
Studies in Ephesians – 6

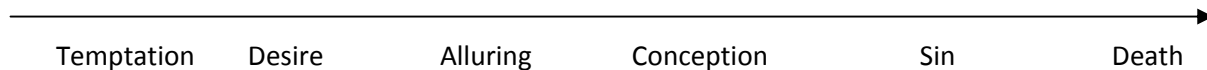
In this final study in Ephesians we look at the warfare that accompanies the building of the church. In our previous study we saw that the church is built from “living stones” (1 Peter 2:5), each of them different but shaped by the Lord’s hand. That process of shaping and building goes on throughout the church age until the Bride of Christ is complete.

In the original creation, the bride (Woman) was built from the rib taken out of the side of the man Adam. She and he lived together in Eden for some time (we do not know how long), enjoying fellowship with one another and with the Lord. But later there came another being whose agenda was opposed to that of the Lord. This creature set out to subvert the best of God’s creation, and to align humanity with himself against God. In this he partly succeeded, at least for a time.

The present study examines the warfare in which we are all involved as we look towards the final consummation of all things (Ephesians 1:10). We shall centre our study on Ephesians 6:10-20.

The process of sin

Reading Genesis ch.3 it is evident that sin did not enter the human race in a moment; it took at least a few minutes. The process is described for us in James 1:13-16, and it is this:



This is the sequence that Eve followed when she listened to the word of the enemy, described in Genesis 3:1-6. It begins with temptation from outside, which becomes internalized as desire. The thing desired then becomes much more alluring, filling our minds (which is why advertising is so effective). At that point the act of sin is conceived in the mind, and then it is actually committed. The end result is death – that is, separation from God’s presence. Note that temptation and sin are not the same thing; the Lord Jesus was tempted but without sin (Hebrews 4:15).

This process took place in the woman. As a result, her husband also fell into sin. He went into it willingly, not because he was deceived. Unlike the woman, who was deceived, he *knew* what he was doing (1 Timothy 2:14), and therefore he deserves the greater blame.

The devil’s aim

In the new creation, there is a new man, the Lord Jesus, whom Paul refers to as “the last Adam” (1 Corinthians 15:45). He overcame the devil in every point when He was tempted in the wilderness (Matthew 4:1-11). Later on, He took on all the forces of evil on the Cross and overcame them finally. Paul says: “He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame” (Colossians 2:15). The word *disarmed* here literally means *shook off*, just as Paul shook off the viper that bit him (Acts 28:3-5). Jesus faced all their power, and triumphed over them. And He did this as a man; He was able to undo what Adam had done in the beginning.

That battle is over now. There is no danger of Christ taking in the enemy’s words like Eve and then Adam did. Nevertheless the enemy continues to contest the plan of God by tempting the new woman (the church) just as he did in the Garden of Eden. Since satan cannot get at Christ, he will try to get at us.

The devil’s aim has not changed since he first sinned. Two passages in the Old Testament shed light on his motives; they are Isaiah 14:12-14 and Ezekiel 28:11-17. In these passages we see a beautiful,

marvellous being who is not satisfied with being a servant of God, but who wants to exalt his throne above the stars of heaven—to be like the Most High. Pride, ambition, and the desire to take the place of God are his motives.

Subverting the human race was a means to accomplish his end. An alliance between satan and mankind would raise the question as to whether God really is worthy to reign in heaven. When Adam and Eve fell, satan thought he was on the way to victory.

His plans were ruined by the coming of the “second man” (Jesus). They are further ruined by the perseverance of the “second woman” (the church) who is being prepared to be a living demonstration that satan was wrong. God will use the church to display his “many-tinted wisdom” to the angels as well as to the devil himself (Ephesians 3:10).

War against the church

No wonder, then, that satan opposes the church. Although he certainly hates the church itself, his ultimate aim in opposing it is to oppose God, and, if possible, to dethrone Him. So as Christians—like it or not—we find ourselves in the midst of an unrelenting war that is going on every moment of every day. So Paul says:

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.

—Ephesians 6:12

And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience.

—Ephesians 2:1, 2

The air around us is evidently the domain of satan and his servants. We are therefore foreigners living in an alien environment, and many of the people that we meet every day are still “sons of disobedience” and subject to the influences of satan, just as we were. Their minds are blinded, just as ours were (2 Corinthians 4:4). If we are indwelt by the Spirit of God, it is inevitable that there will be a clash with the spirit that surrounds us. The warfare is being waged in “the heavenly places” (Ephesians 6:12). M.R. Vincent takes this to mean “the air”, that is, the atmosphere around us. The war is conducted on two fronts: the defensive front, and the offensive front.

The defensive war

Satan’s first aim is to get the church to be *less than it should be*. He wants to drive us back, to make us live on a lower level than God intended for us.

Imagine a soldier standing on guard duty at one of the outposts of the Roman Empire (for example, along Hadrian’s Wall in England). His eyes are looking outward to the countryside that is outside the empire. He watches for movement, for signs of attack. His duty is not to go out and conquer the land before him, but to warn of attack, and to resist. He must not give ground to the enemy.



This is the image that Paul uses in Ephesians 6:10-18. Note the repeated command to “stand”. He says *stand*, not *advance*.

In Ephesians 4:26, 27, notice how anger can give opportunity to the devil. There are also other things that give him opportunity to injure the church of Christ; they are mentioned in the following verses. They include stealing, corrupt talk, bitterness, grudges, evil speaking, malice, and so on. And the worst is unforgiveness. He is constantly seeking these opportunities – see 1 Peter 5:8. But if we resist him (v.9), just as the Roman soldier resists his enemy, James assures us that he will flee from us (James 4:7).

Resisting the enemy

Since the enemy depends on trickery, seduction, deception, false teaching, and lies, most of this warfare takes place in our *minds*. Paul therefore says that we “renewed in the spirit of our minds” (Ephesians 4:23)—that is, the basic bias of our minds changes when we are born again, but the details of how we think change more slowly. As we learn to overcome, we become more and more impermeable to satan’s lies, and we are transformed (Romans 12:2). Here are some of the tricks that satan uses against us:

- Matthew 13:39—he sows seed that looks like the real thing, so that counterfeit Christians can cause trouble and bring reproach to the name of Christ.
- 2 Corinthians 2:11—if we fail to forgive, we give him opportunity to destroy and divide.
- Ephesians 6:11—we are warned against his schemes (*tricks, wiles*).
- 1 Timothy 4:1—demons will propagate teachings that are meant to deceive people. There are many such teachings these days (prophetic ideas, prosperity theories, authoritarian schemes, and so on).
- 2 Timothy 2:23-26—quarrelling and pride bring people into the devil’s snare.

Paul gives a great example of resisting the devil in 2 Corinthians 11:1-15. Here Paul is fighting the defensive war, determined to save the Corinthian church from deception. He is protesting against the introduction of “another Jesus”, “a different spirit”, and “false apostles”. The devil can present himself as “an angel of light” (v.14). Again Paul uses the imagery of Eve and the Garden of Eden (v.2, 3).

He does the same in Galatians, warning them of “a different gospel” (Galatians 1:6) and saying that they have been “bewitched” (Galatians 3:1).

The possibility of deception is always very real. That’s why he warns us, “Don’t be deceived!” Don’t let anyone tell you that:

- you can injure the church of Christ and get away with it (1 Corinthians 3:18)
- you can belong to the kingdom of God and remain in sin (1 Corinthians 6:9; Ephesians 5:6)
- you can keep bad company and not be affected by it (1 Corinthians 15:33)
- you can sow unrighteousness and not reap corruption (Galatians 6:7)
- it’s sufficient to claim to be righteous without living righteously (1 John 3:7)

The armour of God

Since part of the warfare is defensive, we are told to “put on the whole armour of God” (Ephesians 6:11). We will not describe the parts of the armour in detail. Suffice it to say that:

- Most of them are defensive and protective.
- The belt (v.14) was “the point of junction for the main pieces of the body-armour...the common bond of the whole” (Vincent). So *truth* is the main defensive weapon against the deceptions of the enemy.
- The shield of *faith* (v.16) refers to the large,



rectangular Roman shield, about four feet high, covering the whole of the upper body. We must use it to quench the accusations and lies of the enemy.

The offensive war

The calling of the church is to advance the kingdom of God in the world. We are therefore involved in an *offensive war*. You can imagine that the Roman *testudo* formation shown in the image above was difficult to stop, so long as all the members remained in step and nobody broke rank. Paul says to the Colossians:

Though I am absent in body, yet I am with you in spirit, rejoicing to see your good order and the firmness of your faith in Christ.

—Colossians 2:5

Here the word *order* is a military term meaning “orderly array”.

The Lord Jesus said that “the gates of Hades” will not prevail against the church. The gates of a city were the most strongly fortified part of the wall. See Romans 16:20.

Nevertheless, since the world is still ruled by satan (Luke 4:5, 6), it is not surprising that he contests every advance. Paul himself experienced severe opposition throughout his ministry; see, for example, the accounts that he gives in 2 Corinthians chapters 4, 6, and 11; and 1 Thessalonians 2:18.

You can only advance when you know that you yourself are fully protected. You can only learn to fight the battle on behalf of others when you have already fought it for yourself. Jesus did nothing until He had faced all the devil’s temptations and overcome them.

The Lord in His wisdom allows satan to afflict us sometimes—but only so that we learn how to fight and become strong. Hear John’s words:

I am writing to you, young men, because you have overcome the evil one...I write to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the evil one.

—1 John 2:13, 14

Prayer, the battle-ground

The point of Ephesians 6:11-18 is that we should fight through to the position where we pray. Philip Henry said, “When God intends to move, He first sets his church a-praying.” John Wesley said, “More things are wrought by prayer than this world dreams of.” The history of the church abounds in examples in which whole regions have been conquered through prayer. The battle is always to stop us praying.

And satan trembles when he sees

The weakest saint upon his knees.

—William Cowper

We need to fight through and pray effectively for each other, and especially for those who are actively engaged in pushing forward the frontiers of God’s kingdom. Our prayers not only break down opposition (2 Corinthians 10:4); they also confer boldness and effectiveness in the proclamation of the truth (Ephesians 6:19,20; Philippians 1:14, 20).

How the early church prayed

There is an amazing account of prayer in Acts chapter 4. Peter and John were arrested for preaching Christ. The enemies were amazed at their boldness (v.13). Note Peter’s bold reply (v.19, 20). After they were released, they went to a prayer meeting. Notice how that church prayed. They did not pray for protection, for safety, or for God to change the hearts of their enemies. They prayed for boldness (v.29) to carry on doing what they had been doing. And that prayer was immediately answered (v.31).

And then satan had failed to silence them by a frontal attack, he tried to gain a foothold by trickery. The next attack came from within, through Ananias and Sapphira (see Acts 5:3).

The warfare in Ephesus

The story of the founding of the church in Ephesus (Acts 19) is remarkable in that it shows an intense struggle between the church and satan. We see evil spirits cast out (19:12), false exorcists causing trouble (19:13-17); people turning from occultism and burning their artefacts (19:18-20). There was a riot instigated by the servants of the goddess Diana (19:23-29). Paul referred to this as “fighting with beasts at Ephesus” (1 Corinthians 15:32). Finally, he warns the elders of the church there, saying that “grievous wolves” would come, not sparing the flock (Acts 20:29).

The Lord Jesus later warned them about leaving their first love (Revelation 2:5). He did eventually remove their lampstand as He said. Yet the light shines still in other places, as we follow on in the same warfare until the Lord returns for His glorious bride.