



ephesians

a church becoming

Sunday, March 2, 2025

Ephesians 6:10-13 Part 2

If you were with us last week, we entered into the last and final challenge in the book of Ephesians, where Paul walks us through spiritual warfare, and what that means for us as followers of Jesus Christ. He made a strong reminder that our battle is not against flesh and blood, but against powers, principalities in the rulers of wickedness in this age. Paul makes it very clear that just as much as God has a plan for our lives, the enemy also has a counter plan for humanity as well. It is one that if given their way, will lead us straight into destruction. Hence his call to put on the full armour of God as our protection in this spiritual warfare.

This idea of spiritual warfare is an interesting one, because I think for many of us, it conjures up images of us putting on our spiritual armour and charging into battle against the demonic forces. Yet, the reality is that without a foundation of spiritual formation through spiritual disciplines, we can very easily find ourselves ill-prepared for the encounters we face. Although it may seem that Paul starts with the command to put on the full armour of God, he actually begins with something even more foundational.

In Ephesians 6:10-11, Paul's primary directive is for us to 'be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might.' We discussed last week - that this is the foundation of our strategy against the enemy, emphasizing that in order to defeat these evil forces, our strength must come from God Himself.

Paul goes on to describe these evil forces not just as demons but as 'principalities and powers; rulers of the darkness of this age, and spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.' This distinction is important because it clearly shows that the enemy operates with strategy and intentionality, not randomly or aimlessly as it might seem.

Therefore, our counter-strategy must also be strategic, intentional and of course spiritually informed:

The Armour of God serves as our Defense, shielding us from attacks.

Meanwhile, the Sword of the Spirit and prayer equip us in our Offense, enabling us to counteract and defeat the enemy's schemes.

But spiritual formation is the core of our battle plan as spiritual disciplines like prayer, fasting, studying the Word, and engaging in community form our day to day duties.

Together, these three elements - Defense, Offense, and Formation - form our comprehensive strategy to combat spiritual forces. We must meet strategy with strategy. These disciplines are not merely preparatory; they are the essential means by which we align ourselves with God's power and wisdom to effectively stand against evil. It is 'the power of His might' that undergirds every aspect of our defense, offense, and strategic planning. Without His strength, our defense would be penetrable, our offense ineffective, and our battle-plan inadequate against the formidable forces of evil.

Over the next few weeks, we will explore the various pieces of armour that make up our defense and even the weapons of warfare at our disposal, but before we get into all of that, we need to firm up what spiritual formation truly means for us. Understanding and embracing the spiritual disciplines that God has outlined for us to follow only serves to strengthen how we use the armour and weapons as we seek to advance the Kingdom of God together as His family.

Last week we talked a little bit about what this looks like as it pertains to prayer and we will see in just a few short weeks, the power of prayer as Paul teaches us that this is a massive part of our offense.

But before we go into all of the instruction that Paul has in mind for us, it's important to understand that spiritual formation doesn't actually start in the hands, but in the heart.

Which if you've been following closely along, is the essence of the exact same message that Paul opens up his letter to the Ephesians with.

Ephesians 1:1

'Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, to the saints who are in Ephesus, and faithful in Christ Jesus...'

Paul reminds them, and us, to remain faithful in Christ. This may not sound like a profound instruction, but what Paul is essentially saying is that the only way they - and we - will be equipped to withstand temptation, persevere through trials, and continue living boldly for Christ in a hostile world

is to stay close to Jesus. This closeness comes through a relationship first, not routine. We have to understand that Spiritual formation begins in the heart not in the hands. And this is the core of the message that would be spoken to them again in approximately 30 years:

In the book of the Revelation, there were seven specific messages to seven specific churches of which the church in Ephesus was one.

Revelation 2:2-5 (MSG):

'I see what you've done, your hard, hard work, your refusal to quit. I know you can't stomach evil, that you weed out apostolic pretenders. I know your persistence, your courage in my cause, that you never wear out. But you walked away from your first love...'

You see, somehow in the midst of all of their hard work and effort and doing, they had lost sight of why they were even doing this in the first place. It had just become simple routine - they were going through the motions thinking that the hands were the point, when Jesus is reminding us that it's the heart!

Example: Talk about my birthday and how my kids gave me cards and wrote notes and how it wasn't duty or obligation, but that there was true love and joy in them seeing me read these letters.

It's the same thing with what we offer to God through disciplines. It can very much be viewed as worship that is meant to be given to Him out of love with a joyful heart. In his second letter to the Corinthians Paul touches on this concept by saying:

2 Corinthians 9:6-7

'But this I say: He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. 7 So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver.'

Now, in the context of the Corinthians, Paul was speaking specifically towards the spiritual discipline of giving through tithes and offerings. But the overarching principle not giving grudgingly or of necessity but with a joyful heart applies to all of the spiritual disciplines.

You see, there's always going to be elements of duty and obligation in our lives - there's no getting

away from that. We all pay taxes out of duty and obligation - not sure there's a whole lotta love in there...but when it comes to spiritual disciplines, it doesn't have to be obligatory or dutiful. Because when our spiritual practices are rooted in a deep love for God and a desire to grow closer to Him, they go beyond duty and obligation and enter the realm of worship and intimate connection with our Creator. This isn't just about fulfilling religious instructions. It's about ensuring that our hearts are fully engaged in the process, motivated by love for God and gratitude for all He has done for us. This is the essence of what it means to not lose our first love, to keep our hearts focused on Christ, and to let that love drive every action and every discipline.

And this was the way of Jesus when He walked this earth. In his book entitled, 'Desiring God's Will,' author David Benner says that every spiritual discipline for Jesus started not with His will, but with His heart of love for the Father:

'Think again of Jesus. What motivated his spiritual discipline? Why, for example, did he regularly slip off to the mountains or the desert for prayer (Matthew 14:23; Luke 5:5-16)? And what was behind his fasting (Luke 4:2)? These holy habits show nothing of the willfulness of a spiritual self-improvement plan. Jesus wasn't trying to make a statement or fulfill a personal commitment. In fact, I suspect these habits only look like discipline on the outside. The inner impulse for Jesus was something quite different. The motive behind everything that Jesus did was love of God and a desire to know and fulfill his Father's will.'

This is the point. We aren't meant to pray, read the word, attend church, give...etc as a duty or obligation, but as a response of love. In Galatians 5:6, Paul reminds us that what truly matters is 'faith expressing itself through love.' Which is Paul's way of encouraging us to engage in spiritual disciplines not just mechanically or automatically but as a heartfelt response to our relationship with Christ.

Now, I do recognize that there are seasons where that joy and love seem to be clouded over with various challenges in life and embracing these disciplines with love and joy may be difficult and I think that we have to be careful during those seasons. You see, even though we may not feel like it, or the desire seems to wane, the call from Paul to give joyfully or through a heart of love goes far deeper than the surface realm of feelings. In this sense, love is not a feeling, but it becomes a choice. This is what makes it so unique. Yes it's true that you can feel love but it's also true that you can choose love.

Example: Jordan and I in our early 20's falling in love with each other. It was easy and exciting and felt great! Now, after 20 years of marriage, our choice to continue loving each other has grown

deeper than those initial feelings. Our love for each other has evolved from fleeting emotion to active, selfless commitment. When love moves from a fleeting feeling to an active choice, there is a depth there that goes beyond selfish desire and moves into the realm of selfless commitment. This is where the real beauty of love is found - not just in the euphoric highs of early romance, but in the steady, enduring love that chooses to remain even when it's hard. This choice to love, irrespective of fluctuating feelings, is where true spiritual maturity and depth are developed.

It's the same in our relationship with Christ. Just as in marriage, where daily decisions to love create a long-lasting bond, in our walk with God, it's the continual choice to engage in spiritual disciplines - even when they don't feel exciting or we're not particularly motivated - that deepens our relationship with Him. These choices, made in the quiet moments of deciding to pray when we're tired, to study Scripture when we'd rather relax, or to serve others when we feel like focusing on ourselves, are what move us from an immature faith to a mature faith.

So, in seasons when joy and love seem distant, remember that choosing to love can sustain you. It's about deciding, again and again, to lean into God's strength and to live out His commandments, not based on fleeting feelings but on a deep-seated commitment to Him. This understanding transforms our spiritual disciplines from mere routines into profound acts of love and worship.

Now, for the Ephesians, the challenge was a little different. They were in danger of growing accustomed to just going through the motions. It had become simple muscle memory and Paul was calling them back to rediscovery. The rediscovery of all the glory and splendour that Jesus is. To never forget the beauty of their salvation. What He pulled them out of. What he saved them from. To live in Christ.

Don't abandon your first love.

Respond in communion and worship.

Pastor Josh Hageman

Lead Pastor

Kingsview Community Church

Stoney Creek, ON

www.kingsviewchurch.com

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