

# **life group study guide**

## **JESUS WON THE BATTLE ALREADY**

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Ephesians 6: 10-12

*“Finally, be strong in the Lord and in His mighty power. Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.”*

These verses are the culmination of the book of Ephesians, and the point on which they end is that each Christian is engaged in a great spiritual battle and must equip himself for it.

**To open our discussion: What is the great spiritual battle...**

**...in our nation?**

**...in our church?**

**...in your own life?**

Many Christian writers today encourage us to think positively and peacefully, as if there were no spiritual battles at all. They see Christianity, not as an entrance into warfare, but as an exit from it. They see it as the solution to our problems. If you are sick, Jesus will make you well. If you are discouraged, Jesus will make you happy. You get the impression from those who talk like this that to believe in Jesus is to enter upon a smooth path and to enjoy smooth sailing.

Another avenue of thought suggests that there is nothing (or at least very little) for us to do as Christians. “Let go and let God”, some say. That is, the battle is not ours; it is God’s. So just let go; let God do the fighting. At the most, you need only to stand your ground.

**Do you identify more closely with the “positive/peaceful” encourager or the “let God do the fighting” bystander?**

It is true, of course, that Paul does use the word “stand”. He uses it four times! But when he speaks of our armor, he speaks not only of defensive armor (such as our helmet, breastplate and shield), but also of our offensive weapon (our sword). And whether or not he is thinking of fighting offensively or defensively, he IS thinking of fighting against the most powerful and cunning foes. He seems to suggest that there is a proper balance, and it is struck between the two commands: “*Be strong in the Lord and in His mighty power*” and “*Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes*”. We are reminded by this combination of commands that **WE ARE UNEQUAL**

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TO THE BATTLE. We have no strength; our strength must come from the Lord. Nevertheless, endowed with His strength, we are to fight these spiritual forces arrayed against us.

The first five chapters of Ephesians set the stage for this sixth chapter. The purposes of God are expounded, and then the existence of a devil who is opposed to those purposes is confirmed. John R. Stott writes of this: "Is God's plan to create a new society? Then they (the hostile spiritual forces) will do their utmost to destroy it. Has God through Jesus Christ broken down the walls dividing human beings of different races and cultures from each other? Then the devil through his emissaries will strive to rebuild those walls. Does God intend his reconciled and redeemed people to live together in harmony and purity? Then the powers of hell will scatter among them the seeds of discord and sin."

**Read Ephesians 5:22 to 6:9 aloud.**

The very fact that Paul follows his beautiful and uplifting portrait of peaceful Christian homes and happy Christian relations with a stark description of warfare indicates that even these things will not be achieved without conflict. Clearly the victories of the Christian life are to be achieved by a relentless and lifelong struggle against evil. And even then they are realized only to the extent that we avail ourselves of God's armor.

In describing the spiritual forces of evil against which we must contend, Paul says three important things about the devil:

- 1.) He is a great and powerful foe! It is not hard to demonstrate what a serious enemy he is. Reflect on the condition of Adam and Eve before the fall. They were far more intelligent and much wiser than we can ever hope to be; they were more aware of spiritual issues than we are; they were closer to God; there was nothing to separate them from God at all for they had not yet sinned. YET THEY FELL! What is striking about the story is that the devil seems to have had very little trouble bringing their defection about. Although Satan is not a spiritual counterpart to God (he is not omnipotent, omnipresent or omniscient), he is nevertheless a formidable foe. We are foolish if we think Satan can be resisted by human strength alone.

**Bible Trivia Time! Eve was one of only six individuals in all of Scripture who were tempted by Satan himself. Can you name the other five? (There may have been others, but these are the only ones the Bible tells us of specifically.) The answer is at the end of today's notes, so don't peek!**

- 2.) He is wicked and destructive! The devil stands behind the powers of "this dark world" and the forces "of evil" in the heavenly realms. Paul warns Christians that we will not merely encounter evil people, but rather that we are in a struggle against the evil behind such evil, whether we encounter evil people directly or not. If we are to

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overcome these powers, we must (as Stott says) “bear in mind that they have no moral principles, no code of honor, no higher feelings. They recognize no Geneva Convention to restrict or partially civilize the weapons of their warfare. They are utterly unscrupulous, and ruthless in the pursuit of their malicious designs.”

- 3.) He is extremely sly and crafty! The NIV uses the words “the devil’s schemes”. The King James and the Revised versions say “wiles”. The New English Bible uses the word “devices”. The devil does not always attack us directly or in the same way. He uses a variety of times and methods.

What are these schemes? Satan attacks:

- A. When the Christian is newly converted.
- B. When the Christian is afflicted.
- C. When the Christian has achieved some notable success.
- D. When the Christian is idle.
- E. When the Christian is isolated from others who share his faith.
- F. When the Christian is dying.

**Looking over the above list, can you think of a time when you (or someone you know) was attacked during one of these circumstances? Share the story with the group.**

Satan is subtle in his attacks. But he is NOT subtle only in the timing of his appearances. He is also crafty in HOW he attacks. Satan attacks:

- A. As a roaring lion. **Read 1 Peter 5:8.** Peter says that the devil comes to us as “a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour”. Peter means that Satan sometimes appears before us with a frightful roar, trying to terrify us into forgetting who we are and Whom we are to serve.
- B. As a friend. This is how Satan came to Eve. He did not come threatening, he came with an offer to help out. He would show her what God was really like. He would help her and Adam to “become like God, knowing good and evil”. **Read Genesis 3:5.** When Satan comes to us like that, remember that it is Jesus who is really your friend. Only Jesus sticks closer than a brother!
- C. As an angel of light. Satan loves to bring “enlightenment”. This form of temptation often comes from the college classroom: “Nobody believes those myths anymore. Scholarship has disproved all of that.” Many have fallen because they have followed the prince of darkness and his “light”.

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**Read James 4:7**

Satan is indeed a terrible enemy! If it were not for God and the provision He has made for us in this warfare, we would be discouraged and in despair for sure. But we are not to do that. That is why the Ephesians passage was written. It was written to tell us that, although we face a great and terrible enemy, the victory is not his...it is God's!

And it is our victory, too, if we arm ourselves as we are told to arm ourselves and persevere to the end. The conclusion is a simple one. Do not trust yourself. If we trust ourselves, we will certainly fall. But if we know our own weakness and therefore turn to God as our necessary defense against Satan, we will be able to stand against the devil's schemes.

Jesus won the battle already!!!

**Answers to Bible Trivia Time:**

**Job, Jesus Christ, Judas, Peter and Ananias**

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