

Sermon Notes, November 5, 2017
Spiritual Warfare (Pt. 1), Ephesians 6:10-20

This is the last section in Paul's epistle to the church at Ephesus. It's the last major thought Paul gives us, not just for you individually, but for our church at our stage, so it's important to understand and grasp this material. It's about spiritual warfare.

Up to now Paul, in a sense, has been talking about the constructive side of the Christian life. If you really stand back and look at the whole book, you'll see in chapters 1-3, Paul lays out what God is going to do about the mess the universe is in because of sin. The disintegration we see, the disorder, the confusion in the universe, is going to be solved by Jesus Christ being made King over all things.

We get to chapters 4, 5, & 6; Paul begins by saying, "Now if this is true, how shall we live?" He gives you a lot of detailed teaching about what it means to live the Christian life—to live in accord with the realities of who you are in Christ. Paul talks about what it means to change, what it means to put off the old life, to put on the new in the renewal of your mind, what it means to be filled with the Spirit, and how to take that Spirit-filledness and work it out into our relationships in every area of our lives.

Then he says, "Finally ..." What he means is, unless you see the context in which you're working, you're going to make a mistake. Let's be really concrete here. "Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God ..." Why? "... so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground."

What is the evil day? In the evil day, we sense there is some power, there is some force, that's coming around, shadowing us like a cloud, taunting us, jeering at us and undermining us and making us feel guilty or ashamed and tempting us and making us feel bad, egging us on.

Essentially, something is out to get us. So, Paul says if you blame the problems in your life *strictly* on your own failures and *strictly* on other people, you will either hate yourself or you'll hate the world. Sometimes you have to say, "There's more to this than meets the eye." Paul says, "On the evil day, put on the full armor of God, realize you're struggling with more than flesh and blood, and you will stand." There is nothing more practical.

Let me just show you three things this first verse tells you. (We're just going to deal with the first one today.) First, *real Christianity is a fight*. Secondly, *the fight is the Lord's*. Thirdly, *the battling is ours*. It's a fight; the fight is God's fight, but the battling is something we have to involve ourselves in.

1. Real Christianity is a fight

The point is this text tells you, you can tell a genuine Christian as much from the warfare and conflict in your life as from the peace. The Bible is insistent that when you become a Christian, new warfare has started. Real Christianity is a fight.

Here's the thing. If you seek a religion to make you comfortable, despite all its focus on peace and benefit, Christianity is not it! This is no religion for the weak or the lazy. A battle is going on, and contrary to our deception, we do not live on neutral turf. We either live for God or against him. The choices we make either reflect God's character or the character of sin.

Christians aren't called to tranquility. We are called to peace, yes, but peace in the midst of struggle. We need most of all a sense of urgency, an awareness of the conflict, and a sense of our own danger. Yet many of us are guilty of fraternizing with the enemy. Christians are often so unprepared they have not even noticed they have been taken prisoner. Expect opposition. Just look around. We all know the existence and presence of evil, suffering and persecution. Now, here's what sin does. Sin is a narcotic. Sin puts you to sleep. Sin makes you say, "Well, there's always tomorrow." Real Christianity wakes you up to the seriousness of the situation.

If you read through Ephesians, in chapter 4 Paul has been talking about what it means to live out the Christian lifestyle in relationships. In Eph. 5 he gives these instructions, “as God’s beloved children,” he says, “among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God’s holy people. Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving.” Again, it’s relationships among the people of God that Paul is talking about.

We have a new life in Christ. We have taken off the old self and put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness. We are to live differently than people in the world. It is who we are. We are His. Bought with the blood of Jesus.

Chapter 5 ends with Paul giving us the marks of a healthy marriage. Then in chapter 6 he speaks of parents and children, bondservants and masters. How quickly he transitions here from home fires to hell fires. One minute we’re looking at the practical, nitty-gritty life in the home, and then next we’re struggling against the devil and all of his minions. I think this juxtaposition in chapter 6 is intentional. We could argue because some of the greatest spiritual warfare happens in the home with children and parents; that’s true. But also, because all of your life can be put into this cosmic perspective!

It just seems very humdrum and mundane, and then all of sudden, Paul pulls back and gets up to 30,000 feet and shows us the grand picture. He is saying, “Do you realize what you’re doing in the midst of all of this home life and all of this work in the market place, and the life in the midst of the culture that you’re living in and engaging with, you’re fighting to stand firm against the devil! Whether your lives feel very ordinary and small, or they feel insignificant, we’re all part of something much bigger than we can imagine. Our call is to do battle!

If you say you’re a Christian, and there’s not the warring, and there’s not the exertion, it’s because you’re going to sleep. If there’s no fight to your Christian life, you’re either not alive spiritually (you’re not really a Christian—*Eph. 2:5*) or you’ve been knocked out.

Think about all the things the Scripture says. “Stand firm in one spirit. Strive side by side for the faith of the gospel. Be on your guard. Be watchful, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong. Labor for the food that endures. Be steadfast. Immovable. Hold fast to the word of life. Endure hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. Fight the good fight of faith.” Do you realize how many times that kind of language is being used? Is that happening to you?

I want to end by having you notice this word, so important a word, this verb, “stand!” It’s a word of battle, but, it implies Christ has already won a victory! He has already conquered, as we know from Colossians 2:15: “He (Jesus Christ) disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them by the cross.” The decisive blow, the checkmate has already been sounded at the cross. And in our battle, we must stand the ground that Christ has won for us.

As we prepare for the Table, let me end with this quote from N. T. Wright. He writes,

“We are called, therefore, to claim the cross as the victory which undergirds all we are in Christ, and all our work for God. Without it, we would find the odds against us far too heavy, and would be totally discouraged . . . With the cross as the underlying story of our lives, validated by the resurrection and then implemented by the fire of the Holy Spirit, we can have the confidence to take on the world, and stand against the schemes of the devil, with the sovereign love of God and his power at work in us. ‘In the world,’ said Jesus, ‘you have tribulation. But be of good cheer: I have overcome the world.’”