

**"The Unseen Battle"**  
***A Household of Faith Sermon Series***  
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**(Eph. 6:10-18)**

**Introduction.**

Today we conclude our series of sermons on the book of Ephesians, and we're looking at the last chapter which deals with the armor of God and spiritual warfare. Author Greg Ogden writes, "Disciples have an enemy, Satan, who will oppose every step of growth into the sufficiency of Jesus Christ. Disciples must arm themselves for spiritual battle against the ploys of the evil one by putting on the whole armor of God."<sup>1</sup> What Ogden is saying here is that evil isn't just an abstract principle or force. It is an active, personal power in opposition to God, and you and I are engaged in an unseen battle that is raging all around us whether we're aware of it or not.

As we take a look at this matter of spiritual warfare and conclude our study of Ephesians, there are four matters that I want you to briefly consider: 1) the reality of evil; 2) the power of evil; 3) our deliverance from evil; and 4) the societal dimension of evil.

**I. The Reality of Evil in the World.**

There are many people today who don't believe the devil exists, and they suggest that evil is simply the result of ignorance and that the devil is just make believe. But the Bible has a very different view of things. Scripture is never in any doubt about the existence and power of evil in the world, and the presence and work of Satan is seen throughout the pages of Scripture from Genesis through Revelation.

In Hebrew, the word "Satan" simply means "adversary," and the word "devil" comes from the Greek word *diabolos*, which means "splitter." The word can also mean "slanderer" and "accuser." In Scripture, we find that Satan is the great adversary of God and His people, and he is one who slanders the Lord and those who follow Him.

There aren't many passages of Scripture which actually refer to the origin of Satan or how he became evil, and most of the references are figurative in language. Nevertheless, his presence and corrupting influence are spread throughout the pages of the Bible. For example, in the Gospels Jesus spoke openly about the existence of the devil, and we read of an encounter Jesus had with him in the wilderness. And part of Jesus' ministry involved confronting and casting out evil spirits.

From what we piece together in the Bible, apparently, the devil was an angelic creature who, before the creation of the human race, was a great and powerful angel who was second in command in heaven. However, he rebelled against God and became the chief antagonist of the Lord and ultimately humanity, and he was expelled from heaven. In the process, he persuaded a third of the angels to follow his rebellion, and they, too, were cast out. And now they comprise the forces of darkness and are called demons. These fallen angels, along with Satan, wage war against God and His heavenly design. They exist to divide, discourage, and destroy.

In the passage, we read this morning the apostle Paul writes, "*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*" (Eph. 6:12). Paul says that there is a cosmic, spiritual battle that is raging, and you and I are in the middle of it. The unseen forces of darkness are waging war against God and His angels, and these principalities and powers, as they're called, are mighty, evil, and they are cunning.

Satan would love nothing more than for you to believe he doesn't exist, for when you're unaware of the enemy, he is that much more dangerous. Write him off as a myth, relegate him as a figment of imagination, or make him into a caricature of a little man in a red suit with horns and a pitchfork. That's exactly what he would like you to believe. But do not be deceived. Satan is real, and his influence is powerful.

Paul says that what happens in the visible, physical world we live in is directly connected to the war that is being fought in the invisible, spiritual world. And the effects of this unseen battle reveal themselves in things like broken relationships, emotional instability, destructive behaviors, and conflict in our homes. How can you and I become more aware of this spiritual reality, and in what ways can we learn to detect the presence and power of evil in the world?

## **II. The Strategies of Evil in the World.**

In verse 11 of our passage, Paul writes about standing against the devil's schemes. It refers to the stratagems and the tactics of the evil one. You'll recall that in Scripture there are a number of metaphors for Satan. He is described as a *dangerous wolf* who enters Christ's flock in the disguise of a sheep. He is also referred to as a *roaring lion* seeking to devour whom he might. And the Bible says he acts *like a serpent* which is subtle and deceptive. All of these metaphors refer to the power and craftiness of the evil one.

Some of the main strategies and tactics Satan and his minions use are temptation, deception, accusation, fear, division, and destruction. Discouragement

is another favorite strategy of the evil one, and if you find yourself discouraged today, consider the fact that Satan might be behind some of what you're feeling.

I mentioned **accusation** is one of Satan's strategies. When I was in seminary I had a professor who told us, "If something comes at you as though it is edged in black, even if it's true, raise your shield of faith against it. It is not from God. It comes from the evil one. Remember, Satan is our accuser; Jesus is our Advocate. Satan tries to condemn; the Holy Spirit seeks to convict in order to bring us to repentance. They utilize very different approaches."

C.S. Lewis wrote a wonderful book called *The Screwtape Letters*, which is a fictional account of one demon, named Screwtape, who mentors the work of a younger demon, named Wormwood. The "patient" in the book is a human who is the project Wormwood is seeking to influence for the devil. In the book, Lewis analyzes the various and subtle ways Satan tries to influence us in opposition to God and to do harm to us as His followers. I commend the book to you if you want to learn more.

When you and I encounter evil, we don't need to be afraid or apprehensive, because the person who walks with God is promised that he/she is not alone in the battle. And God is able to deliver. As Christians, our confidence lies not in ourselves, nor in our ability to combat evil, but rather in the character and strength of God Almighty who can deliver us by the strength and power of the name of Jesus. When evil assaults us, when temptation comes our way, God is there to help us if we call on Him, and He is able to overcome and rescue us. This leads me to the next matter I want you to consider this morning.

### **III. Our Deliverance from Evil in the World.**

In Ephesians 6 Paul says that God has given us some special armor to use whenever we find ourselves in the midst of a spiritual battle. He says that we are supposed to put on *the belt of truth*. He calls us to fasten the *breastplate of righteousness*. He urges us to shod our feet with *the readiness of the gospel of peace*. He exhorts us to take up *the shield of faith*, the *helmet of salvation*, and the *sword of the Spirit*, which is the Word of God. Each of these items is a tool for the warrior of Christ who wants to do battle with the forces of evil, and we would do well to make ourselves ready with God's full armor which He has provided. (Later on this afternoon, I encourage you to talk with someone and ask them what they think each of these items listed as the armor of God means and how each can help protect you.)

I think it's important to note that the only offensive weapon in the whole list of items Paul mentions is the sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God. The Bible is our best weapon against the evil one. And if you don't know Scripture, you're helpless in the fight. We should always remember that even Jesus, when

He was tempted by Satan in the wilderness, didn't engage in debate and He didn't rely on His ability to argue for the truth when He encountered the devil. He simply quoted Scripture, and in His response to each temptation He relied solely on the Word of God. That should be instructive to you and me.

Many years ago, when my late wife Lorie and I were dating and she was working at Camp Greystone, one night she was in the bus station in Greenville, SC, catching a bus to go back to camp after visiting me in Atlanta. She was alone, it was late at night, and the station was filled with people who looked a little sketchy. Fear came over her and she grew anxious. So she pulled out her Bible and began to read. A sense of calm came over her, and no one gave her any trouble that night. She said it felt like the sword of God's Spirit kept evil at bay that night.

I remember another time many years ago when Lorie and I lived in Dallas. I woke up in the middle of the night, and I sensed an oppressive force of darkness. The presence was so close and so ominous that I actually swatted at it in front of my face. Just then I realized that Lorie was also awake, and she asked me, "Do you feel it, too?" I said, "Yes, I do." And we began to pray together, calling on the name of Jesus and the power of His blood, as Scripture urges us to do, asking for His deliverance from evil.

Soon the presence of evil left our room, and there was stillness and peace in the house. I went and checked on the boys in their bedrooms, and I prayed over them for God's protection. The fact of the matter is that Satan is a dog on a leash, and there is nothing he can do without the Father's permission and the Father's ability to rescue us.

#### **IV. The Societal Dimension of Evil.**

There is one final matter I want to mention this morning about spiritual warfare, and it has to do with the societal dimension of evil. During the last 30 years, I've noticed that philosophers have become increasingly interested in the concept of evil. The motivation for this has partly been because they're trying to understand and respond to the various atrocities that have taken place in the last 100 years around the world.

The Holocaust in Germany, the genocide in Rwanda, the terrorist attacks of 9/11, and the killing sprees of serial killers have caused people to struggle to understand how someone could actually do these awful things. I would add to the list now the rise of white supremacists and neo-Nazis in our day as well. It seems that we cannot capture the moral significance of these actions just by calling them "wrong" or bad," or even "very wrong" and "very bad." They are actually evil. That's what they are.

The recent events in Charlottesville has served to be one more confirmation that evil exists in this world, and I'm becoming more and more aware that there is a societal dimension to evil. It doesn't just involve individuals. Institutions and whole movements of people are also a part of Satan's plan. And Christians are called to stand and fight against evil wherever it raises its ugly head, and sometimes that means we need to stand in solidarity with others and call out the evil and say "no" together. Systemic evil is a reality in this world, and Christians need to be involved in helping to fight in this spiritual battle.

I believe this current moment is an important one in our nation's history and for us as a church. And I'll be honest, I don't know how it's all going to play out. But I do know two things. First, I know that from what we've studied in the book of Ephesians in the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> chapters of this epistle, God wants you and me to be involved in tearing down the walls of racism that separate people. And we have a duty to stand up against anyone who suggests that one race is superior to another, and to affirm that everyone is created in the image of God and therefore carries the inherent value and dignity of God's design. Jesus Christ came to shatter every division – social, political, economic, and racial, and God's consummated Kingdom will be a place of rich diversity and cultural expression.

And the second thing I know is that Satan would love to use the tension of this current moment in our nation to divide our church and to drive a wedge between us all. Remember, Satan's name *diabolos* means "splitter." He wants to divide and destroy. And I urge each of us to not allow Satan to gain a foothold in our hearts or in our church. I know of some people in our congregation who are now afraid to say what they think about the problem of race these days, and they don't feel safe in our church. They are afraid people will judge them. The church should be the safest place on the planet to talk about important matters, and even to have disagreement. So I urge you, raise your shield of faith and don't allow the evil one to divide or to destroy the good work God is doing among us as we wrestle with these thorny issues.

### **Conclusion.**

C.S. Lewis once wrote, "There are two equal and opposite errors into which [we] can fall about the devils. One is to disbelieve in their existence. The other is to believe, and to feel an excessive and unhealthy interest in them. They themselves are equally pleased by both errors, and hail a materialist or a magician with the same delight."<sup>2</sup>

The devil is real, but we should be careful not to let ourselves become preoccupied with his existence. His power is limited, and our God is sovereign. As Scripture says, "*He that is in you is stronger than he that is in the world.*" Augustine once said, "The devil is a mad dog that is chained up. He is powerless

to harm us when we are outside his reach, but once we enter his circle we expose ourselves again to injury or harm."<sup>3</sup> So let's be careful.

At the close of this service we will sing Martin Luther's great hymn "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God." In the third verse of that hymn we read these words:

And though this world, with devils filled, should threaten to undo us,  
we will not fear for God hath willed His truth to triumph through us.  
The prince of darkness grim, we tremble not for him.  
His rage we can endure, for lo his doom is sure.  
One little word shall fell him.

What is that little word? It's the name of Jesus! Jesus will overcome the enemy. He is the one who can deliver, who can rescue us. Call upon His name and ask Him for His power to save.

Where is evil raising its ugly head in your life and in the world around you these days? And how is God calling you to do battle on His behalf and in His name? It might be on a personal level at home, at work, at school, or in your neighborhood. It might be in the realm of systemic injustice and the racial division we're experiencing these days. How is God calling you to be a part of the solution and not just a part of the problem?

I close with this. In his classic book, *Paradise Lost*, John Milton describes the fall of Satan from heaven with his host of rebel angels. He depicts this as a great war lasting three days. The first two days of the cataclysm are waged solely between Satan and his demons and the angels of heaven under the command of the Archangel Michael. But on the third day, the Father sends His Son in glorious power to do single-handed combat with all the demonic host. The following is an excerpt from that scene:

"Stand still in bright array, you Saints; here stand,  
You angels armed; this day from battle rest....  
Therefore to me their doom he has assigned,  
That they may have their wish, to try with me  
In battle which the stronger proves."  
So spoke the Son, and into terror changed  
His countenance, too severe to be beheld,  
And full of wrath bent on his enemies.  
They, astonished, all resistance lost,  
All courage; down their idle weapons dropt.  
And all the wonted vigour left them drained,  
Exhausted, spiritless, afflicted, fallen.  
Yet half his strength he put not forth."

That is the Christ we serve. Never forget that He that is in you is stronger than he that is in the world. So, call upon Him to rescue you from the hand of the evil one. Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> Greg Ogden, *Disciple Essentials*, p. 197.

<sup>2</sup>C.S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters*, p. 3.

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<sup>3</sup>Quote in *Leadership*, Vol. 9, #2.