

Stand Firm in the New Year

Ephesians 6:10-20

1.8.12

Introduction: The date 9/11 will be forever remembered by anyone living in the U.S. In response to the 9/11 attacks, the U.S. launched full speed ahead into the War on Terror on 10/7/01. This war is ongoing as we speak in a number of countries across the world (Afghanistan, Philippines, Somalia, Sahara), but recently part of this war ended, especially Operation Iraqi Freedom (Dec. 15, 2011). But let me pose a question for you: have you ever stopped to consider the magnitude of spiritual warfare present in the world today? Two of my favorite Christian authors have provided some stimulating thoughts concerning this:

“Men think of the world not as a battleground, but as a playground. We are not here to fight; we are here to frolic. We are not in a foreign land; we are at home” (This World: Playground or Battleground? A Call to the Real World of the Spiritual, A. W. Tozer, 4).

“Very few people think that we are in a war that is greater than World War II, or any imaginable nuclear war. Few reckon that Satan is a much worse enemy than any earthly foe, or realize that the conflict is not restricted to any one global theater, but is in every town and city in the world. Who considers that the casualties of this war do not merely lose an arm or an eye or an earthly life, but lose everything, even their own soul and enter a hell of everlasting torment?” (Let the Nations Be Glad, John Piper, 44).

“We have stopped believing that we are in a war. No urgency, no watching, no vigilance. No strategic planning. Just easy peace and prosperity” (Let the Nations Be Glad, John Piper, 46).

Paul, writing near the end of his life, clearly has a war-time mindset:

This charge I entrust to you, Timothy, my child, in accordance with the prophecies previously made about you, that by them you may wage the good warfare, holding faith and a good conscience (1 Tim. 1:18-19).

Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called and about which you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses (1 Tim. 6:12).

Share in suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. No soldier gets entangled in civilian pursuits, since his aim is to please the one who enlisted him (2 Tim. 2:3, 4).

I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith (2 Tim. 4:7).

There is not a warfare part of life and a non-warfare part of life. Life is war! In this war, the battle is not about life and death, the battle is for your soul and the soul of billions of people around you.

The point: Stand firm in the strength of the Lord by clothing yourself with the armor of God.

Truth #1: Stand firm by trusting in the strength of the Lord (10-13)

1. The Nature of this War

a. **The devil is our enemy**

- i. *He is the father of lies and a deceiver*

You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and has nothing to do with the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies (John 8:44).

And the great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world- he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him (Rev. 12:9).

- 1. Case study #1: Gen. 3:1-7
 - a. He questions the goodness of God (believers/ unbelievers)
 - b. He makes evil appear attractive, desirable, and perfectly legitimate. It is a baited and camouflaged trap.
 - c. He tries to gain a foothold in a believer's life through any conduct that is characteristic of the old way of life (4:27).
 - d. Who is responsible (i.e. "The Devil made me do it.")? Me or the Devil?
- 2. Case study #2: Matt. 4:1-11
 - a. He seeks to deceive (believers/unbelievers)
 - b. See Eph. 4:14
- 3. Case study #3: Job 1:6-12 (cf. 1 Pet. 5:8).
 - a. He will test you with all kinds of trials (believers/unbelievers)
 - b. "If God were good, why is this happening?"
- ii. *He wants to hinder the progress of the gospel*

In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God (2 Cor. 4:4).

b. **The battle is spiritual, not physical**

- i. Our battle is a spiritual battle but the Satan can work through people and circumstances.

2. The Power of this War

a. **God is Stronger**

- i. The Lord's power is a supernatural power. It is stronger than all the power of the wicked (see 1:19-23).
- ii. He has already defeated the evil one, but he has not destroyed him.

He disarmed the rulers and authorizes and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him (Col. 2:15).

- iii. In contrast, remember that Satan is a created being.
- iv. "Be strengthened"
 - 1. Passive: the power doesn't come from within but outside the believer
 - 2. Present tense: this should be a habitual aspect.
- b. How is the believer strengthened? By putting on the armor of God.

3. The Weapons of this War

For though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds (2 Corinthians 10:3, 4).

a. **The Armor of God**

- i. The armor description may have stemmed from Paul writing this letter while he was in prison guarded by Roman soldier's (Acts 28:16, 20).
- ii. See 4:20-24: it refers to "putting on clothes."
 1. "Essentially, then, to 'put on the new self' is the same as donning the armour of God" (Peter O'brien, 462).
 2. "You" put on this armor, not God. He is the supplier.
- iii. This will allow you to "Stand firm" (see 11, 13, 14)
 1. The believer must put on the armor "in order to" stand strong against the schemes of the devil.
 2. You can't hide or flee this war. The battle is everywhere. You have the only means of escape for millions in bondage.

"Although he is a dark and sinister foe dedicated to the damnation of humans, I think he knows that it is no use trying to damn a forgiven and justified child of God who is in the Lord's hands. So, it becomes the devil's business to keep the Christian's spirit imprisoned. He knows that the believing and justified Christian has been raised up out of the grave of his sins and trespasses. From that point on, Satan works that much harder to keep us bound and gagged, actually imprisoned in our own grave clothes. He knows that if we continue in this kind of bondage, we will never be able to claim our rightful spiritual heritage. He knows also that while we continue bound in this kind of enslavement we are not much better off than when we were spiritually dead. (I Talk Back to the Devil. A.W. Tozer, pg. 3)

Truth #2: Stand firm by putting on the armor of God (14-17)

You can only stand after you have made the following preparations:

1. Your Waist: Prepare for battle with truth (14a)
 - a. This belt refers to the apron which hung under the armor and protected the thighs. This idea of fastening clothing securely suggests the idea of preparation for vigorous activity.
 - b. Believers will be strengthened by God's truth revealed in the gospel and as a consequence of which they will display the characteristics of Christ in their attitudes, languages, and behavior (See O'brien, 474). See Eph. 4:25.
 1. As God is reliable, faithful, and trustworthy, so should you be also.
 - c. The primary emphasis is believers' integrity and faithfulness. You should be authentic and sincere.
 - d. The opposite is hypocrisy and falsehood. How does the devil use hypocrisy? Everyone sees you at church and think you've got it all together and yet you're in great need of spiritual encouragement.

2. Your Chest: Protect yourself with righteous living (14b)

- a. "Breastplate"
 - i. This is a defensive armor
- b. "Righteousness"
 - i. See 4:24; not forensic righteousness, but ethical righteousness
 - 1. In other words, put on the new man. Be imitators of God (5:1)
 - ii. Sanctifying righteous living guards believers' hearts against the assaults of the devil (see 4:27).

3. Your Feet: Be ready to proclaim the gospel that brings peace (15)

How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, who publishes peace, who brings good news of happiness, who publishes salvation, who says to Zion, "Your God reigns" (Is. 52:7).

- a. This is a readiness to move with gospel power and for gospel purposes
 - i. A willingness to share or announce the gospel of peace
- b. Irony: There is a war going on and we have the solution that brings peace
- c. This interpretation makes sense because one of Satan's schemes is to blind the eyes of unbelievers.

4. Your Body: Listen and believe the Voice of Truth (16)

- a. "The skins and hides that covered the shields would extinguish the incendiary arrows, preventing the wood from catching fire. Furthermore, before battle the shields were immersed in water, soaking the leather cover and canvas beneath the leather, which also aided in extinguishing the flaming missiles" (Hoehner, 848).
- b. "Faith"
 - i. Why this is important? Satan will be speaking lies to you.
 - ii. Who or what you believe determines every action you take in life!
 - 1. Test Case: Eve
 - 2. Test Case: Jesus in the Garden (Matt. 4)
 - iii. You must know the truth.
- c. Satan is a great accuser.

In the first place, are you still afraid of your past sins? God knows that sin is a terrible thing—and the devil knows it, too. So he follows us around and as long as we will permit it, he will taunt us about our past sins. As for myself, I have learned to talk back to him on this score. I say, "Yes, Devil, sin is terrible—but I remind you that I got it from you! And I remind you, Devil, that everything good—forgiveness and cleansing and blessing—everything that is good I have freely received from Jesus Christ!" (I Talk Back to the Devil. A.W. Tozer, pg. 6)

- d. "He is a shield to those who take refuge in him" (Prov. 30:5)

5. Your Head: Live out the implications of your salvation (17a)

- a. Believers possession of salvation gives them confidence of safeness during the assaults of the devil.
- b. Salvation has been spoken of in Ephesians as "already" accomplished.
- c. "As they appropriate this salvation more fully and live in light of their status in Christ, they have every reason to be confident of the outcome of the battle" (O'Brien, 481).

6. Your Mouth: Declare the Word (17b)

a. “Sword of the Spirit”

For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart (Heb. 4:12).

b. “Word of God”

- i. The word for “word” used here refers to spoken words
- ii. Proclaim the gospel in the power of the Spirit; it is the Spirit which gives it its penetration and power (Rom. 10:17).
 1. You use the sword to attack and make new conquests in God’s cause (2 Cor. 4:4).
 2. The way you combat the lies of Satan is with the Word of God (Matt. 4; Ps. 119:9-11).

c. Plug the Bible Reading Plan

Truth #3: Stand firm by praying continually (18-20)

1. “Pray”

- a. Mentioned 4 times in this verse – this shows its importance
- b. Prayer is foundational for the deployment of all the other weapons
 - i. John 15:5 – Apart from me you can do nothing

2. “All”

- a. All the time
- b. About everything
- c. With persistence
- d. For all the saints

3. “Keep alert with all perseverance”

- a. Continue pray with intense effort
- b. Devote yourself to prayer, keep on praying, persist in prayer

4. Connection with the Word

- a. The word gives us the content of our prayers
- b. We can pray the will of God if we pray Scripture.

5. Prayer for Paul

- a. It may refer to his trial before Caesar

6. What do we do with prayer?

- a. We use it not to call in more fire power for conflict with a mortal enemy but to ask for more comforts
- b. God has given us prayer to talk with him in battle to call on his limitless power to advance the kingdom of Christ.

7. Plug the Corporate Prayer opportunity on Jan. 22.

Conclusion: Display! Declare! Pray!