

EPHESIANS

GOD'S PLAN FOR GOD'S CHURCH REVEALED

SERMON TITLE: The Armor of God

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SCRIPTURE: Ephesians 6:10-24

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The Book of Ephesians is a beautiful picture of the spiritual blessings we have in Christ and as members together in Jesus' Church. When he arrived, Jesus revealed what was once hidden from us throughout the ages through the power of the Holy Spirit. As a result, we're introduced to something new—a life in Christ where we find THE answer to the brokenness of this world. But what should this look like? How should we, in the power of the Holy Spirit, live this new life? Jesus' church is meant to be a source of wholeness and life amidst a world of brokenness and death. What does this entail? What does it mean practically? In this letter to the Ephesians, Paul explains the mystery of the church and gives us practical insight into living as believers who have been raised from death to life by faith in Christ.

Paul closes his letter to the Ephesians through a very clear and explicit warning about the Spiritual battle we are in. This thread is drawn through the book as a whole, and really all of Paul's theology, but this is one of the clearest places we see his writing speaking towards our true enemy.

For us to really grasp the severity of the warning we need to zoom out to see the Biblical narrative as a whole and the larger picture of what is contributing towards Paul's mindset in this moment. We need to verse ourselves in the Jewish viewpoint of Old Testament writings.

The Split.

In the beginning of the Bible, we read through the creation narrative. But it is so much more than that. It is really a story about how God shared Himself with His people and made His home among us so that we could delight in each other and ultimately in Him, resting and reigning with Him forever. Somewhere in the course of history, (the Old Testament doesn't concern itself with clarifying timelines or the order of events here) a rebellion happened in the Heavenly realm against God. Created beings, known as Angels, were led by one in particular (Lucifer) to overthrow God's rule and reign. They were not successful and were removed from the Heavenly places. If the adversary could not destroy God, perhaps he could destroy God's people and what God has made. Genesis 3 introduces this story – how men and women were deceived and joined the rebellion against God. The original creation was Heaven *on* Earth, but now in the midst of the rebellion those realms were severed and they became Heaven *and* Earth.

Originally Angels were designated to have various roles. Some messengers, some warriors, some helping to guide humanity. But now with the rebellion those fallen angels would proceed to hijack and corrupt humanity and the systems in which we operate. Behind the scenes darkness would influence humanity in its continued rebellion against God. Ever crafty, these systems of Evil were not easily named and even appeared as good or normal within cultures.

This is the framework Paul has in mind as he is writing this passage.

Ephesians 6:10-12

Paul clearly lays out here that our battle, our enemy, is not as easily identifiable as flesh and blood. It is a sinister, slippery evil that pervades history. It is more understood as "cosmic powers". Paul is referring to the rebellion and the evil that has ensued ever since.

What are the schemes of the Devil? Paul has already given us the reality of one of them in Ephesians 4:27 – exploit anger as a means to injure relationships among believers. There are others to be sure, but they all have one goal in mind: destroy. Destroy relationships, destroy unity, destroy marriages and families, destroy peace, etc. The list could go on. The Greek word for scheme is actually where we draw our English word for method. The methods of the Devil still operate off of the same template we saw in the Garden of Eden:

1. Question God's word (did God really say don't eat of that tree?)
2. Counterfeit God's authority (God won't do what He said)
3. Conquer God's supremacy (you can be like God)

The Devil is not a creator, he is a corruptor and these are still his methods today.

One mistake that Christians often make when it comes to this passage is viewing it as a rally cry for us to adopt a militaristic mindset, apply our own agenda, and crusade against specific individuals, organizations, or even retail stores. Let me say this clearly. This is not Paul's intent, nor Jesus', I believe. Our role in this life is not to try to name individuals and wage war against them, but to name the systems of Evil that exist in our world and resist their influence. What are those systems? Poverty, injustice, oppression, racism, idolatry, trafficking, abuse, and division just to name some. The Christian, the divine warrior, resists those systems, not by villainizing specific people, but by understanding there is a whole other realm at work in this world – a realm we cannot see, but certainly feel – and stands firm against their assaults.

How? How can we resist? By allowing what Eugene Peterson calls “resurrection living” to manifest. Paul seems to have two thoughts in mind.

Ephesians 6:13-17

1. We stand firm by finding our standing in what he's already laid out in this letter:
 1. Standing in our identity in Christ and what He's done
 2. Standing together as a community of believers creating healthy relationships, marriages, and families that are defined by Gospel ethics.
 3. Standing in the Spirit of God which has been given to us and who ensures our victory.
 2. Seeing the armor of God not as individual pieces to add or remove, but adopting the whole of them as a way of living.
- The six characteristics that should mark a believer:
1. Truth
 2. Righteousness
 3. Peace
 4. Faith
 5. Salvation
 6. Word of God

Ephesians 6:18-20

Paul closes this passage by focusing on prayer. He reveals two things in this passage. The first is that even someone like Paul was aware enough to know that he needed help and humble enough to ask for it. This paints a picture for the church that this should be common language among us. To seek the power of prayer from others who are tapped into the power of the Spirit. The second thing it reveals is more of a metric. It seems that as Paul encouraged believers to pray for one another and to keep alert there is an idea in mind: we will pray for one another to stand firm to the degree in which we actually believe there is a Spiritual battle at hand. It is a great question to ask ourselves, “How often do I actually pray for my brothers and sisters to stand firm against the evil forces of this world?” If the answer is minimal perhaps it is because we have not allowed the gravity of the Spiritual realm to concrete itself in our theology.

The bottom line in this passage is that God's people should name evil but resist it, not waging war against individuals. We resist evil by allowing resurrection living to become a reality which will manifest itself in six characteristics which act as armor for us. We understand the battle is real and pray for each other to stand strong.

Community Group Questions

READ Ephesians 6:10-24

1. Was there anything that stood out to you from the message? Did you learn something? Did you see something familiar but from a different angle?
2. In your experience, how have people typically thought about spiritual warfare in our culture? What are examples of things you've seen people do / heard people teach about it?
3. Recap. According to Matt, what are the 'cosmic powers' and spiritual forces of evil? Can you name some of the systems in which they thrive? (remember you're not naming individuals who you think might be evil, but rather systems that pervade culture that allow evil to flourish).
4. Recap. Can the group summarize the 'big picture view' of the Bible that Matt taught? Multiple people may need to contribute. That's ok!
5. How do we stand firm and resist the darkness according to Paul?
6. Where have you seen growth and maturity in your own life within the six characteristics of the armor of God (Truth, righteousness, peace, faith, salvation, Word of God)? Where do you find yourself struggling and in need of growth?
7. Does prayer and supplication mark your walk with Jesus? How often are you interceding for people you know or asking for prayer yourself? What if you closed the small group out tonight by praying for the person to your right?