

Session 6

August 30, 2020

WE STAND TOGETHER IN SPIRITUAL BATTLE

Ephesians 6:10-20

One of the great truths of Scripture is that we do not walk alone. Besides the indwelling presence of God's Holy Spirit, we are surrounded by fellow believers who support us and encourage us in our journey (see Heb. 12:1). The community of the faithful is not simply displayed in the local church congregation on Sunday mornings (although it certainly is); but consists of a global network; a huge and extended family of brothers and sisters in Christ who unite as the Kingdom of Light against the very real forces of darkness. This week's focal text reminds us that the battle rages, and that all believers are called to equip themselves and hold their ground.

Our adversary (vv. 10-13). In chapter 3, Paul prayed that the church would be "strengthened with power in the inner man through His Spirit" (3:16). Here, the idea is more outward and more urgent. In fact, this is not a prayer but a command to prepare the church for spiritual conflict. The armor mentioned in verse 11 and explained in verses 14-17 is to equip the believer to face the full onslaught of satanic power. The word *tactics* (v. 11) is variously translated as *wiles*, or *schemes*, or *strategies*. In every case there is an inherent warning: *the devil doesn't fight fair!* The *full armor* suggests utter and complete equipping, as the forces of evil seek out and target the believer's weakest point. Verse 12 gives the most graphic description of our adversary found in the Bible. Warfare with the devil is particularly insidious. Battles involving mere mortals were well known and thoroughly analyzed in Paul's day. But this enemy has no flesh and blood! Exact identifications are difficult as Paul's descriptions flex and mingle. *Rulers* is a slightly weaker term than *authorities*, but both point to a hierarchy of demonic leadership. The *cosmic powers of darkness* refers to Satan's realm of powers on earth, while *spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenlies* connotes demonic conflict with the host of angels above the earth. The sheer magnitude of the forces arrayed against us justify sufficient preparation for the ever-increasing conflict, that we might stand our ground with confidence (v. 13).

Our armor (vv. 14-17). The armor introduced above is then described piece-by-piece. The metaphor can be over-worked, but Paul is clearly applying the armor in the proper order with which a Roman soldier was fitted. Waist and chest were covered first, with sandals strapped up the legs second. The shield slid over the left arm next, with the cumbersome helmet rocked into place afterward. Finally, the soldier's sword was grasped and readied. Just as the soldier's armor was a complete outfit, so the believer's armor demonstrated all that was needed to resist the enemy and stand firm against his onslaught. The articles of light (truth, righteousness, the gospel of peace, faith, salvation, and God's word) are all given to equip Christ-followers to counter the forces of darkness.

Our intercession (vv. 18-20). Unless you are David standing up against Goliath (and I certainly am not!), the most comforting possession apart from your armor is a band of brethren around you. Or better yet, an entire army. Or better still, an entire kingdom! That is exactly the kind of support Christian soldiers have at their disposal through prayer, and what the apostle Paul commends in verse 18. The believer's prayers are to be *continual* ("at all times"), *comprehensive*

("every prayer and request"), *urgent* ("staying alert"), *persistent* ("with all perseverance"), *intercessory* ("with intercession"), and *universal* ("for all the saints"). After this bold call to arms, the apostle (almost sheepishly) requests prayer for himself and his ongoing ministry while imprisoned. His request is not for his freedom, or even his personal comfort while in jail, but rather for boldness to proclaim the gospel of Christ "as I should" (v. 20) while there.