

**September 2, 2018**  
**Sermon Manuscript**

**Ephesians 6:10-20**

<sup>10</sup> Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. <sup>11</sup> Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. <sup>12</sup> 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. <sup>13</sup> 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. <sup>14</sup> Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, <sup>15</sup> and, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace. <sup>16</sup> In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one; <sup>17</sup> and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, <sup>18</sup> praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end, keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints, <sup>19</sup> and also for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel, <sup>20</sup> for which I am an ambassador in chains, that I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak.

**Note: Much of what is taught below on the biblical explanation of the spiritual realm is from The Bible Project, Tim Mackie & Jon Collins.**

We're Not Wrestling Flesh & Blood

This morning in our Second Lesson from Ephesians, we find Paul's famous passage on the spiritual armor. And throughout the years there has been no shortage of debate and puzzlement among believers about what exactly Paul is talking about, not to mention how it applies to our lives. But in verse 12 he writes, "<sup>12</sup> 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 this is the key verse to understanding the passage, as Paul reminds the Ephesians that there is an unseen, spiritual realm that apparently has considerable influence over what occurs in the physical realm we live in. So before I getting into interpreting what Paul says about the spiritual armor, I want to begin this morning by digging into what the Bible reveals about this **spiritual realm**. So: what do the scriptures tells us about who these spiritual rulers and authorities are, where they came from, what is their relationship to God, and what impact do they have on our lives today?

Now, I understand that this is a lot to take on. In fact, this might be a good day to plan to take home a manuscript if this topic interests you, since I'll be trying to

summarize truths gleaned from scriptures scattered all over the Bible and my manuscript has footnotes to explain things more deeply that time allows this morning. But furthermore, a fair amount of what I will present to you this morning may be sorta new, because most churches either avoid this topic altogether, while a minority of other churches won't shut up about engaging the spiritual realm, but have developed a doctrine of the spiritual realm based on taking a bunch of scriptures like Ephesians 6 completely out of context. So, whatever your impressions of the spiritual realm, I would encourage y'all try come along for the ride with me and even if your head begins spinning to hang in there with me. #

So let's jump in! I think the best place to begin talking about what the Bible reveals about the spiritual realm is by pointing out a curious pattern in scripture that some of you may have noticed. Throughout the Old Testament there are hints that the heavenly realm includes gods (of some sort) other than our own. For example, the first verse of Psalm 82 today states, "God takes his stand in the council of heaven; he gives judgment in the midst of the gods."

Now, what can make this seem odd is that Judaism, the religion of the Old Testament, is a famously monotheistic religion, meaning the Israelites worshiped one God.<sup>1</sup> And His name is Yahweh, or Jehovah, which means "I am". [Although, Jews considered God's name to sacred to say, so whenever you see the word "LORD" in all capital letters in the Bible, you know that the actual Hebrew is God's name: Yahweh.]

So Judaism is monotheistic and Christianity, which comes out of Judaism, nuances this not *a bit* with the doctrine of the Trinity, but Christianity is still monotheistic. We believe in the "one God" Yahweh, we just believe he exists in three distinct persons: Father, Son, & Holy Spirit.

However, in many locations in the Old Testament there is mention of this "Divine Council" mentioned in verse 1 of our Psalm, or as the psalmist addresses them in verse 6: "You are gods, and all of you (sons) of the Most High."<sup>2</sup> Elsewhere, like in

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<sup>1</sup> Jews famously affirm their monotheism with the daily prayer known derived from Deuteronomy 6:4 known as the Shema: "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one," which emphasized that God is one.

<sup>2</sup> **Psalm 29:1** – "Ascribe to the LORD, O heavenly beings [Hebrew *the sons of God*], ascribe to the LORD glory and strength."

**Psalm 89** – "<sup>5</sup> Let the heavens praise your wonders, O LORD,  
your faithfulness in the assembly of the holy ones!

<sup>6</sup> For who in the skies can be compared to the LORD?

Who among the heavenly beings [Hebrew *the sons of God*] is like the LORD,

<sup>7</sup> a God greatly to be feared in the council of the holy ones,  
and awesome above all who are around him?

<sup>8</sup> O LORD God of hosts,

verse 8 of today's First Lesson from Deuteronomy, they are explicitly called "sons of God". But I should clarify that this doesn't mean these beings are actually God's children. Instead, the term "sons of god" in Hebrew is really just a term that means are "spiritual beings" *like God is*, as opposed to physical beings like us.

But another way scripture refers to this Divine Council of spiritual beings is the term "host of heaven". You'll often see this phrase in hymns, but believers often don't grasp what it means. "Host" is an old English word meaning "armies". And it appears about twenty times in the Old Testament.<sup>3</sup> So for example, there's a verse in 1 Kings 22 that says, "I saw the LORD (Yahweh) sitting on his throne, and all the host of heaven standing beside him on his right hand and on his left." In other words, it's describing God as being surrounded by an army of spiritual beings.

But again, even though these "sons of god" or "heavenly hosts" are spiritual beings like Yahweh, this is where their similarities with God end, because scripture consistently makes clear God is greater than them.<sup>4</sup> More than fifty times the Old Testament refers to Yahweh as the "Most High" God (e.g. Gen 14:18). And elsewhere He is called the God of gods and Lord of lords.<sup>5</sup> So when we do come across passages that would seem to rule out the existence of other "gods", like the one that says "there is no other god but Yahweh"<sup>6</sup>, what this really means is that these gods do not compare to Yahweh. You might think of them as "demi-gods".

But they also aren't eternal beings like Yahweh. Instead, they are beings with limited power, created at some point by God. #

So what can we know about God's creation of these beings? Well, ancient people actually identified the heavenly lights of the moon-and the stars with these divine beings. In fact, the moon and the stars *were the gods* of the Egyptians and

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who is mighty as you are, O LORD,  
with your faithfulness all around you?

**Job 1:6** – "Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan [Hebrew *the Accuser or the Adversary*] also came among them."

<sup>3</sup> For example, in **1 Kings 22:19**, the prophet Micaiah says, "Therefore hear the word of the LORD: I saw the LORD sitting on his throne, and all the host of heaven standing beside him on his right hand and on his left."

<sup>4</sup> **Psalm 89:6** explicitly states, "Who among the gods (Hebrew *sons of God*) is like the LORD (Hebrew *Yahweh*)?"

<sup>5</sup> **Deuteronomy 10:17** – "<sup>17</sup> For (Yahweh) your God is God of gods and Lord of lords..."

<sup>6</sup> **Deuteronomy 4:39** – "...know therefore today, and lay it to your heart, that the Lord is God in heaven above and on the earth beneath; there is no other."

Canaanites; that's what they worshipped. But the Israelites identified these heavenly lights as representing divine beings as well! Of course, they recognized that Yahweh was the Most High God behind it all, but the gods of other nations are identified with the moon or stars, or the "starry hosts", at least a dozen times in the Old Testament.<sup>7</sup>

Well, this has led some scholars to conclude that the fourth day of the creation, back in Genesis 1, is describing God's creation of these demi-gods; that when it says, God created the sun and moon and stars, to (quote) "rule the day and night and rule over the day" this is a description of god delegating some level of

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<sup>7</sup> **Deuteronomy 4:19** says, "19 And beware lest you raise your eyes to heaven, and when you see the sun and the moon and the stars, all the host of heaven, you be drawn away and bow down to them and serve them, things that the LORD your God has allotted to all the peoples under the whole heaven." Or in **Deuteronomy 17:3** God prohibits the worship of "other gods" or the sun or the moon or any of the host of heaven.

**Also...**

**2 Kings 17:16** – "They forsook all the commands of the Lord their God and made for themselves two idols cast in the shape of calves, and an Asherah pole. They bowed down to all the starry hosts, and they worshiped Baal."

**2 Kings 21:3** – "He rebuilt the high places his father Hezekiah had destroyed; he also erected altars to Baal and made an Asherah pole, as Ahab king of Israel had done. He bowed down to all the starry hosts and worshiped them."

**2 Kings 21:5** – "In the two courts of the temple of the Lord, he built altars to all the starry hosts."

**2 Kings 23:4** – "The king ordered Hilkiah the high priest, the priests next in rank and the doorkeepers to remove from the temple of the Lord all the articles made for Baal and Asherah and all the starry hosts. He burned them outside Jerusalem in the fields of the Kidron Valley and took the ashes to Bethel."

**2 Kings 23:5** – "He did away with the idolatrous priests appointed by the kings of Judah to burn incense on the high places of the towns of Judah and on those around Jerusalem—those who burned incense to Baal, to the sun and moon, to the constellations and to all the starry hosts."

**2 Chronicles 33:3** – "He rebuilt the high places his father Hezekiah had demolished; he also erected altars to the Baals and made Asherah poles. He bowed down to all the starry hosts and worshiped them."

**2 Chronicles 33:5** – "In both courts of the temple of the Lord, he built altars to all the starry hosts."

**Isaiah 45:12** – "It is I who made the earth and created mankind on it. My own hands stretched out the heavens; I marshaled their starry hosts."

**Jeremiah 19:13** – "The houses in Jerusalem and those of the kings of Judah will be defiled like this place, Topheth—all the houses where they burned incense on the roofs to all the starry hosts and poured out drink offerings to other gods."

**Zephaniah 1:5** "those who bow down on the roofs to the host of the heavens, those who bow down and swear to the Lord and yet swear by Milcom"

authority to these demi-gods or heavenly hosts.<sup>8</sup> And those who argue for this interpretation note that there are only two instances in Genesis 1 where God gives something in his creation authority to “rule” – you can take my word for it – the only two instances are on the sixth day God, when gives humans dominion over the creatures of the earth,<sup>9</sup> and on the fourth day when God gives these hosts of heaven authority over darkness and light.<sup>10</sup> #

But our first lesson this morning actually fills in a little more information about what sort of authority God delegated to these spiritual beings. Look what Moses says beginning at verse 7, where I’ve underlined. He writes,

<sup>7</sup> Remember the days of old;  
 consider the years of many generations;  
 ask your father, and he will show you,  
 your elders, and they will tell you.

<sup>8</sup> When the Most High gave to the nations their inheritance,  
 when he divided mankind,  
 he fixed the borders of the peoples  
 according to the number of the sons of God.

<sup>9</sup> But the Lord's portion is his people,  
 Jacob his allotted heritage.

Here, Moses is explaining that after creating these “sons of god”, the Lord assigned each one to a different nation, but Yahweh kept Jacob – the nation of Israel – for

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<sup>8</sup> **Genesis 1:14-19** – “<sup>14</sup> And God said, ‘Let there be lights in the expanse of the heavens to separate the day from the night. And let them be for signs and for seasons, and for days and years, <sup>15</sup> and let them be lights in the expanse of the heavens to give light upon the earth.’ And it was so.<sup>16</sup> And God made the two great lights—the greater light to rule the day and the lesser light to rule the night—and the stars. <sup>17</sup> And God set them in the expanse of the heavens to give light on the earth, <sup>18</sup> to rule over the day and over the night, and to separate the light from the darkness. And God saw that it was good. <sup>19</sup> And there was evening and there was morning, the fourth day.”

This would explain why later in the same chapter, God says, “<sup>26</sup> Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.” Some scholars believe this refers to the divine council as God says, “let us make man in our image,” but because God is the highest and greatest God, He is the one who actually does the creating in verse 27.

<sup>9</sup> **Genesis 1:26** – “<sup>26</sup> Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.”

<sup>10</sup> Note **Psalms 82:5** – “(The sons of god) do not know, neither do they understand; they go about in darkness”

himself.<sup>11</sup> So what you're looking at is the Bible's explanation for how these spiritual beings (or heavenly hosts) **became** the false gods of the nations surrounding Israel. #

But if you read about some of these false gods of these foreign nations in the Bible, some of them are responsible for calling those who worship them to do some pretty awful things, such as sacrificing their children.<sup>12</sup> And God clearly doesn't want the Israelites to have anything to do with these gods. So what changed? If God created these spiritual beings, what went wrong? #

Well, scripture seems to indicate that these spiritual beings had a fall into evil that *paralleled humanity's fall* into sin. So just as the serpent convinced Adam & Eve (in Genesis 3) to be dissatisfied with the role God had given them, apparently these sons of god weren't with their role either. This is perhaps the best explanation of this bizarre episode in Genesis 6, that describes the "sons of God" deciding to have sex with the daughters of man, with human women.<sup>13</sup> So instead of simply ruling the nations they were given authority over, these sons of God **misuse** that authority by violating these humans and using them to their own ends. Therefore, it seems that at least **these** spiritual beings became evil. [We know not all of the "sons of god" became evil, because some are angels who continued to serve the Lord.<sup>14</sup> But at least the ones who were assigned to the nations seem to have fallen<sup>15</sup>.]

Well, among these evil spirits a chief also emerges. And this is famously revealed at the beginning of the story of Job. Just listen to Job 1. It says, "Now there was a day when the **sons of God** came to present themselves before the LORD, and

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<sup>11</sup> The reference to God dividing mankind in verse 8 (of Deut 32) refers to the table of nations in Genesis 10 when God divides the offspring of Noah's sons into 70 nations. Note the numerical connection to Luke 10. (see footnote s)

<sup>12</sup> **Leviticus 18:21** – "21 You shall not give any of your children to offer them to Molech, and so profane the name of your God: I am the LORD."

<sup>13</sup> **Genesis 6** – "1 When man began to multiply on the face of the land and daughters were born to them, 2 the sons of God saw that the daughters of man were attractive. And they took as their wives any they chose. 3 Then the LORD said, "My Spirit shall not abide in man forever, for he is flesh: his days shall be 120 years." 4 The Nephilim were on the earth in those days, and also afterward, when the sons of God came in to the daughters of man and they bore children to them. These were the mighty men who were of old, the men of renown.

<sup>14</sup> For example, the Archangel Michael.

**Daniel 12:1** – "At that time shall arise Michael, the great prince who has charge of your people. And there shall be a time of trouble, such as never has been since there was a nation till that time. But at that time your people shall be delivered, everyone whose name shall be found written in the book."

<sup>15</sup> Whether they were assigned before or after is unclear.

Satan also came among them... And the LORD said to Satan, “Have you considered my servant Job...?” (1:6,8) #

So the Bible associates these “sons of god” who’ve become evil spirits with seeking to influence humans toward destroying themselves and one another - with Satan as their chief – and with driving the political, economic, and moral corruption of the nations they wield authority over. #

And, as Israel’s history moves forward to the era of the monarchy and the age of the prophets, the nation of Babylon in particular – because it unleashed the most evil and terror on the ancient world – becomes identified with Satan himself.<sup>16</sup> Of course, Babylon eventually conquered Israel and took them into exile in the 6<sup>th</sup> Century B.C. And through that the Babylonians comes to symbolize “all forms of human power that (wickedly) elevate themselves to the place of God.”<sup>17</sup> ##

And the reign of such evil continues to increase unchecked for centuries, until God intervenes by sending His son. Scripture describes Jesus as the one and only son of God,<sup>18</sup> which again, “one and only” can be taken to mean the son of God who is the ultimate or greatest. And Jesus, of course, comes to announce a new kingdom – the kingdom of God – a good kingdom, which humans can enter into through following him and be freed from enslavement to evil and wickedness. But, in the gospels we see that, as Jesus is ministering, he both provokes and has confrontations with many demons. And what are these? You guessed it, these are the same fallen “sons of God” we’ve been talking about, who oppose the reign of God. In fact, the Greek word for demons literally means a “lesser-being” or “demi-god”.

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<sup>16</sup> Isaiah 14 prophesies about the fall of king of Babylon and in verse 12 is identified as or analogized to the “Day Star” (Latin: Lucifer): “<sup>3</sup>When the LORD has given you rest from your pain and turmoil and the hard service with which you were made to serve, <sup>4</sup>you will take up this taunt against the king of Babylon...<sup>12</sup>“How you are fallen from heaven, O Day Star, son of Dawn! How you are cut down to the ground, you who laid the nations low! <sup>13</sup>You said in your heart, ‘I will ascend to heaven; above the stars of God I will set my throne on high; I will sit on the mount of assembly in the far reaches of the north; <sup>14</sup>I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High.’ <sup>15</sup>But you are brought down to Sheol, to the far reaches of the pit.”

<sup>17</sup> Tim Mackie of The Bible Project

<sup>18</sup> **John 1** – “<sup>14</sup>And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth... <sup>18</sup>No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known.”

Well, if we turn briefly to our gospel passage from Luke, notice it describes Jesus sending out seventy-two<sup>19</sup> of his followers to minister in his name and in verse 17 they return saying “Lord, even the demons are subject to us in your name!” And look how Jesus responds. He says, “I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven.” As Jesus sees “people giving their allegiance to (him) as God’s appointed new human king and ... people shift their participation from human kingdoms given to evil to god’s kingdom... in the spiritual realm he is watching Satan fall.”<sup>20</sup>

And then, of course, through Jesus’ death and resurrection he made Satan’s defeat sure and also made a way for us to become (adopted) sons (and daughters) of god,<sup>21</sup> no longer required to be enslaved to the evil forces of the fallen sons of God.

But despite all of this, we still remain vulnerable to cooperating with evil and even being quite blind to it. In fact, any time believers operate in attitudes or behaviors that *dehumanize* ourselves or others we are aligning ourselves with those spiritual forces opposed to God. And, of course, we are vulnerable to this in many areas and on many levels.

The Old Testament seems to focus on evil spirits wielding influence on the *geopolitical level*. And it’s no wonder, since if Satan wants to bring destruction upon humans the most efficient means for doing it is through the power of empire. And you won’t find many who would argue that Hitler and Stalin, Mao Zedong and Pol Pot, were instruments of Satan. But another example closer to home of political ideology leading to dehumanization is what our nation did to Native Americans in the name of a political ideology called “manifest destiny”. But also in the present day, many on the left shamelessly pedal ideology dehumanizing the unborn, while an increasing number on the right are buying into ideology that dehumanizes immigrants or minorities. Our nation’s politics are *rife* with ideologies that dehumanize one party to cater to the selfishness of another, and to align with them is to align ourselves with the powers of evil.

But narrowing things down to our own daily lives and how we relate to our fellow man, Jesus addresses some of the ways we most commonly dehumanize one another

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<sup>19</sup> Interestingly, translations are split between whether this number should be 72 or 70, based upon an inconsistency among ancient manuscripts. More recent discoveries point toward 70, which could mean Jesus is making a reference to the same number in the Table of Nations (see footnote k).

<sup>20</sup> Tim Mackie of The Bible Project

<sup>21</sup> **Romans 8** – “<sup>14</sup> For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. <sup>15</sup> For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, “Abba! Father!” <sup>16</sup> The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God,<sup>17</sup> and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.



in his Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5), such as when we 1) retaliate against someone who has wronged us with resentment or contempt, or 2) when we objectify another sexually with our eyes, 3) when we carry unforgiveness that leads us away from treating others with dignity. Despite how common these behaviors are in our society; and when we behave this way we are cooperating with Satan's plans for us, not the Lord's.

Then finally, in our home... just last week we talked about how common a dynamic develops in a marriage where we seek to serve ourselves by relating to our spouse with controlling love rather differentiating from them and loving them unconditionally and sacrificially. In doing so, we dehumanize them; we play god. And our kids aren't exempt either, as we can dehumanize them as well by projecting our own dreams upon their lives, or positioning our ego to feed off their achievements. Again, in our society many of these behaviors are viewed as quite normal, but in truth they are Satanic; the father of lies is behind them. #

Well, this finally leads us back to Ephesians, where Paul affirms in verse 12 that "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," which he follows with a description of this spiritual armor we're all supposed to "take up" or "put on" to defend ourselves.

Now there are pockets of the church that have interpreted verse 12 to mean that Christians are called to offensively engage these evil spiritual powers – to storm the gates of hell through prayer in the name of Jesus – and that this armor is something we pray on first to make us spiritually invincible. Well, maybe.

But, if we consider this passage in light of the context of the whole letter and in light of what Paul has been up to in Ephesians, it becomes pretty clear that that's not what Paul is aiming for at all.

Many of you recall, when we began walking Ephesians back in July, we saw Paul opening this letter by reminding the Ephesians of the new way of living Jesus has made available: life in the Spirit, the life of the Kingdom. Over and over again he uses the phrase "in Christ" or "in the Lord" and we talked about how Paul was calling us to actually stand in the Lord, meaning to live in an active relationship of reliance upon him through His Holy Spirit.<sup>22</sup>

But then, a few weeks later, we saw how Paul had moved forward in his letter to talk about ethical instruction. And we looked at a passage where Paul was encouraging the Ephesians to put away 1) falsehood and 2) anger and 3) corrupt talk, and 4) to seek to become a giver rather than a taker. However, Paul was meaning to paint a picture of the sort of righteousness that can become possible when we seek to

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<sup>22</sup> See sermon from 7/15/18

live in Christ. So this was good news because to the extent that we are able to obey God's commands we will experience true freedom in this life.

Well now Paul is closing his letter by reminding the Ephesians that their battle is not against flesh & blood, which perhaps scares the bejeebies out of some of them (or at least some of us). But immediately he follows that with an encouragement that the spiritual strength that comes from living in Christ is akin to that of a Roman soldier in his panoply of armor.

Now keep in mind: occupation the Ephesians were all too familiar with the soldiers of the Roman army, since they lived under Roman occupation. To them, Roman soldiers would have epitomized worldly strength; they would have literally viewed a legion of Roman soldiers as invincible: cannot be beaten!

But as Paul lists out the belt and the breastplate and shoes and the shield and the helmet and the sword that makes a Roman soldier so strong, he associates *each one* with a characteristics of the life in Christ he's been describing for the previous 5 chapters: truth, righteousness, peace, faith, salvation and knowledge of the word of God. So this is Paul's way of saying that, while the spiritual forces opposing the Ephesians are great, if they will *merely* seek to live in Christ as he has taught them the designs of these evil forces will not succeed. In other words, the whole secret of spiritual strength lies in union with the Lord. If we forsake abiding in Christ then these evil forces are going to wreak havoc in our lives and use us to wreak havoc in the lives of others. But if we remain committed to the living lives of truth and righteousness and wisdom and peace through reliance upon Jesus and opening up ourselves to him, we're going to be okay and will even become a blessing – a haven – for others.

So, I know people often try to turn this passage into a guide to becoming a spiritual superhero and actively taking on Satan, but we really have to go ignore the context to hold that interpretation. In fact, verse 11 makes clear that Paul's talking about standing against the devil's schemes, not going after him. And other scholars have noted that the armor Paul described isn't complete, as he leaves out two of the soldier's offensive weapons<sup>23</sup> and includes only one, in the sword. Everything else is defensive, which led Bp Handley Moule to conclude, "Paul is not painting a picture of a march or an assault, but of the holding of the fortress of the soul and the church for the heavenly king." #

So perhaps God has called certain believers to be offensive and aggressive to employ some methods of spiritual warfare on certain occasions. But I tell you what, if I'm gonna get into that sorta stuff as a Christian, it **has to** remain secondary to cooperating with God's number one objective for me: which is changing my character to be more like Christ.

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<sup>23</sup> The lance and the dagger (Keener)

We must recognize that in our sinfulness, there is going to be a pull toward spiritual practices that focus on problems that are external to me, in order to evade the inner work that true discipleship requires. Some Christians get fixated on influencing politics for Christ, others obsess over the end times, some focus on getting the liturgy just right, and still others get into signs & wonders and spiritual warfare, all the while resisting the work God is dying to do<sup>24</sup> of healing and changing their heart.

So I'm not saying these interests are bad or wrong, in and of themselves – I'm sure God has people He has called to develop proficiency in each of those areas. But a belief that must be foundational – is indispensable – to healthy spirituality is the belief that the source and root of all of my problems begins with me and my sinful attitude, and working on that – on our character – is how Jesus wants to bring change to the world through us. And everything else is secondary.<sup>25</sup> #

The good news of this passage is that even though it's not flesh and blood we're up against, the battle is engaged and won by engaging in earthy practices, like prayer and study and fellowship and obedience, that keep us in union with the Lord. If we want Jesus to watch Satan's influence fall from our lives like lightning from heaven, we need only learn to stand in Him, in Christ.

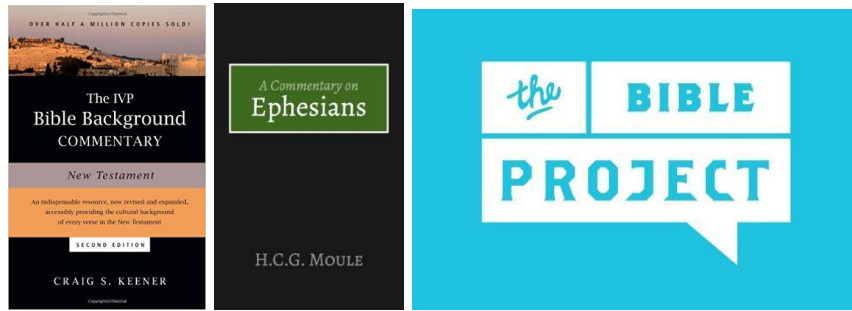
Amen.

## Sources Used

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<sup>24</sup> See what I did there? ☺

<sup>25</sup> **1 Corinthians 13** – “If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. <sup>2</sup> And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. <sup>3</sup> If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing. <sup>4</sup> Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant<sup>5</sup> or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; <sup>6</sup> it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. <sup>7</sup> Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. <sup>8</sup> Love never ends. As for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away. <sup>9</sup> For we know in part and we prophesy in part, <sup>10</sup> but when the perfect comes, the partial will pass away. <sup>11</sup> When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I gave up childish ways. <sup>12</sup> For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known. <sup>13</sup> So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love.”



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