

Opening Words

We are in a great conflict. If our Lord was in a great conflict, should we expect anything else?

195 Eph Holy War in Heavenly Places 3

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.

These are the words Paul uses in the closing part of his book as he brings everything together and points the believer outward to the great battle against the forces of evil in the world. He has spoken much to the church about how to arrange its internal affairs, but now he focuses the church outward and gives it marching orders for the great conflict before it.

We are in a great conflict. If Christ was in a great conflict, should we expect anything else? If he encountered the power of the enemy face to face, indeed, if he encountered the prince, the leader of these forces should we not expect to encounter some of these forces in our walk with Christ? Paul says that we struggle with them. Some translations use the word, wrestle. The idea is a close encounter, hand to hand combat. I think of some civil war movies I have seen in my lifetime. At one point, the opposing forces are lined up against one another and firing their weapons, but eventually there is a charge of both forces and the combatants engage each other in hand to hand combat. That is the picture we have here.

If some of this is a bit scary to you, especially the description of the powers that I gave in the previous message, that is good, because this is serious business and we are not dealing with entities like the old cartoon, Casper the Friendly Ghost. The powers are far stronger and far more intelligent than you and I. This strips us of self-confidence and causes us to call upon the Lord for his strength. This is how Paul begins this great passage on spiritual warfare, “Finally, brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might.”

When Paul tells the believers to be strong, this could be translated, “allow yourselves to be strengthened.” Christ is there for us to empower us in this fight. Translating the verse this way is in line with what he prayed in Ephesians 1:19 where he said, “I pray that you would come to know the surpassing greatness of his power toward us who believe,” and then he went on to describe the power that raised Christ from the dead and enthroned him as Lord over these forces. Paul says, “that’s the power of God available to you. It is not power in yourself. It is not power in your abilities. It is not power in your wisdom. It is power that comes from Christ to give you the ability and the wisdom to overcome these forces. Be strong, be strengthened in the Lord.

Then, Paul says, “in the power of His might.” It is not the power of your might but the power of his might. There is a great scene in the book and movie *Prince Caspian*. This is the second book in C.S. Lewis’ beloved series, *The Chronicles of Narnia*. The evil forces have been routed and they are in full retreat. They come to a bridge and suddenly they halt with fear. What causes them to halt, especially with the victorious Narnian army hot on their heels? Then the camera shows what is on the other side of the bridge, but still it is a surprise because on the other side of the bridge there is standing a little girl, only. It is Lucy, one of four children summoned to Narnia from our world to help the Narnians. She is standing at the end of the bridge with a triumphant look on her face and a knife in her hand. But why would a little girl with a small blade in her hand cause an entire army to stop in fear? Why would a little girl have supreme confidence that she could stare down and intimidate an entire army?

Then the scene widens and we see the full picture, for standing behind Lucy is the great lion Aslan. This is the reason why the army is afraid – Aslan. This is the reason why Lucy can stand on the bridge and stare down an entire army. It is not because she is so strong. It is because the one behind her is strong. Friends, that is the way it is with us. The powers do not fear us. They fear the one who stands behind us for he is their Lord. He is crowned as king over them. They know he has already defeated them. When we stand in the name of Jesus, the powers will cringe before us because of the name of Him who was slain, raised, and enthroned.

But we must stand. In the story, Lucy trusted that Aslan would back her up, and we must walk by faith that the Lord is with us. Lucy wasn’t standing behind Aslan cowering in fear. She walked forward with confidence. We must do the same.

After Paul tells us to find our strength in the Lord, he then tells us we must do something, we must put on the full armor of God. In verse 11 Paul says, “put on the full armor of God so that you will be able to stand.” It is the armor of God. The power comes from God, but we must put it on, we must walk forward, and we must stand firm against the schemes of the devil.

In verse 13 he says again, take up the full armor of God so that you will be able to resist in the evil day, and after everything is done, you will still be standing! It’s a heroic scene, and God calls us to be heroic, but we shouldn’t let it go to our heads and fantasize about what spiritual warfare looks like. And the reason for that is because of a little word in verse 11. Paul tells us to stand firm against the schemes of the devil. The Greek word for schemes is the word, *methodeias*. You can hear the word “method” in it. And the idea behind this word is that Satan has lots of strategies, lots of tactical maneuvers, lots of methods that he uses to fight against us.

Let me list some. First, he employs lies to deceive us. This could be lies about God, “He doesn’t really exist you know.” Or lies about his attitude towards us, “He doesn’t really love you, not you. He may love others but not you.” This could be lies about us – “you are too far gone to expect any grace from God.” Or, “you are an odd one. Others are valuable but you aren’t.” Or, “you are so great. You know, you have accomplished all these things and you are so much better than others.” It could be lies about other people, “Those other people are laughing at you. Those other people hate you. Those other people are out to get you. Those other people aren’t worth your time.” Lies, lies, and more

lies. Satan is the father of lies and all his forces of evil arrayed against us are liars, too, and we must fight against this prime method of the devil to launch lies against us.

Here's another method he uses – guilty feelings. When we sin, he knows how to push our buttons and pour it on. "What a wretched person you are. You call yourself a Christian? Look at what you have done! If your friends could see your thought life, if the church members could see your heart, they would turn away from you. In fact, someone has turned away from you. God has turned away from you. You have gone too far this time and you are no longer his child." What lies!

Here's another method he uses – division in the church. "Don't forgive those people. They have sinned against you and they don't understand you. Hold a grudge against them." What lies!

Let me mention one more – "Go ahead, indulge yourself. You deserve it. You've been working hard. Nobody will find out. You'll be able to get away with it. It will feel so good. You'll be so satisfied. You'll become so happy. This is the way to happiness. Not the way of Christ. That brings only sorrow and hardship. Besides, he's not going to fulfill his promises to you anyway. There really is no reward. Your reward is here and now, and I will make sure you receive a whole lot here and now – more than you could ask for or imagine." What lies!

I think you are getting the picture. When we think of warfare and of the movies we have seen or the books we have read, we get these noble pictures of people doing great, heroic feats on the battlefield, and they do, but it does not feel heroic in the war, and it is not this way in spiritual warfare. War is hard! War is difficult! War is suffering!

Usually, spiritual warfare is fought in the battles of our minds and hearts. It is often fought alone. Yes, we should have friends who will pray for us, counsel us, and encourage us in the Word, but ultimately the battle is won or lost in the secret counsels of our heart with what we choose to believe or disbelieve, the thoughts we choose to entertain or reject, and the choices we make in secret.

Paul tells us to take up the full armor of God, to believe the truth, to fill our minds with right things, and to make right choices. When we do we will be able to resist against these devilish methods, and we will be able to stand. What are these weapons? They are the belt of truth, the breastplate of righteousness, the shoes of peace, the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the spirit, and all of them energized by prayer in the Spirit.

In our next programs, we will become familiar with our weapons. I hope you'll join us as we enter the armory of the Lord and become well acquainted with the weapons he provides. No soldier goes into battle with untested weapons or weapons that he is not familiar with. We'll get very familiar with them in the days to come that we might use them to gain victory.