



VILLAGE BIBLE CHURCH

SUGAR GROVE CAMPUS

Battle Stations

Invisible War: Winning Against Evil | Part 8

Tim Badal | August 16, 2015 | Ephesians 6:10–12



We're going to be in Ephesians 6 for the next three weeks as we wrap up our series titled "Invisible War." This has been a series focusing on spiritual warfare. We have devoted the entirety of our summer to this subject, becoming aware of the war that is taking place around us. This war can have a tremendous effect on our spiritual lives, but also our physical lives in the world. Then we looked at our adversaries in this war. We looked at three enemies: the devil, the world system and the flesh. During those weeks, we talked about the impact of these enemies on our lives, how they operate, what their goals are and how we can fight against them. Over the last three weeks, we looked at our allies: the Holy Spirit, the church and angels. We looked at how these allies help us in our times of need and come to our rescue when temptations come our way. These last three weeks will cover the Armor of God in Ephesians 6. We will look at the weapons God has given us to stand strong amidst trials.

In Ephesians 6 the Apostle Paul closes his letter by talking about spiritual warfare in the lives of the people in the Ephesian church. Not much has changed in the battle since Paul's words were penned. When he speaks to the church about spiritual warfare, he doesn't say crazy things. Many times we hear things in Christian literature and see things on "Christian" television that are fanatical, like casting out demons or performing exorcisms. This is the largest passage in Scripture devoted to spiritual warfare; if Paul was going to address those fanatical things, this is where he would have done it. Notice how boring Paul's advice to us is. It's not flashy. It's not eccentric. It's straightforward. Everything that Paul says to us about putting on the full armor of God and standing strong amidst demonic activity is something that every person can do today. Nowhere in the passage does it say that you have to be a spiritual elite. It doesn't say that you have to achieve a special level of apostleship. It applies to young and old, men and women alike.

With this in our minds, let's look at the treasures that Paul has laid out before us. These are treasures that we will require in our hour of need.

Ephesians 6:10-12:

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might.¹¹ Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil.¹² 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.

December 7, 1941. The surprise was complete. The attack came in two waves. The first wave hit its target at 7:53 AM, the second at 8:55 AM. By 9:55 AM, everything was over. By 1:00 PM, the carriers that launched the planes from 274 miles off the coast of Hawaii were heading back to Japan. The base was in utter chaos. There were 2,403 people dead, 188 planes destroyed. The United States Pacific fleet had only eight battle ships, each one now damaged or destroyed. One stroke of military genius silenced the debate that divided Americans during that time. The war had come to them. In approximately three hours, Japanese planes began a daylong attack on American facilities, not only in Hawaii, but also in the Philippines. This was a day that President Roosevelt said would "live in infamy". The damage inflicted on our country was largely to blame on a sleeping nation.

While we read the headlines and knew that there was a war going on, while we heard of Hitler's movements in Europe, while we heard that Japan was attacking Russia and China, we thought we were immune to a Great War. Many Americans never imagined that a war would come to our doorstep. However, on December 7, 1941, that war came and knocked down our door. We didn't even know it was coming. We paid dearly for that mistake.

That's history. However, history repeats itself. Many Christians are repeating it today. We hear in the headlines that Christian persecution is on the rise. We hear that being a Christian is becoming increasingly difficult, even here in America. We hear our friends and family talking about how the devil is wreaking havoc in their lives. But for some reason we are asleep. We are unwilling to recognize that Christians are in a war. The enemy is conspiring. They are planning their attack.

Japanese historians tell us that Japan planned their attack on Pearl Harbor 18 months in advance. They dreamt up what they were going to do long before we thought war was a reality.

You also have an enemy who is conspiring. While we sit in our specious peace, the enemy is looking for an opportunity to attack. We assume that this attack will never come. Remember, the two major attacks on American soil in the last hundred years came as a complete surprise. Both the attack on Pearl Harbor and the 9/11/01 attacks. Enemies never attack when you expect it.

Now we come and read the words of the Apostle Paul. He loves the church at Ephesus. He's about to wrap up this magnificent book. He addresses a myriad of topics through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and finishes the book by talking about spiritual warfare. He does this because he loves his fellow brothers and sisters in Christ.

Your elders here at Village Bible Church love you as well. One of the ways that we want to demonstrate our love for you is by helping you prepare for the attacks of the devil. Some of you wonder why we make announcements for different ministries. Behind each slide and the boxes in the bulletin is a loving response by your leadership to help you prepare for the battle.

A few weeks ago, our elders led a group of 20 people through a workshop on how to protect ourselves from the enemies' attacks with respect to technology. The elders wanted to make you aware of the war that going on around us. Our enemies are making use of our phones, computers and the Internet. God has allowed the Internet to come into existence for our benefit and for sharing the gospel, but the devil uses it to prey on children. He uses it to ruin people's lives in their struggle against lust. So the elders created this ministry to help one another in this battle. Ministry isn't so that the pastors look good or to bring money into the church. Ministry, at its core, is to help equip the people of God. Our Sunday School classes aim to equip people with the Word of God so that in later days they might not sin against their God. We gather and listen, not so that I can talk at you, but so that you can leave equipped for the coming attack.

This is what concerns me about churches that preach only light and fluffy messages. They're easy to consume. It's like eating a candy bar. You can eat tons of those, right? They go down smooth. However, a light and fluffy sermon won't help you when the devil attacks. So we want to make sure in our preaching, teaching and activities that we constantly remind ourselves there is an enemy around who will strike when we least expect it. We must be ready at all times.

What does Paul say? Paul gives three commands to every Christian in Ephesians 6 that enable them to have victory in the battle:

1. Be Strong

What better words for people who are in the battle? There's no reason to be strong while you're on vacation. There's no need to be alert when you're on a holiday. However, when you're in a war, you need to have the mindset and the heart of a soldier. Ruth Paxton wrote it this way:

God has no place for spiritual pacifists. Every Christian is drafted for both defensive and aggressive warfare. He calls every saint to arms, not into a religious playground or a sports field, but it is into a grim, terrible, bloody conflict of which Christians are called.

It is no wonder that Paul begins with these words. Let's look at them more closely. What does Paul mean when he says in Ephesians 6:10, "*Finally, be strong*"? We live in a generation where the phrase, "live strong" is commonplace. It is the slogan for fighting against cancer and other life-threatening diseases. It means that you need to dig deep within yourself to garner the inner strength that enables you to fight against cancer in your life. It requires mustering up all the strength that you can find, both outwardly and inwardly, to fight the battle. Long before Lance Armstrong and long before the bracelets, Paul was the one who used this catchphrase. Paul is saying the same thing in a different way. There is a battle going on and you cannot win the battle as a casual civilian. It will mean digging deep within you. However, digging deep looks differently in Ephesians 6.

This kind of strength should be a priority

I don't want to move too quickly through all of these words in our passage. I want to take a moment and talk about the word "finally." This word doesn't seem that important, but it means that Paul is bringing to resolution everything from the last five chapters. As he comes to spiritual warfare, he says, "Before I end this letter, I want to remind you of something very important." Why is spiritual warfare a priority? Paul says that because of all we've learned from Ephesians—because we have a place in Jesus Christ, because of all that He has given us in our walk—we need to be ready for the battle.

What has Paul addressed so far in Ephesians?

- In light of what God has done for you
- In light of the glorious standing you have as a child of God
- In light of His great plan from ages past that we are a part of
- In light of His plan and His Word that allows Christian maturity and growth to happen
- In light of the conduct to which we are called
- In light of the filling of God's Spirit into our lives and the ability to walk in that Spirit

Paul calls his readers to remember that the reason God has given believers all of this isn't so that they can sit back and be fat and lazy, but because there's a war going on. Christians will need every gift to be ready to fight the battle. Paul gives his analysis on life: It is a struggle. It involves conflict. Life is warfare. Paul blows the trumpet and calls every Christian into active duty. Your job is to respond courageously because you have been armed with everything you need to live a righteous and godly life.

Christ, through Calvary and the empty tomb, has already won the victory. Our goal, therefore, is to live and learn and walk and make war in light of that truth. We fight from a place of victory, not defeat. Why else might Paul bring this up?

Paul does not want you to be a casualty of war. If you are not ready for the fight, you will lose it. Seek and pursue the strength you need. He will address specifically the armor of God in the coming verses. Many people will say, "Just give me the weapons. Don't worry about verses 10–12. Just get to verse 13. Give me the tools and I'll be fine." The army doesn't work that way. When you enlist in the army, they don't just hand you a gun, a helmet and bullets, sending you on your merry way. No, they put you through basic training to help you think like a soldier. They train you to be prepared for war, knowing that you cannot let your guard down. Before a soldier is given a gun or shown how to fire a missile, he has to go through basic training. He needs to build up his strength so that he can use his available weapons most effectively.

This kind of strength is found in one place

Unlike Lance Armstrong and the "live strong" movement, we don't muster this strength from within ourselves. Ephesians 6:10 says, "*Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might.*" It doesn't say, "Be strong in yourself," or "Be strong in others." You must be strong in the Lord.

The phrase "be strong" is in the passive voice. It's not your strength. This strength does not come from you. You can't go to the "strong" section of Walmart and purchase a big box of it. You can't take it from someone else. It's nontransferable. Our own strength won't cut it. We need someone else's strength and it only comes from God. That means that we have to fight this battle on God's terms, not our own.

After we complete this series, we will be studying the book of 1 Samuel. One of the great stories in 1 Samuel is the account of David and Goliath. There is a great contrast made that we don't often consider because we fast forward to David fighting Goliath. However, before David fights Goliath, remember that no one is willing to fight him. King Saul is not leading his people well. He is afraid of the Philistine giant. David comes, after shepherding his father's flock and delivering provisions to his brothers, he sees Goliath and says, "Hey, I'll take this guy out. He's bad-mouthing the Name of God. I'll deal with this."

Saul says, "Alright, I'll let you do it, but I'm going to give you everything you need from a human perspective to defeat this giant."

David replies, "I can't move in this armor. It's too heavy. It's too cumbersome. I don't need your human weaponry; I just need God on my side."

Saul wanted to fight a battle through human means. David knew that if he was going to be victorious against a greater foe, he was going to need God on his side.

We cannot fight this spiritual battle on our own terms. We have to fight it using God's means. To be strong in the Lord means saying, "God, I yield all my strength to You so that You may empower me. I remove myself from the mix, so that You have an empty vessel to fill up and so I might be victorious." Some of you are trying to fight temptation and sin, thinking, "I can't do it. I can't fix it. I can't change it. I fail all the time. Every morning I vow not to give in and make sure to build up my will to say no to temptation that the devil is using. By mid-day, I've already failed." The Christian life is not try harder, fail; try harder, fail. It means that when we struggle in our spiritual battles, we need to recognize that we will never be equal to the task. We need God, not in small measure, but full measure. This means that we'll have to give up control to the Holy Spirit.

This kind of strength requires a unique power

The text says, "*Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might.*" The only way we'll win the battle is if we connect with the One Who has already won it. Apart from Christ, we will never taste victory, let alone possess it. We must get close to Jesus and identify in His victory over the grave. That's why Paul says that he wants to partake in Christ's sufferings and His victories. He wanted to associate himself with all the good parts of Christ's life and all the difficult parts as well. He wanted all of it because he understood that the closer he got to Jesus, the more victorious he would be. He knew that the more involved he was with Jesus, the more victory he would experience rather than defeat.

The strength that God gives is a grace. You can't get it on your own. God doesn't reward you with strength on the basis of your behavior. It's something that is given. Are you using the provision that God has given?

Yesterday, my catering company had the opportunity to cater for a country music singer and we were given backstage passes. When we walked in and out of those areas, there were a lot fans who wanted to be in my position. That doesn't happen often to me, so I enjoyed it. While I was given that provision to experience something that others couldn't, I could have made the choice not to use it. I could have sat back and not taken advantage of all the opportunities that my passes allowed. I could have decided to be like everyone else. In a similar way, Jesus says, "I have given you provision. Here is the ticket. Here's your ability to be victorious." However, Christ won't force you to take advantage of that opportunity.

Some of you might be saying, "I'm a child of God, but I still struggle with sin. That doesn't make any sense. I thought that if you were a believer everything was supposed to be great and wonderful and it's not happening. It's Jesus' fault." That would be like me looking at my VIP pass saying, "Something's wrong with me" as I choose to stay out of the VIP section. It's not Jesus' fault, it's your own. You have at your disposal all that you need to be more than conquerors in Christ Jesus. Here's the problem: you don't make use of it. You belly-ache, cry and moan about loss after loss.

We point at God and say, "Your Word isn't good enough. Your Spirit isn't powerful enough. The protection You promised me isn't cutting it." You point your finger at the wrong person. God offers to each of us everything we need for the battle. Are you taking it up and using it for this spiritual war?

2. Be Submissive

Ephesians 2:11, "*Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil.*" This is the second command that Paul gives. There are a few observations that I want to note.

Being submissive involves doing what you are told

If you call yourself a child of God, your commanding General has given you an order. You need to put your gear on. God commands His people to wear His armor. This isn't a suggestion; it's a demand. Herein lies the problem: the armor of God cramps our style. It causes us to live differently. The armor of God won't let us sit and consume mindless entertainment. The armor of God won't let us engage in frivolous activities or sinful desires. It won't allow us to laugh at off-color jokes at work. It won't let unwholesome words come out of our mouths. It won't allow us to look at whatever we want on the Internet. It won't allow us to treat our spouses selfishly. The armor of God is not going to allow us to neglect those around us. It won't allow us to have racist thoughts. It won't let us do certain things that we want to do.

For these reasons, many of you choose not to wear this armor. It cramps your style. Your unbelieving friends will see you wearing this armor and say, "What are you doing wearing that? Are you heading off to Medieval Times? What's going on? That's not what the cool kids wear." Piece by piece we take off that armor. By doing so, we proclaim, "There's no war here; just in far off

places. Perhaps you need the armor in the Middle East, but not here." We take off the armor of God because we don't want to look awkward. However, Paul commands us to put it on, even if we don't feel like it.

I love watching war movies and the lessons that they teach. I remember in a Vietnam movie I saw once, there was a group of young GIs. They had just gotten out of basic training and were in the Southeast Asian jungle of Vietnam. They were crying to one of their superior officers about how hot it was, how uncomfortable it was and how bad the mosquitos were. The superior officer kept saying, "Keep your helmets on. Stay down. Even if you're getting bit up, don't scratch." At one point, one of the privates stood up, took off his helmet and started scratching saying, "They're all over me!" Before he could finish his sentence, a bullet went through his head. The superior officer said to the rest of the soldiers, "I tell you these things to save your lives."

You might think I'm being overdramatic. I'm telling you that, as a pastor, when people come to me and are being spiritually shot at, usually they come because they aren't wearing any armor. Let me say this again. When people come to me and sin has destroyed their lives, they aren't wearing the armor that they need. They aren't pursuing the allies in their lives. By the time they come, it's too late.

In the original language, "put on" carries a sense of urgency. God's command is an urgent one. "Do it. Do it now." Why isn't there urgency in your response? He's told us to be at our battle stations, ready for the fight. We must be submissive. We must follow His command.

Being submissive involves dressing for success

We need to wear all of the armor, not just a few parts of it. Many of you just want to wear the parts of the armor for the battle you are aware of. Your tactics are reactionary, not proactive. You see the attack coming from the right and think, "Well, of course I need armor over here. But I don't need it on the left, only the right. That's where the enemy is." God understands. The war is happening in the heavenly realms as well. We can't see that battle. God does. God says, "The reason you need all of this armor is because I see where all of the attacks will come from. The enemy can flank you at any point and I don't want you to be vulnerable on your weak side. Because I know where the battle is and I know how the enemy attacks, wear every piece of armor I supply."

Being submissive involves digging in for the battle

God's armor enables us to stand against the schemes of the devil. In the last Gulf War, we used Humvees early on that were shot up. Soldiers were being killed because these vehicles weren't armored and the enemy had bullets that could pierce right through them. Before our guys could get from one place to another, they were shot up. The armor they had was not suitable for the battle.

We don't have a military contractor putting this stuff together. God has put His Name on our spiritual armor and this tells us a few things:

1. If God is the manufacturer of our armor, we can have confidence that the devil can't throw anything our way that our armor won't dispel. We can have full confidence in that.
2. The infinite and infallible God won't tell us to do something if it's going to fail. If He did, that would make God a liar and God does not lie. If that happened, God would have made a mistake; He doesn't make mistakes.

Because we believe in the absolute authority and supremacy of God in all things, when God says, "put on armor," we know that the armor will be equal to the task as the battle rages on. There are no holes in the armor. There aren't any weak spots. When God tells us to put on something, we have a guarantee that it will stand the test of time.

If you are inflicted with injuries in this spiritual battle, it isn't the armor's fault. You're just not wearing it. If you are standing strong in this fight, you can't boast, "Look at me. Look how strong I am." The strength comes from God and the armor comes from God. That's the only reason why we stand strong amidst trials and temptations.

3. Be Strategic

This is the final command. In Ephesians 6:13, Paul starts talking strategy.

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.

Look at Ephesians 6:11. In order to stand firm, we have to know the plans of the enemy. Believers must use the minds that God has given us and be good students of Scripture in order to understand the devil's operations. What do we need to be strategic about? Paul gives us three things that we need to understand:

Be strategic about the schemes of the enemy

The word "schemes" is closely related to our English word "methods." It describes rational, logical ideas or plans. The devil's plans are purposeful and organized. Ponder this for a moment. This tells us that there is a limit to the schemes of the devil. The devil has a limited arsenal in his fight against you. God knows what those plans are and we need to be aware of them. The devil's schemes are common to man. I want to both encourage and embarrass you today.

The temptations and evils that face you today are things that people have faced for centuries. If you struggle with lust—it plagues you, it eats you up—take heart. It's the same lust that affected and disheartened great people like David and Samson. It is the same fight. The devil uses that one because it works. It's a good weapon for him. For those who struggle with doubt, it is the same doubt that Thomas experienced on Easter Sunday. For those who struggle with your calling and you think you're sitting on the sidelines, you struggle with the same struggle Moses had. He felt that his stuttering problem was too big for God to overcome. For those who struggle with bitterness or discontentment, you're no different from the children of Israel when they wandered in the wilderness. Whatever sin or temptation you face, you are not the first person on whom the devil has used that trick.

It's not like Satan is thinking, "Tim is a tough foe. I'm going to bring against him something that no one else has experienced before." The devil is not scheming up new ways to attack us. His schemes and his purposes are the same. Be encouraged, you're not alone. Don't believe the devil's lie that other people don't struggle with the same things. These are the same things people in the Bible struggled with centuries ago.

God has written us a Book. It is so unbelievably honest. Great men and women of the faith fall so terribly into unbecoming sins. You could have seen them a mile away. You read and think, "David! Don't do that! Don't you know what that sin's going to do?" "Samson, don't go that way." I yell at them!

Here's the embarrassment: I've got their example. I have the rest of their story and I do the same thing. Are you like that? Do you read these stories and think, "I get it. Don't do that. Yet the next day I go and do the very same thing that I just read about"! We have the Word. We have the example of men and women and how the lies of the devil affected their lives. Yet, we live in the same sins.

The devil uses schemes that are pretty standard:

- Immorality
- Persecution
- Depression, getting us down about our faith and questioning our salvation

If you look at examples in the Bible, you will see the devil's attacks over and over again. Here's the thing: the devil loves to use all the new inventions to do evil. Why does it seem so difficult to live a righteous life in this day and age? Our world is changing. We can't keep up with all the technology people are using. They're great tools that can be used for God's glory and for the sake of the gospel. However, at the same time, the enemy is excited to use these new things to wreak havoc in the lives of people. Every dawning of every invention is an opportunity for the devil to take that and use it against people. He takes the glory away from God and tempts people to use these things to bring themselves glory. We see this everywhere.

I've been reading a lot about robotics recently. Every lover of Sci-Fi is thinking, "I knew it! Robots are going to take over soon." Scientists predict that robots will do all manufacturing within the next 20 years. Then I read in the *New Yorker* magazine that someone is trying to create spouses who are robots. It's one thing for a robot to construct our TVs. It's another thing entirely to try and replace a human being with them. The most advancement in robotics is in the field of artificial intelligence. Everything that could be used for our good, the devil thinks, "How can I continue to destroy what God has created?" The church must always ask the question, "Where is the devil fighting next? What will the devil use next to try and win this battle?"

Imagine for a moment that you're in the devil's office. He has a file folder. You open up the folder and see your name. Do you know how the devil is attacking you? Do you know what his scheme is for your life? Do you know how he's trying to trip you up? First, you have to admit that there's an area of weakness in your life to be able to discern possible areas of attack.

Parents, it's imperative that you know this. In my own home, we are trying to discern where the devil will beat up our boys. They're not all the same. What one struggles with, the others two don't. We're trying to figure out how to protect our kids. If you are asleep at the wheel as a parent, God help you, because your kids will be play toys for the devil. You need to be eyes and ears for your kids. You need to see how they're growing and the bent that they have. You need to teach them the Word of God day and night. This means that you have to be teaching the Word to yourself. Help your children understand that.

Your elders also need to help you know where the attack is fiercest. We need to make you aware of it. It concerns us. Some people have been asking what church attendance is all about and if it's really that big of a deal. It is a big deal. When you're not around the people of God, you're by yourself. The devil attacks more frequently when you're by yourself than when you're with other believers. If you think we talk about attendance just so that we can increase our numbers, you've got to be kidding. We are fearful for the church in this country. We don't want to grow casual about the war that's raging. The devil is roaming around seeking whom he may devour (1 Peter 5:8). We want you to be ready for that.

Be strategic about the scope of the battle

Christians often miss this. Our battle is not against flesh and blood. Many of you think people who differ with you are the enemy. You might think some of your friends on Facebook are the enemy when they post absurd things or revile you for your beliefs. An opposing political party is not the enemy. This doesn't mean that you can't disagree with people or have an idea of what politics should be like. We are not fighting a war against a political party. We are not fighting it against people. We are fighting against the gates of hell. Be careful not to demonize people who disagree with you by implying that they're the devil. They're not the devil. If a person is lashing out at you, it isn't because that is who they are; it's because that's what their master has told them to do.

What should we do? All that we can with the love of Christ. Speak the truth in love (Ephesians 4:15) in order to rescue POWs from the clutches of the enemy. Be careful how you respond. I know that it's difficult. Your blood boils. I get it. But the battle is not against flesh and blood (Ephesians 6:12). It's being fought in places our eyes can't see.

Be strategic about the struggle before you

The ESV says, "*We do not wrestle...*" What a great word. We do not wrestle. This isn't a large military campaign where you watch someone else do the fighting. This word "wrestle" describes hand-to-hand, bloody combat. You are in a fight; you're not watching other people do the fighting. You are in the fight along with the rest of us. It isn't someone else's battle. It's *our* battle. Our battle is not against flesh and blood. We don't wrestle in that way.

Some of you are exhausted from the fight. I'm always blown away that old people always seem to have a greater love for heaven than I do. My grandma would always say, "Oh, how glorious it will be to be home with the Lord." I always thought, "C'mon Grandma! It's pretty great down here, isn't it?" I am months away from 40. Grandma is starting to sound a whole lot wiser. Every day that I'm on this earth wrestling, I grow weary. I wake up every morning having to wrestle. Right when I think things are turning around and getting better, I need to wrestle more. Wrestle. Wrestle. Wrestle. Toil. Toil. Toil. Struggle. Struggle. Struggle. Won't it be glorious when we don't have to do that anymore?

Are you struggling today? God knows where the battle is fiercest in your life. If you feel like you are losing the battle, remember that you have allies here. Maybe you're struggling with doubt or lust, or your words or your thoughts, or a sinful relationship. Whatever that struggle is, admit that you need prayer. Come alongside one another and pray for one another. Ask the Lord to meet you in this battle and give you what you need. He has already done so. Will you make use of what He has given you?