9-1-19

Ephesians 6:10-13 (3)

Once again, we look at Paul’s call to battle. All of humanity are slaves to demonic forces unless they are Christian. All Christians are subject to attack by these same forces. Jesus warned His disciples, and through them us, that we would be subject to persecution in this life. Our persecution can come through other people, sickness, or even our own minds; but the ultimate source is always the same, the powers of darkness.

These powers are everywhere, and they are more powerful than we are. If we try to depend on our own human strength and resources, on our own will-power, we will find that we are hopelessly out matched. God allows us to face an enemy that is much stronger than we are so that we have to depend on Him. God wants us to depend on Him; for our salvation, for our ability to withstand the enemy. We depend on Him, but we still work and fight in the strength He provides us. In this way, God gets all the glory; He deserves it. This is part of God’s plan that we read about back in chapter 1, verse 22, where God put all things in subjection under Christ’s feet.

Paul tells us that we are to “be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might”. Last week, we began looking at how we are to do this. The first thing we looked at was to be secure in the knowledge that once we are His, no one can ever separate us from Him. God’s love was set on us in eternity past; no one will ever cause God to stop loving us. Once we have accepted Jesus Christ as our Saviour, we are sealed with the Holy Spirit and this is a seal that will never be broken. No matter what comes against us, no matter what storms we face in life, we can deal with them in the confidence that our heavenly Father will hold us, whether in this life or the next.

Another thing we must do is submit to God and truly believe that we must have His strength. So often, we think we can handle little things by ourselves; small temptations, little trials, minor problems. Suddenly, we will find that we have been deceived and they aren’t little at all. Our strength fails us and then we have a bigger problem. We are outclassed by the enemy; we must operate in the Lord’s strength and with the armor He provides for us.

The last thing was food and drink. This is spiritual food and drink. We feed on the Bible which is the true word of God. The Bible is a spiritual book, and the more we consume it the stronger we become. We also seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit, realizing that He is far more than a seal; He is our ever-present help and guide. He is the One who calls to mind those Scriptures we consume at just the right time.

The next item to consider to “be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might,” is exercise. Just as we have spiritual food and drink, we also have spiritual exercise. We can turn again to the Bible. Some of the passages are quite difficult and require some strenuous thinking and prayer and study in order to understand. But the result is worth all the work; we receive far more than we put into our study. Once we have gained that understanding, satan can’t use our lack of knowledge to trip us up.

Jude has some advice for us in verses 20 and 21: But you, beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God, waiting anxiously for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to eternal life. Each of the things Jude mentions is an exercise in building spiritual strength.

He mentions “building yourselves up on your most holy faith”. Faith is something usable and we are to use it. So many times, we face obstacles in our lives. In all of them, we need to believe God’s promise that He will see us through. If we believe something, we need to act on it. We pray to God, tell Him that we trust that He will work things out for the best, and then deal with the situation the best we can. This takes practice, we will mess it up a lot; but the more we practice, the better we get and the stronger our faith becomes. We become stronger in the Lord.

Jude tells us to pray in the Holy Spirit. Prayer is the way that God has ordained for us to communicate with Him; He wants us to engage in prayer. How do we pray in the Holy Spirit? We ask for His help. Paul tells us in Romans 8:26, “In the same way the Spirit also helps our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for *us* with groanings too deep for words.” See? We can’t even pray right. We need God’s help even to pray; but He loves us and is happy to help us. Even though the Holy Spirit is helping us to pray, by doing so, we receive strength from God. In prayer, we gain “the strength of His might”.

Next we see “keep yourselves in the love of God”. This is a little tricky because we, as Christians, are forever in the love of God. If we are saved by Christ, we can’t get ourselves out of the love of God. Also, because our best works are as filthy rags, we can’t get ourselves any more into the love of God. He loves us with unbounded love and we are safe in His hands. Keeping ourselves there means to remember that we are in His love. Perfect love drives out fear, and God’s love for us is perfect; therefore, we need not fear. Additionally, we need to act like it. We are called to be holy. One of the primary things we are to do as children of God is to live a life of holiness; and that’s not easy to do in this day and age. But then again, it never has been

Finally, Jude tells us to be “waiting anxiously for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to eternal life”. There is a lot of waiting in the Christian life. There are times that we have to wait for God’s timing and that can be hard for us; we tend to want things in our own time. When you get tired of waiting, consider what is said in Hebrews 11:13 about Abraham, Noah, Enoch, and others in their ancestry: All these died in faith, without receiving the promises, but having seen them and having welcomed them from a distance. These waited all their lives and died, still not receiving what God had promised them. They still haven’t received them after all this time. But they will; either when Christ comes back to establish His kingdom here on earth or when God makes the new heavens and new earth. God always fulfills His promises.

We have examples of waiting, and it is waiting in faith, believing that God will bring about all that He has told us He will. Notice, too, that it is waiting anxiously. We don’t wait passively; we are to be at work, we are to be dressed in the full armor of God and in battle. We will receive the mercy of Jesus and we will have eternal life with Him; we just need to wait while following the commands He gave us.

We must be disciplined in living in the strength of the Lord’s might. Again, this calls for living a holy life. Paraphrasing what Paul said back in verse 4:17, You’re a Christian, act like it. Shed the things of this world and the sin that clings to your life. This world’s delights and sins are weights that we must drag around with us. These weights do not make us stronger; they tire us out and drain our strength. If we continue to follow the world’s pursuits and hold onto our favorite sins, the Lord will not impart His strength to us. We will be left open to more influence by satan and his demons. Shed these things; the world is not worth it and sin only leads to hell.

Paul told us about things to be disciplined about back in chapter 4. He told us to be renewed in our minds. We are to avoid bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, slander, and malice. We are not to steal or speak in falsehood. Participation in all these things gives the devil a foothold in our lives. If he gains a foothold, he will push it for all he can get; we will not be able to live for Christ. We are instead to speak the truth, work for our living so that we can share, be kind to each other, tender-hearted, forgiving. Forgiveness is important, because God has forgiven us a greater debt than anyone could ever owe us. All these things require discipline, and the strength for the discipline must come from the Lord.

When it comes down to it, we must practice. Don’t put these things off until you think you might be ready or well prepared. That day will never come. If you wait until you are prepared, you are working in your own strength. As a Christian, the strength is there; we just need to build it up. Additionally, the fight is always there; it will not stop as long as we draw breath. The more we use what God provides us, the more of it we will have. We must prove to be good stewards of His strength and armor.

Let me pause here for a moment for a reminder, because it is difficult to keep two things in our minds at the same time. I have been speaking a lot about what we are to do; our works and our fighting. We must never forget, that none of these things will ever get us even one step closer to heaven. Our eternal life comes through Jesus Christ and through no one or nothing else. It is faith in Jesus and in His work on the cross that provides salvation. Our works and fight are to further His kingdom, provide treasure for ourselves in heaven, and bring He and the Father glory.

We read that Paul tells us to put on the full armor of God. Notice the word “full”; we need it all, not just parts of it. Notice, too, that no where in the Bible are we told to take off the armor. We put it on and keep it on; daily, we ought to renew it. God gives us spiritual armor and weapons to deal with this spiritual battle. In verse 11, Paul tells us to put it on “so that you will be able to stand”. This is important; he is letting us know that we can’t stand without it. In these verses we see “stand” and “resist” several times. These are what we are called to do.

The schemes of the devil are his attacks on us. We’ve discussed some of his methods before; they include subtle temptation, outright lies, intimidation, and appearing as an angel of light. One of his most successful methods that we see in operation throughout the world is getting people to think he doesn’t exist. Don’t be fooled by this; the Bible is God’s word, it is all true, and we are told in the Bible that satan exists; he is very real and he is very dangerous. We need protection against him.

Verse 12 is a rather stunning statement: Our struggle is not against flesh and blood. Some translations say we don’t “wrestle” against flesh and blood. The idea is that this is close, hand to hand combat. Flesh and blood means “people”. This is a stunning statement because if someone is giving us a hard time, well, that’s a person standing there giving us a hard time. It is natural for us to focus on that person as being the source of the problem.

If we are to be effective against satan in our lives, we must know that any non-believer is being driven by satan. We must also realize that if even a brother or sister in Christ is being a problem, it is because they are being influenced by satan. This is why Jesus tells us that we are to love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us. They are people who are being enslaved by satan and their release can only come by spiritual means. As a Christian, our higher calling is to love and pray, because we don’t want to see anyone be condemned to eternal death.

Verse 12 lets us know that there are various levels and strengths of the fallen angels in the kingdom of satan. We can see that they have different jobs. What we don’t have here or anywhere else in the Bible is a listing of what that hierarchy is, how strong they are relative to each other, or what their specific jobs might be. What that tells us is that we don’t need to know, and it is a waste of time to speculate on what they might be. We are simply to be prepared in our armor of God and in the strength of His might, at all times.

We have an example of this idea in the Old Testament book of Nehemiah. Nehemiah’s primary job was leading the people of Israel in rebuilding the wall around Jerusalem. King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon had destroyed the city and walls and taken the people captive back to Babylon. After 70 years of captivity, king Cyrus of Persia released the captives so they could rebuild. After many years, the temple was rebuilt as were dwelling places, but the city was still open to attack. God put it into Nehemiah’s heart to lead the people in rebuilding the wall.

Even during this work, they came under the threat from enemies outside of the city. We are told how Nehemiah handled this problem.

Nehemiah 4:17-18

Those who were rebuilding the wall and those who carried burdens took *their* load with one hand doing the work and the other holding a weapon. As for the builders, each *wore* his sword girded at his side as he built.

Once again, we see a physical world example, or type, of the spiritual world that we must deal with. We are to do our Christian work, but armed and wearing armor all the time. Also, we do all these things in the strength of the Lord, not our own.

Prayer

Lord God, Your word gives us ample warning that we must fight. Jesus told us to expect persecution, Paul gives us instruction on armor and weapons, James and Peter both tell us to persevere in trials and temptations. The Old Testament is full of accounts of Your people having to fight. We have no excuse to be blind to this war.

But in all these things, You provide for us. You even give us Your strength; You provide for us Your own weapons. Your Holy Spirit lives in us to constantly give us guidance and to call to our minds Your word, which is a sharp sword. Your Son Jesus has already conquered satan on the cross, so we fight a defeated enemy.

We do depend on You. Make Your word live in our hearts, ever-present in our minds, and ready on our lips; to give You glory and to sting the enemy. We do not revile these powerful beings, but depend on You that we may stand firm and resist evil.

We pray these things in Jesus’ name

Amen