

SESSION 6

We Stand Together in Spiritual Battle



QUESTION 1:

When have you been surprised by the unexpected?

THE POINT

We stand strong with God's armor and the support of others.

THE PASSAGE

Ephesians 6:10-20

THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

Friends of mine recently prepared their house for sale. They cleaned, painted, and tastefully staged it. Pride of ownership was gleaming in every room. Buyers flooded the home and boasted of its beauty. Everything was going great until the home inspection revealed a significant problem: an army of termites was damaging the structural integrity of the floor. No amount of paint and redecorating could erase the unseen threat hidden deep beneath the visible surface. My friends eventually did sell their house. But they learned a valuable lesson in the process: things aren't always what they seem on the outside.

Spiritually, things might look OK to the outside world, but below the surface a war rages. No one is immune to this conflict. It's not a physical war; it's a spiritual battle. Christians might not always think in those terms, but the battle is still there. Only by realizing we are in this fight can we stand against Satan and his wiles. Thankfully, God does not send His children into battle ill equipped. He provides a spiritual armor by which we can engage the enemy and stand strong.

Ephesians 6:10-13

10 Finally, be strengthened by the Lord and by his vast strength.

11 Put on the full armor of God so that you can stand against the schemes of the devil.

12 For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this darkness, against evil, spiritual forces in the heavens.

13 For this reason take up the full armor of God, so that you may be able to resist in the evil day, and having prepared everything, to take your stand.

A lot of people, both inside and outside the church, view the Christian life as an effort to be better people, help others, and be good neighbors. But Jesus didn't save us to make us *better* people; he saved us to make us *new* people. Jesus wants to radically transform everything in our lives. The life Jesus has called us to live is not a leisurely stroll down the religious boardwalk. The Christian life is a spiritual battle; it's open warfare for our allegiance.

Paul could not have made that any clearer! Look at the imagery he used to describe the Christian life: armor, a stand against the devil, the struggle with spiritual forces of evil, and a call to resist and be prepared. Paul was describing warfare, plain and simple.

In this battle, we fight against a shrewd enemy—the devil. The “schemes of the devil” describe his tactics of craftiness and deception. Satan is cunning in the way he deals with God's children. He knows how to spin things to his advantage and our demise. And, he does it subtly—behind the scenes—primarily by twisting God's truth. He tries to convince us that God's way is not best. His goal is for us to conform to the ways of the world, rather than submit to Christ and allow Him to conform us to the character and plan of God.

In the garden of Eden, Satan declared war on God's people by twisting His words and asking, "Did God really say?" (Gen. 3:1). The enemy has been using that same devious strategy ever since. The battle is fought over our allegiance and worship. Will we believe God or believe the world? Will we live for self or live for Christ?

Christians are most assuredly involved in a war of eternal proportions, but it's an invisible fight. "For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this darkness, against evil, spiritual forces in the heavens." Throughout church history, Christians have mistakenly taken up arms against all sorts of people in the name of Jesus. But our fight is not a fight against people of other religions. Neither is it a political fight against governments or political parties. And it's not a provincial fight against another country. The fight we face is not a visible, physical war; it's an invisible spiritual battle.

If anyone could have felt justified in fighting against people, it would have been Paul; he surely had earned the "right!" He had faced "far more labors, many more imprisonments, far worse beatings, many times near death" (2 Cor. 11:23)—all at the hands of people. But this battered and bruised apostle pointed away from physical attacks against other people; he called us to be vigilant in a spiritual battle. Five times in these verses we're pushed toward vigilance:

- ▶ "Be strengthened by the Lord" (Eph. 6:10).
- ▶ "Put on the full armor of God" (v. 11).
- ▶ "Take up the full armor of God" (v. 13).
- ▶ "Resist in the evil day" (v. 13).
- ▶ "Take your stand" (v. 13).

Allegiance to God requires vigilance, but thankfully we're not alone. The power of the gospel empowers us to stand.

QUESTION 2:

How would you describe the struggle between good and evil in our world?

QUESTION 3:

What are some of the devil's schemes?

Ephesians 6:14-17

14 Stand, therefore, with truth like a belt around your waist, righteousness like armor on your chest,

15 and your feet sandaled with readiness for the gospel of peace.

16 In every situation take up the shield of faith with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one.

17 Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit — which is the word of God.

Spiritual warfare certainly warrants an appropriate level of seriousness, but Christ-followers have no reason to be afraid. God hasn't deployed us into battle wearing flip-flops and holding a broomstick. In addition to informing us that we are in a spiritual battle where the stakes are monumental, Paul also revealed that God equips us and protects us completely. Therefore, we can stand firm with no fear.

Since our battle is not a physical struggle, no physical weapon will do. Spiritual battles require spiritual resources. Not just any spiritual resource will do either. We need God's resources for the battle at hand. As Christians, we can know and be confident that our God abundantly supplies spiritual resources. He promises to supply everything we need to fight the wiles of the enemy. And He promises to protect us from spiritual harm until we see Him face to face. Let's take a deeper look at some of the resources with which God supplies us.

- ▶ **God supplies His protection.** Using a Roman soldier's armor as a metaphor, Paul wrote that God sufficiently clothes us for

battle through the spiritual resources Jesus provides. Paul didn't tell us to put on *our* armor; this is "the full armor of God" (Eph. 6:13). From head to foot, we wear the helmet of salvation, the breastplate of righteousness, the belt of truth, and the sandals of peace, while holding the shield of faith and the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God. Rather than shrinking back in fear before the enemy, we can stand in confidence because God protects us with His armor.

- ▶ **God supplies His people.** From this passage, we can infer another resource God provides His people for battle—each other! God doesn't deploy us into spiritual battle alone. Throughout his Letter to the Ephesians, Paul wrote to a group of people—not just one person. He almost exclusively used the plural form of the word *you*. We should not expect much success in winning the spiritual battle by ourselves. We need one another—the body of Christ—standing together against the schemes of the enemy. No good general wittingly sends one soldier into battle against an army—and neither does our Lord. We don't need to accept the world's individualistic claim that you don't need the church! The church is part of God's supply for fighting spiritual battles.
- ▶ **God supplies His power.** Let's circle back to the earlier verses and remember that undergirding all the resources God has given us is His power. "Be strengthened by the Lord and by his vast strength" (v. 10). Nowhere was the power of God more evident than on the cross where Jesus died and in the tomb where Jesus was resurrected. Now consider this: through the power of the gospel, the same Spirit who raised Jesus from the grave also lives inside of us! (Rom. 8:11). What an incredible truth! The same power that raised Jesus from the grave both saves your soul and empowers you to stand in the face of the enemy. You can stand against the enemy because Satan already lost the war for your soul. Jesus won the battle the day He rose from the grave!

ENGAGE

Think about a current struggle in your life. It might be a sinful habit, an oppressive anxiety, or an unforgiving spirit. For you to overcome in this spiritual battle, you need God's protection, His power and His people:

What protection has God given me to fight this?

How can I access His power to deal with this?

Who are the people that will fight alongside me?

QUESTION 4:

How do these pieces of armor help you face spiritual battles?

Ephesians 6:18-20

18 Pray at all times in the Spirit with every prayer and request, and stay alert with all perseverance and intercession for all the saints.

19 Pray also for me, that the message may be given to me when I open my mouth to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel.

20 For this I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I might be bold enough to speak about it as I should.

KEY WORD: Mystery (v. 19)—Paul used this term several times. It usually meant a spiritual truth hidden by God in the past but now revealed (1:9). For example, God had revealed that Gentiles as well as Jews could be saved by faith in Jesus (3:3-6).

Since the Christian life is a spiritual battle, then the gravity of that truth compels us to stand in the gap with one another through prayer. Praying for one another is one of our greatest weapons in spiritual warfare. In addition to praying for physical provision, Christ-followers should also pray for spiritual needs in each other's lives.

We see several truths in verses 18-20 about the way we should pray for one another.

- ▶ **Pray all the time.** Prayer is not something we do only on Sunday mornings or before meals. We are to “pray at all times.” Whether it’s ten minutes or an hour, Christians should set aside a special time every day that they devote entirely to prayer. But we also should pray throughout the day. We might voice a prayer in the car, while walking, or before bed. Prayer should become like breathing to us, something that is second nature and constant.
- ▶ **Pray in the Spirit.** We “pray ... in the Spirit” because prayer is a form of worship, and God desires that His people worship Him in Spirit and in truth (John 4:24). The Holy Spirit of God lives inside us enabling us to know God, worship God, and pray to God. (See also Romans 8:26.) Often when I pray, I get “stuck” and don’t know what else to pray. In those moments, I ask the Holy Spirit to help me know how I should pray. It’s remarkable what then comes to mind.
- ▶ **Pray with engaged minds.** As we pray we are to “stay alert with all perseverance.” We are to stay spiritually engaged. One way to engage our minds in prayer is by keeping a prayer journal. Some of the best prayer warriors I know categorize their journals into prayers for family members, friends, the

lost, missionaries, church leaders, those who are sick, and other pertinent needs. Praying through different categories on different days expands our prayer requests and better engages our minds during prayer.

- ▶ **Pray for the church.** It may be easy to pray for our families, but Paul also told us to pray with “intercession for all the saints.” We have a responsibility to pray for the physical and spiritual needs of our brothers and sisters in Christ, and also praying that we would stand firm together in spiritual battle.
- ▶ **Pray for the gospel's advance.** Whether it's for our church leaders, fellow church members, or missionaries we've sent, we should pray for them as Paul asked the Ephesians to pray for him: “Pray also for me, that the message may be given to me when I open my mouth to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel Pray that I might be bold enough to speak about it as I should.”
- ▶ **Pray for the persecuted.** At the moment of his writing, Paul was in prison, “an ambassador in chains.” Believers all over the world today experience similar sufferings and imprisonment. Paul did not solicit prayers that his persecution would end; but he did want boldness to speak regardless of his situation. Of course, we can pray for persecution to stop, but we must certainly pray that those currently under persecution would have the strength to endure and boldness to speak the gospel no matter the cost.

As the body of Christ, praying with and for one other is the greatest support we have to give. It's also our greatest weapon in spiritual warfare. So, let's pray for one another as we stand together in spiritual battle!

QUESTION 5:

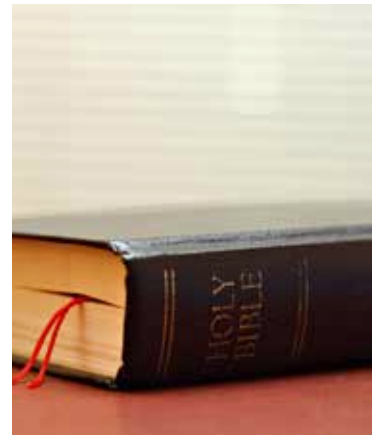
Why is prayer an important tool in spiritual battle?

LIVE IT OUT

What will you do to stand with the body of Christ in the face of spiritual battle? Consider the following ideas:

- ▶ **Take your stand.** Through prayer, commit yourself anew to standing firm in the strength of the Lord in spiritual battle.
- ▶ **Stand with your church.** Take spiritual ownership of your church by praying regularly for your pastor(s), teacher(s), and fellow church members. Begin a prayer journal as a guide to help you pray.
- ▶ **Stand with the nations.** Research the global church including missionary needs, unreached people groups, and persecution. The following websites are valuable resources to help shape your mind and your prayers: imb.org, joshuaproject.net, and operationworld.org.

When we come to Christ for salvation, He gives us a new identity and a new family in His church. In that family, we pray, support, encourage, and strengthen one another as we stand together in spiritual battle.



COMING IN FALL

AFTER GOD'S OWN HEART: A FRESH LOOK AT THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

- Session 1 **Place God First** (Exodus 20:1-6; Psalm 16:1-4a,9-11)
- Session 2 **Honor God** (Exodus 20:7-11; Psalm 145:1-7)
- Session 3 **Honor Parents** (Exodus 20:12; 2 Samuel 15:7-14)
- Session 4 **Honor Life** (Exodus 20:13; 1 Samuel 26:7-11,22-25)
- Session 5 **Honor Marriage** (Exodus 20:14; 2 Samuel 11:1-5)
- Session 6 **Honor All Relationships** (Exodus 20:15-17; Psalm 37:1-6)

ALL IN: A LIFE OF COMMITMENT

- Session 1 **Christ's Commitment to Us** (Romans 5:6-12,18-21)
- Session 2 **Our Commitment to Christ** (Mark 10:13-22)
- Session 3 **Committed to His Word** (Psalm 119:1-11)
- Session 4 **Committed to His Church** (Romans 12:3-16)
- Session 5 **Committed to Pray** (Colossians 1:3-12)
- Session 6 **Committed to His Worship** (Psalm 99:1-9)
- Session 7 **Committed to His Mission** (Romans 10:9-17)