

Divine Strength for Unmovable Resolve

Ephesians 6:10-13

“Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.”

1 Peter 5:8

Introduction: In 1864, a French writer by the name Charles Baudelaire wrote a story that appeared in the Paris newspaper “Le Figaro” in which he said, “*One of the artifices of Satan is, to induce men to believe that he does not exist*”, which has been quoted and cited in articles and movies since then: “*The greatest trick the Devil ever pulled was convincing the world he didn’t exist.*” This phrase is not only insightful, it also sums up the way that Satan operates in the Western world. While travelling in Asia, Africa, South America, and in post-modern Europe, the people there are very in tune with the spirit realm, either trying to appease spirits, communicate with them, or even enter into occult worship. In the West (at least for now), we are more skeptical of things we cannot see. A vast majority of Americans have held a comic view of Satan – pointy ears, pitch fork, red suit, funky facial hair – which resigns him to caricature or the stuff of horror movies. Either way, in our minds, he is not active in our lives everyday, and if he is, he is not that influential.

However, the Bible paints a much different picture of a very real, menacing, and daily threat to this world. In fact, Scripture uses one of the strongest figures of speech to describe him, one that was reserved for Jesus Himself (the Lion of Judah – Rev. 5:5). “*Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour* (1 Pet. 5:8). That sentence is a full visual of the visceral threat Satan is to us. He is our *adversary*, far from a neutral figure, who *prowls*, which means he is sneaky and stealthy, a *roaring lion*, which is terrifying and intended to instill fear, and *seeking to devour*, which means he is actively looking to invoke pain and suffering. In this **video** of a family at the zoo, you’ll see how an innocent looking lion would have devastated a family if not for the protection offered through built in defenses.

This morning, we are going to start the end of the book of Ephesians, which changes focus on actively living out the realities of Christ in all areas of life to living out the victory of Christ in the midst of a great threat and invisible but all too real battle raging around us. We will then put a pin in Ephesians until the New Year, as we focus on the arrival of Christ the King at Christmas, which will be our focus for the month of December.

A Call to Courageous Trust (Eph. 6:10)

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might

Paul was a preacher after my own heart. He opens with “finally” and then goes on another half of a chapter. It signals a change of emphasis, from “*walking in a manner worthy of the calling to which we’ve been called*” (4:1) to one of a defensive and cautious posture. It’s important to look back and see where we came from to understand what Paul calls us to individually and the church corporately in an ongoing battle, both in what he says and what he does not say. Based on the security we have in the sovereign choice of God, the loving grace lavished on us by Christ, and the active work of the Spirit on our behalf, we are **secure, beloved, transformed, alive, brought near, now at peace, and fellow citizens with those who used to be aliens and strangers**. This is the reality of our *position in Christ*, which lead to practice of Christ being Lord of our life:

- **Called to unity and maturity in the church** – we have been gifted and equipped to not only grow in sanctification but help others do the same. The church is built up when each plays their role actively and fully (4:1-16)
- **Called to purity in light of immorality** – we once were separate and ignorant of Christ, but now we are no longer **slaves to sin** but slaves of Christ, and are able to put off the sin that used to consume us and put on righteousness, especially in relationships with others (4:17-32)
- **Called to love as imitators of God** – God loves us in a forgiving, unconditional, and sacrificial way, which is completely contrary to the counterfeit love the world offers in immorality, impurity, and idolatry (5:1-7)
- **Called to the light of truth** – Light exposes the darkness, so one in Christ can now SEE what is truly pleasing to the Lord and what simply seeks to please self. (5:8-14)
- **Called to wisdom in all areas of life** – We seek to redeem our time, do the will of the Lord, and be filled with the Spirit, so that we can live distinctly in all areas of life to the pleasure of Christ: we have a new song, new thankfulness, and new desire to submit to the structures God has set up. We are to worship and glorify Christ in being a wife, husband, child, parent, worker, and employer. (5:15-6:9).

Notice **first** that Christ is Lord so He has a bearing on everything that we do. There is no area that He does not demand worship or control over, so we seek to honor and obey in ALL that we do. **Second**, our security in Christ allows us to not only live boldly but be honest/truthful about our sin and struggles. We all seek to **repent** as a lifestyle, looking to put off sin, renew our mind, and put on righteousness. **Third** the church is called to live radically in the ordinary, to live out a transformed life in the midst of a broken world longing for redemption, and to fulfill our mission demands we secure all that we've been called to. Often individual Christians and churches want to transform the world, or save it, so they are active in many 'good' things to the sacrifice of the most important and that which God has made abundantly clear. This is even more evident when we recognize what we are truly up against in our enemy. We live in the ultimate tension of knowing our future and understanding the hope of what is to come, but living in a bleak reality in the here and now.

We're called to be strong in our time on this earth – This is a fascinating command for those that realize we are in control of very little in this life. The physical strength we had in youth diminishes, and the strength we once *thought* we had to make things happen is realized to be minimal. I often wonder what **Joshua felt like** when he was told to be "*strong and courageous*" to take possession of the Promised Land, to not be frightened but to boldly take what was promised and attain success and prosperity (Josh. 1:6-9; Deut. 31:6-7). He was going to lead hundreds of thousands of people for the first time into an unknown land against an overwhelming force, and God told him four times to be strong and courageous ("*why is he repeating this so much??!!*"). But the same principle for Joshua is there for us: **God calls us to courageous FAITH**, to walk in trust in Him since HE IS THE ONE who will accomplish and clear the path. We simply need to walk in obedience, trusting that He will fulfill His promise and have grace available.

Back in Ephesians 6:10, it's important to note that the command for strength IS an **ongoing** command (keep doing it), but it is NOT one that we find in ourselves. We are actually the strongest when we admit the most weakness (2 Cor. 12:10). No, our strength is that which is found in the Lord Jesus, and in particular in the **strength of His might**. What does that strength look like? We've already seen it in Ephesians 1:19-20, where believers are told that they have access to the same strength and might that God worked in Christ when He was **raised from the dead, seated Him at His right hand, and put all things under His feet**. This is ULTIMATE power since nothing can be greater than the power over death. All things are under Christ, and the existence of the church is proof that this strength is active. That is

why Paul prayed that the church would understand the strength that is available IN US through the Holy Spirit (Eph. 3:16), so that we would understand the vast love of Christ for us.

It is important as we have any discussion about anything from daily life to spiritual warfare that we know without a shadow of a doubt and have the eyes of our hearts open so that we know that there is no greater, stronger, mightier, or more powerful being in all of creation than our God! He is for us. He protects us. He conquered sin and death for us. He indwells us. He is the source of all things, from our salvation to hope of the future. The command to **be strengthened** is a call to place faith in Him and to be presently and actively trusting in Him in the midst of a war.

A Call to Fearless Preparation (Eph. 6:11)

*Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to **stand** against the schemes of the devil*

As Paul wrote this letter to the church at Ephesus, he did so in prison, most likely chained to a Roman soldier who had his armor near him or actually on his body. Seeking to prepare the church for the onslaught of war, the image became the foundation for teaching through a spiritual reality, one which we'll unpack in the New Year. There is one command, followed by its purpose or result, and then the reason behind the command. Each of these is uniquely relevant to where we find ourselves today in our time and place as a church.

Put on the Armor Available to you – The command Paul gives was to put the armor of God, instruments of both defensive and offensive positioning. But here the idea primarily had a **defensive use and posture**. This is not the first time he called the church to “put on”, as the command to *put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness* was given back in 4:24. These are similar ideas. It is, by faith, to access what has been given to us in Christ. In putting off the old man and putting on the new we are able to **fight the battle within**, where our flesh rages war against our new identity. In putting on the armor of God, we **fight the battle outside of us**, against an enemy who seeks to destroy us.

It's also important that we understand the figure of speech that Paul is using here. He chooses to compare our interaction with Satan as a **war, a battle that takes place in unseen realm**. Wartime language is helpful for us to understand the severity and intensity of the command. A soldier in active combat would stay prepared, dressed for battle, or face discipline from his commanding officer or death by the enemy. It's the same for believers today. We must recognize and realize that there is a battle currently going on whether we recognize it or not. And our enemy would LOVE us to think there is not.

Life is war. The casualties are millions, and the stakes are eternal. What we need today is not a call to simplicity, but a call to war. We need to think in terms of “wartime lifestyle” rather than a “simple lifestyle.”

John Piper was one of the first I personally learned and heard from about adopting a **wartime mentality and lifestyle** in life. Especially as American Christians who don't typically think in terms of the spirit realm, it's easy to take on a peacetime mentality, where ease, comfort, and apathy are more normative.

*The problem is that as Christians, **we often forget we are in a war**. Or worse, we don't even know that there is a war... It is easy to understand why many of us act as though we were on vacation.¹*

¹ Ed Welch, “Addictions: A Banquet in the Grave” p. 226-227

Ed Welch, in his excellent book on counseling through addictive sins, pointed out that forgetfulness, ignorance, and desire for ease are the enemies of a wartime mentality. This morning, if you take away nothing else, take away the fact that there is a battle raging all around you and for you, so we must engage well.

Stand Firm – Now, notice how clever Paul is in writing. Five times in Ephesians 4-6 he commands believers to **walk**, which pictured forward movement and daily living. But in terms of spiritual warfare, he switches the nomenclature to **stand**, which has a connotation of being dug in and being immovable. When the word (histemi) was used in military senses, it had the idea of holding a critical position while under attack. We know that Satan is defeated. He knows he is defeated at the cross. But even in defeat he is dangerous. The head of a snake that is cut off its body can still deliver a lethal blow of venom to the unsuspecting passerby. With such a dangerous enemy, the necessity to **STAND FIRM** (which Paul uses 4 times here) is more imperative.

In the winter of 1944, the war in Europe had turned dramatically. Germany had been victorious in just about every military action it had taken since the beginning of WWII, but now they were on the losing end of most and facing a desperate plight. The Eastern front was nowhere near falling, and Stalin had shown himself to be as stubborn as Hitler in his resolve to sacrifice the lives of his people for his own goals. The Allies were back in Europe after D-Day and the landings in Normandy in June of 1944. The Nazi army faced being squeezed from both fronts and dying a slow but sure death. In the midst of sure defeat, the insane person is most dangerous, throwing caution, logic, reasonableness to the wind. Hitler was such a man.

With a plan to break through the Allied lines in the Ardennes forest (which he did in the beginning of the war through the Maginot Line with his *blitzkrieg* tactics), he launched an audacious and suicidal plan to cut through to the coastal city and port of Antwerp, Belgium, hoping the resolve of the Allies would waiver, leading to a peace negotiation and refocus on the Eastern front. What followed was an almost **6 week battle of futility** called ***The Battle of the Bulge***, which cost nearly 90,000 American casualties and more German lives. *Why so many?* The American and Allied forces thought there was **NO WAY** Hitler would launch a counter offensive through a rugged forest, in the winter, without air support, while facing diminishing supplies. So the Allies grew lax in their preparation and anticipation, caught unaware and behind the curve when the first attack came, facing breakthroughs in the line which created the bulge. The lack of vigilance was palpable. Much heroism took place (especially by the 101st Airborne), as men and tanks had to stand firm against wave after wave of enemy attack to win the day, particularly at the town of Bastogne. It was a lesson in preparation when facing an enemy who does not fight according to typical standards. So understanding our enemy is paramount to preparing to **stand firm against him**.

Understand the Multiple Schemes at Play – Satan is a schemer. Here he does not use only one type of scheme, but the word is plural, meaning he uses multiple schemes and types of schemes to devour people. He is also powerful, more powerful than we are alone, but his power is limited and even delegated by God himself. So understanding *how he operates allows us to be prepared and see clearly his attacks*.

- **Lying is the foundation for all of his operation** – John 8:44 says that when the devil lies, he simply speaks out of his own character, since he is a liar and the father of lies. That means that his main modus operandi is to *deceive, to trick, to use cunning and subtlety* as tactics. Remember, he was so bold and brazen that he even tried to use lies on Jesus in the Wilderness after Jesus was weakened by 40 days of fasting (Luke 4:1-13). It also means that the **truth is the ultimate antidote to his lies, since he HATES the truth**.

- **Deception and Temptation are main weapons of his warfare** – He tried it on Jesus (Matt. 4:1) and taught a master class in the Garden of Eden with Adam and Eve (“*did God actually say?*”) He cannot MAKE us sin nor can he possess a believer who is already indwelt by the Holy Spirit. But he definitely has studied our weak areas, has knowledge of our secret sins, and will use them against us, whispering the lie or presenting us with opportunities to fail. He’ll use our **anger as a reason to divide** (Eph. 4:26-28) or lack of intimacy in marriage to drive a bigger wedge (1 Cor. 7:5) and tempt to go outside of the marriage bond. You better believe he will use our falsehood, thieving, bitterness, lack of forgiveness, impurity, lust, and idolatry against us as well. He wants to gain footholds and will always remind us of our old self, that we are not truly forgiven, or that we can never really change.
- **He cannot take away our salvation...but he wants us to think he can** – Danny preached on our assurance and security of salvation last week, and it is one of the most dear and glorious doctrines that we hold to, that nothing can separate us from God’s love (Romans 8:37-39), even cosmic rulers or powers, and no one can steal us out of Christ’s hand (John 10:28-29). But he does not have to take away our salvation to make us ineffective. If he can cause us to question the finished work of Christ, or make us think we have to earn salvation, or that we’ve out-sinned grace, he will leave us joyless and impotent in our mission, and he will claim victory.
- **He is powerful, but limited** – This is important. We do not go demon hunting or look to go toe to toe with Satan. He is given power from God to affect physical realities like weather, nations, and even supernatural events (Job 1:15-19). He can cause physical ailments (Job 2:7-8). He hindered Paul from going to Thessalonica (1 Thess. 2:18). He blinds eyes of unbelievers from the truth (2 Cor. 4:4) and places snares out for believers/leaders (1 Tim. 3:7). He wrestled the angel Michael for the body of Moses (Jude 9), had people thrown into prison (Rev. 2:10), and possessed the bodies of unbelievers (Luke 9:42; Matt. 9:32). He controls the course of this world (Eph. 2:2) and is the spirit at work in the sons of disobedience, and this world is his domain of darkness (Col. 1:13). Because of this control, he exists in tempting with materialism, the desires of the flesh, the desires of the eyes and the pride of life (1 John 2:15-17). He can control systems, politics, judicial systems, and economic structures. But he is limited in his power by God, as we saw in the book of Job. He can only grovel at the feet of the Lord but not usurp it.
- **He is dangerous but not to be feared** – The devil’s head was cut off at the cross. He knew he was doomed but still tried to inflict as much pain on Christ as he could, from entering into Judas to betray Him to seeing Christ lifted up on a cross through injustice. But at the point of what seemed to be the devil’s greatest victory, watching the Son of God writhe in pain on the cross, dying a slow and agonizing death, it actually sealed his own fate. “...**that through death he (Christ) might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery**” (Heb. 2:14-15), sealing his final death by being thrown into the lake of fire with the beast and false prophet, where they will be tormented day and night forever and ever (Rev. 20:10), along with Death and Hades (Rev. 20:14). His end is sure. He loses. But he remains a threat. That is why James said we do not fight him but **resist him** (James 4:7) and he will flee from us.

*Be very careful, then, how you live (Eph. 5:15), put on the full armor of God (Eph. 6:11), prepare your minds for action (1 Peter 1:13), make every effort (2 Peter 1:5), be self-controlled and alert (1 Peter 5:8). These are battle cries, and Scripture is full of them. But unlike our old conception of warfare, where battle lines are clear and the times of battle can almost be predicted, **this is modern warfare in which you are***

not always sure where the enemy lurks. It is guerilla warfare. There are strategically placed snipers. You let down your guard for a moment and the village you thought was safe suddenly opens fire on you².

A Call to Spiritual Insight (Eph. 6:12-13)

*For we do not wrestle against **flesh and blood**, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to **withstand** in the evil day, and having done all, to **stand firm**.*

In the Lord of the Rings, when the King of Rohan was confronted with the reality that a swarming horde of evil from Sauron was approaching his land, he was challenged to rally his people to fight, drawing them away from the women and children. In protest, he claimed, “*I know what you want from me, but I will not bring further death to my people. I will not risk open war.*” Aragorn replied with simplicity and cutting reality, “*Open war is upon you, whether you would risk it or not.*”

We are in a fight. But we remember a few things:

- 1) **The victory over evil, death, rulers, cosmic powers, and spiritual forces has ultimately been fought and WON by Jesus Christ** – He has put all things under his feet. Satan has NO AUTHORITY over us, and only can do what God allows him. So we do not fear him, but resist him, we don’t fight him but stand against, giving him no opportunities in our life.
- 2) **Our enemy is NOT people but the power behind** – Satan is our enemy but people are our mission. There is a reason why there is a liberal agenda and polarizing politics. It divides people. It blinds people. Our mission is NOT to produce a better government but to destroy strongholds with the truth (2 Cor. 10:3-5), to cut through the lie with the truth, to engage people with the ministry of reconciliation, begging and urging people to be reconciled to Christ (2 Cor. 5:20-21), gladly spending and being spent for people’s souls (2 Cor. 12:15).
- 3) **We must gear up for battle each and everyday** – Our enemy is active and looking for opportunities. We have assurance and security in our salvation to repent of our sin, to turn from temptation, and to seek to please Christ in all things. So we must approach each day not as a vacation or trying to avoid conflict, but to realize we are smack dab in the middle of an ongoing one, which necessitates us to be filled with the Spirit, centered on God’s Word, and dependant on grace.

² Welch