

# Unchained | Freedom Rising from Confinement

## *Liberated to Pray*

Ephesians 6.10ff

9.24.17

*Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might. <sup>11</sup> Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil. <sup>12</sup> For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places. <sup>13</sup> Therefore, take up the full armor of God, so that you will be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm. <sup>14</sup> Stand firm therefore, HAVING GIRDED YOUR LOINS WITH TRUTH, and HAVING PUT ON THE BREASTPLATE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS, <sup>15</sup> and having shod YOUR FEET WITH THE PREPARATION OF THE GOSPEL OF PEACE; <sup>16</sup> in addition to all, taking up the shield of faith with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. <sup>17</sup> And take THE HELMET OF SALVATION, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. <sup>18</sup> With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints, <sup>19</sup> and pray on my behalf, that utterance may be given to me in the opening of my mouth, to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel, <sup>20</sup> for which I am an ambassador in chains; that in proclaiming it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak.*

*<sup>21</sup> But that you also may know about my circumstances, how I am doing, Tychicus, the beloved brother and faithful minister in the Lord, will make everything known to you. <sup>22</sup> I have sent him to you for this very purpose, so that you may know about us, and that he may comfort your hearts.*

*<sup>23</sup> Peace be to the brethren, and love with faith, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>24</sup> Grace be with all those who love our Lord Jesus Christ with incorruptible love. (Ephesians 6.10ff)*

We've ended our study of The Book of Acts, the history of how Christianity grew in the first generation after the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The book concludes with the church-planter, the Apostle Paul under house-arrest in Rome awaiting trial.

And it's a kind of indicator of what Christianity IS that Paul is bound and confined but out of his captivity comes freedom. Christianity is ALL ABOUT that...out of death comes life. Out of one man's crucifixion comes redemption and forgiveness and new life for many. So out of Paul's imprisonment comes release and liberation. Paul wrote four letters during this house-arrest that were included in the New Testament and people are STILL finding freedom from those writings.

Today, Paul is writing to the Ephesians, a city captivated by superstition and fear. Paul writes to the young Christian church in Ephesus as "an ambassador in chains" (20). Ambassadors are

supposed to be free; they enjoy diplomatic immunity but Paul is an ambassador in chains and YET his message is NOT chained – it has power to set people free!

Today, Paul brings up the topic of evil...darkness... wickedness. He reminds his readers as Hamlet said “There are more things in Heaven and Earth, Horatio, than are dreamt of in your philosophy.” There are things going on, behind the scenes, there are schemes and deceit...things hidden from our senses... unseen powers opposing us, out to ruin our lives and bent on our destruction. What to do?

Today, a liberating word from prison; the ambassador in chains sends a word of freedom from the Kingdom he represents. Let’s look at: 1) The Unexpected Nature of the Spiritual Life

2) The Necessary Posture IN the Spiritual Life

3) The Great Put-On and How It Happens

When I say the UNEXPECTED NATURE of the Spiritual Life I’m pointing out something implied in this whole passage and that is that LIFE is WAR.

You may not LIKE that conclusion... you may want a peaceful existence and you may WISH that of all things that spirituality would be a source of peace and tranquility...and it is (note the word, “peace” in v.15, v. 23; the word “comfort” in v. 22) and YET the whole tone and context of this passage is war.

And there’s mention of an opponent, in fact a kind of network of enemies who are especially opposed to the people of Jesus Christ. The word, “against” is repeated. Words like “struggle”, “strength”, powers”, “forces”, “wickedness”, “darkness”... and then this famous description of armor – a warrior’s belt, a breastplate, a shield, flaming arrows, evil, helmet... all words indicating violent battle.

And I call it unexpected because, again, people hope that spirituality will produce peace and serenity but that IS NOT the dominant theme here – it’s WAR!

And the opponent is called, “the devil” (11) – another sort of unexpected character/element...that we would be modern, scientifically-minded, thinking people in South Florida...and WHAT?...do we think there’s a red-man with horns and a tail and a pitchfork... like in the cartoons: angel on one shoulder and a devil on the other? (“I never thought THIS church believed THAT!”)

Well, let’s try and see what Paul is saying here: for one thing we could observe the context. He’s just been discussing the main arenas where True Spirituality plays out: the home. In the last 20 verses he’s been speaking to the basic relationships in our lives. Wives, respect your husbands...husbands, love your wives...children obey your parents...parents, don’t anger/frustrate your children...servants, obey your employers...employers, don’t mess with your employees...and before that section an even longer section on relating to neighbors AND

relating to fellow church members.... AND THEN...after talking about all these relationships, Paul brings up the devil...and warfare...struggle...opposition...evil.

Have you heard the phrase, “the devil is in the details”? Well, in Paul’s mind, the devil is in the dining room. I mean the theatre where we are perhaps most likely to encounter real spiritual opposition and ...let’s face it...WARFARE...is at a family gathering... “wives ...husbands ...children ...parents ... employees...neighbors...”

And as you look at your beloved wife in the midst of a “discussion” that has gone terribly wrong...and she appears, right before your very eyes, she appears to be growing horns out of her head...and she feels the same about YOU...and you are both convinced, “Ah- ha! I knew it! I married the devil!”

Or you see your parents that way or your roommate or your children or your employer or a fellow church member... THIS PERSON IS THE INCARNATION OF EVIL... Then the ambassador in chains says, “Nope! Our struggle is NOT against flesh and blood – it’s NOT your manager, your teenager, your mother, your husband... there’s an unseen enemy behind the scenes, spirits (“Macrobes” is what C.S. Lewis called them [That Hideous Strength] ... microbes are organisms too small to see – macrobes are organisms too BIG to see with human eyes.)

See, our relationships ARE not only the arena where true spirituality plays out but they are, for the Christian, where grace is to show up. In our relationships we are to show the presence of God’s new creation...so that people around us ask, “Hey! What gives? How do you live harmoniously with that customer...that husband...those children...?”

And those questions are supposed to lead to opportunities to tell the Good News – “Oh! It’s NOT that we’re good people...it’s that we’re forgiven and therefore we’re learning to forgive...wanna know more?” Relationships are the cutting edge of the Church’s mission...of GOD’S mission!

And that’s WHY these spiritual forces of darkness are so opposed to the family...and to relationships...like friendships and relationships in the church...and in neighborhoods....The devil’s in the dining room.

One more note and that is, to quote Lewis again: we can get messed up on this one of two ways - when we deny the existence of a spirit-world OR when we get fixated on the spirit-world. Probably, in the West, we tend to deny the existence of demons...but some people go the other way and see the proverbial “devil under every bush”. The trick is to stay in the tension – to be NEITHER magician NOR materialist.

The second point is the posture we are to maintain if we really DO get it...and really do see that true spirituality means war...war in our workplace ...in our marriages...friendships... self-life

(thoughts)...if you GET that ...then what IS to be our posture or our general approach to the enemy?

And the clear answer from the ambassador in chains is, “STAND FIRM”. That’s the clearest imperative from this whole passage. “Be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might ... (and v. 14) stand firm!”

All the pieces of armor we find in the passage are to be employed but the main idea is “stand firm”. There IS a battle...there are enemies (macrobes, spirits, evil entities, the devil) and flight or a treaty are NOT options...fight or die are the only options.

And Paul’s wants these Ephesian Christians to know, these people who knew a lot about evil and about a spirit world (they lived in a hyper-spiritual place full of fear/superstition) – Paul wants them to know: if you take the FIGHT option... there’s only ONE WAY TO STAND FIRM and that is, “in the Lord and in the strength of His might.”

As Martin Luther’s great hymn says, “for still our ancient foe doth seek to work us woe...his craft and power are great and armed with cruel hate – on earth is not his equal” – In other words: these are supernatural beings and YOU can’t beat them!

Only God by Jesus Christ can take back from the evil one what our first parents surrendered to him. God became Man in Jesus Christ, a Second Adam came to undo what the First Adam did. Jesus Christ defeated our ancient foe by weakness.

He took our blame and laid down His beautiful life – “the nails they drove into His hands should’ve been through mine, the blood that flowed should have been mine”... Jesus Christ paid my debt and stole me back from the forces of evil who once owned me.

From that same house arrest Paul wrote, “having canceled out the certificate of debt... having nailed it to the cross. When He had disarmed the rulers and authorities, He made a public display of them, having triumphed over them through the Cross.” (Colossians 2.13-14)

The powers of darkness have been defeated and exposed in the Cross of Jesus Christ. It’s as if all the forces of wickedness attacked Him while He was at His weakest...like rabid wolves they bit into Him and then couldn’t let go ...and He dragged them all down with Him...and then... “Up from the grave He arose...with a mighty triumph o’er His foes.”

And now we who believe...we live in that moment between D-Day and VE-Day ...the moment when victory is assured...but not fully manifest. The New Creation with its King, the Last Adam, is certain and guaranteed but these defeated powers still “threaten to undo us” but they cannot... WHY?

Is it because we're so determined? Is it because we are so disciplined or good or accomplished or because we know better? Does the passage say, "Be strong IN YOUR WILLPOWER and in the strength of your might"? NO.

Be strong IN THE LORD and in the strength of HIS might... It's ALL important! The images that follow, the weapons we have put on are only ways of describing or illustrating what this means.

Each weapon in this panoply, this full armor of God is only another way of saying, "Clothe yourself in what God has accomplished for you in Jesus Christ". This is what it means to "be strong IN THE LORD".

You are NOT impressed with yourself. You don't see yourself as a spiritual superhero who can slay the dragon... the armor is God's...the victory is God's and we receive it by faith. The posture of victory is what Francis Schaeffer called "active passivity" – it's trust.

I'm not running away (that's just passivity) and I'm not relying on my will-power (that's just ACTIVITY). Instead, I am learning to trust – wrapped in a sash/belt of the Truth that Jesus Christ won the battle – even though the defeated enemy won't acknowledge it.

I'm protected with a breastplate of righteousness – i.e. counted righteous because Jesus Christ's moral perfection and obedience are attributed to me...and I'm becoming in practice what I've been declared to be... He is little by little changing me.

My feet are wearing the best shoes...ready to point to the good news of peace and say, "Yep! That's why I'm still in the battle because Jesus Christ made peace between the holy God and sinful me!"

And on it goes, the shield of faith...believing/trusting what Jesus Christ finished keeps me strong IN THE LORD and enables me to escape the weird thoughts the enemy wants to inspire in me, the flaming darts.

The helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit – these are all ways of saying the same thing – "My staying power in the spiritual life...is really not MY power at all...it's a received power...I am strong IN THE LORD AND IN THE POWER OF HIS MIGHT!"

Now... how are we to DO this...in a very practical way...how do we clothe ourselves for battle. Let me end with these four ideas: perception, prayer, people and peace.

1) Perception – we perceive the world as a spiritual place...a battle field. I love the book on marriage by Allender and Longman – it's called "Intimate Allies." And the title says it all – those two words don't go together but they're so descriptive of Christian marriage. We see that we are, BOTH husband and wife, in a battle and we need each other – we're intimate allies. We are

learning to discern what Paul refers to as the “schemes of the devil”. There are mindsets, beliefs and attitudes fostered by who- knows-who? By the “zeitgeist” (the spirit of this age) and we are learning to recognize/perceive it and stand in what Jesus Christ has done.

2) Prayer – Paul shows that this is the bottom line. V. 18 says, “with all prayer and petition pray at all times”. This is apparently HOW we don the armor – we pray. And you may be thinking, “Ah-ha! That’s the problem – I am NOT a good pray-er...my prayer life is like a roller-coaster” (as Chris said a few weeks ago)... but here again: it depends NOT in the strength of your prayers but “be strong in the Lord and the strength of His might”. Come to Jesus with your weak prayer life and trust Him to be the dynamic of His own demands...He goes with you into the prayer-room... Let that be the first prayer you pray, “Lord Jesus, I repent of my smelly selfish prayers – YOU must teach me...I depend on the strength of YOUR might!”

3) People – all the imperatives in this passage are in the plural. In other words the commands have to be carried out together. Paul mentions (21) Tychicus...a teacher in the church. There are people, “the brethren” (23) around you who can help you. So take advantage of classes, small groups, friendships in the Body of Christ, the Church.

4) Peace – this passage about warfare ends with a blessing (23) “Peace be to the brethren...” And it reminds us that while Paul is free in prison (“ambassador in chains”), we too are at peace even while at war. We live between the ages – the New Creation is dawning even as the old creation and our defeated enemy lingers...but the old is waning...and God’s grace is enough.

So receive it – trust in Jesus Christ...humble yourself and trust Him... by His grace you’ll make it. Peace to YOU and to all the brethren. Grace and Peace to you even in the midst of the battle...grace and peace.