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## WHY CHRISTIANS MUST BE FIGHTERS

Ephesians 6:12-13

By

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Ephesians Lesson 56

## Why Christians Must be Fighters Ephesians 6:12-13

In January, 1975, three days after Marla and I moved into our new apartment in Dallas where I was attending seminary, we were walking from our carport to the door of our apartment when I heard a voice and felt a hand from behind come around my forehead. I spun around to see something right in front of my eyes. I instinctively grabbed it and pushed it away from my face. As I did I realized that I was holding the barrel of a revolver.

It's amazing how many thoughts flash through your mind in a situation like that. I wondered what I would do if the second man standing there grabbed Marla. I thought about where the bullet would ricochet if the gunman pulled the trigger. I wondered if the barrel would be too hot to hold if he fired the gun. After a brief struggle, he yanked the gun from my hand and the two men ran off into the night, leaving me with a wound from the gun-sight that required four stitches to repair.

That incident affected the way that we lived for the next two years that we were there. Not once after that did I drive into that carport without looking around very carefully to make sure that no strange men were standing around. I never stood outside after dark to chat with anyone. There were single women who would stand out by the laundry room after dark, talking. I would not let Marla go down there alone. Those women were oblivious to any potential danger, but we knew what could happen. Even now, over 30 years later, I always look around for suspicious looking characters when I'm out after dark.

Many Christians go through life like those women by the laundry room, unaware that there is an evil enemy on the prowl, waiting to engage them in hand-to-hand combat. Because they are not thinking about being attacked, they don't bother to put on God's armor. They are not ready for combat. They dally with sin as if it were harmless. They're friendly with the world and its many temptations. As a result, they are caught off guard, fall into serious sin, and their testimony for Jesus Christ is destroyed.

Let's be honest: most of us don't like to fight. Our inclination is to run from conflict rather than to fight. We all like peace. But the Bible is very clear that the Christian life, both individually and corporately, is a life of mortal combat with the spiritual forces of wickedness. Because this enemy never quits his attacks, Christians *must* learn to be fighters. To be unprepared against such an evil enemy or to run from the fight is to insure defeat. In our text, Paul explains why Christians must be fighters:

Christians must be fighters because we struggle against the evil spiritual forces of darkness.

1. Satan and his forces are real, evil, and powerful (6:12).

In military strategy, it is fatal to underestimate the strength of the enemy. To shrug off an enemy as a pushover when he is armed, organized, experienced, and dangerous, is to invite defeat. As I said, I have seen believers that disregard the reality and power of the enemy. We dare not do that!

But I've also seen some that give Satan too much credit. They view him as being almost as strong as God is. It's as if God is desperately trying to get the upper hand, but He hasn't quite succeeded. And they blame Satan for everything, from car problems to anger problems. So they're always casting out the demon of this or that. When they yield to their own sinful desires, they blame it on the devil. We need to avoid this error as well.

William Gurnall (*The Christian in Complete Armour* [Banner of Truth], 1:112) observes that there is a great difference between how God and Satan deal with their followers. God reveals to His followers the strength of the enemy, but Satan does not dare to reveal to his followers the strength of God, or they would mutiny. So we need to look at what God tells us about the strength of the enemy.

A. These spiritual forces of wickedness are real.

Nothing delights Satan more than when people do not believe in him or take him seriously. Years ago the liberal theologian Rudolf Bultmann dogmatically stated, "it is impossible to use electric light and the wireless, and to avail ourselves of modern medical and surgical discoveries, and at the same time believe in the New Testament world of demons and spirits" (cited by John Stott, *The Cross of Christ* [IVP], p. 23). In 1980, a *Christianity Today* poll showed

that only 52 percent of Baptists, 24 percent of Methodists, and 34 percent of Lutherans believed that the devil is a personal being. Among the clergy, 18 percent of the Methodists denied the existence of the devil altogether, while an additional 36 percent regarded him as an impersonal force. Only 34 percent of the general public believed in a personal devil (*Christianity Today*, April 18, 1980, p. 31). Such views make Satan's work easy for him!

But Satan and the demons are not just an impersonal force of evil in the world. The devil is not just a figure of speech or the figment of the primitive, minds of the biblical authors. Rather, he is a real spirit-being. He is a created angelic being who rebelled against God and led a number of angelic hosts in his rebellion. Jesus referred to him as the ruler of this world (John 12:31; 14:30). Paul called him "the god of this world" (2 Cor. 4:4) and "the prince of the power of the air, ... the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience" (Eph. 2:2).

When Paul states (Eph. 6:12) that these evil forces are not "flesh and blood" and that they dwell "in heavenly places," he means that they are not earthly creatures with physical bodies, but rather spirit-beings that are invisible to us. We do not know whether they can temporarily take on a human form of their own, as the righteous angels do, but it would seem reasonable to assume that they can. Some argue that demons in human form cohabited with women prior to the flood (Gen. 6:1-4), but I find that view to be unconvincing. Demons can take possession of human personalities and bodies, creating disease and bizarre behavior, as many instances in the Gospels and the Book of Acts show. Their normal mode of operation is to work through unbelievers and through human religions, governments, cultures, media, and philosophies to further Satan's opposition to God. But the main point here is that they are real spirit-beings, not just an impersonal evil influence.

B. These spiritual forces of wickedness are terribly evil.

The name *Satan* means adversary. *Devil* means accuser or slanderer. He is also called *Abaddon* and *Apollyon*, which mean "Destroyer" in Hebrew and Greek (Rev. 9:11). The name *Beelzebub* (Matt. 12:24) may mean "lord of the flies," or "lord of the idol sacrifice," where the Hebrew word for "idol sacrifice" is similar to their word for "dung" (H. Bietenhard, *New International Dictionary of*

*New Testament Theology* [Zondervan], ed. by Colin Brown, 3:469). Satan appears as the serpent that tempted Eve and caused the fall of the human race into sin (Gen. 3:1-7). Jesus said that Satan is a murderer, a liar and the father of lies (John 8:44). He deceives the whole world, accuses believers before God's throne, and persecutes them relentlessly (Rev. 12:9-10, 13).

In short, Satan and the fallen angels are evil to the core. Contrary to some TV programs where nice witches have supernatural power to do good, all satanic and demonic activity is wicked. Christians should never dabble in anything satanic or occult, including Ouija boards, seances, fortune telling, or astrology.

C. These spiritual forces of wickedness are powerful.

Satan and the demons are very powerful, although God limits their power. Contrary to what many think, the devil is neither omnipresent nor omniscient. He can only be in one place at a time and he does not know everything about us. But he has a large force of evil spirits to carry out his strategies worldwide and they are very experienced and intelligent. We should not trifle with Satan or think that in ourselves we are any match for him. Our text reveals at least five ways that Satan and his forces are powerful:

(1) They are spiritual beings, not physical beings.

We've already seen this in identifying the reality of these forces, but here the point is that we are fighting an enemy that we cannot see with our eyes. There is a sense in which we do wrestle against flesh and blood, in that sinful people can tempt us and oppose us. Even professing Christians can tempt us to sin or lead us into false teaching. And we all struggle against our own flesh, which dwells in this body of sin (Rom. 7:14-25). But our ultimate enemy, the one behind the scenes, is invisible to human sight and therefore all the more dangerous and powerful.

(2) They are scheming and deceptive.

Jesus called the devil a liar and the father of lies (John 8:44). Paul says that he disguises himself as an angel of light and that his servants disguise themselves as servants of righteousness (2 Cor. 11:14-15). One of the main ways that he works is through false teaching that appeals to the flesh and to human pride (1 Tim. 4:1; 1 John 2:18-27; 4:1-6; cf. 2 Tim. 4:3-4). Pride was probably Satan's

original sin (Isa. 14:12-14; Ezek. 28:17). God hates pride, because it takes away from His glory (Prov. 6:16-17; 1 Pet. 5:5).

Every false religion and cult promotes a way of salvation that allows sinful people to take some or all of the credit, thus feeding human pride. A test of sound doctrine is, does it teach salvation by grace alone through Christ alone by faith alone, so that all the glory goes to God? If it adds works to faith or teaches that faith comes from man, not from God, it feeds pride. Satan is the deceiving force behind all of these false ways of salvation.

Satan also uses deception when he tempts us to sin. He always portrays sin as attractive and fulfilling. He convinces us that a particular sin will meet needs that God has not met. Are you single and desiring a mate? Have you prayed, but God has not answered? Satan comes along and says, "Here is an attractive young man [or woman] for you!" You ask, "Is he [she] a committed believer in Jesus Christ?" "No, but look at how nice he is. He treats you well! You know supposedly Christian men that abuse their wives, so being a Christian is no guarantee of getting a loving mate. Besides, you aren't committing to marry him. Just go out with him and see how it goes." And so the unsuspecting get lured into premarital sex and marriage to a nice unbeliever!

Satan uses the same deceptive tactics to lure married believers into adultery. You're having problems in your marriage. Along comes the most understanding, sympathetic, and attractive person! Whereas your husband never listens to you, this man always listens. Whereas your wife never responds to you sexually, this gorgeous woman is ready and willing! Be forewarned! The devil is powerful because he is a deceptive schemer.

### (3) They are strong.

Paul emphasizes the spiritual authority of these foes. He calls them "rulers," "powers," "world forces of this darkness," and "spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places." His repetition of the word "against" in each case underscores the complete incompatibility and the entrenched opposition between these evil powers and God's people.

The spiritual authority of these demonic powers is indicated in an incident in the life of the prophet Daniel. He had been praying

and fasting for three weeks when an angel appeared to him. He describes him (Dan. 10:5-6) as a man “dressed in linen, whose waist was girded with a belt of pure gold of Uphaz. His body also was like beryl, his face had the appearance of lightning, his eyes were like flaming torches, his arms and feet like the gleam of polished bronze, and the sound of his words like the sound of a tumult.” When Daniel saw him, all his strength left him and his complexion took on a deathly pallor. He could not stop trembling. The angel went on to explain that he had come in response to Daniel’s prayer. He would have arrived sooner, but “the prince of the kingdom of Persia” had withstood him for three weeks. Then Michael, one of the chief princes, had come to his aid (Dan. 10:7-13).

This story gives us a brief glimpse into the unseen world of the angelic conflict. Apparently certain demons have authority over entire nations or kingdoms. They are so powerful that even this impressive angel could not break through until he received help from Michael, the archangel (Jude 9)! There is no warrant here for praying against territorial spirits, as some charismatic brethren encourage us to do. But it does show us that these demons have impressive power.

The story of Job also shows that Satan has the power to instigate murderous terrorist attacks (Job 1:13-15, 17); to send lightning to hit specific targets (Job 1:16); to send a tornado force wind on a particular house (Job 1:18-19); and, to strike a man with painful boils all over his body (Job 2:7). He could have killed Job if God had so permitted (Job 2:6). You don’t want to mess with this powerful enemy or underestimate his strength!

Why would God give such authority and strength to such a hideous enemy? We cannot know more than Scripture reveals, but we can know that Satan cannot do anything that is outside of God’s eternal purpose in Christ (Eph. 1:11). God will be more glorified in the ultimate overthrow of Satan and the demons than if He had never allowed them to rebel in the first place.

The Bible clearly shows that God uses satanic forces to accomplish His holy and sovereign purposes, and yet He is not tainted by their evil ways and He will ultimately judge both the demons and sinful people for their sinful choices (1 Kings 22:19-23; 2 Sam. 12:11-12; see John Calvin, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*,

Book 1, Chapter 18 for many more examples). The most evil deed in history, the crucifixion of the sinless Son of God, was carried out through Satan's influence on evil men, and yet it accomplished the predetermined purpose of God (John 13:27; Acts 2:23; 4:27-28)! God even uses Satan at times to chasten God's servants (Luke 22:31-32; 2 Cor. 12:7). So, Satan is strong, but God is stronger!

(4) They are systematized.

The terms used in verse 12 cannot be arranged in any definite rank or order, but they do seem to indicate an organized spiritual hierarchy of some sort. We know that Satan is the prince of the power of the air and that certain demons have jurisdiction over specific earthly kingdoms (Dan. 10:13). A disorganized army is not a strong army. So Satan and his forces are organized against the Lord and His church. They are a force to be reckoned with!

(5) They are often successful.

True, Satan was defeated once and for all at the cross (Col. 2:15). Satan is no match for God (1 John 4:4). In Christ, we have God's mighty power at work in us, power that raised Jesus from the dead and seated Him in the heavens, far above all spiritual authorities (Eph. 1:19-23).

And yet, Satan does have temporary successes in the battle. Pastors and missionaries fall into serious sin that disqualifies them from the ministry. Churches split into factions over minor doctrinal or personal controversies. Christian marriages end in divorce. Christian young people get seduced by the world, the flesh, and the devil, leading them astray from the truth. False teachers lure professing Christians into all sorts of errors. The list goes on!

So while Satan is a defeated foe, he is not a weak foe! The application is, *Don't trifle with Satan!* Don't play around with sin and think that you will come away unscathed. Don't see how much like the world you can be without compromising your testimony. Distance yourself from the adversary. Respect his frightening power. You cannot defeat him if you flirt with evil. The only way you can defeat him is through sustained conflict.

2. Fight by taking up the full armor of God, so that you can resist and stand firm in the evil day (6:13).

Verse 13 repeats much of verses 10 & 11 to drive the point home: "Therefore, take up the full armor of God, so that you will be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm." As I pointed out last week, it is God's armor and God's strength, but we are commanded actively to take it up and put it on. Two observations:

A. Evil days will come to us all.

By "the evil day," Paul is not just referring to the fact that we live in an evil world that will go on being evil until Jesus returns. That is true, but Paul is referring to the fact that both corporately and individually we will face times of spiritual attack that are unusually intense. The word "struggle" (6:12) refers to a wrestling match, or a one-on-one contest of strength and endurance. Sometimes the entire church comes into an evil day, such as the current persecution against Christians in India or the attacks on believers in Muslim countries or under Communist regimes.

But also, as individual Christians we face times of unusual attack. Perhaps your marriage is going through a difficult time and suddenly a very attractive and seductive coworker comes on the scene. It's not a coincidence! It's an attack of the enemy! Or, your family is in financial need when an opportunity to make some illegal easy money is dropped in your lap. Or, you're struggling with depression when one of your friends tells you that he has some illegal drugs that will make you forget your troubles. This is "the evil day," or what John Owen (in his great treatise on "Sin and Temptation") referred to as "entering into temptation."

By including himself ("*our* struggle"), Paul shows that he was not exempt from these battles. True, his struggles may have been different than ours, but the most godly saints face these encounters with the forces of darkness. You must know your own weaknesses and propensity toward sin so that you will be on guard when the enemy engages you in battle. If you think that you're immune, you are especially vulnerable (1 Cor. 10:12)!

B. Adequate preparation is a major part of victory.

Proverbs 24:10 states, "If you are slack in the day of distress, your strength is limited." In Proverbs 1:20-33, wisdom mocks the guy who waited until calamity hit to seek her. Here, Paul tells us to

take up God's full armor so that we will be able to resist when the evil day hits, as surely it will. Then, being prepared, you will be able to stand firm.

You do not need to learn any formulas or complicated steps to victory over the devil (as some books promote). The Bible is quite simple (James 4:7): "Submit therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you." Or (1 Pet. 5:8-9a): "Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. But resist him, firm in your faith...." By the way, we're commanded to flee from sin, but to resist the devil (1 Cor. 6:18; 10:14; 1 Tim. 6:11; 2 Tim. 2:22).

As Jesus showed us when He was tempted by Satan, one of the most effective ways to resist is to know and recite Scripture. And so one way to prepare yourself for battle in the evil day is to saturate your mind with God's Word, reading it over and over and memorizing key verses to equip you for victory.

### Conclusion

When the apostle Paul got to the end of his life, in spite of all of his achievements, he summed it up by saying, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith" (2 Tim. 4:7). He fought, he prevailed, and he stood firm to the end.

Fighting in hand-to-hand combat against these hideous forces of darkness may not be your idea of a good time! But it is an inescapable part of the Christian life. Because this powerful, wicked enemy seeks to destroy us, we must fight by taking up God's full armor so that we can resist and stand firm in the evil day.

### Application Questions

1. How can we know whether an attack stems from Satan or from our sinful flesh? Does it make any practical difference?
2. Should Christians fear the devil? How, or how not?
3. How would you counsel a believer who was in "an evil day"? What steps should he take?
4. What practical things (positive and negative) can a believer do to be prepared for the "evil day"?

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