

Ephesians 6: 10-20

Finally be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. Put on the whole armour of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we are not contending against flesh and blood, but against the principalities...

Where are you coming from when you hear mention of the devil – “not contending against flesh and blood but against the principalities and powers”?

Have you come to think that this sort of talk is very much outdated? That it may have made sense in biblical times – been taken literally. But we are children of the enlightenment and have other explanations for the bad things that happen. The devil? Goodness! Complete with horns and fork?

Maybe you’ve been influenced by the Charismatic Movement- the Pentecostal churches. Had a relative who scared the life out of you as a youngster with talk of demons and the devil.

Where we come from will influence our approach and receptivity to Eph.6.

You have probably already heard CS Lewis who said

In this matter of evil and the devil, Christians can fall into one of two errors – to believe there is nothing in this at all OR

- to be sure there is and to get fascinated by talk of the devil, to look for his workers in every shadow.

We may ignore evil when it does not impinge on us. Be surprised when it does.

Evil is real and powerful. What we do about it is the question. What God has done about it is fundamental.

Scott Peck. “What psychiatry ought to confront is the fact that it is possible for humans to be taken over by evil, to believe in a lie and then to live by it, to forget that it is a lie and to make it the foundation of one’s being.”

When we look at the scriptures we don’t find all the philosophical answers we might have hoped for. What we do find is what God is doing and will do about evil.

= His plan of salvation beginning with the call of Abraham – going right on through those great OT characters. But the mistakes. His own chosen people tainted by the evil. Then the prophetic words of Isaiah – there will be One

who will face up to all the forces of evil and darkness – face up to them using nothing but the power he has lived by – the pure love of God-

“Death we defy thee, the tempter is foiled...”

Jesus fulfilled this role. His going to the extreme, demonstrated for all time that the God who is love, is over all, that he overcomes all. In his death the powers of death and hell were defeated for all time.

The thing to keep uppermost in our minds about this victory is this: The power of the cross is not some sort of “superior power” of the same order as evil but stronger – goodness against badness. It is the cross and nothing but the cross.

Jesus did not defeat evil by laser beams of superior force, but rather by taking it on himself and letting it do its worst to him.

He freed sinners by sharing the consequences of their sin with them, not by exercising greater aggression.

It is by love that God delivers, remakes, heals, frees, saves.

“He took our infirmities and carried our diseases.” Isaiah

That’s what we are to remember. To apply. As those who are “in Christ” we are overcomers with him – as we allow his Spirit to move us in his ways.

But let’s be clear. When we do take the reality of evil seriously we don’t honour it by according it status. As though it might in some way be a threat to God.

We want to avoid any Dualism where we might be tempted to picture God and the devil constantly struggling for our attention.

“Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his power. Put on the whole armour of God, so that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.”

Years ago as speaker at a Bible Class camp I found some young people were anxious to talk. Desperate. Their yearning to find God and to know his power came from the fact that they’d experienced the power of real evil. They had no doubt about it. Frightened. Scared stiff.

They weren’t looking for philosophical explanations or gentle encouragements – they wanted freedom, deliverance.

In Jesus Christ, through the power of the Cross, there is freedom, deliverance. Hallelujah!

What Ephesians 6 is talking about – standing against the wiles of the devil is real. For Christians it is not ancient mythology.

At the same time, this “spiritual warfare”, talk of the devil must not be given undue place. Real, but there in the background.

Nigel Wright in an article about the Charismatic Renewal of few years back:-
“In my opinion the unsystematic treatment of the devil in the bible is a signal for us not to attempt to know more.”

The scriptures give no explanation of the origin of a satanic being.

In John 8:44 Jesus acknowledges such a force, describing it as a murderer and a liar from the beginning.

Throughout Christian history the devil and his works were kept in their place. Powerful, yes, but never dominant, never centre stage.

I never stop to give thanks for the work of God’s Holy Spirit in the life of God’s people. For the way God touched me and so many I knew with “demonstrations of the Spirit and with power”.

It seems that there are seasons of spiritual blessing just as there are seasons of growth in the natural world. We give thanks for them. We can pray for them. We cannot conjure them up.

In times of heightened spiritual awareness the awfulness of evil seems so much more apparent. The power of Jesus to bring freedom revealed. Miracle after miracle.

A danger – that too much credence be given to the destructive forces. The forces that nailed Jesus to the cross.

OK they are there – like a hole in the road – you know when you drive into it – but it's more an absence than a power. You wisely avoid it.

In this context it seems helpful to distinguish between God's acts, the devil's ploys and the normal processes of the natural world. We need to do this to be healthy Christians.

Right, you've discovered that evil is real, very real. Do you know the theological term, "dualism"? The idea that God and other forces are continually at war.

Our Ephesians reading, talks of putting on the armour. We must.

But we do not do so in fear. We do so confident, in faith.

We do not live in a paranoid universe. Where evil spirits are everywhere.

Putting on the full armour of God – the sword of the spirit, the shield of faith – is not to do with fighting force with force.

Evil? Yes. Destruction? Yes. Misunderstanding, insults, pain? Yes.

In minute measure. What Jesus experienced so much more – ending on the cross.

As Christ's followers, what we keep clearly before us is the way he waged this war against evil, sin. Not by matching force with force.

Jesus didn't defeat evil by laser beams of supernatural force. Instead he defeated evil by taking it on himself and letting it do its worst to him.

God's way, God's power is made perfect in weakness.

It's by love that God delivers, remakes, heals, frees, saves.

The armour. Six items. Belt, breastplate, shoes, shield, helmet, sword.

1. The belt of truth. God's truth revealed for us in Jesus Christ. Which is going to keep us up to the mark in our reading and searching to hear what God is saying to us right now.

As Christians we are not afraid of truth. We are not trying to defend a gospel that is shaky.

Sometimes we will need to ask God for courage to listen to his truth.

From Mark Noll "Often Christians have too quickly passed judgment on areas such as science based on wrong assumptions. For instance the early reformers rejected the idea of a heliocentric solar system because they assumed it contradicted scripture. Luther called Copernicus an "upstart astrologer". Within two generations all leaders of the Reformation church

accepted the new solar system picture. The overwhelming evidence for it forced them to re-examine old assumptions about what the bible is really saying. Moving slowly before we pass theological judgments on scientific theories is one of the ways we can love God with all our mind".
– and put on the belt of truth.

2 The breastplate of righteousness (check Wordbook here)

No matter what the enemy throws at you, no matter how you might be feeling, you and I have been given a clean slate by God – through Jesus. Sure we spoil that clean slate but when we confess our sins God wipes that slate clean again, and again, and again.

The righteousness of Christ has been given to us. Yes we are to work at it. But it doesn't all depend on us.

3 The gospel of peace – as shoes for your feet

"As shoes for your feet put on whatever will make you ready to proclaim the gospel of peace."

There is a direct reference to Isaiah 59:17 –

"How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of the messenger who announces peace."

Interesting that sharing the good news should be a part of our armour – a necessary part of our Christian living.

eg In our Home Group we somehow got to looking at how we interact in that time following Sunday worship – our conversations. "How are you?" "Fine." "Oh that's good."

As those who belong together, in a real sense responsible for one another's holiness couldn't we try for something more real?

Rather than scaring the life out of some newcomer we thought we could try practicing – asking another Home Group member after church, how things are with them at the moment.

"Put on whatever will make you ready to proclaim the gospel or peace."

4 The shield of faith. Now faith has quite a wide application for us.

Faith is an act of will. It involves trust, obedience.

We believe we are in harmony with God through faith – justified by faith – trusting in Jesus Christ.

Faith in God involves our handing over our concerns. Doing what we need to do – trusting him for the outcome. AND -

Faith is also very much one of God's wonderful gifts to us – individually and something corporate – something we share as Christian Believers.

6 The helmet of salvation.

Good things helmets. I wear one several times a week. Protection.

This helmet reminds us - "It is by grace we have been saved...through faith, and that not of ourselves lest we should boast about it."

Some folk can give you the day they came to have this assurance of salvation.

I like this quote "Yes I can give you the day and the hour when I was saved – The day was Good Friday, and the hour was 3 o'clock in the afternoon!"

It happened there, in the greatness and mystery of the love of God – back in time. By God' grace it has happened for us. We have put on this helmet of salvation – by faith and baptism. And one day this salvation will be fully revealed.

"Every Christian who has honestly experienced forgiveness through the Cross of Christ, whether by catastrophic conversion or by the grace of a Christian environment, knows that he/she has a weapon against evil of incomparable power." (Interp. Bible)

Be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might.