

“Unseen Realities - The War Within”

Ephesians 6:10-18

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Have you ever had a mental wrestling match with yourself over whether to do something or not even though you knew what you were considering was wrong?

- As in clicking onto a website that you suspect will be sexually explicit.
- Or padding the charitable contributions amount of your “Schedule A” tax returns.
- Or repeating a story about someone that you know is not flattering of them.
- Or when undercharged for something at a store you were being tempted to just walk out with the extra money.

Have you ever thought or done something and then realized what you had been thinking or doing was wrong and asked yourself, “Where did that come from?”

Gordon MacDonald was for many years the pastor of a very successful church in Boston.

He later became president of InterVarsity Christian Fellowship – a large and fruitful ministry to college students worldwide.

In the midst of all that success, MacDonald crashed.

He committed adultery and that was followed by humiliation and brokenness.

He was wonderfully restored to his family and ministry by God’s grace and people’s forgiveness but listen to him describe a new awareness of himself in the midst of his failure.

“I had always subscribed to the essential idea that all human beings are born sinners...But somehow there seems to be a difference between understanding these things from a doctrinal orientation that you might learn in Sunday School and coming to understand them

through a terrible experience of failure where you discover that this sin within...is capable of destroying your life.” (From Rebuilding Your Broken World, chapter 7)

How could that happen to such a prominent and effective man of God?

And if it could happen to him, could it happen to you or me?

In the book of Ephesians the Apostle Paul paints quite a word picture of a life lived **outside** of a relationship with Jesus.

Ephesians 2:1-3 “As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts.

Ephesians 4:17-19 “Liv(ing)...in the futility of their thinking. They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God... Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, with a continual lust for more.

Ephesians 5:3-5 “sexual immorality ...impurity... greed... obscenity, foolish talk (and) coarse joking.

Paul was not saying that every person without Christ is as evil as they could be but that, without Christ, we are part of that dark sphere of existence.

Self-centeredness, selfishness, and sinful self-indulgence characterize our actions - some more so than others but such sensuality characterizes us all.

Our sin-influenced natural inclination is to indulge ourselves and the end of that is destruction.

But Paul writes it is out of that sin-dominated sphere of existence that God saved us.

Ephesians 2:4, 8-10 “But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions... For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith...

Ephesians 1:4-7,13-14 “For he chose us in Christ...In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons... In him we have...the forgiveness of sins...” and we have “the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession...”

Because we are loved by God, chosen by God, forgiven by God, and indwelled by his Spirit a whole new life is open to us.

The possibilities are awesome.

- Ephesians 4:22-24 “Put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires... and put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.
- Ephesians 5:1 “Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children...”
- Ephesians 5:8 “For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light - for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth...”

That is the life and lifestyle to which we are called.

That is so good – we trust Jesus and everything is different?

Yes and no.

- Yes, everything is different because now the power of Almighty God is at work changing us.
- No, it is not all instantly different, because God has chosen to change us over time.

When we are saved by his grace, Christ is in us and we are in Christ and we have a new inclination, a new propensity to follow him.

But the old programmed ways, the old habits developed over years of acting in selfish ways, are not automatically gone.

And so there is a war that goes on within us – will we follow the Lord Jesus in the new way of the Spirit or will we succumb to the old ways of the flesh, which still tempt us.

That's the battle that is going on:

- When you are tempted to click onto a website that you suspect will be sexually titillating.
- When you are tempted to pad the charitable contributions amount of your "Schedule A" tax deductions.
- When you tempted to repeat a story about someone that you know is not flattering of them.
- When you are undercharged for something at a store and you are tempted to ignore it and walk out with the extra money.
- It's the battle that goes on when you sin against the Lord, and you wonder if you can be forgiven.
- Or when you sin the same sin over and over again and begin to wonder if you are hopeless.
- Or when you defiantly contradict God's will and wonder if you are even a Christian.

In this letter to the churches in and around Ephesus, the Apostle Paul has called them and us to holy living in very practical terms.

He spoke of the way we talk, our relationships at home and the work place, of attitudes of humility and patience with each other, of thankfulness, of unity among God's people, of sexual purity, and of worship.

But before he closes the letter he gives them a wise word of counsel. Living as a Christian in a sinful world, and with our old sinful habits still influencing us, will not be easy.

We have an enemy that would love to see us defeated and drop out.

Watch out for him, Paul writes.

In fact stand firm against him.

You have the weapons to withstand his attacks.

Here is how Paul wrote it:

Ephesians 6:10-18

"Finally, **be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power.** ¹¹ Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. ¹² 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. ¹³ Therefore put on the full armor 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. ¹⁴ Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, ¹⁵ and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. ¹⁶ In addition to all this, 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. ¹⁸ And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints.

In 1655 Puritan writer William Gurnall gave us 1472 pages on these verses. In more recent years, D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones gave us 736 pages on them.

I don't want to be simplistic but I do not think the teaching on this subject is complicated.

I think that it is instead rather simple and straightforward.

Six different parts of a Roman soldier's armor and weapons are mentioned here and it would be possible to really wax imaginative on each piece, devising a very complicated scheme of actions we must take if we are going to withstand temptations to sin in our lives.

But I would like to give you a simple acrostic that may help you and me remember the passage and more importantly help us daily in our times of need to stand against temptation of any kind.

W.A.R.

Wary of Satan – he is real and wants my soul (6:11-13).

Alive to the truth – my defense against Satan's deception (6:14-17).

Relying on God – confident in my dependence on Him. (6:10,18).

I. I begin with the apostle's instruction that we are to be Wary of Satan:

Ephesians 6:11-12,18 "Take your stand against the devil's schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but

against...the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms...
With this in mind, be alert..."

The word "struggle" that Paul uses is a word used only here in the NT but in other writings of that era it commonly referred to wrestling – the hand-to-hand, breath-to-breath, closeness of battle.

Paul says that is the kind of war we are in with the enemy of our souls – the devil, Satan.

- Do you believe that a person, a being, called the devil actually exists?
- Do you believe that demons, demonic beings, actually exist?

C.S. Lewis, like many others, has pointed out that the most successful strategies of our enemy, Satan, have been to get people either to become enslaved in their fear of him or to deny his existence.

My sense is that many evangelicals have dismissed the idea of Satan having any practical impact on their lives.

But Jesus and the Apostles believed firmly in the demonic and in Satan as the chief demon.

- Jesus was tempted by the devil in the wilderness.
- Jesus taught that the Evil One was the one who snatches away the see of the gospel from some who hear it.
- Jesus prayed that his disciples would be kept from the Evil One.
- Jesus personally confronted evil spirits in his ministry on earth.
- The Apostle Paul wrote, 2 Corinthians 4:4 "**The god of this age** has blinded the minds of unbelievers..."
- And in 2 Corinthians 11:14 "**Satan** himself masquerades as an angel of light."
- James 4:7 told us to "Resist **the devil**, and he will flee from you.
- Peter wrote, 1 Peter 5:8-9 "Be self-controlled and alert. **Your enemy the devil** prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith..."

It seems impossible to believe that the Bible is the authoritative word of God and not believe in a personal, living, malevolent Satan.

The NT is very clear that there is a Satan and that his main goal is to thwart the purposes of Christ.

- Satan was behind the effort to kill Jesus when he was born. (Mt 2:16; Rev 12:4)
- Satan tried to get Jesus to sell out in the desert. (Mt 4)
- Satan arrayed his forces against Jesus at the crucifixion thinking he could kill him for good.
- Failing at that, Satan's desire now is to keep people from the Kingdom of God (Mt 13:19; 2 Cor 4:3,4) and to make ineffective those who are already part of that Kingdom (1 Thess 2:18).

Paul tells us to be alert to his schemes; I called it being WARY.

To be wary, according to the Oxford dictionary, is to be marked by keen caution, cunning and watchful prudence especially in detecting and escaping danger.

We are to be wary because of "the devil's schemes" – those methods that Satan uses to accomplish his goal.

Ephesians 6:11 "Take your stand against the devil's schemes."

Paul wrote the same to the Corinthians 2:11 Don't let

Satan outwit us, "for we are not unaware of his schemes."

The names by which he is referred to give us some idea of the schemes he uses against us.

Satan is called:

- the slanderer" (Matt 4:1; Eph 6:11; Rev 12:12);
- the destroyer (Rev 9:11);
- "accuser of our brothers" (Rev 12:10);
- the one who "leads the whole world astray" (Rev 12:9);
- and "the tempter" (Matt 4:5; 1 Thess 3:5).
- "the father of lies" (John 8:44);

While Satan's tactics are greatly varied, the one that Paul seems to have most in mind when he writes here is Satan's tactic of deception.

I think it is fair to say that deception is Satan's main weapon.

One commentator wrote, “Mention of the “schemes” of the devil remind us of the trickery and subterfuge by which evil and temptation present themselves in our lives. Evil rarely looks evil until it accomplishes its goal; it gains entrance by appearing attractive, desirable, and perfectly legitimate. It is a baited and camouflaged trap.” (Snodgrass, 339)

Isn't that true? The lie seems so plausible. The action seems so right and so much to our advantage that it is hard to resist the logic.

Ephesians 4:26,27 suggests one of Satan's schemes: “Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold.”

Satan combines his deceptions with our anger and he has us! We walk down the hall of church and someone doesn't speak to us. We assume they are angry with us. We are offended because we assume we are innocent. And in our offense we are now angry with them. The next time we see them, they sense our anger and they are offended and angry with us.

Satan also schemes against us by:

- Getting us to question another person's motive.
- By suggesting that we can't forgive until someone confesses and asks for forgiveness.
- By egging us on in talking about someone who has offended us or with whom we disagree.
- By urging us to think over and over again about the actual offenses of others against us.

In countless ways each day, Satan or his demons tempt us with lies. Lies about what will make us happy, what will make us successful, what will make us secure, what will make us acceptable to others, and even what will cause God to love us.

Paul says be alert, be wary, be on guard because the devil and his spiritual forces are opposed to us.

I am convinced that “rulers, authorities, and powers” are three ways of describing the same reality that is summarized in the phrase, “spiritual forces”.

Some have tried hard to rank the demonic forces as to those with more or less power, thinking that we use different methods for fighting them.

There was a lot of speculation in the first century about the demonic world that led to a large reservoir of terminology but the NT gives us no help in categorizing the demonic.

Our supposed cleverness in being able to name the ranks of demons and calling out those in higher authority is not based on the Bible but on speculation.

And we will see in the remainder of the verses, we are not called to rank the demons, call them by name, rebuke them, bind them, or use any special esoteric language in confronting them.

We don’t have to worry about doing exactly the right thing, or saying it in exactly the right way to resist Satan attacks.

What we will see is that we are called on to have a certain naiveté – an unaffected simple trust in Jesus.

We are given enough insight to take Satan seriously but not so much that we do anything other than actively rely on the Lord as our strength in the battle.

II. Yes, we are to be WARY of Satan but we are also to be **ALIVE to the truth.**

Here is how Paul says it:

Ephesians 6:14-17 “Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, ¹⁵ and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. ¹⁶ In addition to all this, 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.

The apostle Paul had a lot of experience with Roman soldiers and it is evident that he has such a soldier in mind when he uses the metaphors of weapons and pieces of armor to make his point.

Six pieces are mentioned: Belt, breastplate, shoes, shield, helmet and sword.

I have read pages and pages of explanation of these metaphors, which I don't have time to reiterate today.

Instead I want you to see that in the use of the armor metaphors there is one point that Paul wants to make and he does so over and over again.

Do you want to stand against Satan's attacks?

Then be ALIVE to the truth!

Satan's primary scheme or tactic is deception.

And truth is what overcomes lies.

So Paul says: "Stand firm then, with:

"the belt of truth buckled around your waist"

Ephesians 1:13 "And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation..."

Ephesians 4:20 "the truth that is in Jesus."

A settled conviction that the truth about life and eternity is found in Christ – He is the truth.

"the breastplate of righteousness in place"

It may refer to holy living as well but at least it refers to our right standing before God by his grace – we are righteous in his eyes.

Philippians 3:9 That I may "be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ--the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith."

We have a confidence that we belong to God by his grace not by merit.

(See also 1 Thessalonians 5:8 and 2 Corinthians 6:6-7 for another use of "righteousness" that may also apply here.)

"Your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace"

Some have suggested this is a readiness to share the gospel with others, which also results in making us stronger.

But in light of the other phrases, it seems more likely that this is talking about having our feet firmly planted and ready for the attack of the enemy.

We can withstand him when we are standing firmly on the solid ground of **the gospel of peace.**

In other words, when we are confident that we are at peace with God because of God's grace, we are ready to withstand the attack.

Satan can't discourage me when I am ready for the doubts he introduces or insinuates to my mind because I am ready, having planted my feet firmly on the truth that I belong to God by his grace.

“Take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one.”

The shield of faith means that **faith is the shield.**

We are called to trust in God in the moment of attack.

We understand first and foremost that we are not called to DO anything before we first turn in complete dependence and confidence to God.

God is our shield through faith.

When Satan fires his flaming arrows of deception:

- I trust God's evaluation of life rather than my own or someone else's.
- I believe him when he says it will be worth it to deny myself now for the better that will come.
- I believe him when he says following the desires of our flesh lead to death.

Then there's “the helmet of salvation”

Just as faith was the shield so here salvation is the helmet. (see also 1

Thessalonians 5:8 and Ephesians 1:13-14)

Our “salvation” is that act of God whereby he snatched us out a life headed toward eternal death and brought us into his family, his kingdom and gave us his Holy Spirit as the guarantee that we belong to him forever.

I stand protected by God. My life and destiny are in his hands.

I stand assured of the outcome – my God will not fail me.

The sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God

Earlier truth is the belt, righteousness is the breastplate, faith is the shield and salvation is the helmet.

But here the Spirit is not the sword.

Instead the sword is identified as the Word of God.

The Spirit is the one who makes the word effective but the word of God is the sword.

It is truth, truth from God, which we wield in battle against Satan’s wily ways.

- When he tempts us to doubt our relationship with him, we respond with the truth from God’s word.
- When he tempts us to sin, to supposedly fulfill our needs, we respond with the truth from God’s word.

Every piece of armor is a metaphor for the truth that comes from God’s word.

- No I will not succumb to the lie that I’m on my own in life, because the truth is that my God is in control and he loves me.
- No I won’t succumb to the lie that I must get justice, because the truth is that my God will right all wrongs.
- No I won’t succumb to the lie that I better put away just a little more because the truth is that my God shall supply all my need.
- No, I don’t have to succumb to the lies that I have to be married in order to be fulfilled or I have to get a divorce in order to be happy because the truth is that obedience to God brings a reward far beyond fulfillment or happiness.

III.

To stand firm I must be:

Wary of Satan – he is real and wants my soul
Alive to the truth – my defense against Satan’s deception
AND Relying on God – confident in my dependence on Him.

Paul both begins and ends his counsel on spiritual warfare with the same idea:

Ephesians 6:10, 18 “Be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power... And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints.”

“Be strong” is a passive imperative meaning “be made strong” emphasizing that the power is not in us but in the Lord who will strengthen us.

Strong “in the Lord” speaks of the fact that we have been brought into close vital connection to Jesus, we are in him, and he is in us.

We live in the sphere of his powerful influence and it is from him we derive our strength.

And that dependence on Jesus is expressed best in prayer.

In the heat of the battle, in the face of temptation, we turn to God remembering his word, asking for his strength and then acting in obedience.

Back to the acrostic for a minute – W.A.R.

Once we are wary of the enemy knowing that he is actively working against us, God calls for two responses that are really two sides of the same coin –

Be alive to the truth and rely on God.

I know that I haven't said everything there is to say about spiritual warfare.

But Paul sets forth the basics of it as truth and trust.

Will I engage God enough in his Word to know the truth about the temptations of life?

And will I trust God enough to obey him even when the lies of Satan are very tempting?

Ephesians 6:10-11, 18

“Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes... And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints.”

Ephesians 6:17 There are two words in Greek that we translate as “word” in English.

The more common one is “logos” and the less common one is “rhema”.

It is “rhema” which may just be used synonymously with “logos” but may be suggesting the wisdom of speaking the truth of the word aloud in times of temptation.

I don't think there is valid support here for the way in which some think speaking words aloud have a special almost mystical power.

There are some who use certain words or phrases aloud like “I bind you”, “I rebuke you”, “I plead the blood of Jesus”, or “in the name of Jesus”.

And such language becomes almost mandatory in the vocabulary of spiritual warfare as if those words spoken aloud have special, if not magical, power.

Much more likely, from my understanding of Scripture, is that “rhema” is used synonymously with “logos” referring to the truth of God's word and that when we are tempted we do well to remember, believe and even tell ourselves the specific truth from God's word that proves the error of Satan's lie.