

p 89 WEEK 12: STANDING FIRM IN THE REAL WAR

Ephesians 6:10–24

The Place of the Passage

In the final section of his letter to the Ephesians (6:10–24), Paul concludes with traditional personal greetings and with exhortations related to the letter carrier, Tychicus (vv. 21–22). He includes well-wishes of peace, love, faith, and grace, themes repeated throughout the letter (compare vv. 23–24 with 1:2; 2:7, 14; 3:21; 5:2; 6:16). Relative to the church as both a cosmic and an earthly entity, Paul closes the letter’s instructions by expanding his understanding of the invisible challenge believers encounter in this world (1:21–22; 3:10; 4:9, 27; 5:16; 6:11–12, 16). Here Paul gives the largest explicit description of spiritual warfare within his writings.

The Big Picture

In 6:10–20, the believer’s standing with the armor of God serves as a means of completing the church’s gospel mission in the world. Paul revisits previously discussed ideas, including truth (4:21, 25), righteousness (4:24), the gospel of peace (2:14, 17; 4:3), faith (3:12, 17), salvation (2:5, 8), the working of the Spirit p 90 through the word (3:5), prayer (1:15–21; 3:14–21), and the mystery of the gospel (1:9; 3:3–4, 6, 9; 5:32). The apostle draws much of the imagery from Old Testament ideas—and from the armor of a Roman soldier—to speak of the believer’s resources in Christ.

Reflection and Discussion

Read through Ephesians 6:10–24, the passage for this week’s study. Then review the following questions, taking notes on the final section of the letter to the Ephesians. (For further background, see the *ESV Study Bible*, pages 2273–2274; available online at www.esvbible.org.)

1. Cosmic Enemies That Require God’s Armor (Eph. 6:10–13)

Paul urges the Ephesians to “be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might” (6:10). Why does the nature of this war demand that we use the Lord’s strength? How does the Devil fight (vv. 11–12)?

“Flesh and blood” is a figurative way of talking about *people*. If people are not the enemy, yet conflicts and the rejection of the gospel take place between people, how does one explain the

nature of this struggle? What do the different types of powers of evil imply about the sort of warfare the church faces (6:12)?

Based on what Paul has said about activities “in the heavenly places” earlier in the epistle (1:3, 20; 2:6; 3:10), what sort of wrestling must believers do in the unseen realms (6:12)? How does wrestling with immaterial beings explain other conflict-related issues in Ephesians, such as ethnic rivalry (2:14), church [p91](#) disunity (4:3), mistreatment leading to anger (4:26, 31), and submission to authority (5:21)?

What does Paul mean by “the evil day”? How does one “stand firm” in the “whole armor” in that day?

2. Soldier Imagery of God's Armor (6:14–17)

Paul lists seven pieces of armor, including many that have Old Testament images in their background: belt (Isa. 11:5), breastplate (Isa. 59:17), feet related to the good news (Isa. 52:7), and garments of salvation (Isa. 61:10). How does the Old Testament background clarify the meaning of the “whole armor of God”?

It is possible to over-read Paul's imagery and think that the breastplate of righteousness protects one's heart or that the gospel of peace is necessary for walking because it deals with feet. This reading misunderstands the pieces of armor, missing the point Paul is making about behavior flowing from the power of Christ. How should you understand the role that the “belt of truth” plays in standing against the schemes of the Devil?

[p92](#) What activity of the believer is related to the “readiness given by the gospel of peace”? How does this activity operate in the believer's wrestling against evil forces?

How does the believer's faith counter the attacks of the Evil One? What habits related to the Word of God prepare the believer for wrestling against evil?

How do Paul's earlier discussions of the believer's salvation (Eph. 1:3–14; 2:4–10) inform one's understanding of the role of the “helmet of salvation” in fighting expressions of evil in the earthly realm?

3. Gospel Ministry in God's Armor (Eph. 6:18–20)

Looking to the previous working of the Spirit in Ephesians (5:18; 6:17), how does one pray “in the Spirit”? What might lead Paul to require “praying at all times” in order for the believer to stand?

p 93 Paul repeats “all” four times in 6:18 in instructing the believer on warfare prayer. What does each “all” say about the priority that prayer should have in the life of the believer? How does the call to “keep alert with all perseverance” give a greater understanding of the war strategy of the Devil?

How can a believer be faithful to pray for “all the saints”?

What does Paul face in this war that would make prayer necessary for him to declare the gospel “boldly” (6:19, 20)? How does this prayer request help the believer understand the danger of prayerlessness in the lives of individual believers and local churches?

Read through the following three sections on *Gospel Glimpses*, *Whole-Bible Connections*, and *Theological Soundings*. Then take time to consider the *Personal Implications* these sections may have for you.

Gospel Glimpses

THE LORD AS WARRIOR. The frail and finite nature of human existence (“flesh and blood”; Eph. 6:12) puts all people, including believers, at a severe disadvantage to spiritual rulers and powers who are not limited by bodily weaknesses or by the physical consequences of sin. The believer’s hope of success in p 94 this war rests in Christ, who has provided the armor of God. By going to the cross and descending to the lower regions (4:8–10), Christ defeated the invisible powers who sought absolute rule over the domain of the earth (Col. 1:13). The believer finds salvation’s victory—both present (Eph. 6:13) and final (Rom. 8:38–39)—in Christ our conqueror and in his finished work alone.

OUR LOVE FOR CHRIST. “Grace be with all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with love incorruptible” (Eph. 6:24). When God overcomes a sinner’s heart by the power of the Spirit, Christ provides the believer a new heart that can respond to God in obedience. Love is vital to understanding the new relationship between God and the believer. It is “in love” that God has acted through Christ on behalf of the believer (2:4; 3:19). As Christ draws our affections into alignment with his will, we seek the good and glory of the God we love. Our love for him then flows into greater love for our fellow believers (1:15; 4:2, 15, 16; 5:2).

Whole-Bible Connections

ANGELS AND DEMONS. The naturalistic worldview does not have room for personal, supernatural beings, despite the plethora of fictional literature and Hollywood productions portraying demonic characters in a battle for human souls. In contrast, the biblical worldview assumes the vibrant activity of both angels and demons. Angels are “ministers, who do his will” (Ps. 103:21). Demons, conversely, contribute to the opposition believers encounter in their life on earth. A day is coming when Christ will finally subjugate them (1 Cor. 15:24; 1 Pet. 3:22).

PRIORITY OF PRAYER. Many psalms portray the prayers of an individual sojourner or of an entire community seeking God (Pss. 40:1; 67:1; 123:1; 130:1), as do the books of history (2 Chron. 20:6–13; Nehemiah 9). Prayer was instrumental in the gospel’s initial foray into the Roman Empire (Acts 1:14; 4:31; 6:4; 12:5; 13:3; 20:36). The invitation God offers the body of Christ to seek him in prayer is one of the amazing privileges of the believer. We can beseech the ruler of all things to act powerfully against invisible warring powers. Paul’s examples, instructions, and requests relating to prayer reveal his belief in the believer’s great need to prioritize this discipline.

Theological Soundings

GOSPEL AMBASSADORS. “How are they to hear without someone preaching?” (Rom. 10:14). The church bears the task of proclaiming Christ to the world. The last command of Christ defines the goal of the church in the world (see Matt. 28:19–20; Luke 24:27–28; John 20:21; Acts 1:8). A fitting image of the believer’s ministry of proclamation is that of ambassador. The believer acts p 95 as a representative of his homeland under the authority of his king. In heralding Christ, believers have the high honor of offering Christ as he invades history to win people to his kingdom.

ENCOURAGEMENT. Disappointments experienced during the daily conflict a believer faces in the world can lead to discouragement. But people whose hearts have been overcome by Christ’s love have the ability to encourage one another with hope (1 Thess. 4:18; 5:11, 14). Encouraging words and deeds seek the benefit of the entire church (Col. 4:8). Encouragement is the fruit of having a trustworthy God who is a faithful refuge throughout all our trials (Heb. 6:18).

Personal Implications

Take time to reflect on the implications of Ephesians 6:10–24 for your own life today. Consider what you have learned that might lead you to praise God, repent of sin, and trust in his gracious promises. Make notes below on the personal implications for your walk with the Lord of the (1) *Gospel Glimpses*, (2) *Whole-Bible Connections*, (3) *Theological Soundings*, and (4) this passage as a whole.

1. Gospel Glimpses

2. Whole-Bible Connections

3. Theological Soundings

p 96 **4. Ephesians 6:10–24**

As You Finish Studying Ephesians ...

We rejoice with you as you finish studying the book of Ephesians! May this study become part of your Christian walk of faith, day-by-day and week-by-week throughout all your life. Now we would greatly encourage you to study the Word of God on a week-by-week basis. To continue your study of the Bible, we would encourage you to consider other books in the *Knowing the Bible* series, and to visit www.knowingthebibleseries.org.

Lastly, take a moment to look back through this study. Review the notes that you have written, and the things that you have highlighted or underlined. Reflect again on the key themes that the Lord has been teaching you about himself and about his Word. May these things become a treasure for you throughout your life—this we pray in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.¹

¹ J. I. Packer and Lane T. Dennis, "[Series Preface](#)," in *Ephesians, A 12-Week Study*, ed. Dane C. Ortlund, *Knowing the Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016), 3–96.