

How to Fight Sin

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Grab your Bibles and go to Ephesians 6. Ephesians 6 as Paul is circling the field on closing this epistle to the church at Ephesus and he gives them an exhortation on how to fight sin. How to fight sin. Now if you're looking for a little niche or a little formula that kind of cures everything, I don't have that because the Bible doesn't have that, and as I meditated on this and studied on it afresh, I realized anew how important doctrine is. If you don't understand true doctrine, you're not going to grasp much of what he's saying.

Now as we go through these verses, let me say this, a lot of different scholars go a lot of different directions, not that they're violating the text, it's just one of those texts that gives you general concepts and there are many dimensions to these concepts. So I'll pull out of it what I think is important but it's not one of those texts where you can just with hard-core definition say, "This is precisely what the apostle is saying here." But the general truth and how we gain strength and are enabled by these truths to fight sin comes out very clearly.

Verse 10 of Ephesians 6,

10 Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might. 11 Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil. 12 For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places. 13 Therefore, take up the full armor of God, so that you will be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm. 14 Stand firm therefore, having girded your loins with truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, 15 and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; 16 in addition to all, taking up the shield of faith with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. 17 And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. 18 With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints,

How to fight sin. Let's remind ourselves this evening as we look at this that sin dishonors God and in a very personal way. Sin violates God's law. Sin is an attack upon Christ and upon his kingdom. Sin aligns us, doesn't make us but aligns us with God's enemies. Sin hardens our hearts. One man said his mother wrote in his Bible when he was a little boy, "This book will keep you from sin or sin will keep you from this book," and that is very true. We're never the same after we've sinned. Something happens. There's a hardening that happens. You'll either be killing sin or it's going to be killing you. Sin causes another brother to stumble. Sin leads to death, now certainly physical death is the result of sin in the world but there are many ways we begin to die if we walk in habitual sin. We die emotionally. We die to a degree spiritually. We begin to die in our relationships with people. We begin to die in our relationship to God, not that there can be an ultimate separation but those things become less than what they ought to be. It's damaging. It's corrupting. Then, of course, the culminating and highest issue is that sin robs God of his glory.

Now as we look at this, I want to bring out two major thoughts and there's a lot of components under it. As a matter of fact, to be honest, you get a little lost in all the symbolism and terminology that Paul uses here. Again, I trust that the main thrust of the truths that are so helpful for us will come out very clear as we go through here. I., I'm going to say that we are to relinquish all hope in our own strength and rest wholly on God's strength. Now that's where you start. You start fighting sin by telling God you can't fight sin. Are you with me? You overcome sin by confessing to God you have no capacity to overcome sin, and when we do sin, it gives us a chance to go look toward heaven and say, "God, isn't that just like me? It shows you I don't have what it takes. I relinquish all confidence in myself to conquer any sin in my life and I want to rest fully in your strength."

In verse 10 he uses that word "finally." Well, he's getting to the end of his letter and what Paul is saying here on top of all the other truths and principles I've given you, make sure this pattern is in your lives. Make sure you're walking out these truths. We have enemies to fight against, he's telling us. We have a Captain to fight for. We have a banner to fight under. And we have rules of engagement to govern our fight. So when he gets to verse 10, he says, "Now finally," he's saying, "you've done some other things but now let's put this on and let's walk in these truths. This part yet remains and this is a part of your duty as a soldier of Jesus Christ."

Now he's going to point out in this first part here that we are warring against an enemy that's not flesh and bones, and I think that's one of the reasons why it's real hard to get real definite about what Paul is saying is because he's dealing with truths and realities that are beyond comprehension. Can you comprehend the spiritual realm, can you comprehend the satanic world? No, we generally know, we know enough truth that God needs us to know, but there are mysteries we can't comprehend. But nevertheless, we are to be very aware as we go into this battle against sin that you're dealing with an enemy that is super-human. You're not dealing with an ordinary foe. We have a strong, wide awake, unrelenting, ever-present enemy. That's what he's saying to us here.

Look at how he words it there in verse 11, "Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places." So he says you'd better put your confidence in the Lord and not in yourself. Can I just challenge you there? Do you walk in that confession? "Lord, it's your strength, not mine. Lord, I am no match for these trials, I'm no match for these temptations, I'm no match for these enemies. I throw myself in reliance on you. You must give me the victory."

Now this is one of those truths that has, it's sort of like man's responsible to believe on Christ but God's fully sovereign in drawing him and convicting him and converting him. You can't throw away the human responsibility where you must choose, but at the same time, you hold deeply to the fact that you are powerless and it is God's power. He says in verse 10, "be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might." Literally it means find your strength in the Lord. Paul, in effect, is calling us to war because we are in this relentless struggle against evil. You know, when God saves you, he gives you the capacity to begin warring against evil and against the enemies of God. You didn't have that capacity before because you were in legion, you were of the family of darkness and of the evil one, but now you have the capacity to begin fighting for another side, and that is the right side, and by the way, it's the winning side. So we have many battles to fight on our way to heaven and we need a great deal of courage and encouragement.

So we must be strong in suffering, strong in service, and strong in our fighting. I think sometimes and if I might confess it, sometimes we just get in the doldrums and we get lackadaisical and we forget that there is a warring mentality to Christianity. Every morning when you wake up, you go to war. God owns you. You belong to him. You can't lose that. You're always his child and the enemies of the family and the enemies of your Lord are ever-present and ever-working against you.

Put on, he says in verse 11, put on the full armor of God. This is full armor in this day would include a shield, a sword, a lance, a spear, a helmet and a breastplate. It's interesting that Paul, I think he knew the full armor of a Roman soldier pretty well because he was chained to one a lot of the time, and so he takes that imagery and he gives it to us, but here it's not the Roman soldier's armor, he says put on the full armor of God. What is he saying? This is God's strength. This is God's fight. This is God's power you must rely upon. God both bestows and prepares this armor for us. Our armor will not stand in the time of testing. Our armor will not make it through the time of trial. We're to pray for the grace to bring and to put in place and act and exercise in the full armor as the occasion arises.

He says to put on that full armor, continuing in verse 11, "so that you will be able to stand firm." You know, somebody said wobbly Christians are easy prey for the devil. There is a sense in which we need to not get into some charismatic extremes but we need to claim some things that we have in Jesus Christ and stand on them and be firm about them. The Bible says we need to stand firm against what? "The schemes of the devil." It's the idea of method. He has so many different methods. His methods and schemes are to destroy us

and to ruin our witness for Christ. This enemy we fight against, he is crafty. He knows our weak spots. He knows the cracks in our armor and we need to stand firm and hold out, that means to overcome, to endure, to work through those things. He has so many assaults, so many mechanisms and so many snares he throws our way.

Now he continues on and he just keeps amplifying this thing. He says, "For our struggle is not against flesh and blood." The word "struggle" here is the idea of wrestling. You get up in the morning and you start the war, you start the wrestling. That's why a quiet time, seeking the Lord in the morning is so very important to refresh your mind and cleanse your heart and renew your vigor to wrestle against that one who wants to pull you back and cause you to stumble.

The combat that we are involved in is not against a mere human enemy, it's not even against our own corrupt nature, though we do fight the old man, that's for sure. He says it's against "the spiritual forces of wickedness in heavenly places." What all does that mean? I don't know. I just know it means we have a formidable enemy. He wants to bring us down.

Verse 12 again, "For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places." These forces are subtle, they're full of wiles and they're full of strategies. He has a thousand different ways of beguiling unstable souls. He's the master of disguise. He's the wolf in sheep's clothing. The Bible calls him a serpent because he's crafty. The Bible calls him an old serpent because he's had a long time to study human nature and knows what he needs to do to try to undermine us.

They're powerful. He uses the plural words, there are powers and rulers. It means they have a worldwide rule. There's nowhere to get away from them, at least not down here. They're numerous and they are vigorous. They're spiritual forces. It means they assault us in unseen ways. There's no announcement, there's no prescription out there where we can say, "Well, this is what he's doing." We can't see. He comes at us in hidden ways and he knows how to deal with that hidden part of the heart. He knows how to stir our pride. He knows how to stir up envy. He knows how to incite us to malice and on and on and on we could go. He wants to prevent us from going to heaven. Now he can't if you're God's child but the Bible does say that Satan snatches away the word so that people are not able to believe. He wants to deprive us of heavenly blessings, that peace that we can walk with with God in this earth. He wants to obstruct our communion with God. Then the Bible says there are spiritual forces of wickedness. He is wicked, which means he's destructive. Darkness is his abode and their abode. It's the darkness of sin and falsehood that he peddles. So coming out of the gate, Paul has just thrown out there to us, "You're going to have to put on the armor of God. You're going to have to be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. You can't handle this. You've got to relinquish all confidence in yourself and rest in God's strength to help you walk in the victory."

Now I want you to rid from your mind some concept that, "I'm gonna put this to practice and in three weeks and two days I'll sin no more." I wish that were true but as a child of

God, there is such a thing as progressive sanctification. You ought to be able to see that God is working with me and God has given me victories. I don't know how your experience is exactly but I can tell you how my experience is. If God gives me the ability to get a handle on an area or two, first of all, I've got to be careful that I don't get proud about that, and that I don't think I did something to do that. That's defeat in victory. You just traded one sin for the other. But about the time, sometimes you just get too old to sin in some ways, and then, lo and behold, you'll be reading the Scriptures or listening to a brother preach and new things are exposed in your heart and mind and in your thinking and you're convicted that, "I never thought about that as sin. I didn't see that stronghold. That was envy or that was jealousy or that was pride." Then you have whole new areas to battle. It's just a continuum of progressive sanctification until we get to heaven, and no wonder the Apostle Paul said, "Who will deliver me from the body of this death? I get one victory and I find more places to fight." But there's a sense, folks, in which it's a joyous fight and it's a victorious fight even though we struggle and fail often in the fight because we can't lose since Jesus is our Captain. So a strong clear relinquishing of any confidence in our strength and a full resting in his strength.

Now the second thought, a strong predetermination to kill sin. So everything he's going to tell us now is things he wants you to predetermine. He wants you to commit to do these things as your life goes on. We begin in verse 13 where he says to "take up," literally to pick up, "the full armor of God." You must pick it up and you must put it on, then he says, "that you will be able to resist," to stand against, then he goes on with that phrase, "and having done everything, to stand firm." There is just something, child of God, there is just something to getting up in the morning, getting on your knees, opening your Bible and get with the Lord and saying, "I'm not sinning like that today. I'm not going there. I'm not thinking those thoughts. I'm not speaking those words. That envy, that whatever it is, I'm not going there today. That guy at work, that relative that causes me, or rather I allow them to cause me to get in this disposition and get in this sinful way, I determine today not in Jeff's strength, not in my strength but in the strength of the Lord I'm not going there today." There's something to that and this text brings out that aspect of a predetermination. Can I stir you tonight to get up in the morning, go to bed tonight with a new predetermination to walk in victory in some of these areas? "I'm just not going to go there. I'm not going to do it." So he has this idea of resisting and do everything to stand. We must not yield to Satan. We cannot distrust our leader, we cannot distrust our cause, and we cannot distrust our armor. We're on the right team. It is right to fight sin. It is right to follow the Lord. It is right to honor the Scriptures. A predetermination.

I'm reminded of Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane when he was praying and there was that temptation of the evil one and he bowed before the Lord and said, "Not My will but Thy will be done. I'm determined." We can't enter the mind or the emotions of the Lord but we do know he had emotions like men though without sin, and in the torment and in the struggle, he had a predetermination. When Satan tempted him in the wilderness, he already had the word of God in his heart and he was predetermined that when that temptation comes, I'm going to fight it with the truth of the word of God.

Then he says put on the full armor of God and then he begins with what I call the belt of genuineness or the belt of truth. Look at it there in verse 14, "Stand firm therefore, having girded your loins with truth," or it's the idea of a wrap around the waist, a belt-type item of clothing, and that idea of truth has the concept of genuineness, or perhaps a good conscience. In my mind, that means looking back. You're never going to win victory today if you haven't cleared up the sins of yesterday. Did you hear that? You're never going to walk in victory today if you haven't resolved righteously the sins of yesterday. Make sure you're the genuine article.

In this day, you've heard the illustration about how they would take a vase and the word "sincerity" in the original language comes from this picture, and that is they would take a vase and sometimes a dishonest man if he was selling that vase, it might have a crack in it and he would put wax on it and then paint it and you didn't know it had the crack. So "sincerity" means "without wax." It's true through and through. It's the genuine thing. In other words, my heart is true. My heart is clear before the Lord.

Now folks, you can't even remember how much you sinned, you just have to go before the Lord and say, "Lord, search me thoroughly and I want to know that whatever I understand is sin, I've yielded that to You and I've confessed that to You as sin. I want to go forward. I want to walk forth with the belt of righteousness or the belt of truth and a good conscience." God's truth, by the way, is the fundamental piece of our armor. It joins all the other pieces together. Everything depends on the truth. Now what I mean is we let the truth of God dictate to us about our hearts and about our genuineness. Everything depends on that and we need to be faithful repenters when this is missing.

Well, not only would I call the belt of genuineness, also in verse 14, "the breastplate of righteousness." I agree with the scholars who say this has more the idea of righteous living. I think it has both. It's, again, one of those places where we just can't pin it down but he says in the last part of verse 14, "having put on the breastplate of righteousness." Now a breastplate in a warrior's armor was that piece that secured their vitals. It protected the vital organs. This is the idea of a full commitment, again this predetermination comes out, this full commitment that, "Today I'm going to do all that is right in all circumstances," and that shelters me, that guards me from the attacks of the evil one because once you allow yourself a justification, when you allow yourself an exception this difficult thing or that difficult thing, "Well, I can go ahead and act this way. I can feel this way because my circumstance is difficult," well, that's not walking in righteousness, and what you do is you open yourself up to a domino effect of sin and temptations in your life. You can't do that. That's not putting on the breastplate of right living. We want to do the right things according to truth toward God and the right things according to truth with our fellow man and there needs to be a predetermination that that's the way we're going to live.

Now he goes to verse 15 and he has the boots or the shoes or the boots of Gospel assurance. The boots of Gospel assurance. He says there in verse 15, "and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace." Now in this day, these were metal shoes, actually, that the warriors would wear, typically brass shoes, and this brass or

armor on their feet protected their feet from all kinds of traps and snares and sharp sticks the enemies would put in the ground. So they would have an understanding of what this was about. In other words, if you put on those shoes, you're prepared for battle. Again, a predetermination. A prepared and resolved frame of heart and that's what the Gospel produces.

When you properly understand the Gospel, and I thought about our series on the 8 strand cable of sovereign grace as we just delved through the various aspects and the beautiful and wondrous truths and the wisdom of God in our salvation, all that's the Gospel and the more you grasp the Gospel, the more you have peace and the more you have security and the more you have assurance, and that's very vital in making sure that you have what you need to overcome the temptations that are going to come and get you that day. You just fall back on the glories of sovereign grace. "I'm His. I can't be lost. I'm secure. There is a peace, the Gospel of peace is with me." So we have to get out of this mindset and I think you certainly are, this mindset that the Gospel can be explained in three minutes and it's one a 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 year old boy or girl understands and they pray and receive Jesus Christ and that's really the Gospel, now the rest of the time we don't really need the Gospel. Absolutely not. You need a thorough, strong preaching of the glorious endless truths of this great Gospel until the day you die because it continues to meld your heart, it continues to build humility, it continues to build a joying in Christ, it continues to give you a deeper peace which helps prepare you for the battles out there in front of you. I'm telling you, man's not going to have any victory until he has peace by embracing the wonders of the Gospel and your heart should be, "Pastor, give me more it every week. Go back into the storehouse of the unsearchable riches of Christ, go back into the storehouse of the unsearchable riches of Christ and bring out to us more of the glories of the Gospel." And the more we hear it, the more we contemplate on it, the more we look unto Jesus.

Look and live, the Bible says. That peace helps you greatly. You can't go to the foot of the cross – now listen to me – you can't go and I'm not talking about the foot of the cross and think, "Oh, I feel bad that my sin put You there." That's not what you go to the foot of the cross for, you go to the foot of the cross and say, "O, praise God that You finished it for me. Praise God that You did this for me. Praise God that You sealed the covenant between You and the Father for us, the children. Praise God for the Gospel." Do you see how doctrine is in everything? Your victory over the petty sins, and there are not really any petty sins, let's say the everyday sins most of us struggle with, your victory there is greatly dependent upon your resting and grasping and joying in the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

It's the Gospel of peace. Because of this Gospel and I like to view it as a ballast in a ship, when you grasp the Gospel, there is what I call a Gospel humility in your soul. All of a sudden you're just not so important. All of a sudden you're just not so smart. All of a sudden you're not much of anything before Christ and that abiding Gospel humility kind of serves like the ballast in a ship that keeps you steady and keeps you going through the rough waters of temptation and the blast and the work of the evil one against you. You know, I found that when I'm at peace, I'm not quick to react and I'm not quick to retaliate

when something doesn't go my way or when somebody doesn't do me right, because I've been with Jesus at the cross this morning in my quiet time and that Gospel peace has humbled me afresh and I can just let Satan come by with that, "Boy, you ought to be jealous. You ought to be envious. Boy, you ought to be smart back to them." And I'll say, "No, I've got peace. I ought to be in hell and the Gospel saved me." It's a mighty weapon.

Well, let's go to the next one, verse 16, the shield of temptation-quenching faith. Verse 16, "in addition to all, taking up the shield of faith with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one." The shield of a warrior in this day was usually two layers of wood and then there were extra layers of linen and leather and they literally were designed that when a flaming missile or a flaming arrow hit them, they would eventually quench that arrow and put it out. Often they had iron on them, at least in parts of them.

I think really the phrase here in verse 16 means in addition to all means this one touches all of them, and really there's such an overlapping and interweaving here. Try not to take this into these little distinct parts. It's really not. It's the whole truth of what we have in Christ and what we have as his children that we're talking about. We're taking it apart a little bit but they all overlap, they dovetail together. But he says overall, I think it means this quenching shield of faith touches all of them and is essential to all of them. You could say it's more important than all of them because faith is all-important during temptation. When the temptation comes, you have to ask yourself is sinning this sin better for me than trusting what God wants me to do. Faith says trusting what God wants you to do is better. Faith says trust in the Lord here. That's how it quenches those fiery darts.

We have to be fully persuaded of all of God's promises and all of God's goodness toward us. When God gives us his law, and by the way, as Christians we're not under law but we have laws to help us. When God gives us his law, when his law says, "Thou shalt not," he's actually saying, "Don't hurt yourself." That's what faith tells us. When he gives us his law that says, "Thou shalt not do this," he's saying, "Don't hurt yourself." When he gives us his law and says, "You should do this," he's saying, "Help yourself. Be blessed." His goodness. Faith tells us – now listen to me – faith tells us that no matter what my five senses say, God is good and he wants what's best for me.

So that all-important temptation-quenching faith, it just quenches it out. Now these are difficult temptations that come our way, they're called flaming arrows which means they're swift; it means you can't discern their path, you don't know exactly where they're coming from. They can make deep wounds in our souls. They often were poisonous darts. They're like fiery serpents when they hit us. They're violent temptations and they afflict our souls deeply but faith is the shield that quenches these fiery arrows and prevents them from hurting us.

Now he goes a step further, look at verse 17 and he says the helmet of firm salvation. That's the way I amplify it, he says in verse 17, "take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God." The helmet of salvation means in salvation you know you're saved from the penalty of sin, you are being saved from the

power of sin, but ultimately you're going to be saved from the presence of sin and that's our hope and I don't think our minds are there very often. Our hope, our future hope, that is a great part of our armor to overcome the temptation of this present temporal world because we look at these things and think, "That's just temporal and I have something that's glorious and eternal. My salvation is firm." And this helps my mind, it helps my thinking. The mind is where thinking occurs, at least it ought to be. Somebody said, "Think, there's so little competition." There are a lot of things going on in the world today that I don't think people think at all but that's supposed to be where your thinking is and his point is if you're not thinking on the sure, glorious, future hope you have in Jesus Christ, on your eternal glorification that's coming, you're going to be vulnerable to everything this temporal world throws at you. Do you understand this doctrine? You need that helmet of salvation, that protection, that when you grasp, "I have a future hope in Jesus Christ," that protects my mind from entertaining or receiving the temptations that Satan might throw at me in this temporal world.

The helmet is the hope of salvation, a hope that is well-founded and a hope that is well-built and a hope that is preserved for us in heaven. This hope purifies the soul, the Bible says, and it keeps us from being defiled by Satan. It comforts the soul. It keeps us from being troubled because when Satan says, "No, you ought to do this, you ought to go for that, you ought to grasp this and you ought to obtain that," we know that's wrong and this hope says, "No, we know that's not our real end. Our pleasures are in another world and in another place and we can trust our good God."

Satan tempts us to despair but hope keeps us trusting the Lord. Think about all the times and, you know, studying the life of Paul and Timothy, I just thought a lot about the things they endured and how many times they were probably tempted to change their doctrine a little bit, change their Gospel a little bit so that maybe every city they went into, that people wouldn't try to beat them to death. But they didn't. Do you know why? They kept looking at what's coming. The hope, that's the helmet of salvation. Salvation says we are saved now from the penalty of sin, we're being saved from the power of sin, and one day we're saved from the presence of sin. Our glorification is coming.

Verse 17, then he says you have the word of God, the sword of the Spirit. This is the only offensive weapon in the whole armor, "And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit," verse 17, "which is the word of God." In other words, you take this two-edged sword of the Spirit which is the word, and you drag all that sin from its hiding places and drag it out and slay it before the Lord. That means take what the word says about that attitude, take what the word says about that motive, take what the word says about that disposition or that behavior, lay it out there and let the word cut it to pieces. Let the word reign as truth about that situation, that motive, that behavior, that disposition, whatever it might be. The sword of the Spirit. Take the word of God to it.

The Spirit renders the word effectuous and very powerful in our hearts. Remember, it's sharper than a two-edged sword. There is a dimension to that that for the lost man, the word cuts unto condemnation. For the saved man, the word cuts a different way unto conversion. Now we are converted but we're also being converted. We're being converted

to God-fearers and God-followers and Christ's disciples and the word keep sharpening us in that direction. One of the keys here is memorization and meditation on Scripture. You've got to have the word of God hidden in your heart. The young man said in the Proverbs, "I have hidden thy word in my heart that I might not sin against thee." Take it with you. It's a two-edged sword to help you.

I have found in my life – are you listening – when a temptation comes against me, if I quote the word of God to myself, I can't continue in the temptation. I've never found the exception to that. I've never found a time when I can quote the word of God to myself and continue walking on. I don't literally mean always it's in an outward sense, sometimes it is, but I can't continue on in that thought or whatever it is in that temptation. It is a powerful offensive weapon. And of course, sound preaching. Good Bible study. These are things that strengthen us in this battle.

Now for a conclusion, I come to verse 18. He concludes here with this phrase, "With all," which tells me this connects to the previous exhortations, "With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints." I call this the buckle of persistent prayer. The buckle of persistent prayer. This is the buckle that unleashes the power of all the graces.

A pattern of mine and I could certainly know that I could learn from many of you, but a pattern of mine when a difficult situation pops up and I don't know how I'm going to respond or I don't trust me, I say, "Lord, give me wisdom." I immediately go into prayer, "God, give me wisdom. Help me to see beyond me." Wisdom is to see things from God's perspective. "Help me to see this the way You see it, to understand the wiles of the evil one here, to understand what's really going on here. Give me wisdom to see this. Lord, why am I failing in this area so often? Lord, give me wisdom to understand it." Now, you know, we're not into psychology around here because we have the truth of the word of God but there is something to God giving you wisdom to know why certain things are really tough for you and they may not be tough for others. This certain area is just a super-difficult thing for you to get the victory over and this area over here is just as easy as it can be. "God, give me wisdom."

The prayer of seeking God for wisdom is a great weapon to overcome sin in our lives. We must join prayer with all these other graces, imploring God for help and imploring God for assistance, and we are to pray always, emphasize it as a disposition of prayer. Now notice the accumulation of the terms that he uses here. Look at it there again in verse 19, he says, "all prayer and petition," verse 18, "all prayer and petition," that means go to God with every kind of prayer. Do you go to God with a lot of thanksgiving? Just throw yourself. Look, don't wait until you feel like thanking God, he's worthy of thanksgiving whether you feel like it or not. Throw yourself into thanksgiving. Do you know what? I hate to say this to you but I get down sometimes, I get discouraged sometimes and one of the best things I can do is throw myself into all the things I've got to be thankful for, thanking the Lord, praising the Lord, worshiping the Lord, petitioning the Lord, making request of the Lord, confessing sin to the Lord.

All of this prayer, so he says all prayers and petitions, that's all type of prayers, then he says, "pray at all times," that's walking in prayer, that's what Paul calls praying without ceasing, and then "all perseverance," he says, which has the idea of working at it. How hard do you work at prayer? That's one of the great ways to overcome sin in your life, working at prayer.

I remember I've told this to you two or three times but it was one of those times when I read something that stuck with me because there's an important truth there and I never got over it. I think it was a little one page article in a Christian magazine on depression and the story went on that Christians, generally speaking, who are struggling with depression, and by the way, if you are, I have sympathy for you and I can empathize to some degree with you. I understand the battle there. But in the article, the man goes on to develop how the Lord promises to give us peace, to give us joy in all these things, and he said the typical Christian will pray for five minutes and say, "Well, it didn't work. I didn't get the victory. I didn't come through this. I still feel full of doubts and insecurities and anxieties and I'm downcast." Then the article, this author said, "Have you ever prayed all day? Well, why not? Why would you take antidepressants for 16 years and not ever try praying all day, just one day?" I'm not saying there's never a place for that. I understand the battle there. I would hope that you always strive to seek the Lord and maybe work with your doctors to not have to have it and I think the doctors would agree with that, by the way, but have you ever worked at it? Have you ever fought in prayer? Have you ever just striven in prayer? Have you ever just locked yourself in a room and opened the Bible and said, "This stuff's killing me. This stuff's driving me crazy. God, I'm going to cry out to You and I'm going to weep before You and I'm going to read Your word and I'm going to meditate on Your word and I'm going to pray until I get better." I guarantee you shut yourself up somewhere and you get on your face desperate before God and see if he doesn't change some things in your heart and you might get some victories you didn't know where there.

Working at prayer. Have you ever worked at prayer. That's what fasting is all about, it's when something is in your life and it drives you to a place where you've got to seek God. Now we're to continually be in that mode. I understand you can't go in a cave somewhere and forget your family and lock yourself up, but you might can go a day somewhere and seek the Lord. These things are powerful in helping us kill sin in our lives.

Sometimes somebody, some of these Pharisees, I've known some guys in ministry and they are prone to a Pharisaical spirit, and what they would do, they'd get six or eight things and they'd feel like we don't do these six or eight things and that shows that we're really spiritual and other guys struggle with those six or eight things so they're not spiritual. They'll get on those aspects of wrestling with things and they'll say, "Do you think a Christian can do this?" Folks, a Christian can do about anything but here's my response usually when they say, "Well, can a Christian do that?" I'll say, "What I want to know is he in the fight? I want to know is she in the fight? Is she determined to strive again in the full armor of God and walk in the truth of her salvation and put on this armor and battle it out with God or did they just say, 'It's just the way I am'?" No, we're prone to that but we can't let ourselves get to that place.

So daily persistently bathed in prayer, we walk in God's armor of the belt of sincerity or a clear conscience, the breastplate of righteous living, the boots of Gospel peace, security and assurance, the shield of temptation-quenching faith, the helmet of a firm salvation, that is, a firm hope that this is not our life, this temporal world and all its temptations, that's not what's best for us, the sword of the Spirit, the two-edged sword of the word of God, and the buckle of persistent prayer. That's the way you fight sin and you learn to win according to the Apostle Paul and the word of God.