

Series: Unsearchable Riches in Christ (Ephesians)

Text: Ephesians 6:10-13

Message #29 (April 22, 2007)

THE BELIEVER'S BATTLE

Introduction

1. While a student at Moody Bible Institute, I was working with some youth from the Cabrini Green Projects. I and another student were playing basketball on a crowded playground area in the projects one afternoon with some of the kids we had befriended. Every time I drove toward the basket, the kid guarding me would shove me into the goal post. Finally I had had enough and I shoved him back. The whole playground stopped and suddenly we find ourselves surrounded by about 50 guys. (My friend is muttering under his breath – “Why did you do that! We are going to die!) I was no longer at a playground. It was a battleground and I did not even know it!
2. I suspect that the same thing is true of believers today. We assume things are fine as we skip through life, not realizing that we are in the middle of a battlefield. And when we realize our situation we find ourselves outnumbered and in deep trouble! (I was reading a commentary by James Boice on this section of Scripture. He mentioned a book by Puritan author, William Gurnall. The book dealing with this section of Paul's letter was 1200 double column pages. The title was *The Christian in Complete Armor: A Treatise of the Saint's War Against the Devil: wherein a discovery is made of that grand enemy of God and of his people – in his policies, power, seat of his empire, wickedness and chief design he hath against the saints – and a magazine is opened from whence the Christian is furnished with spiritual arms for the battle, helped on with his armour, and taught the use of his weapon, together with the happy issue of the whole war*). How is that for a title!
3. Whether we realize it or not, we are in the middle of an invisible war against a very powerful enemy that seeks to steal, kill and destroy. The more diligent we become in walking the worthy walk, the more intense will be the enemy's counter offensive. The battle is cosmic and universal. There is no real escaping the conflict. The enemy is particularly angry because, when Christ called us, we switched sides. Before we were at enmity with God; now we belong to Him and we are drawn into this holy war against the devil and his angels.
4. Paul had warned the Ephesians elders (Acts 20) how the enemy often works. There

are attempts of infiltration by wolves in sheep's clothing. There are efforts to keep us ignorant of God's Word and His way. There are temptations and distractions to direct us away from our Lord and His cause. Make no mistake about it. We are at war and the stakes are life and death.

5. Paul was most concerned with the Ephesians that they would not falter in this spiritual battle. Notice his repeated use of the word "stand." How do we stand when the enemy is determined to bring us down? Paul tells the Ephesians to be prepared to engage in battle and he makes that clear by articulating **two preparations** that are needful.

I. "BE STRONG IN THE LORD AND IN THE POWER OF HIS MIGHT" (FIND OUR STRENGTH IN GOD)

A. Understand where our strength comes from

1. Paul makes much of being "in Christ." What does that mean? When we trusted Christ as Savior, we became one with Christ. Our lives were intimately identified with His. When He died, the Scripture says that we died. When He was raised, we were raised. When He was seated in the heavenly places, we too were so seated with Him. Our position is in Christ. What is true of Christ is true of me in relation to our standing before God. It is only because we are in Christ that we are accepted by God.
2. Paul told the Colossians that Christ had once and for all defeated the devil, and in fact put him on display as a defeated foe. Because believers are in Christ, we share in the victory over sin and Satan. In Christ, we do not fight **for** victory but **from** victory. Those two ideas are hugely different. If we are fighting for victory, the outcome remains uncertain. If we are fighting from victory, there is no doubt as to who wins! (It is sort of like watching the rebroadcast of a game of our favorite sports team. We know what the score was and that our team won, but as we watch, it is the fourth quarter and we are down by a large margin – but we know we won! So rather than fear and even anticipate defeat, it is an adventure to see how the victory came about!)
3. Our strength comes from God. Consider the following verses: 1 John 4:4 - **Little children, you are from God and have overcome them, for he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world.** Hebrews 2:14 - **Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that**

through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, Ephesians 3:20 - **Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us,** Colossians 1:11 - **May you be strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy,** (Our strength comes from God).

B. Understand why we need His strength

1. We need His strength because we have no strength of our own. Without Christ, how much can we do? (Without Him, you can do ... what?) But with Him what can we do? Throughout the Bible we are counseled not to trust in human strength (Psalm 20:7-8 - **Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the LORD our God. They collapse and fall, but we rise and stand upright.** Psalm 33:16-19 - **The king is not saved by his great army; a warrior is not delivered by his great strength. The warhorse is a false hope for salvation, and by its great might it cannot rescue. Behold, the eye of the LORD is on those who fear him, on those who hope in his steadfast love, that he may deliver their soul from death and keep them alive in famine**). We have no real strength of our own, but He does!
2. We need His strength because the enemy is so strong. We battle not against mere men, but against wicked spirits, world rulers of this darkness, demonic powers and authorities and dominions. Satan is not called a lion or a dragon as a joke or because God delights in mocking the enemy. Satan is so referred because these names describe his character. He is ferocious and frightening, dangerous and deadly. It is a wise Christian who hates him but who also has a healthy respect for his diabolical power. Don't ever underestimate the enemy or over-estimate your ability to deal with him. We need the strength that comes alone from God.

C. Understand how to appropriate His strength

1. Since our strength comes from Christ and since victory is found in Him, it makes sense to stay close to Jesus! There is something of a divine paradox here. The strength is God's but the commitment to stand in His strength is to be ours.
2. Consider the following passages: Psalm 34:7 - **The angel of the LORD encamps around those who fear him, and delivers them.** Psalm 91:1-2, 9-10 - **He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will abide in the shadow of the Almighty. I will say to the**

LORD, "My refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust..." Because you have made the LORD your dwelling place - the Most High, who is my refuge - no evil shall be allowed to befall you, no plague come near your tent. (Be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. That is where we start in this spiritual battle with the enemy. But there is something we are called to do to prepare for the battle).

II. "PUT ON THE WHOLE ARMOR OF GOD" (GET DRESSED FOR BATTLE) (God has provided the power, the same power in fact that raised Jesus from the dead – the power that conquered death and gained the victory over sin and Satan is at our disposal! But there is something that we are supposed to do. We are told to put on the whole armor of God. Isn't it interesting that we are never told to take it off, only to put it on, presumably to keep it on. Like the Israelites who, with Nehemiah, were building the wall around Jerusalem, with a trowel in one hand and a sword in the other, so we are to always be ready, dressed for battle without ever dropping our guard! Paul gives two reasons why we must never take off the armor.

A. Because of the kind of enemy we have (We must put on the full armor of God if we hope to stand against the "schemes of the devil." The devil has many strategies designed to bring us down. We must not be unaware of those strategies. The enemy is called a tempter, a lion, a murderer, a liar, a slanderer, an angel of light (in disguise) and a serpent. There are many lists of things that Satan tries to do to thwart the plan of God, including undermining God's character and credibility, making it hard for the believer to live a truly Christian life, confusing people with false doctrine, stirring up division in the church, and so forth. I believe it would be appropriate to say that his mode of operation is to bring defeat and he does so attacking the mind, the body, the will and the heart. His goal is to deceive, destroy, dominate and discourage. With the help of Warren Wiersbe, let me show you how the devil operates).

1. He seeks to **deceive the mind**. He keeps on telling us lies until we start to believe them. He did that with Eve and he has not changed his tactics. There is no reason to – it still works! His goal in this attack is to keep us **ignorant of God's will**.
2. He seeks to **destroy the body**. He did this to Job and apparently sometimes God allows him some freedom to bring suffering to His people. Satan desires to make us suffer so that we will become **impatient with God** and speak evil of Him! Once again, he has not changed his tactics because they remain effective!

3. He seeks to **dominate the will**. Satan delights in tempting us to **act independently of God**, gleefully encouraging us to run ahead of God. He encourages us to trust in our own resources and in our own schemes rather than depending on the Lord and His might. David was guilty of that. He ignored the warnings of others and the revelation of God, and numbered the people. God basically said, "You think you are strong because of your many men, watch this." And 70,000 men fell dead! Pride – confidence in our own strength, robs God of His glory and that is one thing He does not share with any other.

4. He seeks to **discourage the heart**. He does so by bringing **an indictment** against us. Do you ever become discouraged? Does your conscience ever bother you? Do you sometimes feel like a loser and failure and a piece of garbage? There is a great story in Zechariah 3 about the high priest Joshua standing before God in dirty garments and Satan is accusing the priest, as the representative of the people of Israel, that he is an awful sinner and unworthy of acceptance before God. And Satan was exactly correct in his analysis! Do you know what God did? He took the dirty garments off Joshua and gave him a clean garment. When Satan returned to accuse, it was, "What dirt? What sin?" If we are in Christ, we are washed in the blood of the Lamb and we stand clean before the Lord! If Satan can convince you otherwise by indicting you in regard to your sin, you will be discouraged and you will have lost that battle! That is the enemy's strategy and that is why we must put on the whole armor of God. The second reason for our need to be fully dressed in the armor of God is ...

B. Because of the kind of battle we are called to fight ("We wrestle...") - What is going on here? Is Paul mixing metaphors? First he was talking about putting on the whole armor of God and now he is talking about wrestling? How do those go together? His point is that this is an intense, personal, hand-to-hand combat that is a battle to the death. A wrestler would get another into a hold and press his head and shoulders to the ground in such a manner to bring death to his opponent. One either died or lived to fight again. Paul's point here is that this is not a playground spat. This is a serious, life and death struggle. As you know, we fight this battle on three fronts. Paul's primary emphasis in this section is on front number three. (Let's review them).

1. The world (Ephesians 2:1-3 - **And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which**

you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience-- among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind).

Please remember what Jesus said about the world. "I have overcome the world."

And we are in Christ! (Amen?)

2. The flesh – One of the greatest battles we face and the one in which the Bible seems to concentrate, is our battle with the flesh. Already we considered some of this earlier in Paul's letter, when he admonished his readers to put off the old and to put on the new. The battle is real and ugly here, but again in Christ we have been given the victory. Paul told the Romans that the old man was crucified with Christ and rendered inoperable! As intense as the battle at times seems, in Christ we have died to the law of sin and death! In Christ we stand forgiven and clothed in righteousness! (Is that not good news)?
3. The devil – The devil is powerful, but he is not God, nor does he have the attributes of God. He is not omniscient or omnipresent or omnipotent. He has been defeated by Christ and put on display as a defeated foe. His doom is sealed and he will be cast into the Lake of Fire at the appointed time of judgment. Though he goes around like a roaring lion seeking whom he might devour, he can be resisted! God has given us the command to resist and the power to do so. (I found this extended quote from John Piper intriguing: ***I'm not surprised to hear him say that we wrestle with evil angelic, demonic, supernatural powers. What surprises me is that he says (in v. 12) we do NOT wrestle with flesh and blood.***

I want to say to Paul, "You've been stoned and beaten and imprisoned and run out of town and shipwrecked. Your flesh has been torn and your blood has been spilled and that has hindered your ministry again and again. The flesh of others has torn your flesh and the blood of others has boiled against your blood. What do you mean you don't wrestle against flesh and blood? It's people with their hands and their stones and rods and chains that have cost you dearly and tested your faith almost to the limit."

I think Paul would answer. "You're right. Flesh and blood is real and it can be very evil. But what I mean is this. Whenever someone's flesh attacks me, or

someone's blood boils against me, or my way is hindered by man, something else is also going on, something deeper, bigger, more terrible, more sinister, more destructive than meets the eye. I don't mean that flesh and blood can't hurt or hinder the cause of Christ. I mean that the prince of the power of the air is more dangerous than any of his subjects and that he must be overcome in every instance of conflict, or the battle is lost."

Conclusion

1. Satan is a real entity and a real enemy. He is not a make believe, fairytale, ruler of the underworld. He is the enemy of every Christian, having declared war on us, with the desire to discourage, dominate, deceive and destroy. The Bible presents him as real. Jesus spoke of him as real. The apostles believed he was real and warned against his devices. He is wiser and stronger than we are. He is of a higher order than we. Though only able to be in one place at a time, he has extended his terrible dominion through his cohorts. We are definitely in a battle. That's the bad news.
2. But there is good news. He is a defeated foe. He can be resisted if we do what Paul instructs us to do: to be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might and to put on the whole armor of God. (We will begin to look at that next week).
3. Some of you have been believing lies propagated and encouraged by the enemy. Others are blaming God because of intense suffering. Still others are running ahead of God, trying to make things work out but using only the strength found in the flesh. And still others are discouraged, indicted by a defiled conscience or false assumptions. The time is now to confess our sin and to be strong in the Lord and armed with the defenses He has provided. This is a serious call to arms, but it is not a panic call. It is a call to prepare but it is a call that reflects the victory we already have in Christ. So be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might and put on the whole armor of God – and know the joy that is found in the victory we have in Jesus Christ!