

Unseen Battle **Ephesians 6:10-20**

We are going to finish up our study on the book of Ephesians today. And in the last part of this letter Paul wraps things up with some final instructions. He spent the first 3 chapters writing about the awesome spiritual realities that are ours because of God's grace and calling on our lives through Jesus Christ. In chapters 4-6 he wrote about how we are to live in light of our calling – turning away from sin and seeking God's will in all of our relationships – at church, in our community, at home, and at work. And now, in the last part of this letter, he talks about where our strength for living a righteous life comes from.

Living the Christian life is not an uncontested effort. We are on a journey to a wonderful destination and there will be wonderful rewards when we get there. But the journey is far from easy. Living the Christian life is tough. It can be incredibly difficult at times. And it doesn't take much. All it takes is one person or one situation that can really mess things up. In this series we've talked about how to please the Lord when it comes to how you treat people at church, work, home, and in the community, but almost all of us have difficult people or situations in one, if not all of these areas.

Sometimes a person at church can get you so worked up that you feel sick. I've had times when I've felt so anxious I didn't want to come to church – but I didn't have a choice! Sometimes your spouse or children or parents can be so difficult you feel like going crazy. Sometimes the people at work or in your neighborhood are so nasty you just want to unload on them. We're pretty sure someone sprayed our garden with herbicide in June and about 75% of the plants died. It's good we don't know who it was because the things that welled up inside us weren't pretty! Difficult situations aren't rare. They're common. And just about the time you think you've made it through one, another one shows up right behind it. Some situations seem to have no end in sight and every day can be like a battle. Why does the journey have to be so difficult? And how in the world are we supposed to make it all the way to the end when the troubles seem to never go away?

In the closing section of Paul's letter to the Ephesians he gives us some powerful and clarifying insight into these things. Living the Christian life would have been no easier for the people living in Ephesus. I'm sure they were overjoyed to hear the gospel and turning to Christ would have been freeing and exciting for them. But it wouldn't have taken them long to find out that the kind of life God had called them to was extremely difficult. Doing what Paul told them to do made sense, but it

wasn't easy. Why was it so hard and what could they do in order to succeed? That's what Paul writes about at the end of Ephesians 6.

Read Ephesians 6:10-12.

¹⁰ Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. ¹¹ Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. ¹² For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.

So Paul likens the Christian life to a fight – we're soldiers in hand to hand combat. He knew it wasn't easy. It was never easy for him and he knew it wasn't easy for the people he was writing to. And the reason Paul gave for why it was so difficult was that they had unseen enemies in the spiritual realm that were fighting against them. In Ephesus, the spiritual battle was intense. Besides the temple of Artemis there were other temples and the worship of demonic gods and goddesses was prevalent. There were demonic strongholds and many people practiced magic arts. So, the people in church were coming out of that kind of background and demonic activity was all around them and it was making it difficult to live the Christian life.

I think it's easy for us to forget about what's happening in the spiritual realm. Neil Anderson writes about what he calls "the forgotten middle" in his book The Bondage Breaker. In our day and age, we often think of the physical realm as a present reality and the spiritual realm as a distant and future reality, so we live as if these two realms are completely separate. We assume the spiritual, unseen realm has no bearing on our lives today. But what Neil Anderson reminds his readers of is that the Bible affirms that life actually takes place in "the forgotten middle." Yes, we live in the physical realm, but there is also a spiritual realm all around us that is influencing us right now far more than we realize. Not that there's a demon behind every bush, or that Satan is to blame for everything bad we've done, but the spiritual realm is just as real right now as the physical and has a major impact on our lives.

In Ephesians Paul reminds us of that reality as well. Not everyone is happy about the journey that we're on. We have spiritual enemies who would love to see us struggle and suffer, and who want to cause as much damage and destruction as possible along the way. So the Christian life isn't a walk in the park. It's a battle against unseen enemies who want to destroy us. And that's what makes it so difficult. We're not just dealing with other people's bad behavior and our own temptations to sin – it's not a battle against flesh and blood. We're dealing with

spiritual forces of evil that are working against us and carrying out the schemes of the devil.

I have had several very real encounters with demons over the years. Sometimes in my own life and home, and sometimes in other people's lives and homes. Many of you have had undeniable encounters with demons as well. Most of the time their influence is quiet and deceptive – a whisper here and a whisper there – lies and accusations and sudden temptations – these things sound like they're our very own thoughts, but many have a demonic origin. Other times people are tormented by terrible nightmares that don't make any sense. People are plagued by fear, anxiety, and depression and we often only look at physical or emotional causes when quite often there is demonic influence as well. I've heard multiple stories of physical manifestations. The most common are glowing eyes or a dark and ominous shape in somebody's room. Now you can write these off as people just seeing things, but I've heard enough stories from all kinds of different people with similar details to convince me that demons are very real and very active in the world today.

That's kind of scary and overwhelming if you think about it. How do we stand a chance? How do we fight against an enemy we can't even see? Well, Paul tells us where our strength comes from. Our strength comes from the Lord and in the strength of *his* might. We don't have the strength on our own. We are flesh and blood and that works with physical battles, but Paul tells us this battle is not against flesh and blood. It's a battle against spiritual forces of evil. So our will power and determination and personal strength isn't enough. We need the strength and power that comes from the Lord. He has strength and power that is unmatched by any demon. So for the spiritual battle that we're in every day, we need to fight in his strength. It amazes me that not only did God save us from the devastation of sin that we were in and provide a new life for us to walk in, but he also gives us the strength to live that kind of life.

And the way he does that is to give us what Paul refers to as “the whole armor of God.” Paul envisions a Roman soldier decked out in armor and ready for battle to help us see that God has given us armor for the fight that we're in. That's where we find his strength. We are to put on the whole armor of God in order to stand firm in the battle. And Paul tells us what that armor looks like in the last few verses.

Read Ephesians 6:13-20.

¹³ Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm. ¹⁴ Stand therefore, having fastened

on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness,¹⁵ and, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace.¹⁶ In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one;¹⁷ and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God,¹⁸ praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end, keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints,¹⁹ and also for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel,²⁰ for which I am an ambassador in chains, that I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak.

You can see how Paul goes through a checklist of armor that a Roman soldier would wear and he links each piece with a spiritual blessing we've been given by God to enable us to stand firm against the spiritual forces of evil that are against us. He doesn't give many details about the pieces of armor because he's assuming the obvious significance of each piece will be intuitive. Some preachers go into complex details about each of these, and draw out all kinds of implications, but Paul doesn't – so I'm not going to either. I think there's a straightforward meaning for each one.

The first piece of armor Paul mentions is the belt of truth. We are to have the belt of truth fastened around our waist. The belt held everything together for the soldier, so this simply means that we need to be grounded in the Truth in order to stand firm. It's the same idea he brought up in chapter 4 when he wrote about the importance of growing in Christian maturity so that we aren't like a boat at sea getting tossed back and forth by the wind and the waves. Our spiritual enemies use lies and deception to try to defeat us, so we have to know the truth if we are going to stand firm. Truth is a spiritual blessing God has given us in order to fight the battle. Are you growing in your knowledge of the Truth?

Second, we have the breastplate of righteousness. In the same way that a breastplate protected a soldier's vital organs, righteousness protects us against enemy attack. One of the ways our enemies attack is through accusations and condemnation, and the way we defend ourselves is to remember that God has given us Christ's righteousness through faith in him. We are not condemned because in Christ all our sins are forgiven forever. And if God has declared us to be righteous, who can condemn us? (Rom. 8:33-34) God has already ruled in our favor. Do you believe it? Do you declare the truth about your righteousness in Christ?

Third, we have the shoes of the Gospel of peace. Good footing was critical for the soldier. He needed his sandals strapped so that he was prepared and ready for battle. Paul says the way that we prepare for battle is to strap on the shoes of the gospel of peace. I think he has peace with God in mind here. If you aren't convinced that you have peace with God through Christ, you're not going to be ready for battle. But God has given you assurance of peace through the gospel. So you need to strap that on like a soldier strapping on his sandals. Pastor Jerry Bridges talks about the importance of preaching the gospel to yourself every day so that you'll be firmly planted in peace with God and ready for battle. It's easy to forget the gospel – do you know it for yourself? Do you preach it to yourself?

Forth is the shield of faith. The Roman shield was wooden and lined with thick leather so that when flaming darts were shot they would embed in it and put out the flame. Our enemies attack us with doubts about the promises of God. Arrow after arrow flies in our direction, especially when we're going through suffering. But God has given us a gift that can extinguish these arrows – the gift of faith. Faith is how we respond to doubt – you can choose to believe the lies of the enemy or you can choose to believe the promises of God. And by the power of the Holy Spirit God has given us the gift of faith which we can raise up and believe the promises of God. What are you choosing to believe?

Fifth is the helmet of salvation. Not only did a helmet offer protection for the head, but a Roman soldier's helmet had some kind of crest or plume to make the soldier appear more imposing and commanding – it was an intimidation factor. So if you're the enemy who sees the soldier with that helmet, it looks like he's a giant and it fills you with the dread of certain defeat. I think Paul may have had this in mind when he refers to the helmet of salvation. The gift of salvation that God has given us is an intimidating reminder to our enemies of their defeat. We put on the helmet of salvation by rejoicing in our certain salvation so that our enemies shudder in fear of God's judgment and their certain defeat. Do you rejoice in your salvation in the midst of the battle or has the enemy convinced you to keep quiet?

Sixth is the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. The sword was the soldier's weapon in hand to hand combat with which he would attack his enemy. And here you can't help but think of when Satan tempted Jesus in the wilderness. He lied to him and offered him false promises, and what did Jesus do? He attacked him with the word of God. The word of God has such power and authority that Satan couldn't fight back and eventually gave up. The beauty of the words of Scripture is that they are the very words that proceed from the mouth of God. Paul told Timothy that all Scripture was breathed out by God. So when we use Scripture

to fight against the lies of the enemy, we use a weapon that cannot be defeated. Do you have God's word hidden in your heart so that you can use it for the fight?

And finally, we have prayer. Paul doesn't link this with any part of armor, but his use of grammar makes me think that praying in the Spirit is the same thing as wielding the sword of the Spirit. We attack the enemy with the sword of the Spirit by praying according to the word of God. It's the same thing Jesus did when he was being tempted. He prayed using the word of God. And here Paul says we are to do that at all times with all prayer and supplication. So he puts a special significance on the power of prayer in the spiritual battle – calling them to persevere in prayer for one another and for him. So I picture your prayers like blows from a sword against the enemy. Paul obviously treated prayer as if it would be very effective in the spiritual battle and would yield results. Are you fighting the battle with prayer?

Yes, living the Christian life is very difficult. It's easy to fall into sin against people because there's more going on than meets the eye. There are demonic forces at work trying to destroy us and we are in a battle. But the one who saved us from darkness and brought us into the light has not only called us to walk as children of light, he has also given us the armor and weapons to fight with – everything we need to overcome the sins we're struggling with.

Are you taking hold of these things in the battles that you face? Are you using God's gifts of truth, righteousness, the gospel, faith, salvation, the word of God, and prayer? These are the things that will give you strength from the Lord to respond rightly to the people and situations that seem so difficult. I encourage you to look at one relationship you are struggling with sin in and ask yourself – which one of these weapons are parts of armor have I been neglecting? As God brings that to mind I encourage you to take real and practical steps to grow in that area. And as you do, I trust that you will find the strength to stand.

Sometimes people encounter deep demonic strongholds in their lives and they need help from others. If you think you're struggling with demonic influence and it doesn't let up, please contact me. The elders can help.