

Text: Ephesians 6:10-20

Theme: Series-Jesus Christ and His Church 2: The Essentials of Spiritual Warfare

Sermon delivered by Revd Canon Dele Agbelusi during Service of the Word on 03/07/2016 at 10.30am

Living the Christian life is one of the hardest things you will ever attempt to do. Sometimes, you find it difficult to get yourself to church and some days to open your Bible, read and study it. You struggle to pray and find it challenging to give generously and faithfully in church. At other times you find it hard to keep your thoughts pure and to keep your eyes on what is good. Living the Christian life is difficult.

If I may ask, how many of you are glad we are not in a war zone right now? Would it upset you if I informed you that we are in a war zone? I am not talking about the war against terrorism. I am talking about a war that is much worse than that. I am talking about a spiritual war between God and the enemies of our soul headed by Satan. This war will have the most casualties of any war ever fought. It isn't a physical war but a war that is fought in the spiritual realm, and we are all fighting in it. We will consider the passage under 4 headings:

1. Know your enemy (v12)
2. Stand your ground. (10-13)
3. Use your armour. (14-17)
4. Pray (18-20)

1. Know your enemy (v12)

Ephesians 6:12 says: 'For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against evil authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.'

Verse 11 tells us that the devil has a scheme against us, and the Bible instructs us to put the full Armour of God on so we will be able to withstand the devil's onslaught. He reminds us that this is not a physical war, but a war involving our very spirits. Paul tells us who our enemies are, too. They are the powers of the dark world, the forces of evil in the heavenly realm.

Why are most people unaware of this war? I think it is because we only pay attention to the five physical senses: Feel, taste, hearing, seeing, and smelling. We ignore the spiritual senses. And by ignoring them, we end up succumbing to them. An old saying goes like this: "What you don't know will kill you."

If you took a snapshot of society 40 years ago and put it beside a snapshot of today's society, the difference would be shocking, but we went from one to the other taking one small step at a time, and we didn't even notice the change. Now, we are dying by instalment.

This spiritual war is a bloody war that is a fight to the death . . . between God and forces of evil led by Satan and other fallen angels. This war is being fought over our souls, and we are largely unaware of it. Is that dangerous? Yes. God says His people perish for lack of knowledge, and this is exactly what He was referring to. We cannot fight this war, and we cannot even defend ourselves against this war if we do not have information about it. And by ignoring it so we can be comfortable does nothing but put us at immediate risk. People say they don't like messages like this because it scares them and upsets them. I do not want you to be scared or upset, but I also want you to stay spiritually alive and healthy.

2. Stand your ground (10-13)

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power; in conclusion to all that we have been studying in Ephesians where Paul has carefully established our inheritance in Jesus and how we must walk to appropriate those benefits. Ephesians 6:10-20 is the final instructions. Paul is here stating that in light of all that God has done for you: your glorious standing as a child of God, the great plan of the ages where everything comes together in Christ that God has made you a part of, the plan of Christian maturity and growth He gives you, filling of the Spirit and our walk in the Spirit...there is a battle to fight in the Christian life.

“Stand firm” is the keyword used in the passage. In the military sense of the word “stand firm” means holding one’s ground -to stand firm in faith and duty, to be constant, to persevere, to remain steadfast. You became part of a spiritual battle the day you trusted the Lord Jesus Christ as your personal Saviour. Like in any other battle, in spiritual warfare also, it is very important that every Christian knows how to hold his ground and learn what steps we must take in order to secure our territory.

We are now to consider how to get powered up for battle. This is where spiritual warfare begins with us. We cannot be good soldiers for Christ in this battle, unless we are strong and determined soldiers. In **Ephesians 6:10, The words of “Finally, be strong in the Lord and in His mighty power.” Has become our battle cry.** And it is not just something to get the blood pumping but is also meant to spur us on in our preparation for the battle.

The second half of Ephesians 6:10 tells us to be strong in the Lord and **in the power of His might.** The power we receive for spiritual battle is not ours, but God’s. It is given to us the moment we first believe in Jesus Christ for eternal life. At the moment we believe, all of God’s power and resources and strength and might are put at our disposal. God has vast reservoirs of might that can be realized as power in our Christian life. But His might does not work in me as I sit passively. His might works in me as I rely on it, and step out to do the work. I can rely on it and do no work. I can do work without relying on it. But both of these fall short. I must rely on His might and then do the work.

In fact, this power from on high is a common theme right here through Paul’s letter to the Ephesians. **In Ephesians 1:19, Paul tells us that the exceeding greatness of God’s power has been given to us who believe.** And in **Ephesians 3:16-20, Paul prays that those to whom he writes will know and experience the great power of the Spirit in their lives.**

So let me ask you a question. Why is it, if every Christian has this infinite supply of power available to us—that our lives do not reveal this power? Why is it that we don’t feel it, or experience it, or see its effects in our lives? Why is it that we rarely feel God’s presence in our lives? Why is it—if we have all this power—we rarely, if ever, see any evidence of it in our lives?

Picture your life as a spiritual fuse box. No matter how much power is available, the fuse box only lets a certain amount of power through. If too much power tries to get through, or if there is a power surge, the fuses break. They don’t allow the current to flow through. And that is the way it is in our lives. We’ve got this infinite source of power from above, and this terribly dark and cold room that is our lives over here. But right in the middle, is this silly little ten-amp fuse. And no matter how much power you pump into that fuse box, only ten amps are going to get through, and if you try to send in more, you keep experiencing the frustration of having your fuse break.

But guess what? There is a way you can allow more power to get through, and that is what Paul means here when he says be strong. You can get a bigger circuit breaker. You can get a bigger fuse. You can let more power through.

How? Well, to answer that, let me remind you of the overall picture of the section we are in. Paul is telling us about the armour of God. And the picture is that we are soldiers of Christ in a battle for the universe, against Satan and his forces. Now ask yourself. If a soldier wants to become strong and mighty, what does he do? He exercises and trains and disciplines himself – and their training is rigorous. Before a soldier is given a gun or shown how to fire a missile, he goes through *basic training*. One great purpose for basic training is to build up the recruit's physical strength. It is as if the army says, "Soldier, we are going to give you the best weapons and armor possible. But first we have to make sure that you are strong and that you can use what we give you and last the distance." There is no point giving you all the weapons and you tire out and discontinue the fight. That is the bane of many Christians.

As Christian soldiers we must learn spiritual disciplines that help us go the distance. The basic ones are Bible study, prayer, attending a Bible preaching church, and fellowshiping with other Christians. Those are just the basics, but sadly, most Christians never get beyond those.

And that is why most Christians never experience God's mighty power at work in their lives. Paul says, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. How do you get strong so that you can experience the power? By exercising and training yourself in the spiritual disciplines.

In fact, the word for be strong in the Greek here comes from the word *dunamai* which is where we get our word dynamite. But Paul does something very curious with the word here. He takes the word and adds a special prefix onto the word, which makes the word *endunamao*. In this way, the word doesn't just mean strong, it means become strong. Grow stronger and stronger and STRONGER!

And as we all know from physical exercise, the only way to become stronger and stronger is to keep working out, and pushing yourself, and exercising and lifting weights. You become strong in direct proportion to the time and effort you invest. That is exactly the way it is with the Christian. Do you want to become strong? It won't happen automatically. You will only become strong in direct proportion to the time and effort you invest in practicing the Christian disciplines.

I would go even further than this. I would say that it takes more strength, and more discipline, and more courage to practice the spiritual disciplines than it does to become physically disciplined. It is harder to pray than it is to perspire. It is harder to attend church services faithfully than it is to attend social gatherings.

3. Use Your Armour (14-17)

Let us now focus on the weaponry available to us.

The weaponry used depends on the kind of enemy you will engage; like pistols are useless in a situation that requires heavy artillery. Our enemy is spiritual and therefore we need spiritual weapons. This armour is of God both in the sense that it is from Him, and in the sense that it is His. He now shares that armour with us and equipped with it, we are more than conquerors (Romans 8:37).

The belt of truth (verse 14)

The belt held the rest of the armour together. From it hang the scabbard in which the sword was sheathed, (Ephesians 6:17). The interpretation is 2 fold. First, it means the word of God, (John 8:32). We must know the word by heart. Secondly, our integrity and character. We should be doers of the word. You can't fight an evil that is already in you.

The breastplate of righteousness (verse 14b)

This is not our own earned righteousness, not a feeling of righteousness, but a righteousness received by faith in Jesus. It gives us a general sense of confidence, an awareness of our standing and position. "Thank God for experiences, but do not rely on them. You do not put on the 'breastplate of experiences', you put on the breastplate of 'righteousness.'" (Lloyd-Jones)

The shoes of the Gospel of peace (verse 15)

The specially designed shoes enabled the Roman soldier to remain well grounded even in the heat of the battle and to move fast over any terrain. The interpretation is twofold. First, we have already been reconciled to God through the gospel. This is our foundation. Secondly, we need to be ready with the same gospel to proclaim war against the devil and peace to the world.

The shield of faith (verse 16)

The shield Paul describes is not the small round one, but the large, oblong shield that could protect the whole body. In ancient warfare, these fiery darts were launched in great numbers at the beginning of an attack. The idea was not only to injure the enemy, but to shoot at him at all sides with a massive number of arrows, and thus to confuse and panic the enemy. "Even when such a missile was caught by the shield and did not penetrate to the body, says Livy, it caused panic, because it was thrown when well alight and its motion through the air made it blaze most fiercely, so that the soldier was tempted to get rid of his burning shield and expose himself to the enemy's spear-thrusts. But the shield of faith not only catches the incendiary devices but extinguishes them." (Bruce) **Faith is not supposed to shield us from physical suffering or guarantee ease but strengthen and comfort us in every situation.**

The helmet of salvation (verse 17)

Our mind is Satan's battle field. He brings fear, hopelessness, frustrations and despair into it. 1 Thessalonians 5:8 speaks of the helmet of salvation in connection to *the hope of salvation*. The helmet of salvation protects us against discouragement, against the desire to give up, giving us hope not only in knowing that we *are* saved, but that we *will be* saved. It is the assurance that God will triumph. One of Satan's most effective weapons against us is *discouragement*. When we are properly equipped with the helmet of salvation, it is hard to stay discouraged.

The sword of the Spirit (verse 17b)

Roman soldiers carried short, straight swords. Very effective in hand to hand combat and was essential for individual survival. God's word is our sword. The only weapon of offense. We must use it regularly in order to become proficient users. Knowing the word (logos) is insufficient. Must know how to use it (rhema). Example: Jesus quoted Deuteronomy 8:3 (Matthew 4:4) To effectively use the sword, we must regard it as the word of God – which is the word of God. If we are not confident in the inspiration of Scripture, that the sword really came from the Spirit, then we will not use it effectively at all. We must also take the sword of the Spirit in the sense of depending that He helps us to use it. Not only did the Spirit give us the Scriptures, but also He makes them alive to us (or us alive to them), and He equips us with the right thrust of the sword at the right time.

4. Pray (verses 18-20)

All the above is just preparation. We must keep open the lines of communication to God, our commander. The most powerful position Christians assume is when they kneel. Should be prayer of perseverance, (Luke 18:1-8) and intercession, (Ephesians 6:19-20).

We can say that it is through prayer that spiritual strength and the armour of God go to work. We will never accomplish anything if we fail to go into battle through prayer.

Often we don't pray because we are simply overconfident in our own abilities. Winston Churchill said to Britain in the early days of the Second World War: "I must drop one word of caution, for next to cowardice and treachery, overconfidence leading to neglect and slothfulness, is the worst of wartime crimes."

Keep praying for all the saints: We can battle spiritually not only on our own behalf, but also on the behalf of others. The soldier isn't only concerned for his or her own safety. He feels an instinct to protect and to battle on behalf of others.

And for me, that utterance may be given to me: After bringing up the idea that spiritual warfare can be waged on behalf of others, Paul asks his readers to pray for him. Paul could have asked prayer for many things, but he wanted his readers to pray that words be given him to make known the mystery of the Gospel fearlessly.

