



ephesians

a church becoming

Sunday, February 23, 2025

Ephesians 6:10-13

Over the next few weeks, we will be entering into the culminating text of the whole book of Ephesians. In the previous chapters, we saw Paul's continual use of the word 'therefore' as he would bridge the gap between information and instruction. There are still a few more 'therefore's' to go, but now we come to the 'Finally.' After everything Paul has said in chapters 1-5, 'finally,' it all comes down to this. This next section is the reason why chapters 1-5 exist in the first place.

And I'll be honest with you, it has been an incredible journey thus far. In the early chapters, Paul reminds us of our true identity. That, as Christians, we are all viewed as sons and daughters of the Most High God. Not only that, but God also views us as co-heirs with Jesus - the magnitude of which is absolutely astounding! This is bigger than big. More massive than massive. This is so incredible, that we simply cannot wrap our minds around it, but it is a reminder of how great God's love is for us that he would truly call us family, that he would truly call us son and daughter. Paul then goes on to say that because He views us as family, then it's imperative that we treat each other like family. It is this concept of family that really unites us. Paul says in Galatians that as the family of God there is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And because this is true, then our actions towards each other should reflect the mutual submission that Christ exemplified when He came to earth for us and died on the cross for our salvation. For Paul, this concept of mutual submission anchors all of our relationships: whether it's in marriage, family or work - generally speaking - all of our relationships will grow deep roots if our focus is on each other instead of always on oneself.

If you have your Bibles with you this morning, I would invite you to turn with me to Ephesians 6:10-14a where Paul begins to unveil his final instruction. If you are able to, please stand for the reading of the Word of the Lord:

Ephesians 6:10-13

'Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. 11 Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. 12 For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness 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.'

Paul opens up this section with a call to be strong in the Lord - which is the heart of the text. Now, why would Paul suggest this? Well, you don't call people to be strong if there isn't something they need to be strong for. Get it? I think many people have Christianity all wrong. They believe that upon salvation your life is placed on easy street. That accepting Jesus as Saviour is the answer to all of their life's problems - which it inherently is - but that everything is smooth sailing from that point forward. It doesn't work like that does it? Accepting Jesus Christ as Saviour is the answer to the problem of sin in our lives and allows us entrance into eternity with Christ, but it doesn't mean our earthly lives become free of challenges. In fact, it's often the opposite. Once we commit to following Christ, we may actually face new struggles, as living a life that contrasts with worldly values is rarely ever easy. The Apostle John understood this as he wrote the book of the Revelation and talks about this concept as light pushing back the darkness, but the darkness doesn't push back easily - it resists. Paul knows this firsthand and he's not calling us to be strong in our own might; he's urging us to draw our strength from the Lord. This distinction is crucial because it shifts our reliance away from our limited power to the unlimited power of God.

So you and I have a choice to make. We can be strong in ourselves or strong in the Lord. Paul's encouragement however, is to be strong in the Lord because ultimately, he knows that:

Ephesians 6:12a

'...we do not wrestle against flesh and blood...'

Now this is where things start to get interesting. Up until this point, Paul has been focused on fostering unity among sons and daughters, brothers and sisters in the Lord in whatever 'flesh and blood' relationships and interactions that might come their way. Now he shifts gears a little bit and says, oh, by the way, your real struggle in this earth is not necessarily with your neighbour or your co-worker, that family member, or even with 'people' at all. Your real struggle is in a different realm and against evil spiritual beings. And on our own, we are no match for them. Without the Lord's strength, they will toss us around like rag-dolls - and we will lose every single time. Paul knows this and his challenge is clear. Be strong, not in your own might, but in the power of the Lord, for it is

only in His power that we can overcome the wicked powers of this earth. We'll get back to this statement towards the end of the message, but for now, let's unpack what Paul is saying here.

Notice the terminology that Paul now uses to describe the powers of the earth:

Ephesians 6:12b

'...against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.'

Now, here's where it gets even more interesting for me. Why doesn't Paul just say 'demons' or 'evil spirits?' To me this is most fascinating because if I were writing this, that's likely the terminology that I would use. But Paul, being inspired by the Holy Spirit chooses words that reveal a much more complex and structured spiritual reality that many of us may not be aware even exists.

In his book, 'The Unseen Realm', the late theologian Michael Heiser suggests that the typical Christian view of demons, angels and satan may be far too limited and simplistic in its scope. He suggests that there is a far more intricate realm around us. Heiser points out that the terms Paul uses - 'principalities,' 'powers,' 'rulers of the darkness,' and 'spiritual hosts of wickedness in heavenly places' - aren't just synonyms for 'demons' but that they refer to different categories or ranks of spiritual beings, each with specific roles and authorities in the cosmic hierarchy of the rebellion against God.

Now although this is a realm that we cannot see with our naked eyes, the Bible does give us several clues as to what this spiritual system actually looks like. If we were to go back to the very beginning and read the creation story, we can see language that might be difficult to understand without this lens. For example, in Genesis 1:26, where God says, 'Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.' Heiser points out this isn't just about the Trinity. He suggests it's also God talking to an assembly of divine beings - a sort of heavenly council that's involved in managing humanity.

And this isn't the only time in Genesis that this plural language is used. Heiser goes on to give two more. For example, in Genesis 3:22, after Adam and Eve eat from the tree of knowledge, God says, 'Behold, the man has become like one of us in knowing good and evil.' And lastly, Genesis 11:7 during the Tower of Babel incident, notice that God says, 'Come, let us go down there and confuse their language.' Again, both of these passages seem to support this concept of God using a team or council of divine beings to help participate in decisions and actions that affect humanity.

Now, although these verses don't specifically mention the phrase - 'Divine Council' - Heiser sug-

gests that in the first century, this was familiar language, and that even the Psalmist David referenced it in his writings:

Psalm 82:1-2

*'God has taken His place in the 'divine council';
in the midst of the gods He holds judgment.
How long will you judge unjustly,
And show partiality to the wicked?'*

This is an interesting take for David because it seems that he is referencing these divine beings with a negative overtone - which actually makes complete sense when you understand the timeline of creation. Shortly after creation, we see that there was a massive rebellion against God in the heavens that was spearheaded by Satan. Heiser suggests that Satan's rebellion involved a number of other spiritual beings including some who were originally part of God's Divine Council - some suggest that about 1/3 followed the rebellion. These are not just generic evil spirits or demons doing as they please without order. Rather, they are part of a structured, ordered realm where they have specific ranks and appointed roles - originally created for good but now corrupted and rebellious against God's true and perfect order.

We see a clear picture of this in the book of Daniel where, after a prolonged period of fasting and prayer, Daniel receives a visit from an angel of the Lord. This angel explains that he was delayed because he was battling against the 'prince of the kingdom of Persia' and that he required assistance from Michael, described as one of the chief princes or archangels.

Daniel 10:12-13; 20b

'Then he said to me, "Do not fear, Daniel, for from the first day that you set your heart to understand, and to humble yourself before your God, your words were heard; and I have come because of your words. 13 But the prince of the kingdom of Persia withstood me twenty-one days; and behold, Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me, for I had been left alone there with the kings of Persia...20b And now I must return to fight with the prince of Persia; and when I have gone forth, indeed the prince of Greece will come.'

This vision alone allows us to see that the forces of hell are not chaotic or random, but ordered and structured and strategic in their desire to destroy all of humanity. These 'princes' are actual spiritual authorities over earthly kingdoms. This chapter in Daniel alone, helps us to see a structured spiritual reality where entities have authority over specific geographical and even political domains, impact-

ing the flow of history according to their alignment or misalignment with God's overarching sovereign will. In fact, if you continue reading into Daniel 11, the angel reveals to Daniel that there are dark days ahead as the spiritual battle intensifies and various political strategies unfold on the earth. This shows us that the conflicts we see in the physical world often have their origins in these hidden spiritual wars, with powerful beings influencing the course of human events from behind the scenes.

Example: Frank Peretti's book, 'This Present Darkness.'

So, this is why Paul uses such specific language and not just evil spirits or demons. Notice now, that Paul also neglects to use the word, 'Satan.'

This is where things take a really, really interesting turn. The conversation about Satan is a fascinating one because there's a duality in the name that most people aren't aware of. Typically, we think of Satan as the proper name given to the arch-enemy of God - the leader of the rebellion against all of Heaven. However, the Bible also uses it as a term to describe a role or function, not just the name of a specific being.

So, if I were to ask you when the first time we see Satan mentioned in the Bible, we might intuitively respond, 'Somewhere in the beginning of Genesis when the serpent tempts Eve.' However, that would be incorrect. In fact, you may be interested to know that the entire book of Genesis does not mention the term satan at all. It is not used for the serpent, nor is it used when Cain kills Abel nor is it used in any other context within the book. This doesn't mean that the 'Evil-One' isn't present in Genesis, but the specific identity of the arch-enemy of God as Satan isn't introduced until much later in the biblical narrative.

The first usage of the term 'satan' is actually found in the Book of Job where during a divine council assembly, God discusses the integrity of a man named Job. One of the beings in the council challenges God by saying that Job's devotion is simply due to the prosperity and protection that God has given him. The name of that specific divine being is not given but he is given the title of 'the satan.' In the original Hebrew, the word, 'satan,' means 'adversary or one who opposes.' In this case, the divine being that was challenging God was not Satan the arch-enemy of God, but a member of the divine council who was acting according to the definition of satan - as one who was opposing God. A great way to look at this would be through the lens of a cross-examiner in a court room scene. In this sense, 'the satan' acts not as an evil being intent on destruction, but rather as a challenger or skeptic of Job's righteousness, testing the authenticity of his faith under duress.

The term satan is also used in the story of the prophet Balaam, where God had given him a message to share with the people of God, but Balaam was determined to share his own message instead. On his way to the people to share his message, we read in 1 Kings that an angel of the Lord stood in opposition to him on the road. However, in the Hebrew, the word 'satan,' is used to describe this angel. Obviously, this could not be the arch-enemy of God, but the term was simply describing the nature of this angel as being one who was in strong opposition towards Balaam.

What's really fascinating is how Scripture establishes the term 'satan' as a role - specifically meaning an adversary or opposer - before it ever becomes a personal name for the arch-enemy of God. This isn't just about word choice; it's about setting a foundation. By first introducing 'satan' as a role that various beings can fulfill, the Bible lays a deep foundation of opposition. This groundwork is crucial. It teaches us that opposition to God's will is a general spiritual reality before it introduces us to the being who epitomizes this rebellion. So, by the time we encounter 'Satan' as a name, we already understand the profound depth of what it means to oppose God. It's as though Scripture is saying, 'Understand the function first before you focus on the figure.'

This understanding now helps to bring clarity to Jesus' words to Peter in Matthew 16. Here, Jesus has just had this wonderful interaction with Peter where He asks Peter who he thinks He is. In verse 16, Peter responds with a declaration that, 'You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.' A few verses later, Jesus then shares with the disciples that He must suffer and be killed but that He would rise on the third day. But Peter would not accept this and started to rebuke Jesus, saying firmly that this would not happen. Jesus then turns to Peter and says, 'Get behind me, Satan!' Which has always seemed like Jesus was calling Peter His arch-enemy, Satan, or that perhaps Peter was even possessed, but neither of these are actually the case. Jesus is simply using the term 'satan' to underscore the severity of Peter's opposition. In this context, 'satan' is the strongest term to convey opposition to God's plan, which strikingly highlights Peter's role at that moment as an unsuspecting adversary of the strongest nature. And so this moment alone would have set Peter back on his heels as the realization of what he had just said sunk in.

Now, this may be new information for a lot of Christians in our day and age, but for the people in Ephesus, Paul's language about 'principalities,' 'powers,' 'rulers of the darkness,' and 'spiritual hosts of wickedness in heavenly places' would have been clearly understood. They lived in a city where the worship of Artemis, along with other deities like Zeus and Aphrodite, was intertwined with daily life. These weren't just idols of stone or mythical stories; Paul is pointing to real spiritual forces behind these 'gods,' influencing the city just as the 'prince of Persia' influenced earthly kingdoms in Daniel's vision.

This understanding solidifies the reality that our struggle isn't against mere human opponents or cultural trends but against a structured realm of spiritual beings. It's not chaotic; there's a real strategy and structure in the spiritual realm that actively works against God's purposes.

Recognizing this, we see why Paul insists so strongly on being 'strong in the Lord' - because our own strength is insufficient against such formidable enemies. As we saw in our series through Revelation, although the battle is fierce, the victory belongs to Christ. This assurance allows us to face these challenges not in fear, but in the power of His might.

So, at the end of the day, I am convinced that Paul has this in mind when writing this letter. And he paints a very intentional picture for his readers - one that should remind us that following Jesus isn't just passive lip service - it requires action. Paul's words remind us that the unseen threat is real and now more than ever before, we need the presence and the power of the Holy Spirit just to be able to stand! Especially in this generation.

So, let's go back to the very beginning where we posed the question of whether or not we would be strong in ourselves or strong in the Lord. Knowing what we now know about the strategy and intentionality of the wicked forces in the unseen realm, I think it's obvious to see that there is no other choice but to be strong in the Lord, because there is no strength within us that can stand against them. This is why Paul now says, to be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might.

We can only be strong in the power of His might. This is crucial. 1 John 4:4 teaches us that 'greater is He that is in you, than he that is in the world.' Many of us know this verse, but this isn't just a comforting thought; it's a deep and profound truth. Inside each of us, as believers, resides the Holy Spirit - the same power that raised Christ from the dead. Think about that for a moment. The same power that rolled away the stone, that conquered death, lives in us. This means that we get to tap into an infinite, divine source of strength. It's not our own human efforts, but the power of God through His Spirit in us. This is how we stand firm in the battles we face, not just external but also the internal struggles with sin and temptation.

Over the course of the next few weeks, we will break down the rest of this passage as Paul goes into detail on the spiritual armour that we possess and what it means to respond with prayer. Today's message serves to remind us that the threat is real - very real indeed. But the power of the Lord is greater. So there are three points to consider as we close this morning.

3 Points to consider:

Stand firm: Often, we might think of standing as a fixed, rigid position. But today, I want to suggest that for the Christian, standing looks a lot like leaning - leaning into God, that is. (Bring up plant) Just like a plant leans towards the sunlight to grow and thrive, we too must lean into the light of God's presence and His Word to stand firm against the forces that oppose us. This isn't a passive stance; it's an active, dynamic posture that requires dependence and movement towards our source of life and strength.

Embrace discipline: Spiritual battles require spiritual readiness, which comes from disciplined living. Embracing disciplines such as prayer, fasting, studying the Word, and fellowship is about preparing our hearts and minds for the battles we face every day. Just as soldiers train in peace to be ready in times of war, we too must cultivate spiritual disciplines to maintain our spiritual vitality and readiness. These practices aren't optional; they're essential to our strength and stability in the Lord. It's strategy vs. Strategy. And if you employ God's strategy of discipline then you align yourself with the power of God that can overcome any obstacle or enemy. This helps to ensure that we are not caught off guard but are equipped and ready to stand firm.

Engage in Community: The spiritual battle isn't meant to be fought alone. Just as Paul speaks to the Ephesians collectively, reminding them of their shared struggle and their collective strength in Christ, we too are called to engage actively in our spiritual community. Fellowship isn't just about socializing; it's about strengthening each other, holding each other accountable, and praying for one another. By engaging deeply within our community, we find the mutual support necessary to face life's challenges. Together, we can encourage one another to remain vigilant and proactive, providing a network of support that mirrors the interconnected strength Paul describes.

Ephesians 3:20-21

'Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, 21 to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.'

Blessing

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