

Notes for the Ones Called-Out to Meet

Info: (651) 283-0568 Discipleship Training Ministries, Inc. www.dtmwebsite.org Today's Date: December 8, 2024

Be Prepared For Spiritual Wrestling

by Dan Trygg

“Finally, be empowered in the Lord and in the sovereign-might of His powerful-strength. ¹¹ Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand against the schemes (methods, stratagems) of the devil (slanderer). ¹² For our wrestling-struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world-controllers of this darkness, against the spiritual *things* of the wickedness in the heavenly places. ¹³ Therefore, take up the full-armor of God, that you may be able/strong to resist/oppose in the evil day, and overcoming all things, to stand-firm.” Ephesians 6:10-13

“...though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, ⁴ for the weapons of our warfare are not fleshly, but powerful with God toward tearing-down of fortresses, ⁵ ...tearing-down reasonings and every lofty thing being-raised-up against the experiential-knowledge of God, and taking-captive/subduing every thought/perception to the obedience (giving-heed) of Christ, ⁶ and we are ready to punish all disobedience (not-giving-heed), whenever your obedience is complete.” 2 Corinthians 10:3-6

You can't read these two passages of scripture without realizing that there is a very real spiritual warfare going on. There are spiritual beings who are set against us. They want to keep us under their control, render us ineffective in our spiritual calling, and destroy us, if they can. *We need to be ready to resist the assaults of our adversaries, stand firm, and even advance against them in the power and leading of Jesus Christ.*

The spiritual conflict described here is the backstory that lies behind human history, from the Garden of Eden to the final chapters of the book of Revelation. We are only given wispy glimpses into what happened to cause all of this, ...we don't really need to know. What is clear is that **there are spiritual beings who have rebelled against God, ...and are intent on deceiving, diminishing and destroying us. Why us?** To get context, we must go back to chapter 1. **Before the foundation of the world, God determined that we would be holy and blameless, that we would be chosen to be adopted as full-heirs, and that we would be to the praise of His glory.** God has a plan to bring all things together and sum them up in Christ. At the time of humanity's fall into sin, God prophesied that “the Seed of the woman” would crush the head of the “seed of the serpent” (Gen. 3:15). **God is working out His plan of redemption. Somehow, we are at the center of what He is doing, ...and, at the same time, what He is doing in and with us is all about Christ!**

We were once spiritually-dead, living according to the dynamics and propaganda of the Satanic world system, *...but God... God made us alive in Christ.* By grace (what HE has done) we have been saved, as we trusted in Him (2:1-10). Now, in Christ we are offered not only citizenship in God's kingdom, and a seat at His table (2:11-22), but **we have been given gifts and empowerment to invest in one another as His co-workers, ...to help each other become mature and productive in Him (4:1-15).** As we are filled with His Spirit, His heart is revealed in our interactions with one another, and people see Jesus in our relationships of love and service (5:18-6:9). This brings us to today's study.

Not only are we a redeemed family of love bonded together in Christ, ...and an interactive community of discovery and growth in Him, *...we have also been recruited to become a team of soldiers working together with Him to expose, resist, and overcome the devices and assaults of the spiritual forces of evil that are set against us.*

It is important to recognize that this is not some new idea concocted or introduced by Paul. **When Jesus first mentioned the church, He described it in terms of this spiritual warfare.** He said that He would build His people upon the revelation that He was the Messianic King, “...and gates of Hades will not be strong against it” (Matt. 16:18). **When He spoke these words at Caesarea Philippi, they were standing in a place surrounded by idolatrous shrines and demonic practices, one of the most debased, unclean and despised places that the Jewish mind could comprehend. Jesus brought them there to make His point: Although the enemy is active and entrenched in the world around them, Jesus would lead His people to bring the truth of who He is to the very strongholds of demonic power, and they would not be able to stand against them.** Clearly, there is a spiritual enemy. He is entrenched. BUT, the enemy's fortifications and power will not be able to hold out against, ...who? ...against the Church! ...against you and me as a team in Christ!

It is important to understand the *focus and nature* of the struggle that Paul is describing here. The language in the Greek is very specific, “...because the wrestling-struggle is not with us toward blood and flesh, rather toward the rulers, toward the authorities, toward the world-controllers of this darkness, toward the spiritual-things of intentional-ill-will in the heavenly-places.” It is a little cumbersome in English, so most translations smooth it out to make it more readable. **Our opposition is clearly not other people.** (Please, put that idea out of your mind. We are not “at war” with people! ...not with political parties, or even with adherents of different faiths. *That is not where our battle is!* We are to be praying *for* people, not *against* them!) **It is a wrestling against spiritual beings. Look again at the list Paul compiles here: “rulers, authorities, world-controllers of ‘this darkness’, ...spiritual-things of evil-intent in the heavenlies.”** These are not just minor spirits of temptation or mischief. **These are the “big guns” of the enemy's kingdom!** Think about this

for a moment. **What do the “rulers, authorities, world-controllers, and malicious spiritual beings in the heavenlies” have to do with you and me? They are like *generals*, and we are like *foot soldiers*.** The generals and upper echelon authorities determine the strategy, allocate resources, and are in charge of communication and command of their troops, but **the battle is not won in the war room. It is won on the battlefield, by the foot soldiers.**

The word for “wrestle” describes the intense grappling struggle between two opposing forces. It was used of wrestlers, straining and shaking, as they attempted to throw their opponent to the ground, and hold him there. Do not underestimate your opponent. **To defeat the powers of darkness will involve struggle, wrestling, grappling, labor.** At times, it will mean to “stand firm” and hold our ground. At other times, it will mean to resist and advance against the enemy. It will mean clearing away debris and “fortifications” of lies, deceptions and false teachings. These are the “strongholds” described by Paul in 2 Corinthians 10, ...reasonings, arrogant thoughts, and false-beliefs that keep us distant from God. Sometimes, we will be required to “take captive” a thought or perception by comparing it to the truth that is in Christ. Every thought or opinion must come under His sovereignty, in order for freedom to be gained.

God has provided so that we can not only defend ourselves, but stand firm and even advance against the enemy. God’s provision does us no good, however, if we do not make effective use of it.

First, we are to “be empowered in the Lord”. There is a subtle difference between “be strong in the Lord” versus “be empowered in the Lord”. **God wants us to be strengthened *within* by His indwelling presence. He wants us to look within, and recognize that *He who is in you is the sovereign Lord of all the earth!*** His power is much greater than anything you will face. **He is God Almighty, and He is in you!** (cf. 1 Jn. 4:4; e.g., 2 Chron. 32:6-8)

Secondly, Paul directs us to “take up the whole-armor of God”. The word describes the full tool-kit of clothing, armor and weaponry given to a Roman infantry-person, ...a foot-soldier. We are to “take up” the armor of God, just like a soldier would need to get dressed in readiness for battle. We need to have our **waist “girded around in truth”**. To “wrap around” the waist meant to tuck your garments into your belt, so they would be out of the way, and you would be ready to move swiftly and unencumbered. “Truth” is like a belt that will hold them in place. Next, we need to have “put on the **breastplate of righteousness**”. The breastplate protected the heart and other vital organs. We also need to have “**bound footwear under our feet** in readiness for the gospel of peace”. “In everything having taken up the **door-shield of faith**, with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one.” A “door-shield” was 2.5 feet wide and 4 feet tall. This is not equipment for individual combat, but for a trained team that worked together as a unit. The fact that it is a “door-shield” indicates that we stand together as a group, ...a phalanx or “human tank”. And “take (welcome) the **helmet of salvation** and **the dagger of the Spirit**, which is the personal-word of God.” **Clearly, this is metaphorical, not literal.**

Every aspect of this armor has to do with Jesus. He has *already* defeated the enemy! Our victory is in Him, ...every time! *He is the truth* (Jn. 14:6). *He is our righteousness* that protects our heart (1 Cor. 1:30). *The gospel of peace is the good news of the salvation He has purchased for us* (Mk. 1:1; 1 Cor, 15:3,4). This phrase is an allusion to Isaiah 52:7, “How beautiful are the feet of him who brings good news, who proclaims peace, and announces news of happiness.” We are to always be ready to share the good news. *Our faith in Jesus is like a “door-shield” that we can stand behind for protection*, capable of putting out the burning accusations of the enemy. We also are linked to other team members in the body of Christ through our common faith. *Jesus is the source of our salvation* (Heb. 5:9). *He can protect our minds* from the enemy’s attempts to focus on our inadequacies. We are saved by His grace, not our works (Eph. 2:8,9). Finally, *the short-sword or dagger of the Spirit is the personal directive from God.* (The *rhēma*-word is a specific message of instruction at the moment. It is not a memorized scripture passage, used as a formula.) *As He guides us regarding what to say or do in a situation*, we can attack the enemy.

Third, God has given us “weapons” or “tools” for the tearing down of strongholds. Paul described these “strongholds” as “reasonings, speculations, thoughts or messages” and “every lofty/arrogant thought raised up against the experiential-knowledge of God.” These are lies, planted in our minds through past experiences, or things people have said or done to us, or distractions and enticements that come from the propaganda of the world around us. The point is that these messages either *divert us away* from coming to know God more experientially, or *they have wounded us* in such a way that we either believe we could not be acceptable to Him, or that He is unjust or unfair. The enemy is behind these lies, in some way. **God has given us the means to uncover and expose these messages and false beliefs, as we work together with Him. As we clear away the stronghold, the light of the gospel can penetrate the darkness, and people who have been held back in unbelief or disbelief can begin to experience God in a new and fresh way.**

What has happened in Caesarea Phillipi? That dark and evil place, filled with idolatry and demonic activity has been abandoned. The shrines and temples are gone, or in ruins. The revelation that Jesus is Lord has swept through that entire area, and has brought light, hope and freedom around the world. **The gates of Hades have not been able to withstand the message of the gospel.** Jesus Christ is Lord, and He sets people free. **The powers of darkness cannot stand against the light of the truth that is in Christ, ...that is in us, ...that we can also share with others!**