

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

(LESSON ONE HUNDRED AND TWELVE)

“THE SCHEMES OF THE DEVIL” (PART 2)

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.

We will commence our Lesson this evening with a quote from the *“Prince of Preachers,”* Charles Haddon Spurgeon:

“In every believer’s heart there is a constant struggle between the old nature and the new. The old nature is very active, and loses no opportunity of plying all the weapons of its deadly armoury against newborn grace; while on the other hand, the new nature is ever on the watch to resist and destroy its enemy. Grace within us will employ prayer, and faith, and hope, and love, to cast out the evil; it takes unto it the *‘whole armour of God,’* and wrestles earnestly. These two opposing natures will never cease to struggle so long as we are in this world...The enemy is so securely entrenched within us that he can never be driven out while we are in this body: but although we are closely beset, and often in sore conflict, we have an Almighty helper,

even Jesus, the Captain of our salvation, who is ever with us, and who assures us that we shall eventually come off more than conquerors through Him. With such assistance the new-born nature is more than a match for its foes. Are you fighting with the adversary to-day? Are **Satan**, the **world**, and the **flesh**, all against you? Be not discouraged nor dismayed. Fight on! For God Himself is with you; **Jehovah Nissi** is your banner, and **Jehovah Rophi** is the healer of your wounds. Fear not, you shall overcome, for who can defeat Omnipotence? Fight on, 'looking unto Jesus'; and though long and stern be the conflict, sweet will be the victory, and glorious the promised reward."

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.*"

The phrase, "*the whole armour of God,*" 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. Paul exhorts the Ephesian believers to put on the whole armour of God 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 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. 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 word “*wiles*,” or “*schemes*,” is a translation of the Greek word **methodeia**: (**meth-od-i’-ah**), which refers to an orderly, logical, effective arrangement, usually in steps followed to achieve an end. It describes deliberate planning, or a systematic approach. The word is all-embracing and includes every sin, every immoral practice, every false theology, every false religion, every worldly seduction, and every satanic strategy.

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*” of the devil 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. 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. 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.”

The Greek hero **Achilles** is one of the most famous figures in mythology and a key character in the **Trojan War**. According to legend, Achilles was extraordinarily strong, courageous and loyal, but he had **one** vulnerability, **one** area of weakness-his “**Achilles heel**.”

Achilles was the son of **Peleus**, a Greek king, and **Thetis**, a sea nymph or goddess. When he was an infant, it was foretold that he would perish at a young age. To prevent this from happening, his mother Thetis took him to the **River Styx**, which was supposed to offer powers of invulnerability. She dipped his body into the water while holding him by his heel. Because she held him by his heel, it was not touched by the

water of the river. The heel of Achilles was the one part of his body left untouched by the waters of the River Styx, and it was therefore his only point of weakness and vulnerability.

The most notable feat of Achilles during the Trojan War was the slaying of the Trojan prince **Hector** outside the gates of Troy. When the Grecian army finally invaded the city of Troy, Achilles was ambushed by **Paris** the brother of Hector. Paris shot the unsuspecting Achilles with an arrow which was guided by the God **Apollo** to the one part of the body of Achilles which was vulnerable-his heel. Achilles died on the spot.

The term “**Achilles’ heel**” has come to mean a point of weakness, especially in someone or something with an otherwise strong constitution. An Achilles’ heel is a weakness in spite of overall strength, which can lead to downfall. While the mythological origin refers to a physical vulnerability, the term has become a common reference to any other attribute or quality that can lead to the downfall of an otherwise strong or noble person.

Alluding to the legend, **Spurgeon** made the following comments:

*“We all have our tender spots...We may think that we are covered with virtue till we are totally invulnerable, but we have a **heel** somewhere; there is a place where the arrow of the devil can make way; hence the absolute necessity of taking to ourselves “the whole armor of God,” so that there may not be a **solitary** joint in the harness that shall be unprotected against the arrows of the devil. Satan is very crafty; he knows the “ins” and “outs” of manhood. There is many an old castle that has stood against every attack, but at last some traitor from **within** has gone outside, and said, ‘I know an old deserted passage, a subterranean back way, that has not been used for many a day. In such and such a field you will see an opening; clear away a heap of stones there, and I will lead you down the passage; you will then come to an old*

door of which I have the key, and I can let you in; and so by a back way I can lead you into the very heart of the citadel, which you may then easily capture.' It is so with Satan. Man does not know himself so well as Satan knows him. There are back ways and subterranean passages into man's heart which the devil well understands; and he who thinks that he is safe, let him take heed lest he fall (1 Corinthians 10:12)."

Brothers and sisters, we all know what our personal “**Achilles’ heel**” is. Let us therefore be alert to the satanic “arrows” being shot at that area of weakness and vulnerability. Those “arrows” are designed to render us ineffective on the battlefield. Let us, “*Put on God’s complete armour so that [we] can successfully resist all the devil’s methods of attack*” (**J.B. Phillips New Testament**).

We will now consider briefly the malignant being whose “wiles,” or “schemes” Paul exhorts believers to “stand against” by putting on the “whole armour of God.”

The term “*devil*” is a translation of the Greek word **diabolos**: (**dee-ab’-ol-os**) which means, “prone to slander, slanderous, accusing falsely.” It refers to one who utters false charges or misrepresentations with the intention of defaming and damaging the reputation of another. **Diabolos** is the noun form of the verb **diaballo** which describes not only those who bring a false charge against another, but also those who circulate the truth concerning a person in a secretive and malicious manner.

The word **diabolos** is applied in excess of thirty times in the New Testament to refer to Satan, and in each case, the word has the definite article in the Greek before it. This clearly indicates that the devil is a specific entity. The **New York Times**, in reporting on a survey by the **Barna Group**, noted that two-thirds of Americans do not believe in the devil as a living entity. The Times called it “a result of fundamental, long-term shifts in the nation’s religious culture.”

Regarding the reality of the devil, **Ray Stedman** made the following remarks: "The devil is real, he is active, he is working day and night, trying to subvert and undo and defeat God's plan in human history. The devil is our enemy. And this is war. There is a spiritual war going on behind the scenes of history, and that spiritual war in the unseen world is driving events in our own visible world. There is no peace in the material world because there is a war now raging in the spiritual world. There is nothing more meaningful, more relevant, more real that we could be involved in than the cause of God in this vast spiritual war. The biblical teaching of spiritual warfare shines a spotlight of truth on the basic problem of human existence and human history."

In an article entitled, "*The Devil*," **Ligonier Ministries** made the following comments:

"Unfortunately, popular culture seems more obsessed with trivializing Satan than with representing him accurately. Often, he is depicted as having horns and a tail and as one whom men can easily conquer. Yet Scripture never depicts the Devil in this manner. We are told, for example, that he is a lion who is on the prowl, searching for his prey (**1 Peter 5:8**), which is a metaphor for his power. He is more intimidating when we consider that he commands an army of demons (**Ephesians 6:11-12**) and often appears as an angel of light (**2 Corinthians 11:14**).

Satan is more than a match for us in and of ourselves. Thankfully, however, this is not true of the Lord God Almighty. No matter his strength, the Devil is merely a creature. The Christian faith does not teach a dualism where the Devil is equal to God in power; rather, Satan and his minions are subject to the will of our Creator (**Job 1-2**). They can only go as far as the Lord allows, and their work is included, mysteriously, within God's sovereign plan to redeem His creation."

The Welsh Presbyterian minister, **William Evans** remarked that in his day, it was popular in some circles to spell the word devil with the letter

“**d**” left off thus reducing the idea of an actual being called the **devil** to a mere influence called **evil**. He noted that while the devil may be out of fashion, he was not out of business! Evans went on to state that, “If the devil can’t mislead people that way, he would have them think of him as a horrible, monstrous-looking creature with a forked tail, dressed in a fiery red suit, and with horns protruding from his head. If the devil can get folks to think of him like that, then when he comes as an ‘angel of light,’ he will not be recognized, and so find it easier to beguile his unsuspecting victims.”

Brothers and sisters, the devil’s existence is attested in at least nine Old Testament books and by every New Testament writer. The devil is **not** an impersonal force. He displays all the traits of personality, such as **intellect (2 Corinthians 11:3)**, **emotion (Revelation 12:17)**, and **will (2 Timothy 2:26)**.

From his very first success in tempting Adam and Eve to sin, the devil is depicted in the Bible as waging warfare against human beings in general and believers in particular. As it relates to human beings in general, he blinds, deceives, and rules over them in wickedness (**2 Corinthians 4:3-4; Ephesians 2:2; Colossians 1:13; Revelation 20:7-8**). As it relates to believers, he “*prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour*” (**1 Peter 5:8**).

The devil **incited** David to sin (**1 Chronicles 21:1**); he **accused** Job (**Job 1-2**), and Joshua the high priest (**Zechariah 3:1**); he **corrupted** Peter’s thinking (**Matthew 16:23**), and he **inflicted** a thorn in the side of Paul (**2 Corinthians 12:7**). He accuses all believers before God and opposes them with everything in his power (**Revelation 12:10**).

The devil employs at least **four** strategies against believers. **First**, he endeavours to lead them to break their fellowship with their heavenly Father by enticing them with sinful fruit tailored to their particular taste. He well knows each individual believer’s weaknesses and seeks to

capitalize on them. Each believer must be wary of his or her own area of weakness and make fortifications against the devil in those areas.

Second, the devil places great obstacles in the path of spiritual discipline in an attempt to make the spiritual progress of believers tedious and demanding. He confronts them with apparent dead-ends such as **busyness, loneliness, weariness** and **failure**. With these and numerous other strategies, he attempts to discourage and overcome believers. The believer must therefore flee to the Lord as his or her strength and rock. He or she must employ the “means of grace” (**church attendance, the Word of God, communion**), and **fellowship** regularly with other believers.

Third, the devil lays stumbling blocks for believers by deceiving them concerning God and His Word. From the very beginning (**Genesis 3:4-5**) he has corrupted the truth in various ways. Believers must therefore endeavor to saturate themselves in the truth of God’s Word. They must ensure, as we have been saying, that the “*word of Christ dwell in [them] richly*” (**Colossians 3:16**).

Fourth, the devil continually opposes each step of the believer’s sanctification. Because he is very much aware that any progress that believers make in spiritual maturity (being conformed into the image of Jesus Christ), corresponds to his decline, he relentlessly tries to hinder their obedience by setting up snares to entrap them. Believers must continually “*walk,*” or “*live*” by the Spirit. They must relentlessly surrender to the in-dwelling Holy Spirit and allow themselves to be led by Him.

Satan is a dangerous enemy. We should never joke about him, ignore him, or underestimate his ability. We must “be sober” and have our minds under control when it comes to our conflict with Satan. A part of this soberness includes not blaming everything on the devil. Some people see a demon behind every imaginable thing (hair, clothes, cosmetics, food etc.), and blame Satan for their headaches, flat tires, and high rent. While it is certainly true that Satan can inflict physical

sickness and pain we have no biblical authority for casting out “demons of headache” or “demons of backache.”

We must be careful to avoid one of two extremes in regard to the devil. First, we not think that Satan causes everything and is everywhere. Satan is not omnipotent, omniscient or omnipresent. He is a created being and a controlled being. The other extreme is just as dangerous and that is to think that there is no such being as the devil, but that he is imaginary or a myth. He is very real, very wily, and very dangerous. As we stated in our last Lesson, the spiritual struggle believers face with the devil and his demonic henchmen is not a power struggle as much as it is a truth struggle and the primary battlefield is therefore our minds.

The following three passages of Scripture, all taken from the **New Living Translation**, are very relevant relative to our winning this mental battle:

Romans 12:1-2

1 And so, dear brothers and sisters, I plead with you to give your bodies to God because of all he has done for you. Let them be a living and holy sacrifice—the kind he will find acceptable. This is truly the way to worship him.

2 Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect.

Ephesians 4:21-24

21 Since you have heard about Jesus and have learned the truth that comes from him,

22 throw off your old sinful nature and your former way of life, which is corrupted by lust and deception.

23 Instead, let the Spirit renew your thoughts and attitudes.

24 Put on your new nature, created to be like God—truly righteous and holy.

Colossians 3:1-4

1 Since you have been raised to new life with Christ, set your sights on the realities of heaven, where Christ sits in the place of honor at God's right hand.

2 Think about the things of heaven, not the things of earth.

3 For you died to this life, and your real life is hidden with Christ in God.

4 And when Christ, who is your life, is revealed to the whole world, you will share in all his glory.