

September 6, 2020  
Sunday Evening Service  
Series: Ephesians  
Community Baptist Church  
643 S. Suber Road  
Greer, SC 29650  
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## PLAN TO WIN Ephesians 6:10-12

If you enlisted in one of our nation's branches of military, the first serious thing that will be required of you is basic training. Basic training is not an opportunity for you to exercise in order to loose weight (though you probably will). It is not an opportunity to get physically fit (though you will). Nor is it an opportunity to learn how to survive in the wilderness (though you will). And it is not an opportunity for you to prepare to travel the world – though it is likely that you will do that also, just not according to your vacation plans.

Basic training is a crash course with two goals in mind. First, it prepares you to defeat the enemy. Second, it prepares you to survive. If you don't defeat the enemy, you may well not survive. This is especially true concerning training for Special Ops forces. Granted today's military is very multifaceted. But, ultimately, the purpose of an army is to fight battles in order to defeat the attacking enemy and to protect the nation.

And you say, "That sounds good, but at my age, or according to my desires, the military adventure is not an option." As we have been learning over the past couple of Wednesday evenings, God has chosen to picture the Church with various familiar objects or relationships. For example, the Church is like a body (1 Corinthians 12; Romans 12), the Church is like a building (1 Peter 2:5), the Church is like a family (1 Timothy 3:15), the Church is like a field (1 Corinthians 3:9).

We also read that the Church is like an army, God's army. Speaking of his service to the Church, Paul asked Christians in Corinth, *Who serves as a soldier at his own expense? (1 Corinthians 9:7)*. He referred to *Epaphroditus my brother and fellow worker and*

*fellow soldier (Philippians 2:25)*. Paul instructed Timothy to *Share in suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus (2 Timothy 2:3)*. And he warned that *No soldier gets entangled in civilian pursuits, since his aim is to please the one who enlisted him (2 Timothy 2:4)*.

We are the army of the Lord and, therefore, we will be engaged in His battles. The archenemy Satan and his army cannot touch our Lord and Captain. Therefore, he attacks His soldiers who are on earth doing His work. The gates of hell charge relentlessly against the Church, the army of the Lord. And it is not just a corporate matter. You as an individual soldier of Christ will be engaged in battle after battle as surely as Bunyan's Christian, Faithful, Hopeful, and everyone who is on the road to the Celestial City are engaged in battle.

Will you win? Will you survive? Do you care? The people who God has so richly blessed with Christ in the heavenly places (chapters 1-3) will endeavor to walk the worthy walk (chapters 4-6). The worthy walk makes God look really good and makes Satan look like a loser. He doesn't like that. Therefore, the more we grow into the image of Christ (4:15), the more serious and numerous our conflicts become. If your road to the Celestial City is like a walk in the park, you better check which road you are really on. The road to heaven is a battlefield and our text commands us to be prepared for the battles that will definitely overtake us.

### An Important Command (vv.10-11)

The first two verses of our text give us a two-fold command and the reason for the command. The first part of the command requires Christ's followers to be strong. *Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might (v.10)*. But it is not sufficient for us simply to determine we will be strong. We must be strong in the Lord.

The opening word *finally* answers the question implied by all of the immediate context, "How are we who are so richly blessed in Christ supposed to successfully walk the worthy walk?" The answer: Put yourself in the position to be empowered. I translate the verb "be strong" as a present tense, passive voice, imperative. It is a linear action command. Being strong should be a characteristic of our lives.

Which means that we who love Christ are to be so receptive to the Holy Spirit's work in our lives that it results in Him giving us power.

But, doesn't the mere idea of being strong and empowered conflict with our Lord's teaching that we are supposed to be kind, merciful, and gentle? No. In fact, it gives a very important balance. Consider for example Joshua who received God's Law from Moses in which God especially required His people to be kind and merciful to orphans, widows, and sojourners. But at the brink of God's people entering the Promised Land at Jericho, the Lord said the same thing over and over to Joshua.

*"Be strong and courageous, for you shall cause this people to inherit the land that I swore to their fathers to give them. Only be strong and very courageous, being careful to do according to all the law that Moses my servant commanded you. Do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left, that you may have good success wherever you go . . ." (Joshua 1:6-7)*

Again a couple verses later we read,

*"Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be frightened, and do not be dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go." (Joshua 1:9)*

The principle is this: When we are fighting God's enemy, courage, strength, and power are needed, not kindness and gentleness. If we try to treat temptation to sin, false doctrine, error in attitude with gentleness, we will certainly become a statistic, a failure on the road to our eternal home.

This same balance is given in the New Testament. Paul challenged the Christians in Corinth to *Be watchful, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong (1 Corinthians 16:13)*. I am not even sure we are allowed to give such a horrible, bigoted command in this current culture (even in churches). But the phrase, *act like men*, is not a sexist statement. It means the same thing as "be strong, be courageous." The same trait is necessary for Christian men and women alike because we all fight spiritual battles. We are so encouraged in the battle when we see this trait lived out by women who love the Lord. Women like Adel who was kidnaped as a child

and then forced to marry a Muslim man against her will had to be incredibly strong in the spiritual battle every day.

Notice also, that immediately after Paul challenged all of us who love Jesus to act like men, he wrote in the next verse, *Let all that you do be done in love (1 Corinthians 16:14)*. The Captain of our faith who longs for our success in spiritual battle more than we do commands us to be strong. Great! Let's do it. What kind of strength? Where do we get this strength?

The text clearly states that we must be strong in His strength. *Be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might*. The kind of strength that allows us to fight spiritual battles for the Lord's glory is not the same as self-discipline or determination. The strength we must have for spiritual battles is found only in the Lord.

The command requires that we place ourselves in the position to be empowered for battle when we recognize our identity in Christ. Paul explained that identity this way: *I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me (Galatians 2:20)*. It is almost paradoxical that we must die to our own strength, power, desires, and self-sufficiency in order to be empowered to live in our relationship with Christ.

The Lord empowers us with His strength. There are two words in that statement that could both be translated "strength." Literally the command tells us that we are being empowered in the strength of the Lord's strength. Has God ever lost a battle against Satan? Enough said, right? Of course His strength has always been more than sufficient when He Himself has done battle with Satan (i.e. the wilderness temptation, the Garden temptation). When we are empowered with the Lord's strength, we will be successful in spiritual battles.

The Lord gives us the strength in order to be courageous. And the Lord gives us the equipment we need to fight successfully. The second command requires us to *put on the whole armor of God (v.11a)*. Because this command occurs in the middle voice, it requires that we be responsible to prepare for battle. The first command, "being empowered," was a matter of having God give us His strength. But, putting on the whole armor of God is a matter of us

accomplishing the task. And, in somewhat of a cycle, we can only put on the armor if we are empowered with the Lord's strength.

The process is so necessary because our flesh is weak. Before we will ever find success in spiritual battles, we must be prepared with God's armor. This armor is described as seven pieces of equipment (or 8 if you include prayer) in verses 13-18.

Also, we must take note of the fact that the armor is clearly identified as the armor of God. He is the source, the only place where we can get this armor. Human wisdom offers many ideas, plans, responses to sin. But because that source of armor is human wisdom, it is not effective against sin, which, being resident in all human flesh, so easily besets us. God is the source of the only armor that equips us for victory. God invented the armor for us specifically for spiritual battles. And God has already freely given the armor which we need to take up and put on.

Why should we? It seems like the answer to that question should be self-evident. Nevertheless, God gives us the reason why we must put it on: *That you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil (v.11b)*. We put on God's armor so that we will be able to stand. Specifically, God has given us the armor so that we will be able to stand in every battle we will face. So when we falter, when we are defeated in spiritual battle, what does that say? It does not say that the equipment that God has already given to us is faulty. Failure in our spiritual battles reveals that either we choose not to put on the armor, or we try to put it on but we don't know how to use it.

Or it is possible that we are not standing fast, unmovable in the battle because we are not accurately identifying the enemy. Resident within the reason for putting on the armor is the warning that we must stand against Satanic schemes. Ultimately, the chief enemy in our battles is Satan. The title is *diablos*, which identifies him as the slanderer. As he did with Job, Satan loves to accuse us before God. Before God, Satan accuses us of sinning, for which he does not have to look hard for evidence. He accuses us of trusting God only because God is good to us. He accuses us of not really loving God enough to sacrifice our desires for Him.

The battle is against Satan's schemes for our failure. The Greek word translated *schemes* also gives us the English word methods. While we think that is a positive word that describes how to get

things accomplished, it is not positive when it describes the Accuser's plans to make us fail. When used to define the work of Satan, or any work aimed at failure, it means cunning, craftiness, deception.

Satan's words through the serpent to Eve illustrate the deception well. He began his conversation with the mother of the human race, "Did God actually say," which was crafted specifically to cause doubt or questions. "You shall not surely die," was a direct attack after the doubt was established. Being painfully honest with exactly what God has said in His Word is one of the most important practices for standing against Satan's crafty deception. Words matter. Speaking accurately matters. Considering who and what our foe is, we must realize that we are in an incredible and incredibly important battle.

### **The Reason for the Command (v.12).**

We have learned God's desire for us to be strengthened by His strength. We have learned that He desires for us to put on the spiritual armor He has provided because we are fighting with Satanic forces. Now in the last verse of our text we find an almost frightening description of the enemy.

The real battles in life are not with people. *For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood (v.12a)*. It is true that we do wrestle. Even if we are not fully cognizant of the truth, we are wrestling all day every day (the verb is a present tense, active voice, indicative).

Let's get an accurate picture of this battle. We are not launching missiles at an enemy way out there somewhere. We are not even firing guns or shooting arrows from a bow. In our spiritual battles, we are engaged in hand-to-hand combat. You can't fight spiritual battles from behind the walls of the castle of your comfortable church. You're not winning the battle if you simply launch quaint sayings at the enemy from behind your theological trenches. Spiritual warfare is dirty, sweaty, smelly hand-to-hand, in-your-face, day-by-day grappling. It must be that way because the enemy chooses to fight on our turf. To quote Pogo from half a century ago, "We have met the enemy and he is us."

But ultimately, the enemy is not people (not even ourselves). It appears like the battle is with people, but we are not wrestling *against flesh and blood (v.12a)*. That ornery co-worker is really not the

enemy. The communists, socialists are really not the enemy. Sure they have attempted to destroy God's truth. Sure they have persecuted, tortured, and killed God's choice servants. But those people in uniform or behind the desk are not the real enemy. The false religionist is not the real enemy. They preach false doctrine that damns real people to eternal punishment. They, too, persecute and murder followers of Christ. But they are not the enemy – and at the moment especially not your and my enemy.

Even the ungodly movers and shakers of your culture who present wickedness as normal and good are really not the enemy. No doubt they cause many of God's children to fight and loose battles with vices and addictions every day. Sometimes we might even feel like reaching out and choking some of those people. But that would not solve the problem.

People are only pawns in the battle. Does Satan use willing instruments to carry out his cunning, scheming, and deception? Of course he does. There is a long trail of history that proves it. Think of real people like Pharaoh, Judas, Pilate, and the religious leaders who killed Jesus. They were willing pawns in Satan's chess match with God.

But the real battle is invisible. And the forces we are grappling with every day are fearsome (v.12b). We are not wrestling with people, *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 (Ephesians 6:12b)*. They are invisible because they are demons, fallen angels. Many of the fallen angels are kept in the abyss until the Day of Lord. *For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to chains of gloomy darkness to be kept until the judgment (2 Peter 2:4)*. But Satan's minions (eternal angels who fell in Satan's rebellion) still roam the earth causing all manner of trouble. Jesus and the apostles confronted and cast out many of these demons.

There appear to be levels or ranks of authority, power or the kind of work the demons do. Even as there are levels or ranks of authority, power, or kind of work with good angels (e.g. Michael the "arch" angel), so there are ranks of demons organized and arranged to cause the most spiritual damage possible. This hierarchy was illustrated in Daniel 10:1-14. *On the twenty-fourth day of the first*

*month, as I was standing on the bank of the great river (that is, the Tigris) I lifted up my eyes and looked, and behold, a man clothed in linen, with a belt of fine gold from Uphaz around his waist. His body was like beryl, his face like the appearance of lightning, his eyes like flaming torches, his arms and legs like the gleam of burnished bronze, and the sound of his words like the sound of a multitude (Daniel 10:4-6).*

Obviously this was a heavenly being. God sent one of His angel messengers to encourage Daniel. *And he said to me, "O Daniel, man greatly loved, understand the words that I speak to you, and stand upright, for now I have been sent to you." And when he had spoken this word to me, I stood up trembling. Then he said to me, "Fear not, Daniel, for from the first day that you set your heart to understand and humbled yourself before your God, your words have been heard, and I have come because of your words. The prince of the kingdom of Persia withstood me twenty-one days, but Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me, for I was left there with the kings of Persia, and came to make you understand what is to happen to your people in the latter days. For the vision is for days yet to come" (Daniel 10:11-14).*

In our text, we see four kinds or categories of the enemy in the spirit world. There are *rulers*. This word speaks of first cause, or beginning, or first in line. The ruler is at the top of the hierarchy. Then there are *authorities*. This is a common title for supernatural powers. These are not so much the human authorities in the world as the power behind them.

Third, we learn about *cosmic powers*. The word for them is a compound word combining *world* and *to be powerful*. We are told that these powerful spirits rule over this present darkness. This is what Jesus referred to at the cusp of His trial and crucifixion. He told the band of hypocrites who came to arrest Him, *"When I was with you day after day in the temple, you did not lay hands on me. But this is your hour, and the power of darkness" (Luke 22:53)*. These are powerful authorities ruling over this world. Jesus also described them by saying, *"I have come into the world as light, so that whoever believes in me may not remain in darkness" (John 12:46)*.

Fourth, we see the description, *spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places*. That is not to say that Satan is in heaven. Satan is

the authority of this earthly sphere by God's design and within God's permission. That is how Satan was able to tempt Jesus by offering Him all the kingdoms of the world. The great danger is that all of us are born in sin, relegated to this sphere of sin where Satan rules and works. Paul already described that tenuous condition earlier in this letter. *And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience (Ephesians 2:1-2)*. While we are walking through this world to the eternal world, we are in the realm of spiritual forces of evil. And here is our confidence in spite of that truth: *We know that we are from God, and the whole world lies in the power of the evil one (1 John 5:19)*.

Our battle is against these unseen forces. The Greek pronoun *pros* applies to the four different categories or levels of demons, fallen angels. The word is generally translated to mean, *to, toward or against*. Here we learn that it is the essential nature of righteousness to be opposed to the schemes of Satan worked through demonic powers. It is the essential nature of Satan and his demons to be opposed to us, the children of God. That means that a conflict is sure to ensue. The battle is real, which is why God used Peter to warn us to, *Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour (1 Peter 5:8)*.

We who love Christ had better believe that the spiritual battle is real. The more we exemplify Christ, the hotter the battle is going to get. This is the real "world" conspiracy. We know who is in charge of it. We know who the enemy is. We know how the enemy acts. We know who ultimately wins. Our Captain has provided all the armor we need to stand firm in the battle. Our Captain has provided the battle plan (the Bible). Our Captain has promised to empower us. If we become a casualty, it will not be because our Captain or our armor failed. We fail because we don't believe our Captain's warning and battle plan.