

The Spiritual War

Ephesians 6:10-13

Today, we're jumping into one of the most important topics that Paul addresses in his letter to the church in Ephesus. As Paul nears the conclusion of His letter, he's trying to prepare the 1st century believers, and us, for the **spiritual war** that we find ourselves in.

Ephesians 6:10-13 Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. 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.

There are several aspects to the spiritual battle:

First, it's personal.

Have you ever had one of those days where you just wake up grumpy? Or really discouraged, and you can't figure out why? When your insecurities feel like their amplified all of a sudden? Where you're far more irritable than normal, and you're tempted to do things and react in ways you normally wouldn't? When you're incredibly hard on yourself or you have zero grace for others?

Do you think those days are coincidental?

The next time you have a day like this, ask yourself: *Is it really just a coincidence that I feel like I'm being attacked? That I feel condemned?*

Often, what we're tempted to do in those moments, is blame our circumstances, *"Oh, it's my job, or my finances, or my boss—they're or that's the problem."* And granted, it may be a factor.

Another thing you'll be tempted to do is to blame yourself— *"The reason why everything is falling apart is because I must be a horrible person."*

Secondly, the spiritual battle is **Societal**. It's cultural. For example,

- When a society decides that the systematic murder of babies is not only tolerable, but that it ought to be accepted and celebrated, that is the evil day.
- When you have individuals who somehow think that the best thing they can do for the world is to open fire in movie theatres, in public and private schools, prayer meetings and concert venues – that is the evil day.
- When there are intentional and systematic efforts to indoctrinate, pressure, and coerce children to permanently mutilate their own bodies in the name of "freedom," that's not freedom. This is the evil day.

- When what is evil is celebrated as good, and what is good is detested as evil, that is the evil day.
- When you have the systematic exploitation of children through pornography, prostitution, and sex trafficking, **this** is the evil day.

The Global Estimates of Modern Slavery estimated in September of 2022 that, *“...at any given time in 2021, approximately 27.6 million people were in forced labor.”* (<https://www.state.gov/humantrafficking-about-human-trafficking/>)

The report goes on to say that if you include **forced marriages**, in those numbers, which I don’t know why you wouldn’t, that number jumps to **49.6 million**.

My question is: Why are you trying to downplay the sexual exploitation of children while protecting the monsters that exploit and abuse the innocent? Even if it is one child, isn’t that far too many?

As we watched Sound of Freedom the other night, I didn’t leave sad. I left angry. Church, here’s who we are partnering with to rescue and rehabilitate those who’ve been trafficked and how you can get involved locally.

Partner Organizations:

1. Rescue 1 Global
 - a. Partners with law enforcement to rescue people from human trafficking.
2. NAHT (Nashville Anti-Human Trafficking)
 - a. Christ-centered organization

Reach out to Carrie@gracechapel.net for more information on volunteering and donating!

We tend to process the evil day in different ways. If it’s happening to us, we blame ourselves or the people close to us. But if the evil is happening out there, we elevate ourselves to a position of “moral superiority” and we blame “those people.”

And Paul essentially says, *“If you blame the problems in your life on your own failures, or on other people, you’ll either hate yourself, or you’ll hate the world. And the best thing you can do for yourself and for the world, is to recognize that there is more going on than meets the eye. You are in the middle of all out spiritual war.”*

Paul says, *“You have to realize that your battle is not against flesh and blood. It’s not you. And even though there are straight up evil people in the world, it’s not other people. There are spiritual powers and principalities at play that go far beyond what our natural senses can pick up on.”*

“There is no neutral ground in the universe. Every square inch, every split second is claimed by God and counterclaimed by Satan.”

-CS Lewis

What do you do when you're struggling with what's going on out there? You put on the armor and stand.

One of the things that helps to identify a genuine Christian is a sense of peace, but another aspect of it is a sense of purpose. There's a vision, there's a struggle, a conflict about their life.

Almost 100 years ago, an Anglican bishop, J.C. Ryle, wrote these words: *"Let me talk to you about true Christianity. There's a vast quantity of religion current in the world that is not true, genuine Christianity. It passes muster, it satisfies sleepy consciences; but it is not good money. It is not the real thing which was called Christianity 1800 years ago."*

He continues, *"There are thousands of men and women who go to chapels and churches every Sunday and call themselves Christians. Their names are in the baptismal register. They are reckoned Christians while they live. They are married with a Christian marriage service. They mean to be buried as Christians when they die. But you never see any 'fight' about their religion! Of spiritual strife, and exertion, and conflict, and self-denial, and watching, and warring they know literally nothing at all. Let us consider these propositions... The saddest symptom about many so-called Christians is the utter absence of anything like conflict or fight. They eat, they drink, they dress, they work, they amuse themselves, they get money, they spend money, they go through a scanty round of formal religious services once or even twice a week, but the great spiritual warfare... its watchings and strugglings, its agonies and anxieties, its battles and contests of all this they appear to know nothing at all..."*

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."

You are in the middle of a war. When you wake up in the morning and when your feet hit the ground, does your enemy think, *"Uh oh! I better do something about this guy. Uh oh! I better do something about this girl."*? Or does he think, *"Nah, I got nothing to worry about."*

See, the enemy wants to lull you to sleep with entertainment and comfort. He wants to distract you with the latest gadget and technology. He wants Christians to be divided over petty issues. He wants you **content** to just simply attend a service and call it church.

The church is not where you go on a Sunday. **The church is a family of believers who are following Jesus, being changed by Jesus and living on mission with Jesus, together.**

What are you living for? Most Americans go through life seeking a life of comfort, or pleasure, a life of ease. Now when I put it that way, you think, *well that's empty! Where's the purpose? The meaning?*

Yet if you were honest, how many of you are simply pursuing a more comfortable life? More money, nicer home, better education, better job, better relationship, more comfort, more ease?

Most of us are **content living** as if the goal of life is to arrive safely at death.

If that's how you are living, you are asleep. You're not living, you're just slowly dying in a comfortable way. You're losing the war. You are losing the **spiritual battle**.

You are not called to live a safe Christian life. God has created you to live a dangerous, risky, courageous life. Sometimes that means dying to yourself and your insatiable hunger for comfortable insulated American Christianity and coming alive to the reality that you were made for a grander purpose.

Church, you've got to wake up, shake the cobwebs off, start praying big bold ridiculously crazy prayers, like, "God save my neighborhood, rescue our city, our county. God save the men, women, and children that are caught in global trafficking networks. God bring righteous people into public office in our country. **God transform my community, transform my relationships, transform my life!**"

Do you know why you don't pray that way? Because we're terrified that we might be the answer to those prayers.

We want God to do something incredible, but we don't want to have to change. God has chosen to do His work through people, and if you're not willing to change, God may not choose to move because He's waiting on you!

- The devil wants to keep you safe, comfortable, entertained, and distracted.
- God wants to fill you with a vision that will compel you to move, to stand, to risk! To get radically uncomfortable so that the world would know the goodness and glory of God.

Do you know what this looks like?

Ephesians 6:10 Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might.

How do you be strong in the Lord? When tragedy hits, we are more aware of our need for God. But when life is easy, we think we don't actually need to be strong. We can coast. You're losing the battle, so how can you be strong in the Lord? What does that mean?

Matthew Henry, said about this verse, "**Be strong therefore, strong for service, strong for suffering, strong for fighting. Let a soldier be ever so well armed without, if he have not within a good heart, his armor will stand him in little stead.**"

- You can have the greatest armor in the world, but if your heart is enamored, infatuated by something other than what you're fighting for, the armor serves no purpose.
- God is after your heart, but he's not the only one. The devil is after the same thing.

Q: Where does the war begin?

A: Right here, in your heart.

Q: How do we fight the enemy? How do we stand firm? How do we wage war?

If your heart is set on God, the devil loses.

Our culture is designed around performance. Many people are raised in homes where acceptance is contingent on your behavior or performance. At times, we can project this onto God.

I was thinking how throughout different times and seasons of my life I've thought, *"You know, if I perform, I'll be accepted. If I do good, I'll be good enough."* I felt God speak to me saying, *"Rob, you can preach a message. You can pastor the church. You can do all these things for me, but I want you to remember that my eternal love for you as my son, my care for you, my devotion to you, my affection for you, **my goodness toward you has absolutely nothing to do with what you can do for me.**"*

There is nothing you could ever do for God that would make him love you any more than he already does right now. No amount of self-effort or work can earn it. He comes to meet with you, to shower you with His lovingkindness that is better than life.

If you're enjoying God, sure the stress and tension of life doesn't magically disappear, but it's not nearly as terrible as you made it out to be yesterday. If you're enjoying, you're not a victim, you're a beneficiary!

You're not a nobody, you are an inheritor of God's richest blessings. **You are chosen and beloved!**

Live here. Come back into this presence of God as often as you can. Start your day with Him. Enjoy Him. Set your heart on Him.

But there's a second piece. If it just ended here, something would be askew, wouldn't it?

Psalm 67:1 May God be gracious to us and bless us and make his face to shine upon us,

You know what that's asking for? To enjoy God. To bask in the His glory. But to what end? For what purpose?

Psalm 67:1-2 May God be gracious to us and bless us and make his face to shine upon us, that your way may be known on earth, your saving power among all nations.

God is for you, but it's not about you. He's with you all day long. He'll bless you and shower you with goodness, but it's not so that it would end with you. It's for the whole earth! It's for all the nations! There is a war going on for every human heart on the planet!

Psalm 67:3 Let the peoples praise you, O God; let all the peoples praise you!

Enjoying God is about the battle for your own heart, but glorifying God, is the battle for the hearts of others by living your whole life for His glory!

One day you're going to wake up and stand face to face with almighty God. You'll look back on your life, and what will you think?

Will you think *why didn't I lay it all on the line?*

Or will you say, *"I went all out for you God. I did my absolute best to glorify you, to pray big prayers, to take big risks, to dream big dreams, to live a courageously generous life for you."*

The only way to do that, is to enjoy God. The more you enjoy Him the more you'll glorify Him. The more you enjoy Him, the more you'll trust Him and take risks for Him. While the world looks in on your life and says, *"What are you doing, that doesn't make sense!"* God is looking at you saying, *"Here is a man, here is a woman who knows who I am whose heart trusts in Me even in the darkest valley and the greatest storms!"*

Do you know how big, how glorious, and how unbelievably good He is? Are you enjoying Him and living for His glory? Or are you settling for a mundane, lifeless, average, American Christian life? Are you asleep? Or you fully alive living in and for the glory of God?

Because there is no neutral ground in the universe.