

The Believer's Armor – Part 1

Introduction

a. objectives

1. subject – Paul encourages believers to be strong in the Lord, wearing the full armor of God
2. aim – to cause us to stand fast against the temptations and oppositions of the world in full faith
3. passage – Ephesians 6:10-20

b. outline

1. The Believer's Struggle (Ephesians 6:10-13)
2. The Believer's Armor (Ephesians 6:14-18a)
3. The Believer's Perseverance (Ephesians 6:18b-20)

c. opening

1. the reality of **spiritual warfare** in this passage of Ephesians
 - a. my 2012 sermon *The Subtlety of Satan* is one of the few sermons I have preached *solely* on the person and work of the devil – it is not my desire to give him attention
 - b. however, Paul (in this passage) confronts the *reality* of Satan and a spiritual warfare that is taking place around the believer (and the church) – so, we must give him (and it) some attention ...
 - c. one of the effects of the Fall upon humans is that we are now primarily **naturalists** – we embrace as “truth” only those things that can be investigated by the senses (**i.e.** by the scientific method)
 1. yet, we possess an *innate* sense of the “transcendent” – we theorize and speculate about the existence of things beyond the senses
 - a. **e.g.** the Hubble Space Telescope, multiverses, SETI, philosophies, religion, etc.
 - b. **i.e.** we *suppress* the idea of a spiritual realm outside of our direct senses, even though we see its effects all around us and seem to even possess a desire to “find” one
 - d. a Christian worldview *embraces* the existence of “*heavenly places*” (**v. 12 cf. 1:3, 20; 2:6; 3:10**)
 1. another realm of existence, a spiritual “plane” occupied by the ascended Christ, angels, saints, and the forces of evil under Satan, which coexists alongside the natural world
 - a. **i.e.** the ascension of Christ as a *local transition* as the God-man from one place to another
 - b. the “level” of the plane that Satan and his forces occupy is (in essence) down here “below” the realm of Christ – **i.e.** Satan limited as the “*prince*” of *this* world (**2:2**)
 2. yet, many Christians (having imbibed naturalistic secularism) *deny* (or *ignore*) the existence of this spiritual world and the struggle we have with the malevolent forces emanating from it
 - a. **i.e.** typical preaching promises “victory” over the struggle simply by coming to Christ – that professing Christ will remove all areas of difficulty in your life, to a life of comfort
 1. yes, it is true that coming to Christ will break the power of these things to rule over us
 2. but, it is also true that we will continue to *struggle* with sin and temptation (**2 Cor. 12:7**)
“So to keep me from becoming conceited because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass me, to keep me from becoming conceited.”
 - b. but, the biblical picture is a struggle *not* against “*flesh and blood*” (**v. 12**)
 1. **meaning:** that the *source* of evil arrayed against us is primarily from *outside of ourselves*, in *spiritual* forces that will *use* human weakness to accomplish its evil goals
 2. **i.e.** the *denial* of a struggle against the spiritual realm results in *moralistic* preaching – if the only struggle is “with yourself” then the preaching must always focus *on you*
 - e. **reality: Paul contends that the Christian (and the church) struggles against the forces of evil, and that this evil is so great that it requires the fullness of God's power over us to combat it and survive**
2. the **context** of this passage within Ephesians
 - a. “*finally*” = a word *typically* used to end a list (**i.e.** firstly, secondly, ... finally) – so, either:
 1. Paul finishing the *immediate* list – using various human relationships common to believers to illustrate what he means by the concept of “*mutual submission*” in **5:21**
 - a. **IOW:** in being filled with the Spirit, mutually submitting ourselves to one another in our various roles, as we do in marriage, in parenting, or in our economic relationships
 - b. (**now**): Paul explaining how we are to walk in love in relationship to *non-believers* – how to act in a way that demonstrates our submission to Christ even before the reprobate

2. or, Paul finishing the *original* list – using a word picture of a soldier’s armor to complete the list of subjects within the Great Imperative of 4:1 – to “walk in a manner worthy ...” includes:
 - a. growing and maturing in the knowledge of Christ (4:13)
 - b. putting off the old self and its sinful ways (4:22)
 - c. walking in love towards other believers (5:1-2), and
 - d. (**now**) standing firm in the struggle against evil, both individually and corporately

I. The Believer’s Struggle (Ephesians 6:10-13)

Content

a. the imperative to be strong (v. 10)

1. “be strong” = stand firm; assert strength; exercise a personal power against a force; prevail
 - a. **repetitions:** “strength” (v. 10); “stand against” (v. 11); “wrestle” (v. 12), “take up”, “withstand”, “stand firm” (v. 13)
 - b. a defensive posture against a force coming against you; the ability to withstand a powerful energy targeting you for destruction (note the use of **armor**, a largely *defensive* array of items)
2. **Paul assumes that believers (and the church) will be attacked by spiritual forces outside of themselves, and that they must stand against those forces**
 - a. **IOW:** Paul believes that the church will *always* be under attack because the concept of “walking in love” (in the pure imitation of Christ) is *antithetical* to the forces of evil arrayed against the Lord
 - b. so, we must 1) recognize the *existence* of the struggle, and 2) stand *firm* in that struggle

b. the method to be strong (vv. 11, 13)

1. “put on the whole armor of God” or “take up the whole armor of God” = because the struggle cannot be survived *purely by human strength*, the believer must take up that which God has provided for his defense against the inevitable attack (Paul will describe the pieces of this armor in **vv. 14-18a**)
 - a. each piece of the armor represents **one particular way** that the forces of evil will attempt to destroy the church (and the believer) – acting from the *outside* and (more often) from the *inside*
 - b. **e.g.** the attempt to divide the church (and destroy the central tenet of *sola fide*) through **racialism**
 1. **i.e.** the belief that Christians must *continually* repent over the sins of the past
 2. **e.g.** the “shield of faith” contends that all sinners are in *equal standing before God* re: guilt
2. **Paul insists that believers (and the church) must array themselves with all that God has provided in Christ in order to survive the onslaught of the evil that will come against them**

c. the reason to be strong (v. 12)

1. the adversary = Satan and the array of forces that he commands in this world
 - a. according Barna research (2009), upwards of 60% of American Christians do not believe in the *biblical, literal, and personal* nature of a malevolent being named Satan, but see him primarily as a “symbol” of evil (**i.e.** the *personification* of the totality of “badness” in the human race)
 - b. only about ¼ accept the biblical picture of Satan (seen in over 150 verses) as a created angelic being who served in the presence of God until sin was found in him, was then cast down in judgment, and who now works to thwart the plans of God, especially in the elect
 - c. the biblical writers never make an *apologetic defense* of the existence of Satan – both Jesus and Paul *assumed* his existence and his adversarial role in the world
2. who is the adversary? (**see Job 1-2**):
 - a. he is a **created** being – he is not equal to God or in any way the “peer” of God in the spiritual world
 - b. he is a **limited** being – he is not omnipresent, omnipotent, nor omniscient
 1. the only persons tempted by Satan in the Bible are: Eve, Job, Jesus, Judas, Peter, Ananias
 2. his actions in the world are restrained by God and limited to God’s sovereign purpose
 - c. he is a **powerful** being – he is spiritual and immortal, and in a class “above” us
 1. by virtue of his immortality and experience, he knows far more than we can know ourselves
 2. by virtue of his spiritual nature, he is able to manipulate the created world
 3. by virtue of his “exalted” nature, he controls a vast army of spiritual forces throughout the world
3. what does the adversary control?
 - a. “rulers” = the governance of specific *geographic* areas of the world – **i.e.** the manipulation by Satan of various parts of the world, each with its own “kind” of darkness (**e.g.** East, Middle East, West)
 1. the power of Satan to create and hold whole sections of the world in darkness through religious and governmental forces (**e.g.** Islam and *sharia* law)

- b. “*authorities*” = the control of the “values” within culture and society itself – **i.e.** the shaping of human behavior through the *means* of culture (**e.g.** secularism, materialism, progressivism)
 - 1. the power of Satan to manipulate the forces of culture in order to mold thinking processes over the long term into the embrace of forms of evil as *normal* and *necessary*
 - c. “*cosmic powers over darkness*” = the use of systems of power within human society to “drive” certain evil patterns into a sustained way of thinking (**i.e.** the media, the entertainment industry)
 - 1. the power of Satan to exercise naked forces of power through human beings to create and sustain a climate of “*darkness*” (**i.e.** blindness) over the minds and hearts of people
 - d. “*spiritual forces of evil*” = the *uninterrupted* onslaught of all of these against the human race – **i.e.** the never-ending attack of the forces of evil against the people and plans of God
 - 1. the power of Satan to never give up – the continuing nature of his attack, even in the face of certain defeat – a *consuming* desire to win at all costs
4. **Paul recognizes (and reminds us) that the forces of evil will use every imaginable weapon to attempt to thwart the plans of God, destroy the church, and crush his elect**
- a. but, here is the good news:

“Did we in our own strength confide, Our striving would be losing; Were not the right man on our side, The man of God's own choosing. Dost ask who that may be? Christ Jesus, it is he; Lord Sab-aye-oth his name, From age to age the same, And he must win the battle.”

 - 1. Sabaoth = “the hosts of heaven” – Christ Jesus is sovereign over all of the inhabitants of the heavenly realm, both good and evil, and he is purposed by the decree of the Father to win over all of forces of evil that have come against the human race
 - b. **we, then, must recognize that we are in a spiritual battle, put on the armor God has provided for us, and withstand the onslaught – we must not fall on the battlefield by either ignoring the war or entering it unprepared**