

OUR REAL BATTLE

EPHESIANS 6:10-18

SERMON

We've been studying the book of Ephesians off and on since last September. In the first three chapters of Ephesians Paul discusses theology. God predestined us in Christ, made us alive in Christ through the shedding of his innocent blood on the cross, and brought believers together to be one in Christ. In chapters four through six Paul discusses the practical implications of our new life in Christ. In chapter five and six Paul discusses Christian marriage and parenting. Dustin spoke about children and parenting last week as well as slavery and how a slave's sufferings reflect the sufferings of Christ. This brings us to today's message.

Paul begins the conclusion of his letter to the Ephesians with a word about spiritual warfare. He introduced this section with vs.10, **"Finally be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might"**. I took the point of my message today from this summary verse and you will find the point in the middle section of your bulletin: **Build your spiritual strength in relationship with the Lord. Build your spiritual strength in relationship with the Lord.**

It's like lifting weights. Properly done, weight lifting can build your muscles if you stick with over the long haul. In a similar way, we can build our spiritual strength in the Lord by engaging in spiritual exercises. These include: resisting Satanic influence and corruption, recalling and reciting the Word of God and requesting God's help through prayer. We will consider each of these spiritual exercises a bit later in the message.

God wants us to become stronger, to grow in our belief in Christ by building our relationship with the Lord! Following his plea to become spiritually strong, Paul explained the enormous, cosmic conflict occurring in our universe. He stated in vs.12 that our real enemy in this cosmic clash is not human beings but rather wicked, unseen, spiritual forces of darkness.

Are you aware of Satan's activity and work? Barry Merritt of Toledo, Ohio wrote in **Preaching Today** about the time they lived in St. Petersburg, Florida. *"We would go to the beach. It was always hard to relax and have a good time with our children, though, because there were too many threats: jellyfish, stingrays, sharks and undertow. One time we had some relatives that came to St. Petersburg and brought their boat with them. We decided to go out to an island a couple of miles offshore called Egmont Key. We had a great time because we didn't think we had to worry about the normal threats. The water was blue, the sand was white. We swam with our children carefree in the Gulf of Mexico. A few days later we were telling some friends about our wonderful day. Being more familiar with the area, they informed us that we had been swimming in one of the most shark infested areas around! We were in danger but completely oblivious to it."*

God wants us to be aware of the danger of the Evil One! He poses danger to us in unseen, yet very real ways. One of the best ways to counteract the Evil One is to take the offense by **building your spiritual strength in relationship with the Lord!** God wants us to become stronger in our faith, stronger in our belief in Christ, stronger in our relationship with the Lord.

The Hebrew name for “Satan” means “oppose, obstruct”. Two names in the New Testament appear, one translated, “Satan” (33x) and the other translated, “Evil One” (32x). Biblical authors refer to the Evil One in scripture with these titles, “the Father of Lies”, “the accuser”, “the enemy”, “the prince of demons”, “the ruler of this world”. His chief functions include introducing sin into the world, actively opposing God’s plan of salvation for mankind, and promoting discord, discouragement and temptation among Christians.

Certainly, the surprising news we received this past week about our pastoral candidate removing himself from consideration for our Lead Pastor position could be used by Satan to discourage us and promote discord among us. Instead, we must resist him and pray for the Lord’s help to move forward by faith and build our relationship with the Lord. This brings me to my first point. We build our spiritual strength by:

1. Resisting Satanic influence and corruption.

vs.11 Paul calls us to “Put on the whole armor of God” The word in the original for “whole armor” is *panoplia* and means literally, “all weapons”. Among the Greeks, the *panoplia* included the complete equipment used by heavily armed infantry. Why do we put on the whole armor of God? Note the purpose clause, “that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil”. My son Matthew recently retired from the Army. Many years ago he served a tour of duty in Kuwait. His infantry unit’s function was to protect Kuwait from Saddam Hussein’s Iraqi army. Matthew’s unit existed in a high state of readiness, always prepared, always alert for a possible attack. Like his unit we too must always be prepared, spiritually ready for Satan’s trickery.

Vs.12 Paul explains *why* we must be ready to resist Satan’s evil schemes: our real enemy is not people but evil powers and forces of this dark age. The real culprit behind the prolonged detention in Turkey of the Rev. Andrew Brunson is not an insecure Turkish President or the corrupt Turkish judiciary but Satan. Satan has deceived Turkish leaders! We must resist the Evil One, resist his influence and corruption. How do we do this?

vs.13 We resist with the full armor of God! Paul uses the same word *panoplia* he used in vs.11. He encouraged us in vs.11 to put it on and now in vs.13 we must “take up the whole armor of God”; in other words put it on! We do this so that we can “withstand in the evil day”. This means to “hold our ground”. We don’t want to surrender anything to the Evil One!! We must meet the Evil One’s deception, discouragement and attempts to tempt us with determination and perseverance!

Vs.14-17a We hold our ground with five pieces of defensive equipment: the belt of truth, the breastplate of righteousness, shoes which feature the gospel of peace, the shield of faith and the helmet of salvation. Let’s consider each of these: 1) *the belt of truth*. Jesus identified himself as truth in **John 14:6 Jesus said to him, ”I am the way, and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me”**. Paul mentions truth, or Christ as the first piece of armor to resist Satan! Christ should be first in our lives! 2) *The breastplate of righteousness*. Righteousness refers to right relationship with God. When Jesus is first in our lives as the belt of truth it will be much easier to be involved in a right relationship with him. 3) *shoes, the gospel of peace*. Peace means wholeness. We want our relationship with the Lord to be whole, not broken or unhealthy. 4) *shield of faith*. Faith incorporates both belief and trust. The man or woman

lacking faith will be easy prey for Satan. 5) *helmet of salvation* Paul took this piece of equipment from Isaiah 59:17 where God wears it. In his commentary on Ephesians, FF Bruce suggests this helmet must be a helmet of victory because God wears it! God will win the victory over Satan!!

I love James' counsel in the fourth chapter of his letter about dealing with Satan. He wrote, "**Resist the devil and he will flee from you!**". (vs.7b) The word "resist" is a military metaphor which means "to stand against" as in combat. We stand against the Evil One; we resist him with the full armor of God!

Are you wearing the full armor of God today? Are you carrying the belt of truth, the breastplate of righteousness, the gospel of peace, the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation? When we wear the whole armor of God we will be most able to mount a consistent and strong resistance. It's important that we strive to wear the *whole* armor not just part of it. We also build spiritual strength by:

2. Recalling and reciting the Word of God.

Vs.17b The very last weapon mentioned, the sword, happens to be the only offensive weapon listed in the whole armor of God. Listen to the way the author of Hebrews describes the Word of God: "**For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart**".

Jesus recited scripture when He resisted Satan in the desert. Turn to Matthew 4:1" **Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. And after fasting forty days and forty nights he was hungry. And the tempter came and said to him: "if you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread". But he answered, "It is written, "Man shall not live by bread alone but by every word that comes from the mouth of God". Then the devil took him to the holy city and set him on the pinnacle of the temple and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down for it is written, "He will command his angels concerning you" and "On their hands they will bear you up lest you strike your foot against a stone". Jesus said to him, "Again it is written, "You shall not put the Lord your God to the test". Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. And he said to him, "All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me". Then Jesus said to him, "Be gone, Satan! For it is written, "You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve". Then the devil left him and behold, angels came and were ministering to him".**

In all three of the answers Jesus gave Satan, Jesus quoted scripture. He quoted Deuteronomy 8:3, 6:16 and 6:13. But note that Satan also quoted scripture!! Satan knows the Word of God! However, he will twist it for his own deceitful and destructive purposes. In his rebuttal to Satan, Jesus demonstrated that scripture must be interpreted carefully. One simply cannot take a verse and twist it for one's own devious and selfish ends. One must interpret scripture in light of the whole counsel of God!

How well do you know scripture? To resist Satan effectively, we must know the Word of God! Unfortunately, many Christians have very limited knowledge of the Word of God.

The story's told of a Christian man, very devout, whose son sensed a call to study for the ministry. The son decided to attend a European university for an advanced ministerial degree. The father worried that his son's faith would be destroyed by sophisticated, unbelieving professors. Before he left for Europe his father counseled him, "don't let them take Jonah from you!" figuring the liberal professors might question the authenticity of the Jonah account. Two years later the son returned. The father asked him, "well, do you still have Jonah in your Bible?" The son laughed. "Jonah's not even in your Bible!" Stunned, the father replied, "It certainly is!" What do you mean?" The son continued, "it's not in your Bible, go ahead and look". The father fumbled through his Bible but couldn't find the book of Jonah. At last he checked the Table of Contents for the proper page. When he turned to the right page he discovered that the three pages of Jonah had been carefully removed from his Bible. The son confessed, "I did it before I left for Europe. What's the difference if I lose Jonah by studying under non-believers or if you lose Jonah to neglect?" Let me ask you: is Jonah in your Bible? When was the last time you checked and read it? We must read and be able to recite the Word of God! Finally, we build our spiritual strength by:

3.Requesting God's help through prayer. Let's return to our text in Ephesians.

Vs.18- After listing the armor God provides us to resist Satan, Paul urges us to pray! Paul pleads with us to pray at all times in the Spirit. So, do you pray? Is prayer a strange or unusual exercise for you or something you feel comfortable doing and

that you do frequently?

Our church offers many opportunities to pray. We have an Intercessory Prayer team which prays for our worship services, four prayer chains which intercede for people with urgent requests, we offer a time on Sunday afternoons in which we gather together to pray for church concerns and other regular opportunities. Our church has a wonderful legacy of prayer!! Many of you know the story of the plaque listing 35 men in our church who fought in WW 2. A group of women gathered every week to pray for their safe return and all 35 men returned home safely! These women obeyed Paul's instruction in this verse to "make supplication for all the saints".

For many years I had a painting hanging in my study entitled, "Spiritual Warfare". We will put it up on the screen for you. It depicts a father praying for his young son. The boy has his teddy bear tucked in his arm. The bedroom window behind the father reveals two angelic beings: one evil and the other one, good. The evil angel has a fist clenched and appears intent on attacking the boy. The good angel appears to be a guardian angel and has his hands in a defensive posture for protection. The painting signifies the importance of prayer!! Realities exist in the unseen, spiritual realm; a battle is being waged for the hearts, minds and souls of our children!! Pray for your children and grandchildren every night! Pray for God to send his guardian angels to protect them from harm, evil, tragedy or injury!

Paul also tells us to pray for all the saints. He's referring to the people of God. Do you pray for your fellow church members and attendees? Pray not only for those experiencing illness,

surgery, etc but pray for our teens, children, your elders, deacons and pastors. Pray for your Pastor Nominating Team! Pray that God would protect our church from the Evil One and his divisive, deceitful and discouraging ways.

Paul encourages us today to build our spiritual strength in the Lord. **Build your spiritual strength in the Lord!!** We do this by resisting Satanic influence, recalling and reciting the Word of God and requesting God's help through prayer. God has given us equipment, spiritual exercise equipment to build our strength. Let's use the equipment!!!