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Ephesians 6:13-17
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Spiritual Warfare: Prayer

Today we turn our attentions to something that we don't talk about much in the Church. Spiritual warfare and how we are called to wage war in heaven through prayer and peace on earth through our actions.

Our scripture comes from the Apostle Paul's Letter to the Church in Ephesus. Before we dive in, let me provide a little background on Ephesus and why Paul felt like he needed to address spiritual warfare with the Christians that were there.

Ephesus was a booming metropolis, located in Asia minor, right on the trade routes between East and West. It was said to have rivaled Rome, Antioch, and Corinth in importance as the capital of the province of Asia. This made Ephesus a melting pot of people, cultures, religions, and ideals. It attracted people from all over the world. One might say that it was a lot like America today. Prosperous. Well educated. Powerful. Spiritual, but not religious.

In Paul's day, thousands of people traveled to the temple of Artemis for worship, one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. Artemus was the goddess of fertility and prosperity. The Book of Acts describes how Paul's traveled to Ephesus and planted a church there.¹ As he was sharing the Good News about Jesus Christ with them, so many people were turning away from their worship of Artemus that it caused a riot among the silversmiths who made their living selling Artemus statues to the religious tourists.

It was then that Paul realized that he had touched on the spiritual pulse of something that was much larger, and more powerful than one could see at face value. And instead of positing himself as an enemy to the silversmiths and the Artemus temple culture, he drew people's attention to the true nature of the spiritual war that was waging beyond their sight.

Paul writes, “**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

¹ Acts 19:1-

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. **19** Pray also for me, that whenever I speak, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel, **20** for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should."

Let us pray. Prayer of Illumination.

This morning, I want to look more closely at Paul's words here and especially the imagery that he uses in it. We'll talk about how we as God's people should engage in spiritual warfare and the role that prayer plays in it. We'll consider the importance of knowing who we are, who our actual enemy is, what authority we have to be in the fight, and then how to fight. Finally, we will consider spiritual warfare in our country today and see how we might apply these tools to it.

Notice how Paul took the imagery of a Roman soldier, the enemy, and turned it into a metaphor for how followers of Jesus should act in spiritual warfare. Put on the full armor of God. Put on the belt of truth buckled around your waist and the breastplate of righteousness to guard your heart. Have your feet fitted with readiness of the Gospel. Pick up the shield of faith. Wear the helmet of salvation. And finally use the sword of the Spirit.

People in Ephesus would have been very familiar with Roman soldiers in their midsts. They would have been able to see those images and make the spiritual connection in how they should act.

The belt of truth comes from knowing Jesus's words which help us discern what is true from what is not. This is important because our enemy is shift and conniving. Satan knows Jesus' words better than most and can twist them or take them out of context in such a way so that they seem like they are coming from Jesus when they are not.

The belt of truth also guards our emotions which were believed seated in the gut. With this protective gear, we don't over react emotionally to what we read online or to what someone says. We know that there is something else going on under the surface that led them to say it.

The breastplate righteousness also comes from Jesus. We are cloaked in his righteousness, not our own. He is what makes us right before God, not our own actions. This knowledge guards our hearts from becoming proud, arrogant, or self assured. And when we hear proud, arrogant, or self assured messages from other

Christians...we need to be on our guard...because that is not the Spirit of Jesus. That is the spirit of the enemy speaking through them.

The sandals on our feet is the good news. The Prophet Isaiah said, “How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, who proclaim peace, who bring good tidings, and proclaim salvation, who say to Zion “Your God reigns!”² We are to bring blessings, good tidings, peace, and proclamations of salvation from our God into battle. We also bring the fruit of the spirit with us which is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.³ We do not bring physical weapons, aggressive behavior, or harmful dialogue which are obvious weapons of the sinful nature. These are tools of the enemy, not of followers of Jesus.

The shield of faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see is real.⁴ That Jesus has already conquered the enemy and death. This verse describes the large Roman shield covered with leather, which could be soaked in water and used to extinguish flame-tipped arrows. Therefore with our faith that extinguishes the enemy’s flaming arrows, we have nothing to fear as we go into battle.

The helmet of salvation comes from knowing that we are saved by grace and not by anything we have done, but through faith alone in Jesus Christ.⁵

The sword of the Spirit is the Word of God that the Holy Spirit reminds us of. When Jesus sparred with Satan in the desert, he used the Word of God to silence Satan and put him back in his place. He said, “It is written: Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.” “It is written: Do not put the Lord your God to the test.” And “It is written: Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.”⁶

And then we also use prayer, our strongest and most effective weapon. Prayer acknowledges that this battle does not belong to us, but to the Lord. So we call upon the name of Jesus to work in the heavenly realms in ways that we cannot see. To combat spiritual forces of darkness with the full aid of the heavenly hosts who are always on our side.

The Apostle James wrote, “Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.”⁷Hallelujah and Amen!

² Isaiah 52:7; repeated by the Apostle Paul in Romans 10:15

³ Galatians 5:19-23

⁴ Hebrews 11:1

⁵ Ephesians 2:8-9

⁶ Matthew 4:1-11

⁷ James 4:7

But as we engage in spiritual warfare, through prayer, it is important for us to know who we are and who we are not! Firstly we are not God. We don't fight in our strength or with our intelligence or words. The next time someone says something offensive online or through social media, resist the urge to fight back with our own clever remarks. That is engaging the enemy on their terms, not Jesus'. That is a recipe for disaster.

We do remember that we are children of the most high God. Sons and daughters of the King of Heaven through our faith in Jesus Christ.⁸ And because of that, we are heirs to the kingdom, with all the privileges and blessings that go along with that.

We also remember that Jesus has already won the battle. He has conquered sin and death on our behalf, which makes us conquerors. Therefore we have absolutely nothing to fear.

As Paul reminded the Romans...

"Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is written: 'For your sake we face death all day long: we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.' No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord."⁹

Absolutely nothing!

Next we need to know that our enemy is Satan. He is a liar. He makes up his own truth. He causes confusion and division among believers. He knows that if he can separate us, then we are weaker and more vulnerable to attack. But together, we are stronger. We can stand.

Now Paul is absolutely clear who our enemy is. And it's not the liberals. Or the conservatives. Or those who think or believe differently than we do. Our struggle is not against flesh and blood. Folks this is where we need to pay attention to what we are hearing from Christians today who are claiming to be at war against a particular people group. These attacks are not from the Lord. They are from the enemy in order to divide us.

Paul continues that our struggle is against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world, and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.

⁸ Galatians 3:26

⁹ Romans 8:35-39

The Greek word used for struggle is pale. It means wrestling, conflict or struggle.

The Greek word for ruler is arche. It means authority, principality, or ruler. But it not just any ruler. One from the beginning. Or one who thinks they are in charge.

The Greek word for authority is exousia. It can mean authority, power, or delegated influence.

The Greek word for powers of this dark world is Kosmokrator which means ruler of this world. It is also another name for Satan.

This very clearly indicates that our enemy is Satan. Not Niro. Not Putin. Not Netanyahu. Not Trump. Or Joe Biden. You see that's who Satan wants us to believe is the real enemy, because that causes division. Now that is not to say that Satan doesn't work through these folks. He sure can. Wherever we see acts of the sinful nature such as hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions, envy, drunkenness, orgies and the like, we are seeing the nothing more than the work of Satan.

This why Jesus tells us to love our enemies and to pray for them.

And the Bible directly instructs us to pray for those in authority, to "urge supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgiving for all people, for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead peaceful and quiet lives, godly and dignified in every way."¹⁰ This applies to all leaders regardless of their personal character or political actions.

But if you're anything like me, it is easier to gripe, complain, and bad mouth them to people who agree with me, than it is pray for them.

Well one might say, what gives you that authority say or believe these things? Jesus does.

Just before ascending into heaven he said, "All authority in heaven and earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."¹¹

My friends, it is Jesus that we worship. Not our authorities.

Pastor Pete Greig in his book *How to Pray, A Simple Guide for Normal People*, states, "When human beings worship that which is not God, they give authority to forces of destruction and malevolence; and those forces gain a

¹⁰ 1 Timothy 2:1-3

¹¹ Matthew 28:18-20

power.”¹² Let’s not give these forces any more power for evil purposes in our world

And finally, we need to know how to fight. Again, Paul is crystal clear, we fight through prayer in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. The Spirit is key because, it will keep our prayers in check, to make sure they are in line with God’s heart and not ours.

Maybe our prayers need to start with a good dose of confession and repentance if we’ve fallen into the trap of using the enemy’s tactics and not God’s. Then we can get on with praying with pure hearts and right intentions. For James says, “The prayers of a righteous person are powerful and effective.”¹³

Again, Pete Greig suggests three questions we should be asking when confronting any kind of conflict in prayer.

What is the enemy’s strategy against this person, place, or situation?

What might God’s better plan be?

What can I now do, both prayerfully and practically, to thwart Satan’s plan and to welcome God’s better purposes into this issue?

Let’s see how we might use this strategy toward the violent and divided American political arena today.

What is the enemy’s strategy? You tell me?

Sow seeds of fear, discord, and hatred toward those who think or believe differently than we do. If Satan can get us to stop really talking to one another about things that matter, then he’s won. Because we will surround ourselves with like minded people who will tell us exactly what our itching ears want to hear. That’s human nature. Birds of a feather, do what? They flock together.

Another strategy that Satan is to blur the lines between faith and politics. I know some folks who think they can only vote for one party and still remain true to their faith. That’s regardless of whether they think that party’s candidate is really the best person for the job. Folks its ok to vote across party lines if our conscience tells us to do so. God gave us brains, so lets use them.

Having diagnosed the problem, let’s ask ourselves, what might God’s better plan be? Now to answer this question, we make sure we are listening “carefully to his Word and especially his promises, as well as any intuitions [we] may receive from the Holy Spirit.”¹⁴

Paul in speaking to the Philippians said, “If you have any encouragement from being united in Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being

¹² Pete Greig, *How to Pray, A Simple Guide for Normal People* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2019), 194.

¹³ James 5:16

¹⁴ Greig, *How to Pray*, 202

like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look only to your own interests, but also the interest of others.

Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus:

Who, being in the very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the nature of a servant, humbled himself, and became obedient to death, even death on a cross.”¹⁵

What did we just hear about what might God’s better plan be? You tell me?

Having discerned what Satan is trying to do and what God is wanting to do, we ask ourselves, what can we now do, both prayerfully and practically, to thwart Satan’s plan and to welcome God’s better purposes into American politics? You tell me?

Pete Greig writes, “[We] take our stand against the enemy every time [we] preach the gospel, forgive an enemy, stand up to a bully, care for the poor, create something beautiful, behave with integrity, practice civil disobedience for the sake of righteousness, or take a stance that defies [their] insidious systems of control.”¹⁶

We take our stand against the enemy when we embrace the idea that our opponent was made in the same image of God as we were.

We take our stand against the enemy when we dialogue with one another in love and with humble hearts. Perfectly crafted rhetoric and sound arguments rarely win people over.

We take our stand against the enemy when we listen to what others have to say even if we disagree.

We take our stand against the enemy when we understand that there might be something going on beneath the surface in people’s lives that is causing them to think or act a certain way.

We take our stand against the enemy when we take the posture that is better to plant seeds than to pull weeds.¹⁷

We take our stand against the enemy when we try spending more time in blessing what is right than cursing what is wrong.¹⁸

We take our stand against the enemy when we resist the urge to fight God’s battles because we know that God can and will handle them.

¹⁵ Philippians 2:1-8

¹⁶ Greig, *How to Pray*, 208.

¹⁷ John Wimber, Founder of the Vineyard Movement as quoted in Greig, *How to Pray*, 206.

¹⁸ Greig, *How to Pray*, 207.

We take our stand against the enemy when we choose to not work things out in the public sphere through social media or venues that inhibit true heartfelt dialogue.

We take our stand against the enemy when we do not panic or become bitter towards others.

We take our stand against the enemy when we pray.

So let us pray.

Heavenly Father, we come to you today as beloved sons and daughters. We worship You, and give You praise; for You alone are worthy to receive glory and honor.

Today, we renew our allegiance to You, Jesus – our Savior, our Friend, our Lord and our King. We thank You for saving us and forgiving our sins through the victory of the cross and the resurrection. Thank You that You triumphed over all principalities and powers and made a show of them openly. We stand in that victory today believing that no weapon formed against us can prosper.

And we declare this victory over our families, our friends, our church, our country, and our world.

We put on the full armor of God today.

We put on the belt of truth – We believe You are the Truth, Jesus. Your words are true and we are in You.

We put on the shoes of the gospel of peace. By faith we stand, firm-footed, in Your love that forgives our sins, and we walk forward in confidence to share this good news with others.

We put on the breastplate of righteousness. Protect our hearts. We are new creations and have received the righteousness of Christ. We choose to ‘die to self’ again today and display Your righteousness through our words, thoughts and actions.

We put on the helmet of salvation. Renew our mind afresh today, O Lord. We declare our minds are set apart for You and therefore we reject the insinuations, the accusations and the lies of Satan. You have not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind.

We lift up the shield of faith to resist all the fiery darts of the enemy. Deliver us from evil and work in our lives that there be no ground to give Satan a foothold against us.

We take up the sword of the Spirit, the Word of God, and in the victory of Jesus we know that the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty in God to the pulling down of strongholds, to the casting down of imaginations and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, and to bring every thought captive and make it obedient to Christ.

We break the strongholds of Satan formed against our bodies, souls and spirits today, our Church, and our politics, and choose to make Godly decisions today, by the grace of God.

We pray for our country’s and world’s leaders, politicians, and people in positions of power, may you give them wisdom to govern people fairly and justly and may you protect them from any attack be they physical, mental, relational, or spiritual. May You draw them close to You that they help to hasten the day of justice, love, and true shalom on earth.

We ask for forgiveness of the many ways we have fallen short as individuals and as a country. And we boldly and humbly ask that you would deliver us from the grip of the evil one and heal our land.

We rejoice in You today Jesus; may Your joy be our strength as Your grace and mercy follow us all the days of our lives. And the Church said, “Amen!”