

Title: God's love changes our fight
Text: Ephesians 6:10-18

August 11, 2019
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This week I was studying the fall of the ancient **capital of Babylon** in the 6th century B.C. Here's a picture of what the ancient city looked like. It was the largest city in the world at the time. It was built with the Euphrates river running right down the middle of it. It was surrounded by over 40 miles of walls on the perimeter. Those walls were roughly 200 feet high and nearly 50 feet in width. It took 200,000 men over an entire year to build those walls. Enemies looked at those walls and knew there was no way to overcome them. So the people felt safe and secure inside the city. Then, one night, in the year 539 BC, as the entire people were having a drunken party (like a New Year's Eve celebration), the Persians brilliantly diverted the flow of the Euphrates river. Instead of trying to knock down the walls, they walked right into the city on dry ground and conquered it from within. Everyone in the city was shocked, but by the time they realized what was happening, it was too late.

And think back with me to the events of **9/11**. Most of you remember where you were when you got the news. I was in junior year of high school. I was driving to class. I remember the intersection I was at when the news came over the radio. We were shocked. We were stunned. We learned that day that we were at war, but we didn't know it.

When you are in a war and you don't know it, but collateral damage is always infinitely greater. Today, we are in our final weekend in our series on the Book of Ephesians that we have called, "God's love changes everything." Today, as we look at Ephesians 6, we are going to see that **God's love changes our fight**. What we are going to see today is that, spiritually speaking, there is a war going on. We are going to learn who our enemy is, how the enemy works, and how we are supposed to respond. Let's read our passage today: Ephesians 6:10-18 **10 Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. 11 Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. 12 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. 13 Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. 14 Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, 15 and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. 16 In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. 17 Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. 18 And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord's people.**

This is perhaps the most significant passage in the entire Bible on spiritual warfare, and it begins by identifying our enemy. **Spiritual Warfare: Our Enemy**. Our battle is not against flesh and blood but against the devil's schemes, and against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.

As we have a discussion about spiritual warfare, the simple truth we need to begin with is this: **The physical realm and the spiritual realm are equally real.** The Bible teaches that in addition to the physical universe, which is everything we can see, God created spiritual beings whom we cannot see. These beings are called angels. They are not eternal because they were brought into existence by God, but they are immortal. Just like our souls, they will live forever. Like with everything God created, when he formed the angels, they were good. They worshipped and served the Lord. But the Bible teaches that there came a time when one of the angels, named Lucifer, no longer wanted to worship God. In his arrogance and pride, he wanted to be equal with God. He led a rebellion in heaven, and many of the angels joined him. Lucifer became known as Satan or the devil, and those angels became known as demons. Satan and demons are real. They have been around for a long time, and their express purpose and agenda is to defame God, destroy the world, and thwart God's purposes for humanity. There is a really clear depiction of this in Revelation 12. Let's look at that passage together: **7 Then war broke out in heaven. Michael and his angels fought against the dragon, and the dragon and his angels fought back. 8 But he was not strong enough** (My friend Jon Weece says: Satan is God's enemy, but he is not God's equal), **and they lost their place in heaven. 9 The great dragon was hurled down—that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray. He was hurled to the earth, and his angels with him. 10 Then I heard a loud voice in heaven say: “Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of his Messiah. For the accuser of our brothers and sisters, who accuses them before our God day and night, has been hurled down. 11 They triumphed over him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death. Therefore rejoice, you heavens and you who dwell in them! But woe to the earth and the sea, because the devil has gone down to you! He is filled with fury, because he knows that his time is short.”**

The Bible makes it clear, though Satan and the demons have already lost the war, they want to create as much collateral damage as possible. And if we are unaware they exist and are at war against us, we will be vulnerable and they will be able to inflict greater damage. A recent survey showed that 94% of Americans say they believe in God. Only 34% say they believe in Satan or demons. Listen to what C.S. Lewis says: **There are two equal and opposite errors into which our race 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. The demons are equally pleased with both.**

So with Spiritual Warfare we recognize who our enemy is. Next we need to understand his strategy, how he works. **Spiritual Warfare: His Strategy.** Ephesians 6 says both that the devil has schemes, that he shoots flaming arrows at us. Like any strategic general, some of his tactics are obvious; some are more covert. Revelation 13 makes it clear that the enemy not only wages war against individual people, but also against society and culture at large. Revelation pulls back the veil and helps us to understand that it's actually demonic forces at work behind **Oppressive Government.** When you look at governments of the past like Nazi Germany or the Soviet Union or governments today like North Korea and Syria, the Bible says demons are behind the evil those governments are a part of. It's not just oppressive governments; it's **War.** In the last century, more people were killed in war than the previous 19 centuries combined. Most estimates are north of 200 million people. 200 million people in one century killed in war. Every one of

those people is someone God created and loves. The enemy uses war to kill God's children. Another strategy is **False Religion**. I understand this is not politically correct, but the Bible says the reason there are so many people in the world today that follow Islam, that are a part of Hinduism, or that participate in cult activity is because of the work of demons. The universe is not spiritually neutral. There are billions of people in the world today who have access to the gospel and have rejected it. Why? In part because the demonic world is at work, drawing people away from the worship of the one true God. All of these are exposed in Revelation 13. Revelation 18 reveals another strategy **Sexual Immorality and Materialism**. Satan wants to use our sensuality and our greed to draw us away from God. And if you look at how the enemy is trying to destroy our culture right now, this is probably his most effective strategy. Just last month a mainstream magazine whose primary audience is teenage girls was promoting the virtue of working in the sex industry. This is to our 13 year old girls! And you probably don't need me to give you statistics on pornography, or sex outside of marriage. The messaging today is loud and clear: "If it feels right, do it." "If it looks right, take it." If you want a good life, have more sex, get more things. Don't think that's just clever marketing. Don't think that's spiritually neutral. This is how the enemy is at work on a macro-scale in the world. These are his schemes. To win a Spiritual battle, and it's not just the glory of God at stake, it's the eternal destination of your soul.

The enemy is also at work at a personal level, trying to pull you away from God. The Scriptures teach that when Satan comes against someone, he typically uses very similar tactics. To begin, the enemy uses **Deception**. In John 8:44 Jesus says, "**When the Devil lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies.**" The enemy lies to us about our identity. He says we are not God's child, that we are not loved, that we are not forgiven, that we are not secure. He tries to convince us that sin will be satisfying, or better yet, he'll try to get us to believe there is no such thing as sin at all. This is what he said to Eve in the very beginning. "Did God really say you shouldn't eat from this tree? The truth is that there's nothing God doesn't want you to have. If you want it, just take it. And if by chance you do something God doesn't want, surely you won't die. There are no consequences to rejecting God. The enemy's strategy is deception.

And also **Distraction**. You might hear that and think, distraction, is that really a leading weapon in Satan's arsenal? Absolutely. In Matthew 6 Jesus told us, "**Seek first God's kingdom and God's righteousness.**" God wants his kingdom and his righteousness to be our primary focus. What does the enemy want to do? He wants to distract you. Have you heard the old adage: If the devil can't make you bad he'll make you what? Busy. He wants to keep our focus off what really matters. He wants us so caught up in work and family and sports and money, and entertainment and social media and politics that the eternal realities of heaven and hell, of sin and righteousness, simply fall off our radar. And if you could just hear my heart as one of the pastors of this church, it has been such a joy to get to know so many of the families in this church. From what I've seen, I think this is one of the most effective strategies the enemy is deploying right now for the people in our church. He is distracting us with good things that are keeping our focus off the most important things.

Division—God loves unity, Satan loves division. The last night of Jesus' life, what did he pray? That his followers would be one. God wants our relationships to be marked by deep community,

intimacy, trust, affection. Satan wants to thwart that. He wants to create tension, he wants to sow seeds of division. He wants to divide and conquer. Now it is easy to turn on the news and see how that is happening in our culture through things like racism and the evils of white nationalism--dividing people and culture. But the enemy does it at a personal level, too. Husbands and wives, do you realize that God wants you to be increasingly united, but that Satan wants you to be increasingly divided? The voice that is telling you to humbly repair the relationship is the Holy Spirit. The voice that is telling you in pride to dig your heels in and refuse to budge is probably the enemy. He wants to divide marriages, families, life groups, churches, communities...the list could go on and on. And we have to be aware of the enemy's strategies and fight for unity. In 2 Corinthians, Paul is writing about forgiving someone who wronged him. Listen to what he says: **“What I have forgiven--if there was anything to forgive- I have forgiven in the sight of Christ for your sake, in order that Satan might not outwit us. For we are not unaware of his schemes.”** Wherever there is distance in a relationship, what if, like Paul, you chose to forgive them and say, “I know what Satan is trying to do to divide us, and I’m not going to let him win.”

I could give you 100 more, but this one really matters: **Isolation**. Listen to what the Bible says about Satan: **Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. 1 Peter 5:8.** Have you ever seen the way lions hunt their prey? They charge a herd and then what do they do? They follow the one gazelle that veers off on its own. We are never more susceptible to the enemy's attacks than when we are isolated and alone. That is just one of the countless reasons we want everyone at this church to be in a life group. Every single week, in a home, sharing a meal, talking about the Scriptures, sharing your joys and burdens, making sure no one at this church goes through life alone.

Some people tend to think that spiritual warfare is just for those living in Africa or Haiti or places where there are witch doctors and shamans. Spiritual warfare happens there, but it is just as present here. The enemy just deploys more covert strategies. And the context of this passage is so important to take note of: Paul has just talked about relationships between husbands and wives in marriages, between parents and children, and about how we engage at work. Nine times out of ten, that is where the enemy is going to attack you, where it hurts the most, where you are most vulnerable: in your marriage, with your kids, at your job. We have an enemy. We know his strategy. As we continue reading, we are going to see what we are supposed to do about it.

Spiritual Warfare: Our Response. In terms of how we are supposed to engage in warfare, we see three specific steps we are to take. First, God's word tells us on two occasions **Put on the full armor of God**. Ephesians 6 mentions this multiple times.

-Ephesians 6:11 **“Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the Devil's schemes.”**

-6:13 **Therefore, put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground.”**

And as you read, Paul mentions 6 different elements of armor:

Belt of truth

Breastplate of righteousness

Feet prepared with the gospel

Shield of faith

Helmet of salvation Sword of the Spirit

Just like a soldier going to battle is going to protect himself, we are in a battle, and God is telling us we need protection. When the enemy speaks lies and deceit, we respond with truth. When the enemy speaks condemnation and shame, we claim the righteousness of Christ. When the enemy tries to lead people away from God, we preach the gospel and tell them what God has done for them in Christ. When the enemy riddles our minds and hearts with doubt, we take up the shield of faith, which extinguishes his flaming arrows. We know that fatal blows are often to the head, so we take the helmet of salvation and remember that God has promised to save us for all eternity. And last there is an offensive weapon, the Sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God. When you want to do battle with the enemy, you don't use your weapons, you use God's weapon. When Jesus was in the wilderness and was being tempted by Satan, do you remember how he responded to every attack? He quoted the Word of God! Personally speaking, I have found this to be unbelievably helpful. The enemy deals in lies. Knowing truth is how you silence him.

So our response begins by putting on the full armor of God. Once we have on the armor of God, we are told to **Stand Firm**. This is emphasized multiple times in the passage in verses 13 and 14. **When the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand.** We are in a fight. And God does not want us on our heels. He doesn't want us moving backward, thinking about retreat, only playing defense. He wants us moving forward; he wants us to take ground; he wants us playing offense. We have an enemy who is real and who is powerful. But remember what **1 John 4:4** says: **"The one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world."** On our own we would have no chance. With God, the enemy has no chance. You may have heard of the supposed transcript from a U.S. naval ship released in 1995? The captain, off the coast of Newfoundland, gets on the radio and says:

Captain: Please divert your course 0.55 degrees to the North to avoid a collision.

The response: Transmission received: We recommend you divert YOUR course 15 degrees to the South to avoid a collision.

The captain says: This is a U.S. Navy ship. I say again, divert YOUR course.

The response: No. I say again, you divert YOUR course.

The captain is exasperated and intense: This is the second largest ship in the US NAVY. We are accompanied by three destroyers and five cruisers. Divert your course or we will take countermeasures to ensure the safety of our fleet.

The response: This is a lighthouse. Your call.

The enemy is going to huff and puff. He is going to hiss and growl. He is going to show his teeth, talk a big game and try to intimidate. But he who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world. So stand your ground. When it comes to spiritual warfare, you are not just trying to survive. Our goal is to win.

So we are going to put on the full armor of God, stand firm, and finally: **Pray**. Listen to how this passage ends: **18 And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord's people.**

Look at how important prayer is to Paul **18 And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord's people.** With our armor on, and with a determination to stand our ground, we do our spiritual warfare which is fought on our knees. In Mark 9 there is a really interesting interaction that Jesus has with his disciples. A man approached Jesus and said: I asked your disciples to cast out a demon from my son, but they weren't able to. Jesus asks the Father a few questions and then commanded the evil spirit to come out of him, and never to enter again. The disciples were confused at the exchange. In 9:28 it says: **28 After Jesus had gone indoors, his disciples asked him privately, "Why couldn't we drive it out?"** That's the question at hand that everyone wanted to know. Do you recall what Jesus said? **29 He replied, "This kind can come out only by prayer."** In spiritual warfare, there are some things that will only come about through prayer.

Most of you know that a few months ago I stepped into the role of Lead Pastor here at The Creek. And people have asked me what it's like, if I sense any difference. The key element that I have taken note of is spiritual warfare. My prayer life is far more intense and frequent than before, because I am all the more aware of needs, and God is the only one who can do anything about them. Almost every time I talk with God I think about the people of this church whom I know and love and I plead with God to move powerfully. And I have also noticed an increase in opposition in my own life. Do you know that the day after Gary and the elders prayed over me on this stage, April 28th, I woke up sick, and was sick with pneumonia for the next month? I coughed so much that Hudson started coughing. Not because he was sick, but because that's how he assumed we communicate in our house. I'm not kidding. And at the same time I got that diagnosis, Keren had the most severe back pain and was told by a spinal surgeon that she shouldn't pick up our son for the next three months. Devastating news for a new mom who is nursing. It was hard in our household. I tried my best to help, but I was coughing up a lung. And look, all of this could have been coincidence, that they overlapped, and happened as soon as I started in this role. But it just seemed like something more might have been at work. So Keren and I talked about it, and we circled the wagons: We reminded ourselves that we have an enemy. We are aware of his strategy. We made sure we had on the armor. We grounded ourselves in the word. We committed to staying united and not giving up ground, and then we prayed. And we prayed a lot. We asked our family to pray. We asked our lifegroup to pray. We asked the staff and elders of this church to pray. And we have seen God's favor and provision.

We don't want to be the sort of people who are unaware that we are at war. We have an enemy, and he is hell bent on evil and destruction. But we know his strategy. And we know how we are supposed to respond. We may be weak, but our God is strong. Jesus entered into battle against the enemy. He fought on our behalf. He took the worst blow Satan could throw-he was beaten, humiliated, marched through the city streets, stripped naked, nailed to a tree and killed. Then he rose from the grave. Our confidence, our victory is in him.

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