

“Be Strong & Stand Against Satan”

8 November 2020 - Led by Rev. Sam Mawhinney

Welcome & Call To Worship:

Hymn of Preparation: This Is My Father's World

Act of Remembrance: Andrew Whiteside

Prayers of Adoration & Confession: Ken Mok

Reading: Ephesians 6:10-18

Sermon:

This last part of the letter to the Ephesian church is well known and the armour of God is often spoken about. However, I suggest that most of us like our Christian life to be simple, easy, comfortable and without issue; none of us really desire to be fighting in a battle and taking on evil, unseen beings. Yet Paul continues his teaching on the Christian life when he says *finally* (v.10) and all that follows is the reality for any Christian. The struggle, the battle, is part of the life of imitating God and living a life of love that pleases God. So, we need to switch on and realise we are in a struggle, not just individually but as a Church, with an enemy. We are Christian soldiers (like the Roman soldiers that Paul lived beside), but we fight against *“the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms”* (v.12).

It is hard for us to believe in the devil and these unseen spiritual beings, because our society makes such belief a joke. I saw a small girl on her scooter with a black cape and red horns last week and though I wanted to, I didn't say to her parents, “What are you doing?! Don't you realise that the devil desires for you to be in Hell forever, and you dress your daughter up as a devil or a demon?”

It is hard to believe in the battle because we really don't want it to be so. Naturally, we prefer comfortable, entertained, healthy, prosperous lives; but struggling against evil, sin and darkness? Definitely not. Yet the Bible's story is of a fight that we lose between humanity and Satan and of a fight between God and Satan that Satan loses. Our only hope is to “be strong in the Lord and in His mighty power” (v.10). You can read the account of the beginning, humanity's failure to obey God in Eden, or you can read the events surrounding the appearance of Jesus - the demonic activity, the struggle with death, the darkness surrounding the cross. Or for a comprehensive picture of the whole event and the birth of the Church and Satan's ongoing hostility, read Revelation 12-13. The Christian life means an ongoing struggle with Satan and evil! Therefore Paul calls us to:

I. “Be strong in The Lord and in His mighty power.” (v.10)

The day to day reality is that our church is small and we are unable to meet; sin is subtle and attractive so it's easy to fall into temptation. Society is aggressive and hostile to our views on many issues, including marriage and humanity, and has a boldness to oppose us on the things we believe are true, good and honouring of God. Paul addressed a situation in Ephesus that was no different. The Ephesian church struggled with a very strong anti-Christian society surrounding them, the active presence of false religion and totalitarian

government. Into that reality, Paul commands them to be strong. The question remains - what is this power?

How many books have been written or sermons preached about ways to have the power of God, power evangelism, power prayer, victorious Christian living, 7 ways to live on a whole series of topics? Others encourage us to have a charismatic experience of some description, so as to experience the Lord in His mighty power. I recognise it is possible to know God intellectually, yet there is a need to have a deeper experience of God and His power. Where is the power of God to be found?

The central premise of the gospel and the letter to the Ephesian church is that we are *in Christ*; being in Christ is our reality and our strength. The power we have is the power of the gospel - it converts, confronts and strengthens us against sin, which is the devil's foothold (Eph. 4:27). The gospel breaks the power of Satan over us - sin is forgiven, death is defeated, darkness of character becomes the light of the Spirit's presence and love dwells deep in our souls in Christ. This mighty power is resurrection power - dynamite!

So, to have this power we remind ourselves of the gospel. That is what Paul has been doing. You are chosen before the beginning of time and God will carry you into eternity. You are redeemed from every sin and sealed with the power of the Holy Spirit, guaranteeing your inheritance in glory. And Paul wants you to know and grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, that is the power that is at work in us (3:16-21). This is a strong power, indeed a mighty power, and the command for us is to be strong in the Lord Jesus Christ as individuals and as a church.

II. "So that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes." (v.11)

The prospect of fighting isn't very appealing to most of us; the idea of fighting the devil is worrying! Getting dressed in full armour and then simply standing might seem pointless. However, it is important to grasp that the one we fight against, the devil, is a real enemy! He does attack Christians and Paul realises that if we are to survive, then we must take our stand.

Paul is writing this letter under the guard of a Roman soldier, and though he was unlikely to be in full battle gear, Paul's mind could easily picture the reality. In *taking a stand*, he is thinking of the Roman phalanx - a 10x10 squad of armed soldiers who formed up with shields in front and above, who were ready for the enemy when they attacked. It is defensive, rather than attack-minded, strategy. The only weapon used to attack was the short sword, which could be thrust between their shields.

Martin Luther said, "*Here I stand. I can not do otherwise. God help me. Amen.*" We take our stand on the word of God and defend the truth of God's revelation to us. We stand in difficult circumstances, holding to the promises of His presence and goodness. We defend, for example, the preciousness of life; we defend the priority of the Church and gospel from error and take our stand on the revelation given to us by God. And in this we stand.

The devil is our opponent and it's important we know his schemes. One of the best books written on this topic is C.S. Lewis' *The Screwtape Letters*. In the book, we are given an inside perspective on the thoughts of a senior devil as he instructs a junior devil in his attempt to undermine Christians and the Church. Here are some of the devil's schemes and always remember - he doesn't play fair and he doesn't care about us.

- A. He will attack us when we are **tired and vulnerable**, as he did with David and the temptation of Bathsheba, Elijah when exhausted after a spiritual victory, or Peter when he denied Jesus in the courtyard. Or Jesus when physically weak, having fasted for 40 days in the wilderness, or on His approach to and suffering on the cross.
- B. He will attack us through **other people**. You would not have expected Peter to be an advocate for the devil, yet he tried to stop Jesus from going to the cross. We must be aware that Satan can influence and push family members, friends or church members to lead us against the will and word of God. Obviously, this is difficult and requires firmness and sensitivity.
- C. **Criticism**. The classic case study in the Bible is the way Moses was treated as he led the people of Israel through the wilderness (Numbers 12-16). His brother and sister opposed him, the people grumbled constantly against him and the elders of Israel thought he had erred. It was the devil's way of undermining the direction God had given them. They forgot how God was with them, providing manna and quail every day, and what God was doing in the test. Criticism is one of the devil's schemes - be incredibly careful with a critical spirit.
- D. **Subtly**. The devil only appears three times in the Bible - in the garden of Eden, before the throne of God in the story of Job, and in the temptation of Jesus in the wilderness. He prefers to work subtly; he doesn't jump out and scare you. He makes it a joke; he bides his time and increases the pressure, like the frog in the water that slowly boils to death.

We take our stand against the devil's schemes. Our fight is to stand firm on the truth of God and His word. Psalm 119:59 says, "*I have considered my ways and have turned my steps to your statutes.*" It is on this that we stand.

III. "Our struggle is *not* against flesh and blood." (v.12)

This truth is vitally important to grasp and believe in our struggle to live the Christian life. Life is full of relationship difficulties: personalities clash, work disagreements, theological differences, uncalled for personal animosity, gossip. If you trace the history of your life, you will have experienced them. We have had our fair share in ARPC. People have come up and said to me, "Oh, they used to be members of ARPC but they fell out with the minister . . . they disagreed with what they did with the building . . . they used to attend, but were hurt by our attitude toward _____. This is sad, difficult and creates many problems. The Church is divided, people are hurt and the cause of Jesus Christ suffers.

It is vital that we recognise the nature of spiritual conflict: it is *not* against people, flesh and blood. Remember when Peter urged Jesus not to go to the cross? Jesus said, "*Get behind me Satan,*" not "*Get behind me, Peter.*" He is behind it. However, Jesus went on to say, "*You are a stumbling block to me. You do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men*" (Matthew 16:23). Our struggle is with Satan and we are responsible if we allow it to become personal. Therefore, our direction of travel is always to work through the relationship difficulties and recognise the deeper source of the conflict. We must recognise our own sinful response, and ask for the grace and mercy of God to forgive us our sin and help sort out

conflict. Our struggle is not against flesh and blood - knowing and believing this is immensely helpful.

Our struggle *is* against, “the rulers, the authorities, the powers of this dark world, the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms”. The big question is, who or what are these?

Some separate the list and put rulers, authorities and powers of this dark world as the institutions of false religion, the state, multinational organisations, and make these different and separate from the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. There is an attraction for us in this: they are easier to identify, they are seen, tangible, often opposed to Jesus Christ and the Church. Add to that the fact that we don’t understand, have little experience of, and cannot see demonic beings, which is the alternative if we *don’t* separate the list but understand them as descriptions of the same reality.

Yet I want to advocate not separating these, mainly because of Paul's use of the terms elsewhere in the letter (1:19-21; 3:10-11). This list describes our enemy as spiritual beings headed by the devil. The struggle Jesus encountered was a spiritual struggle in the spiritual realm with spiritual beings and having defeated them, He sits at the right hand of God in the heavenly realms far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. They are not, therefore, institutions of state or government, or even false religion.

The picture of Revelation 12&13 also tells us that the battle in the world is between Satan and Jesus Christ. Because we are in Christ, we are by our association involved in that struggle. If we turn our attention to fighting each other, then we have missed the reality and can cause untold harm to the body of Christ.

So, when you find yourselves in conflict - and you will, because Satan is a roaring lion whose nature it is to stalk and look for prey to devour - say clearly to yourself, “Your struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against spiritual beings which have influence in the spiritual realms and, as such, they are not the structures and institutions of the world.”

Therefore, put on the full armour of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. (v13)

IV. Application

- A. **Accept the struggle of the Christian life!** How robust is your faith? How committed are you to Jesus Christ and the means of grace, to personal Bible reading and prayer? How committed to the church, 3D groups, service? How deeply do you understand and meditate upon the gospel - chosen, redeemed, sealed - and its application?
- B. **Accept the focus of the battle!** It’s not against people! Endeavour to understand the problem, to work things out, to be a peacemaker. Hold your tongue for the greater good, make every effort to engage rather than withdraw! If we are right in our interpretation of who our enemy is, then we can work *with* the government, with our institutions, and honour them in line with Romans 13. We can work for them but be aware that they can be influenced wrongly by spiritual forces of evil, and it is our job to stand and speak the truth.

- C. **Accept the ebb and flow of life!** Verse 13 speaks of *“the day of evil”* and we should be comforted that life isn’t all one big battle with Satan and demonic forces. These times come and they go. Sometimes we are led by quiet waters and the grass is green and the sun shines! There are seasons in life, as it was for Jesus and will be for us. Yet when the day of evil comes, like good soldiers we need to be prepared.

Be strong in the Lord and in His mighty power (the gospel) and take your stand against the devil’s schemes. The struggle is real, standing firm overcomes, and the day will come to pass when our life on earth is finished and we rest in peace.

Hymn of Reflection: O Church, Arise (Arise, Shine)

Prayers for Others: Annie Patton

Announcements

Closing Hymn: Yet Not I, But Through Christ In Me

Benediction: May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with us all, now and evermore. Amen.

Discussion & Application:

1. The ongoing battle between God and Satan is a reality. Discuss your understanding or experience of spiritual warfare.
2. Power is found in the gospel! Remind yourself of the gospel by re-reading Eph. 1:3-14 and 3:16-21.
3. What are some of the ways the devil attacks us?
4. Who is NOT our enemy and how should this impact the way we live and “take our stand”?