

## The Battle Belongs to the Lord

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When I was in college, I was introduced to a song that we sang during the worship portion of our Intervarsity meetings called, "The Battle Belongs to the Lord." Perhaps you are familiar with this song too. The song reminds us that when we use God's armor and God's tactics that we have victory in the battles we fight because of God. This is not the only song that speaks of battles of course. There is the "Battle Hymn of the Republic", which is one of my favorites. There is also the hymn, "Onward Christian Soldiers." All of these hymns remind us of the battles that have been fought, or will be fought, and our role in them.

We all fight battles each and every day. Even those who do not know the Lord recognize that fact. Think of the phrase, "The struggle is real." Everybody uses that phrase. We tend to think that these battles are strictly natural. So, we have a problem with a neighbor and obviously the issue is our neighbor is just weird, it couldn't possibly be more than that. However, that is a very secular understanding of the situation.

The longer we are in Christ, and the more we are in His word, the more we understand that the battles we fight in the natural realm have roots in the spiritual realm. Scripture clearly teaches that there is a war going on in the spiritual realm. Satan and his demons oppose God and are out to destroy mankind. Jesus highlighted this fact throughout His earthly ministry. He was tempted by Satan in the wilderness after His baptism. He cast demons out of many people. Satan influenced the Sanhedrin and the people to have Jesus crucified to end the Lord's influence. But the war was won there by Christ. He willingly allowed himself to be crucified on our behalf so that we could receive forgiveness for our sins and be reconciled to God. He rose from the dead, showing that He has the victory in the war. He ascended into heaven where He intercedes in our battles on our behalf. And He will return to bring us to where He is. Now we who believe are no longer fighting on Satan's side in this war, but rather on God's side.

We have all heard this preached before. But how often do we think about the struggles in this world as rooted in the spiritual? So, getting back to the neighbor we are having trouble with; the issues might be caused by spiritual forces. We might be on opposite sides of the greater spiritual battle between good and evil. One or both might be oppressed in some way by demons. It could be a sin issue in ourselves or in our neighbor. One or both might just be having a series of bad days that are collectively clouding our vision. This is just a small example of a conflict that might be rooted in the spiritual realm.

When we face such conflicts, the important thing to remember is that the larger battle takes place in the spiritual realm. This is especially true of any conflict that calls our faith into question. Paul makes this clear in Ephesians 6:11-12 when he says, "Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places." The words,

'rulers,' 'powers,' 'world forces of this darkness,' and 'spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places' all refer to the demonic forces that obey the devil.

We don't have time to look at those titles in depth, but one example of how spiritual conflict affects the natural can be found in Daniel 10:12-13 and again in verse 20. "Then he said to me, 'Do not be afraid, Daniel, for from the first day that you set your heart on understanding this and on humbling yourself before your God, your words were heard, and I have come in response to your words. But the prince of the kingdom of Persia was withstanding me for twenty-one days; then behold, Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me, for I had been left there with the kings of Persia.'" Spiritual conflict. The angel came to Daniel to give him understanding but was opposed by the prince of Persia and required help from Michael, one of the chief princes, who we know from Revelation to be the archangel, Michael.

Now, verse 20, "Then he said, "Do you understand why I came to you? But I shall now return to fight against the prince of Persia; so I am going forth, and behold, the prince of Greece is about to come." What empire followed Persia? Greece. The things that took place physically with Alexander the Great taking over the lands of the Persian Empire, took place spiritually with the prince of Greece coming after the prince of Persia.

Bethlehem groups, our small group ministry here at St. Barts, are currently studying Ephesians 6:10-20 using the study from Chip Ingram's "Living on the Edge" ministry entitled, "The Invisible War." It's a good study and is sure to get us to think about how to use the armor of God. One of the things Chip points out in the first session is that there is a danger in blaming everything that happens on the demonic. The example he uses is getting a flat tire. We might be tempted to think that we are being attacked by the 'flat tire demons.' An example I would use is I spill cereal all over the floor. We might be tempted to think that the 'spill the cereal' demons are to blame, when in actuality I was just being a klutz.

The point of this passage isn't so much to call attention to the fact that as Christians we are opposed by the devil, but to teach us how to fight this battle with integrity and with love towards the human beings involved. Knowing that our struggle is against the demonic and not the people helps us to be able to react to people with love. The struggle is part of the schemes of the devil. Devil means deceiver. Does God want anyone to be deceived? No! So, when we are persecuted for our faith, the people inflicting the persecution are being deceived.

It is a spiritual battle. To fight we need spiritual armor and spiritual weapons. Paul states what those are using the armor and weapons of a typical Roman soldier as an illustration since everyone in the Roman world would have been familiar with them. Verse 14, "Stand firm therefore, having girded your loins with truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness." Some translations use the phrase, "belt of truth."

The Roman soldier would first tighten his belt around his waist to prevent his clothing from flying around all over the place. It was how he began preparation for the battles ahead. In fact, the Oxford English dictionary states that there are two principal meanings of the phrase, "gird your loins." The first is "to encircle with a belt or girdle," and the second is "to prepare oneself for something challenging." Truth is where we begin with our preparation to obey the command to "stand firm in the Lord." This makes sense for two reasons; first, Jesus said that

he is the truth, which makes it impossible to stand firm in the Lord without the truth. Second the opposite of truth is deception. And since 'devil' means deceiver, it makes sense that to stand in the Lord against the schemes of the devil we need to combat the deception, and to keep from being deceived ourselves. We need to have the truth. We need to have Christ. And it is only in Christ that we have victory in this war.

The breastplate was the piece of armor that covered all of the vital organs. If the vital organs are good, you will be able to continue in the battle. If the vital organs fail, you won't. And whose righteousness is it that we put on? It is not our own righteousness, because as Isaiah wrote in Isaiah 64:6, "And all our righteous deeds are like a filthy garment." Does a soldier wear a filthy garment into battle? No! Do we wear a filthy garment into battle? No! We wear a clean and shiny breastplate. We wear the righteousness of Christ that is only available because He went to the cross and died on our behalf.

It is God's truth, found in Jesus Christ, that we wear as a belt. It is the righteousness of Christ that we wear as a breastplate, protecting all our vital organs from the assaults of the enemy. When Paul says to "stand firm in the Lord" and to wear the belt of truth and breastplate of righteousness, what he is really saying is to remain in Christ. To not shrink back, even though we face difficulty because we are in Christ. It is a command to continue to stand up for the gospel in spite of the attacks of the enemy manifested through persecution. No matter what happens, we are to remain truthful, we are to speak the truth of the gospel, and display righteousness and integrity in our lives by our actions. The world needs to see that we really believe the truth. And that happens when we remain truthful and integrous. That is how we maintain our witness for Christ.

And when we take a stand for Christ, when we remain resolute in our faithfulness to Christ and the gospel, the result is God's peace. Look at verse 15. "And having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace." The gospel is about peace. Not between believers and the world, but between us and God. Because of Christ, we have been reconciled to God. And in addition to being in the truth and having the righteousness of Christ, we get God's peace. In the face of trouble, peace does not come naturally. When things go wrong it does not make sense to have peace. Yet that is what God gives us. True peace is not the absence of trouble or conflict. True peace is peace through the trouble or conflict. It does not make sense to the world. What does the priest say after the post-communion prayer? "And the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in the knowledge and love of God and of His Son Jesus Christ." Peace through the trouble. Peace because of the gospel.

Our resolve to remain in Christ and stand up for the truth and righteousness and experience the peace of God are all components of faith. We seek to remain faithful to God, therefore we stand up for truth and righteousness. Verse 16, "in addition to all, taking up the shield of faith with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one."

A few examples of how this works, practically. The devil shoots an arrow that seeks to strike against our appearance, or our beauty. He tries to get us to doubt that we are beautiful. The faith says that we are fearfully and wonderfully made, that's the truth from God's word,

and that we are made in the image of God, who is beauty, therefore we are beautiful. Poof! Extinguished. Threat neutralized. The devil shoots an arrow that seeks to strike our intelligence. He tries to convince us that we are fools for believing in Christ. Christ is the truth, and everyone who believes the truth will never be put to shame, and only a fool refuses to believe the truth. Therefore, we are intelligent and not fools. Poof! Extinguished. Threat neutralized. The devil shoots a lie, we use the shield of faith to extinguish it.

You see how the armor works together? Each piece works in conjunction with the rest. We believe the truth, put on Christ and his righteousness, experience His perfect peace, and remain faithful. It all works together to protect us from the enemy and results in salvation.

Verse 17, "And take the helmet of salvation." The helmet protects the head, where most of the battles occur. The Roman helmet was unique from those of other armies. The same was true during World War I. You could tell the armies apart, just by looking at their helmets. The French had a mohawk on top of their helmet, the German helmet had a spike on top, the British helmet had a brim all the way around it. Your identity is found in which helmet you wear. The good thing about that is you know the identity of those around you. You don't follow orders from someone that isn't in the same army as you. What distinguishes God's faithful Church from the rest of humanity is the helmet. We wear the helmet of salvation. That is our identity, saved through faith in Christ. We take our orders from God, the author of salvation, not from anyone else. We stand together with those who wear the same helmet. We battle alongside them.

And how do we battle? Not just with the defensive armor, but also with the offensive weapons, and we have been given two. The first is found in the second half of verse 17, "the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God." How did Jesus combat Satan in the wilderness? He used the word of God. "Turn these stones into bread." "No, Man shall not live on bread alone." Satan said, "worship me." Jesus replied, "It is written, 'You shall worship the Lord your God and serve Him only.'" Satan said, "throw yourself down." Jesus replied, "It is said, 'You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.'" That is how the Lord used the Scriptures in combat to stand against the enemy. We also read the Scripture daily, so we know it.

Where is the sword on a soldier? It was on the belt. We cannot know the truth unless God reveals it to us, and he reveals His truth to use in the Scriptures. And when we apply them to our daily lives we stand firm against the devil, and even gain ground as we apply them to more areas of our lives.

We also use the Scriptures in prayer, which is the final weapon Paul mentions. Verse 18, "With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints." We are to be in constant communication with God. Our prayer life is vitally important if we are to stand against the devil. Remember that prayer is both speaking with and listening to God. And when we listen and obey the Lord, we become more effective as soldiers of Christ.

There is a lot more that can be said about this, but I don't want to spoil the study for those involved with Bethlehem groups. However, the bottom line is to stand against the devil, we not only need to understand and accept the Gospel, but also need to be in God's word and

in communication with Him through prayer. We need both parts. That is how we can be effective in the battles we fight. That is how we can be effective witnesses for Christ. That is how we stand firm against the schemes of the devil.

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen!