

“EQUIPPING THE FAMILY FOR BATTLE.”

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First Christian Reformed Church

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Scripture Texts: Ephesians 6:10-18; I Peter 5:8-9

Introduction.

This sermon was originally planned for the first Sunday of the new year. It was meant as a call to arms, a call to start the new year with a fresh commitment to prayer and Scripture.

But in the sovereign providence of God, He had a different plan. And you should be convinced in your mind and heart God’s sovereign providence is always good, always best. Never doubt God’s ways and purposes are higher and better than ours, always for His glory and our good.

I have already seen the hand of God in what transpired in my going to the ER and Pastor Zac preaching on the first Sunday. I believe God wants this word preached on this day.

Who thinks about life the way Paul has described it? Who thinks we are in a war? Who thinks we are in a firestorm far worse than LA? What would I have to say to convince you we are under attack? Would it help if there were rockets’ red glare and bombs bursting in air? Who thinks they are in any danger of being devoured by a roaring lion?

Do you think you or your marriage, home, family, children, grandchildren, are under attack? Or do you dismisses what Paul says as exaggeration, gross overstatement? If you don’t think it is a big deal, then that is yet another way in which Satan is attacking, by making us blind, deaf, inattentive, complacent, to busy to notice.

Satan’s attack on the family.

The family is the very first institution established by God on earth and it is the foundational building block for morality, social values, economic stability and spiritual life and growth.

Satan hates God and everything God has created and called good, and he is hell-bent to tear families apart. The future of our children and grandchildren are at stake, and as goes the family, so goes the nation.

The battle fronts are easy to see. Sexual immorality, pornography, sex before marriage, same-sex unions, gender confusion, divorce, abortion, domestic violence, trafficking, drug abuse, throwing out God's commandments, turning Sundays into a day just for recreation.

Satan is using every possible tool to influence our culture toward the destruction of the family, all the spheres of culture, news media, social media, internet, entertainment, TV, movies, video games, education, government, even some churches and denominations.

Satan is redefining what family means, what marriage means, what husband and wife means, right down to what male and female means. Children are no longer a gift from God and a heritage from the Lord and are being replaced by pets.

Satan has one mission, to steal, kill and destroy, through lies, false teaching, and ungodliness. His power, influence and schemes are evident everywhere you look.

Adam and Eve were foolish, they were naïve, they didn't see the evil, they didn't resist and flee from the devil. They let down their guard and it brought great ruin and destruction to their souls and their family and to all families. The battle started there and hasn't stopped.

Satan is in the garden of our homes, Satan is subtly attacking, subtly undermining, subtly drawing us away from God and His Word and His power.

How are we to fight this great spiritual battle?

Why do you think this chapter is in the Bible? To wake us up, we are in a war and we are naïve if we think differently.

Paul is not blowing smoke here, he is not exaggerating to get a rise out of us. He is deadly serious, and we are foolish to ignore his warning.

The Christian life is a spiritual battle against real spiritual enemies and the hope and help for the battle is spiritual, involving spiritual weapons and spiritual armor.

We need to adopt a warfare attitude. This is guerrilla warfare, Satan is a terrorist. We are wrestling with brutal enemies, the enemies of Christ and His Church and His people.

We need a wartime strategy, a battlefield mentality. We need to take God at His Word, and use His weapons and His armor to defend and protect our souls and the souls of our families and church.

This text is a call to arms, a call to battle. Paul doesn't say run or flee or hide or take cover. He doesn't say be afraid, be anxious. He says be strong, but not in your own strength. Rather, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of the Lord's might.

As a call to arms, it is also a call to hope. Yes, the battle is fierce, yes, the enemy is stronger than you, yes, the enemy out numbers you and is more skilled than you. But you are not alone and you are not dependent on yourself.

The exhortation of Scripture to anyone feeling fearful is, "Be strong and courageous in the Lord, in the strength of His might." This is referring to the power that is ours from the Holy Spirit through a relationship with God made possible by knowing and believing in and loving Jesus.

Ephesians 1:19-20 What is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might 20 that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places.

This "resurrection from the dead" power is ours in Christ.

Notice the armor is God's armor, each one of them are gifts of God's power and grace. They all have their source in God. For the believer in Christ, we are already supplied, already equipped. It is for us to trust in who God is and what God has given us. Our confidence is not in our sufficiency, in our truth, in our righteousness, but God's.

The resurrection power of Jesus Christ gives to us His breastplate of righteousness, His truth, the shield of faith, His Sword and Spirit. All the armor comes with a relationship with Jesus.

Stand firm in your faith in Christ. Stand, resist, and Satan will flee. The weakest Christian with Christ's armor is stronger than Satan.

Benefits of family prayer time, of time individually and together in prayer and Scripture.

All of us who have computers go to some length and cost to protect those devices from viruses and internet bugs and malware. Why do we do that? We don't want to get infected and corrupted and lose what we have saved in our computers.

Why are we not as vigilant with our hearts and homes? Why don't we put up firewalls against Satan and his attacks, against the world, the flesh, and the devil? Why do we let the enemy in our gates?

Prayer and Scripture are the best firewalls, they are the most powerful devices against the schemes of the evil one.

We have the spiritual power and authority to resist and defeat the enemy. But it is only useful if we use it.

Ephesians 6:18 Pray at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end, keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints.

If we have all this armor, why do we need to pray? Are we praying for more armor? If we have all this armor, why do we still give in to Satan and not resist sin and temptation?

The problem is not the armor.

Notice, prayer comes after all the pieces of armor are put on. Prayer is not a piece of armor, prayer is what holds it all together. Prayer is what says we don't trust ourselves or our armor but we trust God. Prayer is how we stand firm in the Lord, in the strength of His might.

The armor equips us for battle, but prayer keeps us in contact with our leader, with our General. God gives us His armor and by prayer we are led by Him in the battle and taught how to use the armor.

The armor are the graces of God given to every believer, prayer is putting the graces to use. Prayer is how we fight, which is to say, we fight by being dependent on God.

Notice he says with all perseverance. Why? Because God doesn't always give us what we ask right away, sometimes He tests our earnestness, our resolve, our desire.

Jesus thought this was so important, it is part of the Lord's Prayer. Your kingdom come, your rule and reign over against Satan's. Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil, from the evil one, from the world, the flesh and the devil.

Practical steps.

This morning I feel the urgency of the attack on our homes and families and church. I am urging each of us individually and every family here to take this war seriously and take this call seriously.

Ephesians 6:18 Pray at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end, keep alert with all perseverance.

Fathers and mothers, protect your home, your marriage, your family, your children, your future generations with prayer and God' Word.

I know many of you think reading the Bible and praying together as a family is intimidating. You have a fear of how to do it, will it be embarrassing if I fumble my way through it, and our fears keep us stuck in doing nothing.

Satan doesn't want you to pray and he will come up with all kinds of lies and hindrances, you are a sinner, you are a hypocrite, you aren't good enough, your prayers aren't like the pastors or elders. There has been no human being who has ever prayed to God who wasn't a sinner and a hypocrite, and none who ever prayed a perfect prayer. Give it up, don't take Satan's bait. Stop letting him win, stop doing what he wants you to do. Be strong in the Lord.

Remember the two men Jesus talked about who were praying in the temple. The one was full of confidence as he prayed, like he had it all together, while the other man stood back looking down, unsure how to pray or what to say, his life was a mess, and he just asked for help.

Jesus said he was the one who went home forgiven and blessed. Jesus loves messy people and messy lives, broken people, people who aren't perfect and know it and look to Him for help.

Do something rather than nothing. Let it be messy, let it be noisy, let it be less than perfect.

Start simple. Make a commitment to do it, to do something, anything. Take advantage of the times you are already together, breakfast, dinner. Start with a family prayer time once or twice a week. Saturday night preparation for worship. Don't be legalistic, but do something.

Do it with an evening *snack*. Nothing enhances family prayer time like popcorn or chocolate chip cookies or root beer floats.

Read a short passage from a Gospel, James, Philippians, a Bible story, a devotional book. Say a short prayer, have kids say a one sentence prayer. Ask what each one wants prayer for, then pray for each other, and others, church, pastor. Say the Lord's Prayer together.

Do you think you don't know how to pray or what to pray or how to lead your family? Fine, then just say it up front. "Dear God, I ask you in the name of Jesus by your Holy Spirit to help us to pray, to know what to pray. Help us, lead us."

Praying in the Spirit is thus not some strange, mystical experience. Praying in the Spirit means asking the Spirit to help you pray, asking the Spirit to lead, using the Spirit's words from Scripture. Take the prayers out of the Bible, take Psalms, take Paul's prayers, use this text.

Prayer is simply responding to the promptings of the Spirit to call out to God and talk to Him about what the Spirit puts on your heart.

Implications and application.

The war is real, it is spiritual, it is all around us, and there are casualties daily. We are in this war by virtue of being Christians and we are under direct attack and assault, even now as I speak. Yes even here in safe little Lynden. There is evil all around us, and it has infiltrated all our homes.

This is why we are participating in a family prayer seminar being sponsored by the Light of the World Prayer Center and Pastor Al Vander Griend. Our Stephanie Rennie is on the planning team. So we are going to be talking about this more.

In your homes talk about where you see the infiltration of the enemy into your home, distracting you from godly living, God-glorifying choices, pulling you away from family prayer, and worship. Recognize where a spiritual battle rages for the hearts and minds of your children and grandchildren. Decide to fight for them in prayer.

Marriage is hard, parenting is hard, life is hard, because it is a battle, a spiritual battle with deadly and eternal consequences. Life is war, and until we see that we won't take prayer seriously. And when you see it you will feel an urgency to pray.

Our real battles are not against spouses or parents or neighbors or relatives. But until we realize that we will keep fighting on the wrong front. We need to attack the real enemy, the concealed enemy, the one who is firing flaming darts at us through the words and actions and annoyances or offences or hurts of whomever he can find.

Where are your battlefields, where are you being called to stand against the enemy and fight? Where are the places you are most vulnerable to attack, where are the flash points, trouble spots? Where do you find yourself most defeated, most beat down? Where have you compromised?

Life is a spiritual battle with a real, supernatural, spiritual enemy. But our hope and help are supernatural and spiritual and victorious. We are not fighting for victory, the victory is won. We are fighting from victory, out of victory.

Christ is on the throne beside the Father making intercession for us and the Spirit is in us doing the same. Jesus has all rule and authority over all dominions and powers. In Him we are more than conquerors. In Him we have everything we need for victory in this war. For the sake of your souls and the souls of your family, I urge you to pray and to begin family prayer.