

# *Speaking of the Devil*

## Dealing with the Devil — Victory Over Temptation

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**Digging Deeper (Questions are on the last page)**

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### Background Notes

**Key Scripture Texts:** Hebrew 4:15-16; 12:4; 1 John 5:18; Galatians 5:16-17; James 4:7; 1 Corinthians 10:13, and others.

### Introduction

“The Invisible War.” That’s what theologian Donald Barnhouse once called the conflict between God and Satan.<sup>1</sup> His arguments have received further treatment in Gregory Boyd’s works.<sup>2</sup> The cross of Jesus Christ signified the defeat of Satan, though the battle still rages: D-Day awaiting V-Day, as we have noted in our studies thus far. Heaven has been secured against Satan’s meddling, but earth remains his main theater of operations (see Revelation 12). And temptation is the supreme weapon in his arsenal against the Christian.

But we are not defenseless in the battle, for Jesus has not left us alone, but through the Holy Spirit he forever remains our companion and comrade in arms. Indeed, we have Jesus’ own example to inspire us:

For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.<sup>16</sup> Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need (Hebrews 4:15-16).

This passage naturally associates the victory of Jesus over temptation with the promise of God’s mercy and grace “to help in time of need.” Based on the context, that “time of need” is the moment of temptation. When it arrives, we are to remember Jesus’ victory, show confidence in the rule of God (“throne of grace”), and draw near in prayer to Him. Knowing that Jesus himself shared every aspect of our temptations lends strength to that confidence. God never asks of us anything He will not stoop down to share. Mysterious as that seems, it too belongs to the sea of divine grace, limitless and deep.

How far does this confidence go? In what at first seems to be an overly optimistic promise, John declares in his letter:

We know that everyone who has been born of God does not keep on sinning, but he who was born of God protects him, and the evil one does not touch him (1 John 5:18).

Scripture uses the image of *birth* to emphasize a number of features: 1) we have the life of God; 2) we become part of the family of God; 3) we have a new nature, a new humanity. No doubt the writer recalls the late night encounter of Jesus with Nicodemus (John 3) in which the Lord tells this elder Pharisee, “You must be born again.” In the present passage, the new birth offers protection against habitual sinning, since the new nature is wholly in harmony with the will of God. The basis of this protection is “he who was born of God.” Using the aorist tense of the Greek verb *gennaō*, the writer lays stress on the decisive nature of the birth: “was born.” In this instance, he is talking about Jesus who was decisively raised from the dead. That is, the basis of our confidence lies in the resurrection of the Son of God. If he rose from the dead, then “the last enemy,” death, will be defeated, and along with it, Satan himself (1 Corinthians 15:26).

John offers an additional assurance: “the evil one does not touch him.” The word translated “touch” is from the Greek *haptō*. Its form is present tense, suggesting the continuous nature of the action: “the evil one does not

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<sup>1</sup> Donald Grey Barnhouse, *Invisible War* (Grand Rapid: Zondervan, 1965).

<sup>2</sup> Gregory A. Boyd, *God at War* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1997); *Satan and the Problem of Evil: Constructing a Trinitarian Warfare Theodicy* (Downers Grove, Illinois: IVP Academic, 2001).

constantly touch him.” The word itself means a bit more than a simple “touch.” In fact, among the meanings is the military connotation: “to set upon, attack.” A more general meaning is “to fasten, bind, cling, hang onto, grasp, lay hold of.” John uses the middle voice which gives the added meaning “for oneself.” Satan cannot successfully attack and seize Jesus who has been born of God into resurrection life. After all, Jesus is now in heaven at God’s right hand, having defeated Satan and thrown him to earth. But this promise also applies to the believer in Christ. We have the assurance that Satan has no right to seize, cling to, or bind the child of God. He will use all of his resources to wage war against the Christian, but God has made provision for the protection of the Christian, as we shall see shortly.

“Greater is he who is in you than he who is in the world” (1 John 4:4). “No temptation except the ones common to human beings...and a way to escape it” (1 Corinthians 10:13). These are solid promises on which we stand. The question remaining in this study is: “How do we deal with the Devil in practical terms? How can we have victory over temptation?”

### The Defense which Defeats the Devil

You will recall from our last study that Satan in his four-fold character makes assault on the Christian. To review that teaching, here’s a summary chart:<sup>3</sup>

Character	Deceiver	Destroyer	Ruler	Accuser
Target	The Mind	The Body	The Will	The Conscience
Weapon	Lies	Suffering	Pride	Accusation
Purpose	Ignorance of God’s will	Impatient with God’s will	Independence of God’s will	Indictment of God’s will

What, then, is our effective defense in each case? How can we deal with the devil when he comes to us with his diabolical character, targeting our lives with his weapons in pursuit of his purposes? The promises given us above ought to assure us of victory. But how do they become effective in practical ways? We hope to answer that question in what follows. For each of the character features of Satan there is a solid defense.

### Defense against the Deceiver: The Word of God

When Satan comes at us as the *deceiver* with his lies and targets our minds, he hopes to keep us ignorant of what God wants. In response, there is only one sure defense: the word of God which is capable of stripping off the disguise of Satan and revealing the falsehoods he wants to plant in our minds. As the first woman learned in her encounter with the serpent, human wisdom is an unequal protection against the strategies of Satan. The main text setting forth this truth is the temptation of Jesus in the wilderness (Matthew 4:1-11; Luke 4:1-13). Faced with his would-be nemesis and the archenemy of God, the Son of God did not join the battle using his divine power. Instead, he countered each temptation by direct reference to passages from the Scriptures. His choice of biblical texts came from *Deuteronomy*, the last volume within in the Torah. In the Hebrew Bible the name of that book is “these are the words.” It’s as if Jesus was telling Satan, “You want some words? Well, ‘These are the words’ that are the true response to your lies.” In each case, he prefaces his quotations with “It is written...” Even when Satan tried to quote the Bible out of context, Jesus met his attack with a proper reading of Scripture.

1. We must allow the Holy Spirit to teach us the truth of Scripture so that we will know it thoroughly. When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come.<sup>14</sup> He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you.<sup>15</sup> All that the Father has is mine; therefore I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you (John 16:13-15).  
The Holy Spirit is called “the Spirit of truth” who “guides into all truth.” Notice how the entire Trinity is involved in the process of giving us the truth we need. From the Father to the Son and through the Holy

<sup>3</sup> In the main, we are following Wiersbe in this organization: *The Strategy of Satan* (Carol Stream: Tyndale House Publishers, 1979), 85.

Spirit, God communicates temptation-defeating truth into the life of the Christian threatened by Satan. Scripture is the place where these Spirit-inspired words assume human form in human language. We must read the Bible regularly and allow the Spirit to shed light on the words he once inspired human authors to write down.

2. We must commit Scripture to memory so that it is readily available to use when temptation comes.

I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you (Psalm 119:11).

The law of his God is in his heart; his steps do not slip (Psalm 37:31).

I desire to do your will, O my God; your law is within my heart (Psalm 40:8).

These passages from the *Psalms* encourage us to make Scripture part of our second nature. Having a consistent plan to do this is essential. I recommend the *Topical Memory System* developed by The Navigators ministry<sup>4</sup> which builds on essential truths, arranged into key topics.

3. We must meditate on Scripture so that its truth saturates our mind, feeds our spiritual life, and fortifies us against temptation.

This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success (Joshua 1:8).

His delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night (Psalm 1:2).

How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth! (Psalm 119:103).

I rise before dawn and cry for help; I hope in your words. <sup>148</sup> My eyes are awake before the watches of the night, that I may meditate on your promise (Psalm 119:147-148).

In the way of your testimonies I delight as much as in all riches (Psalm 119:14).

The law of your mouth is better to me than thousands of gold and silver pieces (Psalm 119:72).

Therefore I love your commandments above gold, above fine gold (Psalm 119:127).

The Jewish people used the word *hāgāh* to convey the idea of “meditate.” It appears in some of the texts above. Basically the word refers to a low sound usually made by an animal such as a dove or lion. In human terms, sighs, cries, and moans are in view. Devising plans or plotting strategy also belong to the range of meaning. There is a strong vocal component to the term. Meditation is not a purely silent or “otherworldly” activity, but a verbalization of Scripture so that a person may hear its words and mull over its meaning *aloud*. The words of Scripture are spoken, repeated, orally interpreted, sounded out, and audibly imagined. The goal of this exercise is to concretely grasp the significance of the text, as well as to sweetly relish the words as one might enjoy a fine meal. In fact, lions are said to “meditate” over their prey as they roar, attack, subdue, and feast on it (Isaiah 31:4). Lions don’t take kindly to attempts at taking away their meal, but will resist and hold tightly to it. Even so is our wrestling with God’s Word. This understanding of the meaning of *hagah* gives graphic insight into what meditation is. Meditation is the outward verbalization of one’s thoughts towards God, and talking out loud as we pour over His teachings and words. It is the wrestling with the Word; we can’t be driven off of it, we are chewing on it, pondering it, day and night.

Meditation is *delight in the Word*, a living romance with the truth of God which pushes away all other seducers and will not permit the Evil One to get a foothold in our minds. When we are full of God’s truth, the lies of Satan become less appealing and less effective.

4. We must spontaneously put the word of God into action against temptation.

And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God (Ephesians 6:17).

But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you (John 14:26).

For we walk by faith, not by sight (2 Corinthians 5:7).

Therefore I consider all your precepts to be right; I hate every false way (Psalm 119:128).

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<sup>4</sup> <http://www.navpress.com/product/9781576839973/Topical-Memory-System-The-Navigators> [May 27, 2010]. The program includes 60 memorization cards, a workbook, and card holder. This was my main tool when I first began to seriously memorize Scripture more than forty years ago. Eight different translations of the Bible are available. Also, there is both free and purchase software available for further expanding your memorization program. Free examples are found here: <http://www.freechristiansoftware.org/>. Reasonably priced software with additional features: <http://www.memlok.com/>.

Temptation is not an entirely private matter. It has to do with how we live our life, or, as the Bible likes to phrase, how we *walk*. People in the ancient world did a considerable amount of walking, and during the course of doing so encountered challenges along the way. Fatigue, hunger, thirst, wild animals, robbers, bad roads, and hot sun all conspired to impede the progress of the traveler. There are spiritual equivalents to the experience of walking, and that is why the biblical writers speak about our walk when they want to tell us how to live. Temptation impedes our walk, but putting the word of God into action helps us to take the offensive. In Paul's account of the Christian's armor (Ephesians 6:11-17), the only offensive weapon is "the sword of the Spirit," God's word. Through Scripture we have the means to take action because we have instructions telling us what to do.

The Hebrew idea of Torah is not primarily about *laws* in the normal sense of that word, although we usually find Torah translated that way in our Bibles. Jewish people looked to Torah to *guide their actions* and to give them *instructions*. That's the root idea behind the Hebrew word *torah*. Assuming we read, memorize and meditate on Scripture, we then need to intentionally put it into practice, forming solid Christian habits. We refer to this as the formation of *virtues* — moral and spiritual *strengths* in our lives able to move forward and not be hindered by the attacks of Satan as he throws his temptations at us.

The Holy Spirit's role includes calling to mind Scripture at just the right time and under the right circumstances so that it can do the most good in combating evil. An old adage applies here: "The best defense is a good offense." Ready at hand, the word of God gives us the right words to speak and guides the right actions to react when temptation comes.

The Psalmist (119:128 above) expresses supreme confidence in the rightness of God's word, and that places him in a position to accurately judge things that are false when he encounters them. Satan the deceiver relies on lies to target our minds so that they are ignorant of God's will. The word of God smells a lie a mile away and prepares us to counter it with truth.

### **Defense against the Destroyer: The Grace of God**

So to keep me from being too elated by the surpassing greatness of the revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass me, to keep me from being too elated. <sup>8</sup> Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it should leave me. <sup>9</sup> But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. <sup>10</sup> For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong (2 Corinthians 12:7-10).

And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you (1 Peter 5:10).

At some time in Paul's life he became afflicted with a bodily malady. We don't know what it was, but from the image of the "thorn" we know it must have been persistent and difficult to remove. God allowed Satan to harass Paul in this way, but He did not allow the *destroyer* to destroy him in the process. Our bodies are highly vulnerable to temptation since so many natural desires, wants, appetites, and needs reside in them. As we noted in our last study, we can hardly separate our total person from our body. Mind and body are highly integrated aspects of human beings. If Satan fails in defeating us through our minds, he may well afflict our bodies. What is our defense when he does?

"My grace is sufficient for you," the Lord tells Paul. The word for "sufficient" is *arkeō* which literally means "to be enough." Normally the word implies the existence of something attacking, but something else is able to "ward off, keep off" the attacker. It is a sufficient defense against the assault. The word "sufficient" may actually be a bit weak in grasping the robust nature of the strength God's grace gives to us when we are tempted. "My grace is fully able to ward off whatever is attacking you" would be a better rendering. Grace means power applied to weakness. Grace is strength shining through weakness. Even when Paul encounters

“insults” he has the assurance that “when I am weak, then I am strong.” Of course, grace is experienced through *the means of grace* which are God’s chosen methods for pouring this enabling power into our lives. Things like the Bible, prayer, fellowship, worship, and the Sacrament must be a regular and disciplined part of our daily lives. Each one of them becomes a source of strength when our human, physical and bodily strength fails because of suffering.

In Peter’s letter, he refers to “the God of all grace,” referring to the multi-faceted and exhaustive capacity of what God supplies. In Hebrews 10:29 we read about “the Spirit of grace,” the one who lives in us and is the source of our supply. “The throne of grace” (Hebrews 4:16) refers to the authority which decrees grace for those in need. We are protected by “the word of His grace” (Acts 20:32) according to Paul’s farewell address in Ephesus, a place where “wolves” would try to ravage the Christian flock.

Salvation begins with grace:

For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, <sup>9</sup> not a result of works, so that no one may boast (Ephesians 2:8-9).

Suffering begins with the earliest ravages of sin in our lives before we encounter Jesus Christ. Much damage has already been done. On our own initiative we cannot take the required steps to put our faith in God. He must take the initiative and bring grace to us. We call this *prevenient grace* — the grace which “goes before” and prepares the way for faith. According to this text, nothing is our “own doing,” but purely a “gift of God.” Jesus said it best: “The Son of Man has come to seek and to save the lost” (Luke 19:10). “We love because he first loved us,” John reminds us (1 John 4:19).

Of course, Satan wants the suffering we experience in our body to become a reason for questioning the grace of God. He diminishes our sense of safety, ability, and acceptability by compromising our bodies with painful suffering. Like Paul we pray for deliverance from the suffering. Instead, God sends the miracle of grace, rooted in the cross and resurrection of Jesus. For the one who died also rose again. If our bodies are weakened by the assault of the Evil One, Jesus is the source of new life and strength, the benefits of God’s grace. The “riches of grace” make possible many things (Ephesians 2:7): the power to serve (1 Corinthians 15:9-10), the willingness to sacrifice (2 Corinthians 8:1-9), the joy to sing (Colossians 3:16), and the words to speak (Colossians 4:6).

These Scriptures are meant to increase our confidence in God’s grace, especially when our bodies suffer. How, then, do we mount a defense when Satan harasses our bodies?

1. We must declare our unswerving confidence in God.

Though he slay me, I will hope in him; yet I will argue my ways to his face (Job 13:15).  
And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God (Job 19:26).

Those words came from the mouth of Job in the midst of physical suffering in the form of a skin condition which covered him with open sores and excruciating pain. No doubt he felt close to death, though he never heeded his wife’s advice to “curse God and die.” In fact, he handed over his physical condition to God. By saying “though he slay me,” Job literally transfers the responsibility for his suffering to God, not in order to blame Him, but to declare hope in Him. That hope seems to imply a coming resurrection: “in my flesh I will see God.”

2. We must be grateful to God even in suffering.

Giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ (Ephesians 5:20).  
Give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you (1 Thessalonians 5:18).

God does not ask us *to like suffering*. In fact, God plans, one day, to eliminate suffering from His creation and replace it with His glory which will cover the whole world (Romans 8:18-21; Habakkuk 2:14). All tears will be wiped away along with the sorrow which produces them (Isaiah 25:8; Revelation 21:4). When we suffer, there is opportunity for growing faith and character development, and we should express

gratitude to God for making these possible. His will is reaching its goal in our lives when we show this kind of thankfulness.

3. We must gain perspective in suffering from the word of God.

Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I keep your word.<sup>68</sup> You are good and do good; teach me your statutes.<sup>69</sup> The insolent smear me with lies, but with my whole heart I keep your precepts;<sup>70</sup> their heart is unfeeling like fat, but I delight in your law.<sup>71</sup> It is good for me that I was afflicted, that I might learn your statutes (Psalm 119:67-71). For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope (Romans 15:4).

The Bible takes on fresh significance because of our suffering. Satan would want to “smear [us] with lies,” but the word of God sheds light on the real reason these things are happening to us. Only a steady confidence in God’s word allows the writer to say, “It is good for me that I was afflicted.” He knows that from such suffering he will “learn [God’s] statutes.” The alternative was for him to go “astray,” and David knew a good deal about doing that! By contrast, the word of God interprets his experience in new ways. We might also suggest that suffering helps to interpret the Bible in deeper ways. A Scripture passage about the purpose of suffering might make little sense to someone who has yet to face Satan’s temptations. However, once in the middle of the battle, Christians come to appreciate the wisdom of God’s word. James tells his readers that trials call for fresh wisdom (James 1:2-8). Such wisdom helps us confront temptation victoriously.

Sometimes the examples of suffering we find in the Bible guide our thinking about our own afflictions. Consider the example of Paul and Silas (Acts 16:44ff). Locked up in a jail, they act according to the wisdom God gave them and sing hymns at midnight! When an earthquake batters the prison, their words of encouragement to the jailer result in his salvation. No doubt the songs they sang came from the Jewish hymnbook — the Psalms. Paul would later write:

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God (Colossians 3:16).

4. We must seek God’s glory in our suffering.

For what credit is it if, when you sin and are beaten for it, you endure? But if when you do good and suffer for it you endure, this is a gracious thing in the sight of God (1 Peter 2:20).

Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in that name (1 Peter 4:16).

Because of our suffering, Satan wants us to curse God and die (see Job 2:4-5):

Then Satan answered the LORD and said, "Skin for skin! All that a man has he will give for his life.<sup>5</sup> But stretch out your hand and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will curse you to your face."

Indeed, Job’s wife could scarcely bear the intensity of Job in his pain and told him to do just that (2:9). Job knows that his bodily condition had robbed him of honor in the eyes among his contemporaries (Job 19:9; 30:15). Yet, to the end of his suffering, Job remained faithful to God. Filled with questions, he acknowledges God’s glory by recognizing His wisdom (Job 28:20-28) and His ability to bring His plans to completion (Job 42:1-2).

Through temptation, God’s grace finds its way into the suffering wounds inflicted by Satan. Unable to change the circumstances of suffering, the Christian draws from the means of grace and declares:

But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 15:57).

### **Defense against the Ruler: The Spirit of God**

Satan claims to rule this world because he thinks that he owns it (Luke 4:5-6). As we learned in our first study in this series, he is called the “prince of the power of the air.” But in the same passage, he is called “the spirit which works in the sons of disobedience” (Ephesians 2:2). Here is a *bona fide* counterfeit, a parody of the Holy Spirit. The *ruler* of this world energizes those who disobey the will of God. By contrast, we have another Spirit who is from God. We must test every other spirit to see if it is fraudulent (1 John 4:1-3). The stark contrast is made in the following passage:

We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us (1 Corinthians 2:12).

Notice the two “spirits”: 1) “spirit of the world,” and 2) “the Spirit who is from God.” Paul portrays the spirit of the world in starkly impersonal terms while referring to the Holy Spirit as the personal emissary of God Himself.

In contrast to Satan, God’s Spirit works in positive, good, and purposeful ways. Paul writes:

Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling,<sup>13</sup> for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure (Philippians 2:12-13).

For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them (Ephesians 2:10).

Living by the power of the Holy Spirit and in true reverence for God, we anticipate God bringing to completion His work in us — the firstfruits of the new creation. Satan appeals to our *pride* in his role as *ruler* of the evil empire. He does not want us to show “fear and trembling” in the presence of God, but defiant self-reliance instead. He wants our achievements to be counted rather than God’s work in us. He is more concerned about what we make out of ourselves than what God intends to make out of us. He tempts us to take credit for everything. *Salvation* is what God does for us, not what we do for ourselves. Jesus is our Lord and Savior to whom we give honor and to whom we are forever grateful.

I have brought you glory on earth by completing the work you gave me to do (John 17:4).

When he had received the drink, Jesus said, "It is finished." With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit (John 19:30).

But when this priest had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God (Hebrews 10:12).

The reason we have our work to do is because Jesus achieved his work for us: “completing the work,” crying “It is finished,” and taking his place in resurrection life at God’s right hand. It is the Holy Spirit who impresses the reality of this salvation on our hearts. He convicts us of our sin and calls us to the Savior. When we acknowledge Jesus’ role in our salvation, we open a new front in the war against Satan.

But there is more. Besides initial salvation, there is *sanctification*. This, too, is God’s work and not ours. Indeed, the Holy Spirit enables a full surrender of our *will*, Satan’s primary target as *ruler of this world*. The heart of this defense against temptation is found in Romans 12:1-2:

I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.<sup>2</sup> Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

Temptation seeks to *conform* us to *this world*. On the other hand, sanctification involves bodies and minds surrendered by our *wills* in order that we might *do the will of God*. When we take seriously this aspect of Christian experience, the result is a transformation to God’s likeness and a rejection of the world’s likeness. Initially, sanctification begins when we first become Christians and allow Christ to “forgive our sins.” At some later point in our lives, when we better understand God’s word (and God’s *will*), the issues remaining on the table come into clear focus. The Holy Spirit does this special work of grace in our hearts, establishing one more beachhead, defending us against the attacks of Satan. Wiersbe sums this up nicely:

If you yield these three areas of your life daily to the Spirit of God, then the Spirit will empower you to defeat the devil. As the Spirit of grace, he will give grace to your body so that you will be able to endure suffering to the glory of God. As the Spirit of wisdom, he will teach you God’s Word and bring it to your mind when Satan attacks with his lies. And as the Spirit of power, he will empower your will to say “No!” to pride. The Holy Spirit will work in you and through you to defeat the wicked one.<sup>5</sup>

The best defense against Satan’s attack on our wills is to surrender them to God:

But he gives more grace. Therefore it says, "God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble."<sup>7</sup> Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you (James 4:4-6).

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<sup>5</sup> *Op. Cit.*, 64.

But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word (Acts 6:4).

If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you (John 15:7).

Notice the distinct acts of the will in these passages: submit, resist, devote, and abide (remain). As an initial and decisive step, sanctification needs to be our daily practice. The more God has of us, the less Satan has of us. The more we give to God, the less there is for Satan to manipulate.

Our wills must also *receive the word of God into our hearts*. The will is the gatekeeper of the heart, which includes our minds which need to be shaped by the Word. Consider:

And we also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers (1 Thessalonians 2:13).

Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us (Ephesians 3:20)

The Holy Spirit facilitates our reception of the Word since he was the one who inspired it in the first place. The Word comes alive because of the Spirit's indwelling in us. When we receive the Word, it goes to work in us.

The Holy Spirit deals with *pride* in our lives. In his follow-up to Romans 12:1-2, Paul writes:

For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned (12:3).

Humility acknowledges that everything of value comes from God, and we must be diligent to give back to Him what rightfully belongs to Him. John Baptist, who became less so that Jesus could become more, told his followers: "A man can receive nothing unless it has been given him from heaven" (John 3:27). In the spirit of this, Paul tells the church:

For who sees anything different in you? What do you have that you did not receive? If then you received it, why do you boast as if you did not receive it? (1 Corinthians 4:7).

By contrast, Satan appeals to our will and sense of achievement. He tells us that we ought to get credit for the things we do, and when we don't, we should seek recognition from others. When temptation comes to us in this way, our response should be an immediate surrender of our ambitions to God. The Holy Spirit will help us do this by prompting us and then empowering us.

### **Defense against the Accuser: The Son of God**

"We have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous one" (1 John 2:1). John uses legal language to talk about the work of Jesus in our defense. The Greek word for "advocate" is *paraklētos*, a word we have encountered in other contexts. Elsewhere, John applies the term to the Holy Spirit — the One who comes *alongside of us* to render help, counsel, and protection (John 14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7). However, when the Holy Spirit does those things for us, he is really acting at the behest of Jesus who sent the Spirit to us. Why does Jesus need to be our "advocate"? Does he need to *defend us against God's accusations*? That seems unlikely, since Revelation 12:10 has already called *Satan* the "accuser of the brothers," and Job's story began with just such an accusation.

From Romans 8:34 we have the assurance that no one, including Satan, can successfully *condemn us*:

Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died-- more than that, who was raised to life-- is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us.

From the concept of *intercession* we infer the role of Jesus as our advocate who both grants us access to God and denies accusations from Satan. The Old Testament prophet Isaiah foresaw a time when such a defense would come from Yahweh:

He saw that there was no one, he was appalled that there was no one to intercede; so his own arm worked salvation for him, and his own righteousness sustained him (Isaiah 59:16).

Seated at God's right hand (Luke 22:69), Jesus is in the place of *power and authority* to counter the charges which Satan brings against the Christian. In fact, the very presence of Jesus in his new position *denies Satan any further access to heaven* (again, see Revelation 12:8-9) where he had previously accused persons like Job and

Joshua (see the previous study) before God. At the present time, Jesus pleads our case based on his shed blood and still bears the wounds as an eternal witness of what he did for us on the cross (John 1:9). He also commits himself to finishing the work in us which he began on the cross and witnessed by his resurrection.

Now may the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, <sup>21</sup> equip you with everything good that you may do his will, working in us that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen (Hebrews 13:20-21).

Jesus has made possible the thorough equipping of Christians to do God's will. This equipment consists of both ministry *gifts* (Ephesians 4:12, 16) and defensive *armor* to fend off the attacks of Satan (Ephesians 6:11-16). It is Jesus, the Son of God, who gives the gifts and covers with armor. We might say that Jesus covers us in two distinct ways: 1) with his blood by forgiving our sins; 2) with the armor of God to shield us from Satan's assaults.

If we return to the account in Zechariah 3, a curious element appears in the text:

The LORD said to Satan, "The LORD rebuke you, Satan! The LORD, who has chosen Jerusalem, rebuke you! Is not this man a burning stick snatched from the fire?" (Zechariah 3:2).

This passage follows Satan's *resistance* to Joshua's appointment as high priest because of his sins. But then, Yahweh *rebukes* Satan by appealing to His gracious choice of His people. Finally, God *restores* Joshua. Consider:

Now Joshua was standing before the angel, clothed with filthy garments. <sup>4</sup> And the angel said to those who were standing before him, "Remove the filthy garments from him." And to him he said, "Behold, I have taken your iniquity away from you, and I will clothe you with pure vestments." <sup>5</sup> And I said, "Let them put a clean turban on his head." So they put a clean turban on his head and clothed him with garments. And the angel of the LORD was standing by. <sup>6</sup> And the angel of the LORD solemnly assured Joshua, <sup>7</sup> "Thus says the LORD of hosts: If you will walk in my ways and keep my charge, then you shall rule my house and have charge of my courts, and I will give you the right of access among those who are standing here. <sup>8</sup> Hear now, O Joshua the high priest, you and your friends who sit before you, for they are men who are a sign: behold, I will bring my servant the Branch. <sup>9</sup> For behold, on the stone that I have set before Joshua, on a single stone with seven eyes, I will engrave its inscription, declares the LORD of hosts, and I will remove the iniquity of this land in a single day. <sup>10</sup> In that day, declares the LORD of hosts, every one of you will invite his neighbor to come under his vine and under his fig tree" (Zechariah 3:3-10).

Notice how God takes off Joshua's filthy garments and puts on him "pure vestments," including a clean turban on his head. As high priest, Joshua is now cleansed by God, and Satan can no longer accuse him of being unfit for his holy office. He is given charge of the Temple, but, more apparently, he has *access* to the holy places which represent God's presence on earth.

This is a fascinating passage because it tells us not only about Joshua and what happened to him, but also makes a promise and a prediction. God refers to Joshua and his associates as "a sign" of what God intends to do in the future. The word "sign" is from the Hebrew *mōphēt* which means "wonder, display of God's power, sign, token of future events." What happened to Joshua and the other priests is a type of something further in the plans of God for His people. In 3:9-10 we have a prediction of the coming of one called "The Branch." The underlying Hebrew expression is *tsemaḥ* which can mean "vine, sprout, or growth." That title also appears in 6:12:

Tell him this is what the LORD Almighty says: 'Here is the man whose name is the Branch, and he will branch out from his place and build the temple of the LORD.

Further references to this person appear in Jeremiah 23:5, 33:15, Isaiah 4:2, and 11:1. His coming will result in removing "the iniquity of this land in a single day." Scholars generally agree that this refers to the Messiah in his role as suffering Savior who comes to remove sin, and thus remove the basis for Satan's accusation against all the people of God.

God's provision for our sins in the work of Jesus on the cross decisively discredits the accusations of Satan. If we allow God to forgive our sins by accepting the finished work of Jesus, we declare victory over the haunting, accusing, and shaming activities of the Evil One against us. Confessing our sins, we proclaim that Satan can no longer use them against us. In so doing, we defeat him when he tries to soil our conscience with false guilt.

## Dressed for Combat

10 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. 13 Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm. 14 Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, 15 and, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace. 16 In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one; 17 and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, 18 praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints (Ephesians 6:10-18).

No doubt Paul had occasion to talk with his Roman guards during one or more of his imprisonments. He certainly had opportunity to admire their decorous appearance, imposing as it was. From several sources we glean the following portrait:

### General Armor Issues

A set of Roman armor would include one of a variety of body armor types (usually designed to be flexible but strong; a centurion's body armor differs from that of the legionary), a *shielders* and *turtlesith* a special design/decoration for each legion), leggings or greaves, an apron (for decoration and protecting the groin, mostly made of metal), marching sandals called *Caligae* (with studs on the sole), a coarse woolen tunic, a belt (showing a soldier's position/rank in the army), and lastly a helmet called *Galea* (with cheek, ear and neck protection). A helmet might have also held a crest if the Roman was an officer or of higher rank than a peer.

### Personal Armor

The *lorica hamata* is a type of chainmail armor used during the Roman Republic and Roman Empire as a standard-issue armor for both the legionaries (higher quality version of the *lorica hamata*) and secondary troops (*Auxilia*).

The *Scutum*, (Latin for shield), was the standard, rectangular, semi-cylindrical shield carried by Roman legionaries during the Principate. Republican-era *scuta* had the form of an oval

The *cingulum* was a military belt worn at all times, even without the rest of the armor.

### Personal Weapons

The *Pugio* was a small dagger.

The *Gladius* was the short sword, 18 to 24 inches long, used by Roman legionaries from the 3rd century BC until the late Roman Empire. It was primarily used for stabbing and thrusting. The *gladius* was made by Spaniards

The *Hasta* was a spear used by *triarrii* in the times of the Republic, and also as the primary weapon of the *hastati* and *principes* in the early Republic.

The *Pilum* (plural *pila*), a specialized javelin that would bend after being thrown to prevent enemies from re-using it.

We also have the opinion of Flavius Josephus who lived during the zenith of Rome's military glory. Having been made a Roman citizen by Vespasian, he traveled with the Roman legions during the middle of the first century. Josephus was truly impressed with military discipline. He claims soldiers always carried their weapons with them, even in time of peace. Furthermore, practice in the proper use of their weapons never ceased. "Every soldier is every day exercised, and that with great diligence, as if it were in time of war, which is the reason why they bear the fatigues of battle so easily" (Josephus, *The Wars Of The Jews*, Book III, Chap. 5, 1).

The strong, fit, equipped and well out-fitted imposing figure must have left its impression on Paul, in spite of his own detention. Seeing such a specimen of human strength, Paul's Spirit-sanctified imagination paints broad strokes as he captures the vision of the fully equipped Christian, endowed by God, not the Empire, and ready to stand in the face of whatever onslaughts might be hurled against him. Had Paul not already told his readers that Christ "had given gifts to men" in the form of gifted persons whose purpose was "to equip the saints for the work of the ministry" (Ephesians 4:12)? Had he not envisioned the new humanity reaching its destiny as the "perfect man"? And does not that equipped "saint" now stand before us in chapter 6, belted by truth, shielded by faith, helmeted with salvation, breast-plated with righteousness, wielding the sword of the Word, and marching in shoes of the Gospel, bringing peace?

But perhaps even more imposing, in Paul's mind, was the figure of another soldier, centuries before, having just inherited the mantle of leadership from Moses, the man Joshua, encamped on Canaan's soil and awaiting orders which now come from Yahweh:

5 No man shall be able to stand before you all the days of your life. Just as I was with Moses, so I will be with you. I will not leave you or forsake you. 6 Be strong and courageous, for you shall cause this people to inherit the land that I swore to their fathers to give them. 7 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. 8 This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success. 9 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 1:5-9).

Nor could Paul have forgotten the figure of Yahweh Himself, "the Divine Warrior":

14 Justice is turned back, and righteousness stands afar off; for truth has stumbled in the public squares, and uprightness cannot enter. 15 Truth is lacking, and he who departs from evil makes himself a prey. The LORD saw it, and it displeased him that there was no justice. 16 He saw that there was no man, and wondered that there was no one to intercede; then his own arm brought him salvation, and his righteousness upheld him. 17 He put on righteousness as a breastplate, and a helmet of salvation on his head; he put on garments of vengeance for clothing, and wrapped himself in zeal as a cloak (Isaiah 59:14-17).

The writer of Isaiah 59 sees the sorry state of the world, including his own world, Israel, and then hears God speaking, unwilling to allow justice, truth and righteousness to fail. And so Yahweh arms himself, like a soldier, with righteousness and salvation, and wearing garments suitable for accomplishing His holy purposes. What does Paul glean from this Isaiah passage? Obviously, he imitates some of its exact language and certainly the "spirit of the times". For six chapters, Paul has poured out his heart to readers he does not know, but whose faith and life in Christ have come to him as a good report. He has reminded, deepened, cemented, and lifted up his readers from the commonness of earth to the heights of "the heavnlies," aided by words intended to "build up" the body of Christ. Paul's vision of the future is hopeful and grounded in the long-standing purposes of God to raise up a New Temple, filled with the Spirit, composed of living stones.

Still, once built, such a structure can only attract the hosts of hell whose own kingdom God has already defeated by the cross and the resurrection of Jesus. The battle has already begun for the hearts and minds of the Christ-followers. The Jewish leadership has opposed the Messianic community, tooth and nail, hauling its adherents from the synagogues and handing some over to the Romans for trial. Emperor Nero will soon implement his own pogrom against the Christ followers, exhibiting them as beasts in the arena and declaring himself to be god in the process. How will the readers of Paul's Ephesian letter/sermon respond when persecution sweeps Asia Minor? Paul's own colleague-in-the-faith, the writer of *Revelation*, will pull back the curtain on troubled times to come, as he sends his letters to the "Seven Churches in Asia Minor", the same audience Paul addresses in *Ephesians*. And so, as Paul frames the closing words of his letter, his use of military imagery seems more than appropriate. In similar ways, inspired by 1 Corinthians 16:13, Isaac Watts asked this question: "Am I A Soldier of the Cross?" all the time hearing Paul's words: "Be watchful, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong." That, too, is the burden of Ephesians 6:10-20.

### **Ephesians 6:10: Strength, Power and Might**

1. "Be strong in the Lord" comes from the Greek *endunamousthe*, used in this form only in *Ephesians*, and should be translated, "be strengthened". The notion of "power, ability", *dunamis*, is found in 1:19, 21; 3:7, 16, 20, while the verb, *dunamai* appears in 3:4, 20; 6:11, 13, 16. We take the voice to be passive, suggesting that God is the one who empowers His people: they do not empower themselves. However, they are invited by Paul to allow God to make them strong, as he wrote earlier, "by the Spirit" (3:16). By adding the phrase "in the Lord", Paul also makes this clear. "In" implies the sphere or realm where the strengthening takes place, namely, in relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ. Then, to reinforce his instructions "to be strong", Paul compounds two additional words: *kratos* and *ischus*.

2. *Kratos* invariably suggests the power of God, normally in terms of his dominion and rule over all things. Christ is said to be ruler over all the powers, as Paul explain in Ephesians 1:19-23.
3. *Ischus* points to "inherent" strength, that which one has by nature and essence, as opposed to that which supports from some external source.
4. Put simply, whatever "strength" Paul encourages here must come from God Himself, the power inherent in Christ who rose from the dead and sits at his Father's right hand. It would be insulting to the gracious work of God to speak about Christians "mustering enough strength" when the power of God flows so freely from the Lordship of Jesus Christ.
5. In many ways, this is a fitting climax to Paul's letter/sermon. Having spent six chapters writing about the powerful work of God which has brought about our salvation, Paul, in 6:10-20, is simply calling on his readers to seize the opportunity afforded them by this salvation and take *their stand* in the world against Satan.

### **Ephesians 6:11: Put on the Armor of God**

Using the Greek word *panoplia*, Paul now writes about what we have come to call "the whole armor of God". Markus Barth, in his commentary on *Ephesians*, suggests translating this word, "the splendid armor", with emphasis on the multi-faceted glory of this endowment--it's elegance, beauty and majesty (p. 761). The crux of this interpretation rests with the Greek word *pan* which commonly means simply "all or every". We are left to consider either the "fullness or completeness" of the armor or its "splendor and majesty" due to its variegated components. Hoehner stresses its use elsewhere denoting "full armor" the suit of armor of the foot soldier (pp. 822-823), and Lincoln agrees (p. 442). Wearing this armor, we are fully equipped, lacking nothing, to borrow a phrase from James 1:4.

This is God's armor, Paul tells us: His very own, not merely what He gives it to us; what He gives already belongs to His own panoply.

1. The language "put on" reminds us of Paul's earlier instruction to "put on the new man" and "put off the old man" (4:22-24). The expressions are parallel in form and in meaning. One is a "clothing" metaphor, the other is a "military" image, but the intent is the same. God has provided something new and powerful with which we are to clothe ourselves, and in this instance it is for battle to resist the devil in his efforts to take back "ground" already captured by Christ and given to us.
2. "to be able to stand against the devil's stratagems". Once more Paul stresses the "ability" (*dunamai*) God makes available to His own. The word "stand" is *histēmi*, implying the "stance" of the soldier, offering resistance to any "comers" in a lasting and stable way, not easily changed or deterred. Such a stance is not easily "pushed around", and denotes a defensive position, as in "holding one's ground". Through Christ God has gotten the victory over sin and death: in Jesus sin has met its match and "ground has been taken back" by God for His kingdom. At least "in the heavenlies", where Christ sits at the Father's side, there is no longer a place for the devil. We sit with Christ in the heavenlies, as Paul has already informed his readers, and so "the ground" is also ours. However, we are "on earth" where the battle continues to rage. Everywhere a Christ community forms and grows, the "ground" is secured for Christ and his kingdom. Paul counsels his readers to "hold the ground" and not (to steal a phrase from General Patton) "pay for the same real estate twice".

The *diabolos* (Devil), is "the one who opposes", who "hurls himself against" his enemies. A powerful scene in Revelation 12 provides insight into the early Christian understanding of evil personified as "the dragon" (12:3), "the ancient serpent", "the devil", "Satan", "the one who leads the whole world astray" (12:9). The writer of the *Revelation* describes "heavenly" battle scene in which God's good angels battle the devil and his angels resulting in the expulsion of Satan from heaven (12:8): "they lost their place". Consequent to this, heavenly voices cry "Rejoice, you heavens and you who dwell in them! But woe to the earth and the sea, because the devil has gone down to you! He is filled with fury, because he knows his time is short" (12:12). Against whom does this *diabolos* wage his war? It is against "God's woman", the people of God "who obey God's commandments and hold to the testimony of Jesus" (12:17). We have in the *Revelation*

passage language compatible with Paul's view of evil and its role in the world. "Heaven" is God's realm where the victorious Christ sits at the Father's side and his people sit with him. "Earth", and the immediate "space" above it, is the realm for the conflict between Christ's church and Satan. God has raised up "on earth" the little colony of heaven, the Living Temple, both Jew and Gentile, redeemed by the cross and the resurrection of Jesus. **What God proposes, the devil opposes**, and that is why the word *diabolos* is used here in Ephesians 6:11.

Caird prefers the word "stratagems" rather than "wiles" when translating the word *methodos*. Paul used the term earlier in 4:14 in conjunction with Christ's gifts which prevent the "methods" of men from "tossing about like infants" the people of God. In that setting, it applied to human strategies, while here it refers to those of the devil. Included in its meaning are "procedure, process, and method", but does have connotations of "strategy, scheme". Elsewhere Paul writes about "not being outwitted by Satan, since we are not ignorant of his designs" (2 Corinthians 2:11), where "designs" is *voēma* and pertains to what the "mind" of Satan has prepared. Snodgrass notes:

Mention of the schemes of the devil reminds us of the trickery and subterfuge by which evil and temptation present themselves in our lives. Evil rarely looks evil until it accomplishes its goal; it gains entrance by appearing attractive, desirable, and perfectly legitimate. It is a baited and camouflaged trap (*Ephesians*, p.339).

Once more we look at Paul's other letters and find this telling passage:

4 For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. 5 We destroy **arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God**, and take **every thought captive** to obey Christ (2 Corinthians 10:4-5).

Since most of the devil's stratagems enter the battlefield of the mind, it is on that "ground" that we must take our "stand". Recall how Paul in *Ephesians* wrote about the "darkening of the mind" as belonging to the old life.

3. In the words of R.P. Martin: "The assaults of demonic powers require heavenly aid to repel, and it is the epistle's conviction, in true Pauline fashion, that God has placed at the Christians' disposal all that is needed to resist such an attack. In particular, the various pieces of armor are listed" (*Ephesians, Colossians and Philemon*, p.75).
4. "Power words" dominate verses 10, 11, 13, and 16. C.E. Arnold points out that these terms are rare in the New Testament but draw their energy from what Paul already said in 1:10. The high concentration of words about principalities, powers, and cosmocrats in 1:12 strongly infer the threats Paul sees facing his readers. No wonder he will instruct them throughout this passage to "resist", "watch", "pray", and "be alert"!
5. The Qumran community, associated with the Dead Scroll Scrolls, saw themselves as warriors in a coming battle between the "sons of light" and the "sons of darkness". Although Paul is not likely dependent on these writings, the so-called War Scroll (known as 1QM), dramatizes the eventual conflict in terms not unlike Paul's call to "put on the armor of God".

### **Ephesians 6:12: "Our Struggle"**

When Paul commences this next verse, he explains more fully the implications of a battle where we face down "the strategy of the devil". Obviously this is no ordinary conflict, as Roman soldiers might face, for instance, on the eastern borders against the Parthians or to the north against the Germans. Nor is it a resistance movement by Zealot Jews against the Romans in Galilee or Judea as would take shape within the decade. Though Christians belong to "another" kingdom, one that is "not of this world", they do not engage in armed conflict with the forces of "blood and flesh".

1. Paul's choice of words has raised some debate about whether "struggle", from *palē*, refers to an ordinary military engagement or to a wrestling match, since the word can be understood in the latter sense. Does Paul intend to imply "hand-to-hand combat" in his mixing of these images? How does wrestling imagery coalesce with soldier imagery? From the research of Michael Gudorf we learn that the term refers to a fully armored soldier who was also an accomplished wrestler, and as such better equipped to handle the "in-your-

face" situations of close-hand combat (*Journal of Biblical Literature*, 117 (Summer 1998): 332-34). And so the blended symbolism is intentional. This is reinforced by Paul's use of the word *pros*, translated as "against", whereas the word actually means "toward" and even "face-to-face". We might literally translate this text as follows: "Because there is not to us the wrestling face-to-face with blood and flesh, but face-to-face with...", followed by various terms describing our wrestling partners. The word "us" is the Greek dative of reference and is not so much expressing "possession" as it is "relevance", as in "for us". We are "in this thing together", and the struggle is a shared one "for us all"--this seems to be the sense of the expression *hēmin hē palē*, "for us the struggle/wrestling event".

2. Who then are our opponents in this contest? Each word in a certain way recapitulates ideas Paul has previously raised in his letter/sermon. Christ's ascent to heaven, you will recall, signaled the defeat of the evil powers of this world, freeing certain aspects of the "heavenlies" from the devil's control. Our heavenly citizenship is in a place where the devil cannot enter; our earthly situation remains the battleground for our souls and our societies.
  - a. "rulers" from *archē*, which we discussed back in 1:21 and 3:10, simply means "ruler" or "leader". The later Gnostics would write about the "archons" who dominated the cosmos and controlled the outcome of worldly situations. The present text sees them in "dark" ways, the enemies against which we battle.
  - b. "authorities" from *exousia* (derived from *exestin*) pointing to "the freedom to act", by implication the "right to act", thus "authority". Elsewhere in the New Testament these two terms, rulers and authorities, appear together in the same context (Luke 12:11; 20:20; 1 Corinthians 15:24; Ephesians 1:20; 3:10; Colossians 1:16; 2:10, 15; Titus 3:1) but can be either human or non-human personages of power. The present context rules out human beings ("not blood and flesh") and so points to angelic beings, the devil's partners, engaged in war against the people of God (once again, refer to Revelation 12).
  - c. "cosmic potentates of this darkness" is probably the best translation of *pros tous kosmokratōras tou skotous toutou*. The word is sometimes rather anemically translated "rulers", *kosmokratōr*, is a Pauline invention found nowhere else in the New Testament. However, as Hoehner points out, there may be connections to "magical or astrological traditions", though these are attested from a later period. The pagan religions saw sun, moon and stars as occupying political roles within the cosmos, determining the fate of human beings. When extra-biblical Jewish writers spoke about such "spirits", they ascribed a demonic role to them. Wilhelm Michaelis, in the *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Volume III, p. 914), sees in them "the terrifying power of their influence and comprehensiveness of their plans, and thus to emphasize the seriousness of the situation". We might well have used other military language to symbolize their threat, such as, "they are the possessors of the true weapons of mass destruction, more deadly than nerve gas, anthrax or nuclear bombs". Ours is a deadly foe who is deadly serious about taking back the ground seized by the ascended Christ.
  - d. "darkness" has been discussed earlier (see 5:8) where Paul contrasted it with the light of Christ. We have come out of darkness into the light of Christ's kingdom, but darkness now wages war against us and seeks to overwhelm us once again. We are also reminded of Paul's words to King Agrippa when recounting his own conversion and how his present mission to the Gentiles involves their "turning from darkness to light, from the power of Satan to God" (Acts 26:18). Fully aware of his formidable foe, Paul also writes in 2 Corinthians 4:3-6 that the "god of this world" (that is, the devil) has blinded the minds of human beings in an effort to hinder their knowledge of God, whereas the light of the Gospel shines brighter still. In Colossians 1:13 believers have been transferred from the "kingdom of darkness" to that of God's Son. The evil powers, ruled by Satan, seek to eclipse the light of God and cast darkness in the world.
  - e. "spiritual beings of wickedness in the heavenlies". An expansive phrase further describing the Christian's foes, but specifically locating them "in the heavenlies". To review our understanding of the cosmos, Pauline-style: there is 1) the visible world, namely this earth and its meteorological environs (atmospheric and stellar heavens); 2) the invisible world, the heavenlies above, ruled by God and His Son, and home to glorified believers; the heavenlies below, ruled by "the prince of the

power of the air" and his minions. In this passage, the word *pneumatikoi*, which occurs in 1:3 and 5:19 as well, simply refers to "spiritual things" when used by itself. Such realities are invisible but genuine. In this case, their association with "wickedness" (*ponēria*), a word indicating the defective nature of a thing, leading to connotative meanings of "sickness, depravity, wickedness, trouble, misfortune" and just plain "evil". The Greek uses the genitive case with the special emphasis on the essential character of these "spiritual beings", that is, they are wicked through and through.

The "in" does not imply that the conflict takes place in the heavenlies, but rather the spiritual beings occupy this realm. Plainly, the conflict is very much an earthly one, as Satan seeks to take back "ground" by undermining the work of God in the world and among His people. We may be assured that our position in Christ is one of victory in the heavenlies, but the battle on earth ranges for us. One day the devil and his angels will finally be defeated at the "coming" or *Parousia* of Christ (see Ephesians 1:10, 21; 1 Corinthians 15:24-28).

### **Ephesians 6:13: "Standing in the Evil Day"**

Repeating his call to "take up the whole armor of God (the *panoplia*)", Paul makes explicit reference to time through the use of the phrase in Greek *en tē hēmera tē ponēra*, literally, "in the day, the evil one". What "day" does he have in mind? The phrase reminds us of other references in the New Testament to an ultimate time of tribulation before the end of the world (see 1 Corinthians 7:26; 1 Thessalonians 5:2-4). Clearly the time in question is one in which believers are or will be present in the world, requiring the putting on of the armor. The form of the verb "to take up" (*analambanō*, used in the aorist tense) may suggest urgency, as one would expect of a soldier facing his foe. Scholars tend to see the "evil day" as referring to the "present age", awaiting the "age to come". Paul has already mentioned "evil days" in 5:16 and asked his readers to make the most of every opportunity because of them. What makes a day "evil"? Since Paul uses the same word for "evil" to describe the spiritual powers in the heavenlies, he likely intends his readers to understand that it is these powers which hurl a world of woe on God's people, troubling their lives *and their days*. Not only are there the ordinary temptations of the devil which can afflict Christians regularly, but there are climactic moments when evil bursts forth with all its ferocity, bringing holocausts and disasters on the world. Both Revelation 12 and 1 Peter 5:8 teach that the devil is a "roaring lion" stalking the world, seeking whom he may devour. Can we easily forget the designs on Job in the Old Testament? Or the afflictions of Paul in 1 Corinthians 12:7 brought on by a "messenger of Satan", inflicting the so-called "thorn-in-the-flesh"?

Note: The Old Testament makes reference to "evil days" in conjunction with the onset of old age (Ecclesiastes 12:1). Jacob, the patriarch, reflecting on his life remarked that "few and evil have been the days of the years of my life" (Genesis 47:9), suggesting that even the normal course of one's life might be measured by the phrase. In Proverbs 15:15 the wisdom writer declares, "All the days of the afflicted are evil", but then contrasts this with "but the cheerful of heart has a continual feast". Evil, in this sense, may also imply calamity and trouble.

### **Ephesians 6:14: Belt and Breastplate**

What follows is a brief, but concise elaboration of the soldier's armor, each piece identified with its relevant spiritual virtue. Not every armor component is mentioned by Paul, but we hear about the critical ones. We can only imagine Paul, in chains, perhaps at times seated between two Roman guards. His constant association no doubt led to conversations about military life not only in the prisons but also at the frontier. No doubt the apostle learned a great deal about the demands on such men, and had occasion to ponder the discipline of their service as illustrated in the armor they wore. Roman soldiers did not always wear the full battle armor, especially if they were not in the field or on duty. Stone reliefs have been found showing soldiers without their full armor, still recognizable as members of the military.

Our first exposure to the *panoplia* comes in 6:14 where Paul once more urges his readers to "stand their ground" through the diligent endowment of their armor.

### **Belt: The Waist Girded With Truth**

The verb form *perizōsamenoī* comes from the verb which means "to bind around, to gird", and commonly applies to something placed around the "waist" or the "loins". Its Old Testament counterpart is the Hebrew *hāgar*. Used in the middle voice, this word suggests the readers are responsible for "girding themselves". The "loins" (*osphus*) or the "waist" refers to the middle portion of the torso, the place a belt or girdle is worn. The New Testament uses the metaphor of "loins of your mind" in 1 Peter 1:13 which must be "girded", presumably by truth. While sword belts and protective girdles have been proposed for this piece of armor, it is far more likely Paul intended the *cingulum*, an apron-like breech covering, made of leather, offering protection to the soldier's thighs. Barth points out the *cingulum* designated an officer or high official, a distinctive sign (p.767). The Old Testament applies this concept to the Messiah for whom "justice" and faithfulness are distinctive marks with which he would be "girded" (see Isaiah 11:5). Wearing this clothing, the soldier bore the insignia of supreme dignity, but for the Christian, Paul is saying that *all Christians* have this dignity, not just a special group of *officers*. The Old Testament also used the phrase "girded with strength" to denote what God makes available to His people, equipping them to be courageous, and **prepare for their work** (see also Psalm 18:32; 65:6; 93:1; Isaiah 45:5; Job 38:3; 40:7; Proverbs 31:17; Nahum 2:1; Luke 12:35, 37; 17:8; John 13:4, 5). Later church fathers extended the meaning to include "chastity", a protection against carnal desires.

In what sense is such a piece of armor appropriately applied to "truth"? Truth in what sense? Does Paul mean the kind he referenced in 4:25 where he counseled "speaking the truth in love"? Surely we cannot exclude such a meaning, since Paul's Ephesian letter/sermon uses this word in other settings (see the *Table* above). It could mean the objective truth found in the Gospel which Paul proclaims, offering salvation to both Jew and Gentile alike, and announcing the creation of the new humanity--all of which are certainly Truth in its foundational sense. However, it could also apply subjectively, namely, to one's reliability, integrity and faithfulness. Since Isaiah 11:5 is the Old Testament background text for this expression, we should not overlook the close connection between the terms "truth", "righteousness" and "faithfulness". They are, on the face of it, *covenant* terms, that is, they describe the powerful relationship which binds Yahweh to His people, or, in this case, Christ to his body. Gathering up the various tangents converging on this idea, perhaps the best connotation of truth is simply the notion of **extreme reliability**, of preparedness to the highest extent. When a soldier is "girded", he is ready for battle, prepared for every contingency, and to be counted on by his fellows and his citizens. Thus for the Christian! Girded with truth speaks volumes about the constancy and firmness of our position. Here is the first and perhaps the most vivid image of *taking one's stand*: **girded with truth**. Lincoln remarks:

Here in Ephesians, the belt which provides support and braces the soldier ready for action is truth. Since in LXX [Greek translation of the Old Testament] Isaiah 11:5 truth referred to faithfulness and loyalty and what was said there of the Messiah is now applied to believers, it is likely that that is also the force of "truth" in this verse (p.448).

### **Breastplate: Righteousness**

This is clearly an Old Testament image, drawn from Isaiah 59:17, applied to Yahweh's own armor. The Roman soldier wore the *thōrax* (Greek) or *pectorale* or *cuirass* (Latin), a metal plate covering a leather coat, usually made of brass, in order to protect the heart and vital organs. Additionally, the breastplate might be accompanied by a "coat of chain mail", the so-called *lorica hamata*. Essentially it protected the body between the shoulders and the loins. An additional background for the "breastplate" comes from the attire of the Jewish High Priest who wore the "breastplate of judgment" (see Exodus 28:15; 39:8 in their contexts), symbolizing his judicial role in divining the will of God. Mounted on this priestly garment were the twelve precious stones symbolizing Israel in its entirety. Hidden in a small pocket within it were the stones of judgment, *Urīm* and *Thumîm*, removed from time to time and manipulated in ways that they answered simple "yes" or "no" questions and were, thereby, employed to discover God's answers. To live righteously meant to do what God wanted, to be "straight" in one's conduct, and not "crooked". The righteous "arrow" was a straight and sure arrow, likely to find its mark and not disappoint the archer. Similarly, followers of God's commands, keepers of His holy covenant, walked in straight paths for their feet (Proverbs 29:27 correlates these terms).

The term "righteous" is virtually identical with the notion of "just", such that righteousness and justice are stand-ins for each other. The Hebrew word is rooted in the form *tzedek*, while the Greek word is *dikaisunē*. Commonly, justice indicates fair-handedness, rendering to each his due. In the law court setting, the purpose of the judge is "to make things right", not merely to pronounce on guilt and innocence. "Right the wrongs": this is the work of righteousness. Through Christ, Paul had consistently proclaimed, God's righteousness has accomplished just that, putting an end to false inequities, the painful separation of Jew and Gentile. Jesus, in his public instruction, proclaimed the righteousness of God through his own holy life and through such extended sermons as the one he gave "on the mount". Christ's own championing of righteousness was seen in his acts of kindness to the outcast, and acceptance of the sinner around the table of fellowship. Those whom others rejected, he embraced so as "to save them", like sick folk in need of a physician. Here is righteousness in action, and we can only assume that Paul meant his readers to see their own "breastplate" as the supreme protection of their own vital interests, but also of the whole Christ community. Righteousness always renders "service" to others in doing its work (see 2 Corinthians 3:9). Wearing the breastplate of righteousness symbolizes dignity, honor and acceptance by God who is the quintessential "righteous judge", as Paul himself affirmed near the end of his life (see 2 Timothy 4:8). When we render righteous judgments to others, we truly wear the breastplate of righteousness (see Deuteronomy 16:18 for an Old Testament parallel).

Where can the world look to see living examples of "just living" and "righteous dealing"? It ought to be the church, filled with Christ-followers, sporting the breastplate of righteousness, not as an ornament, but as their very way of life. Within the Temple of the Lord, rising up as the residence of God through His Spirit, human beings should be able to come and find crooked things made straight, and the rough places smooth (see Isaiah 40; also, Psalm 5:8; Proverbs 11:5; Acts 13:10, where righteousness is clearly the rectifying of the crooked thing). In a world where so many things are twisted, bent and crooked, the Christ-follower offers righteousness as the divine alternative. Paul calls upon his readers to "take their stand" by the righteousness they exhibit in their lives and practice in their dealings with others. Be righteous in the midst of a crooked and twisted world, Paul counseled elsewhere (Philippians 2:15).

Covering the "heart", as it does, the breastplate "guards" the heart. This language appears in Philippians 4:7, and refers to the proper maintenance of "thoughts" that focus on true and righteous things. Righteousness is also a sanctifying experience for the Christian soldier, as Paul makes clear in Romans 6:13 and 14:17.

### **Ephesians 6:15: Feet Shod with the Gospel**

No actual word for "shoe" appears in the text, but rather Paul speaks about the "feet shod" with "the Gospel of peace". The word for "shod" (*hupodeō*) is actually a word referring to the "binding on" activity associated with putting on leather shoes or sandals having straps. Once again, the middle voice is used, implying this is something which the soldier herself is responsible to do. Roman legionnaires had heavy sandals called *caliga*, a kind of low, half boot constructed of multi-layered leather soles nearly an inch thick, studded with nails. Leather thongs tied these part way up the leg, and, in cold weather, were stuffed with wool or fur. These are not "running sandals", but instead foot-gear meant to "stand the ground", their "cleats" piercing the soil and braced against the enemy's assault.

Paul qualifies this foot-gear by speaking about "preparation" in conjunction with the Gospel of peace. Here is the soldier in a state of "readiness", the key idea behind the word *hetoimasia*, along the lines of a modern branch of our own military: "always prepared". The Old Testament equivalent is found in the word *kūn* which means "to establish" or "set up" (see Psalm 10:17), "make ready" or "prepare" (see Psalm 65:9; Nahum 2:3). The idea of "foundation" also lies behind the Hebrew notion (see Ezra 2:68; Psalm 89:14). The implication is that the right footwear strapped to the soldier's feet prepares him to stand his ground with a firm footing.

The soldier's "ability" to keep his footing rests with the Gospel, its true source. Already Paul has told his readers about the gospel of salvation (1:13) and the gospel which proclaims the union of Jew and Gentile in one

body (3:6). We know the root meaning of "gospel" is "good news" (*euaggelion*), the royal proclamation that Jesus, God's Son, has died and risen (see 1 Corinthians 15:1-5). Its roots are in this text from Isaiah:

How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, who publishes peace, who brings good news of happiness, who publishes salvation, who says to Zion, "Your God reigns" (Isaiah 52:7).

When the soldier "take his stand" he becomes God's instrument for proclaiming the Good News that God is King and Jesus is Lord. Through the Gospel, the Christian is authorized to turn aside the onslaught of the enemy who threatens to overwhelm and seize ground once again. Within the context of the Roman Empire, this sort of imagery makes a great deal of sense. The Romans sought to maintain the *pax Romana*, rooted in the *pax Augustus*. By the time of Paul, the work of empire-building was largely finished; the major challenge was the maintenance of empire against Rome's enemies on the borders. Following this analogy, the Christian community, ruled from heaven by Jesus Christ, has already claimed the ground purchased by Christ's death and assured by his resurrection. It is up to the Christ followers to seize the power afforded by the message of the Gospel and, in readiness, face the challenge of the devil and his cohorts.

Consider also Paul's combination of "gospel" and "power" found in Romans 1:16-17:

16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. 17 For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, "The righteous shall live by faith."

In the context of *Ephesians* this means "power to stand".

### **Ephesians 6:16: Shield of Faith**

All of the armor thus far has been attached to the soldier's body. However, the shield (Greek: *thureos*; much like the Hebrew ideas *tsinah* or *magēn*) is something which must be "taken up", that is, received. To which Roman armament does Paul refer? The root idea of the Greek word is *thuros*, meaning "door", pointing to the shield which covers the whole soldier and shaped like a door: the Latin, *scutum*. This shield had a convex surface, roughly 2 1/2 feet by 4 feet in size, and was constructed from wood planks joined together and covered with canvas and calf skins. Its edges were rimmed with metal to prevent wear from contact with the ground. At its center, a so-called iron "boss" repelled the glancing blows of stones and arrows. Because of its size, the *scutum* afforded protection to the whole body, covering the previous pieces of armor in the process.

Why the shield "of faith"? The word *pistis* (faith) is in the genitive form and likely means the faith which gives the shield its usefulness. We know from the Old Testament (Genesis 15:1; Psalm 5:2; 18:2, 30, 35; 28:7; 33:20; 35:2; 59:11; 91:4; 115:9-11; 144:1) that the shield was used metaphorically to describe God's protection of His people, and in which they placed their trust. Faith is, at its heart, trust in the faithfulness of God, that abiding confidence and receptivity to God's activity in our lives. In the words of A.T. Lincoln, "Faith takes hold of God's resources in the midst of the onslaughts of evil and produces the firm resolve which douses anything the enemy throws at the believer" (p. 449). Paul, in this passage, makes reference to the "fiery darts (arrows)" rained down on the soldiers by the enemy. These "missiles" were the ancient artillery, arrows dipped in tar, ignited and then shot into the air from which they fell into the midst of the opposing side. They were experienced as "terror from the sky", much like the spiritual assaults of Satan, "the prince of the power of the air" who rains down his opposition to the newly established kingdom of God on earth. He is called "the evil one" in this context for good reason (see also 2 Thessalonians 3:3; Matthew 13:19; John 17:15; 1 John 2:13-14; 5:18-19). The imagery of the "burning arrow" crops up in places like Psalm 7:13 and Proverbs 26:18. Nothing brings panic like a fiery arrow attack, an assault from heaven, arrows sticking to shields, even if they miss the body, and soldiers trying to shake them off, dropping their shields in the process. For this reason, soldiers soaked their shields in water prior to battle so as to "extinguish" these *ta belē tou ponērou ta pepurōmena*.

What sorts of fiery missiles fall from the devil's sky? Surely they include an array of misfortunes, including, but not limited to temptations, false teaching, persecution, doubt, and despair. Faith empowers the Christ follower to be victorious and shake off such assaults, quenching the fire by a well-prepared faith. Elsewhere, the Bible speaks of the "trial of faith" and offers guidance on coming through it successfully. Consider:

12 Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. 13 But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed (1 Peter 4:12-13).

2 Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, 3 for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. 4 And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing (James 1:2-4).

Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him (James 1:12).

6 In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, 7 so that the tested genuineness of your faith- more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire- may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ (1 Peter 1:6-7).

### **Ephesians 6:17a: Helmet of Salvation**

The final "arming" of the soldier involves putting on the helmet and taking up the sword. As the enemy approaches, the nearly equipped foot soldier seizes his helmet. Paul uses the Greek for *dexasthe*, perhaps translated "grab", as firmly but quickly, marking urgency. The word for helmet, *perikephalaia*, (Latin: *galea*) points to a simple head covering, but plainly in this military context, refers to the "helmet", made from bronze and placed over an iron "skull cap" lined with leather or fleece. By Paul's time, the evolution of the helmet included the feature that it extended down the back of the neck, resting on the shoulder. Its front had a bow-ridge, protecting the nose and eyes, with cheek pieces affording covering to the rest of the face.

Notice the order of the soldier's armament. At this point in his outfitting, he holds the shield in one hand, thus leaving a free hand to drop his helmet in place. He grasps "faith" just prior to receiving "salvation", as we would expect in the purposes of God. Salvation must be "received": it is not something that is "taken" as was true with the previous pieces of armor. Once more, Isaiah 59:17 is in Paul's sites, mentioning as it does the "helmet of salvation". Because of the "battle" context of both passages, it seems likely that the most basic meaning of "salvation" (*sōtēria*) as "deliverance" or "rescue" is intended, or as Hoehner suggest, "experiential salvation" (p.850), the kind delivering us from the attacks of the wicked one (see 1 Thessalonians 5:8).

### **Ephesians 6:17b: Sword of the Spirit, the Word of God**

Paul employs the Greek word *machaira*, implying a short-sword or dagger. Old Testament warriors used a *ḥereb*, the Hebrew term translated by the one Paul uses in *Ephesians*. The Romans called it the *gladius*, a Spanish sword with a double-edged blade some two inches wide and two feet long, a perfect weapon for in-your-face warfare, marked by cut and thrust actions. Ordinarily, the soldier sheathed it high on his right side, attached to his "girdle", and free from the lower extremities and shield-bearing left arm. In Paul's account, it is the only *offensive weapon* listed.

Associated with "the Spirit", the sword receives its power from the Holy Spirit, the likely reason Paul names it as he does here. We find this in the Old Testament imagery as well, where Isaiah writes of the Messiah smiting the earth with the word of his mouth, having the Spirit of the Lord resting on him (Isaiah 11:5). Paul connects the Spirit's sword with the *rēma* of God, using the Greek word more likely associated with the "spoken word" or the more immediate and relevant form of communication, in contrast to *logos*, a title for Jesus himself, but also for the Word of God in its objective sense. The *rēma* may well refer to the word which confronts the evil one in battle, a word which comes from God, empowered by Him, adapted to the needs of the moment. Judging from Jesus' encounter with Satan (see Matthew 4:1-11 and Luke 4:1-13), it draws from the written word to gain its authority and content. Hoehner writes: "The spoken word of God is the 'instrument' of the Spirit" (p.853). It is interesting to recall that Jesus often silenced demons when they tried to speak, showing that the Word empowered by the Spirit trumps the word of the evil one who is, in effect, denied "the last word".

In a similar vein we read:

For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart (Hebrews 4:12).

Often in his confrontation with the religious teachers of his day, Jesus would expose the fallacy of their teaching and the hypocrisy of their lives. In a larger sense this is how the word of God, the Spirit's sword operates: it unmask the enemy, revealing his sinister plans, and thwarting his plots and conspiracies. Appropriately, the one book of the Bible whose title means "unveiled" ("Revelation", *apokalupsis*), says much about the role of the word as striking down the enemies of God (see Revelation 1:16; 2:12, 16; 19:13, 15). By the "word of his mouth", Yahweh, in the Old Testament, slays His enemies (Hosea 6:5). The prophet's words are like a "sharp sword" (Isaiah 49:2).

### **Comments on the Previous Armor of God**

We have seen a soldier dressed for battle, placed in readiness, getting his stance, and handed his helmet and sword. What we must not lose sight of is that this passage is not about one solitary soldier, but rather about the equipping of a whole army: the army of God, the people of God. Martin Kitchen reminds the reader of Paul's letter/sermon that this metaphor has a corporate understanding (pp.119-126). Drawing from Bruce Malina's helpful research on "dyadic personality", Kitchen suggests a total understanding of the organism, the image of a corporate man who is complete, integrated and at one, both with his environment and with himself. This parallels Paul's earlier picture of Christ's followers as reaching toward becoming "the perfect man" (4:13), the "mature humanity" (p. 121).

Furthermore, in Revelation 19, the writer of the *Apocalypse* paints a grand picture of Christ, the armed horseman, mounted on a white horse. That portrait neatly summarizes much of the armor Paul depicts in Ephesians 6, applying it to the continuing work of Christ:

Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse! The one sitting on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war. 12 His eyes are like a flame of fire, and on his head are many diadems, and he has a name written that no one knows but himself. 13 He is clothed in a robe dipped in blood, and the name by which he is called is The Word of God. 14 And the armies of heaven, arrayed in fine linen, white and pure, were following him on white horses. 15 From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron. He will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty. 16 On his robe and on his thigh he has a name written, King of kings and Lord of lords (Revelation 19:11-16).

The armies following this mounted warrior are described as clothed in fine line, white and pure, and can be none other than the Christ-followers, arrayed in their resurrection bodies, equipped to follow Christ into battle. Through this powerful image, the writer provides a helpful glimpse of the future, with the even greater encouragement that one day all kings will bow before this divine warrior.

### **Ephesians 6:18: Prayer as "Standing Watch"**

Scholars have debated whether what follows in 6:18 pertains to the armor of the soldier or represents a whole new section. It might be better to inquire whether this extended passage still relates to the military imagery of the soldier, and pertains to his "standing firm". The answer is "yes", and lies in the connection between "prayer" and standing "watch". We know, for example, from Jesus' experience in the Garden of Gethsemane, that he asked his disciples to "watch and pray" so that they would not be overcome by temptation, that is, by the attacks of the evil one (see Matthew 26:41 and Mark 14:38). In the ancient world the "watchtower", manned by its "watchman" was a critical component of any city's fortifications. Elevated above the city wall, the watchtower allowed the guardians sufficient vantage point to forewarn the approach of enemy armies or report unusual troop movements of a besieging army. The operative idea is "alertness" as evidenced by Paul's use of the Greek expression *agrupnountes*, the participle of a word meaning "be alert" or "be watchful". Falling asleep on watch, in Roman times, was a deadly misstep and could easily cost a soldier his life. Recall the watch of Roman soldiers at Jesus' tomb. In spiritual terms, Paul applies the metaphor to prayer, the principal means for the Christian to stand watch. Among the early Christians, "sleep" was connected to the spiritual darkness around them, and, as we saw in 5:14, the apostles frequently called on them to "wake up". Paul, when he was about to leave Ephesus, warned that "wolves" would likely muscle their way into the Christ community, threatening damage to "the flock of God". He meant, of course, false teachers who would take advantage of young Christians. Paul's instruction was simple: "be alert" (Acts 20:31).

Nor is the prayer Paul desires only private and personal. Instead he counsels, "for all the saints". In a real sense, prayer is a corporate, "group" activity, by means of which we support each other in our respective battles with the devil. No one lives alone; no one fights alone in the body of Christ. As we have stressed throughout this series, God is raising up a new community, the "God society", in the world. It is His holy Temple where he wants to dwell, composed of "living stones" which are the people of God themselves, built on the foundation Christ maintains. Prayer stands watch over the brothers and sisters. By means of prayer we stand watch with them. Equipped with the armor of God, we are also kept keen through prayer and watching out for the spiritual weaknesses of others, supporting them with various forms of prayerful communication:

1. "through every prayer and petition". Two words appear here (as they do in such places as Philippians 4:6). They appear together for the sake of intensifying the idea involved.
  - a. "prayer", that is *proseuchē*. This is the comprehensive word for prayer to the God of heaven, and assumes the form of a "supplication".
  - b. "petition", that is *deēsis*. This is literally a request, petition, or entreaty. Commonly occurring in courtroom contexts, this word points to the appeal of God's people to their covenant relationship with Him when they bring their requests to Him.
2. Paul also makes clear this is prayer "in the Spirit", an idea he previously expressed in 2:18 where he taught that we have "access" to God through the Spirit.
3. Devotion to such persistent and disciplined prayer keeps the Christ follower alert. The soldier fails completely in his mission if, fully armed and equipped, he falls asleep on the job. Not only does he fail his own assignment, he also lets down his unit. Together, Christians must carry the all-important responsibility of prayer together. Such exhortations to "persevere in prayer" appear in Romans 12:12; Colossians 4:2; Acts 1:14; 2:42; 6:4.
4. In light of God's gracious outpouring of Himself in all sorts of resources to live the Christian life, Paul urges his readers to assume responsibility and avoid spiritual complacency and fatigue, pursuing a life of prayer instead.

## Concluding Thoughts

In our study of temptation and Satan's role in it, we have left out a few ideas. Briefly, we need to know that Satan as a created being cannot be everywhere at once, but has his helpers deployed throughout creation to advance his cause.<sup>6</sup> The Gospels include stories about demons and their attacks on human beings. They afflict with sickness (Matthew 12:22; Luke 13:11), and they torment their victims (Matthew 15:22; Matthew 17:14ff). Their work is not limited to the body, however, since they readily lead people to believe false doctrine (1 Timothy 4:1ff), promoting occult activities (Acts 16:16-18). All forms of idolatry have demonic origins (1 Corinthians 10:14-22). The phrase "demon possession" applies to any number of biblical texts (Matthew 4:24; 8:16, 28, 33; 9:32; 12:22; 15:22).

The moving account found in Matthew 12:22-29 reveals Jesus' power over demons and his ability to heal the damage demons inflict on their victims. It also makes plain that when Jesus came to earth as a human being, he invaded the kingdom of Satan, determined to bind him so that Jesus might re-possess the stolen human lives held captive to Satan's will and purpose. Ephesians 4:8 describes the work of Jesus as "leading captive a host of captives." Scripture heralds the final doom of Satan and his angels (demons) (Revelation 20).

We must hold in delicate balance two essential truths about Satan and temptation.

1. On the one hand, Satan is a *dangerous* enemy to individual Christians and to the body of Christ. He has unremitting rage against all of God's purposes, and those include what Christians do for the Lord. Wherever the kingdom of God advances, Satan will throw up obstacles, wound believers, and seek to bring them down with temptations. The whole world "lies within the clutches of the Evil One" (1 John 5:19).

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<sup>6</sup> The reader is encouraged to read C.S. Lewis' cleverly written fictionalized exposé on Satan's helpers in his book, *Screwtape Letters*.

Creation itself groans under the bondage brought by sin (Romans 8:19-22). Knowing these things requires that we take Satan seriously.

2. On the other hand, Satan is a *defeated* enemy who met his D-Day when Jesus died and rose again. Jesus foresaw Satan falling from heaven as a consequence (Luke 10:18). Thrown out of heaven, he is confined to the earth (Revelation 12), limited in what he is able to do.

Therefore, we should not discount Satan's strategies and temptations — he is a real enemy. But we should not give him more credit than he deserves, nor succumb to demonizing everything with which we may disagree. Satan cannot do anything or everything. From a place of great containment, he operates his war of resentment against God's creation. A cornered lion, he roars at and threatens God's people. "We are not ignorant of his strategies" (2 Corinthians 2:11), and we are authorized to resist him in the name of Jesus, binding him by the power of the cross (James 4:7; 1 Peter 5:9; Matthew 12; Mark 3).

George Duffield penned these words in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Its message is still relevant today:

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| <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Stand up, stand up for Jesus,<br/>you soldiers of the cross;<br/>lift high his royal banner,<br/>it must not suffer loss.<br/>From victory unto victory<br/>his army shall he lead,<br/>till every foe is vanquished,<br/>and Christ is Lord indeed.</li><li>2. Stand up, stand up for Jesus,<br/>the trumpet call obey;<br/>forth to the mighty conflict,<br/>in this his glorious day.<br/>You that are brave now serve him<br/>against unnumbered foes;<br/>let courage rise with danger,<br/>and strength to strength oppose.</li></ol> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>3. Stand up, stand up for Jesus,<br/>stand in his strength alone;<br/>the arm of flesh will fail you,<br/>you dare not trust your own.<br/>Put on the gospel armor,<br/>each piece put on with prayer;<br/>where duty calls or danger,<br/>be never wanting there.</li><li>4. Stand up, stand up for Jesus,<br/>the strife will not be long;<br/>this day the noise of battle,<br/>the next the victor's song.<br/>To those who vanquish evil<br/>a crown of life shall be;<br/>they with the King of Glory<br/>shall reign eternally.</li></ol> |
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Glory to God! Amen.

**Digger Deeper: *Dealing with the Devil — Victory Over Temptation***  
(Bob Brown)

To gain a deeper understanding of *Dealing with the Devil — Victory Over Temptation* carefully read the selected passages below. To aid you in your study, we invite you to visit the website <http://notes.chicagofirstnaz.org>, or pick up a copy of the *Background Notes* at the **Information** desk, or from your ABF leader. Now consider the following questions, as you ask the Lord to teach you.

1. According to Hebrews 4:15-16 what does Jesus share with us, and what does he thereby offer to us?
2. What promises do 1 John 4:4 and 1 Corinthians 10:13 give to us in the face of temptation?
3. When Satan attempts to deceive our minds with his lies, what should we do? (John 16:13-15; Psalm 119:11; Joshua 1:8; Ephesians 6:17).
4. When Satan attempts to destroy our bodies through suffering, what should we do? (1 Corinthians 12:7-10; 1 Peter 5:10; Job 13:15; 1 Thessalonians 5:18; Psalm 119:67-71; 1 Peter 4:16).
5. When Satan attempts to control our wills through pride, what should we do? (1 Corinthians 2:12; Philippians 2:12-13; James 4:4-6; 1 Thessalonians 2:13; Romans 12:3; 1 Corinthians 4:7).
6. When Satan attempts to accuse our consciences through false guilt, what should we do? (1 John 2:1; Romans 8:34; Isaiah 59:16; Revelation 12:10-11).
7. Carefully read Ephesians 6:11-18. What image does Paul use to describe our preparation for Satan's attacks? Compare this passage with the following Old Testament texts (Joshua 1:5-9; Isaiah 59:14-17).
8. What does Ephesians 6:10 tell us to do, and how does 6:11 show us how to do it?
9. What features of our struggle with Satan does Paul emphasize in 6:12? List the different words he uses to describe the "powers" we face in our battle with temptation. What seems to be the distinctive feature of each one?
10. What specific command does 6:13 give, and how does it unify our efforts against Satan?
11. Read Ephesians 6:14-17, and list each piece of armor Paul mentions. Comment on the idea which each piece of armor represents and why the association with that particular piece is appropriate.
12. Which piece of armor is offensive in nature, while the rest are generally defensive? Compare Hebrews 4:12; Isaiah 49:2; Revelation 19:15.
13. In what sense is "prayer" a part of the Christian's defense arsenal against temptation and Satan (6:18). What language is used in this verse which links prayer directly to a soldier's work?