

## ***the Fight***

### **Scripture Reading: Ephesians 6:10-18**

*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.*

*Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand.*

*Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.*

*And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord's people.*

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**Let's pray.**

This morning, in week 5 of **Rooted**, our core discipleship study, we come to consider the reality of **the spiritual fight** that all of us are involved in... The very real, though often unseen or unnoticed battle that we are all in against what the apostle Paul refers to as "*the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.*"

As we read a moment ago (**Ephesians 6:12**), "*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."*

In starting here, I recognize that some of us don't ascribe to this – to the notion of there being **real spiritual forces** at work in this world, and specifically to *the reality and power of spiritual forces of evil at work* in our world.

Some of us, and definitely many around us in the world today, would regard this idea as **ridiculous** – an **unrealistic** reading of reality.

Life, as far as the secular worldview is concerned, is made up simply and solely of two components – **human existence** and the **physical universe**.

But Jesus – and the Jewish and Christian Scriptures – invite us to read reality differently – as involving more than just that... More than merely these **two dimensions** of human existence and the physical universe – but also involving the presence and activity of **the Living God AND** of "unseen, *created spiritual beings and forces*".

Anything less and, **Jesus would say**, we're not being **realistic enough!**

"**We are not being realistic** about life unless and until we factor in all four dimensions of reality." (DJ, 85)

Two dimensions isn't **realistic enough!**

And I think many of us know this – we'd agree wholeheartedly to this – that life only makes sense as the interplay of these **4** powerful dimensions.

**But in the day to day of our lives, do we really engage life on all of these levels? Do we take all four of these influences seriously?**

And I ask the question because as I've come to this text and theme this week, I've been struck with how **little** I factor in the work and influence of *the powers of this dark world* when it comes to my own life, the world at large.

If I'm honest, most of the time, I think I pay lip-service to a 4-dimensional worldview, but in practice, I view life as **3-dimensional**. I engage life as a vital interplay of the human self, the physical universe **and God**, but *the powers of this dark world* are mostly out of the picture. Present in the biblical stories, but not in mine. Not *really*.

Which isn't to say that I don't perceive or experience bewildering evil, deception and destruction in the world, in others and in myself at times – but when I encounter it I tend to only really factor in the influence of 3 dimensions, and think little of a 4<sup>th</sup>...

But studying **Ephesians** again, working through the Rooted study, and simply taking Jesus seriously has alerted me to the fact

that somehow I have forced *the work of the evil one* out of my everyday view of life...

And this perception means that at times I'm actually **blind** to what is really going on and where to point my fists when I feel the battle raging...

Now I'm sure that are lots of factors that have influenced me in this, but I suspect some of the seeds of this were sown early on with the influence of a popular book back in the late 80's – Frank Peretti's book, **This Present Darkness**. Some of us will remember it.

Although I can't remember much of the details (without googling it), what I do remember is that the story sought to lift the veil of the unseen and caused many to believe that around every corner, lurking in every conversation, behind every municipal decision and every motive in one's heart, there was a demon at work. Every moment was and is a real-time power struggle between the cosmic army of God and the armies of darkness – ***and it was terrifying.***

And this book was everywhere – it stayed on the bestseller list for 150 weeks! Influencing so many people and their thinking.

But, like many, as I read the New Testament, and in particular the letters of Paul, I didn't hear this same all-consuming spiritualization of everything – a demon behind every act, or an angel whispering at every moment.

And, around that time, I suspect someone probably introduced me to the wise caution of C.S. Lewis, voiced in **The Screwtape Letters**, that the Devil is equally happy with either of the extremes – inspiring Christians to make too much of the Devil or to dismiss him all together. Either way, it's a dangerous deception, and he wins...

So for me, over time, my reaction to Frank Peretti and demon-obsessed Christianity led me to the other extreme – initially downplaying and finally becoming oblivious to *the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms* at work in the world...

But Paul's words in **Ephesians 6** can't be ignored – as he names the reality that our lives **do** involve a significant struggle "*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.*"

To ignore this is to waste our energy chasing after and fighting against the wrong enemies... Or worse, it's ***to lose the battle for our lives*** – and not understand why.

Because the spiritual forces of evil are **real** and they have **real power** – and they are bent on our destruction.

As Jesus Himself says in **John 10:10**, "*The Thief comes only to steal, kill and destroy...*"

This is the truth of what the powers of evil are up to in the world.

But here's the greater claim of Scripture: though Satan and his armies are strong, **God is stronger.**

According to the Bible, the devil and his underlings have power – real power – ***power that we must not disregard.***

But it is **nothing** in comparison to the power of God exercised in Jesus.

In fact, earlier on in **Ephesians** (ch 1:19f), Paul tells us that **Jesus** has **power over all** rule and authority, power and dominion...

And that same power that raised Jesus from the dead and seated him at the Father's right hand in the heavenly realms, ***far above all*** rule and authority, power and dominion – ***that same power is now at work in us...***

**(Eph 2:6)** That "**God has** raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms..."

**This is the reality of Jesus** – He is over all the powers of darkness. **And this is the reality of all who are in Christ** – because we are in Him, we are seated **with Him**... invited to share with Him in His authority over the powers of darkness.

**And so Paul exhorts us, "Finally"** (in the sense of "from here on out"), *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.***"

Elsewhere, in one of Paul's letters to the Corinthians (**2 Cor 2:11**), Paul refers to a situation where he forgave someone, *"in order that Satan may not outwit us, for we are not unaware of his schemes..."*

Notice this repeated word "**schemes**". Here and elsewhere Paul describes the evil one as having familiar, predictable schemes... Schemes that Paul and his readers were aware of.

But I wonder, ***are we? Are you aware of the enemy's schemes?***

I was reading a wonderful book by John White recently (a wise Canadian Christian pastor-psychologist who passed away about 15 years ago) – and in his book titled The Fight, he distills 4 core strategies or schemes of the evil one:

1. He tempts.
2. He accuses.
3. He deceives.
4. He devours.

We could linger on each of these, but I want to get to Paul's wise and needed counsel for us – for how to stand against the devil's schemes.

But, for the moment, let's simply acknowledge that if we expect to effectively **stand against** the devil's schemes, we'd better know what they are...

The evil one **tempts, accuses, deceives, devours**. And I'll **add, divides**.

Stated so clearly, I suspect none of us need introduction, as we have all had our own experience on these battlefields...

We are familiar with **temptation** and the shame and pain and destruction that comes on the other side of its alluring invitation and strong grip...

Many of us know the **accusing** voice of the enemy too well – harassing us with the list of our sin (past and present) and causing us to question God's forgiveness and our standing with God...

Many of us know the familiar **lies** that begin with "*did God really say?*" and end with distrust and disobedience, flat out rebellion because we're no longer sure that God is good and worth our worship, allegiance and trust...

And many of know the **devourer** – who comes to steal, kill and destroy our faith and our lives...

And we've experienced how all this **divides** us – pushes us away from each other, rather than drawing us near into the kind of redemptive friendship and fellowship we need.

**So what are we to do?** In the face of such insidious and destructive powers? What are we to do?

Well, **on our own, there** is nothing we can do. **We are no match** against *the powers of this dark world and the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.*

**But Jesus is.** Truth is, He is more than a match. He is **far above** all rule and authority, power and dominion.

**So Paul exhorts not** simply to "be strong", but to "*be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power.*" **Because He is the Strong One.**

*"Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes.*

*And then two verses later,*

**"Put on the full armor of God,** *so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand."*

Notice that Paul doesn't actually exhort us to **fight** – but rather, simply, **to stand.**

Why? Because, God, in Jesus, is the Strong One – the Warrior who alone can win the battle.

This is why Paul refers to the armor as "*the armor of God*", not "*the armor of the strong Christian*"... because this is **God's** armor... It is **the armor God wears.** The weapons of His warfare.

This is what Isaiah tells us in **Isaiah 59:15-17.**

*The LORD looked and was displeased that there was no justice. He saw that there was no one, he was appalled that there was no one to intervene; so his own arm achieved salvation for him, and his own righteousness sustained him. **He put on righteousness** as his breastplate, and the **helmet of salvation** on his head; he put on the garments of vengeance and wrapped himself in zeal as in a cloak..."*

As Paul knew from Isaiah, God is the Strong One – the Warrior who alone can fight off the powers of darkness – and **in Christ** He invites us to put on **His** armor and "take our stand against the **devil's schemes**"...

*Therefore put on the full armor **of God**, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to **stand** your ground, and after you have done everything, to **stand**."*

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(v.14) "**Stand firm then**, with the belt of **truth** buckled around your waist..."

Think back to the well-known schemes of the evil one and the powers of darkness. What resists, counterattacks and throws off **deception but truth** – "the belt of truth buckled around your waist" – at the core of your being holding everything together...

The **Truth of Christ** and the truth of life as He sees and reveals it... And our growing in Christ as **truth-speakers** in a world of lies...

This is how we stand against the powers of darkness – not by going through some ritual of putting on a spiritual belt of truth every morning, but by wrapping our lives and minds and hearts around the One who is the Truth and, in Him, seeking to speak the truth in love (as Paul says in Eph 4:15).

*Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist,  
with **the breastplate of righteousness** in place...*

Oh we need this! The powers of darkness, the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms come so often to **accuse** us. Satan is described in **Revelation 12** as "*the accuser of our brothers and sisters... who accuses them day and night...*" who accuses us of being unacceptable to God, that our sins are too much and unforgiven, unforgivable, that our faith is too little, that our holiness too lacking...

And so Paul exhorts us to stand firm them "***with the breastplate of righteousness in place.***"

Which, at first glance, might seem to expose our failing and the affirm the validity of Satan's accusation – but when Paul speaks of righteousness he is always first and foremost speaking about the righteousness of God and the grace of **justification** – that in Christ, though we are still sinful, we are **declared righteous**. His righteousness is credited to us, by grace, through faith. And this not of ourselves, it is the gift of God...

**No accusation can stand against that.**

Again, this is how we stand against the attacks of the powers of darkness – not by performing some ritual of putting on a spiritual breastplate each day (though if it helps turn your heart toward the

gospel, go for it), but by seeking to wrap our lives and hearts and minds in the liberating grace of the gospel...

As Paul declares in **Romans 8**,

*"There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus... Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. Who then is the one who condemns? No one. Christ Jesus who died – more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us..."*

And as we live immersed/wrapped in this **gospel of grace**, we find our hearts drawn to seek to walk in righteousness. The righteousness of Christ inspiring and sanctifying us...

Stand firm then...

**Verse 15:** *Stand firm then... and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace.*

Or John Stott years ago put it – put on your **"gospel boots"**.

Again, if we cast out minds back to the familiar schemes of the powers of darkness, what confronts and comes against the divisive agenda of the evil one but the **reconciling peace** that is at the heart of the gospel.

When Paul speaks of peace He is rarely referring to quiet calmness, but instead to the reconciliation of relationships. Which is what his letter to the Ephesians is all about – how Christ is our peace. How Jesus breaks down the barriers that divides us and forms us into a new community empowered by His grace. And now in Christ, we

become peace-seekers and peace-makers – ministers of this  
reconciling peace to others...

O we need this, and the enemy hates this... Where this happens,  
he is defeated...

**Stand firm then...**

**Verse 16:** *In addition to all this, take up the shield of **faith**,  
with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one.*

What are these **flaming arrows** but the onslaught of the  
accusations, lies and temptations that the powers of darkness throw at  
us... Some of us have experienced this this very week – accusations,  
lies and temptations that *in the simple fact that they are there* cause  
our hearts to fail.

And they often come together, don't they?

In truth, temptation never comes alone. It is always bound up  
with lies and accusations. Lies that tell us that its no big deal, that  
nothing will come of it, that this is no sin anyways... Lies that promise  
something that it can't be delivered – freedom, satisfaction,  
contentment, fulfillment, wholeness... Temptation is always  
accompanied by lies...

And accusations about our track record... that our hands are  
already dirty enough, so what's the big deal of adding this.  
Accusations that (that as John Stott puts it), "inflamm our conscience

with what can only be called false guilt", but which then weaken our resolve to turn from sin and trust Christ – and lead to true guilt...

But Paul says there's a way to stand against this – and it's to *"take up **the shield of faith**, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one."*

To stand in faith and declare again, and again, that Jesus alone is to be trusted and that the gospel alone gives us life. That Jesus is Lord – today and always – and that He alone delivers what he promises... And choose in faith to **obey** in faith...

Take up this shield of faith – and not just when you're strong, but when you're weak, when you've sinned and fallen – stand up again and take up the shield of faith...

**And the helmet of salvation** (verse 17).

*Oh how we need this! And how it frustrates the schemes of the evil one!*

Again, this comes from **Isaiah 59** – where **God** puts on the helmet of salvation as He comes to bring deliverance and justice...

And **this is our hope**... Hope that enables us to stand up again, especially when we have failed and fallen... or when the battle feels particularly hard. The hope – the confident hope – that Jesus is not done with us and with the world...

Hear Paul's words in **1 Thessalonians 5:8** – *"Since we belong to the day, let us be sober, putting on faith and love as a breastplate, and **the hope of salvation** as a helmet."*

In times of struggle and chaos, when the battle feels so strong and fierce, this hope is what holds us together, what guards our minds and keeps us standing in Christ – our hope in the ultimate victory of God and the fullness of salvation that will be ours... This hope confounds the evil one and foils his schemes...

*And lastly, Paul calls us to take up **"the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God."***

Much has been said about the fact this is the only piece of the armor **of God** that is truly a weapon – a weapon of attack, not just defense. Though, in truth, **it is both**.

And **its' power** lies in the fact that it confronts and confounds **all** of the enemies schemes.

**Hebrews 4:12** tells us, *"For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than a double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart."*

- ... naming and displacing the lies of the evil one.
- ... drowning out and casting off the accusations of the evil one.
- ... uncovering the ugliness of the temptations of the evil one.
- ... and robbing the devouring lion of it's roar.

For the powers of darkness thrive and prevail in the chaos of a million voices, or the confusion of silence... ***But when the Word of God is spoken and heard, the enemy's days are numbered.***

Not surprisingly, **in Revelation** (1:16), when John the apostle turns to see the Voice that speaks to him – the Voice that rings out over all of heaven and earth, the Voice that rings out over all of history – what he sees is ***Jesus with a sword***, a sharp double-edged sword, ***not in his hand, but coming out of his mouth.***

The Word of God, the sword of the Spirit – that silences and defeats the enemy, like nothing else.

***"And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord's people."***

Note, prayer isn't another piece of God's armor, or the last thing on the list. It is the context in which we do ***all the rest*** – the fundamental expression of our dependence upon God ***in it all...***

Standing against the powers of darkness that tempt, accuse, deceive, devour and divide...

***"So that when the day of evil comes, you may stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand..."***

**In Christ... With confidence...**

Confidence, that though the enemy is real and strong, you don't need to be afraid, because Jesus is Stronger and you are in Him, and in Him the victory is certain...

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So, where are you experiencing the battle these days?  
Where is the enemy seeking to kill and destroy the life of Christ in you?  
How do you need to stand in Christ against the devil's schemes?  
What armor do you need to put on and take up?

Or maybe you are here today and you feel the reality of this battle in you, against you... But you have no confidence in the battle because you are fighting it alone. Without God, without Christ.

Run to Jesus today – embrace Him. He alone is Stronger and He has come to save and give life to all who bow to Him...

As Jesus says in John 10:10, "*The thief comes only to steal, kill and destroy, but I have come that they (you and I) may have life – the fullness of life.*"