

This Means War

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It's a difficult and confusing time...

The last few months have been so disorienting and confusing on many different levels. There's been an onslaught of information and misinformation about COVID-19. Many of us are feeling the serious consequences of the global economy coming to a halt.

There are so many questions, so few answers.
It's an incredibly difficult and confusing time.

I've been trying to be more aware of how I'm processing and reacting to all of this. I like to be able to "go," to "get things moving," and I'm not very good at being still. Because our whole society has come to a halt — we're all in a position to "be still." I don't like it! On some level — I'm just not sure how to navigate all this...

I know I'm not alone.

And as I've noticed and named what's going on in me — I've sensed the Lord tapping me on the shoulder saying,
Do you think it's just by chance that you're feeling the insecurities you're feeling?
Do you think it's an accident you feel a bit lost, and discouraged?
Do you think it's a coincidence that you're more irritable than normal?
You think it's by chance that the things you tend to turn to as a means of escape have become more enticing to you lately?
You think it's a coincidence that you feel like someone is trying to shake the very ground you stand on?

Look at what Peter says...

1 Peter 4:12

Beloved, **do not be surprised** at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though **something strange** were happening to you.

- Peter says don't be surprised. *"When hard times come, don't be taken off guard. When it feels like your world is falling apart... don't be shocked by it as if something strange was going on!"*

Question — *How can you live in a way where you're not surprised or taken off guard by these things?*

This is exactly what the Apostle Paul is trying to tell every follower of Jesus, and if there is ever a time that we need to be aware of this reality, it's now.

Ephesians 6:10-13

Finally, **be strong** in the Lord and in the strength of his might. ¹¹ Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the **schemes of the devil**. ¹² 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. ¹³ 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**.

- Paul is saying *"Here is the Christian life. Here's what it looks like to live it out. You are in a war zone! There are very real forces in and around your life trying to derail, distract, and destroy you, while you strive to advance the mission of the Kingdom."*

Paul wants you to be able to stand firm in the evil day.

**THE STRATEGY OF EVIL
THE BATTLE OF OBEDIENCE
THE ARMOR OF GOD**

THE STRATEGY OF EVIL

1. **In an attempt to explain where evil comes from, and why it exists in the world**, some psychologists say that **every single problem** you face in life is a result of your environment, the way you were raised. It's the conditions you grew up in, how you were trained to think and view life itself.
2. Other experts in that same field say, "No, it's not your environment, the problems in your life are a result of your biological makeup. It's your genes. It's your flesh. People have predispositions toward violence, or addiction... and your choices will make you or break you... it's your flesh."
3. Still others say there's a force of evil that we can't see at work in the world. How else do you explain all the pain and suffering that exists? There is a belief in some religions that behind every bad thing, there is a supernatural force causing it.

Question — *So, which is it? Who is right? Who is wrong? Well, they're all right and all wrong because the truth is — it's not just psychological, it's not just biological, and it's not just supernatural — it's all three — all at once. Evil comes at you from every angle it can — it's contending in you, around you, and beyond you.*

Paul says, "I want you to know what you're dealing with here..."

Ephesians 6:12

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.

Last week Pastor Steve mentioned that with the Corona Pandemic, depression, addiction, pornography use, anxiety, suicide, and domestic violence — have all increased.

- Maybe you feel like you're living a defeated life.
- Maybe you didn't even know there WAS a battle and you're just realizing you've already lost it.
- Maybe you've had victory in the past — and the enemy just changed tactics and has got you down in some other area of life.
- He'll exploit whatever gaps in your armor that he possibly can

The good news is — no matter where you find yourself today — Paul gives us an **enormous amount of hope** in this passage... **but, he starts by telling us that evil is a multidimensional, subtle and cunning adversary, and you are its target.**

"There is no neutral ground in the universe. Every square inch,
every split second is claimed by God, and counterclaimed by Satan."¹
~ C.S. Lewis

Question — *So what do we do? How do we wage war against our flesh, the world, and the devil himself?*

THE BATTLE OF OBEDIENCE

2 Corinthians 10:4

For the **weapons of our warfare** are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. ⁵ We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to **obey Christ**, ⁶ being ready to **punish every disobedience**, when your **obedience is complete**.

¹ Draper, Edythe. *Draper's Book of Quotations for the Christian World* (Tyndale House, 1992)

Puritan writer William Gurnall wrote:

“It requires more prowess and greatness of spirit to **obey God faithfully** than to command an army of men ...”²

~ William Gurnall

Throughout scripture to obey God is borderline suicidal... and, in some cases, it actually was suicidal!

- God tells Moses, “Moses, even though you killed an Egyptian man and fled for your life, go back to Egypt have a chat with pharaoh about freeing a few million of his Hebrew slaves. That should go well.”
- “Abraham, you’re going to be the father of many nations, but first, get your family and just start walking away from everything you’ve ever known...” “Where are you going? I’ll tell you later.”
- “Noah, even though it has never rained before and human beings can’t even fathom the concept of rain... one day, it’s going to rain and the whole earth is going to flood, so build an enormous boat and make a fool of yourself and your family for the next 50 some years... it’ll all be worth, just trust me.”

Objection — Why would any sane person do any of these things?

- Moses, Abraham, for Noah —each these men wrestled seriously with obedience to God in these situations.

And I want to highlight this...

Because some of us, we know we’re in a spiritual battle... but we have moments where we view our inner turmoil, or our struggle, or whatever battles we’re trying to overcome...

- we view these things as evidence that our faith must not be genuine... or our faith must be weak, or else we wouldn’t be struggling so much...

J.C. Ryle, in his book *Holiness*, nearly 100 years ago wrote this...

“Do you find in your heart of hearts a spiritual struggle? Are you conscious of two principles within you, contending for the mastery? Do you feel anything of war in your inward man? Well, let us thank God for it! It is a good sign. It is strongly probable evidence of the great work of sanctification. All true saints are soldiers. A real Christian can be known as much by his inward warfare as by his inward peace.”³

~ J.C. Ryle

Question — *Do you see what he’s saying?*

Ryle says, “*the inner turmoil, the strugglings and wrestlings as you try to obey Christ are **not** evidence **against** the genuineness of your faith; but evidence **for** it!*”

- If you find yourself battling, struggling, in spiritual turmoil right now — **be encouraged! God is at work!**

Romans 5:3-4

...we rejoice in our **sufferings**, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope...

- The word suffering there... it literally means under great pressure or distress...

In other words, we rejoice when we’re being crushed, when we’re wrestling... why? Because God is growing us! He’s strengthening us!

... just as Moses, Abraham, and Noah obeyed when everything in them and around them was telling them not to...

² Gurnall, William. *The Christian in Complete Armour* (Hendrickson Publishers, 2010)

³ Ryle, J.C. *Holiness* (Fig-Books, 2012)

- **When you obey Christ**, in spite *of your flesh, the world, and the devil* doing everything they can do to convince you to give up, to give in, or quit altogether... God grows in you an **endurance, perseverance, character, and hope** that one day God will fulfill every single thing that He's promised — and ***that is a hope that does not disappoint.***

Paul tells us that wrestling, struggling, battling against authorities, rulers, cosmic powers, spiritual forces of evil — ***that is the Christian life.***

- Believe it or not, *that's what you signed up for when you decided to follow Jesus...* you might not have known that initially... you thought you were just getting your sins forgiven! You got a lot more than you bargained for.

A comfortable Christian life is actually no Christian life at all.

A life of faithful obedience to Jesus, regardless of the opposition in me, around me, or beyond me — this is the goal!

It takes guts to obey. It's risky to obey... But this is why Paul uses a military metaphor. He's using warfare to convey the seriousness and the determination required to live a victorious life!

THE ARMOR OF GOD

Question — *So what is our armor and how do we use it? How do you put on the armor?*

Ephesians 6:14-18

Stand therefore, having fastened on the **belt of truth**, and having put on the **breastplate of righteousness**,¹⁵ and, as **shoes for your feet**, having put on the **readiness given by the gospel of peace**.¹⁶ In all circumstances take up the **shield of faith**, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one;¹⁷ and take the **helmet of salvation**, and the **sword of the Spirit**, which is the word of God,

The Belt of Truth

A Roman Belt was the foundation for the rest of the armor. To do anything active, you had to take all your flowing robes and tie them into your belt so that you could move quickly and not trip. *To prepare for battle — this was the first step.*

Paul equates this foundational step with the Truth of God's Word. If you don't build your life on the Truth of God's Word, if it's not the foundation of everything else you do, you're defeated before you begin. You can't add any other armor to your life... this is Step One. ***Build your life on the sure foundation of the Truth of God's Word.***

The Breastplate of Righteousness

The accuser may come after you, condemning, pointing out your flaws and failures as a follower of Christ, and you begin to wonder if you're even a Christian... do I even belong to God? The devil says, "Look at what a lazy Christian you are, look at your sinfulness, you think God is pleased with you — that He could possibly love you?"

Here's what putting on the breastplate of righteousness is: when the devil says, you'll never be good enough for God, you put on that armor by saying, "You're right. But He's good enough FOR me." In other words, "My acceptance into God's family has never been based on my goodness — but on God's goodness in my place! In my own strength, I'll never make it, and that's why Jesus came for me. His love for me is infinitely more powerful than your hate for me will ever be." ***You're actively taking the righteousness that Jesus lived for you and applying it, appropriating it to your life.***

The Sandals of Peace

A Roman soldier's sandals were sort of like the original cleats. They had to have **traction** — so as not to slip in battle. They had to be **durable** — to be able to take a beating and stay together. They had to be **light** — to be able to move quickly, to be agile. If you didn't have the right shoes, you were at a real disadvantage in battle.

It doesn't say, put on your feet the gospel of peace.

It says, as shoes for your feet, put on the readiness, that comes FROM the gospel of peace.

**Readiness, not laziness.
Readiness of heart, living a life of preparedness.**

- Follower of Christ are supposed to have some traction about them, some confidence about their footing in life.
- They are supposed to be durable, able to battle without falling into despair and self-pity.
- They are supposed to be light, filled with joy — as they help others feel lighter.

The Shield of Faith

A Roman Shield was huge — 2.5 ft wide and 5 ft. tall! They were primarily used when the Romans were attempting to besiege a fortified city. The Romans were down below trying to break in — and the enemies were up above, hurling down flaming objects or arrows. The Roman soldiers would interlock their shields around and above them, and nothing could get past.

Question — *what does this tell us?*

1. When you're taking spiritual ground, expect the enemy to throw anything and everything he can at you.
2. It's in these moments when you need your shield — when you're taking spiritual ground.
3. Your faith protects not only you, but those around you, from the attacks of the enemy.
4. **We need one another in this spiritual battle.**

The Helmet of Salvation

The helmet was the last piece of *defensive* armor to put on before battle... possibly the most important because it protected your mind. The Roman Helmet was not only incredibly strong — it was also very ornate. They were like beautiful pieces of art, designed to look like different animals, with etchings in the metal — used in battle, and in ceremonies and parades.

As a follower of Christ, when you are walking in confident assurance of God's gift of salvation to you, when you are resting in all that God has done for you through the person of Jesus — not only is your mind protected from the lies of the enemy — but also you instantly become a noticeable individual.

When you're walking in all that God's gift of salvation means — there is going to be something unique, powerful, attractive about you — your countenance changes, how you carry yourself changes — you're filled with a new assurance and confidence as you face the world.

The Sword of The Spirit

The last piece of weaponry is the Sword. It's the only truly *offensive* weapon in our artillery. And we know the *Sword of the Spirit is the Word of God*.

When you're in the spiritual battle, you can't rationalize or talk yourself up for the battle.

Even Jesus doesn't combat the devil with His own intellect or wit.

What does Jesus use? The Word of God.

Jesus quotes the scriptures. He fights the devil with Truth.

The Armor *begins* with the belt of Truth and *ends* with the Sword of the Spirit.

The Armor of God *begins* and *ends* with the *scriptures*.

You want to be suited up, able to stand firm in the evil day?

Saturate your whole life in the Gospel. In the word of God.

Recite it. Meditate on it day and night. Fill your whole life with it.

Not just to know it. But to obey it. To trust in it.

To base your whole life on it.

That's putting on the Armor of God.

This is how we wage war.

In the first and into the second century, there was a Roman captain named Trajan. In the middle of battle, he would take off His armor and place it on his wounded soldiers — would tear off his garments and use them as bandages for his men.

That's nothing compared to what our Captain did for us. Jesus didn't just lay down his armor, he didn't just tear up his garments for us — Jesus Christ Himself was torn to shreds to heal our wounds. He took the nails and a spear that were meant for us so that we might live.

Jesus Christ took His armor off —

so we could put the armor on.

He made Himself vulnerable —

so we could be protected.

He was disarmed and defeated —

so that we could be armed with heavenly artillery.

Let's not waste the weapons He's given us.

Discussion Questions

1. These past few weeks, have you felt surprised or insecure during any of the hard, strange times going on in our lives?
2. Identify specifically how the enemy has tried to attack you personally, in large or small ways; in new ways, or in resurrecting old strongholds.
3. How does one "take every thought captive to obey Christ"?
4. Discuss, "The inner turmoil, the strugglings, and wrestlings as you try to obey Christ — are *not* evidence *against* the genuineness of your faith — *but* evidence *for* it."
5. React to — The Armor begins with the Belt of Truth and ends with the Sword of the Spirit. The Armor of God begins and ends with the scriptures.

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