

How to fight spiritually

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Preacher: Robin Silson

[0:00] Let's pray. Almighty God, we thank you for your word, the Bible. We thank you that this is how you speak to us. And we just pray for our hearts now as we come to your word.

And we just pray that you'd teach us, that you'd correct, rebuke us, challenge us, that you'd train us in righteousness, that we, your servants, may be equipped for every good work.

We ask for this in Jesus' name. Amen. You'll notice a picture, which is unusual on the screen, of, it's the USS Gerald Ford aircraft carrier, if you'd like to know.

It's the biggest ship in any navy anywhere in the world. It's over 1,000 feet long, 100,000 tons at full load, 4,500 crew on board.

Designed for military combat, but there's something else about this boat. Most aircraft carriers are designed for military combat, but this is specifically designed to stand up against anything, any thing that the natural elements can throw at it.

[1:09] A Category 5 hurricane, no problem. It's remarkable engineering that means in the worst conditions, you can carry on fighting, and fight knowing that you're secure.

Ephesians 6, well, second half of it, is about how to be secure in the fight against spiritual evil, when God's people, when the church is in its crosshairs.

On the USS Gerald Ford aircraft carrier, when the Category 5 hurricane does its worst, the crew still get drenched to the bone, their teeth still shudder, the ship still buffets and roves, waves still crash over the side, but they can't sit back on a deck chair.

But the difference is, there is no danger of being sunk. The effects of the storm are still felt, but they are secure.

The storms of spiritual evil have always come against God's people. They've always come against the church. One of the big points, and maybe perhaps you'll remember, is we've gone through Ephesians, Paul's letter to the Ephesian church.

[2:26] The point he makes all the way through at different points is that the church is one body, that it has unity together. We are knitted together in relationship with one another.

And it is God that has done this, that has brought us together. Chapter 2, he talks about this wall of hostility between people being broken down so that they're no longer enemies, but they're friends, that they're family.

Chapter 4, he says that we're eager to maintain between us the bond of peace. And right here, when we look at kind of spiritual evil, Satan really, when he comes at the church, the unity, the togetherness, the relationships, is where he targets our relationships with one another.

And I want to suggest that all spiritual attack, actually, it might look at it in different ways, but actually all the schemes of the evil one are designed to have a go at two things.

Either our relationship with God, that relationship is secure, but the way that we feel about it, that we doubt his goodness and love when we go through difficulty. So it's designed to have a go at what you think about God.

[3:43] Do you remember, it's the first lie in the garden, isn't it? What did God really say? Put doubt in your mind about God's goodness. And the second one, if it's not relationship with God, it's relationships with one another.

It's what we just looked at the last few weeks, relationships in the home, marriages, children, in the workplace, and in the household of God, in the church. Spiritual warfare, temptation, is designed so that we will fight one another and that instead of being united, instead of being together, there'll be disunity, there'll be fallouts, there'll be conflict, and there'll be division.

We need to redraw the battle lines so that instead of fighting one another, standing alone, we are together as the church, with Jesus, standing against spiritual evil.

And so, the invitation for all of us this morning as the church of Christ, and my hope really, is that today we discover that this fight is not one to be feared.

It's not one to be feared to fight the evil one. Neither is it the place for individual heroics. It's not like a few special ones that are really called to fight.

[5:07] But it is a place where we do fight as one, not in our own strength, but resting in the Lord's mighty power against the spiritual category five hurricane.

The problem. I'm going to start with the problem. The problem is this, is that everyone is too weak, everyone is too weak to stand against evil, spiritual evil.

Before we go any further, you just need to get something out of the way, and I want to tackle kind of a tension that culturally we struggle with, which is actually the reality of spiritual evil.

The Bible's really clear that evil is real. The kingdom of darkness, Satan, his legion of demons, it's not make-believe. The majority of the world actually accepts that.

It's the norm, if you go to a lot of the, many, most of the countries, but it's in the West that we've made a mockery of that. The devil's just a cartoon, baddie, horns and a forked tail.

[6:09] Demons, you know, they're not real, they're just kind of our individual, you know, psychological struggles. Oh, you know, demons on my back, and the kind of emotional bad days we have.

But the Bible teaches that, no, no, they're real beings. I think, I don't know if any of you have seen, it's quite an old film now, it's a famous line from the film, The Usual Suspects, The Usual Suspects, and it's on the money for Satan's tactics in the West.

It's on the money. I won't give the plot away, you should watch it, it's great. But there's this line, and he says this, he says, the greatest trick the devil ever pulled was convincing the world he didn't exist.

And so we treat him like a character from a fantasy novel, and culturally we've reduced it. We've reduced evil to bad people who do bad things.

Now don't mishear me, the devil is not our only enemy, so if we get into sin and problems like that, what we can't say is, the devil made me do it, and abscond ourselves from any responsibility, sin is still in our hearts, it's still real, and we still have sinful desires, and the world is still an enemy as well, you know, it conjures up these ideologies that are against the word of God, philosophies that are kind of against God, and want us to direct us away from him.

[7:37] But having said that, we come into our passage today, and it's a reminder that the kingdom of darkness is tempting our hearts. It is whispering to the world, it is sowing discord in our relationships, it is creating havoc, so that we doubt God, and we get in conflict with the people that we love, and people in the world that we know, and doing that in the attempt to make a wreckage of our lives and the people that we love.

The evil one, as acting like he's this lie that he doesn't exist, he obscures himself. That obscurity is the great tactic, because instead of fighting against him, we fight with one another.

Place yourself on the aircraft carrier. The Category 5 hurricane, the waves are coming over the end of the boat, and the crew, imagine this, instead of shoring up the deck, they, you know, they look at each other, waves are coming over, getting drenched.

Instead of shoring up the deck, start swinging fists, start blaming each other for getting wet, arguing who gets the dry spot, or who's not done their job right. It's a picture of what we do when we fight with flesh and blood.

Verse 11, we read, the devil has schemes, he has plans against us. Verse 12, really, such an important verse for us to understand, 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.

[9:25] Fighting one another is exactly what Satan wants. He wants relationship breakdown, he wants fights between flesh and blood in the church. We're on the same team.

We fight horizontally, whilst our adversary uses it to bring about disunity and division. So, we fight one another.

The other, sort of, place where we go is that we think we can fight on our own. Try and be like the spiritual hero. Our enemy is real, and he's bigger, and he's stronger than us.

That's the, that's the next problem we have, is, we're not trying, instead of trying to fight, fight one another, we try fight alone, and we can't, we can't resist temptation.

You can't resist temptation, by just trying harder. The evil one is too strong. It's like, imagine trying to withstand the category five hurricane, not in a hundred thousand ton ship, but in a paper boat, folded by a school child.

[10 : 35] That is what it's like, to try stand, without the living God. You need to be on the boat, to withstand the storm. It is the only the living God, that can stand, that can fight, and defeat the storms of spiritual evil.

He's the only one, who can win. It brings us to the principle, only the living God, can stand, fight, and defeat the storms, of spiritual evil.

That's really, the whole point. He's the only one, who can stand. When Satan comes up, against the living God, he always loses. Look at, no way better to look at this, than look at the life of Jesus.

There's only ever one winner, when Jesus meets a man, possessed by demons, one word is all it takes, and the demons flee. In the wilderness, tempted three times, Jesus stands his ground, three times, he does what Adam couldn't do, and none of us can either, and the devil's got nothing on him.

The devil, you know, at the work in the heart of Judas, so that Jesus is sold, into the hands of his persecutors. What did the evil think would happen?

[11 : 49] Well, you know, Satan didn't have a clue, that he thought, that crucifixion, was job done. But the irony, the cross, is the very place, where God, decisively disarms, the powers of darkness.

Only Jesus can stand. Only Jesus can fight, and defeat the storms, of spiritual evil. Knowing this, totally changes, I think, how we read these verses.

Look with me, at verse 10. Finally, finally, be strong in the Lord, and in his mighty power. Be strong, or be strengthened.

It's be strengthened, not in something, that we have to produce, or generate for ourselves. We're not the origin, the source of power, and strength. We are, to fight, connected, to the Lord.

The strength, any strength, any spiritual power, strength we have, is received, from being united to Jesus, and his resurrection power. His, disarming the powers, of darkness, kind of a strength.

[12 : 58] It is ours in him. Paul's letter, to the Ephesian church, here comes full circle. Right at the beginning, of the letter, chapter one, and perhaps, you just want to, maybe want to turn with me.

Just a few pages over, chapter one. Look with me, from verse 18. This is right at the beginning, as he's telling, the Ephesian church, of their calling, of who they are in him.

He makes this astounding prayer. He says, I pray that the eyes of your heart, may be enlightened, in order that you may know, the hope to which he's called you. The riches, of his glory and inheritance, in his holy people.

And here we have it, listen to this. And he prays, and, his, incomparably great power, for us who believe. That power, is the same as the what?

The mighty strength, he exerted, when he raised Christ Jesus, from the dead. And seated him, at his right hand, in the heavenly realm. That, that, is, the mighty power, that we have, when we're strong, in the Lord, when we're united to him.

[14 : 15] Paul prays, that we would know, that power, is ours in Jesus. At the beginning, and at the very close, of the letter, that is the very, power that strengthens us.

Don't be strong, don't try to be strong, on your own. Don't just think, this is another, to do list, on the Christian, kind of walk, that you're failing at. No, no, no, no, don't be strong, on your own.

That's impossible. Be strong, be strengthened, with the resurrection, power that you have, in Jesus. the reason, because of what he has done, what he has done.

The question, we have, perhaps naturally, well, how does that happen? How do we go, from the paper boat, to the unsinkable ship? How do fragile people, like us, with no strength, on our own, stand on the deck?

It brings us to, a gospel point, Jesus handed himself, over to the schemes, of the devil, so that we can stand, against him.

[15 : 25] Verse 11, Paul writes it, or in his writing, it phrases it, with this amazing metaphor, it's putting on armour. It's a picture, everyone in Ephesus, would recognise.

Ephesus, was still under the Roman Empire, under Roman occupation, and so every day, on the street, they would see, the legions of soldiers, marching, with intent, with their helmet, shield, and breastplate.

You'll remember, perhaps, for some of us, longer than others, history lessons, learning the, kind of Roman, armour. And when they, walked past, they saw someone, these Roman soldiers, someone who was ready, for battle, kitted out to fight, that could stand firm.

Paul is borrowing, that uniform, to say, you also are fighting, but a much more, devious foe, and you need, better armour than them.

You need the armour of God. You see, the gospel is this, that, when Jesus goes to Calvary, he's stripped, practically naked, and in doing so, he hands himself, over, to the schemes, of the evil one. [16:44] He does so, he does that, he becomes naked, so that he can, clothe us, with his armour. Every piece of armour, he gives us, in exchange, because, you look, at what the, you look at the pieces of armour, they're all things, that we get, because of what Jesus has done.

He takes our lies, and he gives us his truth. He takes our unrighteousness, and gives us his righteous standing. He takes our warring, with one another, and against God, and he gives us his peace.

He faces death alone, so that, so that, as former enemies of God, we are redeemed children. He gives us faith, to believe in his name, and he gives us salvation, for all eternity, coming to us, what, through the word of God, the sword of, the sword by the power, of the Holy Spirit.

We don't fight, with flesh and blood, because Jesus, allowed his own flesh and blood, to be tortured, and crucified. That he absorbed the wrath, to end the hostility, to destroy the works, of the devil.

The armour of God, is not a do-it-yourself, moral checklist, that you have to, remind yourself every day, how to dress. It's not another thing, that Christians have to do. And neither is it, kind of, neither is there, any specific connection, between the armour, and the part of the body, that covers it, it's not an allegory.

[18:14] The helmet of salvation, is not covering the head, because the brain, needs to think about, being saved. The blessed spirit, of righteousness, is not covering the torso, because somehow, the heart is more, to do with being righteous, or the belt of truth, around the waist, because the gut, has anything to do, with truth.

people have tried, people have tried, to make those connections, but actually, it misses the point, where in the armour of God, is a picture of being, united to Jesus, you're clothed, with Christ. Every piece of the armour, is what Jesus gifts you, exchanges with you, at the cross. We own, every piece of armour, it is ours.

There's the temptation, we read this, and go, oh man, must be more peaceful, must have more faith, must do more. No, no, no, this is gifted, to you, in Jesus.

Jesus handed himself, over the schemes, of the devil, so that every time, the devil comes against us, we can stand, against him, in Christ, because he is one.

[19:23] But, that leaves us, with a bit of a question, doesn't it? If we already have the armour, why are we told, to put it on? If we're already, clothed with Christ, with righteousness, and peace, and all the salvation, why are we told, to put it on?

That's where we move, to our response. We get to stand firm, in the Lord, dressed in his armour, with the word of God, and prayer. In light of the cross, we get to wear the armour, every day.

Putting it on, putting on Jesus, comes from, it doesn't mean, we have to, it's nothing we do physically, it's coming to, the truth of who he is, and reminding, through the word of God, through the sword, and through prayer, that it is ours.

Look close with me, in verses 17 to 20, there are two things, that, that by the spirit of God, we can do. Not on our own, but by the spirit of God. Verse 17, we take up the word of God, and we're to pray, on all occasions, with all kinds of prayers, for all the Lord's people.

Verse 18, wearing the armour, is how we confront, the devil's schemes, his temptations, his attempts to unsettle us, his fiery darts, aimed at our relationships, with God, and our relationship, with one another.

[20:37] But it, but it is the word of God, that teaches us, about everything, that we have, in Christ. It's the word of God, reminds us, that, that we have, that the armour, that it is ours, when, it means that, when we're tempted, to stay bitter, against a brother, the word of God, tells us, we have peace with God, and peace with our brother.

When we've sinned, and feel like a failure, it's the word of God, tells us, that we're accepted, as righteous, unconditionally, loved. When we feel like, we just need, to have more faith, it's the word of God, that tells us, that only a mustard seed, is needed.

It's the word of God, Jesus, applies, the armour to our hearts, by his spirit, and it diffuses, the lies, of the evil one, because he, clothes us, with himself.

We pray, to the one, who possesses all power, who's in control, who can do more, than we, can possibly imagine. That is how, we actively depend, on Jesus, to fight our battles, for us, because we can't, fight alone.

Spiritual warfare, it's not for, it's not for, only for the spiritual elite. It's the everyday battle, for every believer. The everyday battle, for every believer.

[22:06] Now sometimes, it might, the battle might feel, harder than at other times, but if the primary place, is to attack, our relationships, our relation with God, then, it's no coincidence, that Paul is, writing this, after he's just talked, about marriage, family, and working relationships.

The church, is the household of God, every scheme, is designed, to cause maximum, relational dysfunction, to cause disunity, in the home, where we work, and where we worship. So today, if, if you get, irritated, with your spouse, annoyed with your kids, if someone in church, says something, that gets your back up, is a, maybe at work, those you don't see, eye to eye with, you may have sinned against, and they may have sinned against you, you might be tempted, and it might be your heart, but Satan tempts our hearts, to respond in sin.

The temptation, is there to destroy, our relationships. If, if you, if you go through, any of that, we go through those things, on any normal week, any normal day, but we have the upper hand, because we stand with Christ.

We stand with Jesus Christ, and his resurrection power, to fight and to win. If Jesus stays dead, the devil wins, but Jesus is raised, and so in him we stand, we fight, and his victory is out.

Let's do it. The storms of spiritual evil are real. The evil one, is gunning for the church.

[23:54] On our own, it's like standing on a paper boat, with Christ, to our unsinkable ship. We will stand on the deck, of life, and feel the storm raging, but our footing is secure, because we're resting in his mighty power, and the strength, of the Lord Jesus.

The strength and power, that is no less, than the power, that raised Jesus, from the dead, and defeated Satan. Just to, just to be aware, Satan knows he's a defeated foe.

He's well aware of that, but until Jesus comes back, he's throwing the kitchen sink at it, whilst he can. Yet, he has no claim on you.

We don't struggle against one another, which is what he wants, but we fight, and stand, putting on the full armour of God, praying to the one who is able. Jesus handed himself, over to the schemes of the devil, so that we could stand against it.

Today, don't fear evil, don't fight alone, and don't fight one another. Jesus' flesh and blood, we don't struggle against flesh and blood, because Jesus' flesh and blood, was tortured and crucified, so that we no longer fight, with our own flesh and blood, but we live as one, as his victorious body.

[25:21] Let's pray. Almighty God, spiritual warfare is an everyday reality.

Sometimes the battle feels more fierce than other times, but we see the attack is designed, so that we fight against one another, and that we doubt God's goodness.

And we know in our own lives, we can think of the times when we've done that, when the temptation is to, yeah, there's been conflict, conflict, and it's been hard to resolve, or things have happened, and we've questioned you, why have you let this happen?

We've doubted your goodness, we've heard the lie, the same lie that the evil one said in the garden, is God really that, is, did God really say that? Does he really love you?

Lord, I pray that you'd help us, that you'd equip us today, that we would be, have that unity as the body of Christ, and that we, in Christ, as, as the spiritual body, that you'd equip us, and help us, to resist temptation, to fight against the evil one.

[26:42] We know that he's a strong foe, but you have the victory over him already. Help us, we pray that we wouldn't fear him, but we wouldn't fight alone, and that we would fight in Jesus.

Forgive us for what we have done, and pardon our sins, we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.