

Sermon: What We're Up Against Ephesians  
6:10-13

This morning we are studying Ephesians 6:10-13 which deals with the subject of spiritual conflict.

In these verses Paul shows us what we are really up against.

In any conflict, it is of the utmost importance to know who your adversary really is.

In the days after 9/11, which was so clearly a terrorist attack, everyone wanted to know one thing- who were the people who pulled off that attack?

Where were they from?

Who funded and supported them?

And why did they do it?

And how do we defend ourselves against such attacks in the future?

Having a clear understanding of who your enemy really is, is of the utmost importance.

Because if you don't know who your enemy is, how can you combat them?

You are certain to lose the battle if you don't know your enemy.

And so Paul informs us about spiritual conflict.

Because he wants us to know what we're up against.

Let us read Ephesians 6:10-13.

Paul writes:

**Ephesians 6:10** 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.

***This is God's word.***

***The grass withers and the flower fades but the word of our God stands forever.***

You have a sermon outline which will help you follow along and the first point there are the first words of verse 10...

I. Finally, Be Strong in the Lord...

Now, the placement of this section of Ephesians where Paul deals with spiritual conflict is a bit deceptive.

He placed it at the end of his letter.

And we might think that because it comes at the end of the letter, the subject of spiritual conflict is therefore of less importance than many of the previous subjects.

When Paul writes "Finally, be strong in the Lord..." we mustn't think that Paul is saying, "Oh Yeah, and another thing I almost forgot..."

Instead, by prefacing his words with "Finally...", he is signaling to us that he is going to write about one last subject that deserves special attention.

It's like that last bit of indispensable advice you give to someone before you say goodbye.

Closing words are sometime of singular importance.

And so here in Ephesians 6:10, we have to imagine Paul's tone of voice changing.

Paul is always serious in his letters.

You never really find him being light-hearted.

Yet here in verse 10, he becomes even more grave as he charges us:

***Finally, Be Strong in the Lord and the strength of his might.***

He is bringing to our attention the fact that, moving forward, we are going to need a strength that in ourselves, we do not possess.

"Being strong in the Lord and the strength of his might" entails two things:

both a dependence and an activity.

### **Dependence**

To be strong in the Lord means that we **first** must recognize that there is a strength we will need if we are going to survive as Christians.

And by survive, I mean having our faith remain alive and ardent.

There is a **dependence** we must have.

We must draw upon the Lord's strength through faith.

We can't just go out there in life and think that because we know the right things and have the right abilities, that we will be able to maintain a lively and useful faith.

Our ability to remain faithful in the face of adversity is not some innate quality within us.

It comes only through **dependence**.

We must be actively dependent and trusting upon the Lord.

It's an intentional thing that we need to be mindful of.

Jesus said in John 15:5

**5 I am the vine; you are the branches.**

**Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.**

He is the vine. We are the branches.

We have to depend upon him actively.

We have to be intentional about this dependence because apart from him, we will be spiritually ineffective.

Or as Jesus says, "Apart from me, you can do nothing."

Therefore, in verse 10 of Ephesians chapter 6, Paul doesn't simply charge us to "Be strong."

No, qualifies it.

***"Be strong in the Lord and the strength of His might."***

There is a dependence here that we have to be intentional about.

We are strong through trusting the Lord and his mighty power.

And yet, dependence is not the only thing that is required of us.

We are called to "Be strong in the Lord." **There is an ACTIVITY.**

And this means that we will need to be steadfast.

We will need to display spiritual courage and bravery.

We will need to be tough and well aware of what stands against us.

So often, I believe that we as Christians think that spiritual courage and steadfastness is something we are just born with, or born again with.

We see spiritual steadfastness as a **personality trait and not an intentional decision** to depend upon the lord and to stand for him.

Yet spiritual strength and steadfastness, if it is of any value, is not a personality trait, nor is it a natural ability. It is the ability to do what is right and true in the face of adversity.

And this sort of strength only comes as we are firmly convinced that God is true and that he is the Lord. Spiritual strength is not a natural phenomena.

It is the product of faith.

And so, as we have faith, we are called to put it into action.

We are called to be strong in the Lord.

To not buckle. To not give in and acquiesce to the culture around us.

Think of the major temptations the Ephesians would have faced in the first century.

Here they are, adherents in this new, upstart religion.

And that's all well and good in the culture's eyes.

There are many God's out there and there's always room for one more- that's what the culture said at least.

And yet the peculiar problem with Christianity was that Christians would not worship any of the other gods.

They wouldn't syncretize.

Instead, they had this dogmatic belief that Jesus Christ alone was Lord.

Not Caesar, Not Artemis, Not Zeus.

Christ alone is Lord.

And for this belief, they suffered.

They were ridiculed. They were black-listed professionally.

This was common treatment for Christians in the 1<sup>st</sup> century.

And Paul knows the type of headwinds they will face and are probably already facing.

And so he tells them to **"Be Strong in the Lord."**

He's sort of like a combat officer telling his soldiers to be **courageous** and to fight.

**"Don't follow the path of least resistance. Be strong in the Lord. Take courage. Stand fast."**

We live in an age which is growing ever more antagonistic against the Christian faith.

And if you are to be a Christian and have integrity, it will inevitably cause you to take hits.

Paul wrote in 2 Timothy 3:12:

**2 Timothy 3:12 Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted,**

Maybe the persecution will come in the form of being judged as narrow minded or small minded.

Maybe you will be considered weak and unthoughtful.

These are the common forms of persecution in the western world.

**Being sneered at and thought extreme or odd or outdated.**

And in such cases, our pride takes hit.

Our reputation and esteem in others eyes takes a hit.

But in other parts of the world, being a Christian can mean it's more difficult to find a job.

It may mean being thought subversive and antagonistic to the government.

It could lead even to physical violence and being killed.

***Being a Christian isn't easy.  
Jesus promised it wouldn't be.***

***Therefore, we must be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might.***

So how are you giving in when you should be standing up and standing fast?

Paul's command to us is clear: "Be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might."

Now there were various forms of opposition that the believers in Ephesus faced.

But Paul wants them to narrow it down.

To see through the clutter of conflict to their real adversary.

He is mentioned by name in verse 11. He is the devil.

And after naming him, Paul goes on to show how he is mightier than any or all of us on our own.

This leads us to our second point in the outline which is...

## II. For We Do Not Wrestle Against Flesh and Blood

Paul highlights the spiritual nature of our conflict when he writes in verse 12:

**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.**

And here, Paul clearly teaches our main struggle or conflict in this life is not against people or forces we can see but rather those persons and forces we cannot see. Our enemy is spiritual and the conflict we face is first and foremost spiritual.

I think we are all aware of how foreign a concept this is in our current age.

In general, Western culture has a very light view of the spiritual realm.

It is given very little credence as to it's importance and impact on daily life.

In our culture, we attempt to explain everything in terms of natural conditions.

So when bad things happen, or when great problems arise, the answers and solutions are always given in terms of natural phenomena.

Spiritual explanations and solutions are seldom, if ever considered.

And from the biblical perspective, the great shortfall of such natural explanations is that they fail to recognize the tremendous sophistication of evil.

In this age, we as humans tend to think that if there is a problem, then there is a solution that is within our ability to discover and execute.

Take any of the world's problems at the moment and notice how they are being addressed.

They are being dealt with purely in terms of the natural.

These are natural problems and therefore we will provide natural solutions.

Yet the scriptures teach us that most problems, or every problem if you like, is at bottom a spiritual problem.

Consider the great environmental concern that has gripped much of the world at the moment. In the west, we consider this a problem to be due to a lack of education.

The thought is, "If people only knew how destructive such behaviors were, then they would cease to do them."

And yet, consumption of almost every resource continues to rise.

Greta Thunberg was perhaps more accurate than most when she spoke of the problem of environmental destruction.

The problem is "greed", she said. The problem is a domineering spirit with little concern for the long term impact on the earth or our neighbors.

The problem is a continual lust for more.

Greed, a lack of concern for people and a continual lust for more are spiritual problems.

Every instance of sin is a spiritual problem.

And because the problem is at root spiritual, the solution must also be spiritual.

Yet, our culture never wants to scratch beneath the surface of these things.

We prefer naturalistic solutions that we can control. And so the call is for more education and more regulation.

Education and regulations are the modern persons solution for everything.

And nowhere is this more true than in western Europe. Which is ironic, because 80 years ago, the Germans were the most educated and intellectually sophisticated people the world had ever known up to that point.

And in spite of all of their erudition and insight, they still charged headlong into a war that engulfed the whole world.

And this shows us education in and of itself is never enough to deal with the real problem of evil in our world and in ourselves.

Educated people still do terrible things.  
Educated nations still do terrible things.

Therefore, how will education alone be a solution to the most significant problems we face- both as a society and as individuals?

The bible tells us clearly that our most significant problem is sin and this is by nature a spiritual problem. A person's head can be filled with knowledge and their life can be filled with opportunity.

Yet if a person's problem with sin is never dealt with, all that has been created is a more sophisticated and more able sinner.

When the bible speaks to us about sin, it doesn't do so in a vague way.

It pinpoints certain behaviors and attitudes that are clearly against God's law.

Sin is not merely a mistake.

Sin is rebellion against God.

It is rejecting his rule in our lives.

And when we do this, we may think that we are acting out in freedom.

Yet Jesus tells us in John 8:34

**John 8:34 ... "Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin."**

To sin is to serve sin.

And in Ephesians 6:12, Paul shows us that all sin is part of a larger administration.

It is inherently spiritual.

**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.

Paul wants us to know what we are up against.

And this is true when dealing with the sin inside of us and the sin we see in the world.

All evil is part of a larger plan, a larger administration. And as Christians, this must inform

- The way we think about and deal with our own sin
- The way we think about and deal with sin in others
- And the way we think about and deal with sin in the world

First, knowing that all evil and sin is part of a larger spiritual administration should inform the way we think about and deal with the sin in ourselves.

By nature, our hearts are sinful.

And when we sin, it is like blood in the water to the sharks of the demonic realm.

Satan seeks to use our sin for larger purposes.

He knows that our sin is not just an isolated mistake. It is a vulnerability that he can exploit.

And he has great designs as to how he will exploit it.

In the political world, it has been said: "never let a crises go to waste."

Do we honestly believe satan thinks any differently regarding our sin?

He has great plans for our sin as a way to undo us, to estrange us from God, to disillusion others and to bring dishonor to the name of Christ.

It doesn't matter what the sin is.

From a lack of discipline in staying up to late at night or eating too much.

To gossiping about our neighbor.

To entertaining lustful thoughts about a person who isn't your spouse.

Satan and his minions have a plan to exploit it in order to do maximum damage to God's work.

And when we see sin in this light, I believe it causes all of us to be a little more sober and watchful.

Peter says in 1 Peter 5:8:

**8** Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.

Peter gave this command right after he told the church to cast all of their anxieties upon the Lord.

He seems to be telling us that if we are not careful with how we handle our anxieties, we may unwittingly play into the hands of satan.

Something as seemingly insignificant as worry can result in great destruction in the hands of satan if we let it go unchecked.

And so we ought to be aware of this and deal honestly and ruthlessly with our sin.

**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.

The second way this knowledge of an evil administration informs us is...

In the way we deal with the sin we see in others.

When someone sins against you or in your presence, we can be sure that they are in a precarious place. We ought to first and foremost pray for them. Because their sin reveals an idolatry and a selfishness that could ruin them and do great damage to others.

So often we take personal offense at peoples' sins. Their selfishness rubs us the wrong way, be it in the form of their being rude or being arrogant or what have you.

Yet their sin is most likely a part of a larger pattern of life, an idolatry that satan wishes to exploit. Just last week, one of my former roommates and college teammates committed suicide. He was a teacher and coach and he was alleged to have committed a form of sexual assault. Now, he either sinfully did the things that were alleged or the person who alleged them sinfully indicted him. Whatever the case, his response was to take his own life. He was a married man and a father of 3. He wasn't alone in his desire to commit suicide. He was pushed along, coaxed along demonically. Because that's what satan does. He wants to reap maximum destruction. He wants to disillusion people. He wants to scar minds and destroy families. He wants us to see the world as black and hopeless. Suicide is such a scourge these days. I don't know if it has always been like that. But with every instance of it, we can be sure that satan is involved.

His only desire is to steal, to kill and to destroy. And so it is imperative that we look to Christ. He came that we might have life and have it abundantly.

O that the world would know the only hope that is in Christ Jesus. Because the person teetering on the brink of suicide has it partially correct. This world is filled with judgment, despair and blackness. In the end, every life does end in death. And yet that is not the whole truth. Because Christ has come. "Light and life to all he brings, risen with healing in his wings"

Luther wrote in his famous hymn:

2. Did we in our own strength confide, Our striving would be losing  
Were not the right Man on our side, The Man of God's own choosing:  
Dost ask who that may be? Christ Jesus, it is He;  
Lord Sabbaoth, His name, From age to age the same, And He must win the battle.

Christ wins. He conquers sin and death and satan and hell.

And apart from him there is no hope. Yet with him, well with him we can do all things. We can do anything God asks us to do because he is the one who strengthens us.

Knowing that satan seeks to use the sin in others as part of a larger plan should cause us to take less offense at people's sin and instead be filled with compassion and most of all, prayer.

Finally, knowing that sin is part of a larger administrative plan of satan informs us of how we think about and deal with the sin we see in our world.

And O how Christians need to be reminded of this during election season.

The large problems that our governments are dealing with and the sins that they commit and condone are not simply their doing. There is a force at work behind them.

**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.

Christians ought to be wise enough to know that voting is good, but prayer is better.

If you identify sin in a larger system, be it an institution or an earthly administration, you can rest assured that Satan is behind it. He is seeking to exploit it for maximum effect. And he will use that sin to sow as much division, hatred and destruction as possible.

Satan wants us to either be so fat and happy that we have no felt need for God or so miserable and filled with spite that we think of waging war.

Whatever it is, he wants to keep us from relying on the one who truly has all power and authority and that is God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

It is to him we are to pray.  
It is upon him we are to depend.  
And it is for him we are to stand.

Are you doing this?  
Are you casting all your cares upon him because he cares for you?  
Or are you fretting and worrying?  
Are you taking matters into your own hands?

The Lord commands us:

Amen.