

Stand Firm and Keep Alert!

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Please open with me in your Bibles to Ephesians 6 if you're not already there. Our text this morning is Ephesians 6. Paul is dealing with the subject matter of spiritual warfare. Brothers and sisters, we are engaged in a spiritual battle and we are, although we don't see it with our eyes, we apprehended by faith, we are on a spiritual battlefield and I have some bad news for you, most of my message this morning is good news but the bad news is that we are surrounded by our strong spiritual enemies. We are surrounded by spiritual enemies that are too strong for us, too numerous for us, and far too experienced for us if we were to rely on our own strength. The good news is that we don't rely on our own strength. The good news is that the Lord Jesus Christ is with us in this spiritual battle and that we are to be strong in the power of his might.

We must be equipped, brothers, as we fight this spiritual warfare. We must be equipped with knowledge. We need to know something about this battle and about this battlefield and about this spiritual warfare that we fight. There are three things specifically that we must know as we fight this battle and the first is we must know the source of our strength, which is the Lord Jesus Christ himself, our King and our Captain and our Chief. He is the source of our strength. It is his might that we believe in and trust in. He is the source of our courage. He is the one who quiets our fears. He is the source of our strength. This is the first thing we have to know. The second thing that we have to know is something about the nature of our enemy. And the third thing that we have to know this morning is the equipment of our warfare. We must know how to use it and we must know the means that Christ has made available to us for its effective use. But above all this morning, brothers and sisters, we must stand firm and we must hold the line. In fact, that's the message that our Savior has for us this morning, is to stand firm and to hold the line in the face of our strong spiritual enemies, in the face of our persecutors who are doing the beck and the call of our strong spiritual enemies.

We are to stand firm, we are to hold the line, and so the title of the sermon this morning is "Stand Firm and Keep Alert!" Keep alert. Be aware who is the source of our strength so that we might have confidence. Keep alert and be aware know the nature of our enemies so that we might fight wisely and not be ignorant of his schemes, and to know the means of our warfare so that we might fight effectively. And above all else, hold the line. Stand firm.

Let me read the passage, Ephesians 6:10 through 20. It reads like this,

10 Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. 11 Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. 12 For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil 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 firm. 14 Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, 15 and, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace. 16 In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one; 17 and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, 18 praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints, 19 and also for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel, 20 for which I am an ambassador in chains, that I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak.

Let us briefly go to the Lord in prayer.

Our great God and our Father, we bow before you this morning requesting your help, asking for your strength, asking, dear Father, that you would pour out your Holy Spirit, that you would fill my mouth with the words of Christ, that you would help me to speak boldly and clearly to your people which is how I ought to speak to them, and that your people might be built up and strengthened and edified in the word of the Lord Jesus Christ so that we might stand firm and so that we might keep alert in this evil day. We pray these things in Christ's name. Amen.

Well, let me talk a little bit about the context that we find ourselves in here in Ephesians 6:10. The whole book of Ephesians is dealing with the doctrine of our union with the Lord Jesus Christ. We have been called to be united to Christ by faith. Brothers and sisters, we have been called in the Gospel to be members of the Lord Jesus Christ. We have been called to be citizens in his kingdom, stones in his temple. We belong to the Lord Jesus Christ and he belongs to us which means that we also belong to one another. We are each other's in the Lord and we are the Lord's and Paul is dealing with this idea in the book of Ephesians, our unity, our oneness. This is a big point that I want you to get hold of this morning and to remember, as that we are one congregation, we are one people, we are one kingdom, and we serve one Lord and one King, and we are united.

Paul is dealing with this in the book of Ephesians and he begins to deal with some of the implications of what it means to be a member of Christ, a member of his body, what it means for us to be members of each other in Christ the Lord, and he begins in chapter 5 to begin to address certain groups in the congregation, in this body of Christ, and he

addresses husbands and he addresses wives, and he addresses parents and children, and employers and employees, or masters and slaves as they were called in those days. But here in our verse, chapter 6, verse 10, Paul begins to focus his attention back to the whole congregation. Not to individual groups in the congregation but to the whole unit, to the whole body, to the whole family, in order to encourage them to remember that part of what it means to be united to Christ is that we are in a spiritual warfare.

You see, there are a lot of blessings that we enjoy because we are united to Christ and the book of Ephesians is filled with those blessings. You remember how Paul opens up the book of Ephesians, perhaps you have the verse memorized, you are familiar with it, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places," then what does he say? "In Christ Jesus," that is, by virtue of our union with him by faith. And there are a host of blessings that are ours because we are united to Christ. All that is Christ's is ours and all that is ours is his, and he has taken all of our weaknesses and overcome them, and he has earned all of these blessings and he has poured them out upon us because we are united to him, and his righteousness is now our righteousness; his kingdom is now our kingdom; his glory, his joy, is our glory and our joy; his inheritance is our inheritance. And we are blessed. His Father is our Father.

We are united to Christ but there is a serious, sobering element to this union with Christ that we can't forget and that Paul is reminding us of here in this context, in this text, which is that whoever is at war with Christ is now at war with us because we are united to Christ. That's a sobering thing to think about. That's a very serious thing to think about but it's what we must put our attention on this morning. Christ's enemies are now directing their attention toward us. Because we are united to Christ, we now have targets on our back and all the host of hell is arrayed against us.

Well, these are the things that we want to think about and draw out, and so what Paul does here in chapter 6, verses 10 through 20, is he reminds the congregation, "We are one congregation. We are one unit. We are one family and we spent together as one with Christ and in Christ, therefore, we must in this battle that we're in, in this spiritual warfare, stand together, stand firm, hold the line and keep alert and persevere. Be courageous," is what Paul is exhorting us to this morning. So there are three things that are going to help us to stand firm and keep alert and the first that we want to consider is that our might and our strength is not our own. We don't stand in this spiritual warfare, in this spiritual battle, in our own power or in our own strength but in the strength of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Look at verse 10 with me really quickly. Verse 10, "Finally," Paul says, again addressing the whole congregation, all who are in Christ, "be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might." We must know that Jesus Christ is powerful, we must know that he is mighty and we must know that he is strong if we are going to stand firm in this spiritual battle. This word that Paul uses here, "be strong in the Lord," is the Greek word *kyrios* and it refers, of course, to our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. That word "Lord" means king; it means ruler; it means governor, master captain, commander in chief. Christ is our

leader. He is our King. He is our General. He is our Captain. But most of all what that word "Lord" means is that Jesus Christ is God. He is the Lord Almighty and we must know if we are going to understand something about the might that we are strong in, the might which is the source of our might, we must know that the Lord Jesus Christ is God. He is God in the flesh. He is the second person of the Trinity; the Son of God; the only begotten of the Father; begotten not made, not created. All that the Father has, the Son has. All that the Father is, our Lord is, and all of his power and all of his might and all of his strength. All that honor the Son, honor the Father also. And it is the Father's will that the Son be glorified so that the Father might be worshiped, glorified and honored through the Son.

This is who our Lord is. He is the only begotten of the Father. He is equal with the Father. He is equal with the Father in power. He is equal with the Father in glory. He is equal with the Father in authority. Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, brothers and sisters, is equal with the Father in his right to be worshiped, to be loved, to be adored, to be obeyed and to be trusted in. He is worthy of our faith. He is Lord, that is, he is Yahweh, the old covenant name for God. He is the great "I Am." He is, in other words, the non-composite, eternal, immutable first cause of all things. Creator of heaven and earth. He is the sustainer of heaven and earth, the upholder of all things.

Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ is the one who gives life and breath to everything. He gives and he takes away, blessed be the name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. According to his will, according to his authority, according to his power, he gives breath, and according to his will, at his pleasure, he takes breath away. According to his will and according to his power and his authority, he gives it back again when he comes again for the day of judgment and ushers in a new heavens and a new earth.

He is the Creator. He is the upholder. He is the all powerful, all wise, all knowing, all good, perfectly just, perfectly righteous "I Am." He is the Lord. He is the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob. The covenant making covenant keeping God of faithfulness and truth and grace and mercy. He is slow to anger. He is slow to wrath. He abounds in grace and mercy and steadfast love. He forgives transgression and iniquity and sin to all who put their trust in him, to anybody who repents and bows the knee before him. He forgives their sins but he by no means clears the guilty. He is the Lord and he is our Lord. He is the Lord Jesus Christ.

Brothers and sisters, the point that I'm making to you and the point that Paul wants us to think about from this text is that it's this one in whose strength we stand in this spiritual battle. It's this one who gives us courage. It's this one who gives us strength in the day of persecution. It's this one who is fighting with us on this spiritual battlefield. Nothing less than the Almighty himself. It is the all sovereign who is our Lord and Captain and King and Master. Our might and our strength is the strength and the might of the Almighty and so we have great confidence and we have great courage as we go into this battle and onto this battlefield.

Well, the second thing that we want to think about when we think about the power of Christ's might is we must understand that his might and his strength is his victory on the cross. This one, although he is the Son of God, although he is Lord, although he is Creator of heaven and earth, humbled himself and came to earth, took on our natures, took on our likeness, so that he might die, so that he might save us from our sins, so that he might die the death of a cross. That is, so that he might make himself a substitutionary atonement for the sins of the whole world, for all peoples everywhere.

He humbled himself. He became like us, brothers and sisters. He took on our flesh. He's not ashamed to call us his brothers. He's not ashamed to call us his sisters. And he died. He died for us. He died in our place like a lamb slain. Although he was sinless, although he was righteous, although he was holy and perfect, he died in our place. He took on our sins. He took on our guilt. He took on our shame. He took on our miseries and our sufferings and bore them himself on the cross so that we might be liberated and set free from them forever and ever, amen.

He is the one who has victory on the cross and when Christ died on the cross, he won victory, brothers and sisters, over our strong spiritual enemies, every single one of them. He won victory over sin. He won victory over the curse of the law and the demands of the law. He won victory over death itself. He won victory over Satan and the demonic forces that are arrayed against us. And he won victory over the world, all in his cross work.

He is our Lord and he is mighty. He won victory over sin in his substitutionary death of atonement, taking that guilt that is due us away from us. He won victory over the curse of the law, taking the penalty of sin away from us. He won victory over the demands of the law because in his cross work and that one act of obedience, he perfectly obeyed the Father. He was the perfect expression and example of love to God and love to man. In this selfless act of dying for our sins, he won victory over sin. He won victory over the law.

Not only this, brothers and sisters, but having won victory over sin and over the law, he won victory over death. Paul says in another place, "The sting of death is sin and the power of sin is the law," and Christ has won victory over both. Thanks be to God that we have victory through Jesus Christ our Lord. He has put death to death on the cross.

The Lord Jesus Christ has won victory then, also over Satan. Satan has two slaves: sin and death, and Christ on the cross has won victory over both so that we have victory over Satan. You can see Satan's legs, as it were, have been cut out from beneath him. Satan is the great accuser. He is the great false accuser of the brethren and, brothers and sisters, our sin and our guilt has been dealt with on the cross, what does Satan have against us? Who can lay a charge against God's elect? It was Christ who died for us and who lives again. Who can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus? Satan can hurl accusations all day long but we are acquitted in the courtroom of heaven. He can hurl false accusations all day long but we are acquitted in the courtroom of heaven.

Jesus Christ on the cross also won victory over the world because the world wished to silence Christ on the cross and the cross has become a message which is, as it were, the shot heard around the world. The cross, the message of what Christ did on the cross is that message which destroys the kingdoms of this earth, which destroys their messages and their agendas, and overcomes them.

So brothers and sisters, our Savior is mighty. He is mighty because he is divinity and he is mighty because he has already won victory over our enemies on the cross. This is the strength and the power of his might but there is a third thing I want us to consider as we think about the strength and the power of Christ's might, and that is that Christ has been vindicated. Yes, he died on the cross but he did not die because he was a sinner, because he had done anything wrong, because he deserved to die. The Father, as it were, looked upon his Son and said, "I'm well-pleased with the sacrifice. He bore on his shoulders the guilt and the sins of all of my people. I'm satisfied. But there's one thing, my Son is not a sinner. He himself did nothing wrong. Death has no claim on him."

So the Father resurrected him from the dead and raised him up and seated him at his own right hand and gave the Lord Jesus Christ all authority in heaven and on earth, all power to administer this salvation that he had won at the Father's right hand. In other words, the Father vindicated the victory of our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, and now our Lord sits at the Father's right hand in power and in might as Judge. He is Judge of the whole earth and he has been given the power of judgment so that he might have the right to acquit all those who repent of their sins and put their trust in him so that he might forgive them of their sins and declare them righteous and declare them innocent. He is Judge.

He has the right and he has the authority to do as he wills in heaven and on earth, and he has also been made Judge so that he might condemn those who continue on in their disobedience and in their disbelief and in their ignorance of the Gospel. He has all power, all might, all authority. He is the vindicated Judge at God's right hand. Brothers and sisters, this is what Paul means when he says in verse 10, "be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might." We serve a mighty Lord and a mighty Savior, and it is this one who stands with us on the battlefield.

Now let me speak for just a moment to those of you who are here this morning who may not be united to Christ by faith. Perhaps you are sitting here and you have never known Jesus Christ as your Savior, here's the implication of the things that I just said. He is divinity. He has won victory over the cross. He is vindicated at the Father's right hand. This means that, brothers and sisters, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ is the one and the only Savior. This means, those of you who are not in Christ, that Jesus Christ is the one and the only Savior and there is no other. There is no other Savior beside him and so the word of Jesus Christ to you this morning, if you are not in Christ, if you have yet to repent of your sins and to believe in him, the word of Christ to you is this, "Turn to me," says Christ, "and be saved, for I am God and there is no other. I am a Savior and there is none besides me."

Be saved from your guilt. Be saved from your shame. Be saved from the fear of death. Be rescued. Know the grace and the mercy of this great King and Judge. Know the mercy of his forgiveness. Flee from the wrath of God and find refuge in the Lord Jesus Christ. His word has gone out and it will not return to him, and his word is this, "There is a day coming when every knee will bow and every knee confess," Christ says, "that I am Lord and Savior, to the glory of God the Father." Therefore, I urge you this morning if you are not in Christ to bow the knee now; to repent and to believe and to be saved from your sins. He is a mighty Lord and he is worthy of our trust.

Now brothers and sisters, you and I, it's the same message. Our Lord Jesus Christ is the one and the only. The one and the only Savior and there is no other beside him, and the call to us this morning is to renew our faith and to renew our repentance and to fly again to his feet; to enjoy refuge under the shadow of his wing; to enjoy forgiveness; the imputation of righteousness; the gift of the Holy Spirit; and a life lived pursuing sanctification; to worship him; to love him; to obey him; to know him.

This is something we have to have. We have to carry this with us, brothers and sisters, into this spiritual warfare or we will not stand. We must be strong in the Lord, in the power of his might. In other words, the message of Christ to us in context of this spiritual warfare is be courageous. Be strong in my might, in my victory, in my vindication, in my divinity.

Okay, well, that's point 1. We need to know something about the strength of Christ's might. The second thing that we need to know in this spiritual battle if we're going to stand firm and keep alert, is we have to know something about the nature of our enemy. Notice what Paul says in verse 11 and 12, "Put on the whole armor of God," he says, "that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil." That is our enemy, the devil. Verse 12, "For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places." I want you to notice, brothers and sisters, that we as a congregation are surrounded by the devil and his demons. We do not wrestle as a church, as a congregation, with flesh and blood. Men are not our enemies, not directly. Not the nations. Not individuals.

Our church right now is suffering a measure of persecution. There are men and women who are hurling false accusations against us and against our leadership but, brothers and sisters, we do not wrestle with flesh and blood, we do not wrestle with these particular individuals. They have been taken captive by Satan to do his will, and I admit it was an easy victory because of the corruption and the sin that's in our hearts, in the human heart, but they are not our enemy. It's the one who is at work in them and through them and behind them, which is the devil and his demons.

This is what Paul means when he says rulers and authorities and cosmic powers of darkness and forces of evil. That does not refer to the kingdoms of this earth. It would be easy to understand that passage that way. You would say, "Rulers, authorities, we're talking about Trump. We're talking about Putin. We're talking about North Korea or the

Senate." No, we're not talking about those things at all. These rulers, these authorities, these cosmic powers, are the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. They are the demonic forces of the evil one. So I want to talk to you a little bit about the nature of this enemy. It's important that we understand something about the nature of Satan and of his demons.

Now, you know that Satan and his demons are nothing more than fallen angels, so I need to talk to you a little bit about the nature of angels, and I've gone over this before but we're going to go over it again just for a little while this morning. You may have in mind what an angel or a demon is. Our culture is filled with images of angels and demons and it's absurd. You have the picture of a cute cherub or a cupid, you have a picture of a Hallmark card or the Hallmark Channel or the holiday specials that come on during Christmas of what an angel is, and you have this idea in your mind of this cute little baby with little tiny wings and rosy little cheeks, playing a little harp, and this kind of thing, and this is absurd. This is not what an angel is and it certainly is not what a demon is. You probably have in your mind the idea of a demon with the little pitchfork and the red horns and all the rest. This is not what the Scriptures teach.

Let me go over with you really briefly some of what the Scripture teaches about the nature of angels. First of all, these beings are glorious and majestic in the old sense of the word, in the full sense of the word. Do you remember Balaam when he met an angel on the road? He fell off of his donkey with his face in the dust because of the majesty and the glory of the being that had appeared before him. Do you remember what happened to Daniel when he met Gabriel for the first time? His face was ashen and he fell down with his face in the dust. He was paralyzed with fear and with dread at the sight of one of these beings. Do you remember Mary when she met Gabriel? Do you remember Mary and her friends when they went to the tomb of Jesus and there was standing there an angel with a face like lightning and they were afraid, they were terrified, they were in dread as they saw these beings? Do you remember John the apostle, what he did when he saw the angel? He fell down like a dead man, it tells us. He was paralyzed with fear. These beings are majestic and they are glorious.

There are two things that a human being does, there are two involuntary reactions that a human being has when they see an angel, and the first is what I've already described to you, they fall down as if they were dead. It's something that cannot be helped. If you were to meet an angel today, you would – this is what would happen – you would become so afraid you couldn't control yourself, you would just fall down as if you were dead. You wouldn't be able to control your bodily functions. You wouldn't be able to stand. You would be in so much fear, so much awe, so much wonder, at one of these beings that you would fall down in fear.

The second thing that you would do, and we read about this, even the Apostle John had this problem, you would be compelled to worship this being. You would be compelled to worship an angel. The angel that John saw said to John, "You've got to get up. You can't worship me. I'm not God." But you see, even the Apostle John, who should have known

better, involuntarily at the majesty of the being that he saw, was compelled to worship him.

These beings, angels, are exotic and they are powerful. Psalm 104:4 reminds us that God makes his angels winds and ministers, and his ministers flames of fire, which is to say that they're spiritual. They don't have bodily form. They are winds and flames of fire.

Do you remember the cherubim that Ezekiel saw by the river? They had four faces: one was the face of a man, one was the face of an eagle, one was the face of an ox, and one was the face of a lion, and they had six wings and they were terrible creatures similar to the four living creatures around the throne of God, perhaps even the very same creatures that we read about in the book of Revelation who have eyes all around them, and so many wings, and so many faces also. Terrifying creatures. Strange, exotic but powerful creatures.

The seraphim that Isaiah sees who have six wings and stand before God day and night and call out, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty. The whole earth is full of his glory."

Do you remember the angel that David saw when he had sinned and he numbered the children of Israel and the angel appeared to bring judgment upon him and the city of Jerusalem? The Scriptures tell us that the angel stood between heaven and earth. There is an angel that is described to us in the book of Revelation who has one foot in the ocean and one foot on the land.

These are terrible, terrifying, majestic, wonderful, exotic creatures and there are innumerable numbers of them. There is an uncountable number of them. There are hosts of these beings in heaven and they are all trained for war. Not only this, but they are organized. They are organized into ranks and to units and they have captains and they have chiefs, and all the rest. We don't want to speculate about those things but this is what an angel is.

Brothers and sisters, Satan is one of these and his demonic forces are these, and it is these forces that surround us. It is these forces that surround us as I speak to you this morning. If Satan were permitted to make an appearance here this morning, if he were allowed to show himself, there are two things that you would be compelled to do. First of all, we would all fall down like dead. We would be so afraid we couldn't control ourselves. The second thing that would happen to us is we would be compelled to worship him. If one of his demons appeared, the same thing.

This is who our enemy is, the spiritual forces of darkness. In other words, brothers and sisters, this is serious business that we are involved in, sobering business that we are involved in gathering together to worship the Lord. Do you remember what Jesus Christ said when he said, "Count the cost of being my disciple"? Well, this is one of the costs and what it means for us is that we must be alert. We must be aware of the enemy that faces us. But I want you to remember also who these demons and who these devils fear

because just like we fall down as dead men before them and are compelled to worship them, there is one that they're afraid of. There is one that they have the same reaction to, and it's our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

You will probably remember the sermon that Jarrett preached just a few weeks ago about the man who was possessed by a legion of demons, a whole unit of these beings, and do you remember what happened when Christ spoke to them? Do you remember what their response was? There was no hemming and hawing, there was no back and forth, it was immediate. As soon as he spoke, they recognized him and they were afraid of him and they begged him to leave them alone. They essentially said, "What are you doing here?" And they begged him not to throw them into the abyss because they know his authority, they know his power, they knew that he had the right to bypass the day of judgment and throw them directly into hell, and so they begged him. Remember this, the one who is with us is greater than those who are against us.

Well, this is something about the nature of these demonic forces and of the devil who is arrayed against us, which is helpful for us to remember to be alert, to pay attention, but let me talk to the thing that's most important. Let me talk to you about the thing that is most important here which is their tactics. What is it that they're doing? What kind of threat do they pose to us?

I want to talk, first of all, about their goal. The goal of these beings, brothers and sisters, is to destroy the relationship that you have with God through his word. Okay, that's a nuanced thing that I just said so let me repeat it again. Their tactic, their goal, the whole reason they fight, all that they do, persecutions, whatever it might be, it's to tear down your relationship with God that you have through his word. That is, they are trying to attack your faith, they are trying to attack your obedience and they are trying to attack your knowledge of the Scriptures.

You have to understand these demons can't touch the word of God. There is nothing they can do about this, about the Scriptures, about the Bible. It stands firm and it stands firm to the end of the age. They can't touch Christ. They can't harm him. They can't do anything to him. They can't touch God. They can't harm God. So what do they do? They harm his family. They can't touch the Father, so they touch his children. They can't attack the Father, so they attack his children. They can't attack Christ, so they attack his bride. They can't touch his word, but they can get to you and your faith in it, and your knowledge of it, and your obedience to it. That's their goal, you see. That's what they're after. They're evil and they're wicked but they are also powerful and they are very strong.

This is their goal, what are their tactics? Well, we just read in verse 12 that we don't wrestle against flesh and blood, and that's true, we wrestle against spiritual forces of darkness, but it's important for us to understand and to remember that they use flesh and blood tactics. Let me describe what I mean. Do you remember Job? Do you remember that Satan was given permission to take his health away, he was given permission to take his wealth away and he was given permission to murder his family? He uses flesh and blood tactics. Now, Satan's end game was not to make Job poor or to make Job sick or to

make Job sad, what it was was to get Job to curse God, and he almost won because as we read in the book of Job, Job gets to the point where he almost is ready to justify himself rather than God. If he had done that, Satan would have won. He would have gotten what he was looking for in taking Job's possessions away from him and his health and his family.

It's important to remember that these demons and these spiritual forces have authority to use flesh and blood tactics. Do you remember Paul? He received a messenger of Satan, a thorn in the flesh. Do you remember Paul in another place, he wanted to see the Thessalonians? He writes to the Thessalonians and he said, "I wanted to go to you guys, I wanted to see you, I wanted to visit you again and again and again, but every time I was hindered by Satan."

They use flesh and blood tactics. They use even men and women. They use the sinfulness that's in the human heart and they do this in two prime ways. Number 1: through false teachers. A false teacher, the Bible tells us, is one who preaches doctrines of demons. Typically it doesn't sound like doctrines of demons, it sounds pretty good, they are good deceivers. A false teacher, the Scripture teaches us, is one who has been taken captive by Satan to do his will. The second way that these devils and these demons use flesh and blood tactics is through persecution. Through persecutors, that is, they manipulate through the bitterness and the sinfulness that's in the heart of men, these sinful and bitter people, to rise up against the church. Right? An unbeliever can focus their bitterness and their hatred anywhere but they become persecutors when they direct it towards the church.

The thing that we want to remember here, brothers and sisters, is that although these devils and these demons can utilize flesh and blood tactics, they can go only as far as God allows. We always have to remember that God is sovereign and that's mysterious to us, but the thing that we want to remember is that God allows these demons to act against us and God puts a stop to it where he pleases and where he wills, and all of this is under his control, under his sovereign rule, under his sovereign care for our benefit and for our good which comforts our fears and gives us courage in the day of battle.

Let me talk about their lord for just a minute, the lord of demons, which is Satan himself, the devil, Paul calls him here, diabolos, which in Greek means accuser or false accuser. That's what the word "devil" means. That's what it is. Again, those who persecute, those who slander God's people, those who throw false accusations against his people, are pawns of Satan. They, the men and the women involved, are not our enemies. We're to bless them. We're to pray for enemies and do good to them and love them, but they don't realize that they are pawns of the evil one; that they are pawns of Satan. I doubt that they realize what it really means that when they persecute us, when they falsely accuse us, the one that they're attacking is not us but Christ, and the one who defends us is Christ, the Almighty, the all sovereign, and that should strike fear in their hearts just as it does ours. May the Lord give them salvation. May the Lord give them repentance from their sins.

I do want to mention something else about these spiritual forces. I want to mention to you something about their experience. These devils, Satan, have been around for a long time. He is our ancient foe. Now here's what that means for you: that means he has you figured out. Do you know what that means for our church, for our congregation? I primarily want us to think about these things corporately, congregationally. That means he has our church figured out. He has us profiled. He can look at you, he can gaze at you, he can see you in a moment, he can tell by the expression on your face what you're thinking. He knows exactly what doctrine it is you don't know. He knows exactly what commandment it is you're going to be most susceptible to if he sends a temptation your way. He knows exactly what promise it is that you've been neglecting or you don't believe in, or that your faith is weak in. He's got you figured out. He's seen you a million times. He's seen you a million times in the church. He's seen churches like this a million times. He is an experienced foe and he is a scheming foe and a clever foe.

All of this, brothers and sisters, to say to us that our enemy is too strong for us, too numerous and too experienced for us. It should strike a certain amount of fear in our hearts, an appropriate amount of fear, but for the purpose not of fear, not as an end in itself, but to drive us back to the feet of our Savior who is mighty and who is strong, who is divinity, who has won victory on the cross for us, and who sits vindicated at the Father's right hand as the Judge of the whole earth. Who has already won victory over these enemies, yet they rage, and it is for the purpose of reminding us and stirring us up to be aware and to be alert. This is the enemy that's prowling against us and these are his tactics and this is his goal.

Well, thirdly, then, let's consider the means of our warfare. Look with me at verse 13, starting there. There are two things that we want to consider here. The first is the equipment that Christ himself has given us to stand in this warfare; and secondly, the means for making that equipment effective. Two things: the equipment and the means for making it effective.

Let's first of all look at the equipment itself. Now we want to be careful here that we don't get bogged down in the details but I'm going to read to you verse 13 through 17. Here's what Paul says, he says, "Therefore," in the light of all of this, in the light of this strong spiritual enemy, "take up the whole armor of God," and this is what he says, "that you may be able to withstand," that is, that you may be able to hold the line, "in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm," that is, to hold the line. "Stand therefore," that is, hold the line therefore, "having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace. In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one; and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God," which is Paul's point here. We don't want to get bogged down with the details of this armor. He's simply describing to us different ways of the same thing, or speaking of the same thing in different ways, that is, the armor of God is the word of God. That is our defense in the day of evil, and specifically our relationship to God in that armor, or through the word. That is what Paul is referring to here is the doctrines of Scripture, the Gospel itself; the commandments of our Savior; the

promises that are ours in the Gospel; the word of God, the whole thing, the whole counsel of God. And where our focus and our attention should be, again, is our relationship to that word; our knowledge of the doctrines; our faith in the promises; our obedience to the commandments.

This is where the enemy is striking but this is the equipment that Christ has given to us, the word of God and our relationship with God through this word, so that the application of this idea, brothers and sisters, is that we as a congregation must be serious about the means of grace, about that it's primarily the word of God and the preaching of the word of God. This is the armor that Christ has given to us.

I mentioned to you that the devil is an ancient foe, he's a clever foe, he's a powerful foe, he's a majestic foe. He is not a fool. He is going to strike our church where it hurts and he knows exactly where to do it. What doctrine is it? That's the question that we have to ask ourselves as we consider that fact. What commandment is it that we're weak in? What promise is it that we are weak in? The devil is a powerful and scheming foe and we must be alert and we must be aware. We've got to put on the whole armor of God and we've got to strengthen ourselves and we've got to stand firm with the armor of God.

So here's my question to you, here's my challenge to you based on these things that we just said: where are you as an individual weak? What doctrine is it that you don't know? What commandment is it that you're not keeping? What sin are you flirting with? What promise are you doubting? That's a tough question. As I ask that question to myself, I'm flooded with conviction in every small way that I don't keep God's commandments, and every way that I fail in some way, and the sudden realization of the danger that I put myself in, and you. Because that's Paul's point here, is we're a unit and we stand together in these things and the devil is attacking us as a unit.

So the next question is an even tougher question which is: in what way are we weak and wearing the armor of God in such a way, which isn't any way, but in what way are we the weak link in our church? Now that's a really tough question. That's a heavy heavy heavy question but it's a question that each one of us needs to ask ourselves alone before Christ our Savior. It's a question that we need to ask ourselves knowing that Christ loves us and that he accepts us and that he forgives us of all of our sins; that he forgives us of all the ways that we fall short of his glory; that he is our Teacher and our Guide and our Prophet and our Priest; that the Father loves us as his own dear children and that we love each other as we ask that question to ourselves.

But that's the challenge of the passage. That's the question that Paul is raising to the Ephesians. "Put on the whole armor," he says, "be strong. Is there a doctrine you're weak in? Become strong in it. Is there a commandment that you've been loose with? Renew your repentance. Is there a promise that you've been doubting or neglecting? Become convinced of it. Renew your faith. Believe again. Go back to Christ. Fall at his feet." That's what Paul is saying. You see, that's the message our Savior has for us, "Hold the line. Stand firm in these things."

We are as the army of Christ. We are as a unit together in this warfare against the devil, and his target, his attention, is our relationship with God through his word. His target is our faith, our obedience and our knowledge of God, and our Captain and our King and our Chief looks out across his lines and he calls out and he says, "Hold the line! Stand firm!" You know when a chief or a captain or a warrior calls out, "Hold the line," the whole point is that for anybody who's in the battle who's become afraid, they need to renew their courage. For anybody who's in the battle who's become distracted for a moment, is to renew their focus. Anybody who in the battle doesn't have his armor on, it's get your armor on. For anybody on the line who is already focused and already paying attention, it's stand all the more firm in your position. Get into position. Lock shields.

That's the message that Paul has for the Ephesians, that Christ has for us this morning. Stand firm. Do you know what it means to stand firm? It means to be faithful in the means of grace, which is where Paul goes next when he mentions praying and praying especially for Paul's preaching. If you look at verse 18, that's exactly where he goes next, "praying at all times in the Spirit." To pray in the Spirit is to pray according to the word of God. To pray in the Spirit is to pray with the presence and the power of the third person of the Trinity.

If you want to learn how to pray in the Spirit, I urge you to listen to those who pray, especially your leaders. If you want to learn how to pray, go to prayer meeting and listen to how the men pray and you're going to notice something, you're going to notice that prayers that are encouraging and strengthening and that are good sound prayers, are in the Spirit. That is, they're according to the word of God. They're shaped by the doctrines of Scripture. They're shaped by the promises of the Gospel. And they are shaped by the commandments. That's what it means to pray in the Spirit, it means to pray according to the word of God and it takes practice to learn how to do that.

Well, the second thing that it means, is it means to pray in the presence and the power of the Spirit himself, the third person of the Trinity, who is with us and intercedes with us when we pray. When you pray, you are not alone. You are with the Spirit and you are approaching the Father through the Son. When you pray, you have fellowship and communion with the holy Trinity and the specific role that the Spirit plays in that fellowship and that communion is he helps you to pray when you don't know how to pray. He helps you to pray even if you don't know how to pray, even if your prayer is not as good as the guys who stand up before you who are praying in prayer meeting. Even if all you can get out of your mouth is gibberish and groaning and moaning, he takes the groans of his people and he delivers them to Christ.

So we should all be encouraged to pray and we should be all encouraged to pray together as a body, as one, because it's by this means that the equipment of our warfare is going to be effective against the devil. It's by this means that we will be made strong in the power of Christ's might as we go to war with the devil. You see, it's the means of grace. That's why it's called the means of grace. It's the means by which God's word is made effective and powerful in our life. Prayer.

Well, also, then, of course, preaching is mentioned here. Paul goes on, notice what he says in the rest of verse 18, "praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints." There is the corporate aspect of prayer, which does indeed mean that we as individuals when we pray individually should be praying for each other, but it also refers to the fact that Paul assumes that the Ephesians gather together as a unit, as a family, as a body, and pray together for each other. There is nothing more encouraging than hearing your brothers and sisters pray for you. It's wonderful. It's intoxicating. It's helpful. It's strengthening. It gives courage to the soul.

Then he goes on, verse 19, and he says, "and also for me." Now this isn't just because Paul is wanting them to pray for him because he realizes his own weakness, which is certainly the case, but it's because he realizes something about his calling and the importance of it, which is apostolic preaching. So he says pray "for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel." That's the second means by which our equipment will be made effective for us in this war against the devil, it's through apostolic preaching that the devil will be warred against, that we will hold the line, that we will keep alert and persevere. Verse 20, "for which I am an ambassador in chains, that I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak."

Prayer and preaching are the means for the effective use of the word of God. That is, if you want to grow in grace, if you want to grow in your understanding of doctrine, if you want to grow in your obedience and your pursuit of holiness, if you want to become more Christ-like, if you want your faith to become stronger, if you want to stand in the Lord's might all the more, the means by which those things will come to pass is through prayer, corporate prayer, and the listening of the preaching of the apostles, that is, of the word of Christ.

So here's my question to you, brothers and sisters, as we close. Two things, but number 1: do you believe what I've said to you this morning? Do you believe that Jesus Christ is mighty and powerful? Do you believe that he is divine in his strength? Do you believe that he has won victory in the cross? Do you believe that he is vindicated at the Father's right hand, ruling and reigning as I speak to you now? Do you believe it? Are you convinced of it? Does an amen well up within you? Do you believe that our enemy is the devil and he doesn't fight with flesh and blood, or we don't fight with flesh and blood, he fights with flesh and blood tactics? Do you believe it? Do you believe that he's powerful? Do you believe that he's strong? Do you believe that he's glorious? Do you believe that you are frail and weak in his presence in your own strength? Are you convinced? Are you convinced that the devil has his target set on the word of God and your standing before God through the word of God? Are you convinced? Are you convinced that it's only the means that God has provided that will give us strength in the day of evil?

Be courageous and take heart and hold the line. Keep doing what you're doing. Keep attending to the means of grace. Keep hearing the word of God. Keep coming to prayer meeting. Keep praying for God's people. Persevere. Prayer is one of the most difficult things you will ever do in your whole life. It will wear you out. That's why Paul

constantly says persevere in it. Keep going. Don't stop. Endure. Because that's exactly what we need to hear because that's our temptation. Persevere in it.

And then the second thing, brothers and sisters, is just to simply remind you that in the face of our strong spiritual enemies, in the face of our persecutors who are at their beck and call, Jesus Christ says, "Stand firm." He says, "Hold the line." If you're out of order, get in order. If you've lost courage, regain your courage. Strengthen yourself again in the power of his might. If you've become distracted, refocus. If there is some sin that you're entertaining, repent of that sin. "Hold the line," the Savior says. Hold the line so that we, brothers and sisters, as a unit, as brothers and sisters, as one congregation, stand shoulder to shoulder with each other and at the call of our Savior we get into formation and we lock shields and we renew our faith and our repentance and our knowledge of God.

May the Lord bless us with the power of his strength and of his might.