

Spiritual Warfare – Ephesians 6:10 – 17

by David Xu 21/08/2016

Spiritual War Is Real

Many of us have had military experience – including Pastor Abri, Wendy, Ping, and LD. When you are in the army, it means you need to be ready for war at any time.

Today we are going to study a different type of war – spiritual war. “Spiritual war” is quite different to what we commonly refer to as “war” in which we can see our enemy and know where to fire our weapons. In “spiritual war” we can’t see our enemies with our physical eyes. And if we don’t pay attention to it, we may not even be aware that we are actually already engaged in this “war”, “spiritual war”, every day. Ephesians 6 verse 12 says **“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”**. It tells us clearly that our enemy is not of flesh and blood, ie. human beings, but the enemies are:

Rulers, Authorities, Powers of this dark world, Evil spiritual forces

I don’t think the rulers and authorities here mean the actual prime ministers, presidents or government officials because it says the war is not against flesh and blood. Rather it refers to the power that represents the dark evil force. However it is interestingly to see, that nowadays many governments are giving up Christian values and turning or yielding to the evil force. For an example, US president Obama, just a few months ago ordered public schools to allow so-called transgender students access to toilets of their choice, or the schools may lose government funding. That means if a male student claims he is female, he can use the female toilets and changing rooms, and if a female student claims she is male, then she can use the male toilets and changing rooms in public schools in USA. I was totally surprised by this news, and I had to read it twice to assure myself that Obama actually issued this order. It just proves one of the sayings that “Politicians don’t need common sense. They need votes.” What made President Obama issue this order? What was he thinking? And what was his motivation for doing this?

We don’t know what made President Obama issue that order. We don’t know what he was thinking. But if we look at the world today, the big picture, we can feel there is an unseen force that drives people and nations against God’s teaching. This evil influence is seen in the breakdown of the family, in the high number of divorces, the more widespread acceptance of homosexual practices & of same sex marriage. We can also see it in the way some terms we have used for hundreds of years which have profound Christian meaning and value are now being changed. For instance, we all know BC refers to Before Christ. Now many places don’t use BC any more, they use BCE, meaning ‘before common era’. AD – Anno Domini meaning “in the year of our Lord,” is now called CE, common era. I read somewhere a few years ago, in some Western countries there is pressure to no longer call Christmas, Christmas! It is now referred to as Xmas or as “the festive season”. It is politically correct to say “Happy Holidays” rather than “Merry Christmas”. Why? – because the term “Christmas” makes some people feel uncomfortable. They want to leave Christ out of Christmas.

The devil is behind all this. He wants to wipe off Jesus from everywhere he can. We are engaged in a “spiritual war”. We must be alert and prepared for this war – evil forces are arrayed against Jesus Christ. If we don’t realize that there is spiritual war, Satan can easily blind us, deceive us and lead us into destruction. And that is happening in many places in the world.

So what shall we do? When we go to war, we need to be trained, to have proper weapons. Spiritual war needs spiritual weapons. One of the amazing things about the Bible is, God doesn't just tell us about a problem without giving an answer. He always tells us what to do and equips us properly.

The Armour of God

One of the most excited moments when you join the army (or the navy or the air-force) is when you get issued with your uniform. Now remember this, your uniform represents which force you belong to. God gives us a full set of armour to equip us. When we put on God's armour, we belong to God's army. Let's have a look of what God's uniform looks like.

¹⁴Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place,

The first thing we are asked to do is to buckle the belt of truth around our waist. The belt obviously keeps everything intact, and keeps everything from falling. The belt and breastplate are connected, if the belt is loosened, the breastplate will fall off.

When you prepare for a battle, the first thing you do is to buckle up the belt. This action makes you alert, quick in response, and move faster. The Bible here rightly said use "truth" as a belt. Truth holds everything together. Contrary to "truth" is "lies". Satan is the father of lies. Therefore when we have truth around us, we are alert to Satan's lies.

The breastplate protects our heart. God asks us to wear righteousness to protect our heart. God is righteousness. **"For the Lord is righteous, He loves justice; the upright will see His face."** (Psalm 11:7) **"If you know that He is righteous, you know that everyone who does what is right has been born of Him."** (1 John 2:29) As newborn Christians, we renounce our sinful past, we have a new life, and we should have God's righteousness in our heart that other people can easily see that we are different. For instance, as Christians we just can't lie, can't steal, can't give false testimony. Because it is not right. Being righteous, doing what is right, sometimes makes things difficult for the Christian in day to day life, in the work place. You may find you are caught in the middle between your clients and your manager – you get pressure from both sides. Telling a lie, or breaking the rules may help you get out of a difficult situation – but only in the very short term. In the long term it will do you great harm. I have seen many people in my life, myself included, telling a lie, small or big, in order to find an easy solution, ending up with far bigger problems.

Being righteousness is not just a way to please God. In fact it is more – through doing what is right God is actually protecting us. The more I understand the Bible, the more I understand that God's commands are there to protect us from being harmed. Like a father setting up rules not to limit his children's freedom, but to protect them from hurting themselves.

¹⁵ and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace.

The Bible praises those who spread the good news. Isaiah 52:7 **"How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, who proclaim peace,"** Our feet are always attached to, and are part of, our body, so it is our duty to spread the gospel wherever we go. And gospel brings peace. Everywhere in the world, when the Good News of Jesus is preached, peace follows.

Many people are fascinated by testimonies of what happened during the Welsh revival (1904-05). It was known that in the coal mines, the productivity dropped in the early period of the revival. People

wondered why it happened. Soon the answer was found. It was because, prior to the revival the miners had used bad language when working with the horses and mules in the mine. Not only bad language – they also kicked and whipped the animals. When the miners got converted and became new reborn Christians, they stopped kicking or whipping the animals, and they even stopped using bad language, so the animals were confused and didn't know how to work.

During the time of the revival police didn't have any work to do, because the Holy Spirit was working in such a powerful way that so many people repented, including criminals. There was no crime during the revival in Wales. Don't you want to live in such a peaceful time?

¹⁶ In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one.

On the battlefield, a shield is vital to protect you from being harmed. Interestingly it says here the shield of faith will extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. With our faith in the Lord, not only can we avoid being hit by the flaming arrows of the evil one, but the flames can be extinguished. This makes Satan's arrows totally useless.

In ancient warfare, if soldiers were wearing armour and had a shield, there would be few casualties caused by long distance weapons like arrows fired from a bow. However if the enemy lit the arrow with fire, then it was a totally different story. The reason was that underneath the armour (made mostly of pieces of iron or leather) were garments made of cotton, so if the fire on the arrow penetrated the first layer of armour, the soldier being hit could suffer burns. They might avoid being killed but fire can cause great pain to the body, and even worse – it could cause panic among the soldiers. Panic leads to chaos, and chaos destroys a whole army. Most casualties are not caused during face to face combat, but when soldiers panic and the army is in chaos. This is why the Bible uses the shield as metaphor of faith. With faith in the Lord, we can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Satan's tricks are completely useless.

¹⁷Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

Now we need a helmet and a sword, then we are all ready to fight. A helmet is used to protect our heads, and the helmet is called the helmet of salvation. We are saved by the Lord already. We need to keep that in mind, that Jesus our Lord, has already won the victory. He defeated Satan once for all on the cross 2000 years ago. As part of his army, all we need to do is walk with Him and claim His victory. That is why in verse 15, we are asked to fit our feet with the gospel of peace.

Now we have our armour and we are well protected. God now gives us one weapon, the word of God, which is described as sword. Now, a sword is a close range weapon. A typical Roman sword is about 65-75 cm long. So when you fight, your enemy is right in front of you. Dear brothers and sisters, when we go out and spread the Good News, we are in close range combat **“against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.”** God doesn't equip us with the weapons of archery (bows and arrows). An archer can shoot an arrow from a distance and when things are not right, he can flee before enemy catches him. NO, God wants us to be involved in close range combat, less than a metre from the enemy – so close we can see the enemy clearly.

The enemy Satan, as described in verse 16, doesn't dare engage in hand-to-hand combat with God's army. What then do Satan and his evil forces do? They hide in dark places, shoot one or two arrows from a distance. Hence we need to take up the shield of faith. And remember this, bows and arrows are

no match for soldiers with swords in close range combat. With our armour and our weapons we can easily defeat the enemy.

¹⁸And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord's people.

Last but not least we need to pray. Earnest prayer can bond us closely to the Lord. Here God reminds us not just to pray for ourselves, but for all the Lord's people.

Ian McCormack, a Kiwi who didn't believe in God, was a typical young man in his age. As an atheist, not believing in God, he engaged in drinking, taking drugs, having so-called fun. One night, when he was in Mauritius he went out diving with his friend. He was stung by one of the most venomous creatures in the world, a Box Jelly fish. Not just once but 5 times. Normally people would die from just one sting.

"As I lay there dying, I saw my mother in a vision praying for me, encouraging me to cry out to God from my heart and He would hear me and forgive me (my mother was the only Christian in our family.) I didn't know what to pray and cried out that if God was real, could He help me to pray. Immediately God showed me the Lord's Prayer, and for the first time in my life I prayed from my heart and gave my life to the Lord."

And then he died. For about 15 minutes. He went down to hell, then God lifted him to heaven, eventually God sent him back to earth. What a trip! In 15 minutes, he traveled to hell, heaven and back to earth, a trip only God can arrange. His last minute's prayer and conviction saved him. And this was an answer to his mothers' prayers over many years.

In early 1992, in China I went to a concert by an American orchestra. During the break time, members of the orchestra came out to audience and we had a chance to chat with them. They came with their families. I can't remember what the conversation was about, but all of sudden one of the older ladies, looked at me, right into my eyes, and said *"I will pray for you"*. I can still remember her face, and the way she stared at me through her eye-glasses. *"I will pray for you"*. She said that twice. It made me very uncomfortable at that moment. I felt like running away from that conversation. When I became a Christian, this scene came back to me as if it had happened yesterday. God must have answered her prayers.

So my dear brothers and sisters, prayer is not just talking to the air, it is not saying self-fooling words to comfort ourselves. Prayer has power. Prayer leads us direct to our mighty Lord. Remember, God listens to our prayer, and God answers our prayer. Because Jesus gives Christians the authority to enter into God's presence, when we pray, our prayers go directly to the Lord.

Proverbs 15:29 **"The Lord is far from the wicked, but he hears the prayer of the righteous."** Psalm 65:2 **"You who answer prayer, to you all people will come."**

If you are facing a difficult situation that you don't know how solve, or you want to make a change to your life but you don't know how to do it, or you are coming to a crossroad and you don't know which way to choose, I challenge you to pray. Earnestly seek God's guidance. And see what will happen.

Dear brothers and sisters, remember we are engaged in "spiritual warfare". We are not fighting against flesh and blood, but against evil forces of wickedness. We must totally rely on the Lord to win the victory. We are not fighting this war in our own strength, nor are we fighting alone. God is our chief commander. Jesus leads us in the front and the Holy Spirit is all around us giving us protection. So onward, Christian soldiers, let's go and claim the victory, and give all the glory to our almighty God.