

AWARE

2 Cor. 2:10-11; Eph. 6:10-13

- We would like to think that when we come to Jesus, the angels sing and life becomes a sweet and pain free adventure.
- The angels do sing, but life with Jesus in a world that defies Him can be exceedingly hard.
- Paul is no stranger to the challenges of living all in for Jesus.

▶ 2 Corinthians 11:23–28 – *Are they servants of Christ? – I speak as if insane – I more so; in far more labors, in far more imprisonments, beaten times without number, often in danger of death. Five times I received from the Jews thirty-nine lashes. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, a night and a day I have spent in the deep.* ▶

▶ *I have been on frequent journeys, in dangers from rivers, dangers from robbers, dangers from my countrymen, dangers from the Gentiles, dangers in the city, dangers in the wilderness, dangers on the sea, dangers among false brethren; I have been in labor and hardship, through many sleepless nights, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure.* ▶

1 *Apart from such external things, there is the daily pressure on me of concern for all the churches.*

- I am in awe of Paul's devotion to Jesus!
- Beyond the physical challenges, every day his heart is burdened for the churches he has been associated with – that they might prevail against the specific challenges they each face.

2 Shocker! Some of Paul's most painful experiences were the product of relational conflict among the saints.

- Here is one of the reasons: Satan is committed to throwing accelerant on conflicts (burning or smoldering) in the body of Christ.
- Let's zero in for a closer look at one such conflict experienced in Corinth.

3 **I. THE CORINTHIAN DEBACLE**

- In 2 Corinthians, we encounter some painful history from Corinth.
- Core problem: Someone crossed a line in Corinth, Paul became a target, the church was thrown into turmoil.

- This happened during one of Paul's visits, probably between the writing of 1 & 2 Cor.
- Paul calls this a "painful visit" (2:1). (Made from Ephesus on 3rd journey?)
- Paul was planning to visit once again but changed plans because of what happened.
- He didn't want to become an accessory to additional pain for the church (2:2).

4 2 Corinthians 1:23 – *But I call God as witness to my soul, that to spare you I did not come again to Corinth.*

- Paul declared it a matter of conscience that his travel decision was driven by a desire to protect the church from hurt.
- Because of something else Paul said, it seems like His integrity was called into question.

5 2 Corinthians 1:12 – *For our proud confidence is this: the testimony of our conscience, that in holiness and godly sincerity, not in fleshly wisdom but in the grace of God, we have conducted ourselves in the world, and especially toward you.*

6 After Paul's painful visit, he wrote a letter (not in NT): 2 Corinthians 2:9 – *For to this end also I wrote, so that I might put you to the test, whether you are obedient in all things.*

- In this letter, he challenged the congregation to address the sin of the individual at the center of this controversy.
- I get why Paul did this – for him to come and personally address the individual could be construed as self-interest.
- So he appealed to them to step up.
- For the majority, they responded well.

7 2 Corinthians 2:5–7 – *But if any has caused sorrow, he has caused sorrow not to me, but in some degree – in order not to say too much – to all of you. Sufficient for such a one is this punishment (rebuke) which was inflicted by the majority, so that on the contrary you should rather forgive and comfort him, otherwise such a one might be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow.*

- The majority of the church (but not all), delivered a rebuke (“punishment” is rebuke or warning) to this individual.
- The rebuke hit its mark and the individual was genuinely repentant.
- His sorrow could become overwhelming.
- So, Paul calls them to forgive, encourage, and reaffirm their love for this individual.

- Paul explains that he is calling them to do nothing less than what he himself has done.
- 8 2 Corinthians 2:10 – *But one whom you forgive anything, I forgive also; for indeed what I have forgiven, if I have forgiven anything, I did it for your sakes in the presence of Christ,*
- Then Paul makes a stunning revelation of a primary motivation for his actions.

- 9 • *!so that no advantage would be taken of us by Satan, for we are not ignorant of his schemes.*
- So that = Paul’s motivation.
- By not answering repentance with forgiveness, Satan would gain some leverage.
- Paul forgives (and appeals to the congregation to do likewise) as a defensive tactic.
- Fail to forgive = sitting ducks!

- 9 • *!so that no advantage would be taken of us by Satan, for we are not ignorant of his schemes.*
- “For” = Paul’s explanation.
- “We are not ignorant” = not in the dark / in the know.
- “Schemes” = mind-craft (not Minecraft).
- We are quite familiar with how Satan messes with our thinking. **Forgive** = easy target

10

2. SATAN'S SCHEMES

- Paul said that the Corinthians are not ignorant of these schemes.
- Paul wrote about some of these experiences.
- Ignorant? Barna Survey (2009) – 65% of (self-professed) Christians don't believe Satan is real.

- First, let me affirm Satan is real.
- He is an angelic being who rebelled against God.
- Even now he works to oppose God and God's people.
- Here are some glimpses of how he operates:

11

2 Corinthians 11:3 – *But I am afraid that, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your minds will be led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ.*

- Satan is real. His opposition to God predates the Fall of man.
- His strategy in the garden was the same as today. To mess with our thinking.

- Specifically, he wants to make following Jesus complicated (with other competing priorities) and compromised (with less than full devotion).
- This was his mind-game in Eden, this is his goal today.
- Paul says “we are not ignorant of his mind-craft” because the Word reveals it. – z.b.

12 • I Peter 5:8 – *Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.*

- Satan who is also called “the devil” is our adversary.
- He is actively hunting for easy targets.
- A clear-headed alertness is called for among all saints.

13 • Zechariah 3:1 – *Then he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the LORD, and Satan standing at his right hand to accuse him.*

- Satan is the accuser of God’s servants.
- He has (currently) access to heaven.
- He is proficient in the art of recrimination.

14 • Matthew 16:23 – *But He turned and said to Peter, “Get behind Me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to Me; for you are not setting your mind on God’s interests, but man’s.”*

- No one is beyond his influence.
- One of his mind-craft strategies is to divert our attention toward man-stuff at the expense of what matters to God.

15 • Mark 4:15 – *“These are the ones who are beside the road where the word is sown; and when they hear, immediately Satan comes and takes away the word which has been sown in them.”*

- Satan employs “word-snatching.”
- When someone is exposed to life-changing teaching, Satan messes with their head and they can’t remember it.

16 • Luke 22:31 –
*“Simon, Simon,
 behold, Satan
 has demanded
 permission to
 sift you like
 wheat”*

- Satan is capable of manipulating circumstances to introduce extreme faith tests. (Job!)
- He takes the initiative and demands access.
- Balance: All of it is Father filtered.

17 • 1 Thessalonians
 2:18 – *For we
 wanted to come
 to you – I, Paul,
 more than once
 – and yet Satan
 hindered us.*

- Satan can thwart travel plans.
- He can do this repeatedly.
- Roadblocks, brick walls, emergencies can be employed to hinder ministry.

18 • 2 Corinthians 11:14–
 15 – *Even Satan
 disguises himself as an
 angel of light.
 Therefore it is not
 surprising if his
 servants also disguise
 themselves as servants
 of righteousness.*

- Satan is capable of convincingly presenting himself as an angel of God.
- His servants work from the same playbook.

- I have heard it said that Satan does not wage war for that which he already controls.
- But among God’s people, this is where he will fight.
- He will do so undercover.
- Option 1: We can give him the advantage.
- Option 2: Or we can successfully oppose him.

- James 4:7 – *Submit therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you.*
- Despite his opposition, those who have submitted to God can offer effective resistance against the devil.
- The devil will flee from those who do.
- So what exactly is involved in “resisting” the devil? Paul explained this to Ephesian Church.

19

3. PREVAILING STRATEGY

- Do not be afraid.
- Do not be oblivious.
- He has provided what we need to prevail!
- Trust God and use what He has provided!

20 • Ephesians 6:10
– *Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might.*

- “Finally” = Paul’s last Word in this letter.
- “Be strong” is a present, passive, imperative. Be continually made strong.
- Two sources: The Lord’s presence and His resources.

20

• Ephesians 6:11
– *Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil.*

- Putting on armor is something **we** must do.
- This involves the “full armor,” nothing left out. A complete set of supernatural resources.
- “of God” = manufacturer and supplier

20 • Ephesians 6:11
 – *Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil.*

- “so that” = resultant ability
- “stand firm” = undeterred, uncompromised, unmoved
- “schemes” = plans for evil that involve deceit and mind hacks
- His efforts fail!

21 • Ephesians 6:12a – *For our struggle is not against flesh and blood,*

- Recon Report
- “struggle” indicates ardor, wrestling
- Our true enemy is not flesh & blood. Therefore, the world is not the enemy.
- They don’t like us, but reality check.

22 • 2 Timothy 2:24–26 – *The Lord’s bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged, with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition, if perhaps God may (1) grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth, and (2) they may come to their senses and (3) escape from the snare of the devil, having been held captive by him to do his will.*

- **Ours is a rescue mission for captives.**

23 • Ephesians 6:12b – *but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places.*

- Our true struggle is against highly organized spiritual opposition involving four different groups of special forces
- Grp 1: “Rulers” = administrators / highly organized.

23 • Ephesians 6:12b – *but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places.*

- Grp 2: “Powers” = capacity to do the extraordinary
- Grp 3: “world forces of this darkness” = earth based truth clouders.

23 • Ephesians 6:12b – *but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places.*

- Grp 3: Specialty = sow doubt, denial, disregard, and resistance to truth.
- Grp 4: “spiritual forces of wickedness” target the flesh

23 • Ephesians 6:12b – *but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places.*

- Grp 4: Promote pursuit of physical or material satisfaction, pleasure and fulfillment (apart from God).
- Operations not confined to earth!

- **Bottom line:** Our enemy is organized.
- Theater of operations stretches from earth to heavenly places. **Nowhere you can go to escape his influence!**
- Forces include: Decision makers, power wielders, global confusion and disinformation specialists, and promoters of wicked pleasure.
- Self-sufficiency won't cut it.

24 • Ephesians 6:13 –
Therefore, take up the full armor of God, so that you will be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm.

- “Therefore” = in light of what we are up against, only one action plan makes sense.
- “Take up the full armor” = grab your gear, all of it!

24 • Ephesians 6:13 –
Therefore, take up the full armor of God, so that you will be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm.

- “so that” = for this purpose
- “you will be able to resist in the evil day” = not succumb to temptation when it is unleashed.

- 25 • Luke 4:13 – *When the devil had finished every temptation, he left Him until an opportune time.*
- Satan sometimes uses neglect to set us up for failure.
 - But the fully armed saint is ready for such an evil day.
 - The FAS, by right of wearing his armor, will effectively resist temptation.

26 • Ephesians 6:13 –
Therefore, take up the full armor of God, so that you will be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm.

- “having done everything, to stand firm” means that donning the panoply is sufficient to have a faith that stands, regardless of what the enemy throws at you.

- We face an enemy who is working a stealth plan to tear down what God is building.
- He and his forces are organized, powerful, capable of clouding our thinking, and can precisely target temptation to our weaknesses.
- But God has designed, created, and makes available to us a complete armor system.

- When this armor is “taken up,” we are capable of effectively resisting this superior foe and his attacks.
- There are seven specific components to this armor (or six plus 1).
- The pieces of armor are not metaphors for positional truth but practical responsibilities (vs. 13). We must “take up” this armor.

- Spiritual defeat and set backs can be traced to specific “armor failures” (Matt. 17:14-19).
- Only believers are issued a panoply. But they must learn to wear it and learn how to use it effectively.
- A believer who assumes that his salvation is his protection from the enemy is a prime target.

27

4. BOTTOM LINE

- We know we are engaged in a spiritual battle.
- We know that on our own, we will fail.
- But God has provided a complete kit by which His servants can prevail.
- Only those who are using this kit will prevail.

1. Belt of truth – tell truth
2. Breastplate of righteousness – do right
3. Shoes of the gospel of peace – confess sin
4. Shield of faith – believe what God says
5. Helmet of salvation – see our future
6. Sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God – believe situation specific word

7. Prayer (not identified with a specific piece of armor) – ask for God’s help with previous 6
 - Will you, daily, commit yourself to these 7 disciplines?
 - Will you, daily, ask for God’s help?
 - Then you will stand firm despite what the enemy throws at you!