

The Real War and How to Fight It, Part 1

Ephesians 6:10-20

It'll come to as no surprise to any of you when I say that we are living in some contentious times. Wars, battles, fights and talk of the same, it's, it's common, isn't it? It's constant in the culture. It's like white noise. It's become so constant: wars, battles, and fights all the time. We've actually got actual wars, they're in the news and headlines all the time, kinetic and violent, like Israel and Hamas, Russia and Ukraine. Those are just two of more than a hundred wars and armed conflicts that are going on in the world right now.

We're also hearing talk about culture war, cyber war, media war, sounds like 1960s, race war. All this stuff is in the headlines. Battles are being waged against cancer, against disease, and for victims of all kinds. Battles, fights are being fought: fight for mental health, fight for psychological well-being, the fight for rights, the right to privacy, the right to

free speech, and all kinds of rights are being talked about that we need to fight for.

As individuals, as members of society, as employees in the workplace, as citizens in a nation, we can find ourselves involved in various wars and battles and fights throughout various seasons of our lives and for various reasons. Not all battles, not every battle is ours to fight, but there are some wars and there are some battles and fights that are our duty, our duty not just as citizens, but our duty as Christians. And the Lord will give us wisdom about what we should and should not be involved in.

But there is one war from which no Christian is exempt, and it is the war that is at the root of all warfare in this world and all conflict. This is the war that we are called to fight as Christians every single day. It is the most real war of all that we're called not only to fight, but to win.

So to see our call to arms as Christians, I'd like you to turn your Bibles to a very familiar portion of Scripture. It's

the letter of Ephesians, in Ephesians chapter 6, verse 10. This is the passage that many young people growing up in church learn from a very young age, on the full armor of God, the full armor of God in Ephesians 6:10-20. The Ephesian letter is one of the four prison epistles. It's called one of the prison epistles because Paul wrote this letter literally from his prison cell in the imperial city of Rome. Twice he refers to himself as the "prisoner of the Lord" and at the end of our text in Ephesians 6:20, he calls himself "an ambassador in chains." He's quite literally in prison.

He's quite literally thinking about warfare because Paul had, as constant companions, Roman soldiers. Ever since he was in Jerusalem, ever since he was in Caesarea, imprisoned there for a couple years, ever since his voyage to Rome, he's been in very close proximity to soldiers. He's even been proclaiming the Gospel to Caesar's Praetorian Guard. Never one to waste a trial, but always redeeming the time and taking advantage of every opportunity, Paul found in the soldier's equipment, armor, his weaponry an apt illustration of the Christian life. And no doubt he's reminded of texts like Isaiah 59, which we read earlier, about God himself as a warrior entering in and winning salvation

for his people. And so he sees that what God wears as weaponry and armor, he gives to his people to wear as well. And so he finds in the soldier's equipment an illustration for the Christian life.

He's written a full epistle of encouragement and exhortation to the Ephesian church, and that letter to the Ephesian church is going to make the rounds to all the churches of Asia Minor. And Paul realizes, then, an opportunity that he has, here, to prepare the churches for the inevitable attack that is going to come to these Christians when they put into practice everything that he's taught them in this letter. If they practice what he has written, they're going to get attacked.

Think about it. Christians, God by his sovereign choice, God by his redeeming grace, God by his election, God by his, his, his favor that he's shown to us, he has made us inveterate enemies of Satan when he elected us by his grace. When he united us with Christ, he made us a foe to all of Christ's foes. He put us on his side. And we read about all that in chapters 1-3, what

God did to save us and bring us into his own family, into his household.

We are devoted to maintaining unity and harmony in the local church and maturing in doctrine and practice, as Ephesians 4:1-16 says, and that the enemy does not like. As Christians, we're growing in the practice of repentance, as Ephesians 4:17-32 says. We are repenting all the time. We're identifying thoughts, attitudes, thinking that needs to be abandoned. The enemy doesn't like that. He likes us to think wicked thoughts. He likes us to be self-centered. He likes us to be proud and not humble. And so when we practice that, the enemy doesn't like it.

Ephesians 5:1-21, Christians are to walk in holiness and love and wisdom. Christians are to play their positions in marriage and in the family, in Ephesians 5:22 all the way through chapter 6, verse 9. They live out the faith in the home and in the world, and when the enemy sees us doing what is written and prescribed by the Apostle Paul, not only in this letter but in other parts of Scripture, when we follow the Lord Jesus Christ, from the perspective of our ancient enemy, Satan, people like that are the most dangerous people on the planet.

On the other hand, there are Christians, professing Christians, who are lazy, distracted, in love with the world, caught up in worldliness, concerned about themselves and not really others, Christians who prefer to pursue selfish ambition, Christians who go to church, show up, do the stuff, but their really, their hearts are really elsewhere. They are no threat to the enemy whatsoever. He has really no need to waste any resources fighting against them, because they're no bother to him in any of his operations at all. They're like the soldier who should be on the front line, aiming his weapon at the enemy, but instead of being there in place, being depended on by his brothers and sisters down the line, he's off in the woods somewhere, wandering around, dropped his gun, took off his helmet, looking at the trees, distracted by things. Why should Satan worry about that one?

The true Christians, those who love God, those who live in constant gratitude for eternal salvation, those who are devoted to the Apostles' teaching, those who are eager to love and obey the Lord Jesus Christ, those who are humbled before God, meek before others, the enemy opposes those kinds of Christians at

every single turn. He sees those kinds of Christians as threats that need to be neutralized, taken out of the fight. And that is what brings us to this text: Paul's warning order, his call to arms so that Christians engage in the real war, to fight, to win and stand firm when Satan attacks.

I've got three points for you, starting with the first section there, Ephesians 6:10-13. The nature of our warfare, the nature of our warfare. That's Ephesians 6:10-13. Before we run to the front as soldiers in Christ's army, it's crucial that we understand the enemy. It's essential that we know what's at stake, how to define winning and losing, what our assets are, what the enemy capability is. This is mental preparation for combat, you might say, and this is going to set us up for success when the enemy attacks, which he most certainly will. If you are following what Paul writes in Ephesians 1-5, you're going to be a threat, and you're going to be engaged by the enemy. You're going to be targeted; you're going to be on his hit list. And so we need mental preparation for what's about to come to us, right?

Ephesians 6:10-13, follow along. Paul writes, there, "Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the might of his strength. Put on the full armor of God so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places. 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."

There are several questions that Paul answers here, like, Who's our enemy? What is the aim in battle? What's the goal? What does success look like? And then, What resources do we have to achieve our aim in battle? Let's first start with, the enemy. We'll start with the enemy, here. The commander in chief, Paul, identifies him in verse 11 as the devil, and then in verse 12 he introduces the enemy forces. And just some brief observations; obviously, I've only got an hour. I don't, I can't get into every detail here, though I'd like to.

But some brief observations on the enemy forces. First, we see it's not a flesh-and-blood war against flesh-and-blood human armies. It's not primarily political or social, though the spiritual war does affect the political and the social and the cultural. But the real war is with spiritual enemies and demonic forces that are arrayed against us, and we can just make some observations about them. They're not flesh and blood. They're spiritual. They're invisible enemies. We can see they're not chaotic. They're not spinning here and there, but they are highly organized and ranked. They march in step. They have an authority-submission structure.

They're not few, but we also know from other parts of Scripture they're not few, but they are many; legion, in fact, upon legion. They're not weak, but they are powerful because they are supernatural. If they're not flesh and blood, then they are not natural. They are supernatural, and so that means they're stronger than we are. And they are not benign forces. They're not innocent. They're not even neutral. These spirits are malignant, malevolent, evil, defiling forces, and they're personal.

The terms that are used here, rulers, powers, world forces, spiritual forces, they're not synonyms. They are defining different things in the structure. Paul tells us there's a rank structure; there's a hierarchy among these demons, increasing degrees of prominence and authority among the demon hordes. They traverse terrain that is unknown to us, unseen by us. They wander through unseen places between heaven and earth, what some refer to as the sub-celestial, that's below the heavens, and the supra-terrestrial, that's above the earth. There's this space they inhabit, and they move back and forth between it.

The demonic army, highly intelligent, well-organized, supernaturally powerful, able to see what we can't see; so it's beyond night vision and heat signature. And this was definitely the advantage of US forces fighting in Iraq and Afghanistan in the recent 20-year war that we had, that we could see when the enemy couldn't. We could see at night. We can attack them when they can't see us. They don't know what's coming. They don't know there's a Predator drone above them that's about to rain down fire, and so we can catch them unawares. Well, it's even worse in the spiritual warfare because this enemy has got the capability to see spiritually, to attack from spiritual realms,

which means that for us, every attack that comes from them to us is a sneak attack.

That's just a quick overview of the enemy forces. What's, second, what is the aim in our daily battle with these spiritual forces of evil? What's the aim? Our aim in spiritual warfare, our goal in the battle, pretty, pretty clear from two explicit statements there in verse 11 and verse 13. In verse 11, it's "that you may be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil." By the language that Paul uses, we're, we're supposed to face the enemy head-on. We're to confront the attack. We're to, on every level of, of the hierarchy, we're to be engaged against the rulers, against the authorities, against the world rulers. When the enemy comes, Paul says, we are going to be struggling against him, verse 12. And the word, struggling, there, is the word for wrestling. It's talking about hand-to-hand combat. It's a word that could be, in today's terms, translated as grappling or like Brazilian jujitsu. It's down on the mat. It's face-to-face with your enemy. It's very personal, very intimate, up close and hard.

Another statement of our aim or our goal in spiritual warfare is in verse 13, "that you may be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm." What's this, evil day language? Is Paul talking about some end-times battle, fighting demons belching forth from, from the black abyss? Is this some type of *Left Behind* book or, what's that, *This Present Darkness*? Remember the Peretti novels? We're slashing demons? No, that's not what he's talking about. Is this a call to bind Satan, cast out demons in the name of Jesus? No, it's not that either.

What's the opposite of resisting? Giving in. What is the opposite of standing? Falling, right? Paul is using martial language, military language, a call to combat to illustrate the true gravity of giving in to temptation and of falling into sin. The fiery darts of verse 16: Darts penetrate, and then the fires of temptation go to work, and they burn with enticement until the victim succumbs and sins. That's what's going on here.

Satan and all of his demonic hordes and all the hounds of hell, listen, they cannot destroy God's elect, whom he reconciled to himself by the cross and by the righteousness of

Christ. And if you have any questions whatsoever about that, you need to read the great chapter of Paul in Romans 8, especially the latter part of the chapter, Romans 8. If you read that, and you still have questions and doubts about whether or not you're protected truly from the enemy or can ever be lost and ever fall forever away from God, after reading that chapter, if you still have questions, come and talk to me. Come and talk to one of us here at the church and let us, let us help you through that. But Satan and his demonic forces cannot ultimately destroy God's elect because they belong to him. They're united to Christ. They can't touch Christ. They can't touch his people, either.

So unable to destroy God's people, unable to possess those who are already fully possessed by the Holy Spirit, what is Satan able to do to us? How does he engage with us? How does he fight against us? Well, he tries to make God's people sin. Why? Why is that his strategy? Because he wants to neutralize them. He wants to use their sins to separate them from God in their conscience, not positionally, that can never happen, but relationally, which does happen. Every time we sin, there's a dark cloud that comes over our, our mind and our conscience, and we pull away and we retract from our God, who loves us, who

calls us, child, who wants us to be near. He wants to use sin that we commit to pollute us and darken our consciences and drive a wedge between us and our father. That's his tactic. That's his strategy.

You may remember in Numbers 22-25 the story of king Balak of the Moabites, who called on Balaam the false prophet to come and curse the Israelites. And when Balaam was unable to curse Israel because God protected them, and overcoming him by the Holy Spirit to speak true prophecies of, of protection and blessing upon Israel, he was overpowered by the Spirit. So Balaam took a different approach. He counseled Balak the king in a different plan. Hey, I know. In order to get that little reward money you promised me, let's get Israel to sin. Let's get Israel to sin. That'll work because then God will judge Israel for you. You don't even need to lift a finger. It's the same strategy for us.

If Satan's goal, then, is to get us to give in to temptation, to fall into sin, to no longer resist, but to give in, to no longer stand but fall, so that he neutralizes our effectiveness, so he pollutes our conscience, so that he defiles

us, so that he distracts us from our mission, so he discourages us from living the Christian life, then what's our goal? What's our goal? Do not sin. Do not sin in your thoughts, your attitudes, in your heart, in your will, in your imaginations, in the grumbling and complaining of your heart, in the way you speak or think about other people. Don't sin.

In the way you interact with people, don't sin. In the way you live your life and set your priorities of your life, don't sin. Stay on mission. Make progress in holiness. That's the goal. Keep trusting God. Keep obeying Jesus Christ. Keep making disciples. In other words, keep on pursuing the faithful obedience that Paul wrote about from Ephesians 1:1-6:9, that whole section. Do that. That is standing firm. Stay on mission.

So how do we do that? This is the third question just in this first section, here. The third question: What hope do we have when we're on the defense all the time? What, what hope do we have when we face sneak attacks from an invisible enemy? He's not using night vision, heat signature, he's not doing any of that. He's actually seeing us spiritually and moving in ways

that we can never even see or detect. How do we deal with sneak attacks from an invisible, superior enemy? What's our resource?

The truth is, when we understand the resources at hand and at our disposal, when we really get this as Christians, we realize Satan does not stand a chance. His attacks are fruitless. His efforts are worthless, futile. The thesis verse of the section, verse 10, says it all, "Finally," here's the secret, "be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might." In a war with a non-flesh-and-blood enemy, a spiritual enemy of demonic forces, we would be nuts to think that we have the resources in ourselves, natural human intellect, ingenuity, wisdom, cleverness, strength, political prowess, whatever it is, we'd be nuts to think we have the resources to fight a, a non-flesh-and-blood enemy ourselves, in our own strength, in our own power, because this fight is on a whole different plane. It's in a spiritual realm, and we would be fools to think that the weapons of our warfare are carnal. They are not carnal.

But if we're strong in the Lord, as it says here, this one-of-a-kind, unique person of Jesus Christ, the only one who possesses both a divine nature and a human nature in one person,

he's omnipotent God and at the same time perfect man, if we're strong in the strength of his might, Satan and all the hosts of Hell, they don't stand a chance, do they? The command that Paul lays down here, it's kind of unique in the way he puts it, the way he writes it.

The command is not in the active voice: John hit the ball. It's in the passive voice: The ball was hit by John. It's a passive voice command, and it's not a one-time act of obedience. It's a call to repeated action here. It's something that we do daily, if needed, hourly. Sometimes in a great fight, moment by moment, literally, he says here, the way he constructs this in the language, he says, Be being continually strengthened in the Lord and in the strength of his might.

So the passive voice, to be strengthened, it reminds us and it highlights the fact that this is not our strength. It's the Lord's strength. And the present tense, Keep on being strengthened, highlights the reality that we have a constant need, a daily need, as I said, and sometimes an hour-by-hour and a moment-by-moment need for his strength. Do you sense that need? Do you have the sense of your own need every single day

that you need the Lord and his strength? Because if you don't have that sense, you're already neutralized. You're the soldier wandering around, drop the weapon, drop the helmet, drop the shield, everything. You're wandering around the woods. You do not understand what you're a part of. Do you sense your daily need? I sure do. I really do.

And what can we do when we sense our need but respond in humble prayer, praying after the pattern of someone like Augustine in his *Confessions*, who said, "Give what you command and command whatever you will." "Tell me to charge whatever hill, take whatever mountain, fight whatever enemy. Just give me what I need, whatever you've commanded me, equip me, provide for me, help me." That's the attitude of a Christian.

Obedience to the command requires fear. There's a healthy fear of the threat that we have from our enemy, yes; but more importantly, it's the fear of the Lord to turn away from evil. There's a greater fear, a deeper fear we have. It's a reverence for the holiness of God, and that brings obedience to the command. Obedience to this command to be strong in the strength of his might also requires humility.

We have to know that our strength in and of ourselves is utterly insufficient to resist any temptation. It's insufficient to keep ourselves from falling into sin. His strength is what we need so desperately. We need it every day. Obedience to the command requires trust. We have to believe that the Spirit who has issued the command through Paul, he has the ability and the willingness to give us what we need so we can stand firm, resist temptation, not fall into sin, but actually keep on the march, obeying his will.

To encourage you in these virtues, fear, humility, trust in the Lord, and to motivate you to seek his strength daily, moment-by-moment, hour-by-hour, consider the kindness of our Lord. He is willing and able and joyful to give us what we need every time we ask it. Some people bem, bemoan their station. They look at what God has put in their lives by his good and faithful wise providence, and they think it's too much for them. I can't handle this. I can't handle this. Whenever you feel that way, it's a good sign because that's the point, you're supposed to realize: I can't handle this. That's a good lesson for you to walk through all the time. Feeling overwhelmed, feeling

overcome, it's not terr, it's not a terrible thing, it's what you do next.

Do you isolate and complain? Do you lash out, get angry? Do you feel resentful of what God has put into your life and the station that's yours by his grace and his kindness? Or do you go to him and ask? Do you seek his help? Do you search the Scripture for the help that you will find there? Because God has given us his wisdom on the pages of Scripture. Do you seek more mature Christians who will come to you and actually confront you and tell you, You know what, your attitudes are wrong, here, and you need to repent. I've been there. I needed to repent, too. Let me show you what I did. Let me encourage you to do that because we have a God who loves to be asked for help.

Consider these words from the Puritan pastor William Gurnall. He writes this, "Which, think you, speaks more love and condescension for a prince to give a pension to a favorite on which he may live independently by his own care," that is, for a prince who's got somebody he's going to care for, and he just dumps upon them everything they'll need forever. Does that speak great love and condescension? Maybe.

But what about this? Gurnall says, "or for this prince to take the chief care upon himself and come from day to day to this man's house, and to look into his cupboard, and see what provision he has, and what expense he's at, and so constantly to provide for this man from time to time?" That is, the prince entering into your home every day, opening up your cupboards, looking in your kitchen, seeing what you need, looking at your bank account, looking at your statements. Gurnall goes on to say, "Possibly some proud spirit that likes to be his own man or loves his means better than his prince would prefer the former, but one that is ambitious to have the heart and love of his prince would be ravished with the latter."

Which one are you? Do you say, God, give me what I need for the rest of my life and don't bother me any further? Or do you say, God visit me and my heart and my house every day. Show me my need, and let me ask you for your wealth, for your resources to help me, but come again tomorrow and the next day and the next day, because I love you more than your stuff. Which one are you?

PILLAR OF —TRUTH—



This is how our God attends to us in giving us his Son, isn't it, in granting us his Holy Spirit to show us our need every day, commanding us to come to him. William Gurnall continues, says, "The great God comes and looks into our cupboard to see how we're laid in, and he sends in accordingly as he finds us. Your heavenly Father knows you have needed these things, and you shall have them. He knows you need strength to pray and to hear and to suffer for him. And in the very hour it will be given."