

Finding Strength in the Lord

Ephesians 6:10-13

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This past week, I watched a few segments from a documentary called, “*Deadly Hunters*.” I was hooked after reading the synopsis: “*Earth is home to fearsome creatures armed to the teeth and in possession of a predatory prowess few can escape. One bite of some creatures is enough to take down a full-grown elephant. Not only are they perfectly adapted to be all but invisible, they are armed with a lethal cocktail of heart-stopping venom. These snakes, spiders and scorpions do not play games.*”

For instance, the Saharan Sand Viper from Africa buries its body in the sand, except for its eyes and a small section of the tail, which it moves back and forth as bait. The snake lies in ambush until an unsuspecting victim is attracted by the movement, paralyzed by venom, and swallowed whole. As I watched, I wanted to warn the animal about the invisible serpent before it walked into the trap.

While I couldn’t save the prey from the snake, I do pray that God will use this message to prevent us from falling prey to the slithering serpent known as Satan.

Let’s give our attention to Ephesians 6:10-13: 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.*** 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.***

As we begin, let’s pray this prayer together from *The Valley of Vision*.

We bless thee that the issue of the battle between ourselves and Satan has never been uncertain and will end in victory. Calvary broke the dragon’s head, and we contend with a vanquished foe, who with all his subtlety and strength, has already been overcome. When we feel the serpent at our heels, may we remember Him whose heel was bruised, but who, when bruised, broke the devil’s head.

As we have mentioned, the Book of Ephesians has two major divisions: *doctrine* (1-3), and *duty* (4-6). The first half exalts our *position* in Christ, while the second half exhorts us to put it into *practice*. A case could be made that there's actually a third section of the book we could call *spiritual warfare*. We could outline it like this:

- *Wealth* (1:1-3:21).
- *Walk* (4:1-6:9).
- *Warfare* (6:10-24).

In our study of Ephesians, we've walked through our *heavenly calling* and our *earthly conduct*, and for the next two weeks, we'll consider our *spiritual conflict*. Incidentally, D. Martin-Lloyd Jones preached 52 sermons on this section of Ephesians 6 and I'm only preaching two messages on these verses!

I appreciate how one pastor captured the flow of Ephesians: "*Having instructed the church concerning her wonderful privileges and opportunities, and having exhorted the church concerning her great responsibilities, Paul concludes with a vital explanation of her vulnerabilities coupled with an encouragement about her possibilities.*"

Here's our main idea: *Stand against Satan in the strength of the Lord.*

1. Be strong in the Lord. We see this in verse 10: "***Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might.***" The word "***finally***" can mean, "*in conclusion*" or "*most importantly.*" While our culture tells us to be strong in ourselves, the Bible urges us to "***be strong in the Lord,***" or more literally, "*be made strong in the Lord.*" Psalm 28:8 says, "***The Lord is the strength of His people...***" Deuteronomy 20:4 shows we can be strong only through the Lord's strength: "***For the LORD your God is He who goes with you to fight for you against your enemies, to give you the victory.***"

The phrase, "***strength of His might***" takes us to the prayer found in Ephesians 1:19: "***...according to the power of His great might.***" The only way to experience this power is to live out our position through prayer. We're to fight in the power of His might because as one pastor says, "*when you were transferred out of the domain of darkness into the kingdom of God's dear Son, you were added to the devil's most wanted list.*" Because of that, spiritual battles require spiritual strength.

H.B. Charles says we need to be strong in the Lord because we have three spiritual enemies who attack us relentlessly.

- The world is our external enemy.
- The flesh is our internal enemy.
- The devil is our infernal enemy.

Charles Spurgeon gave a great challenge: *“When you sleep, remember you are resting on the battlefield; when you travel, suspect an ambush in every hedge.”* Chuck Swindoll captured it this way: *“When you began the Christian life, you did not stroll onto a happy playground...you stepped into a harsh spiritual battleground.”* My pastor friend Bob Boerman summarized spiritual warfare like this: *“As Christians, we play into the hands of Satan and his demonic hosts when we approach warfare as a novel game or curiosity rather than a conspiracy from the pit of Hell.”*

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2. Suit up with the armor of God. The first part of verse 11 is a command: ***“Put on the whole armor of God.”*** God’s armor has been provided for us, but we must put it on. The word **“whole”** in Greek is *panoplia*, which refers to the complete set of armor. Drop down to verse 13 where we see a similar command: ***“Therefore take up the whole armor of God...”*** We’re to take it up and put it on. The command is repeated because it’s essential for believers to be prepared and protected for spiritual battle. In both instances, the emphasis is on the **“whole”** armor of God.

Paul was in Rome which was filled with soldiers wearing armor. In addition, he was chained to a soldier, so he would have had ample opportunity to consider the spiritual implications of each piece of the armor. We’ll look more closely at the armor of God in next weekend’s message.

3. Stand against the schemes of the devil. On this Memorial Day weekend, we remember those men and women who gave their lives by serving valiantly in the military. I’m reminded of what Abraham Lincoln said to his troops: *“Be sure you put your feet in the right place, then stand firm.”* That applies to the spiritual battle we are in: *“Be sure you put your feet in the right place, then stand firm.”*

Once we put on the whole armor of God, the second half of verse 11 gives us a promise, ***“that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil.”*** To

“stand” is a posture of strength and opposition. The idea is to hold your ground while under attack. Notice we’re not to attack the devil or flee from him, because there’s no armor for our backs. If we turn and run out of fear, we will be vulnerable to the Viper who is waiting to strike.

James 4:7 says, **“Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.”** 1 Peter 5:8-9 reinforces this: **“Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. Resist him, firm in your faith...”** Peter is calling us to get serious, to be spiritually alert and to stay on guard. The force behind the command is: *Stay awake! Be ready! Watch out! Don’t be a spiritual sluggard!* The word **“adversary”** refers to an opponent or enemy. The devil and his demons hate Christ, and they hate Christians.

It’s good to be reminded what C.S. Lewis said as we consider the topic of spiritual warfare: *“There are two equal and opposite errors into which our race can fall about the devils. One is to disbelieve in their existence. The other is to believe, and to feel an excessive and unhealthy interest in them.”*

Lucifer is called **“Satan”** in 1 Chronicles 21:1. That’s what Jesus called him in Matthew 4:10. He’s also called **“the devil”** in Matthew 4:1, the **“serpent”** in Genesis 3:1, **“Beelzebub”** in Matthew 10:25, the **“ruler of this world”** in John 12:31, the **“evil one”** in Matthew 13:19 and **“the prince of the power of the air”** in Ephesians 2:2. 2 Corinthians 4:4 calls him **“the god of this world.”**

Revelation 12:9 lists five different names for the evil one: **“And the great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world—he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him.”**

While the phrase **“armor of God”** is used twice in Ephesians 6, the command to stand is used four times, showing how important it is.

- Verse 11: **“stand against the schemes of the devil.”**
- Verse 13: **“able to withstand in the evil day.”**
- Verse 13: **“stand firm.”**
- Verse 14: **“stand therefore.”**

I’ve heard the worst thing you can do when a lion is stalking you is to run. I don’t have any experience in that regard but when I was on a mission trip to Zimbabwe

in the early 80s, an elephant started to charge our group when we were on a safari. I remember our guide shouting at us, “*Don’t run. Stand still. He won’t know what to do if you stare him down.*” That was counter-intuitive because I wanted to get out of there.

It’s fascinating how we’re told to flee immorality, idolatry, and youthful lusts, but we’re never instructed to flee from the devil. We’re to resist him, not run from him. Having said that, you *should run* from every connection with the occult, including Ouija boards, Wicca, witchcraft, astrology, horoscopes, séances, psychics, speaking to the dead, or other paranormal encounters.

We’re to stand against the evil one, or more specifically, “*against the schemes of the devil.*” The word “*schemes*” is the Greek word *methodias*, from which we get “*methods.*” It was used of a wild animal who cunningly stalked and then unexpectedly pounced on its prey. As one pastor says, “*Satan’s evil schemes are built around stealth and deception.*”

The devil’s methods are manifold, and they are all around us. Satan has a strategy which is clever and crafty, using deception and trickery to work his wiles on his unsuspecting victims. We came across this earlier in Ephesians 4:14: “*So that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes.*”

2 Corinthians 11:3 tells us, “*the serpent deceived Eve by his cunning.*”

According to 2 Corinthians 2:11, we need to be aware of how the devil works so we are not defeated: “*so that we would not be outwitted by Satan; for we are not ignorant of his designs.*” Until we know who our enemy is, where he is, and what he can do, we’ll have a difficult time defeating him.

Satan doesn’t fight fair, and he will use anything and everything he can to bring us down. His ways and wiles are attractive, deceptive, and ensnaring. Let’s consider some of his designs or schemes so we’re no longer ignorant of them. Here are 12 that come to mind.

- **Temptation.** Since Satan tempted Adam and Eve, the first of God’s greatest creation, he will also tempt you constantly.
- **Sexual sins and gender confusion.** I’m looking forward to our *Holy Sexuality* Conference with Christopher Yuan on October 5-6.
- **Addictions.**
- **Pornography.**

- **Guilt and shame.**
- **Doubts.**
- **False doctrine.** I came across this quote from Dean Dwyer this week: *“After all, if you are not in collision with the devil, you may well be in collusion with him. Satan figured out long ago that he could never destroy the church. He does more harm by imitation than outright opposition and he achieves much in this world by peddling false doctrine...”*
- **Anger and bitterness.** As we learned several weeks ago from Ephesians 4:26-27, Satan looks for unguarded areas where he can gain a beachhead into our lives: *“Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and give no opportunity to the devil.”*
- **Division.**
- **Discouragement.**
- **Distraction.**
- **Fear.** Just this week, Lifeway Research reported that 63% of pastors believe their church is fearful about the future of Christianity in our nation and world.

Stand against Satan in the strength of the Lord.

4. Steadfastly engage against spiritual forces. After making sure we are strong in the Lord, we’ve suited up with the armor of God, and we’re standing against the schemes of the devil, verse 12 describes who our real enemy is: *“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.”*

The word *“wrestle”* means, *“struggle for mastery”* and was used of the sport of wrestling but also for hand-to-hand combat in a fight to the death. The root idea is swaying back and forth while locked in mortal battle. I wrestled in high school and wasn’t very good. In fact, I got pinned in a matter of seconds while serving as captain during our homecoming match my senior year. Wrestling is very personal, and it’s very hard. A good wrestler is not afraid to get sweaty, a wrestler is a learner, listens to the coach, is disciplined, and knows how to take down an opponent while avoiding being pinned.

Our wrestling matches are not against people but take place in the invisible world. One writer summarizes it this way: *“The ideal war is one which no one realizes war is being waged, which is mostly invisible, not because its actions are*

camouflaged, but because they look like something else. War need never be declared again because we are always at war.”

While it’s difficult to know who the rulers, authorities, and cosmic powers are, here’s what we do know about the spiritual forces of evil:

- **They are numerous.** They are listed in the plural – rulers, authorities, cosmic powers, and spiritual forces of evil. We know there’s a multitude of malevolent beings from the answer the demonized man gave to Jesus in Mark 5:9: **“And Jesus asked him, ‘What is your name?’ He replied, ‘My name is Legion, for we are many.’”** A Roman legion was made up of 5,000 to 6,000 men! There are so many demons that Satan was able to send 6,000 of them to torment just one person.
- **They are organized.** There is a hierarchy among them, with different assigned roles between them. This demonic army has a defined and disciplined chain of command.
- **They are extremely powerful.** They are not dressed in red tights and sitting on your shoulder. J.B. Phillips calls them *“spiritual agents from the very headquarters of evil.”*
- **They are diabolically wicked.**
- **They are cunning and clever.**
- **They are seeking to wipe you out.** They follow their father, the devil who according to Jesus in John 10:10, **“comes only to steal and kill and destroy.”**

In light of all this, we need to heed Ephesians 6:13: **“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.”** The phrase, **“put on”** is a military term and literally means, *“take on to you.”* It’s the last step a soldier takes before going into battle. One pastor gives this challenge: *“Take up your armor, Christian, because all Hell will soon break loose against you. The ‘evil day’ refers to those moments of special temptation we all face...you never know in advance when one is coming your way.”*

Job certainly experienced the **“evil day”** when the devil attacked his body, his family, his possessions, and his friends. The devil’s desires are to make people give up, get angry at God, and turn away from Him.

Ephesians 5:15-16 says, **“Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time, because the days are evil.”** Things are bad

now, but they will only get worse according to 2 Timothy 3:1, 11: ***“But understand this, that in the last days there will come times of difficulty...while evil people and impostors will go on from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived.”***

Hold on to this promise from 1 John 4:4: ***“Little children, you are from God and have overcome them, for He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world.”*** Don’t make the mistake of thinking Satan is God’s opposite or his equal. He is a defeated foe on a very short leash. His destiny is determined according to Revelation 20:10: ***“And the devil who had deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur where the beast and the false prophet were, and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.”***

Let’s take courage from the lyrics to “A Mighty Fortress is our God” where we’re reminded how our ancient foe seeks to work us woe: *“His craft and power are great, and, armed with cruel hate...we tremble not for him; his rage we can endure, for lo his doom is sure, one little word shall fell him!”* That’s what Revelation 12:11 promises, ***“And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony.”*** 1 John 3:8 says the devil is a defeated combatant, ***“The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil.”***

Ray Pritchard writes: *“At the cross Satan thought he had defeated Jesus, but he only bruised his heel. Instead, it was Satan who was defeated when Jesus crushed his head. Calvary dealt a death-blow to the devil and his legions of demons. The cross mortally wounded the enemy of our souls...he fights on, defeated but not destroyed, using every weapon in his arsenal to convince us he has power to overcome us.”*

Action Steps

This passage should serve as a wake-up call for us. 2 Corinthians 10:4-5 urges us to be proactive and not passive in our approach to spiritual warfare: ***“For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ.”***

Here are some ways we can stay spiritually alert by taking every thought captive to obey Christ.

1. Keep praying for lost people. During our renovation, we encouraged people to write the names of unsaved loved ones on the southwest wall of the worship center. There are thousands of names up there behind the sound panels. Over the past several years, we've heard reports of many of these people coming to know Christ, most recently from one of those baptized this past weekend. If you've been praying for a loved one, don't stop! We need to keep praying because 2 Corinthians 4:4 says, ***“In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.”***

2. Keep sharing the gospel. Look for someone to share Jesus with every day. One creative way is to distribute some of our gospel resources in the community. Brad Lester has been taking copies of the *Anchor for the Soul* book and the *Ready or Not* booklet and putting them in the “Little Free Library” located on the Ben Butterworth Parkway. He estimates over 50 copies have been given away just this Spring. What can you do to get the gospel out?

3. March in tight formation with other believers. Satan wants to separate you from other believers where you will be vulnerable to his attacks. We've said it before because it's true: *If you unplug, you will unravel.* We are stronger together than we are alone. If your weekend worship attendance is spotty, it's time make it a priority. If you're not in a Growth Group, it's time to join a small platoon of fellow warriors.

4. Build up your spiritual defenses. Develop the disciplines of daily Bible reading, prayer, Scripture memory, fasting and meditation. We have monthly Bible reading plans available.

5. Read Ephesians 6:10-18 every day this week and put on your spiritual armor. If you've been drifting, it's time to repent. If you've compromised, it's time to recommit yourself to Christ.

6. Adopt a warfare mentality. I talked to a newer family last Sunday and was moved by how determined they were to do spiritual battle when they woke up. I asked the wife for permission to share what happened and this is what she wrote: *“My husband I both had a difficult night with no sleep; he was sore from lots of yard work, and I had a sinus cold. Our son woke up not feeling well and as we were pulling out of the garage, we realized we had a completely flat tire and had to switch cars causing us to run late. As we were driving to church, I thanked the*

kids and my husband for staying positive and as I reviewed the obstacles out loud, I said, 'Look at us making it happen...not today, Satan!'"

7. Get saved right now. C.S. Lewis revealed some insights into Satan's strategy by describing how a group of demons were discussing how best to keep someone from following Christ. One suggested they plant seeds of doubt about God. Another thought they could use hypocrisy to keep people away. After a number of other ideas were set forth, one of the younger demons hesitantly suggested, *"You've missed our most effective strategy...just tell them they have all the time in the world to decide. Tell them it's not that important. Tell them to wait another day..."*

If you're ready to repent and receive Christ so you will be transferred from the kingdom of Satan to the kingdom of God's Beloved Son, pray this prayer right now. Pray and don't delay.

Lord, I admit I am a sinner and deserve Your just judgment. I repent from trying to follow my own way and now turn to you as the only way. I believe Jesus died in my place on the cross and rose again on the third day and He defeated depravity, death, and the devil. I receive Jesus into my life. Please save me from my sins and from Your righteous wrath. I want to be born again so I place all my trust in You and You alone. If there's anything in my life You don't like, please get rid of it. I pray this in the name of Jesus. Amen.

New Members (10:45)

Chris, Liza, Grace and John Tucker