

Standing Firm: Prepared for Perpetual Onslaught – Part 1
Ephesians 6:10-14a

“Put on the whole armor of God that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil”

Introduction: It’s not difficult to dupe anyone some of the time. We’ve all been taken advantage of by a salesman, some have been lied to on a date (or dating website), and others have believed that if their team spent the most money in free agency they would actually win the World Series (oops!). But to deceive everyone in mass, that takes special talent and commitment.

During the ramp up and perpetuation of German power during WWII, the Nazi party had to find a way to conduct audaciously monstrous atrocities without losing the good will of the German people. How could they ship off a German’s citizen’s friend, neighbor, barber, accountant, or local restaurateur to unknown prisons, or put them in huddled ghettos, or murder them without a revolt? They had to introduce “The Big Lie”. The following quote is most likely *wrongly* attributed to Joseph Goebbels, the head of Propaganda, but the quote defines the lie:

“If you tell a lie big enough and keep repeating it, people will eventually come to believe it. The lie can be maintained only for such time as the State can shield the people from the political, economic and/or military consequences of the lie. It thus becomes vitally important for the State to use all of its powers to repress dissent, for the truth is the mortal enemy of the lie, and thus by extension, the truth is the greatest enemy of the State.”

This is an oft repeated strategy used today. Repeat something that would have been unthinkable even a few years ago long enough and loud enough and you can convince the masses that it is true. We have seen the normalization of horrendous, offensive, and rebellious behavior and beliefs that not only have become the law of the land, to dispute them puts you in the crosshairs of hate. Believing there are only two genders is known and believed by the youngest of children, but now is argued and laughed at as the masses continue to pile up more and more gender possibilities. A majority of people, including some “conservatives” are ok with the idea of some form of abortion, just not the later stages. Young people especially are convinced that it is our duty and religious mission to somehow “save the planet”, as if ruining the environment with batteries and not oil is a plausible solution. People have even bought into the idea that since there is no right or wrong, no moral absolutes, that to tell someone given over to drugs that they need help and the best thing is to STOP drugs is actually doing them HARM, since we cannot overstep our bounds of how someone feels emotionally.

Each of these is the result of “The Big Lie”. Say it loud enough, long enough, with enough “professional” backup, ridicule any response, accuse anyone who questions, and change the subject when logic is infused, and the lie is perpetuated. ***Why do I bring all these up?*** These are ALL products of the reign and influence of the *Prince of the power of the air, the unfolding of the sinister yet brilliant ploy of the devil, and the game plan of our arch nemesis*. In understanding how he operates, it allows us to see **how we need to be prepared and to prepare successive generations for the fight of their life!**

The Enemy We Are Up Against (6:10-13)

*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. 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

Understanding our Enemy:

Satan is a schemer. Here he does not use only one type of scheme, but the word is plural, meaning he uses multiple schemes and types of schemes to devour people. The word **scheme** here is the word “method” or “strategy”, meaning he is on a constant hunt and strategizing how he can devour people, striving to cause confusion and preying on our struggles and insecurities. He is also powerful, more powerful than we are alone, but his power is limited and even delegated by God himself. So understanding *how he operates allows us to be prepared and see clearly his attacks.*

- **Lying is the foundation for all of his operation** – John 8:44 says that when the devil lies, he simply speaks out of his own character, since he is a liar and the father of lies. That means that his main modus operandi is to *deceive, to trick, to use cunning and subtlety* as tactics. Remember, he was so bold and brazen that he even tried to use lies on Jesus in the Wilderness after Jesus was weakened by 40 days of fasting (Luke 4:1-13). Satan functions with *accusations, imitations, and confusion*, which means that the **truth is the ultimate antidote to his lies, since he HATES the truth.**
- **Deception and Temptation are main weapons of his warfare** – He tried it on Jesus (Matt. 4:1) and taught a master class in the Garden of Eden with Adam and Eve (“*did God actually say?*”) He cannot MAKE us sin nor can he possess a believer who is already indwelt by the Holy Spirit. But he definitely has studied our weak areas, has knowledge of our secret sins, and will use them against us, whispering the lie or presenting us with opportunities to fail. He’ll use our **anger as a reason to divide** (Eph. 4:26-28) or lack of intimacy in marriage to drive a bigger wedge (1 Cor. 7:5) and tempt to go outside of the marriage bond. You better believe he will use our falsehood, thieving, bitterness, lack of forgiveness, impurity, lust, and idolatry against us as well. He wants to gain footholds and will always remind us of our old self, that we are not truly forgiven, or that we can never really change.

Let me try to illustrate how he operates in two practical ways to try to show the severity of this ploy **1) He uses social pressure to affect how people view themselves, especially our young people** – We live in a growing digital age where people are aware of what’s going on with other people constantly. When I was a teenager, you’d go home and not really worry about stuff till the next day. But now students (and adults) can check in on the activities of their friends or random people, which builds into their fears and insecurities, from *missing out, or being left out, or playing the never ending comparison game.* Validation comes with how many people liked a photo or commented on it. But there is no rest. As the comparison game takes hold, folks are left frustrated, hopeless, and feeling like *they are not worth it* or that their life does not matter. This is a lie from the pit of hell from our deceptive enemy. Our children are told to do whatever makes them feel good or happy, and when they realize that they cannot attain it, they are left with desperation, hopelessness, and despair...right where our enemy wants them.

2) He tries to isolate people, convincing them that NO ONE understands them – This is a continuance of the first deception, but this happens particularly in the church. The church should be a place where one can be fully known and fully loved, where sinners know the freedom of forgiveness, and where we genuinely help each other on a path of sanctification. But often because of negative experiences or wrong thinking, we begin to think “No one is like me”, or “everyone else belongs but not me”, or “I’m

not in the inner circle” and do not fit here. Each of these leads people to isolate and move AWAY from a vital part of a joyful life in Christ. Satan loves to cause division, to see factions, and see followers of Jesus bail on relationships and the church.

- **He is powerful, but limited** – This is important. We do not go demon hunting or look to go toe to toe with Satan. He is given power from God to affect physical realities like weather, nations, and even supernatural events (Job 1:15-19). He can cause physical ailments (Job 2:7-8). He hindered Paul from going to Thessalonica (1 Thess. 2:18). He blinds eyes of unbelievers from the truth (2 Cor. 4:4) and places snares out for believers/leaders (1 Tim. 3:7). He wrestled the angel Michael for the body of Moses (Jude 9), had people thrown into prison (Rev. 2:10), and possessed the bodies of unbelievers (Luke 9:42; Matt. 9:32). He controls the course of this world (Eph. 2:2) and is the spirit at work in the sons of disobedience, and this world is his domain of darkness (Col. 1:13). Because of this control, he exists in tempting with materialism, the desires of the flesh, the desires of the eyes and the pride of life (1 John 2:15-17). He can control systems, politics, judicial systems, and economic structures. But he is limited in his power by God, as we saw in the book of Job. He can only grovel at the feet of the Lord but not usurp it.
- **He cannot take away our salvation...but he wants us to think he can** – The doctrine of the assurance of salvation is one of the most restful, glorious, joyful truths that we possess, that nothing can separate us from God’s love (Romans 8:37-39), even cosmic rulers or powers, and no one can steal us out of Christ’s hand (John 10:28-29). But he does not have to take away our salvation to make us ineffective. If he can cause us to question the finished work of Christ, or make us think we have to earn salvation, or that we’ve out-sinned grace, he will leave us joyless and impotent in our mission, and he will claim victory.
- **He is dangerous but not to be feared** – The devil’s head was cut off at the cross. He knew he was doomed but still tried to inflict as much pain on Christ as he could, from entering into Judas to betray Him to seeing Christ lifted up on a cross through injustice. But at the point of what seemed to be the devil’s greatest victory, watching the Son of God writhe in pain on the cross, dying a slow and agonizing death, it actually sealed his own fate. “...**that through death he (Christ) might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery**” (Heb. 2:14-15), sealing his final death by being thrown into the lake of fire with the beast and false prophet, where they will be tormented day and night forever and ever (Rev. 20:10), along with Death and Hades (Rev. 20:14). His end is sure. He loses. But he remains a threat. That is why James said we do not fight him but **resist him** (James 4:7) and he will flee from us.

Grasping our Responsibility

Be very careful, then, how you live (Eph. 5:15), put on the full armor of God (Eph. 6:11), prepare your minds for action (1 Peter 1:13), make every effort (2 Peter 1:5), be self-controlled and alert (1 Peter 5:8).

*These are battle cries, and Scripture is full of them. But unlike our old conception of warfare, where battle lines are clear and the times of battle can almost be predicted, **this is modern warfare in which you are not always sure where the enemy lurks. It is guerilla warfare.** There are strategically placed snipers. You let down your guard for a moment and the village you thought was safe suddenly opens fire on you¹.*

¹ Welch

Paul uses the language of warfare for two main reasons: 1) It's an apt description of the Christian life with a defined enemy; 2) He wrote this letter chained to a soldier, or at least with a soldier present, most likely watching them come on and go during his imprisonment. Soldiers deal in the realm of life and death, in constant threats which demand consistent preparation. Notice that he will describe **the armor a Christian must wear**, which we will dig into next time, but also the vigilance it demands.

- **Armor is something that needs to be PUT ON (11)** – A soldier would not only be foolish to function in a Roman phalanx without armor, he'd also be dead. God has PROVIDED each believer with resources tailor made to resist and protect from the enemy. The word "Put on" here is a command, but it is also in the middle voice, with means it is something we need to do. Failure to put on the armor available leaves us susceptible to lies and deception, which means when we find ourselves or a fellow believer giving in to deception, the corrective call is to PUT ON your armor.
- **The Struggle is real (12)** – The word Paul uses in verse 12 is "wrestle", which meant hand to hand combat. There is a real, cosmic, ongoing, demonic struggle in our lives every day. Our enemy knows us and Scripture well. They have delegated authority, and hand to hand combat was exhausting, messy, and incredibly personal. Our enemy does not fight fair and will bring up our past, prey on our greatest fear, appeal to our pride, and rile up our anger. He will try to persuade us that our identity is in *anything except Christ, to trust ourselves, to stir up division, and even cause physical ailments* to make us as ineffective as he can.
- **Standing Firm is the call (11, 13-14)** – Because the fight is so real and dangerous, notice that Paul does not use the word "walk", but rather the word "stand", which again was a military term of a soldier dug in, holding a critical position that was under attack. In a Roman fighting line, soldier would often have to hold on as waves of enemies would crash into them. Here, Paul is signaling that our battle with Satan and his forces is not a **boxing ring** but a defensive line. It is not a conquering word but neither does it mean to lose ground. We'll see that we stand on the sovereignty of God, the finished work of Christ and the unchanging nature of God's Word to withstand the promised attacks of our enemy.
- **Diligent Preparation is demanded** – Finally, he says that our armor needs to be "*taken up*", which was a word that described the last preparation and final step necessary before the actual battle begins. The word did not mean a fluctuation of preparedness, but a constant and vigilant kind.

Comprehending Our Victory

We are in a fight. But we remember a few things:

- 1) **The victory over evil, death, rulers, cosmic powers, and spiritual forces has ultimately been fought and WON by Jesus Christ** – He has put all things under his feet. Satan has NO AUTHORITY over us, and only can do what God allows him. So we do not fear him, but resist him, we don't fight him but stand against, giving him no opportunities in our life. That is why we can operate in **strength**, but NOT our own strength, but the strength of the might of Christ (v. 10). The battle has been fought and won, and though Satan is dangerous like a snake with his head cut off, he has no ultimate power over us.

- 2) **Our enemy is NOT people but the power behind** – Satan is our enemy but people are our mission. There is a reason why there is a liberal agenda and polarizing politics. It divides people. It blinds people. Our mission is NOT to produce a better government but to destroy strongholds with the truth (2 Cor. 10:3-5), to cut through the lie with the truth, to engage people with the ministry of reconciliation, begging and urging people to be reconciled to Christ (2 Cor. 5:20-21), gladly spending and being spent for people's souls (2 Cor. 12:15).
- 3) **We must gear up for battle each and every day** – Our enemy is active and looking for opportunities. We have assurance and security in our salvation to repent of our sin, to turn from temptation, and to seek to please Christ in all things. So we must approach each day not as a vacation or trying to avoid conflict, but to realize we are smack dab in the middle of an ongoing one, which necessitates us to be filled with the Spirit, centered on God's Word, and dependant on grace.

Taking up our Resources

"Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth..."

If the fight is real, what are our resources? The first piece of armor mentioned *"is basic to all other pieces because truth and trustworthiness are basic to all the other qualities that believers need in order to withstand diabolical attacks."*² Truth has the idea of **reality**, which is reliable as opposed to what is false. Truth is the antidote to the lie, and where we go for truth is the matter of life and death.

How do we take a stand against the schemes of the devil? We gird up or bind ourselves around the truth. The picture was a tunic or outer garment worn by soldiers that during wartime would be pulled in tightly, under the other armor, so as not to leave something to be grasped by an enemy. It was to be fastened up around the waste so that a soldier would not trip over it or lose his footing. It's a beautiful picture of preparedness, anticipation, and alertness. This would require **self-discipline and TOTAL commitment, the recognition of a life and death struggle and battle.**

So here is the question that we build on in our discussion from two weeks ago about our intake of God's Word: *are we Biblically prepared for the deceptive onslaught of our enemy?* Are we content with mediocrity, lethargy, and indifference when it comes to studying and knowing the truth of God's Word? I talked with a friend this week who was convicted that he couldn't answer his young sons questions about the Bible. The recognition was NOT that the answers were unknowable, but that he had not taken the time required to know them. We are willing to sacrifice and discipline ourselves for many things, but far too often we are unwilling to put in the work and time it takes to know God's Word. There are no short cuts, no other options, and no excuses. We either will be prepared or leave ourselves open to the inevitable attacks.

In the Lord of the Rings, when the King of Rohan was confronted with the reality that a swarming horde of evil from Sauron was approaching his land, he was challenged to rally his people to fight, drawing them away from the women and children. In protest, he claimed, *"I know what you want from me, but I will not bring further death to my people. I will not risk open war."* Aragorn replied with simplicity and cutting reality, *"Open war is upon you, whether you would risk it or not."* The war is raging...are we ready?

² Harold Hoehner, "Commentary on Ephesians", p. 840.