

Battle

Ephesians 6:10-20

Our lesson today is simple. There is a spiritual battle and the apostle Paul shows us in this passage how to win.

There is a spiritual battle

“For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against... the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.” v. 12

We don't talk a lot about **angels and demons** but this is the reality. We are engaged – every single day – in a cosmic struggle between God's forces of light and satan's minions of darkness. Hasn't Jesus already won the war? YES. The decisive battle has been won and the devil's power has been broken. But satan is still the ruler of this world and until Jesus comes back and casts him and his servants into the lake of fire that is their eternal destiny, **the devil remains a dangerous enemy** with resources so far beyond you and me we are fools to ignore them.

The New Testament is filled with accounts of **confrontations Jesus and the apostles had with demons**. One time the apostles couldn't cast out a particularly strong demon so Jesus had to come over and do it for them. One time there was a guy so filled with demons they were called Legion and nobody could subdue him. But my favorite story is of **seven brothers** – the sons of a Jewish High Priest named Sceva - who heard about the apostle Paul's ministry and that there was power in the name of Jesus to cast out demons.

So these seven brothers started casting out demons in the name of Jesus “whom Paul preaches.” It was like going to a conference and learning a new gimmick or getting some new tech and just applying it to your business. The brothers are like – “Sweet! A little magic phrase and the demons just run off!” It worked for a little while until they ran into a more powerful demon. There are layers of authority – which means some demons are stronger than others. **They tried their new trick and here is what happened:**

There is a spiritual battle

“The evil spirit answered them, ‘Jesus I know, and Paul I recognize, but who are you?’ And the man in whom was the evil spirit leaped on them, mastered all of them and overpowered them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded.” Acts 19:15-16

Don't you love the Bible? **Imagine the flannel-graph for this one** – or the coloring page that would come home from Sunday school... “Ummm, sweetheart, why are there seven naked men on your coloring page? And why did you color them all over in red as if they are bleeding everywhere?” “No, Mom – that's totally the story! That's exactly what happened! The demon-guy beat up seven of these guys because they didn't really know Jesus they just tried to use his name. Pretty stupid of them, right? Nobody can USE Jesus, you've got to FOLLOW Jesus!”

If there are demons all around us that are way more powerful than us; and if our enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour; and if there are dangerous wolves loose even in the sheepfold of the church – **how can we possibly prevail?** Here's how.

There is a spiritual battle. Here is how to win:

“Be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. Put on the whole armor of God.” v. 10-11

“Be strong in the Lord.” And suit up in His armor. How do we do that?

The answer is to PRAY. That is how we stand firm in God’s power, finding our strength in Him. That is how we suit up in the armor of God: we pray. If we don’t pray – we don’t suit up. If we don’t pray, we aren’t being strong IN THE LORD, nor are we depending on “the strength of his might.” ***If we don’t pray we are depending on our own strength*** – we are attempting to stand firm ON OUR OWN, even though we should know how insane that approach is.

Think of it as **vacuuming without being plugged in.** None of us would bother with that, right? But don’t we spend days, weeks and even months NOT PLUGGED IN to our spiritual power source? I like this analogy because it reminds us that it isn’t PRAYER that is powerful – it is GOD who is powerful. Would any of us say – “Whoa – this power cord is really something special. Think of the awesome power in this cord!” No way! The cord is just the conduit. The power is from a bigger, much stronger source. How much more true is this when it comes to prayer?

Isn’t our prayerless living the definition of insanity? We’ve been living on our own – walking in our own wisdom and relying on our own strength – and it never works out well. But we keep doing it – over and over – expecting a different result. If we want to experience change in our lives and if we want to see real transformation in our city – this is where we must change the equation. **We must pray.** We must plug in to the power source. We must learn to abide in Christ.

Ephesians 6 gives us four specific ways to pray – ***four daily petitions to live in spiritual victory.*** Paul creatively presents these are pieces of armor – some we are combining for the sake of brevity and simplicity. Let’s look at each petition as a challenge and call to pray!

1. Pray for Perception

“Take up the whole armor of God... Stand therefore, having fastened on *the belt of truth*... And *the sword of the Spirit*, which is the word of God.” v. 13-14,17

The first piece of armor Paul mentions is not armor at all. **It’s a belt.** But a belt holds everything else together – fixes it in place. Your breastplate is no good if it shifts all around. Your sword will fall off without a belt to hold its scabbard – to say nothing of your pants that need a belt to keep them up and to keep your tunic tucked in so it’s not in the way of your legs when you run. This passage is framed by the belt of truth and the sword of the Spirit. Clearly the two are closely related. The only way we know the truth is through the Word of God.

The thing that holds our spiritual lives together is TRUTH. If your worldview is based on something other than Biblical truth, it is a house built on sand. Thankfully Jesus is the revelation of all truth so a life built on Jesus is a life built on a firm foundation! In fact, it is the only life built on the rock. “All other ground is sinking sand.”

You’ll see that every prayer has two simple parts. First, when we pray we give thanks for what we have in Jesus. Then, when we pray we ask for what we need from Jesus. Very simple but very powerful combination of gratitude and faith.

1. Pray for Perception

“Be strong **in the Lord**... having fastened on the belt of truth... and the sword of the Spirit...” v. 13-14,17

A. Give thanks for the truth you have in Jesus

The primary exhortation in this passage is in verse 10 – **to be strong IN THE LORD**. Our only hope for victory is **to stand firm in Christ**. If we do not stand firm in our faith in Jesus, we will not stand firm at all. In Christ we have every spiritual blessing and access to all of the power and resources of heaven. Apart from Christ we can do nothing – we are utterly exposed and powerless before the terrifying armies of the devil.

Prayer begins by remembering and **focusing on the truth of who Jesus is** and all we have in Him. In other words, prayer begins with WORSHIP. The truth we have in Jesus is that Jesus IS the truth. He is the Lord. He is EVERYTHING. We can see the perfection of God in Jesus and we can receive the perfection of God from Jesus. Listen to how Paul prays for the believers in chapter 1.

1. Pray for Perception

“That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation **in the knowledge of him.**” Ephesians 1:17

A. Give thanks for the truth you have in Jesus

Jesus IS “the way, the truth and the life.” He IS “the radiance of the glory of God and the exact representation of His being.” Jesus IS “the head of the body, the church – the fullness of Him who fills all in all.” Jesus IS the word of God made flesh that came to dwell among us – we have seen His glory like a bright light shining in this dark world.

We should praise and thank God every day for the truth we have in Jesus. Because of Jesus we know who God is and we know who we are. Because of Jesus we know what grace is and what love looks like. Because of Jesus we KNOW; we see. The first step in prayer is to give thanks for the truth we have in Jesus. We can powerfully wield the sword of the Spirit in prayer. Listen to how Paul prays in Ephesians 1 – use these Biblical prayers to sharpen and strengthen your prayer life!

1. Pray for Perception

“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.” Eph. 1:18

B. Ask for the insight you need from Jesus

We pray for spiritual insight – for clear perception of all we have in Jesus and all we WILL have with Him. Pray for a fresh vision of the glories of heaven. Meditate on the future grace – the future glory that will be yours when you die or Jesus comes back. The truth we need from Jesus is an accurate picture of the grace He has given us and the grace that will be ours, plus an awareness of His power that is available to us:

1. Pray for Perception

“And what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe... that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead.” Eph. 1:19

B. Ask for the insight you need from Jesus

The truth we need from Jesus is ***to be reminded that He is powerful*** – we are not. He has the answers – we do not. We pray largely to be reminded of our need to pray!

1. Pray for Perception

“And seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named.” Eph. 1:21

B. Ask for the insight you need from Jesus

Yes, there is a spiritual battle raging around us. **But Jesus stands above it.** He has been exalted to the highest place to prove – once and for all – that He alone is Lord. He has been given all rule and authority, all glory and dominion. That’s why He is seated at the Father’s right hand – the place of the Prime Minister who rules the universe.

There is a spiritual war going on – but Jesus is our King. ***And we pray to be reminded of the truth that He is king.*** When you pray, use the Bible. As we prayerfully suit up in the armor of God there is a PRACTICE component as well.

1. Pray for Perception

“Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly...” Col. 3:16

C. Practice: study, memorize and meditate on God’s Word

The Word of God is the sword of the Spirit – it is our only offensive weapon. **So learn to handle the Word of God!** Study it! Meditate on it. Memorize verses and passages. Pray the Bible. Use the Psalms, the prayers of Paul. And as we pray truth from God’s Word the enemy’s gates tremble and crack. For the weapons of our warfare have divine power to demolish strongholds. The gates of hell will not prevail against us as we advance with prayer and Scripture – girded with the truth of Jesus Christ as Lord of Lords.

That is the first step in victorious prayer: to pray for understanding of the truth. It is the truth – that Jesus Christ is Lord – that holds everything else together in our hearts and minds and lives. If we lose sight of this foundational truth, everything else begins to slip. Start there with the belt of truth. Then we move to step two.

2. Pray for Progress

“Stand therefore... having put on the breastplate of righteousness.” v. 14

Successful armies, like the Romans, have always been known for their ***training***. Still today soldiers go through rigorous training programs to prepare them for their assignment and particularly for the dangers of battle.

How much more true is this spiritually? **We are in training!** And the whole point of training is to make progress toward your goals. So we start by praying for perception and insight, then we pray for progress and growth toward maturity. We give thanks for the righteousness we have in Christ.

2. Pray for Progress

“Stand therefore... having put on the breastplate of righteousness... take the helmet of salvation.” v. 14, 17

A. Give thanks for the righteousness you have in Jesus

Notice the past tense here. “HAVING put on the breastplate of righteousness.” Just like the helmet of salvation – we must take it and wear it every day – but it is a gift given to us in Christ at the moment we put our trust in Him. This is the whole message of the book of Romans – that God has revealed His righteousness in Jesus in order to give us His righteousness through Jesus. The believer in Jesus is JUSTIFIED – declared righteous in God’s courtroom.

Prayer should be filled with gratitude for all we have in Christ – and central to the gifts of His grace is justification – the gift of His righteousness. The amazing truth of the gospel is that sinners are declared PERFECT by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. This is nothing we could earn – it is the sheer mercy and wonderful grace of God. But when God looks at you – brother, sister – He does not see your failures or sins He sees the perfection of Jesus. He looks at you and says over you, “Perfect. Righteous.” This is our helmet of salvation and our breastplate of righteousness! That is the righteousness we have in Christ. But we must prayerfully pursue the righteousness we need from Jesus.

2. Pray for Progress

“Put on the whole armor of God... Having done all, to stand firm. Stand therefore... having put on the breastplate of righteousness.” v. 14

B. Ask for the righteousness you need from Jesus

The most striking thing about this passage is **the ACTIVE language here.**

- Four times Paul commands believers to **STAND**.
- Seven times Paul commands us to put on or take up the armor.

This is not a passive thing for us. Just as a soldier does not cower in fear and remain still in battle, so the Christian does not remain frozen and passive. No – our Christian life is one of ACTIVE pursuit, active discipline; it involves movement and progress, strategy and commitment. All of this done with prayer.

2. Pray for Progress

“Put to death therefore whatever is earthly in you... Put on then, as God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility...” Col. 3:5,12

C. Practice: take steps toward maturity in Christ

We must pursue righteousness by praying for it. Yes, Jesus gives the believer a new heart that hungers and thirsts for righteousness. But we must cultivate an appetite for righteousness – putting off our old desires and appetites and pursuing a hunger for the things of God.

- **What is your appetite like for spiritual things?**
- How much do you hunger for the presence of God in prayer?
- How often do you long for worship and just burst out in song or in prayer?

Your appetite for football did not appear one day out of nowhere. Your interest in mystery novels did not grow up overnight. Your love affair with Netflix has been brewing for years and years now. Your craving for Chick-fil-a has been scientifically cultivated. **All of our appetites grow over time depending on how we feed them.** How much do we feed our hunger and thirst for righteousness?

If we want to win the spiritual battle, **we must pray for and pursue the progress and growth in righteousness only Jesus can give us.** Pray for more of an appetite for spiritual things – for more of a love for worship, more of a longing for God’s presence in prayer, for more of a hunger for God’s Word.

And get started. Don’t wait for some new set of desires – **begin down the road of obedience and discipline** by coming to worship EVERY SUNDAY; coming to Sunday School; coming to Youth group; coming to your small group. Come. Discipline must be pursued. It does not happen automatically. Gear up in the armor God has provided. Don’t wait for it to magically place itself upon you like Snow White with her animal friends. It doesn’t work that way.

3. Pray for Preparation

“As shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace.” v. 15

A. Give thanks for the gospel resources you have in Jesus

If you are a believer in Jesus then **you are ready to share the gospel.** Your feet are already fitted with readiness. Once you understand the gospel enough to believe it, you understand it enough to share it. You don’t need a PhD in theology to talk about God’s love for you in Christ. But you do need to give thanks for all that you already have in Jesus! Give thanks that He has already prepared you, and then pray that He will go before you to prepare others to hear the good news from you.

3. Pray for Preparation

“As shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace.” v. 15

B. Ask for opportunities and boldness from Jesus

Our church family has been **praying actively for gospel opportunities the last few weeks.** It’s becoming an emphasis in all of our small groups as we continue to pray for the lost people God has placed in our lives.

I was driving home from our elders meeting a couple of weeks ago and **had to stop at Walgreens** to pick something up. But when I walked up the store was closed and a young man was standing there to apologize and explain – there had been a flood that day so they had to close early. I almost turned to walk away but this seemed like a God moment – so I asked the guy to tell me his story.

His name was **Vincent** and guess what? He is from Chicago! His family moved here when he was 8 so he grew up here and just graduated in May from Gaither. I asked if he knew any of our students and none of the names rang a bell. So then I asked my go-to question – “Did you grow up going to church?” He said, “No. Not at all.”

So I asked him what he thought about God and truth and eternity and everything and he was quick to say he believed in God and heaven and all that. So I asked him how he thought people got into heaven. He hemmed and hawed about how it will all work out and we can't judge things. So I explained how that's right and that God is the one who will judge all of us – and how did he feel about that – standing before God one day to be judged?

The whole conversation took 15, maybe 20 minutes. And he couldn't leave. It was his job to sit there at the entrance to Walgreens. I started doing his shpeel for him – “Sorry, the store is closed – we had a flood – come back in the morning!”

After talking about how good people don't go to heaven because there aren't any good people; how “it's not good people who go to heaven, forgiven people do” (Andy Stanley, *How good is Good Enough?*) and how that's why Jesus had to come and die, he agreed that he knew everything I said was true. So I challenged him to get a Bible or Bible app and read up on Jesus. He told me he would do that later that night when he got home.

It's a dangerous thing to pray for opportunities. Jesus loves to give them to us. Pray for yourself and for the others in your small group. This is what Paul asks for from those who read this letter:

3. Pray for Preparation

“Making supplication for all the saints, and also for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel.” v. 18-19

B. Ask for opportunities and boldness from Jesus

If PAUL needed believers to pray for him to be bold – how much more do WE need to be praying for one another! And, as with the other steps, we need to PRACTICE.

3. Pray for Preparation

“To this end we always pray for you, that our God may... fulfill every resolve for good... so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you...” 2 Thes. 1:11-12

C. Practice: set a goal for outreach and work your plan

What are your goals for evangelism? Who are you praying for? May the Lord fulfill every good purpose of your heart – every act prompted by your faith! May each of us be a light for the Lord over the coming year!

We pray for opportunities – for open doors - we pray for boldness to walk through those doors when God opens them in front of us. Let's keep praying for open doors and open hearts – and keep our gospel shoes laced up and ready to go. Fourth and finally:

4. Pray for Protection

“In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one.” v. 16

A. Give thanks for the protection you have in Jesus

We have an enemy – and he is always shooting at us with dangerous flaming darts. A soldier without a shield is dangerously vulnerable to archers. But with a strong shield he is protected from volley after volley, if he keeps the shield in place.

That is how faith works. ***Jesus Himself is the SHIELD*** – and we cling to Him in faith. The helmet of salvation also applies here – Jesus protects our most vulnerable places. He covers our hearts with the breastplate of His righteousness and He covers our heads with the helmet of His salvation. Jesus covers us completely with Himself. He is our CHAMPION and hero who goes with us into the battle and fights for us.

Give thanks for the protection you have in Jesus. He is the shield that protects you from the wrath of God and – conveniently – from the attacks of the enemy.

4. Pray for Protection

“In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one.” v. 16

B. Ask for the protection you need from Jesus

“In ALL circumstances.” No matter what you’re going through – good times or bad – you need the shield of faith. ***Never lower your defense.*** Never let up your guard. As soon as you drop that shield, the devil is aiming at you with one of his darts.

Our enemy is a crafty foe. He knows to wait for the opportune time. He knows when to attack and when to back off. He knows he can lull us into complacency by leaving us alone for a while. But then when he comes back – if we’re not ready for it – the attack can feel overwhelming.

Men, you know that this is about when it comes to **sexual temptation**. If you let down your guard for even one minute, you know how quickly those old urges can kick in. This is why you can’t let your security software lapse or let your accountability meetings slide.

We know this is true with **addicts and alcoholics** – THOSE people need their meetings and programs. Friends – THOSE people are THESE people. We are fools if we think we don’t need our meetings and programs. Every one of us is a SIN-addict. The devil knows and you do too. Pray for understanding of the truth to see your areas of weakness and temptation and idolatry. Pray for discipline to long for and fight for discipline in those areas. And pray for protection against attack while proactively maintaining all the areas of your defenses.

4. Pray for Protection

“And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another...” Heb. 10:24-25

C. Practice: meet regularly w/ a Christian friend

The practice in this area is to **meet regularly** – at least MONTHLY – with one or two fellow believers. Do you have an accountability partner? Do you have a mentor who is a couple of steps ahead of you? Do you have someone you are training and investing in? That is the pattern Jesus gave us – and it is the way we grow and are fruitful for Him!

So here is the summary for today.

**How to win the spiritual battle:
Pray for more Jesus in your Life**

- A. Give thanks for the blessings you have in Jesus
- B. Ask for the blessings you need from Jesus

That is how to “stand firm in the Lord and the strength of his might.” If we want to win this battle, we must become people of prayer. Let’s take a few moments now and pray through each of these categories.

- **Perception** – Lord open our eyes to see the truth of who you are and who we are before you. Thank you, Lord Jesus, that you are the TRUTH. In you we see the glory and love and righteousness of God. And thank you, Holy Spirit, that you lead us into all truth. You open the Word of God to us. Help us to study and understand your Word. Help us to memorize and meditate on your Word that we might more clearly understand the truth and discern what is best.
- **Progress** – Lord Jesus, thank you for the righteousness we have in you. Thank you that your righteousness is a breastplate that covers our hearts. We see the perfection of God in you and we have received that perfection as a gift from you! Help us to grow more and more into your glorious righteousness. Help us to make progress in fighting sin and in pursuing maturity in you.
- **Preparation** – Heavenly Father, thank you for giving us every spiritual blessing in Christ. Thank you for the gospel of peace – that we stand firm in grace, perfectly at peace with you, filled with the glorious presence of your Spirit. In Christ we have everything we need for life and godliness. You have prepared us perfectly – and you have positioned us intentionally to reach the people around us. So go before us to prepare the hearts of people – convict them of sin, humble them before you, show them their great need for you. Give us opportunities to connect with people and to point them to you, Lord Jesus. Give us boldness to take those opportunities and to call people to respond to your gracious invitation.
- **Protection** – Glorious God, thank you for sending Jesus to be our refuge and strength – our shelter and place of safety. Thank you that your redemption, Lord Jesus, is a helmet that protects our heads. Thank you that your body is a shield that protects us from the wrath of God and from the flaming arrows of the enemy. Strengthen us to trust in you with all of our hearts and not to lean on our own understanding. Help us to see the traps and lies of the devil and to ward off his attacks by our faith in you. For you, Lord Jesus, are the all glorious, all sovereign King of all Kings and Lord of all Lords. We trust in you. We worship you. And we are devoted to you with all that we are.
- **Jesus** – Lord Jesus, above all we want more of you. Thank you that you have given Yourself to us. Thank you that your Spirit lives in us. Help us to stand firm in YOU and in your mighty power!

Intro communion.