

Soldiers of Christ and Their Warfare – Ephesians 6:10–13

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Introduction

Ephesians is one of four letters Paul wrote from Rome in about 62 A.D. while he was appealing his case to Caesar. In describing this period of incarceration, Luke reported that “Paul was suffered to abide by himself with the soldier that guarded him” (Acts 28:16).¹ John Eadie suggests that Paul's daily association with the sights, sounds, and soldiery of the Praetorian Guard (Phi. 1:13) may have suggested the graphic warfare/armament comparison of Ephesians 6:10–17.²

Beginning in Ephesians 5:22 and continuing through 6:9 Paul wrote specific directions to various classes of saints. He discussed husband-wife responsibilities in 5:2–33. In 6:1–4 he addressed parent-child responsibilities. Master-slave responsibilities were his subject in 6:5–9. In drawing the letter to a close, Paul then put all these classes in the same class: Whether husbands, wives, parents, children, masters or slaves, all who are in the kingdom of Christ must bravely stand and fight as soldiers in the Lord's army.

Military Figures in the New Testament

Just as God's people in the Old Testament had their physical standing armies for waging war against the enemies of God, so the New Testament figuratively depicts His people as soldiers engaged in the never-ending battle of righteousness against iniquity and Truth against error. Paul uses this figure more than any other New Testament writer, but Peter and James also make some use of it.

We are engaged in a war, but it is not carnal warfare, nor is it waged with weapons of carnal warfare (2 Cor. 10:3–4). We are to serve as soldiers who “war the good” warfare (1 Tim. 1:18). Our archenemy attacks the Christian soldier by means of “fleshly lusts which war against the soul” (1 Pet. 2:11). The good soldier of Christ will suffer hardship for his Commander-in-chief, even as Paul did (2 Tim. 2:3). His service requires the avoidance of any entangling alliances that prevent him from wholly serving his Commander (v. 4). The Christian soldier is not in a mock battle, but in a real war, which Paul calls the “good fight of the faith” (1 Tim. 6:12). Paul, ever one to practice what he preached, could say at the close of his life, “I have fought the good fight” (2 Tim. 4:7). We are to resist the devil rather than meekly surrendering to him (Jam. 4:7). If we fail to resist him our souls will become part of his spoils of war (Col. 2:8).

Christ, our Commander-in-chief (1 Tim. 6:14-16), has provided a variety of adequate equipment. We have both “weapons” (2 Cor. 10:4) and “armor” (Rom. 13:12; 2 Cor. 6:7; Eph. 6:11,13) with which we must arm ourselves (1 Pet. 4:1). Only by taking advantage of the “whole armor of God” can we victoriously stand for Christ (Eph. 6:11, 13). Thus the New Testament makes frequent use of military figures and terms, designed to inspire us to be stalwart, brave, faithful, militant, and victorious spiritual combatants.

Spiritual Strength Is Available, Attainable, and Obligatory

As we “fight the good fight of the faith” we need to be strong lest we be overcome. The Lord has provided for that need. While physical strength and health may expedite our success in spiritual warfare, it is spiritual power, spiritual health, spiritual strength that we must have to stand against the devil:

...and exercise thyself unto godliness: for bodily exercise is profitable for a little; but godliness is profitable for all things, having promise of the life which now is, and of that which is to come (1 Tim. 4:4-7).

No soldier of Christ that falls in our great spiritual contest can plead that the spiritual weaponry was either unavailable or insufficient. Paul commands, “Be strong in the Lord...” (Eph. 6:10). Literally, since this is a passive verb form, it more literally reads, “be strengthened,” or as the ASV footnote reads, “...be made powerful.” The passive form necessarily implies a spirit of submission to the very avenues of spiritual strength available to us. The great curse of rank and file soldiers of Christ is a spirit of selfishness, resulting in rebellion and insubordination toward the authority of their Heavenly Commander. Many hearers are not so wise and spiritually mature as those who enlisted in the spiritual ranks in old Thessalonica. When they heard the Gospel, they “...accepted it not as the word of men, but, as it is in truth, the word of God...” (1 The. 2:13). Tragically, many who call themselves “soldiers of Christ” accept the Word of God as if it were the words of men, despising its authority and often seeking to silence those who preach and defend it faithfully.

More and more enlistees register this attitude toward the Scriptural authority of Scriptural elders in the local church. While some are actively advocating rebellion against their authority by denying the Biblical teaching behind it, many others have quietly, yet no less obviously, rebelled in their hearts. Such will neither follow the scriptural exhortations nor the righteous examples of the shepherds of their souls. Whether it is exhortations to live a pure life before a wicked world (Phi. 2:15), not to be “...forsaking our own assembling together...” (Heb.

10:25), or to “...withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly...” (2 The. 3:6), some (and sometimes many) in seemingly every church are rebellious. May we not overlook the reality that all such rebellion and insubordination are ultimately directed at Christ himself, Who has commanded preachers to preach the Word (2 Tim. 4:2) and elders to feed and protect His people (Acts. 20:28–30).

The fact that Paul orders us to be spiritually strong necessarily implies that it is possible for us to attain such strength. The Lord does not press orders upon His people that are beyond our ability. He tells us what the sources of spiritual strength are that will fully equip us for battle (Eph. 6:14–17). We may also read of those who became spiritually strong – and without any miraculous or direct supernatural assistance. Such was Abraham of old (Rom. 4:20), such were some in Rome (Rom. 15:1), and such were some of the Galatian brethren (Gal. 6:1). The Hebrew saints were without excuse in their spiritual retardation (Heb. 5:12–14) – and so are we. The sources of spiritual strength are not only available, but the strength we all so badly need is also assuredly attainable for every Christian soldier.

Further, the matter of being spiritually strong is not optional; rather, it is obligatory, imperative. With the force of a military command, we are to “be strong in the Lord.” The sources of strength are made readily available by our Commander-in-chief. The ability of the Christian soldier to apply these sources of strength is without question. How tragic that so many yet feel no obligation to become spiritually strong. We live in a time when few have done – or can be motivated to do – any serious studying of God's Word. Such will be absolutely without excuse when called to the Judgment.

Ignorance of the Word of God is the curse of the Lord's spiritual army. Because of widespread ignorance, not only among the rank and file, but among elders, deacons, teachers and even preachers, the Lord's people are at the same time rendered defenseless when the Truth is under attack and are unable to successfully press the battle offensively. The sad fact is that the Lord's own soldiers have in many cases become so much like the enemy troops that to oppose the enemy is to oppose themselves. Worldliness, impenitent fornication, adulterous marriages, a gadget and gimmick-oriented good-time approach, and outright false doctrine have so infiltrated the ranks in many places that the cause has been all but surrendered to the enemy. Such a sad state would not – could not – have occurred had every soldier of Christ taken the obligation seriously to become strong with the ample spiritual materiel which is readily available. The prevailing challenge before the remaining faithful leaders of God's people

is to encourage and inspire a hunger and thirst for the Truth, which alone will provide the strength needed for the battle.

The Lord Is Our Source of Strength

Three times in this brief context Paul specifies the source of all spiritual power. We are to be **“strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might”** (Eph. 6:10, emph. DM). He twice states that all our spiritual armor is “of God” (vv. 11,13).

First, it is appropriate to notice that spiritual power is “in the Lord” as opposed to “not in the Lord” or “apart from the Lord.” Paul employed the phrase, in the Lord or its equivalent, in Christ, no fewer than 17 times in this brief epistle. This phrase refers to being in fellowship with Christ by having entered into the sphere where the Lord is and where the Lord blesses. It is equivalent to being in the church, the kingdom, and the body of Christ, and therefore to being saved/redeemed by the blood of Christ. There is no source of spiritual strength outside of Christ and His church. Therefore, there is no way for those who are not in the Lord and in his church to so strengthen themselves as to be able successfully to wage spiritual warfare. Spiritual power is found only in Christ, just as salvation is only in Christ.

Second, we must understand that spiritual power is “in the Lord” as opposed to its being in the devices and inventions of men. With Paul, we must never forget: “I can do all things in him that strengtheneth me” (Phi. 4:13). “...The weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh...” (2 Cor. 10:4), either in the sense of their being instruments of carnal warfare or those needed on the spiritual battlefield (viz., the philosophies, practices, and reasonings of men). We must arm ourselves with far more than the imaginations and inventions of men in religion, “For our wrestling is not against flesh and blood, ...but against the spiritual hosts of wickedness...” (Eph. 6:12). If we rely merely upon our own ingenuity or if we try to press the battle with only the strategies and plans of men, we shall most certainly fail.

It is a saddening to faithful soldiers to see many of the Lord's congregations trying to wage spiritual warfare with carnal weapons they have borrowed from the enemy. The multiminsty concept that has become almost an obsession with some came not from the Lord, but from men. It is at once sickening and absurd to read in some church bulletins of a “parking lot ministry,” “maintenance and custodial ministry,” “caring ministry,” and many others. Some congregations have a “minister” and a “ministry” for almost everything but headaches and hangnails. Coupled with this approach to spiritual warfare, one may now often see a well-

rounded sports-recreation-entertainment program provided by the church in its own gymnasium. One congregation advertises a Wednesday night catered meal with a coupon that gives them a \$3.00 meal for only \$.50. Another stratagem borrowed from the enemy that has become the trademark of numerous preachers and congregations is a short, sweet psychological pep talk that masquerades as a Gospel sermon, but which contains little of either – Gospel or sermon.

These congregations that have adopted such approaches are admittedly attracting people – large numbers of them in some cases (even as the sects from which they borrowed them are). But who are they attracting and to what? Largely, they are attracting doctrinally soft, materialistic, worldly-minded brethren from surrounding congregations who want to live any way they please Monday through Saturday and pay a bit of penance on Sunday. They are being attracted by a popular, smooth-tongued pulpiter with a no-guilt message, accompanied by a “fun and games” approach to religion that appeals far more to the flesh than to the spirit. They have mistaken the frenzied and constant activity of the highly-structured “ministries” of such congregations for the fulfillment of the great commission and the daily practice of pure and simple Christianity.

Ironically, the numerical growth of such congregations has convinced them that they are successfully fighting and winning the spiritual war. However, the rapidly growing denominational groups are equally convinced of the same thing and by the same evidences. Numbers can be a wonderful encouragement and even a power in the Lord's army, but only when they are truly devoted to him. Gideon's army (Jud. 7) should remind us that the victory in spiritual matters rests not with numbers, but with those who are serious about faithfulness to the Lord, though they are few. Let us continue to boldly, plainly and faithfully plant and water the seed of the kingdom – and trust God to give the increase (1 Cor. 3:6). The power is in the Lord and from the Lord and His Word. Regardless of the numbers of men or of dollars a religious cause may attract, it is utterly powerless – and is indeed the enemy of God – if it rests not firmly on the Word of God. These things being so, there is far more spiritual power in a group of 100 saints who love the Lord and his truth without compromise than in a group of 100,000 who are more concerned with popular fads and trends in morals and doctrine.

We Have a Powerful and Cunning Foe

While our foe in this spiritual warfare fully utilizes men and women who yield themselves to his service, our real battle is not with them. Our conflict is with him who

dominates and dictates their thinking and behavior. This archenemy of Christ and his people is identified as “the devil” (Eph. 6:11), otherwise commonly identified in Scripture as “Satan” (Mat. 16:23; 1 Cor. 5:5; 2 Cor. 2:11, et al.). *Satan* means “adversary,” “accuser,” or “enemy,” and he is indeed such to all who are striving for Christ. Paul described him as “...the prince of the powers of the air...” (Eph. 2:2), even as his agents against whom we wage war are described as “principalities,” “powers,” “the world-rulers of this darkness” and “the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.”³

The Lord twice called Satan the “prince of this world” (John 14:30; 16:11). The world is led and influenced by him and is dominated by his will. It is in and against this world that the Lord’s soldiers fight the spiritual battles with the philosophies and institutions of men. However, they receive their orders from Satan, a spirit-being, even as we receive ours from the Lord Jesus. Thus our real warfare is with their invisible reprobate spirit prince. He is depicted as being “in the air” and in “the heavenly places” because he is invisible to the physical eye. Therefore, he is described as one who inhabits and pervades the very atmosphere of our earth. He is presently allowed to live in “the air,” but he will eventually be brought down to the eternal Hell prepared for him and his angels (Mat. 25:41), which John describes as the “lake of fire and brimstone” (Rev. 20:10).

Paul warns us of the “wiles of the devil” (Eph. 6:11). *Wiles* is from *methodeias*, referring to “a deliberate planning or system.”⁴ It is obvious that our word, *method*, is a direct derivative. The *wiles of the devil* therefore refers to his crafty, subtle, deliberate strategy in seeking out our most vulnerable points. There is truly “method in his madness.”

Satan is a master of the art of deception and subterfuge. “He is a liar and the father thereof” (John 8:44). He stalks his prey, lurks in the shadows, awaits his opportunity to devour whomever he may (1 Pet. 5:8). We must not be ignorant of his devices lest he gain an advantage over us (2 Cor. 2:11). He cleverly lays his snares that he may bring men into the captivity of his will (2 Tim. 2:26). He constantly seeks a weakness whereby he may tempt us (1 Cor. 7:5). His deceptive powers are so formidable that he at times can pass himself off as “an angel of light” (2 Cor. 11:14). It is plain from the foregoing that he not only engages in open combat, but that he excels in “guerrilla tactics.”

This review of some of the devil's determined onslaughts and strategies should convince us of the folly of underestimating our foe. It should also be evident why we need strength and

power beyond that of mere human ingenuity to wage war with this horrible and powerful spiritual enemy. We make a costly, yea fatal mistake if we underestimate him and try to fight him in our own strength alone.

We Must Be Fully Armed

Because our foe is so formidable, because he is a spiritual foe in a spiritual battle, and because we are so weak by ourselves, we must be well armed. The armament that the Lord supplies is sufficient, both for protection and for attack. Paul twice urges us to utilize the “whole armor of God” (vv. 11,13). *Whole armor* is from panoplian, the “full armor of a heavy-armed soldier...”⁵ Our English word, panoply, comes directly from it. The Lord used the term once in a literal sense (Luke 11:22), and its only other appearance in the New Testament is Paul’s metaphorical use of it in Ephesians 6.⁶ A soldier sent to do battle with only a portion of his armor and/or a dull, rusty, or gapped sword will be severely handicapped and is much more likely to fall than one who is fully equipped. Our foe is indeed strong, but God has provided us with all that we need to survive and be victorious in the most severe battle. Though not using the military figure, Paul stressed this point to the Corinthians:

There hath no temptation taken you but such as man can bear: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation make also the way of escape, that ye may be able to endure it (1 Cor. 10:13).

We must not be so foolish or careless as to believe we can dispense with part of the available equipment. It is no wonder that so many Christian soldiers fall in battle; so many are only half equipped at best to engage the adversaries.

It is important to observe that God does not force his armor on his soldiers. In fact, he does not even put it on them. Rather, we are to “put on” and “take up” all the armor that God provides. First, the foregoing means that the Lord does not draft or conscript anyone into his service; all who enter do so by voluntary enlistment (obedience to the Gospel plan of salvation, whereupon the Lord adds one to His church [Acts 2:37–41, 47]). Likewise, those in the Lord’s army wait in vain if they suppose that the Lord will directly (i.e., supernaturally apart from His Word) bestow upon them the armor needed to meet the foe. The armor is readily available and attainable in the “Word of God” – the Holy Spirit’s weapon for this spiritual warfare. As previously noted, the armaments are utilized only through our diligent effort to “take up” and “put on” this panoply. While the emphasis in Verse 10 is upon passively submitting to the very means the Lord supplies for our spiritual empowerment, the emphasis in Verses 11 and 13 is

upon actively applying ourselves to the attainment of these available resources. Those in places of spiritual leadership must ever challenge the Lord's people not to rest from or grow weary with the task of putting on all the armor provided. Only when we have equipped ourselves as fully as possible will we be able to press the battle and defend ourselves against defeat.

We Have the Responsibility to Stand Fast and Fight

The whole point of being well-armed is not for the parade ground, the reviewing stand or mock maneuvers, but for the field of combat. The reason we are to “take up the whole armor of God” is that we “may be able to withstand in the evil day, and, having done all, to stand” (Eph. 6:13). The evil day is probably best understood as the day of combat, trial, temptation, persecution, or opposition. Although some would refer it to the “day of the Lord” (2 Pet. 3:10), such an application does not harmonize with the fact that when the Lord comes it will be the day of ultimate victory rather than an “evil day” for his servants (1 The. 4:16–17). Others erroneously apply it to an alleged literal “battle of Armageddon.” However, the real spiritual battles are the frequent, often daily, encounters the Christian soldier faces as one takes up his or her cross daily to follow the Commander-in-chief (Luke 9:23). It is in the daily fray that the armaments and weapons supplied by the Lord are most necessary. We will stand or fall spiritually for the most part, not in one great pitched battle, but in the daily skirmishes that add up to the prolonged warfare.

We have a responsibility to stand and fight. Rather than cowering, compromising, or running from the foe, we are to “resist the devil” so as to make him run from us (Jam. 4:7). We are not to “give place to the devil” (Eph. 4:27) by surrendering or abandoning the Truth. We are to “have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather even reprove them” (Eph. 5: 11). We, like Paul, must be “set for the defense of the gospel” (Phi. 1:16). Soldiers of Christ are obligated to “contend earnestly for the faith” (Jude 3). The worthy spiritual warrior must be “steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord...” (1 Cor. 15:58). Concerning Satan, Peter orders us to “withstand steadfast in your faith” (1 Pet. 5:8–9).

When one staunchly and steadfastly stands for Truth when those about him are retreating, compromising, and even deserting the blood-stained banner of the heavenly kingdom, he will encounter suffering. The world will see that the faithful soldier pays a price for steadfastness. Likewise, those in the ranks whose have compromises and/or desertion is/are exposed will turn their “guns” on the bold and staunch soldier who dares expose their treason. Paul, who suffered so many perils, both from worldlings and from false brethren (2Cor.

11:26), perfectly exemplified the trait of determined faithfulness, yea, heroism, under enemy fire. He encourages us: “Suffer hardship with me, as a good soldier of Christ Jesus” (2 Tim. 2:3). Such soldiers have the heartening promise of the Lord:

Blessed are ye when men shall reproach you, and persecute you, and say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets that were before you (Mat. 5:11-12).

Conclusion

Spiritual battles and their outcome can never be measured by human standards, because the human perception is not equal to God’s perception and knowledge of them. It is a great irony that faithful soldiers of Christ may suffer much, even be killed, by the enemies of Truth and righteousness, but still be victorious! Man can only kill the body; he cannot harm the soul, which must be our ultimate concern (Mat. 10:28). Thus, we are urged to faithfully stand—even in the face of physical death—and we will be given the victor’s crown of life (Rev. 2:10). Satan and his demonic hosts may, for a while prevail, but our Lord shall have the last word—even as demonstrated in His seeming defeat in death, only to be crowned with final victory in His glorious resurrection. We rest in the promise that He will cast the old devil and all of his servants into the lake of fire and brimstone and will welcome his faithful soldiers into the everlasting city foursquare (Rev. 20:10, 15; 21:27). Those in the Lord’s army must never cease singing:

Soldiers of Christ arise, and put your armor on;
Strong in the strength which God supplies through his beloved Son.
That having all things done, and all your conflicts past,
You may overcome through Christ alone and stand entire at last.⁷

Endnotes

1. All Scripture quotations are from the American Standard Version unless otherwise indicated.
2. John Eadie, A Commentary on the Greek Text of the Epistle of Paul to the Ephesians (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1979), p. 456.
3. *Tois epouraniois* (“the heavenlies” or “heavenly places”), is used variously in the New Testament and even in Ephesians. *Epouraniois* may refer variously to the abode of God and the angels (Eph. 1:20), the ethereal realm of space in which the sun, moon, and stars are located (1 Cor. 15:40-41), and to the atmosphere immediately surrounding the earth in which the birds fly (Mat. 6:26). So we understand in Paul’s reference to the “third heaven” (2 Cor. 12:2) that he is speaking of the very abode of God, the “first heaven” consisting of the atmosphere and the “second heaven” consisting of the universe beyond earth’s atmosphere. Both immediate and remote context must be used to determine which “heaven” is referred to in any given passage. To which heaven does Ephesians 6:12 refer? Satan and his angels surely do not dwell in the abode of God (Mat. 6:10). This leaves either outer space or the

atmosphere as the area referred to. Ephesians 2:2 would seem to fix it as in the atmosphere. So we read concerning the word for "air": "Aer was used by the ancients for the lower and denser atmosphere..."

4. (A.T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1931), v. IV, p. 523). Thus also, "The air, according to Paul's usage, in the simple physical sense. See Acts 22:23; 1Cor. 9:26; 1 The. 4:17; Rev. 16:17. The air is regarded as the region of the demons' might" (Marvin R. Vincent, *Word Studies in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1957), v. III, p. 374).
5. Vincent, p. 392.
6. William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1952), p. 612.
7. Charles Wesley's hymn poem.

[**Note:** I wrote this MS for and presented a digest of it orally at the Spiritual Sword Lectures, hosted by the Getwell Church of Christ, Memphis, TN, October 21-25, 1984. It was published in the book of the lectures, *The Book of Ephesians*, ed. Garland Elkins and Thomas B. Warren (Memphis, TN: Getwell Church of Christ).]

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