

**Spiritual Warfare
Ephesians 6:10-20
August 22nd 2021**

I have spoken on this passage many times before and will I suspect speak on it again, and I am sure you will have heard myself and others speak on this passage and will almost certainly hear sermons on it in the future. It could be called a key text and it is always somewhat daunting to tackle.

When we preach, we read the passage, sometimes in more than one translation, we pray – a lot, and we read around the passage as well and like John, I have found what John Stott has written on Ephesians to be enormously helpful. C.S Lewis thoughts on Spiritual Warfare are always beneficial and I would encourage you to read and reread The Screwtape Letters – the famous imagined correspondence between an experienced demon and his nephew.

Our passage begins in most translations with the word finally, but actually the best manuscripts that we have use a word that is better translated as “henceforth” – so going forward, from now on. So, from now on, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His power. We are being instructed to stand against spiritual enemies, not in our own power and strength but in God’s power and strength.

I don’t know what you think of this whole idea of Spiritual warfare, how real it seems to you. In the course of my ministry, I come across a lot of folk religion and superstition and we can all be a bit guilty of this at times, maybe somehow believing that if we pray the right prayer in the right way God will give us what we want. I hear things like the prospective Godparent who recently said that he had always been told that the baby should cry when being baptised, because that is the devil coming out. He was only joking of course, but there is often a sort of half belief that goes with these things. I find this quote from the Screwtape Letters chilling in it’s prophecy, given that it was written in 1941.

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We are really faced with a cruel dilemma. When the humans disbelieve in our existence, we lose all the pleasing results of direct terrorism and we make no magicians. On the other hand, when they believe in us, we cannot make them materialists and sceptics. At least, not yet. I have great hopes that we shall learn in due time how to emotionalise and mythologise their science to such an extent that what is, in effect, belief in us, (though not under that name) will creep in while the human mind remains closed to belief in the Enemy. The “Life Force”, the worship of sex, and some aspects of Psychoanalysis, may here prove useful. If once we can produce our perfect work — the Materialist Magician, the man, not using, but veritably worshipping, what he vaguely calls “Forces” while denying the existence of “spirits”

I think that is where many people are at now. They believe in Science as having all the answers and deny the existence of God. They laugh at the idea of evil spirits or any kind of spirits but believe in some kind of life force, or karma or luck – it is all very vague, actually when pushed I don't think many people really do know what they believe in.

The people of Ephesus were steeped in the occult and there is a story in Acts 19 where some Jews were using Jesus name to drive out evil spirits and came unstuck. They were using the name of Jesus but acting in their own power and a man with an evil spirit jumped on them, overpowered them and beat them up, so that they fled the house naked and bleeding. The good outcome to this was that lots of people got scared, became Christians, repented of their occult worship and burned all their occult books.

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C.S.Lewis said that there are two mistakes we can make regarding evil powers, that we can be too interested in them and think they have a power that they do not in fact have, or we can ignore them and not believe in the power that they do in fact have.

It is essential that we do know what we believe and are able to stand in God's strength. Unfortunately, we do suffer from Greek thinking and the dualism that separates the physical from the Spiritual. Some Christians feel that every little thing that goes wrong in their lives is a spiritual attack, others don't think that we ever really come under any serious spiritual attack. We don't need to fully understand the cosmic powers of darkness or spiritual forces of evil, we certainly don't need to be afraid of them, but we do need to have discernment against the wiles and the deceits of the devil so that we can stand firm in our faith and so that it isn't blown away when bad things happen to us for whatever reason.

And Paul instructs us to put on this Spiritual armour, the whole armour of God. Now, I have heard it taught that we should consciously, prayerfully put it on every morning. I am more inclined to wonder why we would ever take it off! But we do need to regularly check that it is in place and in good working order. It is God's armour, remember, that He is sharing with us. The belt of truth is often thought of as being the revelation of God in the person of Jesus as shown us in scripture. There is a good case for it also being truthfulness, sincerity and integrity. The very opposite characteristics of Satan, who is the father of lies, deceit and hypocrisy. Make sure that you know truth by reading God's word and make sure that you are a truthful and sincere person. Jesus Himself is our breastplate of righteousness. Knowing that we are forgiven, completely

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pardoned for everything we have ever done wrong, and have been made right with God is a sure protection. Again we need to combine this with having an integrity of character that comes with this knowledge – we are good people because he has made us good with His goodness and now we can behave as good – righteous people. Then we have the sandals, or boots or shoes of the Gospel. The Roman armour which was the inspiration for this analogy provided the wherewithal for long marches and gave a solid stance, they prevented your feet from sliding around. If we have received the good news of the gospel and we truly believe it, it will give us a firmness and steadfastness in even the most difficult of times, and the gospel of peace will give us the firmest foothold with which to fight evil. Next we have the shield of faith that will quench the flaming arrows of the evil one. No small round shield but a full sized one that covered the whole body and had two layers of wood, glued together and bound with linen and hide and then bound with iron – the Roman shield was indeed designed to put out any incendiary devices – arrows dipped in pitch and fired at it. There are all sorts of fiery darts that can come our way. False guilt, doubt, lust, malice, fear – many others. But our faith which tells us that we are forgiven, we can and will be forgiven again, we are loved, and protected by God's love can quench them all. Our helmet of salvation is the knowledge that we are saved, we have been saved, we are being saved and we will be saved for all eternity and we can hold our heads up high with this knowledge. Our last weapon, and the only one, it is often noted, that is an offensive rather than defensive weapon is the sword of the Spirit which is the

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word of God. In the book of Revelation it is seen coming out of Jesus mouth – every word uttered by God. It is with the sword of the spirit – the word of God – that Jesus defeated Satan in the desert. So let us make sure that we do have every piece of the armour, truth, righteousness, the gospel of peace, shield of faith, helmet of salvation and the sword of the spirit and keep them all in good working order. And don't forget Paul's four alls of prayer – pray at all times – have a regular daily prayer time but also talk to God throughout the day. With all prayer and supplication – every different kind of prayer, all perseverance, like good soldiers never giving up or falling asleep on the job and for all the saints. Pray for your brothers and sisters. Without prayer we will not have the strength to stand strong in our faith. These are without a doubt evil times. But as John said last week, when weren't the times evil. We are able to overcome evil with the goodness of God, protected by God's armour, one prayer at a time!