

Prepare for War: The Enemy is Coming

By Jess Arnds

sermonaudio.com

Bible Text: Ephesians 6:10-13
Preached on: Sunday, May 20, 2018

Providence Church

2146 Buford Hwy
Buford Hwy, Duluth, GA 30097

Website: www.providenceduluth.org
Online Sermons: www.sermonaudio.com/providencechurch

What a blessing to know that we are at peace with God; that those by faith in Christ have a true peace, a reconciliation with their Creator, the omnipresent one, the one that is always with us, the all-powerful one. I mean, we are truly at peace with our environment because God is everywhere. But also because we are at peace with God, we're at war with the devil and that is our topic for today and for next week as well, and as we approach this, as we approach this concept, this idea, this subject, I want to acknowledge the reality that Satan is at war with us and acknowledge our need for God by praying together that the Lord would remove the hindrances to his word this morning, making its way into our heart; remove our resistance to it; that he would remove our distraction from it. So will you go to war with me this morning in prayer, praying for yourself and for one another that his word would explode into our mind and that the reality of these truths would change us and change how we think because this is real. This is reality. So let's pray not just as a ritual that we do, not just as a transition into the next thing, but as a real necessity to hear from God.

Let's pray.

Father, we come to you desperately asking you for help. Lord, we recognize our own weakness, our own lack of strength, our own lack of wisdom and knowledge, but Lord, you have all of those things in abundance and you give wisdom to those that ask and seek. So Lord, I pray that you would this morning remove the hindrances in our heart, in our mind to your word; that you would snap us to focus and to attention; that you would allow us to see what we must know and believe and what we must do in response. And Lord, I pray knowing, Father, there are people in this room who probably do not know you; whose eyes are blinded by the evil one. I pray that you would lift that veil that they would see the glory of God in the face of Christ; that you would be honored in us and among us. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

So our passage and our area of focus will be in Ephesians 6. We'll read verses 10 through 20. The title of today's message is "The Enemy is Coming." Okay, this is the second part of three. Last week we talked about the fact that we have an enemy. He is real, okay? And today the enemy is coming. Next week we will talk about our command from God to stand firm against him. These are three reasons to prepare for war. Three reasons to prepare for war: we have an enemy; the enemy is coming; and we have been commanded

to stand firm. We can't retreat on this. We can't give up ground on this and so we must prepare diligently.

With Ephesians 6:10-20 as our guide, we will explore these realities and we will next week explore how we fight. What weapons do we have? And we'll state it out front that God is far more powerful than our enemy; that his weapons are unstoppable against the enemy. But don't rush too quickly to that before you've come to grips with the reality that we face. This will not be easy. This is not an easy war. This is not an easy fight simply because God is on our side. It will require diligence and it will require zeal. It will require some sweat and tears to fight this thing but it is possible to win against these enemies.

So let's go ahead and read Ephesians 6:10-20 and then we will get into it.

10 Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might. 11 Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil. 12 For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places. 13 Therefore, take up the full armor of God, so that you will be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm. 14 Stand firm therefore, having girded your loins with truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, 15 and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; 16 in addition to all, taking up the shield of faith with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. 17 And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. 18 With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints, 19 and pray on my behalf, that utterance may be given to me in the opening of my mouth, to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel, 20 for which I am an ambassador in chains; that in proclaiming it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak.

So as we discussed last time, we have an enemy who is personal. He's a real person. He's spiritual, okay, so he's an angel. He's ancient. He's been around since the beginning. He is evil. He hates God. He hates you. He hates mankind and he desires to work destruction against us; to shame God and his people and to thwart God's purposes. That is his desire and he is powerful. He can influence weather. He can influence some disease. He is the power behind the thrones in many places and he has myriads of demonic forces on his side, innumerable angels, powerful beings in the heavenly places that are evil and wicked just like he is and they are under his command and control. So he's personal, spiritual, ancient, evil, powerful and he is a schemer. He is envious of the glory of Christ and desires his throne but he has been cast out of heaven and knows that he has a short time to fight against God. He hates God and, therefore, he hates man made in the image of God. He hates Jesus Christ and, therefore, especially hates Christians who are being conformed into the image of Christ.

So knowing that we have an enemy like this, we need to do everything that we can to prepare for war because we have this enemy, and now we come to this second reason: the enemy is coming, and what I mean is this, we have an enemy that is not just evil and powerful, he is actively plotting. He is against us. He is actively scheming and his plans will be brought to bear on our lives at some point.

To illustrate this, I want to point out two phrases in our passage. The first is "the schemes of the devil," and the second phrase is "the evil day." Okay, look at verse 11 for scheming. Verse 11, "Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil." This word "schemes" comes from the Greek word "methodeia." That's where our English term "methods" comes from. This specific word is only used in Ephesians in the New Testament. It's only used twice in the New Testament, the other time is in Ephesians 4:14 where it's used in reference to the false doctrines of men. In non-biblical sources, it is used in a positive sense of planning but is also used in a bad sense to mean cunning, deception and craftiness. It is used of military strategies employing the art of deception. The root of the word takes on this nuance: handling something craftily and deceiving. The person who is like this, the person who employs this is calculated, strategic, deceptive and sneaky. That is our enemy. In this passage in Ephesians 6:11, the context is clearly a military context so this word for "schemes" is military strategies employing the art of deception, and because it is also plural, it's methods, it's schemes, not just one scheme but many, and this suggests that his attacks are constantly repeated and are incalculable in their variety.

So he is constantly scheming and he's had lots of practice doing this. He is sneaky, creative and relentless and so he's scheming against us and he is waiting for the right moment to strike. This is shown in verse 13, "the evil day." So he will attack, okay? So he is scheming and he will attack. Verse 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." There is coming an evil day in which you must stand against his schemes, against his attempts to make you fall back.

What is this evil day? Well, Paul has already introduced this concept earlier in Ephesians 5:16. I'll go ahead and read verse 15 and 16. He says, "Therefore be careful how you walk, not as unwise men but as wise, making the most of your time, because the days are evil." We live in evil days. We live in a time period where evil is running rampant. Okay, the days, our era, the time period between when this was written and when Jesus comes again and does away with evil is characterized by evil.

So we live in days that are characterized by this but there is coming an evil day, one particular moment in which you must stand against him at the right time. So this word for "evil, evil days," the Greek word is "poneros," which means "useless; destructive; and harmful," and this day itself is a day characterized by that.

The level of temptation that Satan brings against us is not steady. It comes in waves. It comes at strategic moments. We know this from our life. There are times when it's easier to follow God and when it's harder. We know that there are moments in which the

company that we keep is helpful and influential in our quest to follow the Lord, and there are other times in which they seem to do everything possible to oppose us and to bring temptation to bear on our life. Not every day is the same but we are to make the best use of every day because the days are evil, and to prepare for the worst because there will come a day in which it requires greater fortitude to resist him. Okay, so we make the best use of the time because the days are evil in preparation for a particular moment when that temptation is going to be really really strong and you need to be ready.

So I want to look at three aspects of Satan's schemes and then we'll focus especially on his methods. So three aspects: his goals; his allies; and his methods. Just real quickly, his goal we've mentioned already. His goal is to destroy God's work; to oppose God's work because he hates God. This ancient evil powerful enemy is scheming against us in order to bring shame and disgrace upon the name of Christ. His goal is to make you dishonor Christ in your actions, to disobey the will of God, and he wants your faith to fail. That is his primary aim, that your faith would fail and that your proclamation of the Gospel would be hindered. He does not want people to worship Christ. He doesn't want you worshipping Christ, he doesn't want anyone else worshipping Christ, and if he can get you to not proclaim the Gospel, that is the point of attack that he really wants to focus on.

So those are his goals. What are his allies? Satan is not alone. Obviously we've talked about his demonic forces. So Satan and the demons, the demonic realm, have two allies on their side: the flesh and the world. Look at Ephesians 2:1,

1 And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, 2 in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience.

Who is that? Who is that spirit working in the sons of disobedience? It's the devil. He is the prince of the power of the air. Verse 3,

3 Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest.

Okay, I want to notice a few things about this passage. Unbelievers are already dead in sin. This means that they cannot please God and that they stand condemned. There is no love for God in their heart. Okay, the world is characterized by this because it is energized by Satan, the prince of the power of the air. He is currently at work in them. They are characterized by disobedience. Okay, this is what characterizes the world and the lust of the flesh is disobedience to God.

And what does it mean that we live in the lust of our flesh, indulging the desires of your mind? Think about this. Okay, when you were first conceived, you were automatically born with a nature that is infected by sin right out the gate. This is why it says you were dead in sin. You automatically have desires that are contrary to the will of God.

Automatically. You can't help it. You don't have to be taught how to covet. You don't have to be taught how to lie or steal or cheat or express anger or lust. My kids are experts at that. They know how to lie. They know how to covet. They know how to steal and cheat, and they definitely know how to express anger. You don't have to learn how to be selfish or disobedient. You don't have to learn arrogance, you already have an overestimation of yourself. All of these things come naturally and we only get more sophisticated at expressing our sinful desires and at getting what we desire. We start to realize that we have to use other people to get what we desire so we have to play along and we get more sophisticated at that, putting on a show.

Well, people will readily admit that they are not perfect, right? Everyone says, "Yeah, I'm not perfect." But they believe that they're basically good. For the most part, people believe they're basically good, deserving of heaven, though they make certain mistakes, but nothing could be further from the truth. Nothing could be further from the truth that you and I and any human being deserves heaven, deserves to be in paradise with God, deserves to avoid judgment. People know they're not perfect but getting them to acknowledge that God is righteous to send them to hell and to be judged for their sin, that's when the teeth come out. That's when you will be opposed vehemently and often violently.

So notice also that these sinful lusts are not just physical urges. Okay, this is not just talking about sexual lust, sinful sexual lust. That's not the only thing. It also is the desires of the mind. The mind has been tainted by sin. This doesn't mean that unbelievers are stupid. Many of them are brilliant, they just do not submit to God. They do not submit to God. Unbelievers are dead in sin and can do nothing but sin. They never are in submission to God and they never act in faithfulness to God. All of their works are filthy rags, just like yours and mine before Christ. They are dominated by the flesh and by sinful desire but believers have been set free. We've been set free from the law of sin and death. We're no longer enslaved to these lusts. We're no longer enslaved to the desires of the mind. We can now do things that are pleasing to God. It doesn't mean that we always will but now we have the power to.

So the difference now between what was going on before you were saved and where you are at now is that now there is a war going on inside of you. Prior to that there was no war, there was only captivity. You were a slave to sin. You were not at war with it. But now there is a spiritual war. The spirit wars against the flesh. That's why you experience internal conflict over your sin, the conflicting desires within you. Before you were saved you couldn't fight back even when you wanted to, but now there is another force inside of you, the Spirit of God, that has caused you to be born again, caused you to have desires to follow God, and is giving you the power and the truth that you need to fight it. Romans 8 says that you are to put to death the deeds of the flesh. This means that you are to make war on your sinful desires and that you are no longer enslaved but now you must destroy them.

So not only are we at war against our fleshly desires, but our fleshly lusts are at war with us. 1 Peter 2:11 says this,

11 Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers to abstain from fleshly lusts which wage war against the soul.

Your own desires, your own flesh is at war against you and it is an ally to the devil.

Look at Ephesians 4:17-22.

17 So this I say, and affirm together with the Lord, that you walk no longer just as the Gentiles also walk, in the futility of their mind;

The Gentiles meaning unbelievers, those that don't know God, they walk in the futility of their mind, their mind being useless for the things of God.

18 being darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardness of their heart;

Do you see that? They are darkened in their understanding, they don't know God because they are ignorant and because their hearts are hardened. They are ignorant and they are willfully ignorant. They are enslaved to that and they are willfully enslaved. Verse 19,

19 and they, having become callous, have given themselves over to sensuality for the practice of every kind of impurity with greediness. 20 But you did not learn Christ in this way, 21 if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught in Him, just as truth is in Jesus, 22 that, in reference to your former manner of life, you lay aside the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit,

And we could keep going, but these lusts, these lusts of deceit are at war against your soul. We are to make war and to kill the lust of the flesh within our own heart, within our own soul, and so that explains what is going on inside a believer.

So we're being called to deny these lusts, the lust of the flesh, the desires of the mind, these lusts of deceit, but Satan does not want you to do that. He no longer has dominion over you, he no longer works within you like he does in the unbelievers, he no longer blinds your mind to the Gospel like he does unbelievers, but he knows that though you are free, you are still tempted by these lusts and he wants to exploit your desires. He seeks to bring temptation to bear upon your flesh. That is what he does. He wants to bring temptation to bear upon your flesh and he has another ally that helps him do this: it is the world. Okay, I don't mean the world as in just people in general. I'm talking about a world system of thought that is raised up against God. As was mentioned in Ephesians 2:2, Satan is at work in the sons of disobedience, the people known as the world. This is the combined system of ungodly thoughts. They are mostly unwittingly collaborating to overthrow God's rule on their life. They do not want to submit to him.

Satan is called the prince and the ruler and the god of this world, little "g." Passages if you want to look them up are John 12:31; 14:30; 2 Corinthians 4:4. Listen to 2 Corinthians 4:4,

4 in whose case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.

This is his goal as we've said before. He is blinding their minds so that they would not see, they would not believe the Gospel. 2 Timothy says that unbelievers have been captured by the devil to do his will. In John 8:44, Jesus said that the Pharisees were doing the will of their father the devil. And 1 John calls those who live in unrepentant unrestrained sin, he calls them children of the devil, 1 John 3:10,

10 By this the children of God and the children of the devil are obvious: anyone who does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor the one who does not love his brother.

1 John 5:19 says that the whole world lies under the sway of the devil. John 7:7 says that the world hates Jesus and it will also hate his disciples. 1 Corinthians 1:21 says that the world's wisdom cannot lead to God,

21 For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not come to know God, God was well-pleased through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe.

The world has its own set of wisdom, stuff that makes sense to them, and they employ that wisdom to try to make themselves right, to justify themselves, and it will not lead them to God because you cannot come to God through the world's wisdom. It is foolishness to God, 1 Corinthians 3:19.

You cannot love the world and love God at the same time. I don't mean you can't love the people in the world but you cannot love the things of the world. James 4:4 says this in a very pointed statement. He says,

4 You adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.

Satan wants to tempt you to seek the friendship and the approval of the world. That is a trap.

So what does this world value? What comprises this world system? 1 John 2:15-17. He says,

15 Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. [and here it is] 16 For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world. 17 The world is passing away, and also its lusts; but the one who does the will of God lives forever.

So there are those three values of the world: the lust of the flesh, okay, sexual lust; the lust of the eyes, that is, greediness, possessions, money, lust for those things, covetousness; and the boastful pride of life, the arrogance that goes along with all these things. This is what the world is pumping out through all of its channels, through all of its news organizations, through all of its television series, through all the songs. Think about the most popular songs on the radio today: sex, money and man, "Aren't I special?" The arrogance that it promotes as a good thing. Almost every song on the radio. Over and over this drumbeat promoting yourself, promoting your lusts, and acquiring possessions and money so you can go and do whatever you want to do independent of God and independent of anyone, and everyone needs to bow to your desires. That is the world. Those are the lusts of the world and it is passing away. That will all fade away. It's all vanity.

So he has these two allies: the world and the flesh, and he uses the world to bring temptation to bear on your flesh. He uses the people that he controls to bring temptation to bear on your desires so that you would fall prey to his lies so that you would become ineffective in the proclamation of the Gospel that saves and sets people free from those things. That's what he's doing and he has many methods to do this.

Now listen to this: God created mankind in the image of God, right? He created him to have a relationship with God and to represent God in creation, meaning he made man in the image of God to tend to the garden and to have dominion over his world. He represents the rule of God on the world. He is to be a godly expression of love to God's creation. God created mankind to worship his Son Jesus Christ. It is this worship that Satan desired for himself and in jealousy he raised a rebellion, took one-third of the angels. He then tempted Eve to doubt God's truthfulness and his goodness which led her to disobey God and then to give the fruit to Adam who then knowing what he was doing, followed his wife and ate of the fruit and cast all of mankind into sin and now they are subject to sin and death for the rest of their life.

Satan's primary focus has been to keep mankind enslaved in sin so that they will die in a state of rebellion against God. Okay, this is the big picture. He wants people to stay enslaved and blinded so that they will die in a permanent state of rebellion against God and that they will curse God forever in hell. That's what he wants because he hates mankind and he hates God and there is nothing good about any of that stuff and he is working to do that, to keep people enslaved. All people are born in sin, conceived in sin, and in Adam all died because all sinned. All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God but God has been on a rescue mission since Genesis 3. He promised in Genesis 3:15 that the seed of the woman would bruise the head of the snake. He promised it right there

and then that eventually this serpent who caused this mess would be crushed by the seed of the woman. So it would be one of the descendants of the woman. It would be a man of some kind. It would be a man that would do this and God has been on this rescue mission ever since, bringing all of history to fulfill that promise and Satan throughout all of history has been trying to thwart God's rescue mission.

He has opposed God's people throughout history. Think of Cain and Abel. God told Cain that sin was crouching at the door; its desire was for you and you must rule over it. Did he obey? Did he heed God's warning? No, he gave into sin. Somehow, how much do you want to bet Satan was there tempting him to kill Abel? And why was he wanting to kill Abel? Probably because Satan thought that the fulfillment of the promise would come through Abel.

He is opposing God's people and wanting to cut off God's promises and thwart his plan. He is opposing people throughout history. He brings accusation against God's people. He brought accusation against Job, a righteous man, one that God was pleased with. God delighted in Job and Satan came to bring accusation against the one in whom God delighted. Why? Is Satan really concerned about righteousness? No, he hates God. He wants to accuse God of wrongdoing. He wants to accuse God of unrighteousness by supporting a man who is a sinner. He brings accusation against God's people.

He is seeking both to find injustice with God and to condemn people who might otherwise worship God. He doesn't want anyone to give worship to God and a condemned person is not going to worship God. He wants you to be condemned and that is one of his tactics is that you would believe that Christ's sacrifice is not enough; that you are still condemned. And the result is like Martin Luther who hated God because he saw God as this tyrant condemning him, not as a gracious Savior providing a way of salvation by faith alone.

So Satan is trying to thwart this mission and he wants people to despise God, and so when he realized that God's chosen people were the Jews, he has tried many times to destroy them. He's tried to deceive them with idols. He has brought temptation to bear upon their kings. He tried to wipe them out through the work of Haman in the book of Esther. Then when he realized that the Messiah had been born in Bethlehem, he energized Herod the Great to slaughter the babies there.

When Jesus walked the earth, Satan tempted Jesus to take the shortcut rather than to go through the cross. He was constantly trying to get Jesus to avoid the cross. How did he do this? He offered him the kingdoms of the world without having to go through the cross. He offered that people would worship him as Messiah, "Throw yourself off the temple so that people will see that you're the Messiah." To shortcut the cross, go around the cross, avoid the cross. When Peter, when he told the disciples, "I must go to Jerusalem and be crucified there," Peter stood up to him and said, "No, Lord!" Do you remember what Jesus said to him? "Get behind me, Satan. You are thinking as man thinks, not as God." He had to go to the cross and Satan was constantly trying to tempt Jesus to avoid it. Why? Why was he going to the cross? Because it was the only way for you and I to be

saved and Satan did not want that. If Jesus didn't go to the cross, no believer in the Old Testament or the New could be saved.

So he wanted to thwart that effort to go to the cross but he failed to stop Jesus. He failed to keep him from marching straight to the cross and laying his life down for our redemption thus crushing the head of the snake. So Satan knows that he has ultimately been defeated. He knows that his time is short. He is trying to mitigate his losses by opposing the work of God and the spread of this Gospel. So he couldn't stop Jesus from being crucified and paying the ransom, but now he's trying to stop the message from going out because it is by hearing this Gospel that people are saved, hearing and believing, and so he is trying to stop that and he seeks to limit the effectiveness of Christians in doing this. He does not want people to be saved and set free from his dominion.

So how does he do this? What are his methods? How does he bring this temptation to bear upon your flesh so that you would abandon the faith and bring shame on the name of Christ and fail in the Great Commission? You could categorize this in a number of ways but I'm going to choose three broad headings, three D's of the devil's schemes: 1, deception; 2, division; and 3, distraction. Deception, division and distraction.

Okay, 1, deception. Satan has blinded the minds of unbelievers so that they would not see the glory of Christ. That is to say people are dead in their trespasses and their only hope is to believe in Christ, but Satan is blinding their minds so that they will not receive this Gospel. They will not believe it. But it is through this light of the true Gospel that people are set free from the devil's snare no longer to do his will but now to do the will of God. So in order to stop this, he will create distortions of the truth, false doctrine. He will lie about the person of Christ, about whether he is God, whether or not he really came in the flesh, and he will disguise himself as an angel of light. 2 Corinthians 11:13-15 says this,

13 For such men are false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. 14 No wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. 15 Therefore it is not surprising if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness, whose end will be according to their deeds.

These false apostles appear and try to make themselves appear as friends of Christ, apostles of Christ, as angels of light, and so not everything is as it appears. Not every doctrine is safe. We have to be discerning about what we believe, about whether it is true or not, because Satan is trying to thwart the Gospel through false representations of it. 2 Corinthians 11:3 says this,

3 ... I am afraid that, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your minds will be led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ.

He wants to deceive you through craftiness in your mind, in your thinking, away from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ. He wants to get you pursuing other things. He wants you to do spiritual things that have nothing to do with Christ. Colossians 2:6 says this,

6 Therefore as you have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, 7 having been firmly rooted and now being built up in Him and established in your faith, just as you were instructed, and overflowing with gratitude. 8 See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ.

There are many false doctrines, deceptions, lies. He wants to confuse believers rather than allow them to be built up in the truth. Ephesians talks about this, that we would no longer be children tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine by the trickery of men and by the craftiness and deceitful scheming but speaking the truth in love we are to grow up in all aspects in him who is the head, even Christ.

You know, often there is a fascination with any new teaching. There is something I haven't heard before and so you chase it down and it becomes this controversy and you get all embroiled in these things and it's a distortion and a distraction and it throws you back and forth by the waves. Instead of that, instead of that we are to speak the truth in love so that we are not tossed to and fro by the devil's schemes, by lies. Satan wants to distort the Gospel of peace. He wants you to believe that you're not truly forgiven; that it's not enough. He wants to catch you in a snare and he wants you to believe lies about sin.

Look at Ephesians 5:5-6,

5 For this you know with certainty,

Okay, I'm going to read this slowly because I'm not sure we always believe this. Ephesians 5:5-6,

5 For this you know with certainty, that no immoral or impure person or covetous man, who is an idolater, has an inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God.

No immoral or impure person or covetous man who is an idolater, has an inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. Okay, how many people living actively in immorality have an inheritance in the kingdom of God? How many people? Zero, it says. Verse 6,

6 Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience.

A deception of the devil is to make it appear as though one can be right with God and fully immersed in immorality. That is a lie. That is a lie. It's a damning lie if you believe what this passage says.

Let no one deceive you with empty words. Such empty words will enslave you in sin, they will not set you free from sin. They will give you a false sense of comfort and security while leaving you enslaved and leaving you condemned. You see, the Gospel is a transforming Gospel. It's not only a forgiving Gospel, it is a transforming Gospel. It doesn't mean we're perfect, it doesn't mean we're not tempted, but what it does mean is that we do not live fully in sin as captives to it. Do you know what that means, Christian? If you are struggling with sin, is that you are free. You do not have to stay there. We'll talk more about that next week.

Satan wants to lie to you so deceptions about the Gospel, deceptions about doctrine, deceptions about Christ, deceptions about sin, and the whole New Testament is just filled with corrections to false doctrine. A survey of New Testament epistles will show that one characteristic of false teachers and false doctrine is that they convey the idea that the simple Gospel of salvation by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, is not enough. You need to take it to a higher spiritual level through keeping ordinances of the law; through rituals; through some deeper spiritual knowledge or having some experience that puts you to the next level. Do you know what that shows? If that's what you're looking for, if you're looking for power to overcome sin outside of the simple Gospel of Christ and the truth of his word, you are believing lies and they will not set you free, they will just make you feel better.

What is often characteristic of these false teachers is they distort the person of Christ, they are greedy, arrogant and sensual, and they make great claims and make big shows of spirituality but they are really rotten in the core. They make a claim of godliness but deny its power and they deny him, they deny the Lord by their works. Just read 2 Peter and Jude. Big, arrogant, boasting, false teachers who are steeped in sin.

Galatians and Hebrews, those two books that were written to people who were tempted to go back to the law to either in the case of Hebrews, to go to the law to be saved, in the case of Galatians, to go to the law to be sanctified. Colossians, they were being tempted by some combination of legalism and spiritualism. They thought by treating their body harshly, asceticism, that they could achieve some deeper spiritual understanding. Christ was not enough. Christ was not sufficient. The Gospel was not sufficient. You needed some kind of extra boost through your own self-righteousness. 1 John was written to correct false understandings of how you know that you belong to Christ. 2 Peter and Jude took on false teachers very very directly and they really thrash them in those two books. And then 1 and 2 Thessalonians were written to correct doctrinal errors about the second coming of Christ. You see, the church was constantly under attack regarding lies, lies coming from Satan to throw people off so that they would be ineffective in the proclamation of the Gospel.

Okay, so deception is his first strategy and you could go on and on and illustrate that more and more. It would take weeks. But his second strategy is division. Division. The entire book of 1 Corinthians and 2 Corinthians and Philippians and Philemon are mostly addressing interpersonal divisions and you see that even in the book of Ephesians that there are divisions between Gentile and Jewish believers that he is seeking to correct. These divisions hinder us in the proclamation of the Gospel. Satan knows that we are most effective as a church when we work together in unity and this is something that Paul worked very hard for. I mean, this is the type of stuff when he was in prison, he was writing because he heard that there were divisions going on and he is writing urgently to correct that, to get them to work together.

Look at Philippians 1:27. Again, he wrote this from prison.

27 Only conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or remain absent, I will hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit [there is our phrase, standing firm in one spirit], with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel;

That's what we're to be about.

Paul's concern in the book of Ephesians was no different. Look at chapter 4, verses 1 through 3. He says,

1 Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, 2 with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love, 3 being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

Satan doesn't want us to work together for the sake of the Gospel so he works to erode our unity. And how does he do this? It's already been talked about in the book of Ephesians. Look at this phrase in chapter 4, verse 27, he says,

27 ... do not give the devil an opportunity.

This is in the context of walking in unity and in putting on Christ rather than these fleshly lusts. Do not give the devil an opportunity. The word here for "opportunity" literally means "a place." Don't give him a place. Don't give him an opening. Don't give him a foothold, a beachhead.

How do we do that? What gives him a beachhead? What gives him a foothold? What gives him a place? Look at verses 25 in the context there, this phrase, "do not give the devil an opportunity," applies to this entire context. It's not just to one thing but these are the ways that we give Satan a foothold. Verse 25,

25 Therefore, laying aside falsehood, speak truth each one of you with his neighbor, for we are members of one another.

By lying to one another, you give Satan a foothold. You see, if we're working together for the Gospel, we are soldiers in this fight, if we are advancing on the kingdom of darkness with the Gospel and you're lying to me saying you're over here when you're actually way over there, you see, it doesn't work. You hang each other out to dry when you lie to one another. Do not lie to one another because you are members of one another.

Verse 26,

26 Be angry, and yet do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger,

Your anger gives the devil a place, an opportunity. It plays into his hand. It divides you. It ruins your ability to work together for the cause of the Gospel, doesn't it? You're distracted with whatever your petty thing is and sometimes it's big things that you're legitimately angry about. You cannot allow anger to stay there and to fester because you give a place to the devil to accomplish his goal of dividing the body so that we do not work together. Instead we're fighting each other instead of fighting the real enemy. You are hindering the cause of the Gospel when you do not deal with your anger. Be angry and do not sin. Do not let the sun go down on your anger. Do not let it stay there.

Verse 28,

28 He who steals must steal no longer; but rather he must labor, performing with his own hands what is good, so that he will have something to share with one who has need.

In Thessalonians it talks about those who are idle and are unwilling to work but just mooch off of everyone. They couch surf and they take food and money and whatever and they just find ways to not work. Here it's talking about those who steal and are refusing to actually labor. We, on the other hand, are to labor to give something good to the body. If you are not, you give a place to the devil. You give him an opportunity. They say idleness is the devil's playground. We're to be at work, productive. Proverbs says he who works his land will have plenty of bread, but he who follows worthless pursuits will have plenty of poverty. That principle applies to everything that we do spiritually and physically. It takes diligence to produce something and when we are lazy, we give place to the devil.

Look at verse 29,

29 Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, so that it will give grace to those who hear.

Do you realize that each word, that your words are not neutral? That your words have effect on the people around you? And is it going to aid them in this battle against their flesh, against the world, against the devil who is strategizing against them, or will it tear them down? Will it hinder them in this fight or will it build them up? Will it give grace to

them? Will it strengthen them and encourage them? Will it properly warn them? Will it inform them? Speaking the truth in love and building them up so that they can put on the armor of God and that they will stand firm? Or are we tearing each other apart either through unhelpful sarcasm or plain criticism? If we allow unwholesome words to proceed from our mouth, we give the devil a foothold.

Verse 30,

30 Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. 31 Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice.

All of these things hinder the body in its work. All these things leave us open to the attack of Satan and give in to his schemes and plans.

Verse 32, instead,

32 Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.

Forgive because this is bigger than you and your happiness. This is bigger than your petty desires. This is bigger than what you wanting it to be easy, wanting respect for yourself, wanting glory for yourself. This is bigger than that. This is more important than that. Lay aside those things and forgive.

Forgive even those who have committed grievous sin. 2 Corinthians 2:6-11 talks about how a man who was in terrible sexual sin had repented genuinely and Paul says that you need to forgive and comfort him so that he will not be overwhelmed with excessive sorrow, so that no advantage would be taken of us by Satan for we are not ignorant of his schemes, he says. It would be his scheme to continue to hold it against a man who has truly repented, otherwise we give in to the devil's schemes.

Well, there's more that we could talk about. Let me talk about the last one, distraction, the last major category of his schemes is distraction. Look at Ephesians 5:15, it says,

15 Therefore be careful how you walk, not as unwise men but as wise, 16 making the most of your time, because the days are evil. 17 So then do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. 18 And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit, 19 speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord; 20 always giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father; 21 and be subject to one another in the fear of Christ.

That word where he says in verse 18, "do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation," that word for "dissipation" means it is wasteful. It is wastefulness. To be drunk is to

waste money. It wastes time. It wastes your mind and it leaves you open to the attack of Satan and it is a distraction from what you're called to do. Don't be foolish. Understand God's will. Make the most of your time. You see, this fills in all of the cracks, right? It's not enough to just avoid major sins, it's not enough to just get your theology correct, just check off the boxes, "Alright, I read the doctrinal statement and I agree. Sweet, I can relax." No, that's not how this works. We are to make the most of the time and God defines what that means.

What has God called you to do? What is the will of God? We've talked about this. We've already talked about holiness and righteousness and how you talk and anger, but he's also called wives to submit to husbands. He's called husbands to love your wives and parents to train your children in the Lord and for all of us to act righteously in the workplace. What is distracting you from doing those things? And I'll just lay this out there. I know for me, it is media, it is constant information, it is whatever, any time my phone dings with some notification. Work. Work is a distraction from God's will sometimes because I'm anxious about whatever it is and I've got to go and I'm distracted and I pull out this phone. How many times have you been at a restaurant and you see the whole family sitting around staring at their phones? Distracted from what matters. What God has called you to do. Distracted from training up your children in a thoughtful way. Rather you let the world train them up through the media that you pump into their mind. I'm no saying it's sinful to watch a show, but I'm just saying what is making the most of the time because the days are evil.

Satan's scheme is to distract us from our primary focus in our cause, to make disciples in our own home and in our community and around the world through deception, through division and through distraction. We need to prepare for war because we have an enemy, because the enemy is coming, and next week we'll look at a third reason, because we have been commanded to stand firm and we've been given the ability to stand firm.

Let's pray.

Lord, there is no way that we could even fully scratch the surface because your whole word is about this and so, Lord, I pray that with all of this information and all of these passages, Lord, that can be overwhelming, I pray, Lord, that you would allow the key truth that each individual needs to hear and to think about to stick with them and that we would help one another and we would lay aside our anger, our divisions, our bitterness, that we would be wise about the deceptions that we're being taught by the world, and that we would be aware of the distractions. Lord, forgive us for the ways in which we have used the time for self-indulgence. Lord, I pray that we would strap on the armor and prepare for war and that, Lord, we would find it a joyful thing to be a soldier in your army, fighting for your cause, because we know that we will win. May you be glorified in us we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.