

In the Spiritual Battle, Stand your Ground

Ephesians 6:10-12 key verse: Ephesians 6:12 “For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood...but against the spiritual forces of evil.”

I praise God and our Lord Jesus Christ for his faithfulness to us. Last week I volunteered to bring the message today. Next week someone else will be speaking.

It has been a difficult week for many people. It has been hard on everyone at OIC. Some people are really wondering what is going on. Why is this happening? No matter what opinion any of us have about what has taken place, we should all agree on one thing. We are in a great spiritual struggle.

Our passage today tells us that we aren't wrestling with one another. Our real challenge is wrestling with spiritual forces. What are we to do? In just these three verses I see at least three things to take special note of:

1. Be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might.
2. Stand against the schemes of the devil.
3. Remember we are not wrestling with flesh and blood, but in the spirit realm.

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

How many of you have read Pilgrim's Progress. This book was written several hundred years ago and the English is not the easiest to understand. There are updated versions. Whatever version you read, I highly recommend it. It is an analogy written by a minister named John Bunyan to help the people of his church understand better their own Christian walk. The main character is a man by the name of Christian. Christian lived in the town of Destruction. Christian had a problem though. He had a large and heavy backpack that he couldn't take off. It was the weight of his sin. He knew he was going to die. He was afraid and would cry out in agony.

One day a man name Evangelist came and showed Christian the way to the Celestial City, that is, heaven. But first Christian had to travel a long road. It was his pilgrimage. The first stop on the road was at the cross where Jesus took the burden from his back. He was so happy! He could dance and be free of the sin! But he still had to travel on. Later he came to a castle where he received armor. He had a helmet, a breastplate, a belt, a sword, special shoes and a shield. He spent a long and enjoyable time at the castle learning about the Celestial City and the Master who had prepared the way for his pilgrims.

But eventually he had to leave the castle and continue walking on his way to the Celestial City. Just after he left the castle he came to the valley of humiliation. What happened there has always stayed with me. He was Christian. He was saved. He was on his way to heaven, the Celestial City. So why did he have to go through the valley? That is the way the road went. In the valley he met apollyon, the devil. The devil was the prince of the City of Destruction that Christian had left. Angrily the devil told him that Christian was his citizen and he couldn't leave the city. Christian faced the devil and said that he was no longer his citizen, but belonged to Jesus.

It came to a fight. The devil shot flaming arrows at him. They hit his shield for the most part, some times one would get by and hit Christian. The devil closed in with his sword swinging this way and that way. The devil was a huge dragon, much bigger and stronger than Christian. Yet Christian stood his ground. Finally in one strong push the devil had Christian down on the ground. He cried that if Christian wasn't going to be his citizen anymore, then he would rather he was dead. As the devil raised his sword to drive it one more time into Christian to kill him, Christian shouted, “Do not gloat over me, my enemy! Though I have fallen, I will rise.” (Micah 7:8) And with that Christian jabbed his sword up into the underbelly of the devil, the dragon. The devil cried out and ran away. God ministered to

Christian's wounds and healed them all.

Christian went on from there in his journey and had many more adventures before he entered the Celestial City. If you want to know about them, you'll have to read the book yourself.

What this particular battle scene brought home to me, was that we use the Bible to stand against the devil. How can we do that if we don't know much about the Bible? Not so well. We are blessed in Japan to have the Bible freely available to us. People didn't always have the Bible. Many people gave their lives trying to get the Bible published in languages other than Greek, Hebrew and Latin. People around the world, even today are in places where if they have a Bible they must hid it. You have God's Word right here. It is powerful, if you read it and meditate on it. It is like taking vitamins, or lifting weights. It makes you strong as a Christian. You can't just carry it, or lay it on a table somewhere, you have to get into it. Remember, this is God's Word, so as you study, ask him to guide you into the truth it has for you. The Holy Spirit will bring you insight and understanding.

Build yourself up in your knowledge of God. Pray always. Have faith. You are not on your own. When you need help, God is there, just rely on his might. If you are in Jesus you are saved. You have your name written in the book of life. But living the Christian life is more than just where you're going to go when you die. It is how you spend your life while you are here on earth. You can live in fear of the devil. You can live in fear of other people. You can live in fear, even of people in the church. But this passage tells us to be strong, strong in the Lord. Go in his might.

If you are in Christ, you have the Holy Spirit of God in you. (Eph 1:13) the Holy Spirit has sealed you. You have the Holy Spirit to guide you. Remember that, and don't be afraid, wherever you go. Furthermore the Bible tells us that his angels are around you. The angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear him, and delivers them. (Psalm 34:7) You don't realize it most of the time, but if you are in Christ you are not alone. There are angels here with us now. We don't pray to them or worship them, but they are sent here by God to protect us. Sometimes they protect us from spiritual attacks, sometimes it is actual physical safety they bring.

Randy Alcorn has written much about heaven, based passages found in the Bible. In one of his Christian fiction books he explains about a Christian man who died and went to heaven. He met the angel that had been with him for years as he was living here on earth. What a pleasure it was to finally see and talk with this other servant of God who had been with him, but not seen until that day. Some day, me too, you too, will have that pleasure.

Now if you are facing a situation, say you are having trouble at work. Remember God is on your side. Since you are going into that situation with the Holy Spirit in you and an angel walking behind you, doesn't that give you confidence? From that comes faith and strength. If we are weak, it isn't because we are unable to be strong. It is because we don't have faith in God and his promises to be with us. If you are confident of this, you can go out to face whatever comes your way in strength! Be strong for service, strong for suffering and strong for fighting.

Stand against the schemes of the devil.

The devil is crafty. He came as a serpent in the Garden of Eden. He spoke words carefully to twist God's words. Revelation 12:9 refers to the devil as that ancient serpent, the deceiver of the world. He is experienced in the art and trade of tempting. He will lie. He is the father of lies (John 8:44).

But we don't need to give in to him and his ways. He is older than the earth, he is cunning and tricky, but he is not equal with God. He is a creature of God, who rebelled. We don't need to fear him, because we are in Jesus.

James tells us to resist the devil and he will flee from you. (James 4:7) That's it, just don't give in to him.

He is the best bluffer there is in the world. I used to be afraid of dogs. When I was a teenager one of our neighbors had a dog. I had to pass by their house fairly often and sometimes that thing would be on the

loose. I'd look as I got close, wondering if I could pass that day without trouble. Too many days it would come running up to me barking like it was going to tear my leg off. I really didn't want to get bitten. If I turned to go away from him he would jump in close like he was going to take a bite. If I stopped and faced him he would stand his ground, just barking at me. Slowly I would move past the house. Take a step, stop and face the dog. Wait, then take another step, and face the dog. I remember one time it took me at least 5 minutes to walk past that house. I think the distance was about 30 meters. Once I got past the neighbor's house the dog would turn and go back to the porch. I got pretty tired of this treatment. I had heard that you should never let a dog see that you are afraid. If you do, they will attack. So I decided that I was not going to let this dog slow me down and mess up my day. The next time I passed by the neighbor's house I just ignored him. He barked at me just like before, but I kept walking without even looking his direction. He gave up and went back to the porch. A few years later I learned that if you yell and charge, most dogs like that will squeal and run away.

I realized as long as I was afraid of it, the dog had the advantage. But if I ignored him he would go away, and if I stood up to him, he ran away. The devil is like that dog. I don't mean to say he is powerless, but if you are in Christ, he has no power over you.

If you deal with the devil, if you worship him, if you encourage him, if you do things like praying to idols, and so on, then yes, he can have power over you.

But notice it is only as you give him power that he has it. If you don't give it to him, he can't hurt you, as long as you are in Christ. because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world. (1 John 4:4).

What are his schemes? Deceit is one. He wants us to believe lies about God's truth. God doesn't really love you. Maybe He loves other people, but not you. You aren't good enough.

Listen, have you realized that you are guilty of sin? Do you know that all have sinned, including me and you? Have you realized that if you die with the guilt of sin, you will be eternally punished? If you have realized this, and confessed it to Jesus, and sincerely asked him to forgive you, then He has. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. (1 John 1:9)

He has taken your sin away from you. You are no longer under the guilt of it. You are a new person in him. If He has done this for you, then you are in him. He loves you like his very own child, because you are his very own child. Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God— (John 1:12)

The devil schemes to tempt you. It seems he can put thoughts and ideas into our heads. He appeared to Jesus to tempt him to disobey the Father, to be proud and powerful, and to doubt the Father's love and protection. You probably know the account, Jesus had been in the wilderness for 40 days without food, fasting and praying. The devil came to him and tempted him to use his miracle power to turn a stone into bread. Normally there is nothing wrong with eating bread, but in this instance Jesus was obeying the Father and not eating. The devil said, "If you are the Son of God, do it! You can make it bread and eat it." But Jesus replied with a Bible verse, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God." (Deut 8:3) Next the devil offered him power over the whole world, appealing to pride. He could have it all, if only He would worship the devil. Jesus replied with a Bible verse, "You shall worship only the Lord your God and him only shall you serve. (Deut 6:13) Finally, the devil took him to a high place and dared him to jump. If you are really the Son of God throw yourself down and God will send his angels to catch you. In other words, maybe you aren't who you believe you are. Test God and see if He will save you. Jesus replied with a Bible verse, "You shall not put the Lord your God to the test." (Deut 6:16)

What do we learn from these temptations? Jesus was tempted. You will be too. Jesus resisted by quoting scripture. You need to be into the Bible, the Word of God. And in the end, the devil went away, at least for awhile.

Remember we are not wrestling with flesh and blood, but in the spirit realm. Too often it is easier to decide the enemy is a person we are dealing with. People will oppose you, but the real enemy in these situations is the devil. He works in people to influence them in ways that are harmful. He works at getting each of us off track from where we should be. He likes to get us divided up and fighting one another.

We have a song we sing here at OIC often. I love it, “the battle belongs to the Lord.” It really is God's battle. We are just the soldiers doing what He has put us in charge of. We aren't responsible for winning the war. We are just responsible for the little part that He has given us to do. Don't fret over the big battle. That is God's responsibility. Just be faithful in what He has given you to do.

We do have something that we are to do. That is to pray. Praying is communing with God. We praise God for who He is. We thank him for what He is doing in us, in the world, in all of history. We bring before him the concerns we have for ourselves and for those around us. Those around us are our family, friends, brothers and sisters in Christ and people around the world.

There is no distance problem with prayer. Many years ago my sister was diagnosed with cancer while Jill and I were here in Japan. I have always been close to my sister. She was 12 years older than me and like a mother to me. I wanted so badly to go back to America to be with her. But I couldn't. I was on assignment here in Osaka. But I realized, that I could pray for her. Because I was so far away from her I prayed all the more. And God being with her did her a lot more good than I could have by being at her side. So I prayed. I had peace about the situation. I saw her again at the end of our missionary term. And she recovered from that bout with cancer as well.

These days especially, we need to pray for God's work here. We pray for each other. We pray for people with hurt in their hearts over what has been taking place recently. We pray for those who aren't here today, and for those who are. We pray for wisdom for the church leadership, and for each of us. We pray for love to abound.

Conclusion: Seek to be strong in the Lord. Spend time in the Bible, his word to us. Spend time in prayer, expressing praise and the concerns of your heart. Be still before him as He brings his comfort and peace to you. Resist the devil. He will surely come to attack, condemn and tempt you. But you are standing in the great God, creator of the universe and Saviour of all who come to him. Don't be afraid, stand your ground.