

ephesians

LIVING IN SYNC WITH REALITY

PART FIFTEEN
STAND!



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LIVING IN SYNC WITH REALITY

Part Fifteen: *Stand!*

By Pastor David Fields

Ephesians 6:10-13

“**10** Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. **11** Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes. **12** For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. **13** Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. **14** Stand firm then...”

- Ephesians 6:10-14a

I. The Nature of Reality

There is a big difference between “science” – the methodology for studying the natural world – and “scientism” – the *belief system* that claims that the only valid way to really know something is through this study of the natural world.

The fact is *real scientists* don’t tend to think science can explain everything. They know the limits of what can really be measured, and that there are whole realms of knowledge that science is simply not the right means to answer.

In C.S. Lewis’ creative novel, *The Screwtape Letters*, the Oxford scholar of literature imagines a set of letters sent from a chief demon, “Uncle Screwtape”, to his understudy nephew Wormwood – instructing him on how to keep his “patient” deluded and distracted from God.

In the first chapters, Lewis has Screwtape say this:

“Above all, do not attempt to use science (I mean, the *real sciences*) as a defence against Christianity. They [the sciences] will positively encourage him to think about realities which he can’t touch and see. There have been sad cases among the modern physicists.”

When Paul speaks of “the devil’s schemes,” and “the rulers, authorities, the powers of this dark world, the spiritual forces of evil,” we don’t need to feel embarrassed, or try and explain away what Paul means here.

If I can believe in God, which I really can, there is no reason why I cannot believe in personal, powerful beings who oppose God.

II. Our True Opponents

“Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.” – Ephesians 6:11-12

The Bible portrays the devil, or Satan, as a personal, non-human, spiritual being who opposes God.

Jesus is described as being in direct dialogue and conflict with the devil, or Satan, in the desert in Matthew 4.

The “powers” are not *human powers* – not “earthly” rulers. These powers operate in the “heavenly realms,” says Paul. So, he’s pointing beyond the physical to the spiritual realm.

If we step back and look at the whole of the Bible, we see the reality of spiritual creatures; some in service to God, others opposing God. But none are “equal” to God. The chief enemy of God, Satan, would be equal to the chief angelic servant of God, Michael.

The work of these forces of evil is to exert real power aimed at destroying what God is seeking to build.

So, the late pastor-scholar John Stott writes:

“Is God’s plan to create a new society? Then they [the forces of evil] will do their utmost to destroy. Has God through Jesus Christ broken down the walls dividing human beings of different races and cultures from each other? Then the devil through his emissaries will strive to rebuild them. Does God intend his reconciled and redeemed people to live together in harmony and purity? Then the powers of hell will scatter among them seeds of discord and sin.” – John Stott

III. Our Real Struggle

The struggle, Paul says, is not against “flesh and blood,” meaning, not other people. It’s not a physical fight. That struggle is never against other people – not ultimately. If it were, we could be successful in our own strength. But it is not. And we cannot.

Other humans, or human institutions might be the site of outward manifestations of the evil, but the real evil, Paul tells us, lays behind and beyond the mere physical; beyond the “flesh and blood.”

Our Struggle Is...Not Against *Other Believers*

“Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.”

– Ephesians 4:3

“[M]uch of the church’s warfare today is fought by blindfolded soldiers who cannot see the forces ranged against them, who are buffeted by invisible opponents and respond by striking one another.”

– Richard Lovelace

Our Struggle Is... Not Across the *Political Aisle*

This is not to say that Christian people should not care about matters of policy in our country or be disengaged from the political processes. We carefully, thoughtfully, prayerfully do both. But we should know: the kingdom of God does not come by voting a certain person or party into power. The kingdom of God is at work where God’s people humbly submit to God’s reign, and then engage in the ministry of reconciliation he has given us. As Christians we recognize that the claim “Jesus is Lord” is a political claim. It relativizes all other claims to power; it puts them into their proper place. Our true allegiance is never to a party or set of political ideas, but to the Person of Jesus.

Our Struggle Is... Not *Only* About the *Spiritual Forces of Evil*

Christians have always recognized that our enemies can be described as this “unholy trinity” of the devil, the world, and the flesh.

- The “world” does not mean “the earth God created.” It refers to “human society organizing itself apart from God.”
- The “flesh” does not mean “our physical bodies.” It means our own sinful nature – what our hearts generate.



There is an “interplay” of all three. So, Johnson says: “The devil and his “principalities and powers” then mess with all these other enemies. They love to fan the flames of sin, fuel the desires of the flesh, and give energy to the world’s quest to live without God.”
– Darrell Johnson

God has given us resources to address all three:

- **Romans 12:2:** We do not *conform* to the pattern of the world.
- **Galatians 5:16:** We do not gratify the ‘desires of the flesh’ by walking in the Spirit.
- **James 4:7-8:** We resist the devil and draw near to God; Ephesians 6:10-17: We stand against the devil’s schemes by putting on the full armor of God.

In Colossians – the “sister book” to Ephesians, circulated to some of the same communities – Paul says of Jesus’ work: “And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.” – **Colossians 2:15**

The powers are ultimately defeated. Yes, they still present a threat. But their final demise is immanent.

The forces of evil have been defeated, but like the gap between D-Day and VE-Day, there are still battles, and the enemy is still kicking against his chains. Between the resurrection of Jesus and his second coming, the powers are tied to a rope, still free to evince their demonic character, but nevertheless bound.

IV. What Are We to Do?

“10 Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. 11 Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes.”

– **Ephesians 6:10-11**

1. Be Strengthened

Paul uses the passive voice of this verb, which means we could render it: “Be *strengthened by the Lord*, and in his mighty power...”

It’s not “me” simply trying to psych myself up, to try and just “be strong.” No, Paul emphasizes God as the active strengthener. So, more like: “Give yourself to the Lord’s strengthening...”

The “be strengthened” verb has the word *dunamis* as it’s root. It’s where we get the English “dynamite”. This is not a “sort of strong” strength. This is *dynamite* strength strengthening. It might not always *feel* like that, but it is, nonetheless. The power that God gives us is the sort of power we need to stand.

Step One: Be aware of the spiritual reality of the struggle.

“Whenever they are attending to the Enemy Himself [that is, God], we are defeated, but there are ways of preventing them from doing so. The simplest is to turn their gaze away from Him and towards themselves.... When they meant to pray for courage, let them really be trying to feel brave.”

– Uncle Screwtape to Wormwood,
The Screwtape Letters, C.S. Lewis

2. Put On *All* the Gear

We need *all the resources* God gives us to stand against the enemy. Paul says, “Put on the *full armor of God*.”

Put on the gear. What’s the gear? It’s not mysterious and weird. Paul will speak of truth; of righteousness; of the gospel of peace; of faith; of salvation; of God’s Word.



We know, from Jesus’ words, that Satan is a liar (John 8). So at least one part of this “putting on” is constantly preaching the gospel to myself. It’s a turning to God to listen to his voice, when the voice of the enemy is so loud in my head. Reminding my heart of what is true. It’s prayer; sometimes as simple as: “God help.” “God, I need you.” It’s worship. It’s gathering with God’s people to lift up Jesus in praise.

3. Stand

And again: the repeated “goal” is not “go out and find a fight” but “to stand.”

“Put on the full armor of God, so that you can **take your stand** against the devil’s schemes.... put on the full armor of God, so...you may be able **to stand** your ground, and after you have done everything, **to stand. Stand firm then...**” - Ephesians 6:10-14

The goal is that we “stand.” Why? Jesus has already won. The ground we stand on is already claimed for the new creation. So, the imagery here is one of “standing – of not retreating away” from the space that God has already redeemed through Jesus’ death and resurrection.

4. The “Henceforth” of our Lives

“Finally,” in v.10 sounds like the “in conclusion,” but scholars note that this word doesn’t mean “the end” in the Greek language. More like, “henceforth...” Like, “in light of all of this, here’s what the way forward will look like.”

Our “standing” – this recognizes the reality of the powers, the schemes of the devil and his minions, but it is not scared and huddled. It’s standing, prayerfully, and doing the good work God has called us to in the world.

We know that getting on with doing what God has called us to do, bearing witness to Jesus in the world, there will be opposition. Is that reason to fear? Not at all! It is reason to be strengthened in the Lord’s mighty strength, to arm yourself with God’s truth, so that you stand in his victory. May it be so.



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LIVING IN SYNC WITH REALITY DISCUSSION

Open Up

C.S. Lewis talks about two common, opposite issues people can take when considering the spiritual realm. One is the “materialist” approach – we just don’t pay any attention to the spiritual realm. The other is the “magician” approach – we see “devils behind every bush.”

Which do you tend toward? Or how have you found a balance in your own thinking and practice?

Dig In

1. Read **Ephesians 6:10-13**. What are some of the key questions that this text raises for you, or some elements of the text that stand out? Take some time to chat about these with the group.
2. In what ways have you – or “people you know” – been tempted to make the “struggle” against “flesh and blood”? Why do we tend to take that route?
3. How might that actually be part of the devil’s schemes?

4. How does this text help correct that for us? In what ways does this help you personally to re-envision the true opponents and the real struggle?

5. How does knowing that Jesus has already won the battle help you think about what it means to “stand”? How will you find God’s strengthening this week so you can stand?

Prayer

Take time to thank God for the way he helps us see the bigger picture through this text, and the many ways he strengthens us. Pray in response to what you’ve heard your group share today. Pray that we as a community would be those who find our strengthening in the mighty strength of King Jesus.