

## Reflections on Ephesians Chapter 6

This is the “Spiritual Warfare” chapter. It’s a very important passage of Scripture not only for the message of Ephesians, but for the follower of Christ. We need to look at it, although our interest here is only verses 10 to 20, and that not necessarily word-by-word or even verse-by-verse. Following are some of my thoughts as I reflect on this text.

Ephesians is not a “situational” letter. That is, Paul didn’t write it to deal with a situation that arose or existed in that church. Most letters that Paul wrote to churches were situational letters. But not this one. Ephesians is a treatise. (So is Colossians.) Paul wrote this to put down in writing what Christianity is. It’s a “new humanity,” one with a purpose. Because of the love of Christ, we’ve been called out of the dominion of Satan and darkness, where we were dead in sin and objects of wrath, to a new life, transformed by the power of God into a totally new kind of person. It’s all by the grace of God that we have this new life and a new relationship with God. Paul explains that it was God’s eternal purpose to do this thru Christ. And as a result, the Church is under obligation to live worthy of our unique calling. We “must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking” (4:17). Instead, we are to serve Christ, building up the body of Christ so that we all attain to maturity, so that we all become like God Himself. We must, for example, walk in love, speak truthfully, share with others, and be filled with the Spirit. And the letter comes to a climax at 6:10. Let’s think now about our Chapter 6 passage.

**“Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power”** (v. 10). In the O.T., the nation of Israel was only able to defeat the Canaanites and her enemies by the power of God. When Moses had his arms held up to heaven, the Israelite army prevailed. When his arms came down, they suffered. It was God who gave Israel victories. Same in Joshua 10, where it states that more Amorites died from the hailstones that God sent down from heaven than by the swords of the Israelites. Jericho fell miraculously by the power of God. David was victorious over the Philistines by the power of God. When Nebuchadnezzar’s forces advanced upon Jerusalem, the army of Judah was far, far stronger than the Babylonians, yet because God was *not* with them, they suffered terrible defeat. Paul is saying here that the church has access to that same power as David and Joshua did. In Chapter 1, Paul speaks repeatedly of God’s power. There (1:19) and here in this climactic passage, he uses three different Greek words (translated, “strong,” “might,” “power”) to highlight God’s enormous strength. But . . . power for what? What is it or who is it we’re fighting?

**“Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms”** (vv.11-12). Our enemy is invisible and transcendent, spiritual beings. They are real and very strong. Only by the power of God can we withstand them, let alone overcome them. It’s really God’s battle. And He’s placed us in it. We’re not just collateral. We’re the very agents that God uses to gain the victory over these spiritual beings. God is fighting evil personified, and we’re His soldiers. It was God’s cosmic purpose to do away with evil so that only good remains, reflecting the goodness of His Person. And now, we’re in the thick of it.

Almost all commentators and expositors believe that Paul’s long sentence with how we’re to be soldierly equipped (vv.13-17) comes from his observation of Roman soldiers, one of whom in fact may have been guarding him as he wrote. *Nonsense!* That totally wrong comment causes us to miss the whole point of this passage. Paul was steeped in the Old Testament. Those Scriptures formed his worldview. He knew that God revealed Himself there as what today’s O.T. scholars call the “Divine Warrior.” God is in conflict with evil and He has every intention to defeat it.

The soldierly allusions Paul makes in this passage are from the prophet Isaiah and all have to do with battle. In Isaiah 11, a “shoot from the stump of Jesse” (ie, Jesus, the ultimate son of David) **“will strike the earth with the rod of his mouth, with the breath of his lips he will slay the wicked. Righteousness will be his belt and faithfulness the sash around his waist.”** In Isaiah 52, “the feet” are of the One who “will lay bare his holy arm,” ie, to show His power to defeat His people’s enemies. In Isaiah 59, God is appalled that there’s no one who cares about truth, justice, or righteousness. So He Himself must go to battle, therefore **“He put on righteousness as his breastplate, and the helmet of salvation on his head; he put on the garments of vengeance and wrapped himself in zeal as in a cloak. According to what they have done, so will he repay wrath to his enemies and retribution to his foes; he will repay . . .”** (vv.14-18).

So when Paul tells *us* to put on this armor, he’s saying we’re to go to carry out the Lord’s great, cosmic purpose of defeating evil in the power of God almighty. It’s as if we’re with Joshua doing battle against the Canaanites. (By the way, Jesus name is literally Joshua.) We’re at war. We’re involved in another great Conquest. We’re here for a purpose.

Paul repeats for emphasis, **“Therefore put on the full armor of God. . .”** He means, of course, put on the Lord Jesus Christ. That’s what the “new man” is, it’s Christ in us. We’re a clone of Jesus, we’re just like Him and He indwells us as we are in Him. Christ is our identity and our life. In Christ we can engage the enemy and remain standing. In Christ we can defeat the enemy, as He did at the cross and then the resurrection. But, How? Doing what?

The phrase, **“the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God,”** probably refers not to the Bible, but to our use or application of passages in the Bible. The Bible contains thousands of swords. The Word of God is “sharper than any two-edged sword.” It’s Scripture that we use, not argument or philosophy. Scripture is our weapon—and it’s a weapon *for offense*. When I encounter an atheist who wants to argue, I just explain the Gospel, recite John 3:16, and let him deal with it.

Paul expects us to be continuing to do what he was doing. He says, **“I...fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel”** (v. 19). It was for this work of reaching the world of Gentiles for Christ that Paul was called. And Paul threw himself fully and fearlessly into the work. We’re to be doing the same. We’re not in this great conflict to be defensive, but to be on the offense and attack Satan precisely where he thinks his power lies, in his grip on human souls.

So “spiritual warfare” is carrying out the Great Commission. It’s sharing the Gospel with our neighbors and those around the world so that those who are in the grip of Satan can be rescued from his dominion of darkness and transferred into the light of Christ, there to be transformed into Christ’s image. We engage Satan and defeat him by stealing away from him those he holds captive.

Confronting Satan is something that can only be done by God. That’s why prayer is so important for this work (vv.18a and 19a). The phrase, **“pray in the Spirit,”** almost certainly means according to the will of the Holy Spirit rather than, as some Christians believe, in a state of something like ecstasy or bliss. In v. 18, Paul uses “all” four times because prayer is that essential to our mission. Our prayers are like the Israelites blowing the trumpets around the walls of Jericho.

Most seculars in the West are so imbued with billions of years and evolution they won’t even listen to the Gospel. I was once that way. But reading a Gospel tract that was given to me, the Lord opened my heart, and I became a believer. Buddhists seek to rid themselves of passion and desire, so to speak of a loving God contradicts everything they know. The Buddhist goal is to reach nirvana, so to have eternal life in heaven to them is like a curse. Reaching Buddhists thus sounds impossible, yet . . . we go in the power of God. In 1990 there were only 10 known Christians in Mongolia and no churches or fellowships. Today, there are an estimated 50,000 believers and 500 worshiping groups there. Through the willingness of some of us to go and serve, God is at work bringing the people He loves into relationship to Himself for an eternity of blessing.

But the front lines aren’t only in Mongolia or the Muslim world, or other distant places. They are also right here in our back yard. The battle is wherever unsaved people are. We can’t just throw money into the plate and expect professionals to do the outreach. If we’re a follower of Christ, we’re in it too. It takes effort and it may entail loss or sacrifice of some kind. But, hey! That’s our calling! Giving someone a Gospel tract may sound like a simple thing to do, but it’s not innocuous. It enrages the surrounding demons. A lawyer has been saved by finding a tract on a sidewalk!

Dear reader: A new pagan religion [some call it an ideology, but it’s not, it’s a religion] is sweeping across our nation. It’s more modern and sophisticated than the old pagan idolatry yet, as with all religions, it has its sacred myths (evolution and Marxism, for example). It incorporates technology, science, and government, plus the academy, almost all the media, our culture, and now even the world of big corporations and finance. It’s big and powerful, and it’s totalitarian. And it’s fiercely anti-Christian, anti-God, and anti-Bible. It can’t be criticized, let alone opposed or overturned. The Church’s responses can be to yield to it, or try to compromise with it, or to hide our faith (as “secret believers”). But what Paul has written here in Ephesians 6 is our only godly response: Seek to save some here and there by reaching out with the Gospel. We may need to suffer for confronting people with it. But God will see to it that some respond and are saved. He doesn’t want anyone to perish (2 Peter 3:9).

So Ephesians tells us what Christianity is. It’s God defeating Satan, his wicked minions, and all evil by our continuing the work of Christ Jesus. Paul repeatedly brought up the fact of confrontation with evil (1:19-23; 2:1-7; 4:7-10; 5:7-14, 17). Then he brings this treatise for the church to a climax in Chapter 6 with this compelling appeal. It’s Paul’s “great commission.” We’re not here on earth to enjoy life and pursue happiness; we’re here on mission. On mission, Paul suffered terribly. But he was faithful to his calling. And here in this chapter, Paul is saying to us, “You too. Get to it!”