

CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

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Series: Spiritual Warfare
Number: 2
Text: Ephesians 6:10-13
Date: April 18, 2010 (a.m.)

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Withstanding Satan's Assaults

It can be confirmed irrefutably from God's Word that the devil assaults believers.

- (1) This is to be observed in God's declaration: "And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed" (Gen. 3:15).
- (2) This is also evident from the names which are given him in light of this, such as, the enemy (Matt. 13:39), the tempter (Matt. 4:3), the wicked one (Matt. 13:19), and the adversary (1 Pet. 5:8).
- (3) It is conveyed by the description of his work among believers: "Your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, who goes about about, seeking whom he may devour" (1 Pet. 5:8). His works are called "the wiles of the devil" (Eph. 6:16), and beguiling (2 Cor. 11:3).
- (4) Then there are the exhortations to arm ourselves against him and to resist him. "Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil" (Eph. 6:11); "Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, who goes about" (1 Pet. 5:8); "Resist the devil, and he will flee from you" (James 4:7).

Our adversary is described as being crafty, deceitful and coy. We are told he seeks to *blind* the minds of unbelievers (II Cor. 4:4; I John 2:11). Notice that this pertains to cognitive perception. Likewise, the devil seeks to address the mind of the believer by raising doubts and sowing doctrinal errors. Note carefully the various Apostolic emphasis here: Pay attention to your teaching (I Tim. 4:16); keep the form of sound words (2 Tim. 1:13); an elder must continue in sound doctrine (Titus 1:9); speak what befits sound doctrine (Titus 2:1); nourished on sound doctrine (I Tim. 4:6); do not be carried away by strange teachings (Heb. 13:9). If anyone does not bring this teaching, do not receive him (2 John 10); he who does not abide in the teaching of Christ does not have God (2 John 9). Teaching as doctrines the traditions of men (Matt. 15:9); doctrines of demons (I Tim. 4:1).

Satan knows, as one of the old divines remarked, "that *faith* is the fountainhead of spiritual life, and he therefore seeks to obscure faith in all its activity.

(1) He suddenly interjects irrational suggestions, such as, 'Is all this in truth? Is not all this imagination?' He will then continually stir you up to mentally reflect upon these suggestions and to search them out. If we then begin to listen, he gets hold of us and begins to present arguments upon which he demands an answer. And if he gets you that far that you begin to respond by reasoning, he will proceed with his argumentation and will, time and again, present new proofs. When the ability to reason fails, he then proceeds to bring you from fleeting atheistic thoughts to embrace atheism itself. You will then be grievously caught in the net and be incapable of having either comfort or peace, and will not be able to be encouraged in whatever you are doing. Therefore, be on your guard against giving heed to these initial fleeting interjections. Let them pass by, and proceed as before, relying upon the Word of God.

(2) Sometimes he unexpectedly interjects: 'Are you really a child of God? Is it really in truth? Have you not deceived yourself? Come, examine yourself, for that which is good can endure a test.' At times he does this when we may live sweetly by faith, in the exercise of its extrinsic acts, and when we may have fellowship with God. Or he will occasionally do so when we are least capable of making a judgment about ourselves. If we do listen to him, our faith will receive a setback at the very outset and we shall be prevented from proceeding in this good frame. When it comes to the examination whether our foundation is right, he does his utmost to obscure that which is good and hold before us our corruptions with utmost clarity. He will then suggest: 'The godly are such and such, but you are far removed from living such a life! Thus, you have deceived yourself; you have nothing more than an enlightened understanding, and you have nothing but head knowledge. You are a temporal believer and a hypocrite.' It is thus that you begin to totter. Therefore, do not listen to those interjections, but proceed with the extrinsic acts of faith, which cannot deceive. For even if you had deceived yourself, it is nevertheless at this point that you must make a beginning. It is safest to practice self-examination when wrestling in prayer; that is, when you are speaking to and transacting with the Lord.

(3) Sometimes he makes your bodily cross to appear much heavier than it is. It then seems as if there is no deliverance, but that it will become heavier and heavier. He will also suggest that this has not come upon you in God's favor, but as a manifestation of His wrath; that it is all because of your sins and is but the beginning of eternal damnation. He knows how to impress this upon you sentence after sentence, doing so in an authoritative and overpowering manner. If you listen to him, his interjections will begin to have their effect, faith will begin to falter, you will easily become despondent, and your cross will press you down. Therefore, reject all such interjections. Take your cross upon you and follow Jesus; adhere to the promise that you will be sustained and that the outcome will be well."¹

REVIEW: Before examining the Christian's armor, we need again to look at the Apostle's exhortations in 6:10-13. It is important to note the implied urgency in the thrice-repeated call to *stand, having done all to stand, stand therefore!* This is serious. The Christian life is anything but a life of ease, as all who have experienced the new birth eventually discover! This is borne out by the rest of the N.T. (cf. I Pet. 4:12; James 4:7; Phil. 1:28; II Tim. 4:6-8). The reason for Paul's urgent appeal is clearly stated: The believer is confronted by Satan and his forces. "He constantly recognized the fact of his existence, and over and over again refers to the nature of the world over which Satan reigns. Here he definitely names him, and we are brought to the recognition of the age-long conflict in which we too are involved. It is a conflict between God and Satan, between those on the side of God and those under the mastery of Satan."² What does it mean, *to be strong in the Lord and in His mighty power?* What does it mean, *to stand?* Why the need for the *armor of God* if we are strong in the Lord?

I. THE STRUCTURE OF PAUL'S THOUGHT

The apostle wrote under divine inspiration, and therefore every word has its proper place and function in Paul's thought. Verses 10 and 11 underscore the importance of priority in the apostle's thinking.

A. THE STRATEGY - Confronted with battle, the Apostle Paul was careful in laying out his battle plan. What are the resources? How are they to be used? Who is the enemy? What are his strengths and directives?

1. First Things First - "Be strong in the Lord," or more lit., "Be made strong in the Lord." How is this done? By knowing God (cf. 1:17-23). Eph. 6:10-13 cannot be appropriated apart from Eph. 1. Paul is urging Christians to immerse themselves not

in some abstract philosophy or power of positive thinking, but in the Living God - not as they conceive Him, but as He has revealed Himself in His Word in Christ! "This knowledge of God," wrote the puritan Stephen Charnock, "is not only a knowledge of God and Christ in the theory, but such a knowledge which is saving, joined with ardent love to him, cordial trust in him, as I Cor. 13:12, 'Then I shall know even as also I am known,' *i. e.* I shall love and rejoice, as I am beloved and delighted in by God. It is not only a knowledge of God in his will, but a knowledge of God in his nature; both must go together; we must know him in his nature, we must be obedient to his will. The devil hath a greater knowledge of God's being than any man upon earth, but since he is a rebel to his will, he is not happy by his knowledge. It must be such knowledge as leads to eternal life, and hath a necessary and infallible connection with it, as the effect with the cause, which is not between a speculative knowledge and salvation. It must be therefore such a knowledge which descends from the head to the heart, which is light in the mind and heart in the affections; such a knowledge of God as includes faith in him."³ For the apostle's "theology" was not a dry academic exercise but a living encounter with God Himself - nor was this only something the apostles were privy to via special revelation - but the revelation was committed to them in order that it should be communicated to others (I Jn. 1:1-4). The whole purpose of Paul's epistles was directed to this end. Therefore, all believers have access to the same special revelation (the Scriptures) as the only means of "knowing God." This is the only way to be strong in the Lord.

- B. THE TACTICS - Before there is the exhortation "to stand" there is the appeal to "put on the full armor of God." This is extremely important. The armor in essence consists of an understanding and an application of the truth of the Gospel. Primarily the armor is defensive. The call to stand is defensive. The call to be made strong in the Lord is offensive. It is not enough to simply be strong. There must be a defensive against the devil's schemes. The point is this: we need protection. We will never mature to the point that we are invincible (note I Cor. 10:12). But the armor is useless without strength. We need to be strong to use the armor! (cf. Heb. 5:11-14).
- C. THE ENEMY - The call for strength and protection stems from the foe to be faced. The Christian is engaged (whether he wants to be or not) in unceasing warfare. There will never be a truce and there are no "spiritual holidays" from the battle. Paul declares that the devil has "schemes." The word is METHODEIAS, lit. scheming, craftiness, or astuteness. Paul uses the same word earlier in 4:14. In II Cor. 2:11 Paul refers to the devil's schemes by the use of the word NOËMA, lit. thought, purpose, design, evil scheming. The word implies the use of intellectual reasoning. In both cases, the Apostle attributes to the devil a high level of intelligence. We are no match for him in this capacity. He can devise his plots so that they cannot be detached by reasoning, and with the appearance of good (cf. II Cor. 11:14,15). Discernment can only be made by the spiritually mature or strong (Heb. 5:11-14). Again, listen to the wisdom of Charnock, "This is what the devil endeavours most to hinder. He is the enemy of man's happiness; he envies man a better state than himself hath; his time is spent in barring the door against it. The course he takes is to bemist the understanding faculty, 'that the light of the gospel of Christ might not shine into it,' 2 Cor. 4:4. He put our first parents upon the knowledge of other things to deprive them of the knowledge of God. He is always pecking at this seed of knowledge. If he cannot kill it, he will sow some cockle to choke it. All errors in the mind have the devil's blessing, and knowledge his curse. His kingdom is a kingdom of darkness. Light is an enemy to his dominion, and he to light. When the knowledge of God breaks in upon the heart, the devil falls like lightning from heaven, as well as at the preaching of the gospel by the disciples, Luke

10:18. It expels his, and introduceth another empire. This is our happiness, which is the devil's grief. That must be necessary for us, which God's and our great enemy took all the pains to stifle."⁴

- D. THE DUTY - Verse 13 rehearses the first appeal and forms the basis for the description of the armor that follows. The expression "after you have done everything" is one word in the Greek text, KATERGASAMENOI. "This verb is very frequently used by St. Paul, and always in the sense of 'producing' or 'accomplishing.' It occurs 18 times in the Epistles to the Romans and the Corinthians...Here, therefore, it is most naturally interpreted, as having accomplished all that your duty requires."⁵

CONCLUSION: We can never underestimate the critical nature of spiritual warfare—and yet an attitude of careless indifference characterizes many Christians today. We can never underestimate the importance of properly understanding how to engage in spiritual warfare as the Bible instructs us—and yet many Christians get caught up in the current fad of fighting in this arena in a way that is decidedly unscriptural. In both cases, the Church has beat a fast retreat. The sad truth is that the Church over the last century has been intellectually weak, structurally subordinate and on a practical level pitiful. The Church has lost her voice. She turns to other lovers (Freud, Jung, Rogers, and a host of other psychobabblers along with marketing consultants and like-minded experts in the field of church growth). Theologically, the Evangelical Church has for decades, been impoverished—and this has had a detrimental effect on *how* the Church does ministry. "The Church is also practically weak. Its practical theology and face-to-face ministry have typically been pitiful. At one end, the Church tends to be superficial, moralistic, "Just say 'no;'" "Have your quiet time, go to Church, all your problems will go away." At the other end the emphasis has been on a kind of spiritual quick fix: "Have the mountaintop experience with Jesus;" "Let go and let God;" "Cast out the demon of anger;" and in one dramatic act all your problems will be solved. All of the issues that you would have to deal with in the middle—all the heart-searching about how we know ourselves, about what's true about people, about how you love them and climb into their lives to work patiently with them—those sorts of things have tended to be seized by the other professions, and the Church has been left in a second-rate position."⁶ Heed the words of Thomas Brooks, "Beloved in our dearest Lord, Christ, the Scripture, your own hearts, and Satan's devices, are the four prime things that should be first and most studied and searched. If any cast off the study of these, they cannot be safe here, nor happy hereafter. It is my work as a Christian, but much more as I am a Watchman, to do my best to discover the fulness of Christ, the emptiness of the creature, and the snares of the great deceiver; which I have endeavoured to do, in the following Discourse, according to that measure of grace which I have received from the Lord. God once accepted a handful of meal for a sacrifice (Lev. 2:2; 5:12), and a gripe of goat's hair for an oblation; and I know that you have not so 'learned the Father,' as to despise 'the day of small things'" (Zech. 4:10).⁷

ENDNOTES

¹ Wilhelmus à Brakel, *The Christian's Reasonable Service* IV (Soli Deo Gloria, 1995) p. 237.

² G. Campbell Morgan, *The Westminster Pulpit* VIII (Pickering & Inglis, 1940), p. 75.

³ *The Works of Stephen Charnock* IV (rpt. The Banner of Truth, 1985), p. 59.

⁴ *Ibid.* p. 25.

⁵ J. Armitage Robinson, *Commentary On Ephesians: Exposition of the Greek Text* (rpt. Kregel, 1979), p. 214.

⁶ D. Powlison, "Modern Therapies and the Church's Faith," *The Journal of Biblical Counseling* (Vol. 15, No. 1, fall 1996), p. 35.

⁷ *The Works of Thomas Brooks*, I (rpt. The Banner of Truth, 1980), p. 3.