

Wrestling with the Darkness

Ephesians 6:10-12

When a group of Christians gathered for an outdoor prayer serviceⁱ on Saturday, August 7, 2021 in Portland, Oregon, USA, the unbelievable happened. Unbelievable, that is, if you are an American. Christians in other countries are very familiar with scenes such as this.

A group identifying themselves as “Antifa”ⁱⁱ (or “anti-fascists”) attacked the Christian group in a Portland park. Antifa threw a large explosive firework into a crowd of children. They threw rotten eggs, urine and feces on the adults. And they pepper-sprayed the pastors who approached them to ask them to stop. Where were the police? They were called, but they never answered the call. One hundred and fifteen (115) Portland police officers resigned from the Portland police department last year as protestors demanded that the city “defund the police.” (The city reduced their funding for the police by \$20 million dollars.) The Antifa group went on to damage the sound system equipment for the event. But one particular question that was shouted at the Christians should catch our attention. The Antifa terrorists shouted, “Where is your God now?!”ⁱⁱⁱ

According to Psalm 115:2, pagans have mocked believers with this question for centuries. But in Micah 7:10, that question occurs in a context which helps us to understand where we are as a nation. The Book of Micah was written to the nations (1:2) to remind them to pay close attention to the way that the Lord would punish Israel for its national sins (1:5). And the question, “Where is the Lord your God?” occurs in a series of events, according to Micah 7:7-10 (described in detail below). This mocking question shouted at Christians reminds us about the nature of the struggle going on around us: it is spiritual warfare. What is spiritual warfare? How should one prepare himself for the battle? How can you face the spiritual attacks on you and your household? God has designed His Word to teach believers how to wrestle with the darkness.

¹⁰ Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might. ¹¹ Put on the whole armor of God that ye may be able to stand against the wiles [schemes] of the devil. ¹² For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. (Ephesians 6:10-12)

Summing Up

The words, “**Finally, my brethren ...**” should be understood as “in conclusion.” In this message and the next message, we will see that some of the most dynamic truth in this letter to the Ephesians is summed up in these verses. Paul probably wrote this letter around 62 A.D., while he was under house arrest in Rome. It is quite likely that a Roman soldier was posted in his house while Paul was under arrest. Paul may have observed the soldier’s armor as he wrote this letter, using that armor as an object lesson. In doing so, he taught us how to wrestle with the darkness.

Be Strengthened in the Lord

This is a command: “**... be strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might.**” These words convey the idea of “be strengthened in or by the Lord and His power.”^{iv} In other words, you shouldn’t and can’t face these things in your own human strength. But there is no need to face it alone. Consider what these believers had already read in Ephesians. As you think through these verses, remember that God is showing us how He gives us the strength to wrestle with the darkness. Paul prayed that the church members would know “the exceeding greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his mighty power”

(1:19). God's power is demonstrated in Christ's resurrection and ascension is "far above all principality and power and might and dominion" (1:21). The gift of the grace of God was given to Paul by the working of God's power (3:7). So Paul prayed "that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in the inner man" (3:16). This is a far greater power than we can conceive of. As Paul prayed in 3:20, "Now unto him that is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us..." So it is not surprising to see that this enablement is reflected in Ephesians 6:11, 13 and 16 – **"that you may be to stand ... able to withstand ... able to quench the fiery darts of the wicked."** So when we join our voices singing, "I sing the mighty power of God" there's a reason for that! God gives us the power to wrestle with the darkness.

The Lord told Joshua to **"be strong and of a good courage"** promising that as He had been with Moses, so He would be with Joshua (Joshua 1:5-6). When the people began to talk about murdering David at Ziklag, **"David encouraged [strengthened] himself in the Lord."**^{vi} In 1749, Charles Wesley wrote, *"Soldiers of Christ, arise, and put your armor on, strong in the strength which God supplies through His eternal Son. Strong in the Lord of hosts, and in his mighty power, who in the strength of Jesus trusts is more than conqueror."* God commands us to be "strong in the strength which God supplies, through His eternal Son" to wrestle with the darkness.

Put on the Whole Armor of God

This is the second command: **"Put on the whole armor of God."** This command explains and applies the first command: to be strengthened in the Lord. The word "armor" translates the Greek word [panoplia], the word behind our English word, "panoply" meaning "a complete collection." Used here, it refers to a complete set of all the parts of full armor used in defensive or offensive battle. This is putting on "the armor of light" which is to "put on the Lord Jesus Christ" (Romans 13:12-14). The extended illustration of spiritual armor draws on the picture of the Lord presented in Isaiah 59:17, **"For he put on righteousness as a breastplate, and an helmet of salvation upon his head ..."** Think of this as you follow the command to "put on the whole armor of God" in order to wrestle with the darkness.

Satan's spiritual attacks on the church are part of his long war against God. But Jesus gave us clear insight into this warfare in Luke 11:21-22, **"When a strong man armed keeps his palace, his goods are in peace: But when a stronger than he shall come upon him, and overcome him, he takes from him all his armor wherein he trusted, and divides his spoils."**

Take heart in this illustration. The strong man (Satan) keeps his palace: as the god of this world, he holds men ("his goods") in blindness (2 Corinthians 4:4). But when the stronger man (Jesus Christ) attacks Satan, He overcomes the devil and takes away his armor (including his fiery darts) and captures the souls of men with the Gospel. This is what happened with every person who has ever come to Christ. God commanded the light of His glorious gospel to shine in the heart of a lost person, and that person saw the light (2 Corinthians 4:6). Have you seen the light of Christ? Have you understood the power of His sacrificial death for you on the cross? Have you believed in God's power, demonstrated in raising Christ from the dead? If you have truly seen this, then you know all about wrestling with the darkness. When you became a believer, you were no longer a victim of Satan on the battlefield. You arose from the dead with Christ (Colossians 3:1), and became very aware of what it means to wrestle with the darkness.

When Goliath threatened David in the Valley of Elah, David responded, **“You come to me with a sword, and with a spear and with a shield, but I come to you in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel whom you have defied”** (1 Samuel 17:44-45). David clothed himself in the Lord’s authoritative power for the purpose of glorifying God. In *“Soldiers of Christ Arise,”* Charles Wesley conveyed these first two commands this way: *“Stand then in his great might, with all his strength endued; but take, to arm you for the fight, the panoply of God.”*

To Be Enabled to Stand Against the Schemes of the Devil

God gave us those first two commands, **“... that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil ...”** We could translate the word, “wiles” as “schemes” or “methods” of the devil. Spiritual warfare is fighting with wicked spirits.

Four times (vs. 11, 13, and 14) the apostle placed great stress on the reason for the two commands in this passage: to be able to stand firmly and withstand the onslaughts of evil. Believers should not be blind to the battle. Even now, the hail of the fiery darts of the wicked is descending upon you. Are you ready to stand firmly, and withstand in the evil day? Those fiery darts will seem to come out of nowhere, and you must be ready for them every moment.

How should you prepare yourself for this warfare, with all its sudden, surprising battles? If you are not regularly using the Scriptures — God’s Word — then you know nothing of this great spiritual warfare. The Scriptures supply you with the military intelligence you need to understand the battle and the battlefield. For instance, Paul noted that an unwillingness to forgive the repentant plays right into the devil’s hands (1 Corinthians 2:6-11). But as Paul said, “We are not ignorant of his [the devil’s] devices. Did you know that being unwilling to forgive someone who repents puts you in the devil’s trap? Sinful anger that you do not confess to the Lord for days on end gives the devil an opportunity to win his battle over you (Ephesians 4:26-27). Contentious people, who are always striving about something, have been taken captive by the devil at his will (2 Timothy 2:26). The term used here for the devil [diabolos] means that he slanders others. It is especially important for pastors to understand this and to humble themselves before the Lord — avoiding dangerous pride. As one author noted, “The devil’s plan is to discredit the overseer [pastor], so when outsiders reproach the overseer, the devil’s plan has been accomplished, and therefore falling into the reproach of the outsiders is described as falling into the trap that devil has set for him.”^{vii} God’s Word gives you the weapons you need, and the “battle drill” to know how to use them. You can wrestle with the darkness.

If you aren’t praying, you are being preyed upon. If you are not exercising faith — dependence on the Lord in vulnerable circumstances — then you are not engaged in this fight. You are not bold and victorious, but merely a blind victim. It’s time to shake yourself awake. In the words of Romans 13:11, “it is high time to awaken out of sleep.”

In the Arena

“For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.”

Wrestling with the darkness is not wrestling with people, but for the souls of people. We are wrestling with the demons, the rulers of the darkness. We are praying, asking the Lord to bring His light into the darkened

souls of men. Think carefully about the arena of spiritual warfare, in Ephesians 3:10. It is through the church that God is showing His divine wisdom to demons and angels. Don't think of the church as this building; think of it as believers. The arena is not these four walls, but the four corners of this world. Isobel Kuhn, a missionary with the China Inland Mission, entitled one of her memoirs, "In the Arena." She was convinced that God was showing Himself to others through her deep trials. This is exactly what the Lord showed the Apostle Paul about his trials, according to 2 Corinthians 12:1-10. He knew that God would demonstrate His grace and strength through Paul's weakness.

What is the point of this passage? God has designed His Word to teach you how to wrestle with the darkness. Be strengthened in the Lord. Put on all the armor of God. Be read to stand firmly in the evil days, having done all to stand.

The fall and rise of God's people, described in Micah 7:7-10

1. The prophet, speaking for the nation, declares, "I have sinned." 9b
2. Consequently, they would bear the Lord's indignation, sitting in darkness. 8, 9a
3. Apparently, this was when their enemies rejoiced and mocked them with the question, "Where is the Lord your God?" 8, 10b
4. Believers look to the Lord, and continue to wait upon Him to deliver them. 7
5. The Lord will be a light for them, ultimately pleading their cause and executing justice for them. 8,9
6. The Lord will bring believers out into the light, and they will see that the Lord acts to vindicate them. 9
7. The enemies will see the Lord's work and be ashamed for mocking God's people with the question, "Where is the Lord your God?" God's enemies will be destroyed. 10

Believers should remind those who mock them of the words of Micah 7:8, "Rejoice not over me, O my enemy, for when I fall, I shall arise ...". (See Proverbs 24:15-16)

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ⁱⁱⁱⁱ Hear the interview with a pastor here at larlson.com

ⁱⁱ See Peter Beinart, *The Rise of the Violent Left*, *The Atlantic*, September 2017, accessed at <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2017/09/the-rise-of-the-violent-left/534192/> and "Antifa (United States)" at Wikipedia, accessed at [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Antifa_\(United_States\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Antifa_(United_States))

ⁱⁱⁱ Jon Brown, 'Where's Your God Now?': Police Stand By While Portland Antifa Assaults Christian Worshipers, Maces Pastor, *Daily Wire*, August 9, 2021, accessed at <https://www.dailywire.com/news/wheres-your-god-now-police-stand-by-while-portland-antifa-assaults-christian-worshippers-maces-pastor>

^{iv} Lenski and others point out this this present passive imperative is durative, meaning that the writer meant to convey that it was occurring before his very eyes.

^v Word by Isaac Watts, see <https://hymnary.org/text/i-sing-the-mighty-power-of-god>

^{vi} From the Hebrew "[*hāzaq*] *be(come) strong, strengthen, prevail, harden, be courageous, be sore* (meaning be severe). (ASV and RSV similar.)" Carl Philip Weber, "636 קָצַח," ed. R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer Jr., and Bruce K. Waltke, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1999), 276.

^{vii} Richard C. Blight, *An Exegetical Summary of 1 Timothy* (Dallas, TX: SIL International, 2009), 182.