

CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

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The Lord's Prayer: The Sixth Petition (Part IV)

Not long ago a group of evangelical pastors from across the greater Phoenix area got together in order to engage in some very serious *spiritual warfare*. Determined to gain a victory over the forces of darkness in the Valley of the Sun, the pastors decided the best way to accomplish this was to first drive out the evil territorial spirits that had made the city their domain.¹ So the pastors stationed themselves strategically at the north, south, east and west points in the valley and proceeded to claim the city for Christ and *ordered* the demons, in true old west fashion, to get out of town by sundown! All of us have no doubt noticed that the valley of the Sun did not change very much as a result of the sincere but misguided efforts of these Christians. Unfortunately, what I have described is fairly common in many evangelical circles (especially in Pentecostal and charismatic churches). In the words of David Powlison, "A great deal of fiction, superstition, fantasy, nonsense, nuttiness, and downright heresy flourishes in the church under the guise of "spiritual warfare" in our time."² There are two extremes to avoid when approaching this subject. The first one is the one we have already alluded to – seeing demons and devils everywhere and becoming so preoccupied with this dimension of spiritual warfare that we lose our perspective. The second danger is just the opposite – we fail to recognize that there are such beings as described in this text in Ephesians (and many other places in Scripture). To ignore the reality of such a situation is dangerous. "The Christian conflict is not only real, it is difficult and dangerous. It is one in which true believers are often grievously wounded; and multitudes of reputed believers entirely succumb. It is one also in which great mistakes are often committed and serious loss incurred from ignorance of its nature, and of the appropriate means for carrying it on. Men are apt to regard it as a mere moral conflict between reason and conscience on the one side, and evil passions on the other. They therefore rely on their own strength, and upon the resources of nature for success. Against these mistakes the apostle warns this readers."³ We shouldn't fail to notice the place this section is located in the epistle, and, for that matter, the glorious content of the epistle itself. Paul's description of the "Holy War" takes place within the same epistle where he has rehearsed the Christian's election, position and blessings in Christ. Paul has already mentioned the "devil" as such in 2:2 and 4:27. Now the Apostle brings us face to face with an awful reality: the devil and his forces are not foes long ago vanquished, that once we became believers, he no longer concerns us, or that he only affects the unbeliever. No indeed. And as the Apostle brings this epistle to a close, he directs our attention to the forces of darkness that confront us in this life.

I. THE CALL TO BATTLE: SOUND THE ALARM! (vv.10-11)

"Finally", the expression is TOULOIPOU, lit., for "the remaining;" it is used to conclude matters. However, in context, it may be an expression used to denote "for the remaining time," a reference to the conflict which believers will be engaged in until Christ's Second Coming. In either case, Paul is drawing attention to the present hostilities.

A. The Call to Be Strong (v. 10) "be strong in the Lord", ENDUNAMOUSTHE, present passive imperative, lit. to be empowered, to be strengthened. "This note of strength was sounded at the outset. The Apostle prayed that they might know the exceeding greatness of His power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of the might of His strength, which He hath wrought in Christ (1:19f.), as the Resurrection and Ascension have testified. There the triumph of Christ occupied the Apostle's mind: Christ's exaltation in the heavenly sphere above all forces, good or evil, of the spiritual world. Here he has in view the need of the same mighty strength, in order that the Church may realize and consummate the triumph. A comparison of the two passages will show how much of the earlier language is repeated in this final charge."⁴ "And His mighty (ISCHUS) power (KRATOS)." Paul is not exhorting them to be strong in and of themselves as the passive voice makes clear. But it *is* an imperative. Notice, however, that the modifier is "in the Lord". He is the source for strength, power and might.

B. The Call to be Armored. (v. 11) – “Put on”, ENDUSASTHE, aorist middle (something you do for yourself) imperative, lit. to put on, to clothe one’s self, “the full armor”, PANOPLIA, lit. complete armor. This will be described in the following verses. Here it is called “God’s armor”; the armor He provides.

1. The reason. “so that you can take your stand” (STENAI, aorist active infinitive to stand). “The word could be used in a military sense indicating either ‘to take over,’ ‘to hold a watch post,’ or it could also mean ‘to stand and hold out in a critical position on a battle field’ against the devil’s schemes”.⁵ The last word is METHODEIAS. We have already encountered the word in 4:14. The word refers to craftiness. The devil (DIABOLOS, slanderer) is a foe to be reckoned with. He has, in addition to his angelic nature, had thousands of years of experience. “If we underestimate our spiritual enemy, we shall see no need for God’s armour, we shall go out to the battle unarmed with no weapons but our own puny strength and we shall be quickly and ignominiously defeated.”⁶

NOTE: We are confronted with the believer’s responsibility in this text. Regardless of how firmly you believe in the absolute sovereignty of God (Paul certainly believed this) responsibility is not done away with or played off against God’s sovereignty. The words of Wm. Hendriksen, and very strict Calvinist, should be taken to heart. “It is true that the counsel of God from eternity will never fail, but it is just as true that in the plan of God from eternity it was decided that victory will be given to those who overcome (Rev. 2:7, 11, 17, etc.). Overcomers are conquerors, and in order to conquer one must fight!”⁷

II. THE ENEMY IN THE CONFRONTATION (v. 12)

We are involved in a “struggle”, PALE, lit. wrestling. The word refers to hand to hand combat, which involves strength as well as cunningness. Paul now spells out the nature of this struggle:

- A. What It Is Not. “not against flesh and blood”. The meaning is obvious. The emphasis is on the “we”; our foe is not human, even though the instruments the devil uses must struggle against an unseen force, not one clothed in flesh.
- B. What It Is. “but against rulers (ARCHAS), against authorities (EXOUSIAS), against the powers of this dark world (KOSMOKRATORAS) and against spiritual forces of evil (PNEUMATIKA TES PONERIAS) in the heavenly realms (EN TOIS EPOURANIOIS). Notice that in v. 12 we have the word “against”, PROS, five times to stress the face to face conflict to the finish. Paul has already declared (1:21) that Christ is exalted above all principalities and powers. He has further stated (3:10) that God’s wisdom in Christ has been displayed before them, and has declared elsewhere (Col. 2:15) that Christ has triumphed over them. Yet here he expressly declares that they are actively engaged in mortal combat against the saints. He describes them in three particular areas. (We will deal with this in greater detail later on).
 1. *They are powerful.* They have authority and the right to exercise it. Even though the Lord Christ has defeated them and the sentence against them has been pronounced, they still have a season in which to carry out their schemes.
 2. *They are wicked.* This is not an abstract expression referring to wickedness in general, but to wicked beings. Darkness is declared to be their natural habitat, and the sphere of their operation is in “the heavenly realms”. This is a reference to the sphere of the invisible as over against the visible. It is likewise a parallel to “the domain of the air” used in 2:2. The point is this: we must contend with that which is not natural to us. The so-called “five senses” are useless. Not only do we not fight flesh and blood, but flesh and blood is worthless against this enemy. This is not to say, however, that our *understanding* is somehow held in abeyance. Spiritual warfare directly involves our minds (cf. II Cor. 10:4-5 where Paul speaks of the spiritual weapons of our warfare in the context of demolishing *arguments* and taking captive every *thought* to make it obedient to Christ).
 3. *They are cunning.* They are organized and have various methods of accomplishing their task. Furthermore we must realize they have no sense of “fair play”. They are as ruthless and unscrupulous as they are cunning.

III. THE CALL TO STAND (v. 13)

“Therefore put on” (ANALABETE, aorist active imperative, lit. to take up). “The word was used as a military technical term describing the last preparation and final step necessary before the actual battle begins.”⁸ Note the aorist imperative, a demand for immediate action. “the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes you may be able to stand your ground.” The expression “day of evil” refers not to some far off time, but to the present day of evil, when the day is evil or full of trials and temptation.

Seeing as how we will never know when we will be assaulted we must always be prepared to “stand”, AVISTENAI, to resist, to stand against. The idea is of withstanding opposition, “after you have done everything” KATERGASAMENOI, lit. to carry out, to accomplish. It means not only ‘having made all necessary preparation, but indicates having done everything which the present situation demands in order that the opposition may be resisted effectively.

CONCLUSION: Between the years of 1662 and 1665 the Puritan William Gurnall preached a series of sermons that were later published as *The Christian in Complete Armour; A Treatise of the Saints’ War Against the Devil*. The book is a commentary on Eph. 6:10-18. It is 1189 pages long (double column at that!). All that writing on eight verses! The Puritans were very serious about spiritual warfare. It is hard to find one of the major Puritan writers who did not deal with this passage in some detail. They realized the “real” world that the Christian has to live in and the reality of the spiritual forces of wickedness. “The Christian’s armour is made to be worn; no laying down or putting off our armour, till we have done our warfare, and finished our course. Our armour and our garment of flesh go off together; then, indeed, will be no need of watch and ward, shield or helmet. Those military duties and field-graces – as I may call faith, hope, and the rest – shall be honourably discharged. In heaven we shall appear, not in armour, but in robes of glory. But here these are to be worn night and day; we must walk, work, and sleep in them, or else we are not true soldiers of Christ.”⁹

ENDNOTES

¹ The concept of territorial spirits is not Biblical. It is, in fact, a very recent development. Frank Peretti’s two novels *This Present Darkness* (1986) and *Piercing the Darkness* (1989) have done much to captivate the imagination of many. Among those who have had the most impact in disseminating this are John Dawson, *Taking our Cities for God: How to Break Spiritual Strongholds* (Creation House, 1989) and C. Peter Wagner, ed. *Territorial Spirits: Insights on Strategic-level Spiritual Warfare from Nineteen Christian Leaders* (Sovereign World, 1991). The best Biblical/Theological critique of this is M.R. Taylor, *Do Demons Rule Your Town? An Examination of the Territorial Spirits’ Theory* (Grace Publications, 1993).

² D. Powlison, *Power Encounters: Reclaiming Spiritual Warfare* (Baker, 1977), p. 373

³ Charles Hodge, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Ephesians* (rpt. Revell, 1977), p. 373

⁴ J. Armitage Robinson, *Commentary on Ephesians: An Exposition of the Greek Text* (rpt. Kregel, 1979), p. 212.

⁵ F. Rienecker and C. Rogers, *Linguistic Key to the Greek New Testament* (Zondervan, 1979), p. 540.

⁶ J.R.W. Stott, *God’s New Society: The Message of Ephesians* (IVP, 1979), p. 142.

⁷ Wm. Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary: Expositions of Ephesians* (Baker, 1976), p. 271.

⁸ Markus Barth, *The Anchor Bible: Ephesians II* (Doubleday, 1981), p. 764

⁹ W. Gurnall, *The Christian In Complete Armour* (rpt. The Banner of Truth, 1974), p. 61.