

Session 6

May 21, 2023

THE STRENGTH TO STAND AGAINST TEMPTATION

Ephesians 6:10-18

Temptation (and the ability to fight it!) are definitely part of spiritual warfare. Remember: The Devil's desire is always to win us over and cause us to betray the God who saved us. Alone, we are too weak and too ill-equipped to stand against him. But God has given us some helpful resources to help strengthen us for the fight.

The devil and temptation (vv. 10-13). Paul makes it clear that the church is involved in a spiritual battle, and the forces of evil rally under the direction of the Devil. The word *tactics* (or *schemes*) in verse 11 literally means “crossings over.” It's a negative word, implying doing things in the wrong way. The armor of God is needed because the Devil is on the attack, and his methods are not of this world. The armor metaphor is interesting; while the battle (literally *ongoing struggle*) is real, the enemies are often invisible. We could certainly try to identify the specific enemies implied in verse 12, but the way the phrases are strung together gives us a sufficient sense: rulers, authorities, powers of darkness, depraved spiritual beings. These represent the upper echelons of evil. Flesh and blood enemies are tangible, predictable, and defeatable. But the cosmic battle—that great conflict between good and evil—pits us against enemies that are intangible, elusive, and seemingly overwhelming. Our spiritual enemies are defeatable, however, but only if we are *empowered* by the Lord's *strength* (v. 10). Verse 13 is instructive, and particularly imperative: *you* take up the armor; so that *you* may resist, so that when *you* are fully prepared, *you* may take your stand against the army of the Devil. For reflection: *Here, the battle seems brutally intense, but James 4:7 says simply, “Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.” How do you reconcile those two Scriptures?*

Defending against temptation (vv. 14-16). British theologian Charles Ellicott (c. 1900) described the Roman method of dressing for battle:

Thus the order in which the armour is enumerated is clearly the order in which the armour of the Roman soldier was actually put on. It nearly corresponds with the invariable order in which Homer describes over and over again the arming of his heroes. First the belt and the corselet, which met and together formed the body armour; then the sandals; next the shield, and after this... the helmet itself; then the soldier was armed, and only had to take up the sword and spear.

Once again, the temptation is to analyze each piece of armor here in great detail. And while the individual pieces *do* matter, and their historical uses *do* give us insight, remember that armor comes as a suit! All the spiritual elements—truth, righteousness, the gospel of peace (note the irony here!), and faith—come together to envelop the warrior for his protection. Topped off with the helmet of *salvation* itself (v. 17), they are *defensive*, placed in the believer's life to protect him from whatever the Devil throws his way. For reflection: *The suit of armor, properly fitted, was a great defense for soldiers. The weak spot, of course, was the well-known “chink” (or “gap”) in the armor. What gaps do you think exist in your own spiritual armor? What can you do to “tighten up” those gaps?*

Doing battle with temptation (vv. 17-18). That leaves only the weapons for *offense*. The context here is clearly defensive; that is, protection from the Devil's onslaught. But God does not leave His people without valuable tools to inflict real damage to the enemy. It's interesting to note that only the *sword of the Spirit* (v. 17) is defined directly: it is the *word of God*. Hebrews 4:12 says, "For the word of God is living, and active, and sharper than any two-edged sword..." While the context of Hebrews 4:12 speaks more to the power of God's word working in the believer's life, the characteristics of the word remain: it is *alive*; it is *active*, and it's *sharp*. Two other important weapons are also mentioned here: the *Spirit*, who empowers us (see v. 10), and *prayer* which binds us together through intercession and gives us mutual strength to persevere in this battle. For reflection: *Remember: the only way for believers to intercede for others is by first accepting the reality of spiritual warfare, and then entering the fray!*