

Ephesians: Living in Sync with Reality
Part 16: Stand! (Pt.2)

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Ephesians 6:13-20

Ephesians 6:13-20 continues Paul's exploration of our Spiritual Warfare.

There is a gnostic tendency that crops up when speaking of Spiritual Warfare in some circles—a sense that being a real Christian is about having 'secret knowledge' about spiritual reality.

But Paul's explanation of how we engage in Spiritual Warfare is anything but esoteric or mysterious. In fact, it shows us that for most of us, most of the time, Spiritual Warfare will look like ordinary Christian discipleship.

Paul gives us this passage so we can be aware and be prepared.

Be Aware: What's a Spirit Anyway?

Paul mentions 'spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms' and, you'll notice, he doesn't explain what he means. That's because for most humans for most of history 'spirits' were an understood part of reality. Not so for us.

What is a Spirit?

Dallas Willard defines 'spirit' as 'unbodily personal power.'¹

God, angels and demons are all spirits. Which means they don't have bodies, they are persons with character and personality, and they have power—the ability to affect things.

Humans *have spirits*. We are not spirits; we can't be because we have bodies. But we are amphibians who are in the physical world yet also connected to the spiritual world and sensitive to it.

Be Aware: Demons

1. Demons are Fallen Angels

Jude 1:6 says: "...the angels who did not keep their positions of authority but abandoned their proper dwelling—these he has kept in darkness, bound with everlasting chains for judgment on the great Day."

Demons are angels who have abused their authority to challenge God.

2. Demons have Limited Power

In Mark 5:1-20 Jesus meets a man with a 'legion' of demons—about five thousand. It takes all five thousand of those demons to control two thousand pigs.

¹ Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy*, pg. 81.

Demons have limited power. They are spirits, like God. But they are *not* all-powerful or all-knowing. Even Satan is *not* able to know all things, Peter says ‘the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.’ (1 Peter 5:8)

3. Demons have Limited Authority

Demons have limited authority and are given that authority by God and people.

As angels, demons were given authority by God. They chose to abuse this authority.

But demons are also given authority by people. Participation in trying to discern the future, magic, summoning ghosts and other occult practices give demons authority to enter into people. This is why they were practices prohibited in Scripture.²

4. Demonic Activity is Discernable on a Spectrum

Through tradition and experience, many present a kind of spectrum of demonic activity from *Possession* to *Oppression* to *Infestation* to *Temptation*.

a. Possession: demonic activity inside a person

Possession is what most people think of when they think of demonic activity—when demons ‘manifest’. That is, having people speak in voices not their own, know things they shouldn’t, or exert strength they shouldn’t have.

Possession—as in being ‘owned’ by a demon—is not possible for believers filled with God’s Spirit. This happens through the invitation of demonic forces through rituals or practices.

b. Oppression: demonic activity outside a person

Oppression can take the form of physical ailments, mental struggles, strong temptations or terrible life circumstances. It often accompanies movement forward in mission or ministry—Jesus tempted by Satan (Matt 4:1-11) or Paul being blocked by Satan from coming to the Thessalonians (1 Thess. 2:18).

Oppression can happen to believers. But it requires discernment to know whether something is from the devil or not. We see Jesus exercise this discernment—in *Luke 13:16* he says a physical ailment is from Satan, in *John 9:3* he says a physical ailment is not from sin and doesn’t mention Satan.

Be careful attributing mental health issues to the demonic—this increases an already terrible stigma. Some mental struggle can be just a function of a creation marred by sin or personal histories of trauma.

Discerning spiritual activity should be done in community.

c. Infestation: demonic activity tied to a place or item

There are subtle signs in scripture that demons are territorial.³ Infestation describes when the demonic has a hold on place because of what happens there or because it has been dedicated to evil. Some people have the gift to see or know if it is spiritual in nature.

² See Exod. 22:18; Lev 19:26, 20:27; Deut 18:10-11.

³ See Mark 5:10

d. Temptation: temptations to sin or disinformation leading to evil

Demons fight less like medieval knights and more like hackers sowing disinformation.⁴ The primary way Satan attempts to turn us from God is with temptations to sin and disinformation—making good look evil and evil look good.

As a strategy, this is because direct manifestations could probably turn people towards God, not away from Him. But disinformation and, indeed, causing people to doubt God or the Devil exists is in Satan's best interest.

Be Prepared: The Armor of God

It is because the Devil's primary strategy is temptation and disinformation that the Armor of God looks how it does—defensive in nature, focused on truth and reality. Paul draws on the book of Isaiah and the Roman soldiers guarding him to give us a powerful image of how we do spiritual warfare.

It is important to know that the images are corporate as well. Military dress is not just functional, it's ceremonial. It sets you apart as part of a group.⁵

1. The Belt of Truth

Roman soldiers wore loose fitting long shirts and leather skirts. The belt bound the clothes up so they could move freely. As a metaphor it says: anything less than the truth and you'll trip all over yourself.

Truth is first in the list because the Devil is the Father of Lies (*John 8:44*).

We put on the belt of truth by knowing the truth, speaking the truth and living consistent with the truth.

2. The Breastplate of Righteousness

Roman warfare was designed to keep your enemies at a distance—using ditches, arrows, pikes and shields. The Breastplate was a heavy piece of armor that could stop a sword blow and a last line of defense.

It also covered the soldiers back.

Satan attempts to stab us in the back with shame—reminders of past sin.

We put on the breastplate of righteousness knowing Jesus' righteousness is imputed to us. But also, by living righteously. William Barclay says:

"Words are no defense against accusations, but a good life is."⁶

Integrity protects our hearts from accusations.

⁴ John Mark Comer, *Live No Lies*, pg. 49ff

⁵ See Lynn Cohick, *New International Commentary on the New Testament: The Letter to the Ephesians*, pg. 416.

⁶ William Barclay, *New Daily Study Bible: Galatians and Ephesians*, pg. 211.

3. The Shoes of Readiness

Good footwear is life or death on the battlefield and in survival situations. The shoes Paul describes are the shoes of the 'readiness that comes from the Gospel of Peace.' It describes how the peace of being reconciled with God gives us freedom to move around and firm footing.

We put on the shoes of readiness by practicing peace—either through having practices that fill us with peace or by meditating on the peace we have with God. Peace makes us resilient and helps us to stand.

4. The Shield of Faith

Fiery arrows were devastating in ancient warfare, not just taking out individual soldiers but lighting fires to spread. Traditionally, the 'fiery darts of the enemy' are seen as temptations. Sin does not just affect us but those around us.

The large Roman shield covered the whole body and had hide on it as a fire retardant. Our trust in God keeps us from temptation, because temptation to sin challenges the idea that God has our best in mind.

We hoist the shield of faith by remembering God's faithfulness in our lives. But we also rely on others to hoist their shields beside us, like the Romans did in their famous 'tortoise' formation.

5. The Helmet of Salvation

Our head is the most vulnerable and most easily fatally wounded. The knowledge of salvation guards our minds against the attacks of the enemy. As Psalm 140:7 says:

"Sovereign Lord, my strong deliverer; You shield my head in the day of battle."

Be Prepared: The Weapons of God

Paul gives us two offensive weapons as well.

6. The Sword of the Spirit

The sword is the Word of God. In the Temptation, Jesus responds to Satan's attacks with *'it is written'*.

Memorizing scripture can help us to bat away Satan when he gets in close. Some take time to memorize specific scriptures for their most prevalent temptations.

7. Prayer in the Spirit

Jesus once told his disciples that a particularly troublesome demon 'only comes out through prayer' (*Mark 9:29*).

Prayer 'in the Spirit' is prayer inspired by and in conversation with God Himself through the Holy Spirit. It is constant, intense and unselfish. For some of us, we need to recognize the spiritual in our prayers, praying against the work of the enemy.

Stand!

For most of us, most of the time, our engagement in spiritual warfare will look like normal Christian discipleship. Which puts our daily practices in a new light:

When you live the truth, you break the bonds of oppression of the father of lies.

When you live righteousness, the blades of the demons break on your back.

When you are at peace with God, you don't lose your footing on the battlefield.

When you trust God, you protect your brothers and sisters from the fires of hell.

When you know your salvation, you blunt the axe of the enemy.

When you read the word, you sharpen your sword.

When you pray, the demons shudder.

When you stand your ground, hell does not prevail.

Discussion Questions

Open Up

Spirits, angels, and demons, how do you feel about these realities? How were you raised to think of them?

Dig In

Read **Ephesians 6:10-20** again.

1. What experiences do you think you've had with spirits or spiritual reality?
2. Demons as fallen angels with limited power and authority and a spectrum of activity, which of these truths struck you? How does it change or enhance your perspective on spiritual warfare?
3. Of the armor of God, which piece are you not 'putting on'? How can we help you?
4. How does knowing your spiritual discipline is spiritual warfare change the way you want to approach your Christian discipleship?

Prayer

Take time to pray against the spiritual forces of evil.