

Session Seven: Fighting Sin: Spiritual Warfare

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[0 : 00] Welcome to Gospel Growth.

And up to now, we've been talking about how disciples grow up in the gospel. We want to continue that today. And one of the ways that we grow up in the gospel is by fighting sin.

And because sin, as we all know, keeps us from growing spiritually in our walk with Jesus. And so the last session we were together, we talked about knowing our idols. If we are going to put up a good fight, then we need to know where our sinful hearts lie, which way they want to always be bent towards.

We want to know what gets in the way of our hearts between us and this living God that we love and that loves us. But it's not just a heart problem, although that is a big part, as we saw last time together.

But we also have this enemy. And Paul addresses this enemy, and he tells us how we can fight against this enemy. And it's in Ephesians chapter 6 from verse 10 to 12.

[1 : 03] It says, Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers, over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.

And so we saw last session that faith is a fight. And Paul is taking that fight very, very seriously by writing what he writes to us. He actually says it's a wrestle.

Now, I don't know if you've watched the Olympic wrestling or any wrestling match. I mean, it is intense. It is full on. It's intimate. It's in your face. And that's what he's trying to get across to us. It's a struggle. And Paul is saying our spiritual lives are sort of a little bit like that. It's not a clean fight. The devil plays dirty. He wants to get us down on the ground.

And so we better know how to withstand the ways that he comes at us. And this famous writer, Sun Tzu, famous quote from The Art of War is, Know your enemy.

[2 : 10] We have to be aware of how our enemy operates. What are his tactics? And so let's talk about knowing our enemy a little bit. So Paul tells us that we are supposed to stand against the enemy's schemes.

He uses that word first of all. Paul is saying that the devil is going to come at you with these schemes, and we have to have some knowledge of what that looks like so we can stand against it. So you're asking, what are the devil's schemes?

And some of you are like, I know what those are. I've seen the exorcist. I've seen other paranormal activity. You would probably say the devil's got a few tricks.

He can make your voice go really deep. He can spin your head around a few times, that kind of stuff that you've seen in the movies. But actually, Paul here does not mention any kind of possession of any person.

The devil is much more subtle than that. He's not that dumb. And some of you and some of us are ignorant about this warfare that we get to wage.

[3 : 10] Because we think because we don't see the obvious dark things and the obvious sinister things that there is no warfare. No, there is a warfare. It just comes as an angel of light, the Bible says. And so it's very important what Paul says here.

And if you go back to the beginning of the Bible, you notice the devil didn't possess Eve in any way. He just lied to her. And that's a biggie. He lied to her.

He didn't twist her head around. He just twisted the truth about God around inside of her head and let her down a way she shouldn't have gone.

He made her think God wasn't really good, didn't really have her best in mind. So, number one, the devil is a liar. One pastor said it this way, the devil doesn't have, sorry, the devil doesn't leave fang marks on your skin.

He leaves lies in your heart. And the word actually there translated devil actually means liar. He is a liar. He is the father of all lies. And Paul stands against the schemes of the liar.

[4 : 11] And so what schemes? Well, it's obvious from what he's saying here. He just brings all these lies over and over again and gives us misinformation that we act upon.

He's a tempter and those temptations come in the form of lies. And often the lies go like this. They make sin seem not that bad. It's not that hectic.

It's very appealing and it's not going to be that bad. And one Puritan wrote a whole book about the lies the devil tells called Precious Remedies Against Satan Devices. And he called the lie of minimizing the harm of sin the scheme of presenting the bait and hiding the hook.

Listen to this quote. To present the sweet, the pleasure, and the profit that may flow in upon the soul by yielding to sin. But he hides the hook, the shame, the wrath, and the loss that would certainly follow the committing of sin.

Thomas Brooks. You know that scheme. I know that scheme. What do we do about this lie? Telling that sin doesn't matter that much because God is merciful.

[5 : 20] We can just repent. He'll forgive us and we go on our merry way. What happens is Satan mixes enough truth in with his lies. Of course God is merciful. And of course God can forgive us.

But he blinds us to the holiness of God. He takes our eyes off his majesty and his holiness and his wonder. And when he blinds us to his holiness, it makes it difficult for us to repent.

If you sin so willingly, who knows if you'll be even willing to repent in that moment. For God's mercy and kindness to lead us to sin is satanic logic.

And that's what the devil will often bring to us. The Bible says that God's kindness leads us to repentance, not to sin. You need to see these lies. We need to see these lies.

We need to recognize them and know that the way these lies come at you in particular. Lies are only effective when we're tempted to believe them. Otherwise they have no power.

[6 : 22] Which lies are you tempted to believe? Lies about God that is not really everything the word says he is. Lies about yourself that you're really actually fine.

That somebody else has much bigger problems than you have to worry about. To engage in spiritual warfare is to become very, very self-aware of who you are and where you stand in your spiritual walk.

We have to know our enemy. You also have to know yourself. Otherwise he will find our weaknesses. And the devil is always on the move.

The Bible doesn't just call him a liar. It also calls him an accuser. The devil is an accuser.

Revelations 12 it says, The devil accuses Christians before God day and night.

Means God's seated on his throne and the devil comes and stands and accuses him and says, God, that chappy and that lady, they're rubbish. They're not really serving you. It's all fake. And he accuses us before God and before the brethren.

[7 : 23] And what he's trying to do, what his tactic is, is to let us see God's mercy and decide that sin doesn't really matter because there's enough mercy to go around.

But right after we sin, then the devil, our enemy, does the exact opposite. After we sin, then Satan starts to accuse us and he starts to judge us and he breaks us down.

And we have fallen into his trap. And he makes us start to feel shameful for the sin that we have committed. And then as he accuses us, he hides God's loving kindness away from us.

And all that comes before it is just shame. We start to wallow in his accusation. We start to feel unaccepted by God. And nobody could convince us that God loves us.

An accusation from Satan is different from conviction of the Spirit. Conviction brings guilt to the specific thing that we have sinned in, the specific moment, the specific act that we have done.

[8 : 32] And then that leads to repentance. Conviction should always lead to repentance. The Holy Spirit says you've done something wrong, but your heart can be led to the grace and mercy of Jesus Christ.

But accusation is different. It brings shame. It says you've done something wrong, and in fact, you are wrong. There's nothing good about you. You're a waste of time. You should just be chucked away.

It tells you you are something wrong. You are dirty. You go around feeling worthless like you couldn't ever really count in Jesus' kingdom. You're defined by your failure.

You stand under accusation. And some listening to this right now probably are enjoying or not enjoying, but experiencing some of those very feelings of shame and accusation and worthlessness.

You've believed a lie, and that has led you into sin. And then when you sin, you come under accusation. You feel useless for days before you are finally walking in confidence again.

[9 : 30] How long does it take you to recover when you have messed up and sinned? Is it quick and instant? If it's not, then it could be that the enemy has got a foothold in our hearts. Thankfully, Paul doesn't tell us to stand against the schemes of the devil without giving us some real help with how to do it.

He gets a little practical. And so firstly, he tells us how we fight the enemy. We're going to see there's a few different ways here. And so first of all, we arm it. We put on the armor of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Ephesians 6, it says, Therefore, take up the whole armor of God that you may be able to withstand in the evil day. And having done all to stand firm, stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth and having put on the breastplate of righteousness.

And as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace. In all circumstances, take up the shield of faith with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one.

And take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the spirit, which is a sword, the word of God. A famous passage of scripture, Paul beautifully describes how Christian can defend themselves against the lies and the accusations of the devil.

[10 : 38] And it's actually gospel armor. It's the gospel that's put on display here. Jesus died for us. And there's this truth that comes out of that moment. This truth that we can put on. And he mentioned six pieces of armor here and one sort of attacking weapon, the sword, which we'll look at in a little bit of a different way.

And the armor mentioned here is truth, righteousness, the gospel of peace, faith, salvation. And we could easily do a whole series through each of these things one by one. But we're going to look at them together.

And I think that we'll see that the gospel itself is actually this amazing piece of armor. So Jesus loves us so much. He died for us. That is the truth we are supposed to put on.

The belt of truth is the truth of the gospel. We've got to remind ourselves of that each and every day. You believe the lie that God isn't really all good. Confront the lie with the truth.

That God is so good because he sent his son to die for you and for me. We put on the breastplate of righteousness, but we have no righteousness of our own. Jesus is our righteousness.

[11 : 42] He was the only one who was totally righteous. That is what we put on. And we remind ourselves of that. It's his righteousness that I get as a gift because I have none of my own.

We may not be so good, but Jesus' 100% record of righteousness is ours as a gift, so we don't have to stand under the enemy's accusation. Then we put on the gospel of peace.

We are far from God, but the good news is that Jesus made peace between us and God the Father. We are sinners. We deserve his wrath. It's kind of war there, and Jesus makes peace between us and him by being our sacrifice.

The faith then we take up as a shield. That's our faith. It's not in ourselves, but our faith is in our great Savior, Jesus Christ. It's in what he has already done.

You don't even have to believe for it to happen in the future. It's done. It's finished. The helmet of salvation we put on isn't salvation that we earn. It is the salvation that Christ has earned for us on our behalf.

[12 : 40] You could never earn this. Just take it as the gift it is. The armor of God is the gospel of God. Paul says, put on the gospel. Put it on every day.

And he's so emphatic in what he's saying. He's actually saying sort of something like this. Put on the gospel. Put it on every day. Just like you put your pants on every single day.

It's just not something we believe. It's something that we put to work in our lives in a daily way. It defends us against the enemy. It helps us stand strong in the world. The gospel protects us both from the enemy's lies and his accusations.

Satan tries to lie to us, tell us that sin isn't so bad. We can minimize our sins or think that they aren't a big deal when we see how Jesus suffered for our sins.

The gospel diffuses those lies. It shows us how bad our sin really is. It shows us that Jesus had to die for our sins.

[13 : 43] They are bad. He had to suffer and pay our debts. And it's totally paid now. We don't have to pay for sins that have already been paid for by Jesus.

We don't have to drown in shame because we have been accepted and adopted and sons and daughters of the living God. The gospel shows us both the mercy and the holiness of God in equal measure.

We don't fall for Satan's lies or wallow in his accusation. Some of us just don't think like this. You need to put on the gospel. If you're wallowing, you need to put on the gospel.

And when you live in this gospel armor and wear it around often enough, it feels like second nature. Some of the guys that I work with, some of them were in the Marine Corps for a good period of time. And they would tell stories of when they go on these training field exercises and maybe a week at a time. And they'd have to sleep outside and they carry around their rifles.

[14 : 43] And they wear these very heavy flak jackets. And they always say that was the worst part because there's these heavy metal plates or clay plates that go inside of it. And they're marching around with these heavy plates on.

And after a week, they get back to the barracks. They can take the flak jacket off. They're getting ready for their first shower after a long time. The thing they always notice most of all is the disgusting smell that seems to emanate from this thing as they take it off.

But the second most notable thing is the sense of freedom and lightness that comes as they take it off. They say it's almost a weird feeling that you can't explain.

You have to experience it. That armor had become second nature to them. And sometimes the areas where the devil's got us become second nature to us.

Got to take the armor of God. Got to take the gospel and apply it to ourselves. Remind ourselves of those truths and let that freedom come. And what happens, the more we do that, it becomes instinct.

[15 : 47] And the Bible talks about it. And it's called the renewing of our minds. It just becomes automatic. It becomes part of our lives. And that is why we have to do this every single day of our lives.

You don't just put your armor on when the enemy starts shooting at you. You wear it all the time on patrol. Wherever you go, you know there's going to be some fight somewhere along the way.

And so you're always ready. And the gospel is your best defense. Two more practical little points as we head towards a close in fighting sin. And it's in Paul's little story here in Ephesians.

Ephesians 6, 17, 18. It says, And the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, praying at all times in the Spirit with all prayer and supplication, so that ends keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints.

Two final dispensens. The first one, constant in word of prayer. We've already talked about a daily time of worship that doesn't just drop new information about God in our heads.

[16 : 47] It helps us go into the world armored up and ready for action. And then with our swords in our hands, we're ready to face the world. Not just because we've done the sort of token process of reading a little scripture, but because we've delved into it.

And when we've delved into the scripture, we've met the God of the scripture, and not just some words on a piece of paper. And we've worshiped that God sets us up for victory. It's not enough to know the things about God.

You have to know God. We need to hear from him through his word and be with him in prayer. Our relationship with God is the means by which we develop the ability to quickly apply the gospel and its truth to our lives every day.

And then committed to community. Paul mentions praying for all the saints. There is no such thing as an army of one. That's just a moving target, one.

As Paul wrote this amazing battle imagery, he would not have been picturing one lonely soldier as cool and strong as that guy might be. And there's a picture of one of these soldiers.

[17 : 53] No, Paul would have pictured a Roman army which fought in a phalanx, an interlocking formation where each soldier was responsible for covering the man next to him with his shield and

