

## Spiritual Warfare (Ephesians 6:10-20)

We have an enemy! Probably not what you want to hear on a Sunday morning, especially in church.

We, you and I, have an enemy! I say this because this is what Paul, in the end part of his letter to the Christians in Ephesus, is preparing them and us for.

Be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power; put on the full armour of God.

Why? To stand against the devil's schemes, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground.

How has this situation come about? Let's start at the very beginning...

Just as Paul's letter to the Ephesian Christians (here they were Gentiles who had converted to Christianity, not Jews) was written for their encouragement, it is also an encouragement for us. In his letter Paul reminds us of the Spiritual blessings we have in Christ, that we are made alive in Christ and that we are one in Christ.

For example, in chapter 1 we're told that God chose us, he adopted us as his children, that we have forgiveness of sins, that we are marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit.

In chapter 2 we're reminded of God's great love for us, we're reminded of God's mercy and his grace. (you might remember a few weeks ago I said that mercy was *not getting what we deserved*, whereas grace is *getting what we don't deserve*.) "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no-one can boast."

Paul goes on to say that once we were separate from Christ, excluded, without hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus we who were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ. We are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people. We too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.

The letter then goes on to encourage us to live this out in practice. Paul discusses what this might look like, and the behaviour expected of Christians.

First, there is to be unity in the body of Christ. We're to make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. For there is one body and one Spirit – just as we were called to one hope – one Lord, one faith, one baptism. Christ is our head. From him the whole body grows and builds itself up in love.

Second, we're called to live as children of light – not in futile thinking, but being made new in the attitude of our minds; not indulging in every kind of impurity, but holiness; not falsehood, but truth; not stealing, but generosity; being encouraging, kind, compassionate and forgiving.

And thirdly, this way of living is to overflow into our relationships at home in our families, with our partners and between children and parents, and to overflow into our relationships in our workplaces and with those we do business with.

Put your hands up if you find it easy to live like this. Perhaps I should have asked you to put your hands up if you find it difficult to live like this; my hand would be up too! It's very difficult to live like this, isn't it?

There is a reason why it is so difficult. Paul knows about this. We are in a battle. We have an enemy. We have an enemy whose sole objective is to prevent us from living like this. Paul has already given us some clues earlier in his letter. He refers to "the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient" (2:2). When Paul urges us, "Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry" he adds, "and do not give the devil a foothold" (4:27).

We can read in the Gospels of encounters Jesus himself had with Satan: for example, when, in the wilderness, he is tempted by Satan, or when Jesus casts out demons from those possessed. Truth is, talk or discussion about Satan, or the devil, and demons, makes many of us uncomfortable. Some of us may even be sceptical.

Eighty years ago, CS Lewis, one of the greatest writers on theological themes in the 20th century, published *The Screwtape Letters*. It is a series of letters by a senior devil to a junior devil about his patient who has recently become a Christian. In the book preface Lewis writes, "There are two equal and opposite errors into which our race can fall about devils. One is to disbelieve in their existence. The other is to believe, and to feel an excessive and unhealthy interest in them." He goes on, "Readers are advised to remember that the devil is a liar."

Here's an extract from one of the letters (No. 7):

*'My dear Wormwood...*

*Our policy, for the moment, is to conceal ourselves.... The fact that 'devils' are predominantly comic figures in the modern imagination will help you. If any faint suspicion of your existence begins to arise in his mind, suggest to him a picture of something in red tights, and persuade him that since he cannot believe in that (it is an old textbook method of confusing them) he therefore cannot believe in you...*

*Your affectionate Uncle Screwtape'*

We have an enemy! "Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armour of God so that you can stand against the devil's schemes."

The devil is not happy that we have received tremendous blessings in Christ. As the father of lies (this is what Jesus called him in John's gospel) the devil will try and make us doubt all this, trick us into

thinking that God can't possibly love us as we are just too bad a sinner, that God won't forgive us again, and so on.

The devil is not happy that we are united together in Christ. He will seek to disrupt what leads to unity and peace, between us as Christians in our churches, and as we live out our faith in our homes, workplaces and communities.

We have an enemy! But he is a defeated enemy! Paul tells us that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ has incomparably great power that he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms.

We're called to put on the armour of God and stand, stand firm, stand our ground. We don't do this on our own, like an army, we stand together and together we resist the devil. As it says in James' letter (4:7), "Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you."

I want to close with a prayer from Pete Greig's book, "God on mute".

(In his prayer I've changed the "me" and "I" to "us" and "we".

Lord, help us to stand today. Trials and temptations abound.

When life hurts, we get confused, dishonest, suspicious, and critical.

*We put on the belt of truth.*

When life hurts, our relationships suffer - especially our relationship with you.

*We put on the breastplate of righteousness.*

When life hurts, we either get really lazy or we make ourselves really busy.

*We put on the shoes of the gospel.*

When life hurts, we let down our guard and leave ourselves exposed.

*We take up the shield of faith.*

When life hurts, our thinking gets negative and we question everything.

*We put on the helmet of salvation.*

When life hurts, we're cowards.

*We take hold of the sword of the Word.*

Lord, it doesn't feel very finished down here. We don't feel very finished.

See us kneeling in prayer.

Lord, help us to stand.

Amen