
The Warfare of the Church

Ephesians 6:10-24

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Spiritual warfare is a big topic in the church:

The world has always had its *perversion* mythologies that fill popular stories, movies and music.

There are the Charismatic excesses which locate all our struggle with sin in spiritual forces with the focus of ministry to cast out these demons.

There is also the religious fascination with the cosmic conflict between spiritual entities whether angel or demon that gives rise to territorial spiritual warfare.

Then there is the very real presence and power of the fallen spirits within the universe and in our own world, our own time and space.

Here is a “your are here” for the book of Ephesians.

The Worship of the Church – our identity in Christ

The Walk of the Church – our life in Christ

And now, the Warfare of the Church – our spiritual armor in Christ

And it is a grand story we are in. We are not just listening to it. We are in it. We are participants in this amazing redemptive story. It is marvelous in its eternal design. It is measureless in its God-centered and glorious purpose. It is magnificent in its redeeming work. It is miraculous in its transforming power. Throughout the story, God is building a redeemed community, a people who will love and live for His glory.

The enemy of God wants to destroy the people of God and the work of God. In doing so, he hopes to tarnish the glory of God. Paul exhorts and equips the redeemed community for the conflict. For this community is under assault. It is under assault by the traitors within. There is remaining sin in the believer and undetected sinners in the fellowship. And we are under assault from the without. Satan and his armies are attempting to destroy the community of God.

May I say a word to experienced Christians? This text has been used and abused so much it is often difficult for people to hear what is actually being said here. So, I ask you to look carefully at the text in front of you as to what it actually says – be ruthless in your preconceptions. Let the Word of God speak for itself.

So, here are the people of God: chosen from eternity past, redeemed by the Lord Jesus Christ, saved out of the world, transformed while living in the world and under assault by the enemies of God.

Warfare by Preparation**(v. 10-17)**

Engage the enemy by being spiritually prepared.

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. ¹⁴ Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, ¹⁵ and, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace. ¹⁶ In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one; ¹⁷ and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God,

The Exhortations

We are commanded through three key exhortations in the context of spiritual assault. As God's people we are to do all that is necessary to be strong and withstand the assault.

Our first challenge in hearing this text is to hear it in a corporate sense. We are so used to hearing these commands as to us individually. Yes, they have that aspect. But the point here is that the city of God, the community of God's people, the gathered church, hear and heed these exhortations. From the idyllic vistas of heavenly realms, to Biblical churches, to godly lives we are now faced with the grim reality of hand-to-hand combat.

Be Strong**(v. 10)**

In the face of the enemy we need to rely on the Lord's strength. We tend to want to fight our spiritual enemies in our own strength. If we do so, we will be overwhelmed. So the true "Stand strong" is through the infusion of God's power in us. The focus here is on both the Christian and the church.

Be Prepared**(v. 11a)**

The worst thing that can happen to soldier is to be caught unprepared and unarmed. Here is the simple exhortation which will be expanded on in the following sentences. Notice that he does not exhort us to on the Christian's armor. We are to put on God's armor. We put on God's armor because we are to hold the line against the devil's strategies.

Be Standing**(v. 13)**

The next exhortation is trumpeted through this paragraph. It is in the different forms of the word, "stand". The word speaks of a defensive posture. It is the church holding the line, standing firm, defending against the enemies' schemes to cause us to believe lies, be controlled by lusts and thus refuse the riches of God's gracious provisions and take what has been forbidden.

The Enemy

(v. 11b-12)

Paul has dealt with the enemy within that would seek to destroy the community through sin and broken relationships, as in 4:26-27, “²⁶ Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, ²⁷ and give no opportunity to the devil.” The devil is ever ready to use the consequences of sin to further his God defying agenda.

His Craftiness

Satan’s utter depravity and deceitfulness is highlighted here. His being crafty points us back to the garden and his temptation of Eve. There he is, a dragon bright and wise, wicked and deadly. He is scheming to bring the universe under his own dominion. He has strategies to deny God His glory and the Christ His rule. These long, old, tiresome schemes use people but they are not about people. Satan despises humanity. He will use her, abuse her and then toss her away. He is only interested in attacking people in so much as it furthers his schemes.

His Company

We must be alert to the schemes of the devil for the universe is filled with intelligences, mighty, fearsome and some cold, dark and malevolent. He sees behind the flesh and blood of our human reality the true enemy.

On commentator highlights the characteristics of our foes:¹⁶

THEY ARE POWERFUL. It is easy to underestimate the power of these evil spiritual beings. They are dangerous and deadly. They are not to be taken lightly.

THEY ARE WICKED. They are wicked to depths we as humans do not know. Some had reached such depths that they had to be chained in a special prison house until the end of days.

THEY ARE CUNNING. They were once angelic beings, wise, bright and beautiful. Now that intelligence has been perverted and corrupted and twisted by long centuries of corrupting depravities and deeds.

So here is our enemy. We are in a war with him and his cohorts. The war is for truth. Their weapons are lies, deceits, myths, errors. We are not engaged in some physical way with them. We are not battling flesh and blood. We are at war in the realm of truth. Now this will be reinforced in the next paragraph as we take up the weapons of this warfare.

The Equipment**(v. 14-17)**

While the Roman soldier may be in view, all of these pieces of armor are from the Old Testament. A great deal of this section comes from the book of Isaiah. So much misunderstanding of this could be avoided by remembering that a great deal of the New Testament is a Christ-centered exposition of the Old Testament. Here are the texts Paul is alluding to:

Isaiah 11:5

⁵ Righteousness shall be the belt of his waist, and faithfulness the belt of his loins.

Isaiah 59:16-17

¹⁶ He saw that there was no man, and wondered that there was no one to intercede; then his own arm brought him salvation, and his righteousness upheld him.

¹⁷ 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.

Isaiah 52:7-10

⁷ How beautiful upon the mountains
are the feet of him who brings good news,
who publishes peace, who brings good news of happiness,
who publishes salvation,
who says to Zion, "Your God reigns."

⁸ The voice of your watchmen—they lift up their voice;
together they sing for joy;
for eye to eye they see
the return of the LORD to Zion.

⁹ Break forth together into singing,
you waste places of Jerusalem,
for the LORD has comforted his people;
he has redeemed Jerusalem.

¹⁰ The LORD has bared his holy arm
before the eyes of all the nations,
and all the ends of the earth shall see
the salvation of our God.

Here a beautiful thread runs through our Biblical theology. This armor is first donned and wielded by the Lord of Hosts, Isaiah's warrior-king. So the Christ is first in view here. He is the one who takes up the armor and wields the sword. He is the first beautiful footed messenger bringing the happy good news that our God reigns.

Then Paul sees the church, the body of Christ in this imagery. It is the church who is armed by salvation's armor and wields the sword. The church's feet are beautiful when she is proclaiming the gospel, the good news that God redeems and reigns. But the church is made up of the individual parts as well. So in our interconnection to Christ and to the church, we participate in this armoring. This armor this is already ours. What we must do is to, by believing God in an obeying way, recognize what we have already received. Look at how this is worded. Stand, having put on this armor. Here is what has been forged and furnished for us.

We are to put on the belt of truth. The point here is that that first and most essential piece of equipping is truth. Without truth, you are going to be undone by the enemies' lies, deceits and lusts.

We are to put on the breastplate of righteousness. Having a right standing with God and having His righteousness credited to us, we stand with the core of who we are protected with that truth. Our vital spiritual organs are defended by God's righteousness.

We are to put on the shoes of gospel peace. There is a sense of going here. But it is more than that. We are called "to stand" and we are standing in the shoes of gospel realities. All that God has done for us in Christ and through His doing and dying prepares us to not only hold the line against the enemy but to advance the kingdom of God.

We are to take up the shield of faith. Believing God in an obeying way is our best defense against the incoming missiles of lies, deceits, errors and myths. These may well up in us as heart talk that is shaped by what comes at us or is present around us.

We are to put on the helmet of salvation. Our head is protected by all the truths of what our salvation means for us and has brought to us. Once again, it is our thinking, our believing that is at stake. Do not fail to protect your thinking against the cunning lies of Satan.

Finally pick up the sword of the Spirit, the Word of God. This is not your personal word or you word of faith. This is the Word of God. It is your Bible. To take it up is Paul's mind is more than holding a book in your hand, it is hiding the truths in your heart.

Surprised? Satan's schemes are in the realm of lies and error. God's armor is largely in the realm of truth, particularly in the truths of the gospel and our salvation. Spiritual warfare then is holding the line against Satan's lies. Unlike Eve we affirm the exact truth of what God says and what He requires so that we believe Him and submit to Him. That is standing. That is winning. That defeats the enemy.

Warfare by Prayer

(v. 18-19a)

After all these putting on armor commands, we now have the music that is playing the whole time. It is the music of prayer...

¹⁸ praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints, ¹⁹ and also for me...

Its Characteristics

What characterizes this kind of praying?

Standing for truth is to be bathed in prayer. It is the ongoing activity. Holding the line against the enemy will moments and seasons of engaged combat. But communing with the captain of the hosts is a continual activity.

It is marked by being in the Spirit. This is a common way for Paul to talk about prayer. When we pray, we are to pray in the sphere or realm of the Holy Spirit. It seems to me that Paul is not talking about something mystical, but rather intensely practical. In the Spirit praying is similar to in Christ living. It is praying according to the Word of God aligning our requests with the desires of God.

It is multifaceted in its expression. We are praying with all different kinds of prayers and requests. Supplication points to our posture as people who are asking. Our praying is communication – just talking to God. And it is also asking.

Its Concerns

I see two practical concerns in this part of the sentence.

We should be wakeful and watchful. Paul is pressing home that we be aware of where we are under attack by Satan's schemes. The alertness here is that of being on guard duty with eyes peeled on the enemy's probes and advances.

We should persevere. We tend to quit. We tend not to see the eternal value and temporal work that praying is doing. Yet the church is called to continue in prayer as a means of upholding truth.

We should have a world-wide view in our praying. The church should not be narrowly focused on its own concerns alone. Supplication should be made for the defense of the truth and advance of the gospel across the world.

Stott is so helpful as he writes incorporating an quote from John Bunyan (yes, a quote within a quote):

Most Christians pray sometimes, with some prayers and some degree of perseverance, for some of God's people. But to replace 'some' by 'all' in each of [p 284](#) these expressions would be to introduce us to a new dimension of prayer. It was when Christian 'perceived the mouth of hell ... hard by the wayside' in the Valley of the Shadow of Death, and saw flame and smoke and heard hideous noises, that 'he was forced to put up his sword, and betake himself to another weapon, called All-prayer: so he cried in my hearing, "O Lord, I beseech thee, deliver my soul." ¹⁷

Warfare by Proclamation

(v. 19-20)

As the last prayer request, Paul points to his preaching, his proclamation of the Word.

¹⁹ and also for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel, ²⁰ for which I am an ambassador in chains, that I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak.

Through Clear Preaching

Paul is asking for the right words in his proclamation. That is a surprise. Of all people you would think that Paul would have the words down pat. But what he is showing is his dependency on God. He may know the truth and be able to say it to himself. But he needs God's grace to say that truth clearly and compellingly in the context of his ministry in Rome in prison.

With Courageous Preaching

And he needs courage. Again, not what we would think. But what we are being exposed to is the back room stuff of which the Book of Acts is the on stage history. What we see Paul doing with amazing courage and consistency in Acts is the answer to these prayers.

May I say, I covet these same kinds of prayers over my own responsibilities to publically proclaim God's Word.

Warfare alongside Partners

(v. 21-24)

Since we live in a redeemed community as God's new people, we then serve with partners in ministry.

²¹ So that you also may know how I am and what I am doing, Tychicus the beloved brother and faithful minister in the Lord will tell you everything. ²² I have sent him to you for this very purpose, that you may know how we are, and that he may encourage your hearts.

²³ Peace be to the brothers, and love with faith, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. ²⁴ Grace be with all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with love incorruptible.

Ministry Encouraging Relationships

(v. 21-22)

The bearer of the letter will fill them on the rest. There was more in their relationship than was in the letter. So this beloved brother and faithful servant, a partner in ministry, is going to communicate what he has seen and what he has been told. He is known to them and is not only the bearer of the letter of Paul's good wishes and personal words. The purpose is so that all will be encouraged.

Grace Based Relationships

(v. 23-24)

The letter opens and closes in the normal fashion of the day. But Paul uses them to set the theme for his letter (chapter 1) and now to bless them from the truths of his letter. Let me close our series and this sermon with my helpful friend, John Stott.

No two words could summarize the message of the letter more succinctly. For 'peace' in the sense of reconciliation with God and one another is the great achievement of Jesus Christ, and 'grace' is the reason why and the means by which he did it. Moreover, both are indispensable to all members of God's new society. Hence Paul's wishing of peace to 'the brethren' (verse 23), who belong to each other as brothers and sisters in the family of God, and of grace to 'all' those who love Christ, without discrimination, whatever their race, rank, age or sex. It is a wish, a prayer, that the members of God's new society may live in harmony as brothers and sisters in his family, at peace and in love with him and with each other, together with recognition that only by his grace can this dream come true.¹⁸

Reflect and Respond

What God has fashioned, forged and furnished, let us take up and use.

May we recognize that the spiritual battle is in the realm of truth.

How does truth affect your praying?

May we be the new community, the people of God, redeemed, reconciled and living for His glory.

¹⁶ Stott, p. 264-265

¹⁷ Stott, p. 283-284

¹⁸ Stott, p. 284