

12/8/24 Christ Fellowship

## Unified Soldiers – Ephesians 6

I have a question for you and I don't want you to answer out loud. Just think about it because it's deeper than it sounds. The question is, how's it going? Now, I don't mean, "Hey, how ya doin'?" I mean think back on your life up until now and think about how it has been going. If you are like most people, it has its ups and downs. You have good days and bad days and some people have bad years or even decades. But it seems like a struggle, doesn't it?

There used to be a TV show called Wipeout that had contestants going through a giant obstacle course over a big pool of water. The obstacle course was filled with giant padded arms and windmills and moving obstacles you had to get past without being knocked into the water. The contestant would take off running and the platform they were on would collapse or a giant padded wrecking ball would swing down. Sometimes the person would make it almost all the way to the end and a big boxing glove would burst out of the wall and send them swimming.

Ever feel like that in your life? Does it seem like everywhere you turn something is trying to knock you down and steal your health, your money or your peace? Just when you get the car paid off, the transmission goes out. Just when you get to feeling better, you hurt your back. You finally get all the family together for Christmas and the granddaughter shows up with a liberal boyfriend and he ruins it for everybody.

You can say it's just life. You can call it bad luck or bad karma (neither exist, by the way). Or you can blame it on the government or the school system. You can say you are being oppressed or whatever you want to call it but the Apostle Paul is surprisingly simplistic in Ephesians 6 when he called it our **struggle**.

Let's turn there and look at it. **Ephesians 6**, just **verses 10-13**. Well, this is it. We have finally made it through 10 weeks of studying the book of Ephesians. And we have come to probably the most famous chapter of the book. It's the chapter that talks about putting on the **full armor of God**. But by my calculations, I have preached on that armor five other times in the last fifteen years or so. So, let's approach this chapter a little differently this time.

Paul starts off the first half of the book of Ephesians teaching us solid doctrine. He tells us who we were and who we are now. We used to be separated from God but then He adopted us. We used to be dead but now we are alive. And now we are seated with Jesus

in the heavenly realms. He also taught us that Jesus loves us with an unimaginable love and that He can do “amazedably” more than we could ever ask or imagine.

But in the second half of the book, Paul tells us how to live. If we have God’s power and His love and we are part of His family, then we should live like it. We should live in unity with all other believers. We should love like Jesus does. We should live as imitators of God Himself. We should submit to each other.

Then here in this last chapter, Paul leaves his last words as words of caution and encouragement. If anybody knows this life is a struggle, it’s Paul. If anybody has lived a life of sacrifice, it’s Paul. If anybody has had his good deeds rewarded with evil, it’s Paul. And so, here Paul gives us a warning that we should expect the same thing. But there is a secret to getting through these attacks and Paul knows it well. Let’s read it in **Ephesians 6:10-13**.

*Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. <sup>11</sup> Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes. <sup>12</sup> For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. <sup>13</sup> Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand.*

Okay, I want to give you an absolutely ridiculous scenario. You’re sitting at home, minding your own business one night when the phone rings. The person identifies himself as the **chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff** of the United States. He’s the most powerful man in all the military. And he says he needs your help. The United States needs your help. Russia, China and North Korea have all declared war on the US and are threatening our annihilation immediately but the whole military is scared and don’t want to fight so they need you to do it. They need you to go to war with all those millions of soldiers with their tanks and bombs and planes and ships. Will you do it? And as you pull out your toy plastic rifle, you confidently tell the chairman, **“Don’t worry, sir! I got this!”**

Pretty ridiculous, isn’t it? But do you know what is even more ridiculous? Trying to get through this life you are leading without God’s help and God’s power. You can’t do it. The whole Old Testament is one story after another trying to show us that we can’t do it. We need God’s help and God’s power. And in our passage, Paul is trying to tell us just how ridiculous it is to try to get through this life on our own when we, as physical beings, are being attacked by armies of spiritual enemies.

If our battles were against flesh and blood people, we might have a chance. But Paul says our battle is not against flesh and blood but against all these different ranks and levels and hierarchies of demons working for Satan. We are outnumbered, outgunned and overpowered. There is an organized army of spiritual enemies that we can't even see, much less defend against and they are led by a roaring lion looking to kill you physically dead.

But Paul tells us the secret to surviving and even thriving in this battle and we're going to get to that in just a second. But, first, let's think about where this battle is being fought. We know our ultimate enemy is the devil but the battle is being waged on three fronts. We face Satan and all his demons on one front. They are united and organized and their main targets are Christians. They know they can't have your soul but they want to keep you from bringing anyone else into the Kingdom. And if God continues to protect your life, then they will try to steal your witness and your peace.

But do you know who else we have to battle? Ourselves. I heard the great preacher, **Adrian Rogers**, say one time that he was going to call out a man in his church. He said this man is a troublemaker and he's weak. He has a poor attitude and he runs to sin every chance he gets. He is not measuring up to God's standards and it was high time he got called out publicly right there from the pulpit. Dr. Rogers said, *"I want you to know who this man is. His name...is Adrian Rogers."* Himself. That's one of the greatest battles we have to face, isn't it? That nasty old man in the mirror.

Paul calls that person we battle with "the flesh." In **Galatians 5** he says, *"So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. <sup>17</sup>For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other."* We are at war with ourselves. There is a civil war going on in our hearts.

Now, I have good news and bad news about that. The bad news is we can't beat that guy on our own either. We can't even overcome ourselves when it comes to temptation. How many of you know that?

Let me tell you about the guy in our church that needs to be called out. I made a pie last week for our church meal. It was buttermilk coconut pie and it is my favorite. I came home with an empty pie plate. But I had some coconut left over. And I had some buttermilk left over. And I didn't want to be wasteful. So, I made myself a pie. Just for me. And the whole time I'm adding ingredients, I'm thinking, *"I really shouldn't be doing this."* 3 eggs. *Don't do it.* Stick of butter. *This is so unhealthy.* 5-gallon bucket of sugar. *I gotta stop.* Buttermilk. *Unhealthy.* Coconut. *Eh, that's like a fruit or something so it's okay.* And by the time that golden brown gooey goodness came out of the oven, I had surrendered and was fighting

for the other team. It's a battle and our flesh is impossible to overcome without God's help and God's strength.

Now, the good news about fighting the flesh is that if you realize that there is a battle going on inside of you, then that's a good sign. If you don't battle against yourself and you just sin whenever you want to and you don't feel bad about it, that's a red flag that maybe you are fighting for the other team all the time.

When Jesus left His disciples, He promised to send the Holy Spirit to live inside of us as believers. And part of that Holy Spirit's job is to convict us of sin. When a true believer does something that displeases God, it should pain us and make us immediately go to God to ask for forgiveness. So, if you have that battle waging inside of you then that's good news because that's what happens to believers. You should expect that.

So, we know that our struggle is against Satan and his demons. We also battle against ourselves. But there is a third front that we battle against and that front is the world. We battle against the things of this world. **James 4:4** says, *"don't you know that friendship with the world means enmity against God? Therefore, anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God."* **1 John 2:15** says, *"Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in them."*

But here's the catch. We live in the world. We were born in the world. We will die in the world. And until then, we will live in and surrounded by the world. It's like God has dropped us off behind enemy lines. The verse that comes right after the one I just read in **1 John 2** says, *"For everything in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—comes not from the Father but from the world."* The lust of the flesh, lust of the eyes and the pride of life. That's what the whole world is.

The world is the TV commercial that comes on with Matthew McConaughey driving a Lincoln looking cool and you think, *"I could look cool too if I drove a Lincoln."* The world is your neighbor skipping church and going to the lake and coming home Sunday evening laughing about all the fun he had. The world is your co-worker telling you to just get a divorce since your husband doesn't appreciate you like he should. The world is a spirit of discontentment.

The difficult thing about all of that is that driving a Lincoln isn't a sin. Going to the lake is not a sin. And, yes, your husband should appreciate you. The sin is when you say, *"I need"*, *"I want"*, *"I deserve"* when the Bible says to put others first and to be holy and to imitate

Jesus. But the world will distract you from that and Satan never had to lift a finger. He just sits back and laughs.

So, this struggle is three pronged. We battle against Satan and his forces. We battle against our own flesh, the old person we used to be that keeps wanting to live again. And we battle the world. So, what are we going to do to make it out of this battle with our blessings, peace and testimony intact? Well, I told you earlier that Paul knew the secret and the secret is in **verse 10**. *“Be strong in the Lord and in His mighty power.”*

But what does that mean? First, it’s important to understand what “be strong in the Lord” does not mean. In the original Greek language, the term is a passive voice verb meaning “to be rendered (more) capable for a task.” To be strong in the Lord does not involve building up your own strength. Believers cannot strengthen themselves in the Lord; rather, they must **be empowered** or **be strengthened**, as the Greek voice indicates.

(GotQuestions.org)

In other words, you can’t even do that on your own. But that’s the beauty of it. God wants to strengthen you and He will strengthen you. You just have to put yourself in position to be strengthened. And what position is that, you ask? That position is found as close to Jesus as possible. It is found curled up in His lap with your ear to His mouth or maybe just standing with your nose between His shoulder blades, just so close to Him that when He speaks or He moves that you know and are protected. His strength is your strength. You will never be strong enough on your own. You have to have His power and that power is found only when you are what Jesus called “abiding” in Him.

In **John 15**, Jesus said, *“If you abide in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. <sup>6</sup> If you do not abide in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers.”* And that is the real difference between a believer and one who says he is a believer. The true believer abides. The true believer is the one who has a Bible study and prayer time every day, even when the world says, *“Hey, look! Gunsmoke is on!”*

The true believer is one who is at church every time it is possible even when the world and Satan and the flesh are saying, *“You’ve worked hard this week. Maybe next week.”*

The true believer is the one who is a prayer warrior spending time talking with God, not just giving Him your wish list but actually spending time talking about what He wants to talk about and then listening to His answer.

The true believer knows that there's nothing wrong with watching a little TV or surfing some internet but we also know that's the step we take before we start to battle the world and that spirit of discontentment.

When you find yourself struggling in this life and you realize you are battling Satan or the flesh or the world, or maybe all three, the only secret is to abide in Him and allow Him to give you the strength you need to get out of it alive. Stop trying to be strong enough. That's ridiculous. You can't be strong enough. You weren't intended to be strong enough. You were intended to rely on God. Are you doing that?

\*music\*

Are you a true believer? Maybe today you realize that just because you were raised in church or your daddy was a Sunday School teacher that you aren't positive that you are a true believer. Maybe you even got baptized and you go to church all the time but you have never truly asked Jesus to be your Lord and Savior. Do that today as we bow our heads and close our eyes. All you have to do is truly believe that Jesus died on the cross to pay the price the Father said was due for your sins. And then allow His Spirit to come into your life and change you from the inside out. Allow God to forgive you of all your many sins. Do it right now as the music plays.