

“Counter Strategy in Spiritual Warfare”

Ephesians 6:13

Introduction:

1. Every follower of Jesus Christ is involved in a spiritual war. Satan and his evil allies have an implacable hatred for God and his people. The spiritual forces of evil endlessly seek to oppose God’s plan to display his glory, and they strive to ruin God’s chosen people. It matters not to the enemy how he strikes us; any harm he causes is a reason for perverse delight. However, Satan and his army are doomed to defeat, because God has already won the war through the saving work of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. The Lord has spiritually outfitted us with spiritual protection and has made available to us the greatest resource, his almighty power to face the enemy and his malicious schemes.

2. Although the war is won, there are still many battles to fight until the Lord returns and finally ends all evil works. We face a desperate, fatally wounded dragon, which still lashes out at us before he is cast into the Lake of Fire that God has prepared for the devil and his angels. God has willed that we must confront the enemy to make known God’s triumph in his Son. Now how do we do this? What is the Lord’s counter strategy for us?

Exposition:

I. We must be actively engaged in spiritual warfare.

A. The true Christian life is not a way of passivity or of inactivity.

1. At various times in church history, there have been some who have taught a passive view of the Christian life. Their teaching has been presented something like this: “Don’t struggle; that is the way of the flesh; just let go and let God.” I think that they wanted to protect the importance of faith, but they went wrong in the process.

a. One thing that people want to avoid is a struggle. We want life to be easy; Christians want the Christian life to be easy. In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, many taught the error of sinless perfection—that a Christian could achieve, in various ways, freedom from sin. Some of the teachers of perfectionism taught that it could be attained by sheer effort of will. The tragic error is that human effort can never perfect a person.

b. But though some saw that perfection could not be achieved by human effort, they could not let go of the concept of the possibility of perfection. So for effort they substituted a redefined idea of faith that taught, “You can’t become perfect by struggling. Instead, you must not struggle; let God make you perfect. ‘Let go and let God.’”

2. But faith is not passivity. It is an active reliance or dependence upon God that produces action, as the letter to the Hebrews makes very clear (11:3,4,7,8,17,20,21,22,23,24-28,29,33-36). Faith reasons that God is able to do what we cannot, and then moves forward in obedience, relying on God to supply our need.

B. In this entire text (6:10-18), the Lord calls us to action.

1. In this passage the Holy Spirit gives us five clear commands: “be strong... put on... put on... stand firm... take...” The Lord through the apostle demands that we carry out these orders! Everyday we have these orders; to disobey them is to sin.

Comment: How many Christians are nowhere near as holy and godly as they suppose themselves to be? Why is it that a professing Christian can have great troubles of conscience about shop lifting or telling lies, and not have the least anxiety about direct disobedience of the Commander of the Lord’s armies? I’d suggest there are many poorly taught consciences.

2. The Spirit also teaches us that we are in a struggle or more literally, a “wrestling match”. We come into close combat with the powers of darkness, and in their view, there are no “illegal holds”. Addiction, abandonment, sexual immorality, domestic violence, robbery, and verbal abuse scar the human heart and provide opportunities for the enemy to strike with self-pity, jealousy, anger, an unforgiving attitude, despair, discontent and old unbelief.

Apply: In a gathering this size there are probably some that have been scarred in the ways that I mentioned, and the evil spirits have been wrestling with you and seem to have you in an unbreakable hold. For example, whenever something causes you to remember how you were robbed or cheated, you are tempted to become angry or perhaps are filled with fear that it might happen again. Is there a way out? Yes, **if** you want to follow the Lord, you will find his way.

II. We must follow the counter strategy that our Lord has planned.

A. We must put on “the full armor of God”.

1. This armor will certainly protect us from spiritual attacks, because it is Christ and the blessings of salvation that belong to us through our union with him. Since the

apostle will present this in detail in the following verses, we will discuss it more fully “piece by piece”.

2. However, we must understand our responsibility to “put on” each part of the armor. Possessing a resource for protection is not the same as using it.

Illustration: My car came equipped with a system of lights. If I drive it in the twilight or at night or in poor weather conditions like fog, those lights help protect me. But I am responsible to turn them on when necessary.

Apply: Everyday we must put our armor on. This is not a legalistic ritual, though people have a remarkable talent for making anything legalistic! I am not talking about putting something on a daily checklist, mumbling a “putting on the armor” prayer, and then feeling self-satisfied. “I put my armor on! Did you put your armor on?” No, the Holy Spirit is directing us in the Word to a daily fellowship with the Lord in which by faith we rely on his resources.

B. We must stand our ground.

1. At this point some paint pictures of passivity, wrongly imagining that the apostle is recommending that we curl up into some sort of spiritual fetal position and let the evil ones beat on us! What kind of general would order that posture for his soldiers? Generals equip their soldiers to enter combat, to engage the enemy, and by standing firm, to drive the enemy from the battlefield.

Illustration: How did Chamberlain defend the extreme left of the Union Army on Little Round Top? He stood firm against repeated attacks, and then with his equipment drove his enemy away.

2. How do we stand or resist successfully the enemy? [Lloyd-Jones]

a. Don't feel unhappy or discouraged because you are in a battle.

Your Lord has called you to battle, fully equipped you and promised you his strength. A spiritual battle is an opportunity for the Lord to demonstrate his glory through you.

b. Don't feel frightened in the battle. Certainly we must never underestimate the power of the evil one, but the Lord's power is greater. Yep, you're going to be hit, but by grace, you're going to strike back with the fear of the Lord hitting the enemy.

c. Don't be lazy! Take your stand! Don't expect someone to carry you or to fill your spot. Get in the battle line. “Hate what is evil” (Rm 12:9).

d. Never give thought about retreat. Stand to the last!

e. Keep alert. 1 Pt 5:8-9