

## EPHESIANS 6:10-14 THIS IS WAR!

“Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. Put on the whole armour of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. Therefore take up the whole armour of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm. Stand therefore.”<sup>1</sup>

“**T**here is no discharge in time of war”<sup>2</sup> [ECCLESIASTES 8:8]. This is the assessment of the Wise Man. I question whether this current generation is as hearty as those that preceded. Our parents and grandparents fought two world wars that demanded sacrifice of each citizen in order to bring the conflict to a successful conclusion. Foodstuffs were rationed. Commodities were rationed. There were few luxuries available. “Don’t you know there’s a war going on?” became a common saying whenever someone complained about rationing or when they appeared to be extravagant in their use of precious commodities. These conditions of deprivation continued until the war was brought to a successful conclusion. Despite hardship, the populace willingly did without in order to support the boys who fought on two fronts, placing their lives on the line to defeat a vicious and cruel enemy.

That is not the situation today. Canadian troops are among the finest in the world, despite being handicapped by inadequate and outdated equipment, and in spite of political masters using Canadian forces as a political football. Though these brave men and women perform with excellence in the face of a brutal enemy, it seems as if few Canadians pay attention to their sacrifice; and those that are aware of their sacrifice often clamour for them to quit, arguing that the sacrifice is too much. Though luxuries are readily available in our nation, and despite the fact that we experience no rationing of commodities or food, many Canadians resent the necessity of spending money to supply the troops. The attitude appears to be, “how can the government supply our personal comfort if they are spending money on the armed forces?”

A similar transition has taken place within the Faith during the past several decades. In an earlier era, saints willingly sacrificed in order to advance the cause of the Master. They were faithful to participate several times each week in the worship of Christ the Lord. They eagerly set aside time to unite in prayer and held one another accountable to live godly lives. Though they grieved at the necessity of disciplining errant church members, they nevertheless did the hard work required to turn the disobedient back to paths of righteousness. They sacrificed of their earthly goods to spread the message of life throughout the world, ensuring during the century just past the greatest missionary advance ever witnessed.

That is not quite true of the saints of this day. It is well nigh impossible to get people to share in more than one service of worship in a week. United prayer is a thing of distant memories, if it has been experienced at all. Sacrifice is something that we readily admit is taught in the Word of God, but we are uncertain that we wish to be inconvenienced by such demands upon our own precious time.

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<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from **The Holy Bible, English Standard Version**, copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

<sup>2</sup> **New American Standard Bible: 1995 Update** (The Lockman Foundation, LaHabra, CA 1995)

We are at war. If you are a Christian you are engaged in a titanic struggle for righteousness and against evil. Whether this is the terminal generation may well be determined by whether we realise that we are engaged in combat. We have forgotten that the Apostle speaks of war that is being fought even now. He writes, “Though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds” [2 CORINTHIANS 10:3, 4].

This is a war that began in heaven, spilled onto the earth, and will be concluded on earth, but only after an assault on heaven. That conflict began when the devil seduced our first mother, and the conflict intensified and became more brutal still with the advent of the Saviour. John saw that intensification and wrote of it, “The dragon became furious with the woman and went off to make war on the rest of her offspring, on those who keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus” [REVELATION 12:17]. Earlier, he had written of a time yet future, perhaps very near, when he sees that war in heaven. He writes, “War arose in heaven, Michael and his angels fighting against the dragon. And the dragon and his angels fought back” [REVELATION 12:7].

Thus, those who follow the Lamb of God are engaged in a war that began long ago, and will be brought to a successful conclusion by the return of the Master. Until He comes again, we who are called by His Name are responsible to pursue this war. Our conduct is described by three imperatives: “Be strong,” “Put on the whole armour of God,” and “Stand.” This is war!

**“BE STRONG”** — One of the difficult challenges for the preacher of the Word is the necessity to warn the people of God of the danger arising from the enemy of our soul without seeming to glorify him. Our enemy is cunning. He was an angel—and not just any angel; he was the “anointed guardian cherub.” It will be beneficial for us to review the origin of our enemy. In order to do this, I invite you to turn in your Bible to **EZEKIEL 28:12b-19**. There, we see the LORD God speaking, addressing one identified as “the king of Tyre.” However, as we read the address, it becomes obvious that this is no mortal that is addressed. Listen to the Lord as He speaks.

“You were the signet of perfection,  
full of wisdom and perfect in beauty.  
You were in Eden, the garden of God;  
every precious stone was your covering,  
sardius, topaz, and diamond,  
beryl, onyx, and jasper,  
sapphire, emerald, and carbuncle;  
and crafted in gold were your settings  
and your engravings.  
On the day that you were created  
they were prepared.  
You were an anointed guardian cherub.  
I placed you; you were on the holy mountain of God;  
in the midst of the stones of fire you walked.  
You were blameless in your ways  
from the day you were created,  
till unrighteousness was found in you.  
In the abundance of your trade

you were filled with violence in your midst, and you sinned;  
so I cast you as a profane thing from the mountain of God,  
and I destroyed you, O guardian cherub,  
from the midst of the stones of fire.  
Your heart was proud because of your beauty;  
you corrupted your wisdom for the sake of your splendour.  
I cast you to the ground;  
I exposed you before kings,  
to feast their eyes on you.  
By the multitude of your iniquities,  
in the unrighteousness of your trade  
you profaned your sanctuaries;  
so I brought fire out from your midst;  
it consumed you,  
and I turned you to ashes on the earth  
in the sight of all who saw you.  
All who know you among the peoples  
are appalled at you;  
you have come to a dreadful end  
and shall be no more forever.”

The individual God addressed was said to be “the signet of perfection.” Moreover, this being was said to be “full of wisdom and perfect in beauty.” Additionally, this creature was in “Eden, the garden of God.” It should be evident that this is an angel—and not just any angel, but one identified as the “guardian cherub.” I’m not certain that we can fully appreciate all that God relates in this passage, but the implication is that this being guarded the throne of God.<sup>3</sup> This powerful individual “walked on the mountain of God.”

Despite this creature’s exalted position and despite the privilege he possessed, he fell from his position, as Ezekiel says and as Isaiah describes.

“How you are fallen from heaven,  
O Day Star, son of Dawn!  
How you are cut down to the ground,  
you who laid the nations low!  
You said in your heart,  
‘I will ascend to heaven;  
above the stars of God  
I will set my throne on high;  
I will sit on the mount of assembly  
in the far reaches of the north;  
I will ascend above the heights of the clouds;  
I will make myself like the Most High.’  
But you are brought down to Sheol,  
to the far reaches of the pit.

[ISAIAH 14:12-15]

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<sup>3</sup> See **New American Standard Bible, 1995 Update** for clarification of this claim

Despite the fact that he has been cast down from the exalted position he once occupied, our foe is nevertheless powerful. He has millennia of experience against mere humans. He has at his command a large army of demonic beings. The terrifying and horrific demonic powers that will be released on the earth during the Great Tribulation “have as king over them the angel of the bottomless pit. His name in Hebrew is Abaddon, and in Greek he is called Apollyon” [REVELATION 9:11]. “Abaddon” means destruction; “Apollyon” means destroyer. It is descriptive of the evil one’s work, for he is a destroyer of all that is good and holy. Peter warns Christians, “Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour” [1 PETER 5:8]. The mandated response to this threat is “Resist him, firm in your faith” [1 PETER 5:9].

If we will resist, we must be strong. However, the strength that is required is not human strength. It is the stuff of humour when comedienne say, “I can resist anything but temptation.” However, there is nothing funny when we unpack that statement. We mere mortals are susceptible to temptation, and the devil knows precisely what buttons to push to cause us to capitulate before the battle really begins. Therefore, the strength that is commanded is the strength provided by the Lord. That is the reason the Apostle commands, “Be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might.”

God does not call us to resist in our own strength, because it is insufficient. Compared to this malevolent being, we have no more ability to resist than did our first mother when she was deceived. Christ defeated the devil at the cross, but that does not mean that he has ceased a vicious assault against the people of God. The victory that we have is that provided by the Master, of which victory we read: “You, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, by cancelling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This He set aside, nailing it to the cross. He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in Him” [COLOSSIANS 2:13-15].

Early in this Ephesian Letter, the Apostle wrote, “I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers, that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come” [EPHESIANS 1:16-21].

Again, he wrote, “I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God” [EPHESIANS 3:14-19].

Do not fall into the trap of imagining that Paul speaks of some magical idea of power. Power is not the goal. Paul is speaking of power to live obediently. Power is not a current to be turned on or off. Neither is power for personal advantage in view. This power and the strength in view, have the sole purpose of enabling us to stand for Christ and against evil.

The fact that Satan is a defeated foe does not mean that we can cease to be vigilant. Christians must always be alert, for the wicked one still seeks to harm the cause of Christ. He does this through his slanderous work, for that is what his name means—“slanderer.” He slanders the people of God to the face of the Father, just as he slandered Job [JOB 1:6-11; 2:1-5]. Tragically, his slanderous work is often advanced by God’s own people as they devour and consume one another, disseminating lies about one another and wickedly criticising one another.

Slander is not simply unbecoming in followers of the Risen Saviour—it is symptomatic of a heart that is not walking with the Lord. Thus, we are admonished, “Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamour and slander be put away from you, along with all malice” [EPHESIANS 4:31]. In a similar vein, believers in the Lord Christ are warned, “You must put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander and obscene talk from your mouth” [COLOSSIANS 3:8]. Among the prominent symptoms of a terminal society is slander [see ROMANS 1:30]. Assuredly, slander has no place in the life of the people of God. The churches are responsible to hold the members accountable both for their words and for their attitudes toward one another.

History is littered with the rotting hulks of congregations that were once valiant for the Faith, but today have lost the ability to wage war. There are few warnings more chilling to the conscientious elder than that which is delivered by the Lord of the churches when He speaks to the Ephesian church: “I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first. Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first. If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent” [REVELATION 2:5, 6].

**“PUT ON THE WHOLE ARMOUR OF GOD”** — This imperative anticipates another command which is issued in verse 13, where the Apostle says, “Take up the whole armour of God.” Improper dress before combat is a sign that either an individual is poorly trained or that the individual is deliberately ignorant of the need for preparation. We are not fighting with human beings; rather, we struggle against spiritual wickedness. Thus, we are commanded to be gentle, to avoid being pugnacious, to turn from doing harm to our fellow man. However, we are engaged in a deadly fight that threatens our very existence as a community of faith.

Putting on the whole armour of God recalls an earlier imperative the Apostle issued. Christians are commanded “to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires.” We are to jettison the attitudes and actions which once marked us as belonging to the world. Now, we are “to be renewed in the spirit of [our] minds, and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness” [EPHESIANS 4:22, 23].

The armour of God refers to the armour that God provides, or even to the armour that God Himself wears. Moreover, putting on the armour of God recalls the command recorded in EPHESIANS 5:1, where believers are admonished to “be imitators of God.” Followers of the Son of God are to train themselves to become godly, holy, righteous. All are synonyms for a life that reflects the characteristics of God Himself. The concept is perhaps best summarised by the term godly. As Paul continues instructing believers, he makes it clear that godliness is achieved through training oneself to speak the truth in love, striving to be righteous, always prepared to explain our freedom in Christ. To be godly, we must train ourselves to live as God’s redeemed people, skilfully wielding the Word of the Lord to disciple others, praying and seeking God’s powerful presence among His people. Our Christian identity is defined and shaped by truth, righteousness, readiness, faith, salvation and the Gospel message.

One aspect of this passage should be of interest to each member of the congregation. Each of the imperatives is plural, though the translators have chosen to treat the commands as though they were singular. In other words, reading this passage in English, we tend to draw the conclusion that each of us is responsible to prepare ourselves for spiritual conflict—and that is accurate. Each Christian is responsible to prepare for combat. However, just as a combat company (or a platoon, or a squad, or a reconnaissance team) of marines operate as a unit, holding one another accountable and watching out for the welfare of other team members, so a congregation must always remember that they are a team—a unit, operating under the leadership of the Spirit of God.

Our cultural tradition as Canadians, or as Americans, stresses individual responsibility. We hold as an ideal the resolute individual standing starkly against the enemies of the crown. Think of the single Mountie, representative of the Crown, quelling a riot or placating marauding native bands. Movie heroes are loners—a frontiersman, a mountain man, the lone misfit that saves the day. Unfortunately, that ideal frequently is brought into the congregation of the Lord, and we see ourselves as a collection of individuals, each jockeying for oversight over the people of God. However, the biblical model is defined as a body that co-operates to advance the cause of Christ. There is no single individual that constitutes a congregation; rather, it is always corporate responsibility that must prevail and the unity of the Body that is sought.

I do not deny responsibility of the individual to be godly—this is clearly taught in the Word. However, corporate responsibility is virtually absent from western congregational life, and woefully neglected by the pulpit. Discipline of errant church members is almost unknown among contemporary churches; and when it is employed, it meets with intense resistance. It is far more likely that a congregation will ignore an unruly member than it is that they will endeavour to hold her accountable. Church leaders are far more likely to tolerate disruption and dissent than they are to discipline a member who is walking in a disorderly fashion.

Modern Christians are uncomfortable with the idea that they must rebuke a fellow member of the congregation, so they are far more likely to ignore their indiscretions and lack of spiritual discipline. However, if we take what Paul has written at face value, we must ensure that each member stands in the strength of the Lord's might. We must each accept responsibility to ensure that each member of the assembly is properly outfitted for spiritual combat. And we must each accept responsibility to encourage one another to stand firm in the face of spiritual assault.

In life, everyone wants to be a hero; however, heroes are recognised in the context of a team. A quarterback will not move the football down the field if there are no guards or defensive ends. A centre will not often make the basket if there are no forwards. A pitcher will not pitch a no-hitter if there are no outfielders. A preacher will not win many to the Faith if there are no members to disciple those who are brought to Christ. The Church of the Living God is to be the Community of Faith—each of us is dependent upon the other. The Spirit has worked in each of our lives, gifting each one and situating each one “for the common good” [1 CORINTHIANS 12:7].

Again, “the body does not consist of one member but of many... As it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as He chose. If all were a single member, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, yet one body” [1 CORINTHIANS 12:14, 18-20]. And a final observation from the Apostle: “God so composed the body, giving greater honour to the part that lacked it, that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honoured, all rejoice together.”

The Apostle then nails the matter when he writes, “Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it” [1 CORINTHIANS 12:24-27].

The believer’s battle dress will be the subject of a more intensive study at a future date. For the purpose of the message this day, the emphasis I wish to leave in your minds is that of the corporate responsibility we bear for one another, watching out for one another to ensure that we are equipped to fight. The equipment we have received is the best possible equipment, for it is designed and provided by God Himself. It will accomplish His will and defeat the enemy, if only we use what God has given.

“**STAND**” — The third imperative to receive our focus in this message is the command to stand. You will notice that the Apostle does not command us to advance; rather, we are to stand. The reason for this is that we occupy ground which has already been conquered by the Son of God. Thus, God does not tell us to attack the enemy; He does frequently command us to resist the enemy. James commands believers, “Resist the devil, and he will flee from you” [JAMES 4:7]. The pastor’s command anticipates that which Peter delivers while drawing his first letter to a close. “Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. Resist him, firm in your faith” [1 PETER 5:8, 9a]. These commands are akin to Paul’s warning to “give no opportunity to the devil” [EPHESIANS 4:27].

Our battles in the spiritual realm are fought by standing firm, not through aggression. The manner in which we Christians conduct our battles is the most eloquent witness to the Faith. I cannot emphasise too strongly that we do not attack satanic strongholds; we hold ground that the Master has already won. For this reason the Master said of the church that He would build, “The gates of hell shall not prevail against it” [MATTHEW 16:18]. It is the congregation of the Lord that is being attacked; we are attacking neither Satan nor his minions! Unfortunately, many of the professed saints of God imagine that they are serving God through violence toward those with whom they disagree. Such thinking is wrong; professed believers who are pugnacious, aggressive, obstreperous, combative and generally ill tempered cannot honour the Master.

An old saying from the southern United States reminds us that “It is never right to do wrong in order to do right.” In the Apocrypha is found a saying that speaks to this precise point: “Like a eunuch trying to take a girl's virginity is someone who tries to impose justice by force.”<sup>4</sup> For a Christian to justify doing evil by claiming to be engaged in spiritual warfare dishonours God, demonstrating that the one perpetuating violence does not understand the nature of His appointment. Unfortunately, some among the professed saints of God have attempted to justify violence against abortion providers, or against pornographers, or against homosexuals. Christians cannot permit themselves to act in unchristian ways when rejecting sin. Make no mistake—abortion, pornography and homosexuality are grave sins that threaten the welfare of the nation; however, no appeal to Scripture can ever justify violence to achieve a righteous end. In the same way, the Christian that slanders and attacks a fellow Christian cannot find justification for their actions either in the Word of God or through appeal to the Spirit of God.

Christians often misunderstand this truth, thus seeking to justify weird and outlandish behaviour as spiritual warfare. Such error frequently grows out of ignorance of the call of God for His people to stand. One of the great harms perpetuated on the people of God has been the intense focus on evil in the place of focusing on God’s power and goodness. People are fascinated by evil; however, this fascination can lead to enticement, ultimately turning believers from pursuing the Master’s will.

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<sup>4</sup> Ecclesiasticus 20:4 <http://www.catholic.org/bible/book.php?id=28> (accessed 11 September 2009)

Not many years ago, a series of novels were published that generated great interest both in the evangelical world and in the secular world. The author was a former Pentecostal youth pastor, born in Lethbridge, Alberta and raised in Seattle, Washington. The novels became runaway best sellers, and the novelist now has over 12 million novels in print.<sup>5</sup> Unfortunately, his adult novels present a concept of “spiritual warfare” that ultimately glorifies evil at the expense of godliness. They appear to present a concept of dualism and introduce the idea of territorial spirits that smack more of Zoroastrianism than of Christianity. Moreover, a growing number of evangelical, and even charismatic pastors, have complained that people are attempting to use the novels as guidebooks for prayer, spiritual warfare and the New Age Movement.

I have frequently observed well-meaning Christians at prayer who suddenly turn from addressing the Living God and begin to address Satan. “I come against you, Satan,” they shout. Where did they learn that? Certainly not from the Word of God! One moment they are petitioning God and the next they are yelling at the devil. Such people give the devil far too much credit. Remember, he is a defeated foe. Dangerous? Absolutely! However, he is neither omnipotent nor omniscient. Though he is the “ruler of this world” [JOHN 12:31] and the “prince of the power of the air” [EPHESIANS 2:2], Satan reigns over a kingdom of dust. He is not in control and his power is limited. His demonic hoards can never conquer the Faith; those who resist him will see him flee in failure. In reality, the devil is more of a nuisance than he is a threat to the Christian who is trained in righteousness. Indeed, Martin Luther was correct when he wrote:

The prince of darkness grim, we tremble not for him;  
his rage we can endure, for lo! his doom is sure;  
one little word shall fell him.<sup>6</sup>

God commands us to engage the enemy in warfare, but this is not a mortal enemy, nor is it war as humans think of war. To be certain, spiritual warfare requires that we know our enemy; but even more important for us as Christians is that we know our Great Commander. He has provided us with weapons that are more powerful than anything man has ever produced. Of the weapons at our disposal and the conduct of our fight, the Apostle Paul has said, “We do live in the world, but we do not fight in the same way the world fights. We fight with weapons that are different from those the world uses. Our weapons have power from God that can destroy the enemy’s strong places. We destroy people’s arguments and every proud thing that raises itself against the knowledge of God. We capture every thought and make it give up and obey Christ” [2 CORINTHIANS 10:3-5].<sup>7</sup>

We make no appeal to “blind faith” in this war; there is no attempt merely to be hopeful. Rather, we train ourselves to think logically and to act reasonably. We use our minds to think the thoughts of God after Him, and we use our hearts to love one another deeply as we pursue God’s glory. We saturate our minds with the Word of the Eternal God, and we seek His honour in every struggle. We appeal to reason, and we apply logic. We analyse arguments and provide sound logic as we appeal to the wisdom of the Living God. This is the path to victory. The eternal welfare of friends and family members depends on the manner in which we conduct ourselves in this war. Fellow church members will stand or fall, depending on how faithful we are to the Master’s command. The outcome is too important to ignore this teaching.

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<sup>5</sup> <http://www.frankperetti.com/biography-119> (accessed 11 September 2009)

<sup>6</sup> Martin Luther, “A Mighty Fortress Is Our God”

<sup>7</sup> **The Everyday Bible: New Century Version** (Thomas Nelson, Inc., Nashville, TN 2005)

Perhaps you listen today, and you are not a fellow believer; you do not have the life that Christ offers to all who have faith. You must receive the free gift that is given to each believer—the gift of life in Christ Jesus the Lord. The Word of God says, “If you confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ believing in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. It is with the heart that one believes and is made right with the Father; and with the mouth one confesses and is saved.” That passage concludes by citing the Prophet Joel, “Everyone who calls on the Name of the Lord will be saved” [ROMANS 10:9, 10, 13].<sup>8</sup> Believe and be saved today.

The hymn writer has written a most marvellous hymn that captures the message for this day. It is appropriate that we who are Christians should encourage one another by singing this glorious song of faith.

Stand up, stand up for Jesus, stand in His strength alone;  
the arm of flesh will fail you, ye dare not trust your own.  
Put on the gospel armour, each piece put on with prayer;  
where duty calls or danger, be never wanting there.<sup>9</sup>

Amen.

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<sup>8</sup> Author's free translation

<sup>9</sup> George Duffield, Jr., “Stand Up, Stand Up for Jesus”