

# FOUNDERS JOURNAL

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BE STRONG  
IN THE LORD





# The Founders Journal



Committed to historic Baptist principles

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Issue 92

Spring 2013

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**Be Strong  
In the Lord**

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# The Founders Journal

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# Be Strong in the Lord

## *Editorial Introduction*

*Ken Puls*

Scripture makes it clear that we are in the midst of a battle. Everyday and on many fronts we face opposition and assault. We have a real enemy and the stakes are high. Peter tells us:

Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour (1 Peter 5:8).

It is important in the battle that we learn to recognize the enemy and his schemes against us, and learn to lay hold of the provisions that God has given us to stand and fight. Near the end of Ephesians, Paul speaks to the reality of spiritual warfare. He identifies the enemy and reminds us of all God has given us in Christ to stand against him:

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. 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 (Ephesians 6:10–12).

This issue of *The Founder Journal* focuses on unpacking these verses from Ephesians 6 and readying God's people for the daily, unrelenting spiritual battles we will face as we seek to live for Christ in a fallen world.

The first two articles are an Introduction and Chapter One: "Be Strong in the Lord" from a forthcoming book by Rob Ventura and Brian Borgman entitled: *Spiritual Warfare: A Biblical and Balanced Perspective* (scheduled for publication by Reformation Heritage Books, 2014). The last two articles, "The Fight of Your Life" and "Know Your Enemy: Evil Rulers in a Holy War," are from a study on Spiritual Warfare by Tom Ascol.

# Spiritual Warfare

## *A Biblical and Balanced Perspective*

*Brian Borgman and Rob Ventura*

The following article is taken from the Introduction and Chapter One of the forthcoming book, *Spiritual Warfare: A Biblical and Balanced Perspective*, (Grand Rapids: MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2014) and is printed here with permission from the publisher. For more information, see [www.heritagebooks.org](http://www.heritagebooks.org)

### INTRODUCTION

#### One Side of the Horse or the Other

Living the Christian life is not merely about mastering one truth or even a set of principles. Living the Christian life is learning to think and act biblically. There are certain truths that we must be reminded of frequently, lest we become unbalanced or myopic in our view of the Christian life. One such truth is that we are in a war of the most serious nature and that war is not with flesh and blood, but against spiritual forces of darkness. This vital truth is to shape and inform our worldview. Unfortunately, some almost completely ignore the reality of this war. Others, however, seem to give it far more attention than Scripture does. There is certainly a danger in both extremes. C. S. Lewis makes precisely this point in his famous work, *The Screwtape Letters*:

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. They themselves are equally pleased by both errors and hail a materialist or a magician with the same delight.<sup>1</sup>

Along these same lines, Martin Luther once noted that Christians are often like a drunk trying to get on his horse. First, he falls off one side, only to fall off the other the next time. Given the stakes in this war, we cannot afford to fall off either.

Since the 18th-century Enlightenment, the worldview of the West has grown increasingly closed to the supernatural. Consequently, many today deny a world that God governs and where

the devil and his demons are our enemies. This worldview is called “naturalism.” In this view, everything has a natural cause and nothing exists beyond what we can see with our own eyes. The biblical worldview however, clashes with naturalism and sees not only a sovereign God who rules over His world and the events of our lives, but it also acknowledges Satan, and demons. As Christians, we might have a biblical worldview in certain areas, but perhaps our perspective is more naturalistic than we realize.

In contrast, the other extreme establishes spiritual warfare as the lens through which we perceive everything. In this view, virtually everything that happens is attributed to demonic activity and spiritual warfare. This worldview is built more upon fictional books and movies than the Bible. David Powlison notes, “A great deal of fiction, superstition, fantasy, nonsense, nuttiness, and downright heresy flourishes in the church under the guise of ‘spiritual warfare’ in our time.”<sup>2</sup>

Some false teachings in this regard may include demon-possessed Christians,<sup>3</sup> formulas for exorcisms, binding the devil,<sup>4</sup> rebuking demons, mapping their physical location, and the list could go on. Many of these emphases have little or no biblical foundation. What they all lack is solid scriptural footing, and while many throughout the ages have attempted to build doctrinal skyscrapers on such chicken coop foundations, these structures inevitably fall under their own weight. The end is like that of the man who builds his house upon the sand. The personal ramifications are tragic.

Doctrinal excesses like those just described often lead to an imbalance in the Christian life that magnifies one aspect of biblical truth to the minimization or exclusion of the rest of Scripture. Such biblical truths as the believer’s responsibility for his own actions, remaining sin in the Christian, the character-changing power of the Spirit, and the centrality of the Gospel are often eclipsed or ignored. The danger here is not a neglect of spiritual warfare, but a truncated view of the Christian life, in which Satan and demons are wrongly blamed for every problem we face. In light of these two extremes, if we would live sound and stable lives as believers, then we desperately need a biblically balanced understanding of spiritual realities and the spiritual warfare to which God calls us; anything else will be disastrous.

## The Biblical History of Spiritual Warfare

From the beginning of human history, there has been spiritual warfare. What happened in the Garden was the inception of the battle.<sup>5</sup> Satan twisted God’s Word, challenged His authority, and lied to our first parents. After the fall, God promised continued warfare and ultimate victory. In speaking to the serpent God said, “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel” (Genesis 3:15).<sup>6</sup>

There would be a struggle between the serpent and the woman. That struggle would continue with the seed of the serpent and the seed of the woman. Finally, the serpent would have a bruised head (a fatal blow) and the seed of the woman would be injured, but not permanently



(bruised heel). Theologians call this the *protoeuangelion*, “the first gospel.” The seed of the woman is ultimately Jesus Christ. Although there would be a battle between those who follow Satan (e.g., Cain) and those who follow God (e.g., Abel, 1 John 3:10–12) and there would be a battle between Satan and those who follow Jesus (1 Peter 5:8; Revelation 12:6–17), the ultimate battle would be between Satan and Christ (Revelation 12:1–5). Part of Christ’s mission when he came to earth was to overthrow the work and kingdom of darkness.

But Jesus knew their thoughts, and said to them: “Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation, and every city or house divided against itself will not stand. If Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself. How then will his kingdom stand? And if I cast out demons by Beelzebub, by whom do your sons cast *them* out? Therefore they shall be your judges. But if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, surely the kingdom of God has come upon you. Or how can one enter a strong man’s house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man? And then he will plunder his house” (Matthew 12:25–29).

Every time Jesus cast out a demon, every time He healed the sick or raised the dead, He was assaulting the kingdom of darkness. Jesus was entering the strong man’s house, binding him with His superior strength and plundering his stolen property. This was seen for example when He freed the woman who had a demonically induced disability for eighteen years. The synagogue ruler objected to the healing since it was on the Sabbath, however Jesus responded by saying, “Ought not this woman, being a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan has bound—think of it—for eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the Sabbath?” (Luke 13:16).

Jesus’ ultimate overthrow of Satan, however, took place at the cross. Certainly, the work of Jesus on the cross is multifaceted. There are so many dimensions to His redemptive work that we cannot narrow it to one truth. However, one aspect that we cannot overlook is that Jesus at the cross was stripping Satan of his power and performing the ultimate rescue operation.

“Now My soul is troubled, and what shall I say? ‘Father, save Me from this hour’? But for this purpose I came to this hour. Father, glorify Your name.”

Then a voice came from heaven, *saying*, “I have both glorified *it* and will glorify *it* again.” Therefore the people who stood by and heard *it* said that it had thundered. Others said, “An angel has spoken to Him.” Jesus answered and said, “This voice did not come because of Me, but for your sake. Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be cast out” (John. 12:27–31).

The cross was an act of judgment evicting the ruler of this world. Years later, the apostle John would reflect on the incarnation and death of Jesus with these words, “For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil” (1 John 3:8). According to John, this means that part of our salvation experience is deliverance from Satan’s power and kingdom.

Having disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it (Colossians 2:15).

Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage (Hebrews 2:14–15).

Now, as followers of Jesus, we live in the tension of the “already” and the “not yet.”<sup>7</sup> That is, we have been delivered from Satan’s dominion through the finished work of Christ, yet we still battle. Part of our struggle in this life is that we must fight against Satan and his forces in the world. One day our victory in Christ will be fully realized: “The God of peace will crush Satan under your feet shortly” (Romans 16:20). But until that time, we must keep in mind the following truths: We are wrestling not against human forces but spiritual powers (Ephesians 6:12). We need therefore, to be alert because our enemy the devil is seeking to devour us (1 Peter 5:8).

How we think about this battle is critical to how we fight it. The significance of Ephesians 6:10–20, which is the basis of this book, cannot be emphasized enough. This classic passage gives us a biblical framework for spiritual warfare. On the one hand, it frees us from the misconception of a closed, naturalistic worldview that understates our spiritual battle. On the other hand, it provides us with a sane approach that avoids overstating it as well. This text gives us a perspective on spiritual warfare that can dramatically shape our daily life, showing us how to rightly engage in this great war.

Our approach in this book is straightforward. We will present what Paul says about fighting this fight in Ephesians 6:10–20. While doing this we will explain each piece of the armor, and practically apply its truth to our lives. Our primary focus will not be Satan, but Christ, who is the Victor over all.

## CHAPTER ONE: BE STRONG IN THE LORD

“Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might” (Ephesians 6:10).

The first step in successfully waging spiritual warfare is to recognize our own weakness and the Lord’s great strength. Self-sufficiency is a killer in this battle; dependence on Christ is crucial. In Ephesians 6:10–20 we are repeatedly reminded of our insufficiency for this fight; we need strength (v. 10), weaponry (vv. 11; 14–17), and lines of communication with our Savior for aid (vv. 18–20). These means are external to us. Without them, we have inadequate strength to stand against principalities, powers, the rulers of the darkness, and spiritual hosts of wickedness. Left to ourselves we would soon crumble in the heat of battle. We are simply deficient for the task. But God loves His people and never leaves us defenseless.

As we now consider Ephesians 6:10, attempting to clarify its meaning and apply its truths, let's see this verse in its overall context. The book of Ephesians divides nicely into two parts. The first is a doctrinal foundation, and the second builds on that foundation with practical application of those doctrines to the life of the church. This follows Paul's typical pattern in his writings: the indicative (i.e., a declaration of what God has done in Christ) followed by the imperative (i.e., what we are to do in response). Paul's practical application begins in Ephesians 4:1 and reaches its climax in 6:10–20, with a cosmic perspective on the Christian life with the believer engaged in spiritual warfare.

As Paul draws this letter to a close, he begins this new section with the word *finally*. We should find it interesting that the crowning section of the epistle, this grand finale, focuses on spiritual warfare. It is significant that the apostle cannot end this letter, which is filled with so many magnificent truths, without instructing his readers about the great ongoing threat that they face. In order for us to understand why he ends on this note, we need to know something about the Ephesians and their city, Ephesus.

## Ephesus, the Spiritual City

Ephesus was a thriving metropolis on the west coast of Asia Minor, ranking alongside Rome and Alexandria as a major Roman city. According to legend, the city was founded by Amazons (i.e., giant female warriors). This legend was well known and influenced Ephesian culture religiously and socially. The population of Ephesus is estimated at over 250,000 in the first century, making it the third largest city in the Empire. It was an advanced city, boasting an amphitheater that held 24,000 people, baths, gymnasiums, and a medical training school. It also hosted the *Koina Asias*, the common games of Asia. Beyond its sophistication and technological development, it was also a spiritual city. The chief religion of Ephesus was the cult of Artemis Ephesia (its Greek name) or Diana of Ephesus (its Roman name).

The Artemis cult was predominant throughout Asia Minor. The *Artemosian* was the temple that housed the multi-breasted figure of Artemis. Constructed of marble, the building measured 93,500 square feet. It stood with 127 marble columns, which were each 60 feet high. The temple was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. "The worshipers of Artemis extolled their goddess as supreme in power, a 'cosmic' power that was believed to be superior to that of any other deity, astrological fate, and evil spirits."<sup>8</sup>

But beyond this cult, Ephesus was the center for magical practices. Bruce Metzger once noted, "Of all ancient Greco-Roman cities, Ephesus was by far the most hospitable to magicians, sorcerers, and charlatans of all sorts."<sup>9</sup> The famous Ephesia Grammata, the "Ephesian letters" were words written on amulets, which the people used as charms believing that they brought protection from the powers (evil spirits) or gave them help in times of distress or need. Furthermore, Jewish involvement in power and magic was pervasive.<sup>10</sup>

When Paul arrived in Ephesus, an event recorded in Acts 19, he found a metropolis trafficking in the occult and the powers of darkness. The Ephesians lived with a worldview that was totally open to supernaturalism. Magic, demons and spiritual power were very real to them and many were involved in occult practices. Paul ministered there for three months in the synagogue and two years in the School of Tyrannus (Acts 19:8–10). During this time, the Word of the Lord was shining forth in Ephesian darkness. Many were coming to faith in Jesus and repenting of their sorceries.

And many who had believed came confessing and telling their deeds. Also, many of those who had practiced magic brought their books together and burned them in the sight of all. And they counted up the value of them, and it totaled fifty thousand pieces of silver. So the word of the Lord grew mightily and prevailed (Acts 19:18–20).

The impact of the Gospel in Ephesus began to have a serious impact on the religious scene. Ephesus was so deeply committed to Diana, both religiously and commercially, that when people were converted and stopped buying idols, a riot broke out due to the loss of revenue (Acts 19:21–41). This riot happened just as Paul was planning to leave Ephesus. By this time he had ministered three years among these Ephesians believers (Acts 20:31). He knew them well and he knew their struggles. Since it is common for believers to deeply regret their wicked lives before Christ rescued them, it could be that some converted Ephesians were being haunted by their occultist past. Perhaps they even lived in fear of the spiritual powers with which they had been acquainted.

As we come to Ephesians 6:10–20, we see that the apostle does not dismiss the realities of the powers like a parent reassuring a child that there really is not a monster under his bed. Rather, he validates spiritual realities and equips them for the battle at hand.

## Summary Exhortation: Be Strong in the Lord

The command is literally, “be strengthened, be made powerful.” There is good reason for Paul to begin this section of his letter this way. As soldiers in Jesus’ army, we will face many battles and hardships on our way to heaven. At times, we will feel besieged and utterly exhausted. We will keenly feel temptation and suffer battle wounds. Therefore, we must be provoked to pursue spiritual strength and power. A feeble or cowardly disposition in spiritual warfare will be detrimental to our success. It will cause us to regress. In light of this, Paul calls us to be mighty men. He wants us to enter this battle courageously and with great hope. This call to be strong is a constant one in Scripture. As Joshua was commanded to “be strong and of good courage” (Joshua 1:6, 7, 9), and David “strengthened himself in the Lord his God” (1 Samuel 30:6), we must do the same.<sup>11</sup> If we would be triumphant in our walk with Christ as we engage in spiritual battle, we must seriously heed this exhortation.

Paul’s charge to “be strong” is in the passive voice, which means that this empowering is something that is done to us from an outside source. This tells us that we dare not look to



ourselves for strength in this combat. Spiritual stamina for spiritual battle is not drawn from within or by flexing our muscles from without. Rather, we are specifically called to be “strong in the Lord.” Here is where our strength is to be found—in the Son of God Himself. What a glorious thought! Paul points us to Christ as the all-sufficient source of our strength, who by His mighty power gives us all that we lack. As believers we can do all things through Christ who strengthens us (Philippians 4:13).

But there are other nuggets of truth in these words. The command “be strong” is also in the present tense indicating that in Christ we have constant, on-going supplies of all that we need for spiritual warfare. Jesus is our continual refuge and strength, our very present help in trouble (Psalm 46:1). Yet what does it mean to be strong in the Lord? In summary, it means to maintain an ongoing awareness that the Lord Jesus has superabundant stores of strength for us, and in realizing this, we draw from that strength continuously. The idea is that by virtue of our union with Christ we utilize the strength that is inherent in Him. Our Lord has all that we need for warfare. Though we are weak, He is strong, and He perfects His strength in our weakness (2 Corinthians 12:9). Therefore, as the battle rages on, we are to look to Him for help; for His “divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness” (2 Peter 1:3).

Paul consistently reminded the Ephesians that the power of God in Christ was available to them, so it should not be surprising that he now calls them to make good use of it. This power is nothing less than the power of Jesus Christ demonstrated in His resurrection and exaltation (Ephesians 1:19–20). Since we have been raised with Him and are seated with Him (Ephesians 2:6), that power is ours in Him.

We do well to pause and ask ourselves if we are persuaded of this fact concerning our Lord. How we view Him will be a major factor in our regularly going to Him to “obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need” (Hebrews 4:16). Never forget that Jesus is no longer the suffering servant of Jehovah dying on the cross. Rather, He is the exalted king of heaven and earth reigning on high! Jesus is the risen head of the church who fills “all in all” (Ephesians 1:23). He is the One in whom dwells “all the fullness of the Godhead bodily” (Colossians 2:9). These truths about Christ are not meant to be filed away in some dusty theological cabinet. Instead, they are to prod us to action. This knowledge concerning our Lord is to drive us to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think. So avail yourself of this power in Christ (Ephesians 3:20–21). Daily cast all your cares upon Him, for He cares for you (1 Peter 5:7).

The phrase in v. 10b “and in the power of His might” amplifies and expands what it means to be strong in Lord. The combination of these words takes us back to Ephesians 1:18–23.

... the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated *Him* at His right hand in the heavenly *places*, far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only

in this age but also in that which is to come. And He put all *things* under His feet, and gave Him *to be* head over all *things* to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all (Ephesians 1:18–23).

Here we see Christ's unrivaled power in His resurrection, ascension, and exaltation. No other power compares with it, and Christ is its great focal point. This divine power was exerted by the Father, in raising Christ from the dead, thereby destroying the inferior power of death. This divine power was subsequently exerted in Christ's enthronement (Ephesians 1:20), resulting in Christ being seated at the Father's "right hand in the heavenly places." The right hand is the place of honor, power, victory and authority. Christ Himself is far above "all principality and power and might and dominion." These terms refer to evil spiritual powers, to which Paul refers in chapter 6:12. Christ is also surpassingly above "every name that is named." Among other things, Paul's mention of "every name that is named" includes those names found in the incantations invoked by the unsaved Ephesians to harness spiritual powers. The central message of the apostle here is clear: Christ is higher than and far superior to all powers that exist, including every demonic and spiritual power!

Christ as the exalted and enthroned Lord rules over all. The entire spirit world is subject to Him, "not only in this age but also in that which is to come." Jesus inaugurated the age to come at His first advent. He will consummate the age to come at His second advent. Christ will reign in the age to come. However, He presently reigns in this age. Murray Harris memorably says, "The resurrection proclaims 'He lives—and that forever'; the exaltation proclaims 'He reigns—and that forever.'"

Jesus' resurrection, exaltation, and reign demonstrate the surpassing power vested in His person, and this power is *already* ours in Him. This is what the apostle says he wants us to be aware of in Ephesians 1:18–23. This omnipotent power conquers all the spiritual forces of every age. There is nothing lacking in it. This power alone will see us through our battles with the devil.

If we have been injured in spiritual battle, let us stop and ask ourselves if we have been relying on the power we possess in Christ. In and of ourselves, we are not fit for this great fight. We do not have the necessary strength or skill to oppose Satan and spiritual forces. We are not as strong as we think; sadly, our experience confirms this. Nevertheless, in spiritual union with the risen Lord, His infinite power and strength are ours by faith. Our passage calls us then to be humble, dependent warriors constantly going to Christ, the Captain of our salvation for this mighty power. It calls us to recognize our native deficiency and to see His great spiritual sufficiency. This is the essence of Paul's opening exhortation. This is the heart of it. Charles Hodge put it this way,

He, therefore, who rushes into this conflict without thinking of Christ, without putting his trust in him, and without continually looking to him for strength, and regarding himself as a member of his body, deriving all life and vigour from him, is *demented*... When we are weak, then are we strong. When most empty of self, we are most full of God.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> C.S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters* (Uhrichville, OH: Barbour and Company, Inc. no date), in preface.

<sup>2</sup> David Powlison, *Power Encounters: Reclaiming Spiritual Warfare* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1995), 13.

<sup>3</sup> Appendix Two will address this issue, “Can a Christian be Demon Possessed?”

<sup>4</sup> If we could bind the devil, why would the Apostle Paul call us to put on the whole armor of God that we may be able to stand against him?

<sup>5</sup> The authors are fully aware that such passages as Isaiah 14:12–14, Ezekiel 28:12–19, Luke 10:18, Jude 6 and Revelation 12:9–12 seem to indicate that the devil was originally made a perfect angelic being who dwelt in heaven with God and yet was removed from this lofty estate with a third of his angels, because of their rebellion. For further discussion on this topic, we point the reader to Wayne Grudem’s *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994), 412–414.

<sup>6</sup> All Scripture references are from the New King James Version.

<sup>7</sup> This topic will be discussed in more detail in chapter two.

<sup>8</sup> Clinton E. Arnold, *Ephesians Power and Magic: The Concept of Power in Ephesians in Light of its Historical Context* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1989, 1992), 39.

<sup>9</sup> Quoted in Clinton E. Arnold’s, *Ephesians Power and Magic*, 14.

<sup>10</sup> Dr. Clint Arnold, a leading New Testament scholar and expert on Ephesian spirituality, has detailed these practices. Arnold’s *Ephesians Power and Magic* is his academic work on the subject, *Powers of Darkness* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1992) is his popular level treatment of the subject.

<sup>11</sup> In addition to these references also see 1 Corinthians 16:13 and 2 Timothy 2:1.

<sup>12</sup> Charles Hodge, *Ephesians* (1856; reprint, Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1991), 275–276.

# News

## *2013 Founders Fellowship Breakfast*

Make plans to join us at the Founders Fellowship Breakfast at the SBC in Houston, Texas this June. Voddie Baucham, Pastor of Preaching at the Grace Family Baptist Church in Spring, TX, will be speaking on “The Reformation We Need.” The breakfast will be at 6:30 AM on Tuesday, June 11, 2013 in Room 353 (D,E,F), Level 3 of the the George R. Brown Convention Center.

Tickets are \$25 and include breakfast.

For more information or to register online, visit our website:

[wwwFOUNDERS.org/conferences/ffb/](http://wwwFOUNDERS.org/conferences/ffb/)

## *Coming this Summer from Founders Press eBooks*

In 1996 Founders Press was launched with the modest offering of a small booklet entitled, *From the Protestant Reformation to the Southern Baptist Convention: What Hath Geneva to Do with Nashville?* The purpose of the booklet was to help argue the historical point that Southern Baptists have much in common with other Protestant heirs of the Reformation. Specifically, the concern was to demonstrate that the doctrinal heritage of the SBC is firmly entrenched in that Reformed theology known as the “doctrines of grace.”

This summer Founders Press will release an updated and expanded edition of this booklet. It will be available first as an eBook through our online store. Check our website and eNewsletter this summer for more information.

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# The Fight of Your Life

## *Ephesians 6:10–12*

*Tom Ascol*

### INTRODUCTION

Every Christian is a soldier. If you are a follower of Jesus Christ, then you are engaged in spiritual warfare. How are you doing in the fight? Are you standing firm, or losing ground? Are you even aware of the battle? Too many Christians today are living as spiritual pacifists, conscientious objectors in this battle-to-the-death with principalities and powers in high places. Are you one of them?

Do you think of your Christian life in these terms? Do you realize that Satan and his forces are aligned against you, plotting to destroy you every day of your life? If not, then you have been duped, spiritually injured in a conflict about which you have been dangerously ignorant.

Do you feel like you are spinning your wheels spiritually? Maybe the reason is precisely because you have forgotten that you are in a war. Your enemy would be delighted to see you expend all of your energy on a treadmill that gets you nowhere. That is one of his subtle military strategies.

The war in which we are engaged will never have a cease-fire or offer a peace treaty in this life. It will end only when your Commander calls for you or comes for you.

The Bible directs most of its teachings on spiritual warfare to Christians. Unbelievers, however, are also in this war. But they are on the opposite side. If you are not trusting Jesus Christ as Lord then you are fighting against God in your unbelief.

He calls you to surrender to Him today. He offers you peace and forgiveness. Humble yourself before Him. Ask Him for mercy. Jesus Christ has died for rebel sinners like you and me. Trust in Him today and you will find peace with your God.

This war that is presently raging is more deadly, more intense and more important than any that has ever played out on the battlefields of this world. The stakes are greater and the casualties are higher than they were for either of the World Wars of the twentieth century. It is more brutal than anything that has been witnessed in Afghanistan or Iraq. The casualties in this war have eternal consequences.

The stage on which this war is fought is not some foreign battlefield. Rather, it is taking place in the soul of every man, woman and child. It is a spiritual warfare, and the whole world is

engaged in it. There are no neutral parties—everyone is enlisted on one side or the other—either for God, against Satan, or (whether consciously or not) for Satan, against God. There is no neutral ground.

## THE CALL TO BE A CHRISTIAN IS A CALL TO FIGHT

Failure to understand and think seriously about spiritual warfare has caused many believers to become disillusioned and frustrated in their efforts to live the Christian life. Have you ever struggled with thoughts like these?

“Why is it so hard for me to pray?”

“Why do I give in to temptations?”

“Why can’t I get along with my husband/wife?”

“Why is this sin so enticing to me?”

“Why don’t I like to be in church?”

“Why isn’t the Bible more important to me?”

“Why am I so afraid to witness?”

“Why do I sometimes think such horrible thoughts?”

Why do Christians have such struggles? Because, if you are a follower of Jesus Christ, you have an enemy who hates you and who is intent on destroying your spiritual life. And, this enemy is powerful, wicked and cunning. He dogs your every step and through various disguises and subtle strategies, he is constantly trying to ruin you.

Now, this may not sound very positive, and indeed, some people might find it strange to hear the Christian life described as a fight. But, the fact of the matter is this: The Bible portrays Christianity in precisely this way. Consider these words of the apostle Paul in Ephesians 6:10–12,

“Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual [hosts] of wickedness in the heavenly [places].”

At first glance, these verses almost seem out of place. Immediately before them Paul has been writing about what it means for Christians to live in the fullness of the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 5:18–6:9). For a wife it means living submissively and respectfully with her husband (5:22–24, 33). For a husband it means living sacrificially and lovingly with his wife (5:25–29, 33). For a child it means living respectfully and obediently with his or her parent (6:1–3). For a parent it means gently and thoroughly training one’s children (6:4). For employees it means working honestly and

diligently for their employers (6:5–8). For employers it means treating employees kindly and with justice (6:9).

The kind of world that Paul is describing is wonderful! If every Christian lived like this all the time, what a difference it would make in our relationships! Why, then, does Paul shift gears so dramatically? Why does he leave the lofty ideals concerning how Christians are to relate to people in the Spirit of Christ and so abruptly introduce the language of warfare? This does seem rather startling and out of place, doesn't it?

Yes, it does; until you begin to understand the Christian life the way that Paul understood it. He never lost sight of one important fact that many modern Christians too easily forget: **the principles of Christian living will not be successfully implemented without a fight.** The call to follow Christ is a call to war. When a person becomes a Christian, he enlists in a fight—the fight of his life.

## For the fight of your life you need supernatural strength (10)

This is what the Scripture means when it says, “Be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might.” In and of ourselves, we are not up to the fight. You do not have the natural strength to withstand the enemies of your soul.

This has been true from the beginning of time. Have you ever asked yourself the question, “Where did this war begin?” Its origin is in many ways like that of World War II. How did the United States get involved in that war? On December 7, 1941 Japanese warplanes bombed the US military base at Pearl Harbor. On the next day, the United States government formally responded with a declaration of war on Japan.

The third chapter of Genesis records the origin of our spiritual war. God's formal declaration of war is found in verse 15 as He speaks to Satan:

“I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel.”

With these words God drew very clear lines of opposition. Satan and his forces (his “seed”) are on one side. The Lord Jesus (“her Seed”) and His forces are on the other. Every man, woman and child without exception is on one side or the other.

God's declaration of war followed Satan's terrorist attack on Adam and Eve. Genesis 3:1–6 describes that tragic event. Through very shrewd deception Satan was able to entice the first human couple to rebel against their Creator. Even though they were without sin, the devil was too much for them.

Human strength is simply not adequate to withstand the attacks of Satan. You may be strong enough to win some physical, emotional or intellectual battles, but you will never win a spiritual

battle in your own strength! Martin Luther's hymn says it well: "Did we in our own strength confide, our fighting would be losing."

The situation, however, is not hopeless. There is supernatural strength available. Where is it found? "In the Lord." This is precisely Paul's point when he encourages us to "be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might." He is saying, "Let the strength of the Lord continually be poured into you." This reminds us of another statement by Paul which is found in Philippians 4:13, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." With Christ's strength being poured into him, a Christian can do all things.

Paul is obviously thinking about the supernatural power of God that is at work in the life of every born-again Christian. The three words that he uses in Ephesians 6:10 (strength, power, might) have their roots in three words that he previously used to describe God's work of raising Jesus from the dead (Ephesians 1:19–20). In other words, Paul is reminding us that the strength and might of the Lord on which we are to draw is nothing less than resurrection power!

Through faith, the believer is being indwelt by the resurrected Lord. His power—resurrection power—is available to us. How does a Christian access this power? How can we obey this command to "be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might"?

While the Christian life can never be reduced to a set of simplistic "ABC's" or mechanical formulas, there are three biblical steps that must be followed in order to be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might.

First, you must understand. Recognize that through faith you are united with the resurrected Christ who now indwells you. He is in you with all His strength and power. Christians often lose sight of this amazing reality. Therefore, Paul said that he prayed that his fellow-believers would come to know in a deep, personal, abiding way, "what is the exceeding greatness of His [God's] power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead" (Ephesians 1:19–20). One of the greatest needs that every believer has is simply this: to understand that God's immeasurable power—resurrection power—has been given to us in Jesus Christ.

Once this amazing fact begins to sink in, the next step to accessing the power of God's might involves faith. You must believe. Accept this amazing fact ("Jesus Christ lives in me") with all of its biblical implications (therefore, "I can do all things through Christ"). The challenges that you face, the responsibilities that God calls you to take up are indeed doable. You are not equal to them in your own strength, but through Christ, you most definitely can meet and fulfill them.

After understanding and believing comes action. You must act. Start obeying God's will. Commit yourself to living by God's Word. Read the Bible to discover God's will for your life (Ephesians 5:17). Once it is clear to you in any area, move forward to obey it, even if it looks impossible at the outset. Remember—if you have been born again by the power of the Holy Spirit, you have the resurrected Christ living in you and through Him you *can* fulfill God's will.

For example, a wife reads in the Bible that it is God's will for her to be submissive to her husband (Ephesians 5:22) and to respect him (Ephesians 5:33). "But it is so *hard*," she reasons.



Her husband often does not deserve her respect and he makes it very difficult for her to maintain a submissive attitude. What should she do? Before attempting anything she must recognize that *this is spiritual warfare!* War is always difficult.

In order for a wife to fulfill her God-given responsibilities to her husband, she must “be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might.” She must understand that the risen Christ indwells her. She must believe that through Him, she can do all things—including maintaining a submissive and respectful attitude toward her husband. Then, with confidence in the Lord, she must begin acting in submissive and respectful ways toward her husband. By doing so, she is taking up the fight.

What about husbands? The Bible is clear: “Love your wife as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for it” (Ephesians 5:25). “But sometimes I don’t feel like loving her. She can make it so hard on me!”

Guess what, husband? You are in a fight! Understand who you are in Christ, and who Christ is in you. Because you are joined to Him through faith, the same power that raised Him from the dead is available to you. Draw on this power by believing that, through Christ, you can find strength to love your wife, even when she seems unlovely. Then begin to treat her the way that Christ treats the church. Provide for her. Give her gifts. Protect her. Make sacrifices for her. Lead her. Help her understand. This is vital, and it is a part of the normal course of spiritual warfare for Christian husbands.

It works the same way for children. The Bible says to them: “Obey your parents. Honor your father and your mother” (Ephesians 6:1–3). Most children find this to be very difficult at times. “My parents can be so frustrating! They don’t understand what it’s like for me.”

What is a Christian young person to do? He or she must recognize that this is spiritual warfare. Like every other Christian in every other relationship, Christian young people must *understand* (that they have resurrection power through Christ), *believe* (that they can obey and honor their parents through Christ’s strength) and *act* (be obedient and honoring to their parents). This is the battle that children and young people must fight.

Parents must apply this teaching in the very same way. Many Christian parents find themselves struggling in their efforts to raise their children. It takes patience, strength, understanding, consistency and discipline. Yet, it is not uncommon for parents to find that these inward graces are occasionally in short supply. It is hard to raise children God’s way. In fact, it is a battle.

So, how should parents take up the fight? Understand. Believe. Act. The fundamental responsibilities of parents are all wrapped up in Ephesians 6:4, “Do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord.”

Parents (and not churches, youth groups, Sunday Schools or other schools) are responsible to bring their children up. And, they are to do it by employing the two irreplaceable tools that God has entrusted to them: 1) discipline (from the word, “training”), which includes the use of the rod

of correction, and 2) instruction (from the word, “admonition”), which involves intentional communication.

Once this responsibility is understood, parents must believe that, through the strength of the Lord Jesus Christ, they can indeed fulfill it. Then, they must purposefully and decisively set themselves to the task of obeying the Scripture in what it says about child training.

Regardless of the situation in which you find yourself, the Christian life is a fight. The only way you will ever fight successfully is to remember who you are and, more importantly, remember Whose you are. Be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might.

## For the fight of your life you need supernatural protection (11)

“Put on the whole armor of God that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.” In this verse Paul introduces a theme on which he will elaborate in verses 13–18. To engage in spiritual warfare effectively, Christians must protect themselves with the supernatural armor that our Lord provides.

The nature of the enemy dictates the kind of armor that we need. A Blackhawk helicopter is not needed to withstand the attacks of a single warrior with only a homemade spear. If, however, your enemy has a battalion of crack troops who are armed with surface-to-air missiles, then you would need far more than a single helicopter to survive.

Christians face a formidable foe. In Ephesians 6:11 he is called “the devil,” which means, “slanderer.” He constantly misrepresents Christians to God and God to Christians. All by himself the devil stands as an imposing opponent, but the Bible teaches that he is not alone in his battle against the believer.

In addition to Satan, Christians must also fight against “the flesh” (the sin that, despite our conversion, remains within us until we leave this life) and “the world” (the godless values and philosophies that predominate our culture). This unholy trinity is set to undermine the work of God in the believer’s life. And Satan is the personal strategist for them all.

He uses your sinful tendencies to tempt you in hopes that he might derail your spiritual growth. Paul warns against this specifically when he admonishes those who tend to seethe with anger to “not give the devil a foothold” (Ephesians 4:27, NIV). Anger that is ignored and not put to death becomes an invitation for satanic activity in one’s life, resulting in untold injury to one’s self and others.

The devil also uses this fallen world’s attractions to entice Christians away from their first love. In *Pilgrim’s Progress* John Bunyan demonstrates how this works when he describes Christian and Faithful’s journey through the city of “Vanity Fair.” The devil and his companions, recognizing that the path to the Celestial City runs right through the town of Vanity, set up a fair along the road. All kinds of enticing merchandise was sold at this fair, with the sole purpose of

tempting pilgrim's to leave the path of life. Beelzebub, Bunyan notes, is the "chief Lord" of this fair.

The devil tries to ensnare believers by making the world and its enticements appear far more valuable than they are. Wealth, status, ease, honor and blessings of every kind, along with sinful pleasures and immoral activities are attractively displayed to ensnare travelers through the city. Anything and everything that would distract a person from loving Jesus Christ supremely can become weapons that the devil cunningly uses to ensnare believers. We need supernatural armor to stand against this array of enemies.

We also need it because of the nature of the fight that characterizes spiritual warfare. In verses 11 and 12 Paul mixes the language of the battlefield ("armor") with that of the gymnasium ("wrestle"). The picture that emerges is one of hand-to-hand combat. The fight of your life isn't fought with surgically precise, launched-from-a-distance smart bombs. It is guerilla warfare—the kind that was required in the mountains of Afghanistan during the hunt for Osama bin Laden. It is personal and intense. In this fight, bayonets are as important as bullets.

In order to fight successfully you need more than your own resources. You need the armor that God supplies. Many believers make a grave mistake at just this point. Because they are nice people, easy to get along with, reasonably intelligent or experienced, they are tempted to think that they can live the Christian life in their own strength. But natural gifts and abilities are inadequate for spiritual warfare.

A supernatural enemy calls for supernatural power in order to withstand him successfully. In Ephesians 6:12 Paul describes our enemy in plural terms. "Powers," "rulers of the darkness," "spiritual wickedness in high places"—these are the believer's enemies. This is the description of Satan and his forces.

Some see in this description a very strict hierarchy in the demonic realm. While I am unconvinced by such arguments Paul's elaborate language does suggest that we are up against a comprehensive array of spiritually wicked and powerful forces under the rule of Satan. The Scripture has much to say about the nature of our spiritual enemy, but notice the three descriptions that Paul gives us in these verses.

Satan and his forces are powerful. Paul refers to them as "principalities and powers." Literally, he calls them "world rulers." By God's permission they wield power and authority over the earth. There is a significant measure of power that God allows our spiritual enemies to exercise and believers do well never to forget that fact.

Secondly, Satan and his minions are wicked. They are rulers of "darkness" and are called "spiritual hosts of wickedness." The devil is pure evil, which is hard for us to conceive. He has no moral code, no principles of conduct. He is unscrupulous and malicious, determined to carry out his destructive work at any cost with any methods.

Finally, Paul describes the devil as cunning. Christians are instructed to stand against his "wiles." It is the same word Paul uses in 4:14 where he warns against being taken captive by the "trickery" of men who in cunning craftiness lie in wait to deceive naïve believers. The devil rarely

attacks a believer with a frontal assault. Rather, he employs stealth and operates by seduction, subtlety and deceit.

This is how he approached Eve—he first raised questions in her mind about the Word of God (“Has God indeed said...?” Genesis 3:1). Then he used the wedge of doubt to plant unbelief in her heart and mind resulting in her and Adam’s violation of God’s will.

No wonder Luther wrote of Satan in his hymn, “His craft and power are great, and armed with cruel hate, on earth is not his equal.”

There are two opposite, yet equally deadly mistakes that Christians are prone to make in their evaluation of Satan. The first is to underestimate him, not to take him seriously. He loves it when we do that. It allows him to catch us off guard. The other error is to overestimate him. 1 John 4:4 reminds us that “He that is in you is greater than he that is in the world.” The devil is mighty, but he is not almighty. Ascribing too much power to him can breed fear and paralysis in our hearts.

What we must never forget is that the devil is our sworn enemy. You may forget about him, but he will never forget about you. If you are ignoring him or miscalculating his power, wickedness and trickery, then you have come under his influence by playing right into his hands. It is time that you wake up and recognize that there is a war going on and, whether you have been aware of it or not, you are involved.

## CONCLUSION

As you read this article today you are standing on one side or the other of this conflict. Either, you are a soldier for the Lord’s side and are decidedly standing against the devil, or you remain under the rule and leadership of Satan and are set in clear opposition to Almighty God Himself.

Few people think of themselves as being the enemies of God. Yet, that is precisely what the Bible teaches about those who are not following Jesus Christ in a life of repentance and faith. Jesus said, “He who is not with Me is against Me, and he who does not gather with Me scatters abroad” (Matthew 12:30). To be against Jesus is to be opposed to God. Those who are in such a condition are subjects of Satan and as such, enemies of God. My unbelieving friend, do you see yourself in this light?

The good news is that God offers peace to those who oppose Him. He is willing to be reconciled to His enemies. The Bible says of every Christian, “when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son” (Romans 5:10). Every follower of Jesus Christ can testify that this is true. We were once God’s enemies, but we have been reconciled to Him. God’s offer of peace is real; it is legitimate. It is a bonafide, or good faith, offer. Not long ago many of us were in the enemy camp. Because of the sinful nature with which we were born, we were, as Jesus describes it, slaves to sin and children of the devil (John 8:34–47). But God had mercy on us. And He is willing to have mercy on you, also. What you must do is raise the white



flag of surrender. Those are His terms: unconditional surrender to His Son, Jesus Christ, as Lord and Savior of your life.

It was because of His enemies that Jesus Christ came into the world. He died on the cross so that sinners would be reconciled to God. By repenting of your sin and rebellion and by believing in Jesus Christ, you will be saved—you will be delivered from the kingdom of Satan into the kingdom of God.

My hope and prayer as I write this article is that you will not put it down without being reconciled to God through faith in Jesus Christ. The promise of the Bible is this: “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved” (Acts 16:31). Jesus Himself said, “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life” (John 3:16). By confessing your sin and placing your faith in Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, you will be saved.

What happens to the person who comes to faith in Jesus Christ? When a person comes to treasure Jesus Christ above everything else and is brought to peace with God, does that mean that, for him, the war is over? Not at all. What it means is that, as a forgiven, former traitor, he has switched sides. And because of that, he now finds himself in for the fight of his life. That is true for every Christian.

This fight, though real, intense and even deadly, will not destroy those who are trusting in Jesus Christ as Lord. He is our Captain, our Champion and the One who supplies our strength. Because of Him, victory is assured. It is true that we will not experience this victory without going through hard-fought battles. But we will, most certainly attain it. How? Through faith—faith in Jesus Christ who by His life, death and resurrection has fully and finally conquered sin, death and the devil.

Nothing in the devil’s arsenal is able to inflict a mortal blow on the child of God. No matter how violently he attacks us, God has promised that, because of Jesus Christ, we will remain standing to the very end. Listen to the confidence that the Apostle Paul expresses about this. He describes believers as “more than conquerors through Him who loved us.” Then he adds, “For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels, nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 8:37–39). Such promises give us strength and courage to engage fully in the fight.

# Know Your Enemy

## *Evil Rulers in a Holy War*

*Tom Ascol*

John Bunyan, a 17th-century pastor, is best known today as author of *The Pilgrim's Progress*. Allegory is used to tell the story of a person's conversion to Christ. "Christian," the main character, leaves the city of his birth, the City of Destruction, and sets out for the Celestial City where he will live forever. With keen insight into the Word of God and brilliant imagination, Bunyan describes that dangerous journey of seeking the right path and avoiding by-paths. This allegorical story tells what happens when a person, becoming aware of his sin and his just condemnation under God, is transferred from that condition to a place where he will live forever with God.

What is not very well known about Bunyan is that he wrote several other allegorical works. He wrote stories about what takes place in heaven and another about what happens to a person who lives and dies in his sin. The best of these is his book entitled *The Holy War*. It is a story about one individual's life. The whole story takes place in the heart and soul of an individual. Bunyan allegorizes it by describing this holy war as taking place in the reclaiming of the town named Mansoul. Mansoul, in its original founding, belonged to King Shaddai—belonged to God. But, Diabolus (Satan, or the Devil) and his armies captured Mansoul. So the holy war begins when the forces of Shaddai attack Mansoul, overcome Diabolus, cast him out, placing Lord Emmanuel (the son, the prince, the vice-regent of Shaddai) on the throne of Mansoul, heart castle. As you might expect, Diabolus, though he has been conquered and cast out, doesn't just take it lying down; he begins to attack again. He figures out ways to get back into this town of Mansoul and reclaim it. What Bunyan describes in *The Holy War* is a very insightful, biblically-accurate description of what happens in the life of any individual who is converted to faith in Jesus Christ. All of this is a picture of a Christian—as one whose heart and life have been captured by the gracious power of God. A Christian is set free from the enslavement of Satan (Diabolus) and has Jesus Christ enthroned in his heartland life.

However, as Bunyan so aptly illustrates, when a sinner becomes converted in this manner, it is the beginning of a war—a holy war which is waged by Satan and his forces against the soul of the Christian.

Through various schemes, the devil tries repeatedly to enter once again into the life of a believer with delusions and methodologies to direct him off of the pathway of following Christ—trying to recapture Mansoul and dethrone Emmanuel. The result is a war—a holy war which is

carried out in the theater of every Christian's soul. If you are in Christ you are called to take on the armor that he provides you and to gird yourself up for battle—for a spiritual conflict.

We continue on the theme of knowing our enemy. Who is our enemy? Who is it that the Christian is called upon to fight in this holy war? Verse 12 warns us as Christians not to confuse people with our real enemies. “We do not wrestle with flesh and blood.” Rather, our real spiritual enemies are the devil and his forces. We began looking at what the Bible teaches us about Satan by considering first of all where he came from and secondly, what he is like. He is powerful, wicked, cunning, and tricky. He is a formidable opponent and, therefore, we cannot take him on in our own strength. You don't have the resources in and of yourself, nor do I, to go toe-to-toe with Satan and his spiritual forces. The apostle says, “Be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armor of God....” Without the resources provided from above, we will never be able to fight successfully. The more I study the Word of God regarding Satan—his activities, his attitudes, his demeanor—the more I am convinced that you cannot understand human history, you cannot make sense of the present world scene, and you cannot understand your own life without a clear understanding of what the Bible says about Satan and his forces.

Notice in verse 12 that Paul gives us a four-fold description of the evil forces against which we must fight. He introduces each category with the word “against.” “Paul is not to be understood as enumerating four different classes of demonic beings. Each term simply views the forces arrayed against God and His people in a different manner.”<sup>1</sup> We are to fight against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. Following the apostle's order, let's continue our consideration of Satan and his forces by thinking about each of these four descriptions. What are we up against as Christians? How are we to understand our enemy? The four phrases in verse 12 give us much insight into these issues. Before looking at each one of them individually, note that they are plural. It is “principalities,” “powers,” “rulers,” and “hosts.” These are collective references to Satan and his forces. We could say “demons,” or “devils.” We usually talk about our spiritual warfare as being against Satan or against the Devil (singular); the Bible does talk like that but the Bible also speaks in terms of a whole conglomerate or a whole army of evil forces. Satan is the leader of a spiritual army. And it is he and all of his forces which are in view in these verses.

## “Principalities” (“rules”)

Satan has a kingdom. This is taught elsewhere in the Scriptures. In Matthew 12 when Jesus was accused of casting out demons by the power of Beelzebub, he said that if he were to do that we would have a kingdom divided against itself. If Satan were casting out Satan by the power of Satan, his kingdom could not stand. Jesus refers to Satan in categories and terms just like the apostle Paul is referring to here as the head of a kingdom (“his kingdom”—Matthew 12:25–26; “prince of this world”—John 14:30).

So Satan is a ruler. Unlike human rulers (who may govern only the bodies and purses of subjects), Satan rules the hearts and minds of his subjects. We see this depicted in Revelation 13:4—the world is described as bowing down in worship to the dragon [Satan]. It is a photograph of what is spiritually taking place in the hearts and lives of those who are the subjects of the kingdom of Satan. His subjects will serve him—either wittingly or unwittingly—they will inevitably serve Him.

There are two kingdoms and everyone is a subject of one kingdom or the other: You are either under the rule of Christ or of Satan. Many people today love to think of themselves as in a kind of “spiritual neutral zone” saying “I know I’m not like you and I’m not religious and probably not a Christian but I’m not a bad person either! It’s not like I love and serve Satan.” In the Bible, Jesus Christ says, “If you are not for Me, you are against Me” (Matthew 12:30). There is no neutral ground! Either you are a subject of the kingdom of Satan or you are a subject of the kingdom of Christ. Many of those who are in Satan’s kingdom are there unwittingly and without a full awareness of what it is they are doing and what their actual condition is. That is precisely the way Satan loves to have it.

The Scripture teaches that those of us who have found the Lord Jesus Christ and have come to faith in Him are people who have been rescued from Satan’s kingdom and restored to our rightful Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. In Colossians 1:13 Paul says, “He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love, ...” In Ephesians 2:1–2 Paul describes what we once were, “And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, ...” In other words, you used to walk and line up according the pattern of Satan. You were under his authority, his influence, and under his power. It is a very sobering thought to recognize that Satan rules over unbelievers; it is a grim irony when we stop and reflect upon it for a moment. What is the essence of human sin? What is it that keeps people from being what God would have them to be? Is it not rebellion against God’s rule? At the very heart is this sense of “I will be the master of my own fate! I will not have anyone rule over me and I will be a law unto myself! I will be the Captain of my own soul! I will not submit to anyone! I want to be free!” Yet, far from being free, such people are in bondage to Satan. What a tragic irony that is.

It is not only those whom the Bible describes as “demon possessed” who are the subjects of Satan’s kingdom, though certainly, that is true, but is anyone who is outside of the Lord Jesus—every unbeliever! Christian, do you recognize your unconverted friends this way? Wouldn’t this effect the way you think about them and pray for them and try to speak the gospel to them? All those barriers would suddenly begin to seem insignificant because here is someone being held hostage by Satan in his evil kingdom. Unbeliever: do you see yourself this way? Do you understand that, according to the Bible, you are under the rule of Satan? Do you understand that you are walking according to the pattern that Satan has laid out for you?

## How Did Satan Acquire His Kingdom?

He did so in three ways:

**1. Through an immoral conquest.** In one sense, he conquered mankind. In the garden, through his subtlety, charm and deceit, he entrapped and conquered Adam and Eve. He turned them away from God—the first hostile takeover in history! He stole Adam’s heart; he took what was not lawfully his.

**2. Through a rebellious human choice.** No one held a gun to Eve’s head; no one forced Adam to run along and fall into the sin that his wife had committed. They willingly chose to follow Satan’s advice and counsel to sin. So, today, the sons and daughters of Adam willingly continue to follow Satan’s sin against the Lord Jesus Christ.

**3. Through divine permission.** There is no escaping this point: God allows Satan to have a kingdom. One of the most difficult questions for those who take the Bible seriously, or those who even think of life seriously, is this: Why is there evil in the world? If God is good, merciful, gracious and loving in the way that we know Him to be in the Scripture; if He is powerful, almighty, omnipotent, and sovereign over every last molecule in the universe; then why is there evil in the world? No matter how you try to peel that question back, you will never get beyond the fact that God in His wisdom, goodness, and sovereignty has allowed evil. The Bible doesn’t give us detailed answers; we must be careful not to speculate beyond what is revealed in the Scriptures; but we can observe and recognize how God has used, and is using, Satan. That helps us to see why He has allowed Satan to have a kingdom.

God uses Satan as an act of judgment against human sin and as a means of testing His own people. In one sense, God uses Satan as His unwitting executioner—to bring about a judicial punishment upon sin. The Old Testament experiences reveal how God would send a deceiving spirit and use Satan’s temptations to bring about judgment against sin. God also uses Satan as a means of testing and strengthening His own people. Think of Job. Why did God let Satan try Job? Whatever else might enter into that answer, certainly it worked for Job’s own strengthening. Job learned things and grew in faith and in humility. He grew in those wonderful graces that ought to mark a child of God. Satan was the instrument God used to provoke that growth in Job’s life.

God also uses Satan to get greater glory through Christ’s redemption. When Jesus came into the world, He came as the regent of the eternal God: the kingdom of God intervening and invading this world system. He came to the very threshold and very heart of Satan’s kingdom and routed the enemy forces. He conquered Satan. On the cross, when it looked like He was failing and was victim of the world, He was, in reality, the Victor over sin and Satan. He was conquering Satan! He held Satan and all of his empire up to public spectacle, and those who are in Christ today can see it. If you don’t see it yet, the day will come when you will—when the Lord Jesus returns once again in all of His glory, victorious with all of His empire with Him; when Satan is fully and finally exposed for what he is; when he is cast into the eternal lake of fire. Then, every eye will see that this wicked empire was overthrown at the cross and through the

resurrection of the Lord Jesus. Christ is the great conqueror of Satan; God has used Satan to get great glory in Christ's redemption.

As a ruler, Satan has an empire and a kingdom, and thus, he and his army are called "principalities" in the Bible. Not only are they called "principalities," but they are also called "powers."

## "Powers"

The devils' position as principalities is meaningless without the power to enforce their rule. And, according to our text, such power they do indeed have. Now, they do not have absolute power—they are not in any sense equal to God. Satan and his angels are servants of God to the degree that they are God's creatures and under His authority. It is not absolute power but it is significant power. Remember that he is an angel (a wicked angel, to be sure) but as an angelic being he is specially endowed. In Psalm 103:20 we read, "Bless the Lord, you angels who excel in strength." They are not limited by physical bodies; they have swiftness and great intelligence. The biblical images that we have of Satan help to underscore his power and strength. He is called by the Lord Jesus a "strong man" who is able to keep his house (Luke 11:21). The only way that a strong man can ever be defeated in his own house is by a stronger man so the clear implication is that only God in Christ can overthrow Satan and his empire. He is described by Peter as a *roaring lion* (1 Peter 5:8). One who is looking for something and someone in anyway to devour and rip to shreds. He is described as the *great dragon* (Revelation 12:9). He is the one who with the power of his tail is able to reek havoc upon the world. Paul calls him the "god of this world" (2 Corinthians 4:4). Not the true God, but a god who has power and attributes similar to, though far less than, the true God. We have previously considered some of the activities of Satan which display his power but suffice it to say that he, indeed, has the power to rule in his wicked kingdom. It is not absolute power but it is significant. William Gurnall, a 17th-century Puritan and Anglican who wrote 1200 pages in very small print on verses 10–18 of Ephesians says, "Satan's power is limited, and that in two ways—he cannot do what he will, and he shall not do what he can."<sup>2</sup> He can't do what he would like to do because if God gave him a free hand, he would destroy everyone and everything. He can't do what he will, and not only that, he shall not do what he can—God will not give him reign to exercise all of the authority that he would love to exercise. His power is significant, but it is not absolute.

## "Rulers of the darkness of this age"

This phrase tells us two very important things about Satan and his forces. First, his kingdom is limited to this present life—*this age*—not the age to come. Unlike Christ's kingdom, Satan's kingdom is not eternal. A time is coming when Satan and his forces will be thrown into hell

forever and they themselves know it! When Jesus was confronting some demons in Matthew 9:29 “have You come to torment us before the time?” They know their time is short and not eternal. Unlike Christ’s kingdom, Satan’s kingdom is limited to this world—he’s already been expelled from heaven. So once we, as Christians and as saints, enter into our reward and our rest in the eternal kingdom of heaven forever, we will no more be harassed by Satan. Isn’t that a wonderful thought? His kingdom is limited to here and now.

Secondly, His kingdom is limited to those who are “in darkness.”—those who live in a state of sin and spiritual ignorance. What is meant by “darkness”? The Bible often speaks of darkness as a way of thinking or acting that is contrary to the ways of God and in rebellion to His rule and authority. We see it even here in this letter: “This I say, therefore and testify in the LORD, that you should no longer walk as the rest of the Gentiles walk, in the futility of their mind, having their understanding darkened,...” (Ephesians 4:17–18). These are those who are aliens from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them and the hardening of their hearts and the darkening of their mind. They have no clear spiritual understanding; they have been deceived—they believe a lie and reject the truth. They are in darkness. Paul says that is the way we used to be, “For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light...” (Ephesians 5:8). Notice that he does not say that you were in darkness but that darkness was in you. In Colossians 1:13, Paul says that we have been delivered from the “power of darkness.” What does it mean to be in darkness? It means to be separated from God. It means to be blinded by spiritual ignorance. When God commissioned the apostle Paul, he said that God called him to go and to preach deliverance to those who were in their sin, “to turn them from darkness to light, from the power of Satan to God” (Acts 26:18). Satan rules over those who are in a state of darkness and darkness is a perfect description of our world today: darkened; blinded by the god of this world to the eternal realities all around us; ignorant of God, of themselves, of heaven, of hell etc.

Have you listened to the fretful laments coming across the airways and in the places of public conversation about crime and immorality in our day? Have you watched the pundits and experts wring their hands and observe their futile solutions. They miss it! They are clueless! I do not mean this disrespectfully, but listen to our President talk about what we need to do about children committing violence to one another in our public schools. His answer: Let’s require uniforms to be worn. We have too many people killing one another says the Surgeon General—what we need is safer bullets! Too many of our children are getting pregnant—let’s pass out condoms in our schools. Listen to the language of the supposed cultural experts in our day addressing the ills, and trying to prescribe remedies—if it were not so serious it would be laughable. It is no longer an adultery; it is an affair. It is no longer homosexuality; it is an alternate lifestyle. It is no longer abortion; it is a choice. Our world is in darkness. Ignorant of God, ignorant of sin, ignorant of what man is and ignorant of the dignity that belongs to every man, woman and child created in the image of almighty God. Listen to the philosophers, educators, and government officials scoff at God, scoff at His law, ridicule His gospel, disdain His people. And all the while, Satan and his demons laugh with devilish delight—ruling and watching their empire, continuing to march on.



If we fail to recognize what is taking place in our day in terms of Satan's activities then we will become a part of the problem, and the solution from God's Word will not be prescribed.

Bunyan perfectly illustrates the plight of so many in our day with his character called Ignorance in *The Pilgrim's Progress*. Ignorance is a man who doesn't enter the narrow path through the narrow gate. He jumps over the wall saying, "I'll get there my way, you get there your way. We are all going to the same place." He travels through life convinced all is well, blissfully ignorant of his own doom, never concerned about any sin, never concerned about doing things according the Word of God until it is too late. Christian and Hopeful try to warn him and explain the truth as opposed to the ignorant lies he has believed and is living on the basis of now, but he just rejects them and shuns them until he comes to the place of knocking on the door of the Celestial City. Emissaries are sent from God on high to take Ignorance and to cast him into the pit because he lived, and so he must die, in darkness—ignorant of God and Jesus Christ. He was enslaved and in bondage to Satan and his empire, never having been translated from that kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of light that is in Jesus Christ. So many in our day typify this type of spiritual ignorance and darkness.

What is the cure for darkness? Light! What dispels darkness? Light! Where do we have spiritual light? In the Word of God that tells us of Jesus Christ. If you and I really believe what the Bible has to say about Satan and his minions being the rulers of the darkness of this age then we ought to take seriously the call to take the light of God's Word and the light of the gospel and go into the world and begin trying to turn on the lights. Tell men, women, and children the truth—that they are serving a wicked king. And yet, there is a good, glorious and merciful King who offers them salvation. He came into the world to conquer this kingdom and through Him there is life eternal and there is real freedom, real joy. There is the knowledge of God and the forgiveness of sin. Light is what the world needs; if we believe this then those of us who have the light must take the light, the knowledge of God and His Word, into the world. This is why we need God's Word; we must spread God's Word; why you must believe God's Word!

## “Spiritual hosts of wickedness in heavenly places”

What these words mean is that Satan and his minions are evil spirits. They are the essence of wickedness, beyond which we cannot fully comprehend because there is no goodness or kindness whatsoever in them. Because they are spirits they never die, they do not grow tired; they continually gain experience. It is an older, wiser Satan that has set himself against you and against the kingdom of Christ today than entered the garden of Eden years ago. They live in “heavenly places” —not in *the* heaven where God dwells, and not in the heavenly places Paul referred to in chapter three speaking of the good principalities and powers that surround the throne of God in heaven. Yet, these wicked spirits are not restricted to “earthly places” either; they are not earth-bound creatures; they are wicked beings who dwell in the spiritual realms.

Once again we are faced with the grim reality of our adversary. He is powerful, organized, numerous, wicked, and tricky. He is our spiritual enemy. Because these things are true of Satan and his forces, they are precisely why we must “be strong in the Lord and the power of His might” and why we must “put on the *whole* armor of God.” Otherwise, we will never be able to stand. Christian brothers and sisters, do recognize this to be true of yourself: we are in enemy territory! We once were a part of this wicked kingdom, but God has rescued us; He has ransomed us; He has redeemed us; He has made us now to be sons and daughters of His kingdom. But, we are still here in this world and we are still called upon to represent the true and living King in a fallen and wicked world. We have been commissioned to hold the ground that has been recovered by our Captain, the Lord Jesus. We are to hold the ground in our own soul—not to give up, not to go backward, not to let the enemy forces throw us off the path. We are not only to hold ground but to advance against the enemy, to capture new ground. We are to go into this wicked kingdom seeking to release those who are enslaved to Satan and to his minions. Satan rules over darkness. We have the light of the gospel of Jesus Christ. And by that light we are to guard our own souls and to move into this spiritually, morally benighted age to rescue many more souls for Christ.

Our friends and loved ones outside of Christ are slaves to Satan—he has blinded them. They are darkened and cannot see, and they need the light of God’s truth. It ought to make us weep; it ought to make us pray; and it ought to make us diligent in trying to bear the light of the gospel to them. Do not let them go on in their blindness. Do not leave them without a clear gospel witness. Plead with them to be reconciled to their God.

Unbeliever, do you see what God says about you? Maybe you were in spiritual ignorance and did not know the truth and you did not see yourself as a servant of Satan, but now the word of God has come to you in the spirit and has taught you. Yes, you need to turn from your sin, you need to confess what you are to God, acknowledge your need of mercy, help, and strength and go to this great conqueror and Savior. Jesus Christ came into the world to destroy the works of the Devil, and if you will flee to Him today, He will save you and bring you into His kingdom. He will secure you forever into his eternal state of blessing. Do not stay under Satan’s dominion! Come to Christ! He will save you. Believe the gospel and find freedom, forgiveness, and a new life. Jesus came into the world to save sinners. Commit yourself to Him today!

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<sup>1</sup> Curtis Vaughan, *Founders Study Guide Commentary: Ephesians* (Cape Coral, FL: Founders Press, 2002), 126.

<sup>2</sup> William Gurnall, *The Christian in Complete Armour*, 2 vols. (1655–1662; reprint, Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1986), 1:146.