

THE COSMIC CONFLICT
Winning the War for Your Soul
Palmetto Baptist Church

Text: Ephesians 6:10-13

“Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. 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. 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.” (ESV)

Introduction:

Anyone at all acquainted with warfare knows “war is a grueling business.” Warfare of any kind between nations has always had horrific consequences for the people of the nations engaged in the conflict. For this reason, a formal declaration of war is perhaps one of the most serious and important speeches a Commander-in-Chief or Head of State is ever called upon to deliver.

Perhaps the best known example of such a speech is the one given by Franklin D. Roosevelt on the morning of December 8th, 1941. It was short (just 6½ minutes long) and it was sobering! President Roosevelt’s words made absolutely clear both the description of the enemy and his confidence in absolute victory. What follows is a portion of his text:

Mr. Vice President, Mr. Speaker, members of the Senate and the House of Representatives:

Yesterday, December 7, 1941 - a date which will live in infamy - the United States of America was suddenly and deliberately attacked The attack...has caused severe damage to American naval and military forces. I regret to tell you that very many American lives have been lost. As Commander-in-Chief of the Army and Navy I have directed that all measures be taken for our defense, that always will our whole nation remember the character of the onslaught against us.

No matter how long it may take us to overcome this premeditated invasion, the American people, in their righteous might, will win through to absolute victory.

I believe that I interpret the will of the Congress and of the people when I assert that we will not only defend ourselves to the uttermost but will make it very certain that this form of treachery shall never again endanger us.

Hostilities exist. There is no blinking at the fact that our people, our territory and our interests are in grave danger. With confidence in our armed forces, with the unbounding determination of our people, we will gain the inevitable triumph. So help us God.

This speech marked the entrance of the US into a conflict that ended 1347 days later (3.6 years) on September 2, 1945 on the deck of the USS Missouri anchored at Tokyo Bay, Japan. The cost of the conflict was immense – 16 million men were mobilized in both theaters; 446,000 battle deaths (100,000 of them in the Pacific Theater alone); 1,027,000 total US casualties (6.6% of the population).

Declarations of War are serious business!

The passage before us records an even more important declaration of war by the Supreme Commander-in-Chief of the Universe! This war is a cosmic conflict that has gone on since before the creation of the world – an immense, relentless conflict between the forces of Satan and those loyal to God. And there have been earthly casualties. Since the dawn of the church, over 70 million believers have lost their earthly lives in this conflict over the last 2000 years!

Clearly, hostilities exist and we are in the middle of it! And this explains the reason why so many of us experience a very real sense of oppression and opposition after we have become Christians or after we have become serious about our Christian lives. It is because we actually are under attack from an enemy that though unseen, is actually very real.

In the passage before us Paul writes about this conflict. He tells us the nature of the conflict. He exposes the tactics of our enemy. He informs us of the invincible armor and weapons God has tailor made to protect us as we advance His cause in the conflict. Finally, Paul assures us that if we stand faithfully, we will overcome our ancient foe!

However, most of us do not really live as though the conflict is real. And if we do, we attempt to arm ourselves with armor that will never stand up under the withering fire or the relentless force of our ancient enemy. We content ourselves with armor of our own making and suffer needless defeat in our lives simply

because we are unaware of the actual armor God has designed and given us specifically for the daily conflict we face in the war for our soul.

This message is the first of a series of messages designed to help us understand the reality of spiritual warfare. We are in a battle and the enemy has us in his sights! He is determined to defile our character, destroy our marriage and family, discourage our work for God, derail our walk with God and render us totally defeated in our Christian life. However – God has other plans!

Our great and mighty Commander-in-Chief has left us inspired information designed to fortify our mind, guard our heart, and strengthen our resolve to fight in the battle faithfully and successfully. That information begins with four important truths we must embrace in order to fight well in the battle.

I. **The Pervasive Conflict Around Us: (6:10-11)**

“Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil.”

- Many contemporary Christians seem blissfully ignorant that there is a spiritual conflict – a spiritual war of cosmic proportions – going on around them constantly.
- However, in this paragraph Paul shocks us into facing the reality that we are in a massive conflict against a powerful enemy bent on our defeat, destruction, and if possible our physical death!

A. ***The Reality of the Conflict***

- 5x in these verses the word “against” appears.
- Very clearly Satan and his forces are opposing God in His realm by attacking His people in this realm!
- The action or combat is described as “wrestling” (v 12). This is a word that occurs 1x in the NT (**palh**) and it refers to close, hand-to-hand conflict. (Illustration: Job)
- We are not in a war fought comfortably from a distance. It is up close and personal! Satan is coming against you and me in order to take us out personally! (How? Destroy, disqualify, divide, divert, distract)
- And this conflict is going to last for our whole life! Paul, at the end of his life gave testimony to having fought a good fight. He showed up for battle every day!

B. *The Realm of the Conflict:* *for we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, . . . but against spiritual wickedness in high places (v. 12)*

- 1. *Spiritual not natural*** – this conflict is not like earthly conflicts fought against a human enemy with human weapons – this is a war against Spiritual beings who are being led by Satan!
- 2. *Cosmic in impact*** – furthermore, this is a conflict that is being fought in “heavenly places” – a realm that is as real as this one!
- 3. *Local in expression*** – but it is played out in this realm, in your church, in your marriage, in your family, and in your life! Satan is opposing God in His realm by attacking His people in this realm!

C. *The Reason for the Conflict – to stop us from a worthy walk!*

- Satan is determined to oppose God – he has done this from the beginning and he will continue to do so until the final battle in Revelation.
1. God is adopting a family of holy and blameless people – Satan wants to ***defile*** them!
 2. God is calling together a body of people properly arranged to His Son and to each other – Satan wants to ***divide*** them.
 3. God is building a temple for His Spirit to indwell – Satan wants to ***destroy*** and ***desecrate*** it!

II. **The Powerful Enemy Against Us: (6:12)**

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.

- Paul not only announces the reality of the conflict, he alerts us to the nature of our enemy. Who are we up against and what is he like?
- Our enemy is none other than Satan (Adversary) – but he does not come at us alone. With him come a host of wicked beings bent on our destruction!
- Satan and his forces are marked by three things:

A. *They are Powerful and Numerous*

- Principalities, powers, and rulers of darkness – all terms for power, ruling, authority over this age/world. (Illust: Prince over Persia who resisted the Angel sent by God to Daniel until Michael the Archangel came to aid in the battle – Daniel 10:13)

- Powers who constitute a large spiritual “host” or army!

B. *They are Wicked and Depraved . . . against the spiritual forces of evil*

- This is the best word to sum up their nature and character – wicked!
- Comes from the word “pornea” and it has the idea of depraved or perverted – morally incapable of right thinking or right living!

C. *They are Cunning and Deceptive . . . the schemes of the Devil.*

- We get our word “method” from this term – has reference to the strategy, methodology, or schemes the Devil is using against us.
- The word is plural suggesting that there are very many of them that he uses repeatedly throughout the battle against us!
- These strategies are deceptive, and they are destructive!
- They are cunningly employed – sometimes he attacks relentlessly at other times he gives us a strategic respite while waiting patiently for an opportune time (Luke 4.13 temptation of Christ)
- And they are known to us – God as marked them out in His Word. Satan uses the same methods from age to age.

1. He deceives us like he did Eve (Gen 3)
2. He distances us from God like he did Adam (Gen 3)
3. He divides us from each other Cain and Abel – Gen 4)
4. He discourages us like he discouraged Elijah (1 Kings 18)
5. He distracts us with temptation and worldly pleasure like Achan (Josh 7) and Demas (2 Tim 4.10).
6. He defiles and defrauds us like he did Saul.
7. He defeats us like he did David with Bathsheba.

BUT – the Lord has not left us defenseless or unprotected against such foes . . . but has provided us a marvelous armor by which we may withstand even the chiefest of our enemies – Satan our Adversary!

III. The Personal Protection Available to Us: (6:11, 13)

Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil... 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.”

- When Paul was writing this paragraph, he was chained to two Romans soldiers (6:20). Those soldiers would have been among Rome's finest. And they would have been dressed out in full armor!
- So when Paul wanted to help believers understand the protection God has given us – he chose to describe that protection in terms that every one of his readers could relate to – the protective armor and offensive weaponry of the most skilled fighting man in the world of his day – a Roman soldier!
- But even more importantly, this is armor that God Himself is described as wearing (Is 11:4-5; 59:17; 1 Thess 5:8).

A. *The Source of the Armor – of God!*

- It is provided by God!
- It is the armor that He is described as wearing. (Is 11.4-5; 59.17).
- You got it at Salvation!
- You got all of it – no pieces were missing and none of the parts of the armor are defective!
- You have everything you need to stand your ground successfully!

B. *The Nature of the Armor – full or complete*

- 5 defensive pieces of armor that is marvelous in its protectiveness
 - 1 offensive weapon that is matchless in its effectiveness
1. It is majestic in appearance – It is God's Own Armor!
 2. It is marvelous in its fullness – it covers every part of you!
 3. It is matchless in its effectiveness – if you wear this armor, God said you will stand! No matter what Satan throws at you or against you in the battle.

C. *The Function of the Armor – invincible protection*

- It reflects our character – who we are
- It signifies our conduct – what we are to do and how we act.

So, if we are defeated by Satan at some point – we have the whole reason in front of us! We have not understood some important truth about the armor God has given us! And this means that we need instruction in its wearing and in its proper use.

IV. *The Practical Instruction Afforded to Us: (6:11, 13)*

*Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the **strength** of his **might**. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil ...*

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.**"

Paul gives imperatives designed to help us use the armor effectively stand successfully in the day of battle! These instructions are serious and if we disregard them. we have the full reason for our spiritual defeat!

A. *Be Strong – Strengthened with His Might (v 11).*

1. *The source of this strength* – His strength not ours

- Note passive – “be strengthened” instead of be strong!
- This is something that you ask Him to do rather than you doing it on your own. (cf. Eph 3:14-21)
- It is His strength – not yours that you are after!

2. *The nature of this strength* – it is power that comes from His inherent strength!

- “Power” – his mighty ability
- “Might” – His inherent strength – where this ability comes from! God wants us to arm ourselves with ability that comes from His mighty strength!
- This power has already defeated Satan once (1:19ff) and it can do so again and again!
- This power has already operated once in your life (2:1,4) and it is available to you constantly and limitlessly.

3. *The access to this strength* – in the Lord!

- You must be a genuine believer (4:17ff)
- You must be a growing believer (5:1-14)
- You must be a Spirit-controlled believer (5:15-21)

Hoehner’s Bulldozer Illustration

- Bulldozer has the ability and capacity to dozer mighty trees (dunamis). You can look at it a get a sense of its inherent strength (isxus) and when the engine starts up you can see its raw power

(kratos) – but when it actually knocks down a tree and pushes it aside, you can see its energy (energia).

- God’s strength is like this – it has the capacity and the inherent ability to help you stand. When you see the power God has, you have an inherent sense of its strength and its unstoppable might. But when it actually stops the enemy in his track and keeps you safe from a withering attack – you will experience its energetic working in your life!
- **So, how do you energize this power? By taking up the armor of God (6:11,13).**

B. Be Armed with His Weapons – (vs 12, 13)

1. Put on – v 12 (The Spiritual Reality of New Birth)

- Idea here is that this happened when you were saved.
- The armor reflects who you really are in Christ!
- This refers to your true spiritual position in Christ that is yours when you became a New Man (4.17ff)
WEAR THE ARMOR! Don’t have the mindset that you take your armor off and on – it is always on!

2. Take up – v. 13 (The Spiritual Responsibility of New Birth)

- Idea here is that you need to use the armor that you are wearing.
- This refers to the ethical and practical ways in which you are supposed to live now that you are a new man!
- Put off old man behavior – put on new man behavior!
- Use the Armor – by living out its implications every day!

C. Be Faithful to His Assignment . . . having done all, to stand!

“Stand” is a military term that means to hold your ground by defending your position at all costs! Believers do this by:

1. Don’t give up –by enduring Trials and Tribulations that come our way in life Joyfully and Thankfully.

2. Don’t give in – by resisting and overcoming temptations and sins that afflict us in this life prayerfully and fervently.

- 3. Don't give ground** – by standing firmly and faithfully when Satan attempts to distract us, divide us, or divert us from the truth.

Conclusion:

Almost 2000 years have passed since Paul wrote these words and in every generation the cosmic conflict described here in Ephesians 6 has raged.

Tragically, there have been some who have fallen in battle because they failed to “stand” in the day of battle. There are generally four basic reasons believers fail to stand in the day of battle:

1. They don't engage in the conflict persistently. (I just need a break!)
1 Thessalonians 5:6-8 “So then let us not sleep, as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober. For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, are drunk at night. But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation.”
2. They don't take the enemy seriously. (War!! What war?)
1 Peter 5:8 “Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.”
3. They don't depend on God's strength fully. (I can do it all by myself!)
Mark 14:38 “Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.”)
4. They don't utilize God's armor properly. (How does this armor work again?)
1 Cor 10:12 “Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall.”

However in this conflict there have also been soldiers of Christ who have stood faithfully unto death! In fact, since the time Paul wrote these words, there have been over 70 million casualties who have lost their lives in this war!

But – have they really lost? Paul would say they haven't in 2 Cor 4.15-18! Christians who have finished their earthly fight and who have gone on to heaven ahead of us would confirm Paul's assessment!

“As a part of Christ's Army, you march in the ranks of gallant spirits. Every one of your fellow soldiers is the child of a King. Some, like you, are in the midst of the battle, besieged on every side by affliction and temptation. Others, after many assaults, repulses, and rallying of their faith, are already standing upon the wall of

*Heaven as conquerors. From there they look down and urge you, their comrades on earth, to march up the hill after them. This is their cry: "Fight to the death and the City is your own, as now it is ours! For the waging of a few days' conflict, you will be rewarded with Heaven's glory. One moment of this celestial joy will dry up all your tears, heal all your wounds, and erase the sharpness of the fight with the joy of your permanent victory! . . . And if the fight should be too much for you, your dear Savior stands by with reserves for your relief at a moment's notice. He will not forget your faithfulness – and when you come off the field, He will receive you as joyously as the Father received Him upon His return to Heaven!" (William Gurnall, *The Christian in Complete Armor*, p. 27)*