

“ . . . NOT AGAINST FLESH AND BLOOD, . . . ”

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I can remember the first few months of being full-time in the ministry as though it were yesterday. I guess the intense war Satan waged against my emotions is the reason I can remember it so well. The enemy did such a good job of covering up the fact that he was the one attempting to overcome me, it was almost impossible for me to fight back.

Like so many other Christians, I didn't understand the nature of my enemy at the time. Little did I know that he is a devious master of psychology who tries to devastate believers by systematically breaking them down in such a way that they never really know who is doing it.

I can remember waking up during the night feeling pressed down under a strange kind of emotional burden that caused me to lose my sense of rational perspective. Any problems I was dealing with seemed blown all out of proportion. It didn't matter how small or insignificant those problems really were. To me, they looked absolutely hopeless with no possible answer in sight.

I would toss and turn on my bed, waiting for morning to come. I know now that the devil uses those night hours of semi-consciousness—when our defenses are down—to indoctrinate us with insecurities and to break down our emotions. Thank God, now that I understand this strategy of Satan, I use those same hours when I am waking up, going to sleep, or just lying on my bed half-awake to meditate on God's Word!

We are up against an enemy whose expertise is mind games, and there is no doubt about it—he's good at it. Satan uses such weapons as ego, self-exaltation, pride, and fear to manipulate us until he has us under his control.

If you are wondering how good the devil is at playing mind games, just ask yourself, Why don't all Christian denominational churches speak with tongues? The devil is a master at psychology and deception, and he will try to use the same kind of tactics on us that he has successfully used on various religious groups.

Satan has been able to convince many people that speaking with tongues is not for today or is unscriptural. But in dealing with Spirit-filled, tongue-talking, Word-confessing believers, he has had to step up his tactics somewhat. This is why Ephesians 6:10-12 says: *Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might. Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.*

Notice what the Apostle Paul was saying here. In order for us to stand against the wiles of the enemy, we must put on the whole armor of God. In short, the word "wiles" means methods intended to ensnare or deceive. The method the devil uses to find inroads into our lives is through the carnal realms of seduction—the deceptive, alluring call to appease the appetites of the flesh.

When Paul said that we wrestle not against flesh and blood but against POWERS and PRINCIPALITIES, he was saying, in essence: "Just as sure as one army pits itself against another army in war, you and I are also striving against an army—only this army isn't comprised of flesh and blood but of invisible powers and principalities. Nevertheless, the war is just as real! The weapons the devil uses are not guns, swords, or spears. Rather, he uses imaginations and disobedient thoughts that exalt themselves against the knowledge of God."

Second Corinthians 10:3-5 tells us the same thing: *For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh: (For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds;)* Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.

You see, what the devil is really after is our standing with God. He wants to destroy our relationship with Jesus Christ and ruin our testimony. He wants to seduce and deceive us until our prayers are no longer answered and we have lost our fellowship with God.

Let me put it this way, a man can put me in prison and take my money. He can even take my life. But these things are not going to hurt my relationship with the Father God!

That's why the devil is after that one thing: our relationship with God. Satan wants our lives to offer proof to the world that God doesn't exist, even though we say He does. And the devil will fight us any way he can to obtain that goal. He will go down through the generations fighting against our children and our children's children, introducing and reintroducing imaginations or systems of thoughts that exalt themselves against the knowledge of Christ. The enemy does this because his unchanging motive is to unseat the knowledge of Christ from the throne of our hearts and our lives.

Many Christian denominations and churches that once preached and taught the born-again experience, the baptism of the Holy Spirit, and the importance of a holy life before God have become deceived and neutralized by some form of these destructive systems of thought. The saddest part about this is that people who belong to these churches don't even realize what has happened. If you ask them, "Are you deceived?" they invariably answer, "No!" because they don't understand the wiles of the devil that have come against them.

This demonic strategy began long ago with one man named Adam. The devil knew that if he could sabotage Adam's relationship with God—if he could convince Adam to compromise—that one man's deception would result in countless numbers of people being lost.

With this in mind, consider what Paul told us in Ephesians 6 once again: We can only stand against a plotting, scheming, murderer like Satan by putting on the whole armor of God. Isn't that something? I'll tell you how that knowledge affected me when I first heard it. Like never before, I really wanted to know how to put on the whole armor of God because that meant I would be standing in the power of HIS MIGHT.

But there was one part of that passage in Ephesians that I never really understood. Knowing that we don't wrestle against flesh and blood, I wondered, *Where does the real wrestling match take place?*

The fact that the pieces of our spiritual armor all symbolize spiritual forces ought to tell us what the devil is really after. When the Apostle Paul told us what to clothe ourselves in, he was really telling us what the devil is constantly trying to TAKE AWAY from us.

Satan wants to wrestle away from us the whole armor of God, one piece at a time. The enemy knows God has given us authority over all his evil power. Therefore, in order to defeat us, the devil knows he has to destroy our relationship with God, which is symbolized in each piece of our spiritual armor.

It is very interesting that the **first piece of armor the devil will try to wrestle from us is TRUTH:** having your loins girt about with truth ... (Ephesians 6:14). In fact, when Paul instructed us in Ephesians 4:24,25 to put off the old man and to put on the new, his first instruction was to put away lying as well: *And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true*

holiness. Wherefore putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbour: for we are members one of another.

Many people think that the truth Paul is making reference to here is strictly the revelation knowledge as set forth by God's Word, but that is not the case. There is another piece of our spiritual armor that makes strict reference to using the revelation knowledge of His Word to overcome the enemy. That piece of armor is the sword of the Spirit, which is THE WORD OF GOD (v. 17).

And if you look at the truth God talks about in Ephesians 6:14 when He tells you to "gird up your loins with truth," it is the same truth Proverbs 12:22 speaks of when it says, *Lying lips are abomination to the Lord: but they that deal truly are his delight.*

To "gird up our loins with truth" literally means to turn the light of the Word inwardly, allowing it to develop our character until we conform to the Word and refuse to compromise truth through deceit or lying. On the other hand, the sword of the Spirit is an aggressive weapon that is to be used through the confession of God's Word to change circumstances and move mountains the devil puts in our way.

So when the devil comes after the first piece of God's armor, his goal is to gain a foothold in our lives by causing us to compromise TRUTH. It doesn't matter how small or insignificant the compromise may be. A little white lie or a small misrepresentation of the truth gives the devil authority in our lives in certain areas, for in compromising the truth, we have submitted ourselves to the FATHER of lies. No matter how small the opening may be, the enemy will keep on hammering away until we give him more and more ground.

If you are wondering how far Satan will go to take you away from the truth, look at what Jesus said to the Jews—the people to whom God first delivered the revelation of His Word: *Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it.* John 8:44

So the wrestling we engage in is not against flesh and blood but against powers and principalities. And if you're wondering the way I did what arena this wrestling match is fought in, let me answer that question for you: **THE BATTLE IS CENTERED IN THE EMOTIONAL REALMS OF THE SOUL!** The devil will use the pressure of torment, fear, and the lusts of the flesh to coerce, seduce, and deceive us. He will keep at it until he gets us to the place where we are willing to lie just a little bit, whether for personal gain, to save our own skins, or to cover hidden sin. However, if we take the bait and lie, our conscience will let us know what we are doing.

You see, the real wrestling match takes place within our own emotions when we resist with everything in us the temptation to compromise the truth, no matter how small or how great the consequence. In doing so, we are actually resisting the devil, who is looking for a crack in our armor. He knows that God has given us authority over all his power, so he literally has to deceive us into giving him back authority in our lives.

DON'T ALLOW THE DEVIL TO DO THAT TO YOU! Remember, his goal is to strip you of every piece of your spiritual armor.

Sometimes, you cannot help but wonder how some of the large denominations could start out so powerfully years ago and eventually end up so spiritually dead. Let me help you understand the systematic process of breakdown that the devil uses to overcome Christian organizations, as well as individual believers.

The "wiles of the enemy" means a *methodical, military-like force that is strategically planned to overcome the saints*. This is why Paul modeled the spiritual forces that make up the armor of God after the military attire of a Roman soldier. Paul wanted us to know that we are in a war.

As we saw in Second Corinthians 10:4: The weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds [or military- like fortresses]. Paul goes on to tell us what these fortresses are when he says in verse 5: Casting down IMAGINATIONS

Imaginations are elaborate systems of thoughts that become high fortresses exalting themselves against the knowledge of Christ. Their purpose is to unseat and replace the knowledge of Jesus with the knowledge of themselves. We can see examples of this in the elaborate systems of thought defining many of our large denominations. As a result, these denominational groups no longer preach about the born-again experience, being filled with the Holy Spirit, or living a holy life before God.

But how do strongholds begin? They begin by not following the instructions put forth in the last phrase of 2 Corinthians 10:5: *and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ*.

Just the fact that there are thoughts that need to be captured and brought into the obedience of Christ ought to tell us that the devil has a way of planting certain thoughts into our minds. However, we can stop worrying about whether or not Satan can read our minds. HE CANNOT! All he can do is make suggestions and plant thoughts into our minds and then watch us for some kind of reaction to see if those thoughts have had any effect.

Remember, the devil has been stripped of his power in your life. All he can do is stand there and make his lying suggestions to your mind. But you never have to receive those lies!

Look again at what Paul says in Ephesians 6:12 to describe the enemy we wrestle against: *For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against THE RULERS OF THE DARKNESS OF THIS WORLD*

If God were to open our spiritual eyes through the gift of discerning of spirits so we could see into the realms of Satan's kingdom, we would be shocked at what we would see. We'd see ugly, demonic rulers of the darkness of this world operating among men, surrounded by a host of unclean spirits of every kind.

As long as we stay full of God, those evil spirits won't want to come around us, much less talk to us. However, when they do come around, unclean spirits throw powerful suggestions and commands at us. Even though we can't see them with our natural eyes or hear them audibly with our natural ears, we can pick up what they are saying with our spiritual ears.

Often the devil's suggestions and commands manifest themselves in strong emotional feelings. These feelings can easily give birth to thoughts that fuel negative emotions, such as anger, self-pity, fear, torment, and unbelief, as well as the lust for other things that can be gained by lying and cheating.

The next thing the devil wants us to do is GIVE PLACE to his thoughts and emotional pressures by acting on them. When we act on the enemy's thoughts instead of on God's Word, these demonic imaginations will continually exalt themselves against the knowledge of Christ until they have finally replaced God's truth with their lies. At that point, they become strongholds that defiantly take up residence in our lives, ruling in God's stead through fear, torment, unforgiveness, self-pity, self-exaltation, unbelief, false doctrine, filthiness of the flesh, lying, and the cares of this life.

As we have seen, the spiritual pieces to the armor symbolize our relationship with God. And the first thing we do is "gird up our loins with truth," knowing it is impossible for God to lie or join Himself to a lie. If we will tell the truth at any cost, God will join Himself to our lives and answer our prayers.

However, Paul's instructions do not stop there. Secondly, we must "put on the breastplate of righteousness." You see, when we were born again by God's grace, we were MADE the righteousness of God in Christ. But we PUT ON the breastplate of righteousness by allowing the nature of that rightstanding to demonstrate itself in true holiness in our character and in our actions.

Third, we are to have our feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace (Ephesians 6:15). One of the most rugged pieces of equipment in the attire of a Roman soldier was his sandals. This military footwear would hold up for hundreds of miles in every kind of terrain and under any kind of condition during the Roman army's long, forced marches. Paul was saying that in the same way a Roman soldier would secure his sandals on his feet by using leather straps, so would the peace of God enable us to stand sure-footed in faith under any kind of condition or in any kind of situation of life.

So prepare your feet with the sandals of peace, for it is the peace of God that makes you virtually indestructible. As First Peter 5:7-9 says: *Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you. Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour: Whom resist stedfast in the faith*

The opposite of peace is torment, worry, and CARE. Being consumed with the cares of this world is what makes us "devourable," and to resist taking the care upon ourselves is to resist the devil.

Fourth and "above all," *we are to take the shield of faith so that we may be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked*" (Ephesians 6:16). You see, the best defense is to stop the devil before he can get to the other pieces of our spiritual armor. This is what the Roman shield was designed for.

When a foreign army would approach the Roman soldiers, they would do so by throwing spears and shooting arrows. But in the spiritual realm, the devil declares war on us by bombarding us with wrong imaginations, with high things that exalt themselves against the knowledge of Christ, and with thoughts to disobey God.

So how do we take up the shield of faith? We do it by meditating and meditating and meditating on God's Word until we are renewed in the spirit of our mind, for: *Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God* (Romans 10:17). Then when the devil hurls a fiery dart of an evil imagination at us, it will bounce off the shield of faith, unable to find a place in our thinking. These devilish darts are useless against a mind that has been transformed by the Word of God.

Finally, we are to *Take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God: praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints* (Ephesians 6:17,18). These last three pieces of the armor—the helmet of salvation, the sword of the Spirit, and prayer—all go together.

It has been said that the Roman army was one of the most ferocious war machines ever assembled. These soldiers were relentless. Yet the only offensive weapon in the armor of a Roman foot soldier was his sword, and his life depended on how well he could use it.

Roman soldiers were so well-trained to follow the orders of their commanders that they would obey to fight against any opposition. They were also fiercely loyal to one another, knowing that their lives depended on their fellow comrades. If one soldier saw another soldier being overcome by the enemy,

he would jump in and fight for his fellow soldier, regardless of the odds, until his comrade was back on his feet.

Keeping this in mind, notice the last phrase of verse 18: *watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints*. Using the word "thereunto" shows that the main purpose for the sword of the Spirit is as an aggressive weapon used on the behalf of other saints. Thus God's command to "watch thereunto" means we are to stand guard with all perseverance and supplication for all saints.

We are to pray for one another as Paul did when he made intercession for the Galatians. In that case, the devil was using legalism to beat down the Galatians' armor—right down to their helmet of salvation! That's why Paul said in Galatians 4:19: *My little children, of whom I travail in birth again until Christ be formed in you*.

The helmet of salvation consists of the grace of God. Paul was saying to the Galatians, and to us, "Don't let the devil get you into legalism. You are saved BY GRACE, so keep your helmet of salvation on! Stand fast in the liberty wherewith Christ has made you free, and be not entangled by any yoke of bondage."

So never forget, you wrestle not against flesh and blood but against invisible powers and principalities. The real wrestling match takes place when the devil comes to steal your armor one piece at a time. Don't give it to him! The enemy wants to defeat you by causing you to break your fellowship with God. But if you don't let him steal your armor, HE CANNOT DEFEAT YOU!

Your friend and co-laborer,
Dave Roberson

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