

The Christian's Ongoing Warfare

A Study in Ephesians 6:10-20

Our lesson in this study will focus on Ephesians 6:10-20. Every child of God soon learns that the Christian life is a battleground. There are powers in the unseen world—Satan's forces of darkness which are determined to destroy all that is good and everything that God approves.

God's children are soldiers; the Lord Jesus is the commanding officer; Satan is the adversary. Our warfare is not merely contending against godless philosophies, or individuals caught up in the cults, or cold-hearted infidels; it is actually a battle against demonic forces—evil spirits that wield tremendous power.

1. The Adversary (Ephesians 6:10-12)

Because there is an enemy opposing God's people, life is not a playground. To fight the battles of life requires being "strong in the Lord" (verse 10). That is, we cannot conquer the enemy by our own willpower, but in the strength that comes from God working in us.

In the Christian life, we battle against powerful evil forces, headed by Satan, who is a vicious fighter. First Peter 5:8 says that he walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. To be prepared for withstanding his attacks, we must depend on God's strength—and use every piece of armor described in our text.

Satan is no myth. He is very real, very clever, and very deceitful. Satan is the spirit-power behind all the terror, and all the impurity and immorality that pervades the world system. Satan is behind each act of violence that occurs in our communities. It is Satan who blinds the minds of those who do not believe (2 Corinthians 4:4); resists the work of the good angels (Daniel 10:12-13); holds the masses of unsaved people in his grip (Acts 26:18); is the prince of the power of the air (Ephesians 2:2); and attacks believers, leading to disobedience toward God's Word.

The instruction to "stand against" the wiles of the devil (verse 11) refers to "holding a position against" the onslaughts of this powerful and cunning enemy of God. Resist the devil. Don't give in to his powerful appeals. Jesus believed in both demons and angels. He spoke of them and affirmed their existence. Surely we should never be embarrassed to do the same.

The word "wrestle" speaks of a struggle. There will be no cessation of hostilities until the end of life, or until the end of the present age. We are in the midst of an ongoing struggle against evil.

We must be careful not to underestimate our spiritual enemy. Paul gives us a frightening description of the forces launched against us. The struggle is not really with human beings, but with supernatural intelligences. Our enemies are not human, but demonic.

James explains that the true beginnings of sin arise out of the human heart. Temptation to evil comes from elements which have their roots in the human heart. Actually, the enemy is twofold: James 1:14 says that we are tempted when we are drawn away by our own desires and enticed.

The “lust” (evil desires) is the enemy within. “Lust” includes all that the sinful heart may passionately desire: greed for excessive eating and drinking, lusting after material things, letting loose our anger, succumbing to discouragement, and giving in to sweeping sexual desire.

The word “enticed” refers to the devil who inflames the “lusts” (the “evil desires”). The combustible matter is within us, but the flame is stirred up by the enemy without (the devil) who entices us (solicits us to do evil).

There are three characteristics of the enemy described in verses 11-12. The enemy is *powerful*—the term “principalities and powers” speaks of differing ranks among the evil spirits. The enemy is *wicked*—the words “spiritual wickedness” mean that they use their power to destroy; darkness and wickedness characterize their actions. The enemy is *cunning*—the term “wiles of the devil” speaks of schemes and trickery and deception.

The devil seduces into compromise. He deceives into error. He mixes enough truth with falsehood to make it sound believable. One of the devil’s greatest deceptions is to persuade people that he doesn’t exist. In addition, there is a vast host of demons that function under his control. The enemy is a vast hierarchy of demonic beings, headed up by Satan himself.

2. The Armor (Ephesians 6:13-17)

Paul was in prison, chained to a soldier when he wrote the epistle to the Ephesians. Night and day the Roman guard was there to insure that Paul would not escape. As Paul looked up from time to time, the soldier’s armor may have suggested to him a picture of the armor needed to fight the Christian warfare.

Paul describes six pieces of armor furnished by the Lord to help us courageously fight the battles of life, and to stand for what is right.

The purpose for our being attired with “the whole armor of God” (verse 13) is so that there might be defense against the wiles of the devil. Three times in verses 11-14, we are told to “stand”—that is, we are to seek stability in the Christian life. Wobbly Christians become an easy prey for the devil. The way to “stand” is to put on the whole armor of God—the equipment designed to help us fight the battles of life.

The words “the evil day” speak of those times when great spiritual contests come our way. The phrase refers to times of sore testing. This includes our response to others when falsely accused, and our attitude when we learn that a family member has cancer, or a brain tumor, or a major physical problem. The “evil day” is a special time of conflict in the life of the individual Christian. It is one of those times when we are inclined to say, “Does God really love me?” It is the time when the enemy comes in like a flood!

The six pieces of armor are intended to help us gain victory over satanic onslaughts. Because our conflict is not a physical battle, the weapons are not physical (carnal) weapons.

a) The *loins* (or “waist”) “girded about with truth” (verse 14a) refers to a belt which the Roman soldier used to hold his loose garments in place. It speaks of preparation for battle; there should be no loose clothing that would be in the soldier’s way during the time of battle.

In the spiritual realm, the belt is “truth.” The Christian (in order to win battles) must be truthful and honest, not deceitful and hypocritical. We must be people of the truth. We speak and live the truth. Our word is our bond. We can be trusted.

b) The *breastplate of righteousness* (verse 14b) refers to a hard leather protective device placed in front of the heart and lungs, which also went completely around the body. It protected the heart and lungs and other vital organs from the front and back.

In the spiritual realm, the breastplate is “righteousness.” Just as a soldier’s breastplate protected his chest from the enemy’s attack, so upright living helps to guard the believer’s heart against the assaults of the devil. Our lives should be clean; there must be no hidden sin. Sanctified living will make it more difficult for Satan to find something for which he can accuse.

c) The soldier’s *shoes* (verse 15) were designed for long marches over rough terrain. Ill-fitting shoes hamper a soldier’s ability to fight with efficiency.

In the spiritual realm, the shoes are symbols of the gospel, and readiness to declare it. When one receives Christ and goes down into the waters of baptism, he can know that his sins are forgiven, and there is peace! Those who know peace with God should be prepared (as opportunity arises) to share the message of peace with God through Jesus Christ.

People without Christ do not have peace. One can often sense it. They know their life is not right, but they are often unwilling to embrace God’s remedy. There is probably no better way to defeat the enemy than by keeping busy telling the story of God’s redeeming grace to the searching multitudes.

d) The *shield* (verse 16) was a large oblong piece of wood or metal (longer than a yard stick and more than three feet wide) that was moveable, and was used to protect the whole body. During periods of war in New Testament times, the tips of arrows were often wrapped with pieces of cloth and soaked in pitch; and just before the arrow was shot, it was set on fire.

In the spiritual realm, the shield refers to faith—taking God at His word. The “fiery darts” speak of fierce temptations—deep doubts about God’s goodness, strong sweeping passions, and dark heavy discouragement. The “fiery darts” include temptations to doubt and disobedience and lust and fear. These passions are often sent as flaming darts by Satan’s missile system.

We must pray for the continuing gift of faith—the power to keep on believing the trustworthiness of the Bible, no matter what comes our way. Faith can quench the darts of temptation. Faith believes there is a crown at the end of the road. Faith believes that nothing is impossible with God.

Satan will launch arrows designed to get us to doubt God's goodness. When our married daughter was diagnosed with rare brain tumors, Satan persistently brought doubts about the Lord's goodness. "Faith" is what enables us to sing from the bottom of our hearts (even in the midst of deep trial)—*"Tho Satan should buffet, tho trials should come, let this blessed assurance control, that Christ hath regarded my helpless estate, and hath shed His own blood for my soul. It is well; it is well with my soul."*

e) The soldier's *helmet* (verse 17) was a large piece of metal (made of bronze or iron), and lined with felt—which protected the head from injury.

In the spiritual realm, the helmet *is* salvation. The helmet symbolizes the forgiveness and deliverance from Satan's bondage which we experienced when we accepted Christ and were adopted into His family. We experienced salvation, and now when Satan comes, we can reply with the words: *"I've been adopted; my name's written down; I'm the child of a King."*

When God saves an individual, that person receives "a renewed mind." When Jesus cast demons out of the man from Gadara, they found him "clothed and in his right mind" (Luke 8:35). We read in 2 Timothy 1:7 that God gives to those who are saved "the spirit of a sound mind." The mind of the unsaved person is blinded by lies, but the mind of the person who has experienced salvation will seek to be alert to Satan's tactics. In fact, 2 Corinthians 2:11 says that the saved person is "not ignorant of his devices." And so our minds, which feed on God's Word, are not as quick to embrace Satan's lies.

f) The soldier's *sword* (verse 17) is said to be "the word of God." The sword was a weapon used not only for defense against an enemy, but also for offense—for attacking the enemy. We will look at the "sword of the Spirit" in the final section of our lesson.

3. The Attack (Ephesians 6:18-20)

Twice in Ephesians 6, God tells us to put on the whole armor of God (in verses 11 and 13). Three times He tells us to "stand" (in verses 11, 13, and 14). Now, we are given instructions telling us how to go on the offensive, and attack. The attack against the enemy forces of evil involves a three-pronged approach.

a) Make use of the sword of the Spirit (6:17)

The "sword of the Spirit" is clearly identified as "the word of God." God's written word is like a sword. It cuts through people's defenses. It pricks the human conscience. Every preacher of God's truth knows that God's word has cutting power! It is sharper than a two-edged sword, and we must never be ashamed to use it.

The words "take" the "sword of the Spirit" mean that we are to read it, meditate upon it, memorize it, study it, and use it. The Bible is a "living sword." Hebrews 4:12 says that the word of God is "quick [living] and powerful." It changes the lives of those who are willing to embrace its message.

Many years ago, when I was preaching at Bowery Mission in New York City, the director took us to the second floor of the building, and showed us the alley behind the Bowery buildings, where they had

painted Bible verses on the walls of the building. The verses included words like “Prepare to meet thy God” and “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved.” The director of the mission said that homicides in that alley had almost completely disappeared after those signs were painted on the buildings.

In carnal warfare, soldiers use a dead sword to stab living men. The living men fall to the ground and die. In spiritual warfare, God uses a living sword to stab dead men (dead in trespasses and sin), and the dead men rise up with new life.

When Jesus was tempted in the wilderness, He showed us how to use the sword. Each time the tempter came, Jesus had an appropriate Scripture to throw at him. Just so, in order to use the “sword of the Spirit” effectively, we must know what it says. It is necessary that we spend more time in the Scriptures. Most of us don’t carefully study the Bible nearly enough! If we will memorize just one verse of Scripture each week, we will have more than 50 darts to throw at the devil every year! We must never underestimate the value of time spent in Bible study. It is time used to store up ammunition for the day of battle and for winning the war against the forces of evil.

b) Practice believing prayer (6:17-19)

Prayer is to pervade all of our spiritual warfare. Prayer includes the concept of keeping in touch with headquarters. It is maintaining communication with the Captain! We are to be “*praying always*.” Most Christians pray sometimes; we should always be in an attitude of prayer, ready to communicate with the heavenly Father. Prayer for us should be a habit, and not an isolated act.

We are to pray “*with all prayer and supplication*.” We are to speak to God with reverence about needs which are always present—the need for more wisdom and for a greater level of consecration. The word “supplication” speaks of earnest requests—appeals to God about matters of intense concern. It means praying about needs which are keenly felt.

The word “all” (“*all prayer and supplication*”) refers to “all kinds” of prayers—prayers of asking, prayers of intercession, prayers of thanksgiving. We are to pray when the sun shines and when the storm clouds rise. We are to pray when all is well and when sickness comes. Sometimes our prayers will be short—just a brief cry for help, “Lord, save me!” Other times we will pour out our hearts in extended prayers.

We are to pray “*with all perseverance*.” Prayer is hard work. It takes time. It calls for perseverance. It is easy to give up. The Lord usually keeps on blessing us even when we are not faithful in prayer, and so we tend to become careless. We are to be faithful and persevering in prayer if we expect to be increasingly victorious in fighting the battles of life.

We are to pray “*specifically*.” Paul says, *Pray that I might open my mouth and speak boldly*. We should get into the habit of *naming* people, places, and particulars. The early Christians were not to pray simply that God would bless Paul’s ministry, but that he would “open his mouth boldly to make known the mystery of the gospel” (verse 19b).

Floyd Pierson, a retired Africa Inland Mission worker, was a man who prayed in every situation. He was constantly in an attitude of prayer, and ready always to pray audibly. So habitual was his praying that when he went to renew his driver's license late in life, he said to the policeman who got into the car with him, "I always pray before I drive; let's bow our heads together." Pierson did it almost without thinking. The examiner surely wondered what kind of ride he was in for!

c) Continue to be alert and watchful (Ephesians 6:18b)

We must stand up and watch, and never relax our vigilance. One of the important factors in achieving increasing victory over Satan's attacks is the determined effort to stay awake and alert. Jesus repeatedly emphasized the need for watchfulness. In Mark 13:35, He says, "Watch ye therefore, for ye know not when the master of the house cometh." The apostles also echoed the same words. We are told in 1 Corinthians 16:13 to watch, stand fast in the faith, be brave, and be strong. In Revelation 3:2, God says, "Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain." We are to watch our **W**ords, **A**ctions, **T**houghts, **C**ompany, and **H**earts.

The devil, along with his hierarchy of spirit beings, wants to destroy the *work of God*, discredit the *Word of God*, and discourage the *people of God*. Satan is *strong*; we need to stay close to the Lord. Satan is *subtle*; we need to keep our eyes open. Satan is *cunning*; we need to be aware of his goals. Thankfully, God provides the protective equipment we need to fight the battle.

In order to defend ourselves, we must make use of the belt of truth, the breastplate of righteousness, the shoes of peace, the shield of faith, and the helmet of salvation. In order to be aggressive and move into battle with Satan, we need to make use of the sword of the Spirit, engage in a vigorous prayer life, and continue to be alert and watchful.

-Harold S. Martin

BIBLE HELPS

Robert Lehigh, Editor

PO Box 391

Hanover, PA 17331

United States of America