

THE SOVEREIGN GOD AND THE MYSTERY OF HIS WILL: A STUDY OF EPHESIANS

(LESSON ONE HUNDRED AND ELEVEN)

“THE SCHEMES OF THE DEVIL”

EPHESIANS 6:10-12

10 Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might.

11 Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.

12 For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.

In verse **11** of our text Paul writes, *“Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.”*

The **New English Translation** renders the verse as follows: *“Clothe yourselves with the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand against the schemes of the devil.”*

We must be careful to note, that it is not **our** armour that Paul says we are to put on. He says we are to put on **God’s** armour. We must not attempt to engage in battle with the enemy of our soul based on human ability, or by employing carnal weapons. Spiritual warfare demands spiritual armour, and that spiritual armour can only be the *“whole armour of God.”*

In **Ephesians 6:11** Paul urges believers to put on, “*the whole armour of God.*” The phrase is a translation of the Greek word **panoplia**: (**pan-op-lee’-ah**), which refers to the complete set of instruments used in offensive and defensive war. The idea is of the full preparation of a foot soldier for offense and defense.

The armour is referred to as **God’s** armour for two reasons. Firstly, it is God who supplies the armour, and secondly, the armour is **His** actual armour. In **Isaiah 59:16-17** we read the following:

16 And he saw that there was no man, and wondered that there was no intercessor: therefore his arm brought salvation unto him; and his righteousness, it sustained him.

17 For he put on righteousness as a breastplate, and an helmet of salvation upon his head; and he put on the garments of vengeance for clothing, and was clad with zeal as a cloak.

(King James Version)

Brothers and sisters, the armour with which God furnishes His elect, is the very same armour that the Messiah, Jesus Christ, clothed Himself with in order to wage spiritual warfare against Satan and his hosts. **God has supplied** us with the complete armour, but it is **our responsibility** to put it on. We need “*the whole armour of God,*” without the lack of any single part. God has not sent us out into battle without providing everything we need to guarantee our victory, and the armour that He gives to us is one that He Himself has tried and proven!

Brothers and sisters, in a real sense, Jesus Christ Himself is the armour that we must put on. Paul informs us of this in **Romans 13:14**. He writes, “*Instead, put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh to arouse its desires*” (**New English Translation**). Paul is obviously speaking figuratively. He is **not** making a reference to that which is **external** but to that which is **internal**. He is speaking about the believer’s intimate identification with Jesus Christ. “To be clothed with a person” is a Greek idea, signifying the assumption of the interests of

another. It means to enter into that person's views, to imitate the spirit, words, and actions of the person, to the extent of identifying completely with the person. To "put on Christ" conveys the thought that when others interact with us, when they scrutinize our lives, they ought to see Christ rather than us. Paul explains it this way: "*I have been crucified with Christ, and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me. So the life I now live in the body, I live because of the faithfulness of the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me*" (**Galatians 2:20, New English Translation**).

Why does Paul exhort the Ephesian believers to put on the whole armour of God? He does so because that is the only way that they will be "*able to stand against the wiles of the devil.*" The phrase, "*to stand against*" is a translation of the Greek word **histémi**: (**his'-tay-mee**) which means "to make to stand, to stand; to make firm, fix, establish; to cause a person to keep his or her place, or a thing to keep its place." **Histémi** was a military term for holding one's position and therefore not yielding an inch of territory to the enemy. The word conveys the idea of standing one's ground, as opposed to taking flight.

From a practical standpoint, believer's "*stand*" by living Holy Ghost-filled, Word-saturated lives (**Ephesians 5:18, Colossians 3:16**). In order for a believer to successfully stand against the wiles, or schemes of the devil, he or she must continually be filled, or controlled by the Holy Spirit, or to say it another way, he or she must have "*the word of Christ dwelling in them richly.*" When the believer consistently lives in such a state, he or she will not quench or grieve the Spirit, and will therefore be empowered by Him to stand firm.

The greatest weapon we have in spiritual warfare is not what we say to the devil, but how we allow the Lord Jesus Christ to live His wonderfully efficacious life in us and through us. It is not by "binding," or "rebuking," or "pleading the blood," that we are enabled to stand, but it is by surrendering to the Holy Spirit's influence, His promptings and

His leading. It is by saying “**Yes**” to the Spirit and “**No**” to the totally depraved adamic nature or the “flesh.”

The Phrase “*will be able*” is the translation of the Greek word **dunamai**: (**doo’-nam-ahee**) which means, “to be able, have power; to be able to do something; to be able, capable, strong, powerful.” In the context of **Ephesians 6:11**, this enablement is a supernatural one. **Dunamai** is God’s omnipotent, inherent, dynamic ability which enables us to accomplish what He commands us to do. In this case, He commands us to stand firm when the battle is raging all around us! Brothers and sisters, we cannot stand against the devil in our own strength and we should never attempt to do so. It is only the Holy Spirit’s enablement that makes it possible for us to stand.

I want to repeat what I stated earlier. The only way that we will be able to “*stand against the wiles of the devil,*” is if we “*put on the whole armour of God!*”

Paul speaks in verse **11** about “*the wiles of the devil.*” In an earlier Lesson, we noted that **Warren Wiersbe** made the point that in this section of his letter to the Ephesians, Paul discussed four topics-**The Enemy, The Equipment, The Energy, and The Encouragement**. Here, in verse **11**, we encounter the **Enemy**, the commander in chief of the invisible army that is arrayed against believers.

In his commentary on this section of Paul’s letter to the **Ephesians**, **John Phillips** writes the following: “The evil one has many names in Scripture, the most common being **devil** and **Satan (Revelation 20:2)**. As the **devil**, he is the **accuser**-the one who constantly assails us before God. As **Satan**, he is the **adversary**-the one who opposes God and constantly seeks to prevent us from entering into our birthright as children of God.”

Before we focus on the **Enemy** however, we will consider his “*wiles,*” or “*schemes.*”

The word “*wiles*” is a translation of the Greek word **methodeia**: (**meth-od-i’-ah**), which means, “to follow up, or investigate by method and settled plan; to follow craftily, frame devices, deceive.” The word refers to an orderly, logical, effective arrangement, usually in steps followed to achieve an end. It describes deliberate planning, or a systematic approach and can have a positive or negative connotation. The negative meaning of **methodeia** implies the use of clever methods or strategies to attain the desired end. The writers of the New Testament always use **methodeia** with a negative connotation.

Brothers and sisters, we must always be alert because the devil’s scheming craftiness always has a systematic approach—a deliberate method and purpose. His goal is to mislead believers and overthrow their faith. Behind the evil, or ignorant men and women who expound false teaching, there is always a supernatural evil power seeking to deceive believers with his cunning craftiness. The devil’s schemes are promoted and spread through the **kosmos**—the ordered world system over which he rules. They are promoted and spread by the fallen angels or demons who are his emissaries. The word “*wiles*” is all-embracing one and includes every sin, every immoral practice, every false theology, every false religion, every worldly seduction, and every satanic strategy.

William MacDonald made the following remarks: “Most serious of all is the danger of deception. Those who are babes are unskillful in the word of righteousness, their senses are not exercised to discern between good and evil (**Hebrews 5:13-14**). They inevitably meet some false cultist who impresses them by his zeal and apparent sincerity. Because he uses religious words, they think he must be a true Christian. If they had studied the Bible for themselves, they would be able to see through his deceitful juggling of words. But now they are carried about by his wind of doctrine and led by unprincipled cunning into a form of systematized error.”

It is important for us to note Paul’s use of the definite article “**the**,” before the word “*wiles*” in the Greek. The use of the definite article

indicates that the “wiles,” or “schemes” that Paul speaks of are not general but very specific. It suggests that the devil and his emissaries have specific schemes that are tailor-made for each believer, for they are aware of “*those sins that wrap themselves so tightly around our feet and trip us up*” (**Hebrews 12:1 Living Bible**). These schemes involve systematic and devious methods that involve an orderly, technical procedure in the handling of each individual believer.

The “wiles of the devil” are carefully and methodically selected to attack **each** believer’s specific weaknesses and vulnerabilities. His schemes are usually attractive, always deceptive, and often ensnaring. We need to think carefully about this definition in the context of spiritual warfare. Satan is orderly and logical in the strategies he employs against us to achieve his wicked purposes. This realization should cause each of us to be even more appreciative of the fact that we cannot stand against our invisible enemy in our own intelligence, our own strength, or our own human “methods” or “schemes.” The only way we can stand against him and his army is to put on the whole armour of God, supplied to us “in Christ.” I want to emphasize yet again that this is only possible if we are “*filled with the Spirit.*”

Brothers and sisters, the majority of attacks of the devil against believers are not direct but indirect. That is why they are called the “**wiles**” or “**schemes**” of the devil. Both words suggest deviousness, or acting in a way that is subtle, secretive, and treacherous. He employs various strategies to attack us. He uses discouragement, frustration, confusion, moral failure and doctrinal error. He knows our weakest point and aims for it. If he cannot destabilize us by one method, he will try another. One of the things that we must bear in mind is that evil rarely looks evil until it accomplishes its goal. It gains entrance by appearing attractive, desirable, and perfectly legitimate. The **New English Translation** renders **2 Corinthians 11:14-15** as follows:

14 And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light.

15 Therefore it is not surprising his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness, whose end will correspond to their actions.

The American evangelical Christian author and pastor, **David Jeremiah** made the following thought-provoking comments relative to Satan's **methodeia**, or schemes:

"If you could sneak into Satan's office, wherever that might be...and take a peek into his files, you might be surprised to find a file folder with your name on it. I'm not exaggerating. He keeps a file on you, and inside that file are all the strategies he's tried on you—the ones that have worked and the ones that have failed. He doesn't waste his time with the ones that don't work anymore. Instead, he uses variations on the strategies that have caused you to stumble in the past. As long as they keep working, he keeps using them. Somewhere in that file cabinet there's a file labeled: **Jeremiah, David**. In this file, I wouldn't be surprised at all if there was a notation that reads something like this: 'Subject may be prone to discouragement, especially if he becomes overly weary. This has worked several times before and seems a promising method of attack. Suggestion: Make sure he stays very busy, overcommitted, and physically tired. At all costs, keep him from extended times of Bible reading and prayer.'

So what is Satan's strategy for me? He looks for ways to discourage me, and if possible, cause me some depression. He will use whatever people, means, or circumstances it takes to achieve his goal.

Don't kid yourself, he knows very well where your vulnerabilities lie. It's all in his file. It's the same for you. Maybe your file says, 'Frequently tempted to gossip,' or 'quick temper,' or 'prone to coveting and jealousy,' or 'weak in the area of lust.'

We noted when we began our study, that spiritual warfare demands spiritual armour, and that spiritual armour can only be the "*whole armour of God*." This is the case whether we are dealing with

demonically inspired human beings, or directly with the wicked spirits that inspire them.

For example, in **2 Corinthians 10:3-5** Paul writes the following:

3 For though we live as human beings, we do not wage war according to human standards,

4 for the weapons of our warfare are not human weapons, but are made powerful by God for tearing down strongholds. We tear down arguments

5 and every arrogant obstacle that is raised up against the knowledge of God, and we take every thought captive to make it obey Christ.

(New English Translation)

In these verses Paul describe spiritual warfare. He informs us that **a.** The battle is **spiritual**, not physical, **b.** The battlefield is our **mind** and our **thought life**, **c.** The battle ultimately is over **truth**, the truth of God versus “truth” as human beings, even “saved” human beings, interpret and present it.

Paul explains that even though he still lives in a body that is subject to what **J. I. Packer** refers to as the “anti-God energy” of the totally depraved adamic nature, or the flesh, he doesn’t fight battles according to that energy anymore. He doesn’t use the weapons of the flesh anymore. Paul’s point is that while he would go to war with his opponents, he would not resort to fleshly wisdom or human methods to carry out his “military campaign” against them.

He states that the believer’s weapons have divine power, not human, worldly, fleshly power. They are **supernatural** weapons that are divinely effective. They get the job done because God works in and through them.

What are our weapons? Since our adversaries are spiritual, so, too, must our weapons be spiritual. We wield the weapons of truth, righteousness,

faith, assurance of salvation, the Word of God, prayer, and praise. What are the weapons of the world that Paul repudiates? Human ingenuity and wisdom, showmanship, charisma, charm and eloquence devoid of the Holy Spirit.

What can our spiritual weapons do? Paul says they, “*tear down strongholds.*” What are these strongholds? Paul identifies them as “*arguments and every arrogant obstacle that is raised up against the knowledge of God.*”

A stronghold may be described as “**a mindset saturated with hopelessness that causes a person to accept as unchangeable something that is contrary to God’s will.**” Strongholds are negative patterns of thought that cripple our ability to obey God and thus breed feelings of guilt and despair. These negative patterns of thought are etched or burned into our minds either through repetition over time, or through one traumatic experience.

Paul is informing us that our spiritual weapons are effective in destroying the erroneous way that people think, demolishing their sinful thought patterns-the mental structures by which they live their lives in rebellion against God. They destroy every arrogant claim, every haughty or prideful thought, every argument used to rationalize sin and unbelief and delay repentance. In short, every thought or act that forms a barrier to the knowledge of God.

Paul says, “*And we take every thought captive to make it obey Christ.*” In other words, every anti-Christ idea, and every anti-Christ plan is taken over and transformed as they come into a new allegiance-the allegiance to the Word of God.

Brothers and sisters, our warfare is aimed at dismantling and tearing down the sinful reasoning and rationalizations which are strongholds by which the mind fortifies itself against the truth of the Gospel. Therefore, in its original context, demolishing strongholds refers to changing wrong

ideas about Christ in the minds of persons influenced by teachers who are inspired by seducing spirits.

The solution is in experiencing the truth of the Gospel, by filling our minds with God's Word, affirming our identity as Christians, meditating on things that are **true, worthy of respect, just, pure, lovely, commendable, excellent and praiseworthy (Philippians 4:8)**, and by Challenging every negative or destructive thought the instant it enters our mind. We do so by evaluating these thoughts in the light of the Word of God.

It is very important for us to understand that **2 Corinthians 10:3-5** is **not directly** addressing spiritual warfare on a cosmic level. The "strongholds" that Paul speaks of in this passage are **not** referring to demonic spirits. The "strongholds" that he is referring to here, are ideas and arguments and philosophies and excuses that are directly opposed to the kingdom of God and His glory. It must be said however that these ideas, arguments, philosophies and excuses are all inspired by the devil and his demons.