

THREE MEASURES FOR WAGING SUCCESSFUL SPIRITUAL WARFARE

6¹⁰Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty strength. ¹¹Put on the complete armor of God so that you may be able to withstand the schemes of the devil; ¹²because our struggle is not against flesh and blood but against the powers, against the authorities, against the world-rulers of this [present] darkness, against the spiritual hosts of evil in the heavenly realms. ¹³For this reason, take up the complete armor of God, so that you may be able to stand in the evil day, and to remain standing, having overcome everything. ¹⁴So then, stand with truth wrapped around your waist [like a belt], and clothed with the breastplate of righteousness, ¹⁵and with your feet fitted with the equipment of the gospel of peace. ¹⁶Besides all this, carry the shield of faith, by means of which you will be able to extinguish all the fiery arrows of the evil one. ¹⁷Also, take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. ¹⁸[By means of] every prayer and petition, keep praying in the Spirit on every occasion, and in this state keep watch for all the saints with all perseverance and every petition. ¹⁹Also [pray] for me, that words may be given to me, [together] with boldness, whenever I open my mouth to make known the mystery of the gospel, ²⁰(on behalf of which I am an ambassador in chains), so that I may speak boldly for it as I ought to speak.

²¹So that you also might know about my circumstances, how I am doing, Tychicus, the beloved brother and faithful servant for the Lord, will inform you of all things. ²²I have sent him to you for this purpose, so that you may know about our situation and your hearts may be comforted.

²³Peace and love to the brothers, [together] with faith, from God the father and the Lord Jesus Christ. ²⁴Grace be with all those who love the Lord Jesus Christ with an undying love. (Eph. 6:10-24)

Introduction

Pastor Mark Howard of the Good Shepherd Community Church and Mr. Tom Harris, the headmaster of the Christian school in Deacons' Corner, found themselves in the law office of Attorney Wayne Corrigan, they were seeking his legal help. The two explained to Mr. Corrigan that a lawsuit had been filed against Tom and the Christian school.

A little ten-year-old girl who had just recently started attending the school had proven to be a seriously disruptive problem: in the classroom she was a discipline problem, on the playground she sought to teach the other children occult practices, and she even gave evidence of being demon-possessed. The Christian school officials had been forced to take disciplinary action against the girl, including corporeal punishment, which was in accordance with their beliefs and was clearly specified in the parent/student manual. But now they found themselves the defendants in a lawsuit brought against the headmaster and the school by the irate mother of the little girl.

The lawsuit was being prosecuted by the local chapter of the A.C.L.U.; it was well financed, and it threatened the very existence of this little Christian school. Poor Mr. Corrigan, the attorney, knew he was greatly overmatched in such a case and wondered half aloud, "Why are such things happening to these descent, God-fearing people and their school?" A few pages later the veil that conceals the spiritual realm from the physical is drawn back: hordes of demons are swarming all around like vile, stinging bees. The intensity of the onslaught is shocking.

The preceding account—presented in slightly adapted form—is one writer's conception of the very real spiritual conflict in which we find ourselves engaged (*Piercing the Darkness*, Frank E. Peretti, pp. 67-80).

We must never lose sight of the fact that *"our struggle is not against flesh and blood but ... against the spiritual hosts of evil."* Because our foes are none other than the spiritual hosts of darkness, we must equip ourselves with the spiritual measures enumerated in Ephesians 6:10-22.

I. Be Strong in the Lord (6:10-12)

Verse 11 informs us that as Christians we are facing *"the schemes of the devil."* These *"schemes"* refer to the tricks or stratagems of the devil that are intended to ensnare and deceive. Compare the clear warning of God recorded in Genesis 2:16-17 with the deceptive insinuations of the devil recorded in Genesis 3:1,4-5,

Jehovah God commanded the man, From every tree of the garden you may freely eat; ¹⁷but you shall not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die. (Gen. 2:16-17)

Now the serpent was more subtle than any beast of the field Jehovah God had made. And he said to the woman, Indeed, has God said, You shall not eat from any tree of the garden? ... ⁴But the serpent said to the woman, You shall not surely die; ⁵for God knows that in the day you eat [the fruit of that tree] your eyes shall be opened, and you shall be like God, knowing good and evil. (Gen. 3:1,4-5)

Not only are we opposed by a powerful spiritual foe, but one who is extremely cunning, ruthless, and completely anti-moral, note the testimony of the Lord Jesus with regard to the devil and his character: *"the devil ... was a murderer from the beginning and is not established in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he is speaking in accordance with his own [nature], because he is a liar and the father of lies"* (Jn. 8:44.)

Verse 12 reminds us that our struggle is *"not against flesh and blood."* Human systems of thought (false philosophies that lead to destructive ends) and human beings themselves play a role in this spiritual warfare; but there resides a far more sinister being behind the human dimension: the devil himself. Consider

Revelation 13:1,2b, a passage that reveals the spiritual presence and power behind the human governments and systems of this present world, *“And I saw a beast coming up out of the sea, having ten horns, and seven heads, and on his horns ten diadems, and upon his heads names of blasphemy. ²... and the dragon gave him his power, and his throne, and great authority.”* In this passage of Revelation, the *“beast”* represents the worldly empire of man with all of its power and worldview, while *“the dragon”* represents the devil—the spiritual power behind the kingdom of the world, which energizes it and directs it.

As Christians, our struggle is really against spiritual foes; foes that are described in the following terms:

“the powers”—literally, “ruling powers;” here is a reference to those unholy spiritual beings who exercise spiritual power for evil; here is a reference to the whole host of demonic beings who hold ranks and jurisdictions in this present creation

“the authorities”—the devil and his legions exercise spiritual power and authority in this present world; in rejecting God’s divine lordship, Adam was accepting the devil’s lordship: he allowed the devil to tell him how to think, how to interpret life, and what decisions to make—Adam rejected God’s word and accepted the devil’s word

“the world-rulers of this [present] darkness”—the devil and his legions exercise a rule of darkness and evil over this present world, note 1 John 5:19b, *“the whole world is under the control of the evil one.”*

“the spiritual hosts of evil in the heavenly realms”—here is a glimpse into the mysteriousness and awesomeness of this spiritual warfare: evil beings are actually permitted access to the heavenly courts of God, note Luke 22:31, a passage in which the Lord Jesus informs Peter of the petition the devil made before the throne of God, a petition that was granted: *“Simon, Simon, Listen, Satan asked to have you, so that he might sift you like wheat.”*

If we are to survive, we must correctly identify the enemy: the spiritual hosts of wickedness. We must not underestimate the enemy of our souls, as the Apostle Peter cautions us, *“Be [spiritually] sober. Be alert. Your adversary, the devil, like a roaring lion, is prowling around, looking for someone to devour. ⁹Resist him by standing firm in the faith, knowing that the same ordeals of suffering are being placed upon your brothers throughout the world”* (1 Pet. 5:8-9.) The devil has set himself as the adversary of our souls, he is compared to a roaring lion, he is on the prowl, and he seeks to devour our spiritual life, our very soul.

Nor must we ever forget the One before whom the devil and all his legions must bow: our Lord Jesus Christ. *“All the people were astonished, so much so that they questioned among themselves, saying, What is this? [Here is] a new teaching! With*

authority he even commands the unclean spirits, and they obey him!" (Mk. 1:27.) Such was the reaction of the people when they witnessed the Lord Jesus casting out a demon. In this very epistle to the Ephesians, the Apostle Paul informs us that God the Father raised *"[Christ] from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, ²¹far above every rule and authority and power and dominion and every title that can be given, not only in this present age but also in the coming age. ²²And "he put all things in subjection under his feet"* (Eph. 1:20-22a.) We must place our confidence in Christ, take refuge in Christ, and never stray away from Him who is the Shepherd of our souls.

If we are to survive in this spiritual conflict, we must rely upon the strength of the Lord: *"Be strong in the Lord"* (vs. 10.) The command, *"Be strong in the Lord,"* reminds us that we have no strength in ourselves to combat and to conquer the enemy of our souls. In the words of Martin Luther's great hymn, *A Mighty Fortress Is Our God*, "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. You ask whom that may be? Christ Jesus, it is he." The command, *"Be strong in the Lord,"* reminds us that we must avail ourselves of Christ's divine power and victory. Recall the apostle's prayer recorded in Ephesians 1:18-19; there he prayed that Christians may know (or, experience) the awesome power of God towards us who are believing. One purpose of this divine power, which is offered to us, is to enable us to withstand the assaults of the devil, to stand up under spiritual pressure, and to stand faithful to Christ.

II. Put on the Complete Armor of God (6:13-17)

The Christian is called upon to stand *"with truth wrapped around your waist [like a belt]."* The N.I.V. translation phrases it, *"Buckle the belt of truth around your waist."* When the loose-fitting tunic was gathered up around the waist and held fast with a belt, the soldier was ready for battle. The "belt" that holds the Christian's "tunic" in place and prepares us for spiritual warfare is *"truth."* The point being made: the way you prepare yourself for the assaults of the devil and guard yourself against those assaults is by having a firm connection to the truth of God; knowing the truth and building your life upon it. The devil's strategy is as follows: First, he tempts men to depart from God's truth and then encourages them to seek truth (and moral standards) apart from God—commitment to God's absolute truth is abandoned in favor of a "search for truth." Then, in the course of time men come to realize that their "search for truth" is futile; note the comment of Pilate made at the time of Jesus' trial, *"Pilate said to him, 'What is truth?'"* (Jn. 18:38.) Now the search is abandoned in favor of relativism, the belief that there are no absolutes, or at least none that can be known. In the Western world today, the question is no longer, "Are you measuring up to the Standard?" rather, the question is, "What is **your** personal standard?" If you have no, "Thus saith the Lord," to guide you and upon which to stand, then what happens? Everything deteriorates into confusion, compromise and apathetic complacency. Everything degenerates: men give themselves to base immorality to experience

gratification, to seek escape, or to seek fulfillment. Men give themselves to the State for identity, belonging, definition of values, meaning and purpose; the State becomes a substitute “god” dictating morality and defining existence for the individual. Men give themselves to the demonic in a desperate effort to fulfill their need for connection with the spiritual. As Christians, we have the divine resource to stand firm in the midst of the destructive relativism of the age: the Truth of God. In His prayer to His heavenly Father, the Lord Jesus testified, *“Your word is truth”* (Jn. 17:17b.)

The Christian is exhorted to put on *“the breastplate of righteousness.”* We are to clothe ourselves with—to put our trust in—the perfect righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ:

Then he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of Jehovah, and Satan standing at his right hand to accuse him ... ³Now Joshua was dressed in filthy clothes as he stood before the angel. ⁴The angel said to those who were standing before him, Take off his filthy clothes. Then he said to Joshua, See, I have taken away your sin, and I will put rich garments on you. (Zech. 3:1,3-4)

I rejoice greatly in Jehovah, my soul exults in my God; because he has clothed me with the garments of salvation, he has wrapped me in a robe of righteousness—like a bridegroom adorns his head with a turban like a priest and like a bride adorns herself with her jewels. (Isa. 61:10)

But much more than that, I regard all things as losses on account of the all-surpassing value of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, because of whom I have suffered the loss of all things. Indeed, I regard all such things as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ, ⁹and be found in him—not having my own righteousness derived from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness that is from God received by faith. (Phil. 3:8-9)

We are not only to trust in Christ’s perfect righteous, by the grace of God we are also to become increasingly conformed to that divine righteousness: *“just as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct; ¹⁶because it is written, ‘Be holy, because I am holy’”* (1 Pet. 1:15-16.)

As Christians, we are to cover our feet with *“the equipment of the gospel of peace.”* The Roman soldier needed footwear that would protect him from the poisonous stakes planted by the enemy. For the Christian, that necessary footwear is *“the gospel of peace.”* We are to be found resting and relying upon the comforting truth of the gospel: Christ died for my sins to insure peace with God. Note Isaiah 40:1-2 and Romans 8:1,31-34,

Comfort, O comfort my people, says your God. ²Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and announce to her that her affliction has come to an end, that her iniquity has

been pardoned, that she has received from Jehovah's hand double for all her sins. (Isa. 40:1-2)

Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus ...³¹What, then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us? ³²He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? ³³Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. ³⁴Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us. (Rom. 8:1,31-34)

In addition to all this, the Christian is to carry *“the shield of faith.”* The Roman soldier's shield was very large, measuring 4 feet by 2 ½ feet—the Greek term translated “shield” (θυρεός) is related to the word for “door” (θύρα)—yet, the shield was also portable, with it the soldier could ward off the flaming arrows of the enemy. For the Christian, that protective shield is our faith, our confidence in the power and the promises of God: *“You will keep him in perfect peace, he whose mind is set on you; because he trusts in you. ⁴Trust in Jehovah forever; for Jehovah, Jehovah himself, is an everlasting rock”* (Isa. 26:3-4.)

The Christian is called to take *“the helmet of salvation.”* Just as the helmet protects the head, so here the apostle is speaking about protection for the mind and the intellect. That protection is a thorough working knowledge of the Scriptures: knowing the teaching of the Word of God as it pertains to salvation, to morality, to the issues of life, note 2 Timothy 3:14-17,

But as for you, continue in what you have learned and of what you have become convinced, remembering from whom you learned it—¹⁵how from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise with regard to salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. ¹⁶Every Scripture, [being] inspired by God, is also profitable for teaching, for rebuking, for correcting, for training in righteousness; ¹⁷so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work. (2 Tim. 3:14-17)

Finally, the Christian is to take *“the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God.”* The Lord Jesus used the Scriptures to successfully combat and defeat the devil when He was tempted in the wilderness. We must likewise employ them in our efforts to lead a godly life and advance the cause of Christ in this world.

Let us take heed to God's commandment: *“Put on the complete armor of God.”*

III. Resort to Prayer (6:18-22)

Verse 18 must actually be connected to verse 14, *“Stand ... [by means of] every prayer and petition.”* Only those who spend time with God in prayer are able to

stand against the devil. Let us remember how our Lord Jesus prepared Himself for His greatest hour of trial, He resorted to prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane: *“Then Jesus went with his disciples to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to them, ‘Sit here while I go over there and pray’”* (Matt. 26:36.)

The combination of the terms *“prayer and petition”* emphasizes earnest prayer as well as being specific with regard to our prayer requests. We must pray as though our spiritual well being depended upon it, because it does. Prayer must not be viewed as a last resort; on the contrary, prayer is the essential starting point for victory in spiritual matters; as John Bunyan phrased it: “You can do more than pray, after you have prayed. But you cannot do anything until you have prayed.”

We are instructed to pray *“on every occasion.”* That is to say, we are to pray at all times, under all circumstances, with regard to every matter. If a matter is important enough to be concerned about, it is important enough to pray about. We must pray in preparation for the spiritual conflict as we see it loom before us, we must pray in the midst of the conflict, and we must pray after we have passed through it—praying with thanksgiving for being brought through and praying that the experience will result in spiritual growth and greater fruitfulness. Consider the admonition of Colossians 4:2, *“Devote yourselves to prayer”*—we are exhorted to keep close company with prayer. Just as daily practice assures quality performance on the athletic field, daily access to God in prayer assures an open channel of communication in the hour of trial.

We are instructed to pray *“in the [Holy] Spirit.”* We must rely upon the Holy Spirit to assist us in prayer, being confident that the Holy Spirit is interceding on our behalf, note the assurance provided for us in Romans 8:26-27,

In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know for what we ought to pray, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express.²⁷ And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God’s will. (Rom. 8:26-27)

We are instructed to pray *“with all perseverance.”* We must remember our Lord’s admonition, we *“ought always to pray and not lose heart”* (Lk. 18:1.) We must bear in mind the experience of Daniel as recorded in Daniel 10:10-14,

Then a hand touched me and set me on my knees and on the palms of my hands.¹¹ He said to me, O Daniel, you are greatly loved. Consider the words I am about to speak to you and stand upright, for I have now been sent to you. When he had spoken this word to me, I stood up trembling.¹² Then he said to me, Do not be afraid, Daniel. Since the first day you set your mind to gain understanding and to humble yourself before your God, your words were heard, and I have come in response to your words.¹³ But the prince of the kingdom of Persia stood

against me for twenty-one days [this is a reference to the devil and his demonic influence in the Persian court] ... ¹⁴*Now I have come to inform you what will happen to your people in the latter days.* (Daniel 10:10-14)

We must not be surprised if, in His sovereign wisdom and for His purposes, the LORD permits the devil to exercise a period of interference between the time our prayers are received by God and the time God responds to them. Daniel was informed that such was the explanation as to why his prayers on behalf of God's kingdom were not immediately answered.

We must also consider the example of our Lord Jesus Christ as recorded in Hebrews 5:7, *"During the days of Jesus' life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears to the one who could save him out of death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission."* As was true in the case of our Lord Jesus, we must not be surprised to find the LORD answering our prayers by bringing us "through death unto resurrection," instead of sparing us from the experience of death-like trials.

Prayer is not merely to be a private matter devoted exclusively to personal needs and requests; we are instructed to pray for *"all the saints."* We must remember that as fellow believers in the Lord Jesus Christ we are all members of the same spiritual body:

"When one part [of the body] suffers, all the [other] parts suffer with it; if one part is honored, all the [other] parts rejoice with it. ²⁷Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it" (1 Cor. 12:26-27.)

We must recognize that we all undergo the same trials and the same temptations:

Be [spiritually] sober. Be alert. Your adversary, the devil, like a roaring lion, is prowling around, looking for someone to devour. ⁹Resist him by standing firm in the faith, knowing that the same ordeals of suffering are being placed upon your brothers throughout the world. (1 Pet. 5:8-9)

We are especially instructed to pray for God's servants who are proclaiming the gospel. We are to pray that God would give them *"words"* (or, *"utterance"*)—that is, the ability to clearly present the Word of God, the grace to say the right thing at the right time. We are to pray that God would give them *"boldness,"* note Paul's repeated request for this grace in verses 19 and 20. We are to pray that God would give them *"open doors"*—that is to say, that God would provide the opportunities to proclaim the gospel, as was the case with Paul's ministry in the city of Ephesus. He testifies to the Corinthians, *"I will remain in Ephesus until Pentecost, ⁹[because] a great door for effective ministry has opened to me, and there are many who are opposing me"* (1 Cor. 16:8-9.) This also means praying that the LORD would open hearts to receive Jesus as Savior and Lord, an example

of which is presented in Acts 16:14, *“One of those listening was a woman named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth from the city of Thyatira, who was a worshiper of God. The LORD opened her heart to respond to Paul’s message.”*

Conclusion

We must never lose sight of the fact that *“our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but ... against the spiritual hosts of evil.”*

Because our foes are none other than the spiritual hosts of darkness, we must equip ourselves with the spiritual measures enumerated in Ephesians 6:10-22. Let us be strong in the LORD. Let us put on the whole armor of God. Let us resort to prayer.