

## SPIRITUAL WARFARE

**The Christian life is not a playground;** it is a spiritual battlefield. It is one where the forces of darkness are arrayed against us seeking to do us great harm. William Gurnall said that this war is so serious it makes the cruelest battle between armies of men to seem like a child's game. Sometimes we can forget this; other times we can make too much of it. The apostle Paul would not have us to fall into either extreme. In Ephesians 6 he gives us a proper balance to spiritual warfare so that we neither *underestimate it nor overestimate it*. How we think about this spiritual battle is critical to how we fight it. This classic passage gives us a biblical framework for spiritual warfare. It provides us a perspective that can dramatically shape our daily lives, showing us how to engage rightly in this great conflict.

As believers, our first step in successfully waging spiritual warfare is recognizing our weakness and the Lord's great strength. Self-sufficiency is a killer in this battle; dependence on Christ is crucial. Ephesians 6:10–20 repeatedly reminds us of our insufficiency for this fight. We need strength (v. 10), weaponry (vv. 11, 14–17), and lines of communication with our Savior for aid (vv. 18–20). These means are external to us. Without them, we have inadequate strength to stand against principalities, powers, the rulers of the darkness, and spiritual hosts of wickedness. Left to ourselves we would soon crumble in the heat of battle. We are simply deficient for the task. However, God loves His people and never leaves us defenseless.

Throughout the rest of this section Paul calls us to *put on the whole armor of God* and describes each piece of the armor (vv. 11–17; cf. Rom. 13:12; 1 Thess. 5:8; 2 Cor. 6:7; 10:4–5). As Christians, we need the whole armor because our enemy is a relentless foe. If Satan and his minions cannot wound us in one place, they will target another: if not the head, then the heart; if not the conscience, then the emotions. Since Satan and his cohorts attack us in a variety of ways, God provides a variety of defenses sufficient to withstand any assault they might throw at us. Every piece of armor is another way of putting on Christ (Rom. 13:12, 14). The Puritan William Gurnall said, "What is this armor? By armor is meant Christ. Till Christ be put on, the creature is unarmed."

The apostle also calls us to *stand* (vv. 11, 13, 14). The Christian is a man of war, and as a good soldier of the Lord Jesus Christ, he is to maintain his spiritual position throughout life. The verb stand means to hold one's position continually. It suggests a soldier firm and steady while under fierce attack. Thus, Paul is calling us to put on the full armor of God so that the devil will not gain one inch in our lives or lead us off course. In sum, we are to hold fast the solid ground that Jesus has already won us in our lives. It is clear then from Paul's language that the Christian life is not intended to be one of defeat in which the devil is constantly having his way with us. While we might lose some battles with Satan at times, the believer is ultimately the winner because He who is in him is greater than he who is in the world (1 John 4:4).

Lastly, Paul calls us to *pray* (v. 18). Prayer is not an additional piece of the armor but the means by which each piece is effectively employed. No doubt, Paul mentions prayer last for the sake of emphasis. The passage that begins with "be strong in the Lord" (v. 10) ends with "praying always with all prayer and supplication" (v. 18). Prayer is the critical component of our warfare, reinforcing each piece of our armor. The armor of God does not consist of literal pieces we can put on; rather, it consists of spiritual truths that the Christian appropriates through prayer. Christians must daily put on each piece with prayer, calling on our great Commander-in-Chief for fresh supplies of grace, and help for combat.