

Be Strong in the Lord

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Date: 07 July 2024

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[0 : 00] Okay, I have a theme as I was working on the lesson this past week and reviewing the memory verses and thinking of the holiday that we just came through and recognizing that really there's a theme emerging here this morning.

Our memory verse has been showing the conflict between God and people in the nations that are in rebellion against Him, that rage against Him.

Then this past week, July 4th, we celebrated Independence Day, a day that came because of much conflict as well. And then this morning we begin a study on our topic of spiritual conflict and the armor of the Lord.

Most people don't like conflict on any level, really, individually. Or even as a nation. It's something that we try to avoid.

I think back, again, as I was doing this lesson, preparing this lesson, and thinking about this whole matter of conflict and avoiding conflict. My father was a participant in World War II, and most people in the United States, politicians, etc., after World War I, they wanted nothing to do with another world war.

[1 : 25] They wanted to avoid it at all costs. They had enough of wars. But avoiding it was not possible.

It came to our country. It came to our nation. And as a result, we were plunged into World War II. In Ephesians 6, Paul directs his readers to a war that they couldn't avoid either, that we cannot avoid. And they and we need to be aware of the nature of the warfare that we are in, the resources that God has provided for us in the midst of this conflict, and how we can stand firm in the midst of the conflict.

And as it was true for Paul's readers, and so it's true for us as well. While this letter was written by the Apostle Paul to the church in Ephesus and other churches in Asia Minor, I think we always need to remember and approach the Scriptures with the sense and understanding that this is God's personal letter to us, to us today, with the information that we need in these days.

It's been preserved by God for us to read, to study, to apply, so that we too can stand firm in the midst of the warfare that we cannot avoid.

[2 : 53] But we can fight with the resources that God has provided and use at this time, in the place in which we live, in the circumstances that we're all passing through, different as they might be.

And then we can also walk in a manner worthy of the calling that we have from God today. So let's look at this important message that God has for us.

You can open your Bibles to Ephesians 6. I'll provide a lot of the passages on the screen.

Ephesians 6, chapters 1 through 3, Paul writes of God's great work of salvation on their and our behalf, and the blessings of the inheritance that we have in our union with Jesus Christ.

And then in chapters 4 through 6, verse 9, Paul introduces them or really reminds them of another aspect of their union and life in Christ that they are called to.

As I said, something that they and we might rather avoid or wish was not part of the Christian life, and it's this whole matter of spiritual warfare. The quotes that were on the screen prior to class, Alistair Begg, the same grace that reconciles a man or a woman to God antagonizes that man or woman to the evil one.

[4 : 23] And then a quote by Martin Lloyd-Jones, we have to realize that we are called in the Christian life to a battle, not to a life of ease, but to a battle, to a warfare, to wrestling, to a struggle.

And so that's what God, through the Apostle Paul, is communicating to, again, us today. This morning and weeks to come, we'll take a look at this spiritual conflict and the resources God has provided for us to stand firm in the midst of this conflict.

This morning we're just going to take a look at chapter 6, verses 10 through 13. I want to cover and help us identify the enemy and the conflict in which we're involved, the resources that we have from God to meet the enemy, and then the outcome of meeting this enemy with the resources that we have from God.

So first of all, the conflict that we're involved in and the adversary that we face. It is a severe conflict in which we are fighting together.

Paul uses the word wrestle or struggle in verse 12 when conveying the severity of the conflict. This is just one passage where these military metaphors and terms are used by the Apostles when instructing them and the saints about the severe conflict in which they and we as followers of Christ are engaged in.

[6 : 01] And of course, the military engagements back then involve close-to-close combat. Jeff and I, before the class, were talking about the difference today.

You know, somebody, a soldier, even considered a pilot, can be sitting in Nevada running the controls for a drone that's halfway across the world.

And that conflict is very different from what Paul was conveying to the people at this time and what he was writing. The combat that he was talking about was a hand-to-hand combat, wrestling and struggling against the enemy in a life-and-death struggle.

Really. So Paul's use of this terminology really got their attention and they realized that the Apostle Paul was writing to them about a very serious conflict in which they and we are involved in today.

But not only with that military term and metaphor that he was using, but the severity of the conflict is seen in verse 12 again with the repetition that he uses there.

[7 : 13] You'll see it in verse 12. He says, against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places, as the repetition of the word against is used as it's used.

You really sense the weight and the intensity and the gravity of your situation growing and mounding up. Each time he uses that word against, it's almost like you want to say, okay, okay, stop, stop.

You know, I get the idea that this is a serious battle in which I'm involved. It's not something that we can take lightly. As maybe that person sitting at the controls with the drone, I mean, he's not sensing quite possibly the intensity of the conflict.

Maybe he is to a certain degree. I don't know. But Paul is communicating to them that this is a conflict not to take lightly.

And if we're moving through our day with a casual attitude in regard to this spiritual conflict, then we actually do need to hear this call that Paul is making.

[8 : 34] This call to a renewed recognition of what really is going on and a proper response to the reality of this spiritual conflict that we are in and that we are involved in day by day.

And the severity of the conflict is also seen in just the scope of it. How widespread it is. You see where he says, therefore we wrestle.

It's a conflict in which all Christians are involved. It's not just something one person happens to be involved in this conflict over here and, you know, I'm just fine over here uninvolved, unrelated to me. It's a conflict in which all Christians are involved. Every Christian in this auditorium is involved in this conflict.

Now the conflict or attacks may take different form, may be at different times. They may come individually, certainly, and they will, or collectively as a church body.

[9 : 42] But they will come to every Christian. And being one body in Christ, an attack on one, is truly an attack on the whole body.

So we need to be aware of one another and watching out for one another. In the reality of this spiritual conflict, there's no room for neglect of the one another body life.

I know I've heard in the past a soldier being interviewed in regard to the conflict in which he was involved and he was talking about how, yes, we understand the big picture of what we're fighting for, freedoms for people around the world in the United States.

But when we're in the battle, we're actually fighting for the guy next to me and trying to protect him, that individual.

individual. And so there is that sense, yeah, the scope of it is wide. We're all involved in it, but as we understand that there is some encouragement in that reality as well, that I'm not involved in this on

my own.

[10:58] I have others watching out for me, ready there to assist me, come to my aid in the midst of the conflict as they are discerning me and my life and what's going on and what I'm going through.

So, standing shoulder to shoulder with each other, watching out for one another in the midst of the conflict. And we'll learn more about this in the weeks to come. the severity of it is also seen in the superior enemy that we face, an enemy that is superior to us in and of ourselves.

And the Apostle Paul first identifies for them who this enemy is not. You see it there in that verse, for we do not wrestle against flesh and blood.

The enemy or the ultimate enemy is not flesh and blood, although the enemy will work through people to oppose God, oppose his purposes, oppose God's people.

The point is, don't get distracted in regard to who is ultimately behind the evil in the world that we are seeing being manifested. That's easy to do.

[12:17] The Apostle Paul talking to Christians here and so we as Christians need to understand, don't get distracted about really what's going on here, what ultimately is taking place here.

And we can become distracted. I've seen this even in my own marriage at times. Husband and wife in conflict with each other in their words and actions.

They have an enemy but it's not each other. they've been distracted from the real enemy and in the start of fighting together shoulder to shoulder against the real enemy, they begin fighting against each other in their words or their actions toward one another when difficulties come.

And they've forgotten who the ultimate enemy is. Or even children fighting against each other or even against their parents and what's going on in the home.

the children are not seeing the greater, the ultimate enemy in the conflict and so parents need to come alongside them and help them understand, you know, why are you fighting?

[13:26] Well, it's because he took this toy. Okay, those are some of the circumstances involved in the conflict you're having but let me help you understand something bigger that's going on here.

Some parents say, well, I don't want to scare my kids. They need to be scared about what the reality is. And the enemy that is out there seeking their own demise and destruction and distorting what's going on in their lives and the parents are the ones, hopefully, are the discerning ones and are remembering the ultimate enemy that is involved in this situation and now the parents can come alongside and nurture their children in the Lord from Ephesians and help them understand what really is going on and it turns into a redemptive opportunity because the children now understand that I can't fight this enemy on my own that you're talking to me about.

Mom or dad, help me. Well, I can help you and show you the one that can be, the one that can bring you deliverance. So, it takes a lot of wisdom on our part as parents and grandparents to help our children understand the ultimate battle that's going on here in the enemy that is involved in it.

Or even church members. We just got done, Jeremy did, in teaching from the book of James and there were examples of Christians in conflict with each other who again lost sight of the ultimate enemy that they were facing and God in his kindness and graciousness had James write a letter to them to help them once again get the proper insight and understanding that they need to see about what's going on inside them and in their relationships with other people.

So, we need these, this instruction from God. It's a superior enemy that we're facing and it's not against flesh and blood.

[15:17] So, who is the enemy? Verse 12. 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, we are in conflict with the devil and his organized forces of evil that are again attacking God, his purposes, and his people.

When we repented and were converted, believed, the Lord Jesus Christ bowed to him as our Lord, we entered this battle that Satan had been waging against God since the beginnings in his rebellion against God.

And that's what this verse is identifying for the saints in Ephesus and for us in Bremen, Indiana. Paul's identifying that Satan and his organized forces are the ultimate enemy that is opposing God and opposing us today.

And it's an enemy that works strategically. See that in verse 11, Paul uses the phrase, the schemes of the devil. The idea is that he and his servants of evil use deceitfulness, craftiness in their attacks

against God's people, the church, to get them to no longer love God, to obey God, walk in humility and dependence upon God, serving God, serving one another.

The devil will use schemes, deceitfulness, and his craftiness in order to intervene in the lives of God's people and to keep them from walking in obedience to him.

[17:00] And in the Bible, we can read and see many times in which Satan worked in opposition to God. That would be numerous lessons. But just let me share a few.

Certainly in the beginning, the Garden of Eden, Genesis 3, Satan took the form of a serpent in order to deceive Adam and Eve and turn them away from following God and his good design for them.

It wasn't a frontal attack, very open as to who he was, but in craftiness he came and deceitfulness in the way he spoke to Eve.

And then that spread further within their family as their children came along with Cain who killed his brother. Genesis 4, 6, God gave Cain a warning.

Sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is contrary to or toward you, but you must rule over that.

That's God's compassion coming to Cain, warning him.

[18:05] And so again, you as parents in compassion coming to your children, helping them see what they don't see, what they're unaware of. 1 John 3, 2 also speaks further about this.

We should not be like Cain who was of the evil one and murdered his brother. And so the schemes of the devil were very active in the family.

Well, let's move ahead. Many years, even against Jesus himself at his birth, Satan worked through Herod in his efforts to kill Jesus as Herod had all the babies two years old and younger killed.

And then as Jesus started his ministry, tempted of the devil for 40 days in the wilderness to try and get him again to turn away from the purpose for which the Father had sent him.

And Jesus had confronted many demons in his public ministry. I've read in the past of individuals who believed that the demonic activity was much more during that time when Satan was on the earth carrying out his ministry.

[19:15] And it was there trying to thwart what he was doing. And then Jesus recognized the ultimate enemy of Satan behind Peter's insistence that he, Jesus, should not die in the Christ.

This will not be. This should not be. Took Jesus aside. Rebuked him. No. Don't be speaking this way. Jesus recognized the reality of the ultimate enemy that was fighting against him.

And he said, Get behind me, Satan, for you're not setting your mind on things of God but on things of man. Well, Peter evidently learned something from that because later in 1 Peter 5, 8, he's the one taking up the mantle of providing this warning to the people that he was writing to.

And he said, Be sober-minded. Be watchful. You see that? That we can't move through our days with this casual atmosphere of not recognizing and being aware of the ultimate enemy that we have.

And Peter said, Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion seeking someone to devour. Resist him. Firm in your faith. And then going back to Jeremy's lessons from the book of James where James gave similar warning in 4, 7.

[20:31] He said, Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. The conflict is very real back then and continues on for us today.

And even as we're in this book of Ephesians, the Apostle Paul, when he first entered the city of Ephesus, faced various expressions of demonic activity and the forces that were at work in hindering his ministry and in the lives of people.

So Satan and his forces are at work in the world today in various ways. He's at work through the godless world system in which we live that opposes God and His Word.

Trust that we are aware of that and expressions of that each day. But Paul wrote in regard to this matter as well in Ephesians 2. Prior to their conversion, he says, that they were dead in their trespasses and sins in which they once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, that spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience.

So the world system in which we live thinks that to follow Jesus and to believe the gospel is foolishness. We heard that from Pastor Colin a few weeks ago as he started his series in 1 Corinthians 1.

[21:53] The world system does not think Christ and the gospel is relevant to the problems of the world today. God's counsel isn't even considered as a reliable resource of truth about our very origins and about the problems that exist in the world or what really are the solutions to the

problems in our society today.

They have to come up with solutions and those solutions will be dependent upon their reasonings of what they think can truly solve these problems apart from God and His Word.

And then Satan and his forces are certainly at work presenting allurements to us that appeal to those fleshly desires that Peter said are at war against our souls.

So we have this enemy who works through the world system presenting world allurements to our sinful flesh.

Another quote from Alistair Bagg, but in the midst of the world in which I live and you live as a Christian believer there are dark, demonic, spiritual, intelligent forces that are seeking to undermine, to destabilize, to cause absolute chaos within your marriage, within your family, within your work and on and on we could go.

[23 : 20] That's what Paul is saying here. In a quote from John MacArthur, Paul's purpose, however, in regard to what he's writing in verse 12 is not to explain the details of the demonic hierarchy but to give us some idea of its sophistication and power.

We are pitted against an incredibly evil and potent enemy but our need is not to specifically recognize every feature of our adversary but to turn to God who is our powerful and trustworthy source of protection and victory.

And that's what we want to do at this time having this renewed understanding and warning from God of the severity of our conflict and the superior nature of our enemy and his forces.

We can take heart in the midst of this. Remembering the resources that God has provided for us.

And we understand the importance of resources to meet a superior enemy.

I mean, we see this on the news as well from President Zelensky of Ukraine. As he makes his appeals, he recognizes we can't stand against this superior enemy, this country in which we're facing.

[24 : 37] We've got to depend on a superior power than what we have who has the resources that we need in order to meet this enemy. And so we see that in the world today.

So the saints in Ephesus and for us, God through Paul is identifying these resources that God provides for his children to fight against this superior enemy that we have and his organized forces that work in scheming ways to get us to turn away from God.

And first of all, what he mentions is that we have the resource of God's power. Verse 10, Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might.

Finally, it's really a word to get your attention. It's not necessarily, finally, okay, you can start packing up your Bibles. I'm almost done here. You can get ready to go. No, it's, you know, be alert. trying to rouse your attention to this next point that you need to hear and you need to understand.

And that point is be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might.

[25 : 49] God, in God, his inherent unlimited power to do his good pleasure and to carry out his sovereign will. He is the omnipotent God.

He is the almighty God and the scriptures we can see many ways in which his power has been manifested to accomplish his purposes and to carry out his plans.

And so we need to remember that he is the almighty God. Something that last week we heard from Pastor John that disciples had forgotten as they were rowing across the Sea of Galilee not making progress and as they saw him coming and scared to death and thinking that they were going to perish.

And as Pastor John mentioned they had forgotten the works of God in the past. And so we as this morning and throughout our weeks as we're involved in the conflict need to remember that this is almighty God that is our God and his power has been manifested in his great plan for the salvation of his people.

It's a power that's been manifested in the past and is continually at work really in preserving and sanctifying those who have come to him by faith in Jesus Christ.

[27 : 17] In fact it's something Paul prayed that the believers in Ephesus would remember and have a fuller comprehension of. Ephesians 1.19 this is what he prayed that they would know what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe according to the working of his great might.

You see the repetition of that. That he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at the right hand in the heavenly place that's far above all rule and authority and power

and dominion.

There's nothing that is above the power of God and above every name that is named not in this age only but also in the one to come.

So when Paul writes about this spiritual conflict he lets them know and he also lets us know that we need to be strong in the Lord in the strength of his might.

Now let me give you a little information on what's implied in that grammar that he's using here. It's in the passive imperative mood.

[28 : 29] Let me give you a brief description of what that means. The passive imperative is a command directed to you in which you are not the active doer but rather the cooperater and recipient of someone else's doing and yet you still retain responsibility.

So in this passive imperative command we see God in his power that he is working to protect and to preserve and perfect his people from the spiritual forces that oppose us that are strategizing ways in which to get us to turn from loving obedience to God.

Now God is not standing up in the heavens just kind of as an uninvolved observer of what's going on. He never loses control of his ability to work and preserve and protect his people.

What we need to do is recognize his power to work on our behalf to trust in him and his ability to work all things together so that while Satan means evil against us God works it for our good our transformation into the likeness of Jesus Christ.

We trust in God. We pray for wisdom to know a bodily response to the circumstances in which the spiritual conflict is taking place. Then in dependence upon the power of God his indwelling Holy Spirit we do what is pleasing to God.

[30 : 04] You see the combination of be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. We recognize that. We're acting in accordance with that believing that God is the almighty God working on our behalf.

And then we also have as part of our responsibility in this is to take up the full armor of God the whole armor of God verses 11 and 13.

He says but put on the full armor of God the whole armor of God that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. Therefore take up the whole armor of God that you may be able to withstand an evil day and having done all to stand firm.

So you know first of all that Paul doesn't say take armor from God but it's the armor of God. Paul may have had in mind Isaiah's description of how God worked on behalf of his people.

Isaiah 59 16-17 He saw that there was no man and wondered that there was no one to intercede. Then his own arm brought salvation and his righteousness upheld him.

[31 : 22] He put on righteousness as a breastplate and a helmet of salvation on his head. He put on garments of vengeance for clothing and wrapped himself in zeal as a cloak.

And then in another passage in Isaiah 1-5 just a portion of that passage in verse 5 righteousness as he describes the Messiah who would be from David's lineage and describes the foundation of his rule.

He uses some of these similar terms that were found in Isaiah. Righteousness shall be the belt of his waist and faithfulness the belt of his loins.

So Paul is reminding the Ephesians that what God had Isaiah right so many years ago has been accomplished in and through Jesus Christ.

Jesus, the founder, the leader, the captain if you may, of our salvation, of our faith, dressed in all his godly character and attributes as God fought against the powers of darkness and was victorious.

[32 : 32] and with that being true, we can put on the full armor of God. We take it up as well. The use of this terminology is common in Paul's writing.

We see the same concept of putting off and putting on in Colossians 3. First of all, Paul was teaching, instructing them about their union with Jesus Christ and in light of that, there are attitudes and practices that we put off.

We have nothing to do with them anymore. They're part of our past life. And then there are certain attitudes and practices that we put on instead. In fact, the idea is that we actually clothe ourselves with the attitudes and actions of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Those attitudes and actions that were characteristic of Him as He was in the world and since we are united to Him.

We rest and trust in, appropriate by faith the redemptive work of Christ on our behalf and with that in mind, we walk in newness of life against the spiritual forces that fight against us.

[33 : 49] We put on Christ. We put on the whole armor of God. Quote from Joshua griever. In Paul's theology, the Christian's clothing is Christ and the effects of union with Christ.

Paul teaches that all Christians have already put on Christ and that they have already been united to Christ and have experienced a decisive break with their old lifestyle.

And on the basis of union with Christ, Christians are to continue living in new ways, which is referred to as putting on the new man or putting on the Lord Jesus Christ or various virtues or putting on the armor of the Lord.

All these pieces of armor that we're going to be learning about are descriptive of Jesus Christ, the character of Christ.

And so we're clothing ourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ in very practical ways as we enter these conflicts in our day and age.

[34 : 53] so what will be the outcome of meeting the enemy with these resources that we have from God, standing in the power of God and the strength of his might, taking up the full armor of God, clothing ourselves with the attitudes and actions of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The outcome will be, as it's described again in verses 11 and 13, put on the whole armor of God that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil.

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. So in the exhortation to stand firm, we do see the outcome.

A firm stand in the evil day. the evil day or the time of temptation. And it may come at any time.

We're familiar with that. Out of the blue sometimes it seems to come. They come in different intensities as we move throughout our week. But when it comes, as we stand in the power of God and are clothed in the whole armor of God, we aren't caught unaware of what's going on.

[36 : 14] We recognize that there's something going on here and could very well be a scheme of the devil. And the force is working against me and my love for God and Jesus Christ and obedience to Him.

Trying to allure me away from being a faithful follower of Jesus Christ. And at this time I need to resist the devil.

This is armor that's reliable for us and will not fail us in our time of battle. There's times I've watched a program called Forged in Fire.

And it's when some blacksmiths come together, four of them initially, and they have to form these knives. And throughout the program certain ones are eliminated until there's only two left.

And they're given the task of making a certain weapon, usually some big sword or something. And when they're done working on that for five days, they come and their swords are tested, their weapons are tested, and one is the test of strength, and it's beat against some big barrel or ram's horn or something.

[37 : 26] And some of them don't make it, and they describe them as having a catastrophic failure. That won't happen with the armor of the Lord.

There will never be a catastrophic failure with any piece of the armor of the Lord. We can stand in the power of the Lord and the strength of His might.

You'll never find that happening, a catastrophic failure with any piece of the armor of God. So, as you're strong in the Lord, the strength of His might, and this week as you take up the full armor of God, you will and you can withstand in the evil day the time of testing, the time of temptation.

And having done all, you can stand firm. Let's pray that that would be true for us this week.

Heavenly Father, we give thanks that You again have provided us Your Word.

We can get busy in life. Busy with so many things going on around us. our minds can be distracted even about what we might be thinking or how we might be responding in certain situations and as a result forget about this ultimate enemy that is working against You and Your purposes of sanctifying us and You being honored and glorified through our lives day by day, moment by moment.

[39 : 04] And so, we need Your help. We need the help of Your Holy Spirit to alert us, to bring these scriptures back to mind, to remind us that You are the Almighty God, that we can stand strong in the Lord and the strength of Your might.

And so, help us by Your Spirit to continually take up our part in putting on the whole armor of God so that we too can stand firm in the evil day and having done all to stand firm.

In Jesus' name, Amen. Thank you.