

- Evil is unleashed on those who wholeheartedly follow after their own desires.
- Desires of power, greed, lust and any other selfish sin, opens the doors for evil to come in.
- When we submit to our desires, our desires will make our decisions.
- As Christians, we have the power to choose to be Spirit lead instead of desire driven.
- Satan cannot make you do anything.
- He can only deceive you with the goal of influencing you to make bad choices.
- The responsibility rests solely upon your will.

The one who controls your desires, controls you.

- You will submit either to one or to the other.
- **James 4:4** says that “*whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.*”

On a more positive note... Let's take a look at some of the tools that we have at our disposal... Let's read **Ephesians 6:13-17**...

13 Therefore, take up the full armor of God, so that you will be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm.

14 Stand firm therefore, HAVING GIRDED YOUR LOINS WITH TRUTH, and HAVING PUT ON THE BREASTPLATE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS,

15 and having shod YOUR FEET WITH THE PREPARATION OF THE GOSPEL OF PEACE;

16 in addition to all, taking up the shield of faith with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one.

17 And take THE HELMET OF SALVATION, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

We can equip ourselves with certain things, which will protect us from evil and allow us to stand firm

- The first piece of equipment we have is the truth.
- Truth is the foundation on which everything is built.
- If you don't know what is true, you cannot avoid deception and will fall to the 'schemes' or deception of the devil.
- This belt is what holds all things together.
- Everything in our spiritual life is fastened and held in place by truth.
- Without a solid understanding of truth, all defenses are compromised.

The next thing we are equipped with is **"the breastplate of righteousness"**.

- The breastplate guards the heart and vital organs.
- Only by righteousness can we protect our heart from attack.
- If I am living in sin, every problem in life can lead me to death.
- However, when my heart desires God's righteousness only, it can't be pierced by sin.

What about our feet? **"...shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace"**.

- Paul wrote this epistle while observing the Roman soldiers who held him captive.
- The Roman soldiers that Paul observed, wore a very lightweight sandal that laced up over their calves with leather bands for support.
- Underneath the sandals were metal spikes that assured them of a firm footing.
- The Romans realized that the soldier with the best footing will have victory on the battlefield.
- The same is true for the Christian.
- We need to understand why we believe what we believe.
- A faith that is dependent on feelings, will fail when problems arise, but a faith that is based on truth will stand strong regardless of circumstances.
- Anything short of a Christ focused lifestyle will create a weak faith that cannot provide you with the footing needed to get us through our spiritual battles.
- Focus on Jesus—When He's in place the rest of the world comes together...

The next piece of equipment is also imperative... **"the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one"**.

- Faith is your shield.
- If you don't trust God, you cannot withstand Satan's attacks.
- A defeated Christian is one who quickly falls away when problems rise.
- When pain or trials come along, they don't trust God so they stop fighting.
- We can't allow our faith to be shaken by hardships.
- **Verse 10** says that we need to **"be strong in the Lord, and in the strength of His might"**

- This strength comes from faith.

Another piece of equipment to be worn is the *“Helmet of Salvation”*.

- This is the part that allows us to eagerly anticipate the future—To hold strong during times of intense battle.
- Because we know what we have to look forward to and this gives us great strength.
- To receive salvation, however, we must submit to Christ.
- When I recognize my ways can not make me right before God, I turn from my own ways and choose God’s way.

A final piece of equipment is found in **verse 17** and it is *“the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God”*

- How do we advance the kingdom of God?
- With the one offensive part of the armor that is spoken of...THE WORD OF GOD.
- The church only becomes weak, when we abandon the word of God.
- Not only is the word used to advance the kingdom, but it is also used to defend it.
- The apostle Peter advised *“always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence...”* (1 Peter 3:15)

SUMMARY:

1. It is very difficult to win a battle when we don’t understand who the enemy is:
 - Satan doesn’t have any power over the righteous. Unless we allow him to.
2. We can be prepared for this spiritual war by examining ourselves and being aware of our own weaknesses. Keep on fighting, and don’t give in.
3. We need to be equipped with:
 - Truth / Righteousness / Confidence (stable footing) / Faith / God’s word

God has enlisted us to be His soldiers!

- We just need to remember that when we go to boot camp we learn to be disciplined soldiers.
- We learn to put our faith in the commanding officer.
- We prepare ourselves for battle.
- And we practice drills so that when we face conflict, we will be able to respond in the most appropriate fashion.

As Christians, we need to be able to be disciplined and prepared to respond according to our commanding officer’s will.

- If we do so, we are guaranteed a victory because we know that our enemy is powerless against God’s strength.