

The Spiritual Armor Part 1

“Stand Firm!”

Eph.6:10-12

It’s hard to take our spiritual warfare as seriously as we take physical warfare. The Bible warns us about an adversary, but how much danger are we really in? And how do we protect ourselves against disaster? If you have become lax in the warfare, this is a good message for you.

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Introduction

Eleazar & Shamma stood firm

Even though we don’t know a whole lot about David’s mighty men of valor, I have always been fascinated with them – especially Eleazar and Shammah. If I lived in that day, I think I would have been terrified to be a soldier. When you fight with a sword, you have to get within a few feet from the enemy. An enemy who is fighting with everything that’s in him, because he’s fighting for his life. And He’s surrounded by his comrades, who, if he gets into trouble with you, will come help him. I can hardly imagine what it must have been like to walk into battle – march right up into the midst of an army of armed, trained killers, and fight them face to face. All you have to do, in your whole military career, is encounter one guy who is a little stronger or a little quicker or a little more skilled than you, and you have sword through your chest. I can see why sometimes when the Philistines faced the Israelites, instead of attacking each other right away, they would stand on opposing mountains and get in a shouting match for a few weeks or decide to send one champion to fight the other guy’s champion, and let that decide everything.

Actual combat was so brutal and bloody, it’s understandable that they would be reluctant. I think I can also understand why, if the enemy started getting an advantage, everyone would retreat. If I’m fighting for all I’m worth, and my buddies are dropping like flies all around me and I can see our side is starting to be overwhelmed and overrun, I’m going to look at this 230 lb Philistine war hero approaching me with his tree-trunk arms, and his huge sword still dripping with the blood of my best buddies, and I’m going to think one thing *“I wonder if I’m a faster runner than him.”*

Something just like that happened to Shammah. The Israelites fought valiantly, but they started to become overrun by the Philistines, and some of them started running. And once that happened, the others realized “If we couldn’t win with those guys, now that they are retreating we really don’t have a chance” and so they ran too.

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They all ran, except Shammah. According to 2 Sam.23:12, Shammah saw that the battle was turning against them, and things were getting ugly, and he saw all his comrades turn and run and his response was...

12 Shammah took his stand in the middle of the field.

He found a spot in that field that he was determined to defend. And he stationed himself in that spot, and took a stand.

11 When the Philistines banded together at a place where there was a field full of lentils, Israel's troops fled from them. 12 But Shammah took his stand in the middle of the field. He defended it and struck the Philistines down, and the LORD brought about a great victory.

Right away a couple Philistines fighters come up to him swinging, and WHAP, WHAP – they're both on the ground. Anyone who came near him lost an arm or a head or something. No matter what the Philistines did, Shammah wouldn't budge. And when it was all said and done, and the whole thing was over, and the dust settled, Shammah was still standing. That earned Shammah third place among David's mighty men. Just above Shammah was Eleazar.

9 he was with David when they taunted the Philistines gathered [at Pas Dammim] for battle. (That was the time when David killed Goliath). **Then the men of Israel retreated,**

It's possible this may be talking about a different time, but there is a close grammatical connection, so it seems to me the most natural way to understand this is that it is talking about that same event. So at some point in that war, there was a time when Israel retreated. The account in 1 Sam.17 says that after David killed Goliath, Israel pursued the Philistines. So evidently, either before or after or during that pursuit, there was a conflict and Israel retreated. And when that happened Eleazar did the same thing Shammah did at another time:

10 but he stood his ground and struck down the Philistines till his hand grew tired and froze to the sword. The LORD brought about a great victory that day. The troops returned to Eleazar, but only to strip the dead.

Eleazar and Shammah were considered mighty men of valor because they took a stand, stood their ground, and when all the dust cleared, they were still standing. That is exactly the kind of thing Paul is calling us to in Eph.6. We have been studying verse by verse through the book of Ephesians, and we come this morning to 6:10ff, which is all about standing. He mentions it 4 times in 4 verses.

10 Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. 11 Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. 12 For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.

13 Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. 14 Stand firm then

Outline of the book: Sit, Walk Stand

10 Finally...

That word introduces the final section of the book. Without peeking at the notes, can anyone remember the 3 word outline of the book of Ephesians? The first 3 chapters tell us where we sit – our position in Christ. Then most of the rest of the book is about our walk – very practical instruction on exactly how we are to live. And then

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the last part of the book, starting here in 6:10, calls us to stand firm against the attack of Satan. And one thing you’ll notice as we get into this section is that we are going to go back up into the heavenly realms now. In ch.1-3 Paul was speaking from a cosmic perspective. The unity of the Church was pictured in relationship to the entire cosmic scheme from the perspective from heaven. Then, beginning in ch.4, Paul brought us down to earth, and discussed some very practical details of living the Christian life from the human perspective. Now we get launched back into the cosmic perspective so we can see our role in the cosmic warfare. There is something good in us that likes a good fight. Most people acknowledge war is a bad thing, but valor is a good thing. And so Paul picks up on that and appeals to that part of us that is energized at the thought of courage, and valor and heroism in warfare.

Structure & Message

This paragraph, that goes from v.10 through the first couple words of v.14, is a chiasmus. That means the very first thing that is said matches the very last thing. The second thing that is said matches the second to last thing that was said. And so on until you get to the middle, which is v.12.

- A. v. 10 **be strong** in the Lord and in his mighty power.
- B. v.11 **Put on** the full armor of God
- C. v.12 For our struggle is not against flesh and blood
- B’. v.13 **put on** the full armor of God
- A’. v.14 **Stand firm** then

And just observing that structure will give you a great idea of the message of the passage. He starts by saying, “Be strong!” and ends with “Stand firm!” That’s the general message. Then he tells us specifically what he means by that. In v.11 he said **put on the full armor of God**. And he repeats that in v.13. And right in the middle of it all is v.12, which is the reason why we need to be strong and why this is the kind of armor that we need. So those are the three emphasized points in the passage: What, How and Why.

1. What is the command? Be strong and stand firm
2. How is that done? By putting on the armor of God
3. Why? Because of who your enemy is

Most of the time when I preach, I just move phrase-by-phrase through the passage in the order it appears in the text. But in passages where the reason, or motivation is given at the end or, in this case, in the middle, I feel we should start with that. Everything we learn about being strong and putting on armor will mean that much more to us if we first become impressed with the importance of it. So let’s start with the Why? Why do we need to be so strong and put on this armor? The answer to that is in v.12.

Not against flesh and blood

12 For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.

He mentions 4 groups: **rulers, authorities, powers and spiritual forces**. As we learned earlier in the book, these terms refer to evil spiritual beings in places of authority.¹ **Rulers** and **authorities** are general terms that, when used together, describe various different rulers of various different rankings. **the powers of this dark world** lit. **the world-rulers of this darkness** The term “world” can refer to the earth, or it can refer to the system of evil that dominates sinful humanity... That’s how Paul used it back in ch.2.

¹ The first two, **rulers** and **authorities**, are a very common way to refer to all those in authority – both in the spiritual realm and in the physical realm. Those two words appear together in that order ten times in the NT. (Luke 12:11; 20:20; 1 Cor. 15:24; Eph. 1:21; 3:10; 6:12; Col. 1:16; 2:10, 15; Titus 3:1 see also Eph.2:2) Sometimes they clearly refer to human authorities. Other times to spiritual authorities in the heavenlies. And other times it’s ambiguous – possibly referring to both.

Since earlier in the book he specified that they were in the heavenly realms, and since that fits the context here as well, we are safe in taking this to refer to evil spiritual beings in places of authority.

Eph 2:1-2

As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, 2 in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient.

That’s not talking about the ways of the planet. It’s talking about the evil system. That’s the world. Ronald Reagan was right when he called the USSR an evil empire, but we would be wrong to limit it to just them. The evil empire is world-wide, and our own culture is a major part of it. Some government leaders are more evil than others, but no matter who the leader is of a country, the people in that country are part of a world-wide system of evil. And there are rulers over that system. Evidently there are certain evil spirit beings who preside over this world’s orchestrated network of evil. That’s how it gets orchestrated. That’s why there is so much evil in this world. And the phrase **this darkness** refers to the time period when that is going on. Remember back in Eph 5:16 he said we need to redeem the time because **the days are evil?** In Gal.1:4 Paul called it **this present evil age**. This age is evil because there are these powerful spirits who are in positions of authority organizing and running the evil world system. **and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms**. That’s a catch-all phrase to describe any and every other kind of spiritual authority. So our opponents are the high-ranking demons – the ones in positions of authority. This is the only time you ever see Paul warning us against a plurality of opponents. Normally it’s always just Satan we are up against. But here he gives us some insight into how Satan operates. We fight against Satan in the same way American soldiers fought against Saddam Hussein. We fight his whole army. So when Scripture says Satan did something, it may very well be that Satan did that by assigning one of his generals to do it. And the general did it by assigning some lower demon or by influencing some human being to do it. But since the orders come from the top, that’s where Scripture places the focus. You really don’t read a lot in Scripture about demons. The focus is mostly on Satan and sometimes on the various rulers under him. Now, let me show you why that’s so important.

The nature of the threat determines the nature of the solution

Nobody has a problem with the command in verse 10. Even the world agrees it’s a great idea to be strong. Every human being on the planet knows life is hard, there are threats out there, and we need to find a way to be strong against them. The big question, though, is exactly what those threats are. We all know we need to be strong, but strong against what? Paul goes on to describe a war against the Devil and other evil spiritual beings. That is not even close to what the world believes. The world thinks the dangers and pitfalls of this life and not spiritual at all. And it’s important for us to know if we have been influenced by the world’s thinking on that, because your belief about the nature of the threat will dictate where you go for the solution. If it’s a spiritual threat, you’re going to need spiritual armor. The world thinks it’s purely a natural threat. And so they don’t seek spiritual solutions. They think their problems are caused by human beings, or bad luck, or the weather, or nature or hormones, or chemicals in the brain that are out of balance or by the trauma of their past, or by their difficult circumstances now. And so when they want to stand firm against the pitfalls and dangers in life, they look to medications or therapy, or changing their circumstances to be more pleasant or human wisdom in one form or another. The absolute last thing on their mind is to put on some protective armor to shield themselves against satanic and demonic attacks.

We live in a psychological age where everything begins and ends with man. We think of ourselves and our little world as the be all and end all of reality. That’s the disastrous way our culture tends to rub off on us. It’s disastrous and it’s deadly. Satan’s goal is not for you to believe in him instead of believing in God. He’s very happy for you to believe in God and not believe in him. The devil’s job is 10 times easier if you don’t believe he exists. Anytime you are in a war, and you’re trying to destroy someone, it’s a huge advantage for you if your enemy doesn’t think you exist. Imagine if we got in a war against China. If China could figure out a way to convince us that they didn’t exist – there is no such thing as a literal China... And so we directed all our retaliations and defenses toward, Canada, that would make things pretty easy for China to defeat us. If you can get your enemy to defend against a completely different kind of threat rather than against you, you’ve got it made.

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So Satan is thrilled when people don't believe in him. He's thrilled when he reads Snodgrass's commentary on Ephesians and sees Klyne Snodgrass refer to him as "it" instead of "him" throughout. It's important that you believe there is a personal devil. A lot of people will give lip service to believing what the Bible says about a real, personal devil, and a spiritual warfare. But you can tell what you really believe by where you look for solutions and protections against the troubles of life. When you face something really serious, are you going to seek a spiritual solution or a human one? What is your first reflex? When you take steps to guard against future threats, do you take natural precautions or spiritual precautions? You can tell from that what you really believe about these things. If you aren't energetically, intentionally doing serious battle against real, personal spirit beings, the only explanation is you must not really believe they exist.

The Devil is a person

“But isn't it possible that the Bible speaks of the devil in personal terms just as a figure of speech?” “Isn't it possible that evil is an impersonal reality, and the Bible just kind of personifies it by way of illustration?” No. If you can't establish from Scripture that Satan is a person, then you can't prove that God is personal either. Because all the criteria we use to establish the personhood of God applies just as much to Satan. He has thoughts, and intentions and purposes. He makes decisions, has emotions, develops strategies and schemes and plots. He communicates with God in complete sentences and God speaks back, and Satan responds to what God says. He uses logic and reason, he quotes Scripture, he tells lies. The Bible always uses personal pronouns to refer to him (he is always “he” and never “it”). Someday he will be punished for his evil. You can't punish the abstract concept. You can only punish a person. There is zero evidence from Scripture to support the idea that what Scripture says about him is all figurative.

What kinds of threats come from the devil?

So there is a literal devil who is out to destroy you. And this passage is calling you to defend yourself against his attacks. So the next obvious question is, what are his attacks? What events in life should we interpret as satanic attacks? When do you blame something on the devil? How do you know when to say, “Praise God for what He is doing” or “Wow, I'm under attack by the devil?” Which events are from Satan and which are from God, and how do you know the difference? The answer is that's the wrong question.

11 Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes.

It's not about events; it's about schemes. Events are not inherently good or evil. The issue isn't to determine whose idea the event was. The issue is to trust in and participate in God's good purposes in that event and to oppose and resist Satan's evil intentions in that event – his schemes. If your pipes break and flood your basement, the issue isn't “Who broke the pipes – God or Satan?” The issue is “What are God's purposes in this and what are Satan's purposes in this?”

God is always doing something good, and Satan is always trying to bring about some evil. First and foremost our opponent is a strategist. And so what we need to do is discern his strategies and purposes, so we can resist those. And if we fail to do that, he will outwit us with his schemes.

2 Cor 2:10-11

I have forgiven in the sight of Christ for your sake, 11 in order that Satan might not outwit us. For we are not unaware of his schemes.

One of Satan's schemes is to con us into holding grudges. He's very tricky about how he gets us to do that. In fact, that's the scheme that Paul already warned us about earlier in Ephesians.

Eph.4:27

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do not give the devil a foothold (lit place)

The context there is about unrepentance. When we sin, from the moment we first make the decision to do something wrong until the moment we genuinely repent, we have a room in our hearts with a sign on the door that says, "Welcome, Devil." That's the scheme Satan tried against Paul, but Paul was able to see through Satan's scheme and not be outwitted in that case. So what exactly are Satan's schemes? What are his purposes? I think his purposes can be boiled down to two goals:

- 1) to dishonor God and oppose His work
- 2) to destroy you

And what are his strategies for pulling that off? Primarily they all revolve around suffering and pleasure. He knows we hate suffering, and that we love pleasure. And so he will try to get us to respond the wrong way to suffering... Or to sin in order to avoid suffering... Or to sin in order to get some pleasure.

TT Job 1

This is a great example of seeing the event as coming from God, but at the same time discerning and resisting the devil's scheme. What were Satan's purposes in afflicting Job? When Satan first came up with the idea of afflicting Job, he said to God:

Job 1:11-12

stretch out your hand and strike everything he has, and he will surely curse you to your face."

So he tried it, and it didn't work, so Satan came back and said,

Job 2:5-6

stretch out your hand and strike his flesh and bones, and he will surely curse you to your face."

Satan's purpose is very clear: he wanted to use events to influence Job to curse God. (And Mrs. Job was right on board with that purpose, by the way:

Job 2:9

His wife said to him, "Are you still holding on to your integrity? Curse God and die!"

And Satan said, "Amen!" Those were exactly his two purposes:

- 1) for Job to dishonor God
- 2) for Job to be destroyed

And what was his strategy for bringing that about? He tried to get Job to allow his thoughts to be governed by his pain. If you are focused on yourself, and pain comes, you will lash out against whoever caused that pain. Satan knew Job's theology was sound, and that he would think of the suffering as having come from God, and so **Satan's scheme was to try to get Job not to accept that suffering.** Instead of humbly accepting it from God, Satan wanted Job to react in anger and dishonor God, which would result in Job bringing destruction on himself. How did Job respond? He recognized the calamities themselves as having come from God, but he was also able to discern Satan's evil purposes and reject those. He didn't know about Satan, but his response to his wife (who was functioning as Satan's spokesman) was:

Job 2:10

He replied, "You are talking like a foolish woman. Shall we accept good from God, and not trouble?" In all this, Job did not sin in what he said.

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He accepted the trouble as a good thing coming from God's hand, but he rejected Satan's evil intentions. He refused to curse God, and so he wasn't destroyed. He saw through Satan's scheme, and thwarted both of Satan's intentions. Another passage that is designed to give us insight into Satan's schemes is the account of Jesus' temptation in the desert. If you read that section you'll see that Satan's purpose was to get Jesus to reject suffering, depart from God's will, and bypass the cross. And the schemes he used were

- He attacked Jesus immediately after a major high point, because he knows that when our guard is down.
- He tried to get Jesus to doubt God's Word.²
- He disguised the sin so it didn't look like sin.
- He tried to deceive Jesus into thinking suffering and dependence were incompatible with being the Son of God.
- he disguised that sin as something that seemed perfectly innocent – making bread.
- He tried to use Jesus' appetite for food to drive Him to justify sin.
- In the second temptation Satan tried to get Jesus confused over the difference between faith and presumption.
- in the third temptation Satan tempted Jesus to use bad means justify good ends.

Even with Jesus Satan tried to use the fear of suffering to drive Jesus into sin. And his favorite kind of suffering to use to destroy you is suffering that comes as a result of your own sin.

Luke 22:31-32

"Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift you as wheat. 32 But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers."

Satan wanted to sift Peter – to separate the wheat from the chaff. Satan wants to participate in the testing process, because he loves to be the one who provides occasions for us to fail a test. So he sifted Peter, and turned up some pretty serious chaff in Peter's heart – he denied Christ three times in order to avoid suffering. Peter thought he was pure wheat – total love and devotion to Christ. And so God decided to test him and show Peter that there was some chaff. And Satan was the first in line to provide the testing. Satan knew Peter would probably fail, and he wanted to be the one to help that along, so he could dishonor God and destroy Peter. God granted Satan's request, but Jesus pulled Peter aside and prepared him, so Satan's purposes would be thwarted. The first part of Satan's purpose was realized – Peter did dishonor God by denying Christ. But instead of ultimately dishonoring God and being destroyed through his sin like Judas, Peter repented and then used that experience to strengthen his brothers for the rest of his life. When Satan tries to destroy you through suffering, his favorite tool is the suffering that comes from your own sin. But it didn't work on Peter. Yes, Peter went out and wept bitterly. That was appropriate. But then he got back up in the saddle and pressed on, and spent his life in wonderful service of Christ. He didn't allow Satan to use his horrible failure to destroy him.

That's an introduction to some of Satan's schemes. I tried this week to study all that Scripture says about Satan's schemes this week and summarize it for you. But that proved impossible. I wrote pages and pages, and deleted pages and pages. And finally it was Saturday night, so I gave up. There's just no way to summarize it all in one sermon. All I can say is watch out, because Satan's schemes are incredible effective, and incredibly deceptive.

2 Cor 11:14-15

Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light. 15 It is not surprising, then, if his servants masquerade as servants of righteousness.

² God the Father had just got done saying, one verse earlier (3:17), **this is My Son**. And then Satan says **If you are the Son of God...** Just like he did with Eve – **"Did God really say...?"**

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That's why he's so effective, Rev.12:9 says he has led the whole world astray. All that to say we are up against a very dangerous opponent. And if you are a Christian, there is no opting out of this war. You can't just say, "I'm not in to that spiritual warfare stuff, so I'm not going to concern myself with this."

This is a war!

There is a war going on. Paul has made a major point so far in Ephesians about the indescribable power of God that is available to us And then here he says

10 Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power.

What he's saying here is this: "You had better take advantage of all this power I've been talking about in this book." This power is not a novelty, or something for the Christians superstars, or some level of Christian living that is only needed for certain people. Every one of us is a soldier in a war, and every one of us had better find a way to gain as much access to this power as possible, or we are going to get flattened in the warfare. If you are a Christian, you are on the battlefield. And there will be casualties. Not all of us are going to make it. And if you want to be one of the ones who is still standing at the end, you are going to have to find a way to be strengthened by God's power. If you think the enemy is going to spare you because you aren't some Christian celebrity, think again. He takes people like you and I out all the time. He eats people like us for lunch. The doctrine of our security in Christ is a wonderful and very important doctrine. We need to understand that doctrine in order to keep from becoming discouraged or disheartened or overwhelmed. But I think many people have twisted that doctrine into a fantasy that we are somehow untouchable. We can wander around the battlefield in a daze whenever we please, and we are in no real danger. They think the Christian life is like a ride at Disneyland or something, where the monsters are plastic and they can't really get to you. Nothing could be farther from the spirit of the NT.

How many times does the Lord warn us, "Watch out!" "Be on your guard." "Be careful." "Be alert." "Flee." In 1 Peter 5:8 the Devil isn't compared to a *photograph* of a roaring lion, or a *hologram* of a roaring lion. He's depicted as an actual roaring lion, looking for someone to devour. And that passage is directed to Christians.

1 Peter 5:8-9

Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. 9 Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings.

That's talking about us. The threat is real. This is not a drill. These are not war games. We are in the heat of a real war with real bullets and real casualties. And there is a good chance you or I could be one of them, so the Lord warns us, "**Be strong!**" When someone tells you that you had better put on armor, that should be a little unnerving. These words here are reminiscent of what the LORD said to Joshua when he was about to enter the Promised Land. In Josh.1:6 God had just finished telling Joshua that none of their enemies would be able to stand against them, and that they were going to be able to have victory. But then He has to tell him this:

Josh 1:6-9

6 Be strong and courageous...

7 Be strong and very courageous...

9 Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged

If you were in Joshua's shoes, how do you think it would affect you to hear God keep saying over and over, "Be strong, be strong, don't be afraid, don't be terrified, be courageous, don't get discouraged..." What does that imply about what's about to take place? How do you react when someone says, "Something is about to happen, but please – don't panic – and here, put on this bullet-proof vest. You'll need it."? That's a little scary. Did God promise the people they would be able to drive their enemies (the giants) out of the land? Yes. Does that mean it was going to be easy? Not on your life. It was going to be terrifying, intimidating, and discouraging. And unless

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they were really strong in the Lord, and really courageous, it wouldn't happen. That's the situation we're in. And if this doesn't get us serious about putting on the armor, it's only because we don't believe it. If the mafia were after you, you would take that seriously, right? Wouldn't you take some drastic measures to insure your safety if you knew some major crime family had put a price on your head? We are in a real war against an opponent far more powerful than any crime boss. And far more vicious. Far more evil, and far more experienced in getting to people like you and me. Has God provided protection for us? Yes, but it's not automatic. That's what this section is all about. It's an urgent call for us to take cover and be strengthened before it's too late. If the armor would automatically protect you just because you are a Christian, there would be no command to put it on.

We need strength

Some of us need to get over the fantasy that we are strong. Those of us who have walked with the Lord for many years, and who see other people who struggle in ways we don't struggle at all. We can fall into measuring ourselves by the yardstick of the weakest people, and we come out thinking, “I'm a pretty strong Christian.” We need to get over that. We throw that term, “Strong Christian” around pretty freely. But if I'm such a strong Christian, why have I failed so much the past, and while do I still routinely fail now? If you think you are a strong Christian, just ask yourself, what keeps happening to all your resolutions and commitments to do better? Why do we so often find ourselves in the place of repentance – or worse yet, unrepentance? If we'll admit the truth, we'll have to admit that we are extremely weak, and our Christian lives are fragile. And especially when the tough times come.

13 Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes you may be able to stand your ground

There are two definite articles: “the evil the day,” so it's not just talking about an evil day. It's talking about THE evil day. When is that? Some say it's that time when Satan will let loose with his final effort just before the Second Coming. (The Great Tribulation). I think that's probably right, but whatever that phrase refers to, it seems to me a valid application of it would be that you need to prepare such that you will be able to remain standing after the worst day of your life. Whether it's referring to that final day of evil, or just the most evil day you will ever see – either way, the worst day of your life is the one you need to be prepared for, right? Because if you are prepared for that, you are prepared for all the other days too. For Jesus it must have been that night before His crucifixion. That night that He sweat drops of blood, was betrayed by all His friends, and when He was in agony anticipating what was to come.

Luke 22:53

Every day I was with you in the temple courts, and you did not lay a hand on me. But this is your hour — when darkness reigns.

That was the day of evil for Him. Everyone one of us in this room is going to face a day at some point that will be the hardest day of your life. And this passage obviously isn't telling us to prepare for the past, so the ultimate day of evil in your life refers to the worst day you will have between now and the time you die. That day is coming. The big showdown with the devil is coming – that day when he pulls out all the stops. And so between now and then you had better put on all the armor of God, and become strong in the Lord, so that...

you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything...

When it's all said and done. You have withstood all the attacks.

to stand.

"Stand Firm!"

Eph.6:10-12

The goal is not annihilation of the enemy. God will take care of that. Your goal is to simply remain standing. In this life there is no final victory over the enemy in the sense that he is no longer a threat. Even when Jesus defeated his best shots in the desert, it just says the Devil left until a more opportune time. If anyone ever comes along trying to sell you on some doctrine that says you can reach a point where the Devil is no longer a problem, don't believe it. You are Shammah. You are Eleazar. You are there in the middle of the field. You have taken your stand, and it's not Philistines coming at you, but the rulers, authorities, powers and spiritual forces of evil...and Satan himself. And your Commanded has ordered you to stand firm. Let nothing move you. The enemy will use a huge variety of weapons to knock you off your feet or get you to retreat. Take a moment as we close, and just ask yourself, "What kinds of things shove me around?" "Where are my points of vulnerability?"

- suffering (you can't handle physical or emotional pain, and so you have an ungodly response in your thinking) (Or you will bypass God's will in order to avoid suffering)
- the lusts of the flesh (you can't say no to your appetites)
- fear of man (can't handle someone mocking you)
- peer pressure (you can't go against the crowd)
- doctrinal error? (your understanding of theology is fuzzy)
- money (enticed by the temporal treasures of this world)
- your moods (you get derailed by depression or discouragement, and you get pushed around by whatever mood you're in)
- fatigue (you get tired, and you just can't persevere)
- self-pity (you think you just have it too hard, and no one seems to understand that)
- past failure (you've blown it big time, and you're letting the devil use that to destroy you)
- failure to understand that you *can* stand firm (harbor so many defeatist thoughts you become paralyzed and you forget your resources in Christ)
- fear (you're looking over your shoulder for a possible retreat. You're always thinking of giving in or quitting, because you're afraid you won't be able to handle what's coming)
- spiritual sluggishness (you're not very alert to spiritual things)
- self-confidence (1 Cor.10:12 – it's when you think you stand firm that you are most in danger of falling)

What is it that shoves you around knocks you off your feet? When is it that you can't seem to remain standing firm? The reason those things are a threat is not because they will make your life a little less pleasant. It's not because they might make your family dysfunctional. It's not because they will keep you from becoming self-actualized. Those things are a threat because they are the intentional strategies of intelligent, powerful spiritual enemies who are out to destroy you. The nature of the threat determines the nature of the solution. And the threat is spiritual. The only protection is to **be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power** and to **put on the full armor of God**. How is that done? That's what we'll look at next week.

Benediction: Heb.10:32a, 35-39 **Remember those earlier days after you had received the light when you stood your ground in a great contest in the face of suffering...35 do not throw away your confidence; it will be richly rewarded. 36 You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised.**

Review Question:

1. Why is it so important to know who our opponent is?

Because the nature of the threat determines the nature of the solution you seek.

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Appendix

God controls all things, and that we should interpret the painful events of life as good and wonderful gifts from Him. So if everything is from God, what is from Satan? Well, in the book of Job we learn that everything is from God, but some things are both from God and from Satan. That is, they have a divine element and a satanic element. God is always in full control over all things. There is never a moment when God relinquishes His sovereign control, and then has to come along afterward and try to repair the damage to His plan. When disasters happen, it is not only appropriate to think of those things as having come from God's hand, but it is wise to do so.

1 Sam 2:6-7 **The LORD brings death and makes alive; he brings down to the grave and raises up. 7 The LORD sends poverty and wealth; he humbles and he exalts.**

Isa 45:7 **I bring prosperity and create disaster; I, the LORD, do all these things.**

Amos 3:6 **When disaster comes to a city, has not the LORD caused it?**

"OK, that makes sense when it comes to certain things, but what about when there is a sinful human being involved?" Is God in control even when human beings are making sinful decisions? Yes. In 1 Kings 12:15, when wicked King Rehoboam refused to listen to the pleas of his people for mercy, it says **the king did not listen to the people, for this turn of events was from the LORD, to fulfill the word the LORD had spoken**

When Joseph's brothers sinned by selling Joseph into slavery, Scripture says: Gen 45:5-7 **it was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you .**

He was there because of their sin, but Joseph looked past that and said, "God sent me here."

"But wasn't that a situation where men sinned, and then God came along afterward and made lemonade from the lemons? Wasn't that a situation where what actually happened was a sinful thing that God never had any intentional involvement in, but then later made good come out of it?" No. Gen 50:20-21 **You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives.** God did have an intentional role in bringing it about. He ordained it to happen on purpose as part of His perfect plan.

In Acts 4, talking about the wicked decisions of wicked men to torture and crucify Jesus, the disciples said to God, Acts 4:28 **They did what your power and will had decided beforehand should happen.**

"OK, but what if we know for sure it was Satan's doing?" If you know that the devil is responsible for some evil thing, isn't it a sin to attribute that thing to God or to refer to God as the cause? Well, one set of calamities that Scripture is very clear came from the devil was the things that happened to Job. Those things were the devil's idea, and the devil's work. But when Job thought about it, he looked beyond just that: Job 1:21 **The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away**

Job 2:10 **Shall we accept good from God, and not trouble?" In all this, Job did not sin in what he said.**

So on the one hand, all events come from God. However, Scripture is also very clear that the beings God created with a moral will do have the ability to generate evil. And when that happens, even though God is in control of the event, He is not the source of the evil in any way – directly or indirectly. When an evil thing happens, God can be trusted and praised for the good He is doing, but at the same time the moral agent responsible for generating that evil should be opposed. So when some evil is done, I rejoice in knowing that God is doing some good thing (even if I can't see it), but I do not rejoice over the evil. In fact, I oppose and fight against the evil. The event I attribute to God. The evil I do not attribute to God.

So it's oversimplifying and misleading to ask the question, "Did this event come from the devil or from God?" It may very well be that in the very same event, God is accomplishing His righteous purposes, and Satan is accomplishing his evil purposes.