

## **“MAY YOU BE FILLED WITH THE FULLNESS OF GOD.”**

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**First Christian Reformed Church**

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**Scripture Texts: *Ephesians 6:10-12***

Intro: Personal Word, Introduce myself, thank the congregation for the opportunity to preach.

SECTION 1: Ephesians can be broken into two main sections. What God did for us, and how we should respond. Paul tells the gospel story of how God chose us before the foundation of the world, sent Jesus to conquer sin, save us, and bring us into his covenant, into his family. Listen to the pinnacle of the first section, reminding the Ephesians of God’s grace to gentiles, bringing them into the Abrahamic covenant through Jesus’ death.

- “For you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God”. Ch 2:19

SECTION 2: The second half of the book is a long “Therefore”. Since Christ saved us, and brought us into his family, how should we respond? And the beginning of Chapter 4 tells us:

- “Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, and patience, showing tolerance for one another in love.”  
(Ch 4:1-2)

Because of what Christ has already done, we should live in holiness, and purity. Loving those around us, maturing in faith, knowing Christ’s love. And being spiritually strong!

And this brings us to our passage today. The last bit of the “THEREFORE”. Where Paul exhorts the Ephesians to be on guard against the devil, turning to God for strength.

**“Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might. Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places.”**

- Little background

- Paul has just addressed different specific life situations. He called husbands and wives to love like Christ and submit like the church. He called children to obedience, and fathers to discipline and instruct their children in the lord. Paul encouraged slaves to faithful service as unto the Lord, and he called masters to be fair and reasonable, knowing that they themselves are slaves of God.
- But beginning in verse 10 Paul begins addressing everybody again. As if to say, “Now, no matter what your situation, whether husband, wife, child, master, or slave, everybody is to be strong in the Lord.”

- Why? Because we are in the middle of a war.
  - o As Christians, we face a unique battle that extends beyond the physical realm. The Apostle Paul reminds us in Ephesians that we are engaged in a struggle that is not about what we can see or touch, but against forces of darkness and spiritual wickedness. He pictures Christians as warriors defending against the attacks of Satan with spiritual armor.
  - o This is not a safe war. This is not a simulation or play acting. Spiritual warfare is real, it's dangerous, it's constant and its' consequences are eternal.

### What Spiritual warfare looks like

- So what is Spiritual Warfare? What is its origin? What does it look like?
- What is spiritual warfare, what is its' origin?
  - o Origin is Satan rebelling against his maker
- It's real, and dangerous
  - o First, Paul warns us about the nature of the struggle because we can diminish its importance or even forget about the battle altogether.
    - 
    - Today's world often rejects the spiritual realm. Most of the modern world understands the universe as a solely physical reality. Science is their god, and they explain everything through their god, just like we explain everything through our God. Creation of the world is the big bang and chance, inexplicable evil is labeled 'mental health disorder', miracles are lies, reason rules supreme, mankind is basically good, etc.
    - We often fall pray to this vision of the universe. We are surrounded by news stories, coworkers, friends and family who have physical explanations for everything, and deny God's existence, our own sin, and the danger of Satan.
- So let us wake up to the danger. It's as if we are in the middle of a battlefield with bullets whizzing overhead, men getting shot and killed, total chaos around us, and Paul runs up yelling, "Wake up! You're on a battlefield; you need to fight, here's your armor."
- He uses violent and scary language intentionally. He does not emphasize the power of Satan to discourage us, but to cause us to have truthful expectations about the Christian life. So that we may better resist by the power of the spirit.

So what does this war look like in our lives? What is the expectation?

- I want to emphasize four aspects of this combat in our lives. Sharp, close, universal, permanent combat.
  - o **SHARP:** The combat is intense. Augustine captures the intensity in his

book "The confessions". His pictures his soul as being torn in two, as he tries to turn to Jesus Christ, yet Satan's claws are deep in his nature, reinforced by habitual sin. Other books like Hiding Place, or Foxes' Book of Martyrs give us physical representations of the spiritual battle, and do a really good job at showing us the intensity of the battle, but never losing sight on its spiritual nature.

- **CLOSE:** "Satan comes close up, and gets within the Christian, takes hold of his very flesh and corrupt nature, and by this shakes him. (William Gurnell) By this quote I do not mean to say that Satan can possess us as Christians. We are filled with the Holy Spirit, not possessed by Satan. I mean that spiritual warfare is not just "out there"; in third world countries, or just among unbelievers, or for people who don't read their bibles as much as I do. The war is taking place in our own souls. Our own flesh is fallen, our will is twisted, and Satan knows how to use this to his advantage.
- James 1:13 is just one of many passages which emphasizes Christians' responsibility for their own sin. "each person is tempted when they are dragged away by their own evil desire and enticed." We don't need help to figure out how to sin, it comes from our own heart.
- The combat also affects those closest to us. Satan also does not fight fairly. He uses the things closest to us, to cause us to fear, and despair. He causes pain and suffering in our own children, friends, and family. Often our loved one's suffering is much harder to persevere in faith than our own pain. Forgiving people who have hurt vulnerable loved ones is very difficult. And Satan often uses these most intimate relationships to tempt us to despair.
- **UNIVERSAL:** The devil prowls about on the earth, looking for someone to devour. The world has been given over to the devil for a time, and we await our heavenly city where the devil has no dominion. Yet while we live here on earth, we must not search for places free from the battle. No nation is at peace when it comes to spiritual warfare. No community is neutral; no family is protected from the violence. Remember, the warfare is within our own souls, so do not be naïve and let your guard down when you are at home, on the road, with friends and family, at church, or work. Be strong in the Lord no matter where you are.
- **PERMANENT:** And finally, this warfare is permanent while we are upon this earth. This is actually something I have been wrestling with the last year or so. It used to really discourage me to think of never being able to put my guard down when it came to temptation. If I had fought well for a week or so, I felt like I deserved a break, a reward for my hard work.
- Yet I realized wanting a break from putting my sin to death was wrong. I viewed God's law as a burden, as something that was keeping me from happiness. This is how I was looking at my sin. If I resisted for a while, I should deserve a guilt-free sin. Remember Jesus telling us that his yoke is easy and his burden is light. Or in John when he tells his disciples to keep His commandment so that THEIR

## JOY MAY BE COMPLETE.

God is not out to get us, or to take away our happiness. He wants our joy to be complete. So do not listen to the voice of Satan which says,

- “Did God really say you shall not taste of any of the pleasures of life?” And we foolishly fall for the bait and respond, “No, He only said we shall not \_\_\_\_\_ or we shall surely die.” To which Satan responds, “You will not surely die, God is just trying to keep you from happiness. He knows that if you \_\_\_\_\_ your eyes will be opened and you will be like God.”

And we must not entertain this slander of God’s character. God’s law brings us life and joy, sin brings nothing but death.

Take heart and continue resisting until you leave this earth. Do not grow weary in doing good!

### **Be strong in the LORD**

- **So how should we fight? How should we defend ourselves from Close, Sharp, Universal, and Permanent combat?**
  - First of all, we approach it having read Ephesians 1-3. The war is already won! Christ has already defeated sin and death!
    - “When He (Jesus) had disarmed the rulers and Authorities, He made a public display of them, having triumphed over them through Him. (Col 2:15)
    - This is the image of a victorious Roman emperor parading through the streets of Rome, flaunting his victory, showing off the spoils of war. He publicly defeated death and is now seated at the right hand of God, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion.
    - We fight against the devil knowing that Christ has already won and has all authority in heaven and on earth.
- **THEREFORE...**
  - Be strong in the strength of the Lord. We do not try to fight on our own, we are told to be strong **IN THE LORD**.
  - Romans 8 verse helps us understand what “In the Lord” means.
    - (Rom 8:13) “For if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live.
  - We fight in and through and by the strength of the Spirit. And not our spirit, but the spirit of God. This should be fairly obvious theologically, but we are often tempted to try and prove our own strength.

- b. God's sovereignty is in no way diminished by the working of the devil. Nor does Satan have freedom to do as he wished, as if God had no means of hindering him.
  - c. The book of Job represents the sovereignty of God over Satan. Satan kills Job's servants and children, takes his possessions, and finally strikes him with sickness. Yet even in the book of Job, God is unquestionably the main actor, and the ultimate authority. Satan can go no further than God allows, and his part in Job's suffering is almost a sidenote to the true philosophical question of why God allows innocent men to suffer.
  - d. We must view the world through the lens of scripture rather than horror movies or pop books. Our world is ruled by God, not controlled by autonomous demons. In every book of the bible, God is the main actor, mankind responds to God, and when demons are mentioned, they are 2D, predictable background characters.
- 2) Satan only has power over us because of our own sin.
- a. "Had we continued in the state in which God created our father Adam, it is certain that the devil would not have had any advantage over us. But since we are now overwhelmed with darkness and are captives of our own nature, that is how the devil is called the prince of the world." Calvin pg 664 Sermon on Ephesians 6:11-17
- 3) And finally, Satan is never responsible for our sin.
- a. Mankind is always held responsible for their own actions. God did not excuse Adam and Eve's sin because Satan had tempted them. There are Christian groups who find demons behind every rock. They refuse to take responsibility for lots of sin because the devil was out to get them. However, the bible simultaneously shows demonic action and temptation while never diminishing human responsibility. Like Jesus in the desert, we are tempted, and like Jesus, we have the freedom by the spirit to put to death the deeds of the flesh.

### **Conclusion**

We have looked at the nature of the combat, reminded ourselves that God has already defeated death, works for our sanctification, and continues to be sovereign over our own hearts, Satan, and evil. So what do we DO? What does it mean to put on the armor of God?

Do we use God's power to cast demon's out, speak in tongues, go to healing meetings? Maybe in very rare situations, but this is not what Paul commands in this chapter, nor what Jesus demonstrates in his ministry.

Yes, Jesus cast out demons, and performed miracles, but His central work, the ultimate exorcism was accomplished through Faith, Obedience, and Prayer. Do not take this for granted. John 12 gives us an amazing contrast between the hype surrounding Jesus, and his

prophesying his death. Jesus enters Jerusalem at the height of his power and fame. He has performed incredible miracles, cast out demons, successfully fought against Satan in the desert, rebuked the pride of spiritual leaders, and taught with authority. In fact, people give him a king's reception into the City. Yet as soon as he enters the city, Jesus begins foretelling his death. All these miracles, exorcism, and even teaching was secondary to his sacrifice.

- John 12: 27-32 “Now my soul is troubled, and what shall I say? ‘Father, save me from this hour’? No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour. <sup>28</sup> Father, glorify your name!”<sup>31</sup> Now is the time for judgment on this world; now the prince of this world will be driven out.<sup>32</sup> And I, when I am lifted up<sup>[g]</sup> from the earth, will draw all people to myself.”<sup>33</sup> He said this to show the kind of death he was going to die.”

Jesus cast out the prince of this world not by dramatic miracle or exorcism, but by obedience unto death. He considered it a joy to submit to the will of His Father.

And Jesus calls us to do likewise in the same passage.

- Anyone who loves their life will lose it, while anyone who hates their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. <sup>26</sup> Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honor the one who serves me.

Like Jesus, our main goal is obedience until death, and by this obedience we will defeat the devil. There may be times when Spiritual warfare could include more dramatic things like casting out demons, speaking in tongues, miracles. But when we hear the term “Spiritual Warfare,” we should picture Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane, crying out to His Father, asking for strength as he submits himself to death. This is the essence of Spiritual warfare, Faith, obedience, prayer. Everything else is secondary. And if we serve Jesus, our father will honor us.

END

So let us close tonight with a prayer written by Paul earlier in Ephesians, in which Paul asks God for Spiritual strength. (From the passage Pastor Robert preached on two weeks ago)

This prayer is similar to our passage tonight in that Paul is emphasizing the need for Spiritual Strength. In our passage, Paul exhorts the Ephesians to be spiritually strong so that they can stand against the devil, in this passage he prays that they would be spiritually strong so that Christ would dwell in their hearts and that they would know his love.

Well, which is it? And of course, that's a terrible question. A false dichotomy.

There is no separation between these two prayers. It is only by knowing Christ's love that we will stand strong against the schemes of the devil, and only by countering the devil's lies can we know Christ's love.

So let us wrap up tonight by praying Paul's prayer in Chapter 3 and making it personal. I am

going to change the “You’s” to “Us”. Let’s pray.

Our Father, We pray that you would grant us, by the riches of your glory, to be strengthened in our inner man, in our spirits, so that Christ would dwell in our hearts through faith, that we, being rooted and grounded in love, would be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses all knowledge. Open our hearts to you. Amen.

### GOD’S BLESSING

**Ephesians 3:20-21 “Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us, to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen.”**

There is no physical place where you can escape the possibility of temptation and evil, for we carry about this evil within us. Our own wicked hearts are so susceptible to the devil’s lies. EXAMPLE of thinking fighting sin would be easier once I was a pastor. The Charles Spurgeon reading that woke me up.

Look at the example of the pharisee’s not accepting Jesus as the Messiah, despite all the prophecies, his own teachings, and his miracles.

We must not wrestle against God. Think about Baalam beating his donkey, while the angel stood in the road sword drawn. Pharaoh hardening his heart against the miracles and power of Israel’s God. Paul defending Jewish teachings from a dangerous new heretical sect called Christians, only for Jesus to reveal that Paul was actually persecuting Him.

What are ways we fight against God?

- When we reject the word, brought to us by ministers.
  - All throughout the OT there are examples of “Preaching of the Spirit”. Noah, Abraham, Moses, Aaron is called “Instruction of the Spirit.” Ne 9:20. When we spurn this teaching, we reject the spirit himself. And yes, often those who reject the Spirit’s teaching
- When we reject clear pricks of conscience.
  - By God’s mercy, His Spirit turns our eyes inward to the blackness of our hearts. The word of God is sharper than a two-edged sword, able to pierce the bone and marrow. So do not strive against the Spirit when He convicts you.
  - Remember, war within your spirit is usually a good sign. It means you are awake and fighting against the old Adam, putting to death flesh. Do not be discouraged. Do not go silent into that black night.

- Maybe mention that different lusts can cause conflict, and so make sure their inward battle is the Spirit fighting against sin, not one sin fighting against another sin.
- When we reject God's providence.
  - Biblical stories are such a help for understanding God's providence in our lives. They tell history as it really happens, with God as the main actor. Think about Joseph being sold into slavery by his brothers, wrongly accused of seduction. Yet what these men intended for harm, God intended for good, using these circumstances to place Joseph in a position of power and wealth, to save his family from famine. Think about David being chased by Saul, spending years as an enemy of the state, yet he did not take his own revenge, but waited on God to give to him the kingdom. On the other side of the coin, think about the Israelites in the wilderness, having witnessed the powerful arm of God delivering them from the Egyptians, yet constantly grumbling against His providence. Think about Jonah, being angry with God for forgiving the Ninevites. "How can love to God be preserved in a discontented heart?" William Gurnell pg 118.
  - Think about Job. If anyone had a defensible cause, a legal case against God, it was Job. He was a righteous man, a God-fearing man. He committed no sin to warrant total humiliation and divine displeasure. Yet even Job was rebuked for daring to sue God.
  - So what are we to do??? Take the Psalms as your guide. David is simultaneously so bold towards God, and so humble and tender. And this makes sense. If you have a tender relationship with your father, and you trust him with your very soul, you will approach him with boldness and will not hesitate to make your requests known. Groan but do not grumble. Acknowledge the pain of your situation and cry out to God for relief. Ask God why he has done this, yet do not accuse him of evil.