

Series: Ephesians – God’s Word for Today #4

Ephesians 6:10-24

T. Leg, MCF 26.07.2015

Spiritual Warfare – How to Stand Firm in the Faith

Today we will complete our short series on the Book of Ephesians, which Ken so aptly introduced as “God’s Word for the Church Today”. Our topic today is “Spiritual Warfare” or rather “How to stand firm in the faith”.

Many commentators point out that Christ is the Christian’s armour, and that it is important to put on the full armour of God in the right order. I therefore want us to consider the Christian’s relationship to Christ in the book of Ephesians. Then at the very end, we will briefly read the passage.

In chapters 1-3 of Ephesians, we saw God’s mighty work of redemption at the Cross and everything that flowed from it. In chapters 4, 5 and the first part of chapter 6, we saw how we as Christians are to live in the light of that mighty redemption. As we look at the topic of spiritual warfare, we see again that it is very important never to reverse God’s order. We must build on the foundation that God has laid, if the building of our lives is to stand. We must put on the full armour of God in his prescribed order if we are to stand firm in our faith. It’s a matter of life and death.

The book of Ephesians mentions the word **redemption** three times, two of which appear in chapter 1, v.7 and v.14. The word redemption is another word for salvation. It describes God’s part in our salvation and means “full payment of the ransom price for the deliverance of a slave”. The ransom price is the blood of God’s Son, and the slaves are you and me as members of fallen mankind, safe in Satan’s keeping, until Christ, the strong man, comes in to deliver us. Christ himself makes this clear:

Mar 3:27 NIV In fact, no one can enter a strong man's house and carry off his possessions unless he first ties up the strong man. Then he can rob his house.

But when Christ comes in, he delivers us and sets us free. We have **salvation, past tense**. This past aspect of our salvation is called **Justification** or **imputed righteousness**. We are imputed or given Christ’s righteousness. God from now on sees us as if we had never sinned. He cancels our sin by laying it on Christ. He even clothes us with Christ’s righteousness. He now sees us positionally in Christ and delights in us as his children. Saving GRACE: God’s Riches At Christ’s Expense. We see this in v.7:

Eph 1:7 NIV In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace

v.14 of Ephesians mentions a different **aspect of our salvation or redemption which lies in the future**, our **glorification**:

Eph 1:13-14 NIV And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him

with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, (14) who is a deposit (downpayment) guaranteeing our inheritance **until the redemption of those who are God's possession**—to the praise of his glory.

How can this be? Already saved and not yet saved? Positionally the Christian is in Christ, our souls are safe in heaven, we are not of this world. But our bodies are still in the world, until a coming day when all of this groaning creation – what a painfully accurate description of our world - will be redeemed and our souls will be joined with our new resurrection bodies, and a new heavens and a new earth will replace the one we see today. God will remove all sin and wipe away all our tears. What a glorious day that will be. Don't you wish that day would come rather sooner than later? As Christians, we are not just to wish for it, we are to actively long for and work towards it.

In this age between Christ's first coming in humiliation and his second coming in power and glory, we live in the inevitable **"tension between the already saved and not yet saved"**. And as representatives or ambassadors of Christ in this world, God calls us to work out **our salvation with fear and trembling. This is the present-tense aspect of our salvation, our sanctification, our striving to live holy lives in a corrupt and evil generation.** How are we to do it? Empowering Grace: God Reigns As Christ Empowers. We are to let the Holy Spirit and the Word of God dwell richly in our midst, so that the indwelling Christ breaks the power of our cancelled sin. **Imparted righteousness**, God making us righteous through obedience to the sanctifying word. We learnt that we must be filled with the Spirit, controlled by him, to be good husbands, wives, children, employees and employers, or whatever God calls us to be. For God to fill us, we must ask him to forgive us our sins regularly and to cleanse and fill us anew. He will do it according to his promises. God's supplies will keep coming if we bow our knees and humbly accept the word of truth planted in us, by which we are being saved; and if we keep asking him – "Give us this day or daily bread ...". And, we will also need to pray "... and lead us not into temptation but deliver us from the Evil One", which is very relevant in the context of spiritual warfare.

The Christian life which Paul asks us to live in chapters 4, 5 and 6 is not just difficult, it is **impossible: it is impossible to live by mere human willpower, determination and strength.** This is what many who are interested in the Christian faith are failing to understand. I believe the same is sometimes true for immature or backsliding Christians who stagnate and fail to bear fruit in their lives. Christ demands our all or nothing, not just our intellect, affection or will. We must strive to love him with all our hearts, souls, mind and strength. And let us be as clear as we can: such a life can only be lived in Christ's strength. In him we live and move and have our being. A godly life can only be lived in the strength that God provides in response to our daily asking. It doesn't mean we will never sin, fail or suffer, but by the riches of God's grace, even our failures and suffering will only serve to make us stronger, more Christ-like. Fortunately, the lives of many Christians in the Bible and in the history of the Christian church are proof evident that living such a life is not only possible, but that it is the only way to truly live. But let me add this, this life is the normal Christian life God intends for all of us, not just Super-Christians but Christians like you and me. Jesus says to you and me even today: I am the Resurrection and the Life. I am the True Vine, I am the Bread of Life, ... And yes, even today we are surrounded by a cloud of faithful witnesses around the world who faithfully live their lives in humble obedience to Christ, despised and rejected by the world because of the message they preach with their lips and lives, the message of the Cross. This message is foolishness in the world's eyes but it is

the power of God for salvation to all those who believe. By it, our affections for the things of this world are strangely crucified, and by it, we truly live to God in righteousness. And by it, we will be able to stand in the good fight of faith.

Rev 12:10-11 NIV Then I heard a loud voice in heaven say: "Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of his Christ. For the accuser of our brothers, who accuses them before our God day and night, has been hurled down. **(11) They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb (-> Christ's work of redemption at the Cross) and by the word of their testimony (-> mutual encouragement); they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death (-> Satan can touch/kill the body, but not our souls, they are safe with Christ in heaven).**

To show us what it takes to live such a life and to help us to live it successfully with the resources that God provides - was the main reason why Paul wrote the book of Ephesians. As we have already seen, the first three chapters of this beautiful letter are absolutely foundational. There we see the foundation of the Christian life laid: it is God's work of redemption through the Cross of Christ (esp. ch. 2).

Yes, but where are the Christians, who on the foundation of God's mighty work of redemption aren't just talking the talk but walk the walk? Those who live lives worthy of their high calling in Christ? You may want to open your eyes around yourself ... I know that the people you see are far from perfect, but they are who and what they are by the grace of God. But still, it's a good and legitimate question, don't you think? As Christians, we are called to examine and judge ourselves regularly lest we be judged. That's one reason why the Lord's Supper is so important in the life of the Church.

Yes, but ...! How often have we heard these words raised by those who make a sport of criticising or mocking Christianity? But even worse, how often do we listen to the old nature within us repeating those very same words - yes but, ... you cannot possibly be a Christian? And so we make this voice our own instead of rejecting it, and, taking up the helmet of the hope of salvation, protesting that our hope is not in ourselves but in Christ! Dear friends, God's perspective is not our perspective. He sees time differently, and he doesn't want us to wildly attach but to stand by withstanding the wiles of the devil. Let's take courage, let us learn together to put on the full armour of God. It will take everything we have to give but will be worth it. Whenever we might be tempted to give it all up, we are seriously losing sight of what the Cross of Christ stands for. We are failing to take into account that the righteous will live by faith and not by sight, and that it is by our faith that we will overcome; and we are also **failing to reckon with the existence and fierce opposition of a personal devil**, Satan himself, the prince of this world who blinds people to the reality that Christ has once and for all triumphed over him at the Cross of Calvary. He blinds them to the reality of his own existence, and that he has already lost the war that is raging in the spiritual or unseen world between the powers of darkness and the powers of light, a war that influences everyone and everything in the physical or seen world. He has lost the war but still fights skirmishes and battles because he hasn't realized that God is making a display of him through the Church of Christ and the word of truth - the gospel of our salvation, the only force in this universe that is equal to withstand Satan and conquer his remaining vestiges of darkness. Every believer who stands firm in the faith is a threat to Satan, a living testimony that deliverance is possible, an escape door for those trapped by

Satan. Once a believer confesses Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour, he or she is instantly translated from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of light, and joins God's forces: but, equally, from now on he or she has a cruel enemy, Satan and his fallen angels, and Satan will not give up any territory without fighting.

You often read that the Christian has three enemies: **the world** (i.e. the philosophies and godless thought patterns of this world), the **flesh** (i.e. indwelling sin), and the **devil** and his fallen angels. **Some commentators, however, argue that there is really only one enemy, Satan himself, who launches direct attacks**, which are downright demonic and debasing to man, **and indirect attacks** through the avenues of our bodies, souls and spirits which are interwoven in a mysterious manner. We are fearfully and wonderfully made, and nobody really knows where the seat of our soul or spirit is in our body, but an attack on any one of these will affect us as a whole, our entire being. The devil works methodically to bring us down. Don't expect him to show mercy when you are already beaten and bruised when the day of evil comes, and it will come. His wiles or evil methods are many, but his main one is lying or deceiving, in order to kill and murder. If, contrary to the truth of God's Word, he can deceive us into believing that he has more power than he actually has, and that we cannot withstand or resist him, our faith becomes useless in any given situation and we stand defeated before the battle has begun.

Paul knew very well how weak and vulnerable we are in and of ourselves, therefore he often prays and reminds us of Christ's authority and power over our enemy.

Eph 1:17-23 ESV that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a **spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, (18)** having the **eyes of your hearts** enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, **(19)** and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might **(20)** that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, **(21)** far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. **(22)** And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, **(23)** which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.

In chapter 3, Paul also reminds us that the church is instrumental in God's plan to destroy the works of the devil and in pushing back the powers of darkness in our world through the Gospel of Jesus Christ – this is why Christians are the salt of the earth, and light of the world, preserving what is good and giving hope to the lost.

Eph 3:6-20 ESV ... **(8)** ..., [I was given grace] to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, **(9)** and to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things, **(10)** so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. **(11)** This was according to the eternal purpose that he has realized in Christ Jesus our Lord, **(12)** in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through our faith in him. ... **(16)** that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, **(17)** so that Christ may dwell in your

hearts through faith--that you, being rooted and grounded in love, (18) may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, (19) and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

It is the manifold wisdom of God that triumphs over the manifold wiles of the devil who seeks to destroy our faith, because by that faith Christ dwells in our hearts and gives us power in our inner being to withstand. But that's not all, Christ himself now intercedes for our faith, so that we may stand in the time of trial, as he did for Peter. Even in our suffering, which often seems so pointless to us, God mysteriously works to destroy the works of the devil to prepare us for his glory.

Some commentators point out that the devil is an extremist and works hard at bringing Christianity into discredit by producing unbalanced or even obnoxious Christians. This is easier for him today than it was in previous centuries. Many have bought into the lie that it is primitive to believe in a personal devil, with devastating consequences.

In Spiritual Warfare – a Biblical and Balanced (Borgman & Ventura)

“Living the Christian life is not merely about mastering one truth or even a set of principles. Rather, it is learning to think and act biblically. We must be reminded of certain truths frequently so that we don't become unbalanced or short-sighted in our view of the Christian life. One such truth is that we are in a war of the most serious nature, and that war is not with flesh and blood but against spiritual forces of darkness. This vital truth ought to shape our worldview. Unfortunately, some Christians almost completely ignore the reality of this war. Others, however, seem to give it far more attention than Scripture does. There is certainly a danger in both extremes. C. S. Lewis makes precisely this point in his famous work *The Screwtape Letters*: “There are two equal and opposite errors into which our race can fall about the devils. One is to disbelieve in their existence. The other is to believe, and to feel an excessive and unhealthy interest in them. They themselves are equally pleased by both errors and hail a materialist or a magician with the same delight.” Making a similar observation, Martin Luther once noted that Christians are often like a drunk trying to get on his horse. First, the drunk falls off one side, only to climb back up and fall off the other side. Given the stakes in this war, we cannot afford to fall off either side”

This is why Ephesians 6:10-24 is so important. It reminds us that we do not live in a perfect world, which we can make our home. We live in enemy territory. It reminds us that our world is not a playground but a battlefield. It reminds us that life itself is not a walk in the park or a Mediterranean Cruise. Life is a struggle, a fierce unrelenting fight not against flesh and blood enemies, but against the evil and wicked spiritual forces of darkness. Most importantly, it mirrors the rest of the book of Ephesians in showing us that we are fighting this fight from a position of victory and peace, deep and lasting peace with God, ourselves and our fellow men; and all we need to do is to be strong in the power of Christ's mighty resurrection power, and to take up the full armour of God and clothe ourselves with Christ's mighty salvation, past – present – and future, so that we will be able to stand after we have exhausted all our energies. By standing firm in the faith, we can extinguish **all** the flaming darts of the evil one. And then of course we must and keep the communication lines open with our commander at all times: we must pray specifically and generically for all the saints at all times. The fight will be fierce, but victory is sure, if we follow God's orders.

Eph 6:10-24 ESV

- (10) Finally, **be strong in the Lord** and in the strength of his might.
- (11) **Put on the whole armor of God**, that you may be able to **stand against** the schemes of the devil. (stand or withstand/resist 4x = main action)
- (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.
- (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.
- (14) **Stand therefore, having** fastened on **the belt of truth**, and **having** put on the **breastplate of righteousness**,
- (15) and, **as shoes** for your feet, **having** put on **the readiness given by the gospel of peace**.
- (16) **In all circumstances take up** the **shield of faith**, with which you can **extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one**;
- (17) and **take** the helmet of [the hope of] salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, [dagger, God's word applied to specific situations]
- (18) **praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication**. To that end **keep alert with all perseverance**, making supplication **for all the saints**,
- (19) and also for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly **to proclaim the mystery of the gospel**,
- (20) for which I am an ambassador in chains, that I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak.
- (21) So that you also may know how I am and what I am doing, Tychicus the beloved brother and faithful minister in the Lord will tell you everything.
- (22) I have sent him to you for this very purpose, that you may know how we are, and that he may encourage your hearts.
- (23) Peace be to the brothers, and love with faith, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.
- (24) Grace be with all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with love incorruptible.

In closing, I want to leave you with an inspiring picture from nature, what the fight for life is like, and how we can be victorious. We'll show a 2-minute film clip the "March of the Emperor Penguins" by Luc Jaquet (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zvwcp_wRljk), and then we'll pray.

During the Antarctic winter, emperor penguins trek 50–120 km over the ice to breeding colonies. The females lay a single egg, which is incubated by the males while the females trek back to the sea to feed; parents subsequently take turns foraging at sea and caring for their chick in the colony. In between times, the egg must be passed between the mates carefully, if it falls on the ice, that life is lost. The breeding takes place at air temperatures around -40°C , with wind speeds of 144 km/h. As a defence against the cold, a colony of emperor penguins forms a compact huddle ranging in size from ten to several hundred birds, with each bird leaning forward on a neighbour. As the wind chill is the least severe in the center of the colony, all the juveniles are usually huddled there. Those on the outside upwind tend to shuffle slowly around the edge of the formation and add themselves to its leeward edge, producing a slow churning action, and giving each bird a turn on the inside and on the outside.