

Confronting The Field Of Battle

Take the Fight to the Enemy

Martin G. Collins

Given 28-Sep-19; Sermon #1508

In a couple of days we will observe the Feast of Trumpets which symbolizes a vast turning point in world history. It begins the pivotal changeover between the age of man, of darkness and of Satan, to the age of God, the Millennium, and the Kingdom of God.

For almost 6,000 years, Satan has invisibly swayed the nations, he has guided human governments, influenced man's civilizations, possessed powerful leaders, and inspired world wars. Satan's influence has had a significant part in causing hate, misery, and violent death. He has plagued mankind since Adam and Eve disobeyed and lied to God. Satan our accuser, our adversary, our attacker is still a major hindrance to all of us in our seeking God and our submission and our devotion to the Almighty Father and His Son, Jesus Christ.

God is not in competition with Satan. There is no controversy. The question of who will rule the earth has already been decided. Jesus Christ has already overcome Satan and will remove him.

But what are we faced with today in the current literal world? What must we be doing now? Should we be in a defensive holding pattern just waiting for God to take care of everything that comes by? Or should we be on the conquering offensive? Well, we must confront the field of battle and be prepared for it.

The whole state of life, the whole state of the world, and all the difficulty of living, and especially living God's way of life in these confused times in which we find ourselves, is not easy by any standard. It is not that human life has ever been easy in this world for the Christian. It was not so for the early Christians, and today, in some respects, the problem is even more acute and more urgent perhaps than it has ever been because of the near-complete saturation of the world by evil. We see this in the media, we see it in all of

the entertainment that we have available to us in the world. We see it in politics and education and sports. It is everywhere.

Please turn with me to Ephesians 6, to a passage of Scripture that you are very familiar with. There was a time just before the modern age when at least a man's home was more or less shut off from the world. But now the world comes into the home in many different ways, not only with radio and television, as I mentioned, but now we have the Internet, wireless devices, and other media. We even have AI answering us when we speak in our house. If you have something like Alexa or Siri or whatever it might be, it responds without you even having to ask it a question sometimes.

Thus the fight of faith becomes particularly difficult and strenuous for us at such a time. In addition to all this, there is the general strain of the times and the anxiety of the hour because of wars and rumors of wars, pandemics and rumors of pandemics, financial crashes and rumors of financial crashes. And I might add political scandal and rumors of political scandal. Christ inspired the apostle Paul to tell us how we should handle this.

Ephesians 6:10-13 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. Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day [and we are in that evil day], and having done all, to stand.

Many mainstream Christians today would judge the teaching of these verses as unimportant. They would encourage us to think positively and peacefully as if there were no spiritual battles at all to fight. They see Christianity, not as an entrance into warfare, but as an exit from it, and they see it as the easy solution to our problems. Just hide your head in the sand and let God take care of you. If you are sick, Jesus will make you well. And if you are discouraged, Jesus will make you happy.

You get the impression from those who talk like this that to believe in Jesus Christ is to enter upon a smooth path and to enjoy smooth sailing. So you have things like the prosperity gospel, where everybody is trying to make as much money and be as happy as they can with material things. Another wrong approach to the Christian life does not so much deny the reality of spiritual warfare, as insists that although it exists, it is all over and done with. In a certain sense, they believe that Christianity involves merely standing on ground Christ has already won for us and that is it. They believe that because of Christ's victories, our warfare is always a defensive rather than an offensive struggle.

Now there may be some truth in that because Satan's deceptions always have some small truth in them. But the problem is that this thinking has been carried over into expressions of what it means to live a Christian life, which suggests that there is nothing, or at least very little, for us to do as Christians. Mainstream Christianity tries to encourage people by misleading them to think that the battle is not ours, but God's alone. So God does the fighting. At the most, you need only stand your ground. We know, not only from the Scriptures, but also even from common sense in the world, that if you are standing still, you are not moving forward, but you *are* eventually moving backward. So it is not a matter of us just standing still and waiting for God to handle things, we have our responsibility.

It is true, of course, that the apostle Paul does use the word stand. He uses it three times in those verses that we just read. But when he speaks of our armor, he speaks not only of defensive armor, such as our helmet, breastplate, and shield, but also our offensive weapon, our sword, which can be both defensive and offensive. And whether or not he is thinking of fighting offensively or defensively, he is thinking of fighting with vigor against the most powerful and cunning foes that have ever existed.

The proper balance is struck here in Ephesians 6:10-11, which contains two commands. First, be strong in the Lord and in His mighty power (verse 10), and second, put on the whole armor of God, so that you may take your stand against the devil's schemes, which is proactive and not reactive. It can include the reactive, but it should be a proactive approach. We are reminded by this combination of commands that we are unequal to the battle. We

cannot win it ourselves. We have no strength. Our strength must come from Christ. Nevertheless, imbued with His strength, we are to fight these spiritual forces arrayed against us.

The fact that Paul follows his beautiful and uplifting portrait of peaceful Christian homes and joyful Christian relations in Ephesians 5:22—6:9, with this stark description of warfare, indicates that even these things will not be achieved without conflict, without a fight. Clearly, the victories of God's way of life are to be achieved by a relentless and lifelong struggle against evil, which we certainly feel every time we turn on the TV or look at the world's entertainment. And even then, they are realized only to the extent that we take advantage of God's armor.

The apostle Paul told us to be strong in the Lord and to put on the full armor of God. Now he tells us why this is necessary. As I mentioned, he says in verse 12, our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world, and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. So when Paul says that we do not struggle against flesh and blood, he is not denying that we do at times actually struggle on the human level, and it is obvious that we do. He is saying that our struggle is not *just* on that level, we cannot overlook the spiritual battle that we are in. So we do have a visible physical struggle, but over and above that, over and above what we see, there is an invisible spiritual struggle going on against Satan and his forces.

Now we cannot see Satan or his legions, yet as Peter says in I Peter 5:8, "Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour." He is active, so we also have to be actively resisting his wiles and his influences. If we are to be successful in this battle, we must be alert to it and be equipped to use the armor that is needed.

Right here we have something that sets Christianity off from the philosophies of the world. The world of our day is secular. That is, it operates only within the jurisdiction of this age. And it is materialistic, which means that it considers as real only what it can see or touch or measure. And so that is why we have the scientific method that is based on this very thing and comes up short because it cannot explain the spiritual. For our

contemporaries of the world, it is a closed system and that is why talk about the Devil is hardly regarded as serious.

People still talk about God, of course. He gets some respect out of deference to religious traditions, but the Devil, "You can't be serious. Is that your enemy? He has little demons. . ." and the ridicule goes on and on. If you mention it, people laugh at any suggestion that our warfare is spiritual. And, on a more serious note, accuse us of neglecting the real battle, which, in their opinion, should be waged against such tangible things as poverty and oppression and hunger and various forms of social injustice.

They call it social justice. What is it based on? Well, God's justice is based on *His* justice. Social justice is based on the people's opinion. That is why social justice is such a horrible movement because it promotes humanism. We do not want to deny for an instant that many of those are real problems or that we should do all what we can not to cause them. But we ask: if the real problems of this world are merely visible and material, how is it that they have not been solved or eliminated long ago? Notice the way Paul repeats the word "against" five times in this sentence.

Ephesians 6:12 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.

It is not the way one is supposed to write, of course. If he were to go and have this edited by a modern editor, that editor would take out those *against*s. But I think Paul knew exactly what he was doing when he repeated that word, and what is more to the point, God had His own clear purpose when He inspired and directed the writing. It is a way of saying with emphasis that in the warfare and the Christian life, Christians are really up *against* it big time.

It is not just a string of things that we should be concerned about, per se. They are enemies and we must fight against them, and we must fight against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Of course, we have to be careful saying that we are going to fight against the rulers because we

know that we are to honor the king, and we are not to fight against them, per se, individually, but to what they promote and what they bring to law if it is against what God teaches. It is not just a string of things though, it is a whole way of life that we are fighting.

Paul is using terms which take the powers that are arrayed against us together. The distinction is between the various areas of life over which they exert an evil influence on us. So it is an all-encompassing type of "against" that he is using there.

When Paul talks about rulers, he is thinking about Satan's control of certain regions. A ruler governs a certain territory, a certain portion of land. In human terms, a ruler presides over England or Australia or over South Africa, still another over the United States and so on. Apparently the demons also operate that way. In fact, they would have to because unlike God, they are not omnipresent. That is, they are not everywhere at once as God is, in one sense. They are finite creatures, though of great power, so they must be in one place or another. So when Paul speaks of them as rulers, he is probably thinking in this way regionally.

Now we know of course that in some areas of the world, the power and influence of Satan is very strong and obvious. In other places, particularly places where the gospel of Jesus Christ has gone, it is comparatively weaker. Well, at least we could say that before the last few decades.

What about authorities? Authority is not the same thing as rule. Bill Gates exercises no physical rule, but he has great authority. Authority has to do with values. So when Paul speaks of authorities, he is saying that the values of our culture, as well as specific territory, are demonically controlled. We need to see that the dominant values of our culture, the "me first" philosophy for example, pleasure for its own sake, materialism, and other things are not Christian, but are controlled and manipulated by Satan for his own base ends and we are to be at war against those things.

Paul mentions power. Power concerns control. So the powers are those who control what people think and do, as we heard in the Commentary today. I relate this to the secular media which controls so much of the world's contemporary moral philosophy. But not just the media, it also refers to

powers that stand behind even these very powerful figures. Some people call it the "deep state" here in the United States (there are many terms for it), the elite, and so on, the people with true power, those who are in the billionaire capacity. The final words make clear that Paul is not just thinking particularly about evil men and women who somehow control others for their own dark designs. He is thinking rather of the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Heavenly realms is another way of referring to the unseen spirit world.

Now, the emphasis here is upon the evil of the spiritual control. It would be possible to have a holy beneficent power. In fact, that power exists. It is the power of God in which we are encouraged to be strengthened, "Be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might." But the spiritual forces against which we struggle are not holy or beneficent. They are wicked and destructive and it takes spiritual power to fight against the spiritual forces.

The Christian warfare is not merely a struggle between truth and falsehood, good and evil, as most people would understand these comparisons. There is a philosophy of history that looks upon struggle between truth and falsehood as being essentially good since, so the thought goes, that is the way that progress comes. Truth and error struggle and truth wins. That is the philosophy of the world. Similarly, we are to suppose that good inevitably triumphs in this world. But this is not always the case either. Truth is often bested and evil does win, at least temporarily, and the dramatic increase of error and evil in society will carry the world into a new dark age therefore, and this is what we are beginning to see happen. We are in a post truth era now. It is the same as saying we are in a dark age.

Therefore, Christians must do more than stand firm. We must fight for God's truth and His way of life, and that begins in our homes and in our congregations. We must uphold standards. To erode the standards, to push the envelope all the time, is not Christian. We do not live in the gray areas because under God's rule and under the letter and spirit of the law, there are no gray areas. There are only gray areas in the human mind and human reasoning.

We must never forget that everything that is given to us to make our victory possible is from God the Father through Jesus Christ. Is it truth? He is the truth.

Ephesians 6:14 Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth.

Jesus is the one who said in John 14:6, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me"

Is it righteousness? He is our righteousness.

Ephesians 6:14 having put on the breastplate of righteousness.

In I Corinthians 1:30 Paul writes, "Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—and righteousness and sanctification and redemption.

Is it the gospel? The gospel is the gospel of the peace of Christ.

Ephesians 6:15 having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace.

Is it faith? It is faith in Him.

Ephesians 6:16 above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one.

Is it salvation? Christ is our salvation.

Ephesians 6:17 and take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

Christ gives us everything we need, which He made possible by His death.

Acts 4:10-12 "Let it be known to you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you

crucified, whom God raised from the dead, by Him this man stands here before you whole. This is the stone which was rejected by you builders, which has become the chief cornerstone, nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved."

Even prayer is a gift that He has opened up for us to have intimate conversation with God.

Ephesians 6:18-19 praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and suffocation for all the saints. [That does not sound to me like that is a defensive mode, that sounds like an offensive mode, a proactive mode.] and for me, that utterance may be given to me, that I may open my mouth boldly to make known the mystery of the gospel.

Paul says not one of us can stand against the spiritual forces of evil in our own strength, not even for a moment. But in Christ we can fight on to victory and we are promised that help. When Christ returns leading His spiritual army, the battle will not be an entirely physical one, and because that is true, His saints will have prepared to fight alongside of Him in both ways.

I Thessalonians 5:8-9 But let us who are of the day be sober [that is you and I], putting on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet the hope of salvation. For God did not appoint us to [incur] His wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ.

In this life of ours, we will not have trained to physically fight against God's enemies, but the saints will have trained to spiritually fight the ongoing battle with Satan which began with our calling. We will not need to fight the physical side of it because Christ will handle that aspect through His mighty power.

Now we already know what our spiritual armor is. That is listed here in Ephesians 6. The question is, are we learning to use it now for the present battle and will we have become proficient in using it for our return with Christ? See, the armor of God is not just for us fighting the battle now in this world as we live physically, but we are to learn how to use that so we can

come back with Christ, return with Christ when we are resurrected, and fight it spiritually as well.

Please turn over to Jude and more scriptures that you are very familiar with. The anti-Christ world system will be crushed using Christ's spiritual power and might over physical and spiritual adversaries. Christ with His saints will fight human and demonic forces.

Jude 14-15 Now Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesized about these men also, saying, "Behold, the Lord comes with ten thousands of His saints, to execute judgment on all, to convict all who are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have committed in an ungodly way [So the emphasis there is these people are sinners, ungodly, as a way of life.], and of all the harsh things which ungodly sinners have spoken against Him.]

Jesus Christ has already conquered Satan and his demons in one sense and He is worthy to rule the nations. But Christ has not subdued Satan yet. Satan and his demons will be cast into their place of restraint by the power and might of God, which we are learning to have access to and use right now.

What does Paul mean when he says that we are *wrestling*, not against flesh and blood in ourselves or in any other people, but against these spiritual powers and rulers? We were told that these principalities, these unseen instigators of wickedness that are at the back of evil, are controlling the minds of evil men and all their activities, and they are set against us in order to try to defeat us, to spoil our Christian lives, and bring the whole of the gospel into disrepute. And at the same time we see, in our modern age now, the destruction of the Israelitish countries, the descendants of the children of Israel. A lot of it is happening from within because of the corruption, but there are also enemies outside of us trying to bring us down.

So there is a physical battle on that side that we are not fighting yet but that God is allowing to happen because of the sins of the Israelites, the descendants of the Israelites, who should have known better having God's truth in His Word.

The first thing you have to do is to understand the nature and the character of your problem. We have to realize that we are called as Christians to a battle—not to a life of ease, to a battle—to warfare, to wrestle, and to struggle. And none of that is ever easy. Now there are varied, almost endless ways in which Satan in his wiliness and subtlety tries to trap and ensnare, to confuse and confound us. Usually that method is from the world, something we see or hear. Or maybe it is an attitude that is projected to us from Satan or his demons to get angry at one another and to hold a grudge. There are many ways that he has. He may even make our grudge look like it is fair and it is the truth. Well, it may be that somebody has offended us, but it does not matter. We still have to forgive them and not hold a grudge.

But we must remember that it is only half the battle, that is, to be forearmed and forewarned. Were we to leave it at that we would all undoubtedly be depressed. Most people out of pride feel that they are sufficient enough to solve any problem that comes their way, that is, until they are in the midst of the spiritual problem that has become a trial. Then all of a sudden we realize we need help.

Who is sufficient for these things? Who can stand against such massed hordes of evil with all their subtlety and destructive power? Well to consider the problem in isolation could lead to no result, except that we would all feel depressed, as well as completely and entirely hopeless. But we can be thankful though, that the Word of God is always realistic. It never hides any of the truth. It never gives a false impression. Of course, I am speaking to God's people who are converted. The world has blinders on because God has made it that way, but He has revealed to us the Word of God so it does not hide anything from us. There are some things God keeps from us like what is going to happen in the future, I mean specifically, but everything else is revealed in its own good time to each and every one of us as we can understand it.

It is not a true gospel that gives us the impression that our lives as Christians is easy and that there are no problems to be faced. In a sense, the Bible can be very alarming and unnerving at first, even terrifying at times as it shows us the problems that will confront us as a result of going against the culture of this world.

But God's inspired written Word does not stop halfway. It goes on to the second half and here it shows us the way in which we can be enabled to wage the battle, and not only to wage it, but to triumph in it. It shows us that we are meant to be more than conquerors. We are not just to sit back and enjoy Christ conquering; we are to be part of that conquering. So the apostle Paul goes on to show us the second half and he does this in his usual way. He even puts this before he states the problem. He says, "Be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armor of God in order that. . ." then he introduces the problem.

So God encourages us with what He reveals through Paul here and we are told that despite all that is against us, whether in realms above or in the world in which we live with all its strains and stresses, as God's people we can be enabled to triumph, to rejoice in the midst of it all, and to know that victory is assured.

What is offered to us as we find ourselves as God's people facing all this wrestling, the struggling in this combat? Notice that there are just two things that Paul points out here by Jesus Christ's inspiration: "Be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might," and "put on the whole armor of God." These are two major spiritual gifts we are offered. As we come to look at these two things, let me preface them with some preliminary comments.

The first is that both of these are necessary and we must not take one without the other. Paul says both things, so we must do both. But notice the order in which he puts them. He does not tell us to put on the armor first and then be strong in the Lord. No, it is the other way around. Be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might, then put on the whole armor of God.

Now, there is a very real significance in the order. There is clearly a relationship between the two factors. So often people take just one or the other of these factors and therefore shipwreck their faith. There are some who say, all you need to do is hand it over to God and rely on His strength. They do not say anything about the whole armor of God. That is left out completely. There are others who put their whole emphasis on putting on the armor of God as if they could wield it themselves. They forget their absolute dependence upon the power of the Lord and His might, in His strength. We

see then that there are several interesting concerns in the mere presentation of the two things which are essential to a triumphant living of God's way of life.

Let us start then with the first: Be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Picture this is as a great order issued by this mighty captain, the apostle Paul, and he is relaying God's Word and it is a word sent out to the Christian army gathered together with the enemy they are in position facing it. And here is the word that comes from this great leader who himself had broad experience in warfare personally and who had the care of all the churches upon him and had seen firsthand the conspiracies of the evil one against God's people.

Here then is a great order for the day: "Be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might." That is a statement that we can read over and over and over again and just glance over. Hold on to this. Do not forget it. In the heat and the thick of the battle later on in the day, whatever happens, never forget, never lose sight of this great guiding and controlling principle.

But what does it mean and how are we to do it? It is a decisive phrase. To read it, to repeat it, is not enough. We like singing the words of the hymn, "Onward, Christian Soldiers," but what does it mean in practice? Well, let us look into it a little bit. Christianity is not a form of psychology. It is interesting, I have known several people who have gone into universities and majored in both philosophy and religion, or theology, and think it is the same thing and that one is a complement of the other. It is not, they are totally different. One is from a human reasoning standpoint and the other is from God Himself. That is the true Christianity.

You do not just walk along saying, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might, using it as some kind of incantation or auto suggestion, repeating the phrases to yourself as a cliché. That is not Christianity at all. However, it is true of the false religions. It is the psychological brainwashing method. You repeat the phrases such as, "Every day and in every way I'm getting better and better." You persuade yourself and you think less and less about your health and you therefore begin to feel better. Up to a point, it may seem to work, but only up to a point, until you pay the price.

However, nevertheless it is not the way of God. If we are not careful, we can be in danger of abusing the Scriptures in this way. We use them as mere phrases in that way or lightheartedly without serious thought. We sing our hymns, we feel better for the time being, but we should think about what we are praising God with. As we are singing the hymns, are we thinking about what the hymns are saying or just spouting them off or reading them off without thinking about them? Every one is a sermonette or sermon in itself.

When you turn Scripture into a drug, into something which gives you a temporary relief without your knowing why or how, the effect does not last. It gives a temporary feeling of exhilaration but fails you when you are in the struggle and in the heat of the battle. It is no different than the physical drugs that the pharmaceutical companies produce in mass production to try to make all the money they can offer you whether they hurt you or not.

What, then, is the true application of the apostle Paul's teaching? The first thing to realize is the need to be strong because of the power of the enemy. Never underestimate that power! God always calls us to face the enemy. And as Peter says, to realize that he is a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour. We are told that the archangel Michael dared not speak lightly or loosely to Satan, and when he debated with him concerning the body of Moses, he did not bring a railing accusation against him. As Jude 9 tells us, all the archangel ventured to say was, "The Lord rebuke you."

We cannot rebuke Satan. We do not have any power. We only have the power that God gives us. So we should say, "The Lord rebuke you," not, I rebuke you or anything of that sort. The enemy is terribly powerful and full of wiles and of subtlety and of guile and he can even transform himself into an angel of light, as Paul informs us in II Corinthians 11:14.

Another reason and a very practical one from the human side, is that if you are to be able to stand and withstand in the evil day, you need this strength. Though God's way of life should be lived consistently, in one sense, there are variations. There are evil days, some days are worse than others and they can be exceptionally bad. In general, at the present time, we are living in a very evil day. It is evil in every respect. And I am not only thinking of international tensions, it is an evil day because evil and sin are so powerfully organized and so deeply entrenched in everyone. And that is another area

that we have to take on and face the battle and use the things that God has given us to rid those things out of our own lives.

It is an evil day because of the confusion of many of the churches, which sometimes seems to deny not only the whole of the gospel, but even belief in the being of God Himself. There is a lot of ministers and priests who are in it as a business. They get a salary, they can make money, and they can control people. I remember years ago, it must have been actually two or three decades ago, reading a statistic about the Catholic Church, and how (I think) it was either 60% or 70% of the priests did not believe in God. They do not believe He existed. They just thought of it as a humanist philosophy that they promoted in, benefited from. It is not just the Catholics. Protestants are just as bad, just not as idolatrous, but not too far from it.

Please turn with me to II Timothy 2. To live righteously is difficult in this world and we see someone who is succeeding, someone who can stand against the enticements and the insinuations of evil, someone who is not carried away off his feet by the popular thing, someone who stands steadfast for truth and for everything that is worthy, and we are greatly encouraged when we see that. You see, our life, the way we live it as an example, affects everyone. If you do something to offend someone else, it offends the whole congregation. If you do something that is sinful, it influences the rest.

We do not live in a vacuum. We live in a family that is affected by every sin we commit. And that is why we should be careful to uphold standards and not push the envelope beyond what is right. We have to take into consideration what is appropriate and what is not appropriate. When people get into the appropriate and not appropriate areas, then you get into the gray areas, but we have to use the principle of, "will this hurt someone else?" Is this going to produce good or is it not going to produce good? We have to weigh everything. Everything is a test in this life.

In our daily lives, whatever our earthly calling, we all live in some kind of circle. We are surrounded by people who are blinded by Satan in the world there and carried along in evil ways by him at his will.

II Timothy 2:26 And that they [those who are in opposition], may come to their senses and escape the snare of the devil, having been taken captive by him to do his will.

Most of people that come into the church, or used to anyway in the Worldwide Church of God and probably even today, have come to God's truth by seeing someone else's example in living God's way of life. That is the most effective witness. That is the most effective way for God to call people into the church (because we cannot bring anyone into the church, not truly, not spiritually).

There, then, are some reasons and preliminary considerations why we must be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might.

Now, in the second place, to the second general principle, we have to realize our own weakness and our own need of help and that is the presumption behind what Paul is saying here. He is not only concerned about this because of the power of the enemy, he is equally concerned because of our own weakness, our own lack of strength, and the best way to realize this impotency is to understand something of the power of the enemy. And there is ample teaching in the Bible to bring you to that knowledge.

Go back to the very beginning of the Bible. There you find a man called Adam, who was sinless and perfect, but he is confronted by the manifestation of the wiles of the Devil. Though Adam and Eve were perfect and had lived a life of fellowship with Him and communion with God, they failed, and oh so easily. The subtlety of the enemy with his insinuation that God was against them, that God was unfair to them, was too much for Adam and Eve. And so they failed because they believed the lie. Right from the beginning, the lie has worked and it is still going on.

When Satan launches his attack, what is man, even perfect man made in the image of God. And if Adam and Eve in that perfect state failed, who are we to stand without God's Holy Spirit?

But let us go further. Look at the Old Testament saints. All of them—the patriarchs, the godly kings, and the prophets—they all failed. Not one of them could stand up to Satan—all have failed. They have all sinned and come short of the glory of God. They have succumbed to the wiles of the Devil—that was until they received God's Holy Spirit and received the power to be able to resist and fight that and their own human nature. We must never forget that our own human nature, even if Satan is not around, will give us a challenge because it, by nature, has enmity towards God.

This has been the universal testimony of all the saints. One of the assurances of the saints is that they do not give the impression that the life of a Christian is an easy one. The person who gives the impression that it is easy has confused something else with Christianity and he has found what he thinks is a shortcut which he imagines brings him to a place where everything is quite simple. That is what we see in mainstream Christianity. Simply believe on Christ and everything is good. They still believe that you should be good. They do not believe that you *have* to keep the Ten Commandments, at least many, if not most, of them believe that.

But simple and easy is not the lifestyle of a Christian. The greatest saints have always testified to the fierceness of the battle, to their own weakness, and to their own lack of ability. We must then pay heed to what this great cloud of witnesses is saying to us today. But you can also pay attention to your own experience. If you feel you are a very strong Christian, let me ask you why you have failed so much and why you still fail? What happens to your resolutions and your resolves? Why do you so often find yourself in the place of repentance? Why are you sometimes attacked with feelings of utter hopelessness and also despair? To what is this due? It is all due to the plain fact of our weakness. It is because we are insufficient and fallible.

But we must face this honestly. We have to admit to ourselves we are weak, but human pride does not want to admit this, but this is half the battle. We need to know that we are weak. In other words, we need to strive to do a great deal of self-examination. If you are not looking at your own life and looking for things that you can improve upon, you are not self-examining.

That was the main problem with the Pharisees. They thought they were right with God and that there was nothing wrong with them, but they were riddled with flaws and weaknesses. Are there elements of weaknesses that are in us inherently and that render us incapable of fighting the battle against sin, self, and Satan? We have to realize that mere principles of morality are not sufficient for us. I do not mean mere principles of morality as in putting down morality. I just mean that they are not enough. The world has always been interested in what it calls "the good life."

Philosophers have always been interested in happiness. They have written about it, talked about it, and argued about it. But the trouble has been that they were never able to grasp it. Principles of morality are good as far as they go, but they are not enough. You can read books on ethics and can wax eloquent on these things, but it is a very different thing to put them into practice.

Please turn with me to Romans 7. The apostle Paul never depreciated the law of God because it is spiritual and that is emanating from God who is Spirit. Knowing that God's law can only be perfectly kept with God's Holy Spirit dwelling in him, Paul describes his struggle with his own human nature, which is common to man. And this, as far as being eye-opening, is one of my passages of favorite scriptures. I just think that he has said it so well so that all of us can see what our struggle is.

Romans 7:18-25 For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find. For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice. Now if I do what I will not to do, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me. [That sin is in our human nature.] I find then a law, that evil is present with me, the one who wills to do good. [He is saying the evil is present in him, even though he is trying to do the right thing.] For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man. But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? I thank God—through Jesus Christ our

Lord! So then, with the mind I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin.

So we see that a certain thing is right, but the problem is, how am I to do it? And it is when we really face the problem that we begin to realize the extent of our weakness, how hard it is to overcome a bad habit or whatever it might be that we are doing that is wrong.

Furthermore, human willpower alone is not enough. Willpower is excellent and we should always be using it, but it is not enough. A desire to live a good life is not enough. Obviously we should all have that desire but wanting it will not guarantee success. There is a lot of things we want that we do not get and some of that is improved character. We are working on so many things in our lives—pick the worst thing and work on that and then go to the next thing. Do not try to overcome it all at one time, but do not neglect it either.

Hold on to your principles of morality and ethics, use your willpower to accomplish things, pay heed to every noble, uplifting good desire that is in you. But realize that these things alone are not enough; that they will never bring you to the desired place. And we have to realize that all our best is totally inadequate, that a spiritual battle must be fought in a spiritual manner.

Please turn with me to Matthew 18. Now the problem is not just a problem in physical moral living. That is the limit of the physical ruling government's concern with regard to how we conduct ourselves. It knows nothing about the spiritual principles because it knows nothing about Satan and his demons, the principalities and the powers, and that is why it continues to believe that secular education can solve the problem and reform people. And that is why it evokes the aid of psychotherapy and various other methods in prisons. But the more it follows these deceptions, the more the problem seems to increase. There are more people committing crime now than ever before.

It is because carnal human beings do not realize the spiritual character of the problem. You and I have to realize that living God's way of life does not follow automatically upon conversion—for many are called but few are chosen. There is a great deal of hard spiritual work to be done.

Matthew 18:3-4 [Jesus said] "Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore whoever humbles himself as this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven."

A major part of humbling ourselves is in recognizing our weakness. A person may recognize the truth intellectually and he thinks that he needs to act. He needs the act of God in Christ to save him. But he seems to leave it at that. He feels that in the future he is going to live God's way of life by his own power. He has a new understanding, so now he is going to live his life. And as we live God's way of life, we learn more and more how to keep the commandments correctly and to live our lives in an even better way. We think we are doing well when we are first baptized, but when we have been baptized for decades, you realize how hard and how long a job it is.

Principles of morality are good as far as they go, but they are just not enough. But it cannot be done because he is trusting in nothing but his own human strength. That is, the person who is relying on his own willpower.

On the contrary, this is a battle that has to be fought in a spiritual manner and with spiritual understanding and power. John 4:24 says, "God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth." The same holds true for everything we do with God. And it holds true for that spiritual battle that is coming and that we are in. So both spirit and truth are required. The law of God is a reflection of the character of God and it can only be understood and perfectly kept with the power of God's Spirit. True worship of God requires spiritual understanding of God's law of love, which is the foundation of God's truth.

Moving on now to the third general principle: having realized that I am to be strong, and that in and of myself I am essentially weak because I am still in the flesh and that it is still true, as we see here.

Galatians 5:17 For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish.

Again, there is Paul, in a very succinct way, saying the same thing that he said in the last scripture that we read.

Realizing that all that is still true of us and that we are here in this warfare and up against this terrible power, what is the next thing? It is to realize that *God is strong*. It seems like such a ridiculous statement because does not everyone know that God is strong? To realize that God is strong, that He is mighty, and as the Old Testament reminds us, the name of the Lord is a strong tower. His very name is strong. In Exodus 20:7, "You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain, for the Lord will not hold him guiltless who takes His name in vain."

I am always amazed at how many atheists use God's name in vain. Somebody who they do not even believe exists. You just have to scratch your head at that. But even more so people in Christianity who use God's name in vain when it is clearly stated right in the commandments.

The name represents Him, who He is, and what He is, and the important thing therefore we have to realize is the greatness of His strength. That is what Paul is saying in Ephesians 6 to us. Listen to the words, examine them in detail. He says, "Be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might." Do we realize its full significance? What does he mean the power of His might? Well, the basic thing, obviously, is the might, and we are directed to the power of His might.

Now, the difference between power and might is that *might means power and strength as an imbuement*. Might means inherent power, something a person is given. Think of a very strong, muscular man. The might is that man's inherent muscular strength and power. He has been given the type of physique or the type of makeup in his body where he can be strong.

Power means the manifestation of that might. The might is there as a potential, as something inherent now manifesting itself, showing its usefulness, showing that it can be effectual. It means that this great reserve of strength and power is actually in operation doing something. Not the imbuement itself, but the proof of the fact that you have the imbuement. So by having God's Holy Spirit indwelling us—Jesus Christ in us—we have been imbued with that power. And what Paul is saying? We have to use that

power. We have to rely on that power and that power is the greatest power in the universe and beyond. So why do we worry? We worry because we are physical human beings.

The apostle Paul uses the two terms and it is important that we look at both. He says be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might, or strength. So you start by reminding yourself of His strength. Look at Him, he says, look at His power. You have been looking at the enemy and you have seen his strength and you have looked at yourself and you are trembling in your weakness and then your ineffectiveness. Well now, he says, look at Him, be strong in the Lord.

To be strong in the Lord, you must remember the power of His might and the power of His strength, express it whichever way you like. But look at Him and realize all the reserves of strength and power that are in Him. That is what the New Testament epistles are saying almost everywhere. In Him, says the apostle Paul to the Colossians.

Colossians 2:9 (ESV) For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily.

It is there in him.

Colossians 2:2-3 (ESV) that their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, to reach all the riches of full assurance of understanding and the knowledge of God's mystery, which is Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

So what is it "in Christ" is all unlimited. There is no limit to His knowledge, His truth, His power, His glory. They are all there. They constitute this might and this tremendous inherent strength and power. To be strong in the Lord includes meditating about Him and His strength. It is not just a phrase, an incantation, or formula. It means that you sit down and remind yourself of these things and you look at Him and you remind yourself of some of the things that are true concerning Him.

Let us say you are facing a trial and you sit down and you think He is all-powerful. He is greater than anything else in the universe. Why am I so concerned? It is not that easy, of course. But it is certainly comforting, to say the least.

This is one of the main reasons for reading the Scriptures regularly and reading the four gospels in particular. We should not read the Scriptures merely in order that we may say that we have read them or read them as our daily portion and so we have done our duty. That is no reason for reading the Scriptures. It is not to say we should stop reading them systematically. That has its purpose as well. But please do not become content with a mere mechanical reading of the Scriptures without really looking at them, and meditating on them without realizing what they are saying, and without drawing lessons for yourself and praying about the exercise. It takes time to read the Scriptures properly.

Where do you see His strength? We see it in His life. We see Him here in this world when He was physical. We see that obviously He knew hunger and thirst and physical weakness and tiredness, that He knew what it was to be disappointed with people. And He has gone through it all and He knows what we are going through.

And yet, what we see as we look at Him is that He stands. He always stands, and there is never a wavering, still less of falling or faltering or failing. He stood with the world and the flesh and the adversary, *everything* against Him. But He still stood and therefore, as we look at His life, we see immediately one who walked through this world without deviating in any respect. And He just went on steadily.

We see even more than that. We see in it all His miracles. We see it especially in the miracles in which he cast out demons. Here is One to whom they were not a problem. Christ never had a problem with them. They would attack Him but He never had a problem. Here is One who can command the demons, He can exorcise them. He speaks with power, with authority, and the demons have to come cringing to Him, asking Him to spare them, not to

cast them into the deep. Here is a master. That is another word that is underrated when it is referred to Jesus Christ and that is what the word Lord means.

The demons come to Him and say, we know you are the holy one of God. Here is the One who, when the demons are operating powerfully, with a word could drive them out. The disciples could not do that, not until they were given Christ's power to do it. Look at the boy at the foot of the Mount of Transfiguration. The father had brought the boy to the disciples and they had done their best but they could not help, and the poor boy remained a victim of Satan's power. But at a word from Christ, Satan is driven out, and the boy is healed and is restored to his father.

There we see His power in operation, there we see something of the power of His might. He is the Master of the principalities and powers and rulers of the darkness of this world and the spiritual wickedness in high places. He has total control of them, but He allows them to do their dirty work so that His plan of salvation may be carried out.

Nevertheless, we are not done with the power of His might. It is revealed in His own temptation. He was tried directly by Satan himself, not by some of the emissaries, not by one or the other of these principalities or powers, but by Satan himself. With all his wiles, Satan appears to take charge of the situation because he realizes that it is the biggest problem he has ever confronted. And so he came to Jesus and he tempted him 40 days and 40 nights in the wilderness and on other occasions. But Satan was utterly and entirely defeated. With the words of Scripture, Jesus repels him and Satan falls back defeated, waiting for another time. But he completely failed in spite of his enormous efforts.

The apostle Paul says to make practical use of that power yourself. Jesus, with all His power in operation, met Satan in single combat and Jesus easily defeated him. Therefore, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. The power was always and already in Him. When Satan comes Christ just shows it and He just lets out a little of it at a time, in a sense, and Satan is immediately repulsed. I am sure it did not take very much of that mighty power to repulse Satan, to force him away. In exactly the same way in grasping this point, James says,

James 4:7 Resist the devil and he will flee from you.

Where do you think that resistance, that power for that resistance comes from comes? It comes from God's Holy Spirit, Jesus Christ residing in us as His temple.

That is the way it works out. But it does not work out until you and I are quite sure about Christ's power and really do know something of the power of His might and the *inherent power that is in Him*.

Jesus Christ proved and demonstrated His power at the crucifixion and in the resurrection. That day seemed to be the day of the power of evil and sin, and the powers of evil thought that to be the case, as also did Satan and his demons. The world too had similar thoughts. They reviled Him, they laughed at Him, and they jeered Him. "If you were the king of the Jews, save yourself." They thought that He could not do that and that Satan had defeated Him. But what was happening there was that He was,

Colossians 2:15 . . . disarm[ing] principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it.

In other words, He was victorious over them when they thought that they had defeated Him.

Please turn with me to Psalm 68. This is the supreme paradox. Jesus appears to be dying in weakness but there is inherent strength there and there is this might of His, there is the power of the divine nature of God there. Jesus turns even that into the vanquishing of Satan and into the setting of His people free. He has mastered completely over all those powers that are set against us. He defeats them all.

Psalm 68:17-18 The chariots of God are twenty thousand, even thousands of thousands; the Lord is among them as in Sinai, in the Holy Place. You have ascended on high, You have led captivity captive.

Christ is the conqueror over everything that is set against us. But we must remember that God is the author of this victory. He formed the plan, He executed it in the offering of His Son.

This is not some psychological formula that you and I can apply. But it all comes back to this: to truly know Him is to know the power that is in Him. You will never know spiritual power in your life until you know Him. How do we do that? What is the test of knowing Jesus Christ? The apostle John gives us a clear definition.

I John 2:3-4 [easy formula for memorization: 1,2,3,4] Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments. He who says, "I know Him," and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.

So that is one of the major ways that we can know Christ.

The various sections of the armor are nearly all directed to that end—to know Him and to know the truth concerning Him. And we start with that here, in the Lord and in the power of His might. We realize that His power is available to us and then we realize that we belong to one who is the Lord and Master and that all the fullness of deity dwells in Him. That there is invincible might and power in Him and that it is power and might that not only remains potential, but also becomes actual. It shows itself and it manifests itself on our behalf. This power and might enable us even in this evil day to stand and withstand, to be strong, to fight the spiritual battle with principalities and powers, and to bring honor and glory to His great and holy name.

Satan is indeed a terrible enemy. But we can be encouraged by the fact that Satan and his demons will be removed for 1,000 years from influencing and deceiving mankind, and their imprisonment in the place of restraint will be so that mankind at last may be made at one with God.

If it were not for God and the proper provision He has made for us for this warfare, we would be rightly downcast and discouraged and we would be severely depressed. But we are not to do that. Although we face a great and

terrible enemy, the victory is not our enemy's, but God's. It is not our enemy alone, but God's, and it is our victory too if we arm ourselves as we are told to arm ourselves, and persevere to the end.

The conclusion is a simple one. *Do not trust yourself*. If you trust yourself as Peter did, you will fail as Peter did. Peter told Jesus in Mark 14:29, "Even if all are made to stumble, yet I will not be." But that very night Peter, who considered himself the strongest of all the apostles, denied his Lord three times; on the last occasion, even with cursing and swearing. If we trust only ourselves, we will fail.

Turn with me to for a final scripture to I Corinthians 15. Now, if we know our own weakness and therefore turn to God as our necessary defense against Satan, then we will be able to stand against Satan's schemes. Let us end on a positive and thankful note here.

I Corinthians 15:57-58 But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.

The literal translation of verse 57 is, "But thanks be to God, who keeps on giving us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."

So we experience the power of His resurrection in our lives as we yield to Him. He will never leave us nor forsake us because we are of the body of Christ. May God spiritually strengthen all of you, especially in preparation for the fall holy days.