

Fighting
the
Good Fight

Notes of prayer meeting addresses given by
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The whole armour of God

Ephesians 6:10-13

Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might. Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.

26th October 2000

It must have been a shock to the disciples to come down from the Mount of Transfiguration back to a world full of wickedness and unbelief. But there are parallels for our lives too. In our congregation a communion season has just ended. Communion seasons are often times of blessing, but like the disciples, we cannot make tabernacles to dwell in, we must make our lives in the world. We have to live soberly, righteously, and godly *in* this present world, not somehow separate from it. But we are to carry into the

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world the view of Christ that he gives to us at times of refreshing and in the means of grace.

The epistle to the Ephesians begins with high doctrine—free grace, and the privileges of believers. This is followed by the precepts and requirements for daily life that flow from these doctrines. If these doctrines are a reality to us, if we have experienced the grace of God, it will have a practical outworking in our lives.

Here at the end of the epistle the apostle is drawing our attention to the fact that we are up against opposition—opposition from the world and from the flesh, but also from the devil. Living the Christian life is not done in some sort of vacuum. Living the Christian life is done in an environment where Satan is very active. We have to carry the strength of the Lord into that situation, because every step we take will be contested by the devil.

1. The opposition we will encounter

We know the opposition we have from the world, and we know the opposition we have from our own fallen nature, which is in some ways the most difficult to cope with. But beyond that, there is opposition from the powers of darkness. This is more than merely human opposition—it is difficult enough to contend with that—but something far greater. *We wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against*

principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.

Each of these terms, ‘principalities and powers,’ and so on, has its own particular significance no doubt, but certainly the general impression conveyed to us is a world of spirits, a spiritual world. It is a well governed world—there is an organisation of evil spirits which have control in this world. The ignorance of men and the darkness of men and men’s alienation from God give these evil spirits power and control over them.

They even have access to those who have union with Christ Jesus. Verse 12 refers to ‘spiritual wickedness in *high places*.’ That is the same term as we have in chapter 1 verse 3, where it is translated ‘heavenly places.’ This does not mean that evil spirits have access to heaven. Yet even though the people of God have union with heaven and conversation with heaven and are on their way to heaven, that does not alter the fact that the powers of darkness can affect us and beset us in the world.

There is a whole world of evil spirits arrayed against God’s people. It is good that we should be aware of this. Satan is happy to have people think that there are no such things as evil spirits, and indeed few in our day believe in the existence of devils. But the Bible’s teaching is clear—just as there are good angels, there are also wicked angels, who fell

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from their first estate. At their head is the devil, the accuser, the slanderer, a liar from the beginning. He slandered from the beginning—he got a false impression of God into the minds of our first parents—and he has been doing the same thing ever since. He slanders people to God, as we see from the Book of Job. He slandered Job to God, saying, ‘If you plague Job, he will curse you.’ He even slanders people to themselves. He tempts believers to sin, and then he tells them that they are great sinners and hypocrites and that there’s no mercy from God to be had for such as you!

The text speaks of *the wiles of the devil*. He has many stratagems and subtle methods. He has great intelligence, even though it’s perverted. He doesn’t come out in his true colours to start with. He managed to insinuate things into the mind of Eve to tempt her to take the fruit of the tree. He tempts people with ‘little’ sins to start with, and before they know it they’re swept away. There are many in a lost eternity who started off with little sins.

Satan is always working against the Lord’s people in subtle ways. He tries to come between them and Christ. We believe he knows he can’t succeed in this, but this doesn’t stop him from trying. Either he puts fears into them or he puts pride into them, but he keeps on trying, one way or another, continually. How realistic the Bible is in saying so!

The Bible is also realistic when it warns the Lord's people that there will be evil days in their experience. We are to redeem the time, because *the days are evil*. Evil characterises all the days to some extent, but there are especial and particular days of battle for the Lord's people. We are to watch always, but there are days of particular danger, perhaps even following a blessing.

2. Our aim in countering this opposition

The aim in countering this opposition from the devil is *that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.*

To withstand

We are to set ourselves against the devil and his temptations. The devil tried three different approaches to the Lord, but the Lord stood against them. When he did so, he took his stand on the Word of God. He could have sent the devil away with a word of his power, but he didn't use any weapon that his people don't have. He used his own Spirit and his own Word.

We are to resist the devil, and he will flee from us. James Laing, a boy in McCheyne's congregation, died at the age of 13 years. On his deathbed the devil had been tempting him by telling him that this word and that word in his prayer was sin. 'But,' said James Laing, 'I told him it was all

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sin, and I bade him go to Christ.' That was resisting the devil. That's what we have to aim at. We will never get rid of him completely, but we have to keep resisting him.

To stand

Our aim is, having done all—having taken the whole armour of God—to be still standing. After all that the devil can do, we're still standing, we're still in Christ, we're still following the Lord.

Christ has overcome these principalities and powers and rulers and spiritual wickedness. He overcame them in his cross. He stood in the evil day, and in him his people will stand. They will get to heaven by the skin of their teeth. The righteous scarcely are saved. But at the same time there is an abundant entrance into glory. There is no doubt, no question, no uncertainty about Christ, although as far as believers in themselves are concerned, they just get there and no more.

Their aim is to stand, so that Satan would not be able to separate between them and the love of Christ.

3. Our strength for withstanding and standing

Be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might. These three words, 'strong,' 'power,' and 'might,' belong to the Lord's people. The people who are tempted and assaulted by Satan, the people who are so weak and helpless, the

people who are glad just to be able to stand—these people have strength and power and might.

The strength of God is available to them. The strength of God is sustaining them. His mighty power is working in them (Ephesians 1:19). The power of his might is preserving and sustaining his people. That's what faith has to grasp and rely on. Though we are weak in ourselves, all the strength and power of God belongs to the weakest of believers.

That does not mean that they will have the feeling of power in themselves, but it is manifested in their perseverance. How can a believer stand, and withstand, and resist the devil, and repent and believe and love the Lord? Because there's a power in him which is more than human and more than adequate to deal with the devil and his wiles.

Therefore we are to abandon all our own strength, which is utter weakness, and be strong in the Lord. People who are not in the Lord have no access to the strength of the Lord. They cannot fall back on the power of his might. But a person who is in Christ is united to this power.

In the Lord, or 'in Christ' is a very basic expression that Paul uses. In chapter 1 he writes to 'the faithful *in Christ Jesus*' (verse 1). They are blessed in the heavenly places *in Christ* (verse 3). They are chosen *in him* before the foundation of

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the world (verse 4). They are accepted *in the beloved* (verse 6), *in whom* they have redemption (verse 7), and *in whom* they have obtained an inheritance (verse 11).

In Christ we have all the spiritual blessings that are in the covenant of grace. We are to be strong *in the Lord*.

What a strengthening thing it is, to be aware of our union with Christ! We should think often of our union with Christ in the everlasting covenant and in effectual calling. Nothing can separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 8:39). The devil gets the advantage of us when we lose our assurance. If we don't know ourselves, how can we stand against the devil? The grace of the union will sustain us, but we won't get the comfort that comes from assurance. The strength of the Lord gives us strength to withstand in the evil day, and, having done all, to stand.

4. The whole armour which the Lord has provided

Put on the whole armour of God. Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God.

The Lord has provided means. He has taken measures to secure the safety of his people.

We are to take the *whole* armour of God. That doesn't mean just some of it. It's something complete, a 'panoply.' All its parts go together. We are to *take* it. There are means

we have to use, and graces we have to exercise, in this fight. The Lord's strength will keep us, but he will keep us through the use of the means he has given us.

'Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness; and your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace; above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God ...' (Ephesians 1:14-17)

The strength of the Lord is to be harnessed in the use of the means and the exercise of the graces. We are to use the means of grace, and exercise the graces of the Spirit, and that is how we will stand.

Conclusion

We live in a world that is full of the activities of the devil. Therefore Christians are not to be surprised at the opposition they encounter. Whatever grace does, it doesn't prevent us from experiencing the assaults of Satan. Yet these things are not said to dishearten or discourage us, but to remind us that, however strong the world and the devil may be, we have a refuge and a strength and a security. Nothing is able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.