

THE REFORMED WITNESS HOUR

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Wrestling the Powers of Darkness
Rev. Wilbur Bruinsma

Dear radio friends,

Our present life in this world is a battlefield. There is no time for spiritual ease and comfort but only time for wariness and preparedness. In our present society, where it seems that the world welcomes us and gives us no trouble, this is easily forgotten. We are reminded, however, in Ephesians 6:11, 12 that, no matter what the age or society, the devil is at large and is at work to destroy us. We read of this truth in these verses of Ephesians 6. "Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. 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 must wrestle with the devil and his fallen host of angels—in order that we may, above all, stand faithful to our God.

One cannot miss it. There is a certain urgency surrounding the command of our text. It is not a command that can

be ignored. Ignoring it would result in dire consequences. We must put on the armor of God and make a stand in this evil day. The urgency of this command is given us in verse 12: "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." God's people are fighting a battle, a fierce, relentless battle against sin. And they fight that battle not simply against sin from within, but against sin that attacks us from without as well. The battle we carry on is a war not only with our sinful flesh, not only with the wicked, unbelieving world that surrounds us, but with a whole host of spiritual beings, as we are told by Paul. We are warring against spiritual principalities and powers. We are in hand-to-hand combat with the rulers of darkness. These are our spiritual foes. And these we must know in order that we might fight them.

Who are these powers of darkness to which the apostle Paul refers in these verses and

of which we ought to be intensely aware? There is only one being out of them all that is identified by name in our text, and that is the devil, at the end of verse 11: "That we might be able to stand against the wiles of the devil."

We ought to take note of that fact, first of all. The Bible does not identify anywhere any fallen angel other than Satan. That some try to identify other powers of darkness is wrong. It is the vain invention of man's foolish and superstitious imagination. Satan is identified for us by name, however. He is so because the devil, or Satan, stands at the top of the ranks of fallen angels. He is the prince of the power of the air, the most powerful, therefore, of all the rulers of darkness. He it was who, soon after his creation, led a large part of the angelic world in rebellion against God, in order to usurp God's authority and seat. Ever since, Satan heads his host of fallen angels, called devils, in order to attempt to accomplish that same purpose.

Now just think of that for a moment. We are in combat with the devil himself, a devil who, we are told, walks about as a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour. How are you fighting? Can you take on the strength, the prowess of the

devil? Well, he is, first of all and foremost, our adversary. Each day of our lives we are called to battle against him or those who are under him. He looks us in the eye and he defies us. And he defies the living God whom we serve.

Now, that is just one of the foes that we fight—the mightiest of them, for sure, but only one. Already at this point we, or at least I, begin to feel a bit helpless. We must not forget the host of fallen angels that Satan has under his rule. These make up, together with Satan, the spiritual foes against which we are called to fight. This passage describes this host of devils in three ways. There are three matters it deals with as regards our enemy. First of all, this foe against which we war, we are told in verse 12, is made up of principalities and powers. These terms point out to us the fact that the devil's host is organized and powerful. It is made up of various ranks of demons. There are high-ranking devils who have authority over other devils who, in turn, have authority over still other devils. All these devils themselves are very powerful. They have great strength and ability to fight the spiritual warfare. They are "powers" of darkness who, like their prince, are much mightier than we.

Secondly, we are told in our text that these fallen rulers are, in fact, the rulers of the darkness of this world, or literally, they are cosmic rulers of darkness. Now we are not speaking here of the literal darkness of the nighttime, so that we must think

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of these devils as only coming at night and then fighting against us. This passage of God's Word speaks of spiritual darkness. You see, God is light, and everything that belongs to Him and proceeds from Him is light. That light is the shining forth of God's holiness and perfection. It is all that is good and right. And darkness is the opposite of light. It signifies all that which is evil and depraved. It is the lie as opposed to the truth, wrong as opposed to right. The enemy against which we fight is made up of those who rule and direct the evil and depravity of this world. They are the darkness of this world, the powers of darkness. And these powers persuade and lead sinful, unbelieving men to accomplish their evil designs and purposes. The world of darkness and unbelief is under the command of Satan and his

host. Wicked, unbelieving man is Satan's ally.

Finally, Paul describes the fallen angels as spiritual wickedness in high places. This description of these powers of darkness makes me shutter. You know, if I had to fight hand-to-hand an enemy I could see, that would be frightening enough. If I had to fight against flesh and blood it would be

disconcerting enough, especially if I knew that the man I fought against was bigger and stronger than I. But God's people are called to fight against spiritual wickedness in high places. That is to say, we must wage a warfare with depraved beings of a totally different dimension—those belonging to a spiritual realm. These are beings, powerful and organized beings, that carry on their battle with us from a higher plane, an invisible realm, from high places. And when I think about fighting these spiritual powers of darkness, I begin to feel so utterly helpless. I mean, how do I fight them? What are they doing to destroy me? I cannot see their moves. So it is almost in panic that I start flailing my arms about, battling the air, in a wild attempt to combat the foe. I feel so helpless. How can I possibly win

in battle against such overwhelming odds?

Now you understand the urgency of the command of these verses we are considering. We are weaklings, so frail in comparison to our foes. How will we be able to war against them? And yet, war we must.

But to battle the enemy, we must not only know who he is, but what is his method of warfare, his battle tactics, as well. We are warned of this in the last part of verse 11. We must be able to stand against the wiles of the devil, or, literally, the methods that the devil uses. What are these methods?

In the first place, they are highly spiritual. Satan and his host do not carry on a physical or even a visible battle with God's angels or with us. Many superstitious people and their vivid imaginations claim to see both angels and devils locked in some kind of mortal combat with each other. There are even books out there that like to portray this kind of thing. That is not the method of warfare that Satan carries on. It is invisible and it is highly spiritual. Satan and his host of fallen angels are interested in our souls. Their desire is to

draw us away from God and into the arms of this present world of darkness and unbelief. They do not want to kill us physically. They do not want to hack us in pieces and be rid of us. They want us to forsake the way of truth and right and join forces with them.

So their intent is spiritual. They come to us from within and without in order to turn us from that which is good to do the evil. So our struggle

against them is spiritual as well.

In the second place, the method of achieving their goal is that of deceit and falsehood. The methods of Satan are sinfully shrewd. They are wiles. Such is the meaning of "devil" itself. It means "liar." The power of darkness will use every means at his disposal to make the dark to appear as light and the light to be seen as darkness. These powers will attempt to make evil look good to us and the good appear as evil. And they will do this through falsehood and deceit. "Has God told you not to eat of the tree of knowledge, of good and evil? He knows that the day you eat of it you will be as

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gods yourself, knowing good and evil. He says you will die? Ha! You will not die!"

Liar! But Satan succeeded, did he not? Adam and Eve were convinced and fell into sin. And the devil, who is the father of the lie, has continued his battle ever since. The same is true of us. New houses? Property? Luxury? Vacations? Fun? Ha, these are not sin. On the contrary, these are the things that count. That is what matters. These will give you true joy and happiness in this life.

Liar! But Satan succeeds so often, does he not? Fornication, greed, drunkenness—it is all innocent fun. And, after all, it is very enjoyable. What does it hurt you?

Liar! But how often it is that our sinful flesh is attracted exactly to these things. You see, Satan is a deceiver, and we must be aware of the wiles of the devil, the shrewd methods of the devil because he appeals to our sinful natures and truly makes the evil seem so good and desirable. At the same time, he makes serving God and being spiritually minded seem so boring and useless.

One last reality we must be aware of concerning Satan's method of warfare. It is *relentless*. Our English transla-

tion cannot show it like the original does. Actually the command of these verses is this: "Keep on putting on the whole armor of God, that ye may be able to keep on standing against the wiles of the devil." And the reason we must keep on standing is because the devil and his host are constant in their warfare. They do not take a moment to sleep. They come at us from every conceivable angle and at all times. We turn one way, they assail us from another way. We let our guard down for a moment, and they are on us. They do not give up. They throw at us constantly every trick in the book that they have written over the past six thousand years. Satan, remember, is the prince of darkness. He reigns, therefore, over a kingdom of darkness, a kingdom where man is free to walk in sin. And it is his ultimate purpose and goal in all of this warfare against the church to usurp the kingdom of God and replace it with his own kingdom of darkness.

Now Paul speaks of this warfare in terms of wrestling in our text. We have to wrestle. We all know what wrestling is. It is not standing a quarter of a mile away from a person and aiming a gun at him to shoot him. It is not even boxing, where we stand and dodge the blows of our assailant and

deliver a few punches ourselves. Wrestling is grabbing hold of our foe and grappling with him arm-in-arm. It is pitting our strength against his in an attempt to throw him down and conquer him. Wrestling is personal confrontation, where we look the enemy right in the face, we smell his sweat, and with might and main we try to subdue him.

It is the greatest test of strength and endurance. That is the kind of warfare we are called to fight with the devil and the powers of darkness.

Remember, we are not fighting against flesh and blood as we wrestle. This is not some physical fight we are having here. It has nothing to do with how physically fit you and I are. It has nothing to do with whether we know karate or kung fu or are quick-witted in defending ourselves in a fistfight.

How well are you doing in battling Satan and the powers of darkness and high places? Examine yourself. How strong are we in battling against our foes? How fit do we make ourselves spiritually? How much do we exercise ourselves in spiritual matters? How strong are we in prayer and in

the Word of God? That, truly, is of the essence, because, I'll tell you something, Christian soldiers, we are fighting for

our eternal life in this battle. We are fighting for our souls. And that is far more serious than any battle in earthly masteries.

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How dare we think that our life could be one in which we take our ease? That is the one thing so wrong with modern Christianity today, it seems. Salvation and belonging to Christ are made so easy. That is exactly one of the shrewd attacks of Satan himself to make us think there is nothing to fight, that the Christian life is a breeze. All we have to say is that we believe in Jesus Christ and we can go on living like the wicked world. It does not matter. Satan wants us to feel at ease in Zion. Life can go on status-quo. No battle with ourselves. No struggle against the temptations of the evil world. No need to defend ourselves. All is well.

No, all is not well, as Satan would have us think. Do you imagine that the devil comes only boldly and openly to do battle with us? He is a

deceiver. He comes undetected, in what might even seem the little things in life. You do not think so? He sure does. He is sly. He wants us to join those who believe the lie. He wants us to join hands with them in common cause, forgetting the truth, forgetting what makes us distinctive as believers. And he makes himself look so good, so right. Satan is so shrewd. Anything to get everyone together under the one throne of the kingdom of man, his kingdom, the kingdom of darkness. Satan attacks us as far as our walk of life is concerned. He attacks us in the family. He attacks us in our relationships. He attacks us through our so-called friends and acquaintances. He attacks us in those moments when we are alone or when we are with friends. Do you see him? He attacks us in the area of recreation. He attacks us in the area of doctrine.

We must wrestle. Never underestimate the wiles of the devil. We must struggle. We must not grow weary against our foe. If we are spiritually lazy, then we will be taken in by the powers of darkness. Our life in this world is not a playground. It is a battlefield. Are you fighting? Or are you playing?

This Word of God to us is certainly not meant to discourage those who are truly fighting. I know that to the true

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child of God, who battles long and hard with his sin, these mighty foes seem invincible. But they are not.

That is why Paul enjoins us to put on the whole armor of God.

Now we surely do not have time in our broadcast today to describe each piece of this armor and its function. That is not the intent of these couple of verses that we consider anyway. But look briefly at that armor. In the verses that follow the passage that we consider today, there is a description of the spiritual armor we must put on. In those verses we find that we must be equipped with truth, righteousness, the gospel of peace, faith, salvation, and the Word of God. These make up our spiritual armor. All of these are necessary to defend ourselves against the attacks of the devil. And with these, we *are* able to wrestle the powers of darkness, and we *are* able to gain the victory.

How is that possible? If we were to take a close look at all of these pieces of our spiri-

tual armor, they would lead us to one conclusion: we must put on Christ! Where is truth and righteousness to be found, other than in the cross of Jesus Christ? Where can we find true peace? Where can we find faith and salvation, other than in the cross of our Savior? What we need to fight this battle is Christ, because He it is who gives us the victory over our enemies. He already has accomplished the victory over those enemies. He accomplished it at the cross, because it was there at the cross that Christ Himself did battle with Satan. Satan attempted to kill the Christ through the hands of wicked men. But all they served to do was to bruise our Savior. It was there at the cross of Jesus Christ that Christ crushed the head of the serpent, that is, Satan.

In order for us to fight the battle, we must take to ourselves the blessings of salvation that Christ has earned for us, and we must live in that salvation. We must constantly be asking God in prayer to give us the necessary strength to fight the battle of faith. That is the only way to wrestle with spiritual powers in high places. We must maintain the truth rigidly. We must detest all that is of the lie. We must regularly, in true sorrow, seek the

forgiveness of sins at the foot of the cross. We must, in truth, cling to Christ, trusting in Him for all our strength. And then we go forth conquering our enemies with the Word of God.

Ah, the special weapons of warfare. God's Word. This is in what we must exercise ourselves. If we are going to be able to be strong and stand against the mightiest of our foes, even Satan himself, we must equip ourselves with the Word of God. Then we will stand.

Can we win this warfare? Surely not in ourselves. But when we are equipped with all that God has given us in Christ, we *will be able to stand*. And being able to stand, we will receive the victory too. So we fight. We do not despair in that battle. We do not falter in that battle. But, through the cross of Jesus Christ, we fight. And we win.

We end with the victory cry of the believer recorded in I Corinthians 15:57: "But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."

Let us pray together.

Father in heaven, thanks be unto Thee for the victory that we have received in Christ. May we go forth fighting the good fight of faith and

battling against our spiritual enemies. May we do that by clinging to the cross of Jesus Christ. And may we do that through Thy Word which Thou hast given to us. Strengthen us, Father, in our faith so that we might go forth and be victorious over against our foes in Christ. Bless us. And where we stumble in that battle, forgive. We thank Thee for the cross and the forgiveness that we receive there. For Christ's sake, Amen.