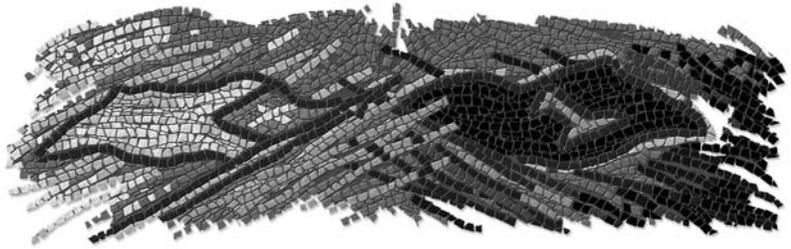


The Christian Warfare



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Isa. 35:4; Dan. 10:19; Luke 22:31; Rom. 7:15-20; Eph. 6:10-12; 2 Tim. 4:7, 8; Rev. 12:9.*

Memory Text: “For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places” (*Ephesians 6:12, NKJV*).

The reality of the war. The Bible begins with two great accounts. First, God created a perfect world and placed Adam and Eve in stewardship of this perfect world (*Gen. 1:27, 28*). Second, Satan led Adam and Eve into a rebellion against God, bringing that world and the entire humanity under the curse of sin (*Genesis 3*). The Bible also proclaims two great accounts of good news. First, God sends His Son to this earth to die for the sins of the world and reconcile the fallen humanity unto Himself (*2 Cor. 5:14-18*). The Cross and the resurrection of Christ ensure the ultimate destruction of sin and Satan at the end of the world. The second part of the good news is that God will create the new heaven and new earth as the home of the saints (*John 14:1-3*).

Between these accounts the Inspired Word traces the perils and the progress of the great war between Christ and Satan, a war that we are all involved in. This week we look at Paul's words on how we can be victorious.

The Week at a Glance: How real is the Christian warfare? Ultimately, what kind of battle are we in? What are some of the wiles of the devil? Where and how do we fight this enemy? What promises do we have of victory over Satan?

*Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, December 17.

Finally . . . the War

Paul begins his narration of the Christian warfare with the words “Finally, my brethren” (*Eph. 6:10*). The word *finally* makes a forceful point. Thus far, Paul has outlined how God has redeemed us from sin through Christ, sealed us by His Spirit, brought us into a fellowship of unity, and made us a family of God. As members of this new family, God expects us to “walk worthy of [His] calling” (*Eph. 4:1, NKJV*) by putting away the old sinful life; by putting on the new transformed being; by walking in purity, in love, in light, in wisdom, and in godly relationship with all. The Christian life and walk should be in the fullness of the Holy Spirit (*see Eph. 5:18*).

But there is a demonic, evil spirit working against the Christian. Satan desires to have us, as he did Peter (*Luke 22:31*). So, Paul says, “Finally, my brethren,” get ready for the daily battle against Satan.

The word *finally* provides a summary or a conclusion. But the Greek word can be rendered better by the phrase “From henceforth” or “From now on.”

Read Luke 22:31. What do you think Jesus meant when He said that Satan desired to “sift” Peter? What does it mean when Satan “sifts” a person?

Read Ephesians 6:10. As Paul begins this exhortation, what’s his point? How are we to fight? What hope does God’s Word give us that we can be victorious?

Paul has spoken of God at work in Christ for us. The coming of Christ in history has introduced a new and powerful dimension in the cosmic battle between God and Satan. Christ’s victory over Satan on the cross has become the basis of the believer’s acceptance before God. But the believers should know that their journey to the kingdom has just begun. “From now on,” they have many battles to fight, a cunning enemy to contend with, and a war to win “against the wiles of the devil” (*Eph. 6:11*). “With full assurance of faith we may expect that He will unite His omnipotence with the efforts of human instrumentalities, for the glory of His name. Clad with the armor of His righteousness, we may gain the victory over every foe.”—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, p. 111.

Think about a time you were victorious in a spiritual battle and a time you failed. What made the difference?

Key Text: *Ephesians 6:10-12*

Teachers Aims:

1. To understand that, as Christians, we are involved in a war between God and Satan.
2. To stress that, in a real sense, we ourselves are the disputed prize in this war.
3. To draw our attention to the necessity of God's power to our eventual victory.

Lesson Outline:

I. Christian Warfare (*Eph. 6:12*)

- A. Conversion is not an ending point but the beginning of a struggle.
- B. The struggle is not only against our own worst impulses but against demonic agencies.
- C. One's acceptance of Christ should make us conscious, dedicated enemies of Satan, just as he is of us.

II. Wiles of the Devil (*Eph. 6:11*)

- A. Many of the ways in which Satan attempts to lead us away from God seem harmless, even laudable.
- B. The one thing that may indicate the origin of these strategies is their tendency to draw our attention from God to ourselves or to other incidentals.
- C. Avoiding obvious sin is not enough; Satan can deceive us with our own "righteousness."

III. Be Strong in God's Might (*Eph. 6:10*)

- A. To avoid believing in lies, we must immerse ourselves in God's truth.
- B. Knowing God and His truth enables us to use and experience His power.
- C. God's power goes only to those who submit themselves completely to Him.

Summary: In becoming Christians, we take sides in the war between Christ and Satan, the war from which all other wars and conflicts derive. Not only are we participants, we are also the prize to be claimed. We can take comfort in the fact that Christ has already laid claim to us and will not give us up as long as we cling to Him.

COMMENTARY

Paul began his letter to the Ephesians with thanksgiving for "all spiritual blessings in heavenly places" (*Eph. 1:3*), and now he closes the letter with a reference to a warfare (*6:10-12*) that began in heaven (*Rev. 12:7*). The story of this war is the great controversy between Christ and Satan that is now being fought between the forces of evil and God's people. The Ephesian Epistle outlines how God created the church, made up of both Jews and Gentiles, and how God expects His family to walk in all purity and unity. But the walk is neither easy nor trivial. Our study this week focuses on the

“The Wiles of the Devil” (*Eph. 6:11*)

Paul’s description of the spiritual warfare begins with a general warning to be aware of the “wiles of the devil” (*Eph. 6:11*).

What are the wiles of the devil? The devil does not always or necessarily attack the believer in the most obvious and evil ways. Often his ways are subtle, and his appeals may appear to uphold higher and nobler motives. Note two examples: First, the high motive he offers in his temptation to Eve in Genesis 3:1-5; second, the eagerness to establish the Messianic kingdom on earth with which he filled the mind of Judas.

In his book *The Screwtape Letters*, C. S. Lewis presents a series of imaginary letters that Screwtape, a senior demon, writes to a junior partner not experienced in the skillful art of tripping the saints. For example, when John is praying for his mother who is suffering from rheumatism, Screwtape advises the junior demon not to cause John to lose faith in prayer. Instead, John should be encouraged to pray for his mother at all times; meanwhile, John’s attention should be diverted from the necessity of massaging his mother’s aching joints.

In another letter, Screwtape suggests that Christians must be encouraged to worry and fret over great and grave issues in order to divert their attention from real and immediate problems. The name of the game, says Screwtape, “is to have them all running about with fire extinguishers whenever there is a flood.”—(London: Collins Clear-Type Press, 1956), pp. 128, 129.

Look up the following texts: How, in each case, can we see how Satan works? Do any of these methods seem especially familiar to you?

Job 2:9

Zech. 3:1

Mark 4:15

Luke 22:3

2 Cor. 2:10, 11

1 Thess. 2:18

2 Pet. 3:4

Rev. 12:12

reality of this war, the wiles of the adversary, and the need for Christian readiness to face the enemy.

I. Christian Warfare: Its Reality (*Eph. 6:10-12*)

The apostle affirms, in no uncertain terms, the reality and the cosmic nature of this war. “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” (*Eph. 6:12*). This is our war; there’s no way we can escape it, except to be on God’s winning side. The war is a test of our allegiance. On whose side are we? Christ’s or Satan’s? Upon whom are our thoughts and affections? Whom do we love and serve? The war is Satan’s studied scheme to defeat God’s plan for His people and to keep us away from Him. As surely as sin has made the war real, so surely the Cross has made the victory certain. But the war has to be waged.

“Many look on this conflict between Christ and Satan as having no special bearing on their own life; and for them it has little interest. But within the domain of every human heart this controversy is repeated. Never does one leave the ranks of evil for the service of God without encountering the assaults of Satan.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 116.

Nothing delights Satan as much as a denial of his existence and human indifference to this warfare. Liberal theology may see the biblical portrayal of Satan as an embarrassing explanation of human inadequacy. Psychology may see it as a result of cultural deficiency of a primitive mode. Science may have no interest in the subject at all, and philosophy continues its metaphysical battle on the nature of good and evil, without focusing on its real cause. On the face of it all, what matters to the Christian is what the Word of God says. The Bible has no reservation in recognizing the origin, the workings, and the eventual extinction of demonic forces. Jesus specifically asked His believers to pray for deliverance from “the evil one” (*Matt. 6:13, NIV*). The whole biblical witness testifies that God sent His Son to crush the devil and deliver Satan’s captives. Satan assumes himself to be the god of this world, blinding the minds of the unbeliever (*2 Cor. 4:3*). If not resisted, he can cause havoc in moral and spiritual life (*Acts 5:3, 1 Pet. 5:8*). So, the need is real to face this war squarely.

II. Christian Warfare: The Wiles of the Devil (*Eph. 6:11*)

Paul makes three facts clear about this warfare. First, this war is not against “flesh and blood” (*Eph. 6:12*). We are not fighting human beings, even wicked ones. Indeed, we are to love all people and, if possible, to live peaceably with all (*Rom. 12:18*). Second, this war is against demonic forces, “rulers of the darkness” and

The Enemy We Face

How does Paul describe the enemy we face? What is he really saying to us about the kind of battle we are engaged in? *Eph. 6:12*.

First, our primary enemy is not “flesh and blood” (*Eph. 6:12*)—that is, not human. Selfishness, pride, egotism, and anti-Christian hostility are all forces Christians have to contend with, but there are cosmic powers greater than all these working to disconnect our relationship with God.

Second, our enemy is described as “principalities,” “powers,” and “rulers of the darkness of this age” (*vs. 12, NKJV*). They are “spiritual agents from the very headquarters of evil” (*vs. 12, Philips*). The description is frightening but real, indicating superhuman, cosmic, demonic forces that contend for our allegiance in opposition to God. Whose shall we be? Satan’s or God’s? That’s the central pursuit of the Christian warfare, the great controversy between Christ and Satan.

Satan is our adversary. A relentless and formidable foe, he is a vicious fighter, lurking “about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour” (*1 Pet. 5:8, NKJV*). He is the accuser (*Rev. 12:10*), a liar and murderer (*John 8:44*). He has sinned from the beginning (*1 John 3:8*), perverts the way of the Lord (*Acts 13:10*), “deceives the whole world” (*Rev. 12:9, NKJV*), wars against God’s remnant church (*Rev. 12:17, NKJV*), persecutes the saints (*Rev. 2:10*), can appear even as an angel of light (*2 Cor. 11:14*), and, at the end of this age, will lead all those opposed to God in a final battle to overthrow His rule (*2 Thess. 2:4-10*). It is against this superhuman being and his army of fallen angels that Christians are engaged in a constant and continuous warfare. “In every soul two powers are struggling earnestly for the victory. Unbelief marshals its forces, led by Satan, to cut us off from the Source of our strength. Faith marshals its forces, led by Christ, the author and finisher of our faith. Hour by hour, in the sight of the heavenly universe, the conflict goes forward. This is a hand-to-hand fight, and the great question is, Which shall obtain the mastery?”—Ellen G. White, *Sons and Daughters of God*, p. 328.

In your own life, how have you experienced this struggle between these two forces? In what ways is the battle manifested? How well does Satan hide? How aware are you of what’s really going on?

“against spiritual wickedness in high places” (*Eph. 6:12*). Third, our enemy is crafty and cunning—so cunning that he may appear as an “angel of light” (*2 Cor. 11:14*). Therefore, Paul alerts us against the craftiness and deceit of the devil (*Eph. 6:11*).

These deceptions or “wiles” aim at thwarting God’s purpose through subtle ways. “Satan . . . will bring in subtle fallacies to darken and confuse the mind and root out the doctrines of salvation. Those who do not accept the Word of God just as it reads, will be snared in his trap.”—Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 2, p. 52. Consider some of the lies Satan presents in opposition to God’s truth:

GOD’S TRUTH	SATAN’S DECEPTION
1. In the beginning God created.	1. Life is a result of evolution.
2. Sin is transgression of God’s law.	2. Sin is a myth; there are only failures.
3. In Christ God creates a new community.	3. Humanity is evolving toward newness.
4. In Christ God broke down all dividing walls.	4. Differences promote growth.
5. Satan deceives God’s saints.	5. There is no Satan; he is a result of human imagination.
6. God wants His church to be united.	6. Unity insists on uniformity.

Inductive Bible Study

Texts for Discovery: *Joshua 1:9, Isaiah 35:4, Daniel 10:19, Romans 7:15-25, Ephesians 6:10-12*

❶ While Joshua stood on the border of the Promised Land, he must have thought about the many challenges he would face. The Ephesian church also confronted many challenges. What makes the difference between victory and defeat in Christian warfare? How do Joshua 1:9 and Ephesians 6:10 provide an anthem of hope?

❷ Being forewarned provides the opportunity to be forearmed. Read Ephesians 6:11 and Luke 22:31. How does knowing Satan’s plans for our failure help us prepare for encounters with him? If we fight in our own power, what will be the outcome? What can you suggest to someone who is struggling without God’s help?

❸ Computers work well until they are unplugged and the battery is depleted. How is Satan working in your life to disconnect you from the Source of power you most need? How long have you been running on battery trying to fend off evil by using your own resources? Take time to reprioritize your daily schedule with the intention of taking time to reconnect with God.

“Be Strong . . . in the Power of His Might”

The word *wrestle* (see *Eph. 6:12*), as used to describe the Christian warfare, indicates two things. First, it is like a hand-to-hand combat, as in wrestling. Second, the enemy is as close and immediate as the opponent in wrestling. The enemy is both subtle and audacious in his attempts to deceive those who have their faith and loyalty rooted in Christ. Victory in this warfare depends on three fundamental principles of Christian life and faith: “Be strong” (*vs. 10*); “Put on the whole armor of God” (*vs. 11, NKJV*); and “Stand” (*vss. 11, 13, 14*). Today’s lesson will focus on the first essential; the other two will be examined later.

The phrase “Be strong” appears in the New King James Version more than thirty times, three of which are in the New Testament. In most cases, the expression signifies God’s call to face fearlessly the enemy in either physical or spiritual conflict. The call suggests that God is saying “Your strength comes from Me. Therefore, be strong, and be not afraid.” Look up the following texts and note the assurance offered in each one, despite the varying circumstances. How could you apply that admonition to yourself and whatever struggles you are now facing? *Josh. 10:25, Isa. 35:4, Dan. 10:19, 1 Cor. 16:13.*

Paul’s call is to “be strong in the Lord” (*Eph. 6:10*). God’s eternal foe can be fought only by his opponents being on the side of God. “‘Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit,’ says the Lord of hosts” (*Zech. 4:6, NKJV*). Spiritual hosts of wickedness cannot be fought by human strength, however great and refined and morally precise that human strength may be, but only by spiritual forces. Nothing short of the power that flows from God through the Holy Spirit will suffice in fighting the evil one. “Without Me,” said Jesus, “you can do nothing” (*John 15:5, NKJV*). To this Paul adds: “Thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ” (*1 Cor. 15:57, NKJV*). His grace is sufficient for us (*2 Cor. 12:9*).

Paul adds one more specific to “Be strong in the Lord.” The strength from the Lord flows from the “power of His might” (*Eph. 6:10, NKJV*). Already, in Ephesians 1:17-21 Paul prays that we would experience God’s power as He displayed it in Christ’s resurrection. In Ephesians 2:1-7 the apostle explains how he hopes we will experience this power. Just as God was able to raise Christ from the dead, so He is able to raise us from death in sin to newness of life in Christ, and it is in this resurrection power that we ought to fight “the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms” (*Eph. 6:12, NIV*).

The devil's deceptions are not limited to doctrines alone; they extend to every situation where Christ lovingly demands and expects His disciples to obey. Such a subtle war requires utmost vigilance on our part in order to detect the trap and to continue to rely on Jesus, who alone assures victory.

III. Christian Warfare: the Need for Readiness (*Eph. 6:10*)

Paul knows the war's reality and the enemy's determination to get us away from God (*Luke 22:31, 32*). Paul calls upon all believers: "Be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might" (*Eph. 6:10*). The strength to fight the foe cannot come from within us, but from Jesus. "Without me ye can do nothing," said Jesus (*John 15:5*).

Witnessing

Oh yes, there's a major battle going on; one so important that the fate of each human being hangs in the balance. The battle is between right and wrong, between good and evil, between the children of God and the legions of darkness. However, even while the battle roars, God's followers know the outcome. And that is why it is important to share the good news of salvation with those who have yet to learn of Christ and the eternal life He gives to all who will accept it.

Believers are responsible for showing nonbelievers how Satan has earned the title Master of Morph, how he has been able to convince people through the ages to soften and demystify his image from the personification of evil to the rather harmless and inoffensive, even somewhat romantic, figure portrayed in various media.

Believers have the responsibility to show nonbelievers that Satan is lying when he asserts that people have the power within themselves to change their life; to use their core "self" to take full control of their destiny. He knows that only God can change lives for the better, but he desperately needs to keep God and His Son out of the picture!

Believers have the responsibility to warn nonbelievers not to be fooled for a single moment by Satan's manipulative tactics. Believers see his ruse of innocence for what it really is—a treacherous deception. He is real; and he continues to be every bit as dangerous as God says he is.

Finally, believers have the responsibility to tell everyone they know the good news—that in the end, Satan will fail. He will lose his hold on this planet, and he will be destroyed. Through faith in Christ, God's followers will overcome Satan's inflections of pain. They look forward to the better world they have been promised. And nothing . . . nothing will keep them from God's side much longer!

“Put On . . . Stand”

Having issued the call to “be strong . . . in the power of His might” (*Eph. 6:10, NKJV*), Paul gives what admonition to the believers? What does he tell them to do, and why? *Eph. 6:11.*

In ourselves we have neither the strength of the will nor the tenacity of endurance to face the devil. By nature we are sinners (*Rom. 3:23*). Sin has separated us from God (*Isa. 59:2*), made us its slaves (*John 8:34, Rom. 6:16*), and corrupted our minds and consciences (*2 Cor. 3:14, 2 Tim. 3:13*).

Look up the following texts. What role do we have in this battle against Satan and sin? Are we to be passive, or is there a battle we must endure? *Matt. 16:24; Luke 13:24; Acts 14:22; 2 Tim. 2:3; Phil. 4:1; James 5:10, 11; 1 Pet. 4:1.*

Even though Christ has defeated Satan on the cross and gives that victory to us, our new life is not without its perils. As Herman Ridderbos, a noted New Testament theologian, points out: The satanic powers, “however much already vanquished in Christ, have not yet become harmless. But in order to be able to contend against them suitably, the church has received an armor from God, so richly furnished that it is able to continue to stand.”—*Paul: An Outline of His Theology* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1975), p. 392.

It is with this armor that God sends us into battle against “spiritual hosts of wickedness” (*Eph. 6:12, NKJV*). This armor is more than adequate to deal with Satan’s deceptive schemes. Satan is a cunning enemy and will not fight fair. He will use every trick he can—from turning into a talking serpent (*Genesis 3*) to masquerading as an angel of light (*2 Cor. 11:14*). Hence Paul’s twofold admonition: “Put on.” “Stand.”

“Put on” is a command to take something that does not originate with us. Anything that springs from within us is totally insufficient to meet the foe. “Put on” also indicates the idea of permanence; the Christian cannot live for a moment without the “armor of God” (*Eph. 6:11, NKJV*)—and it must cover the entire being, from head to toe, from thought to action. In Ephesians 6:11-14, four times Paul urges the believers to “stand”—hold the ground, resist the enemy, be awake and alert, and never surrender. Victory is ours.

If you know someone who is going through “hand-to-hand” combat with Satan right now, why not spend time with that person? Besides prayer, what other things can you do to help?

Life-Application Approach

Icebreaker: As the new year approaches, consider some of your past resolutions. How long did you keep them? In what ways have you found God’s presence in your life a golden key to success?

Thought Questions:

❶ “Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat” (*Luke 22:31*). Satan has included each of our names in his request to be our ruler. How does this make you feel? What Bible promises assure us we are not alone in our battle against evil? (*See Rev. 12:9 and Isa. 35:4.*) In your Sabbath School class, share a season of prayer asking for God’s presence in each member’s life.

❷ Take a few moments to contemplate what it must have been like to live in a perfect world—a place without sin, despair, or evil. How does such a place look in your mind? Do you see bright colors, hear beautiful music, or feel the solace of complete peace? Now contrast this world with the one in which we live. Why does Paul say “Be strong in the Lord and in His mighty power” (*Eph. 6:10, NIV*)? How is this possible?

Application Question:

The Cross and the Resurrection cut across the failure of humanity with an offering of hope. Scripture contains many examples of our Savior sharing very personal encouragement with those “who have longed for his appearing” (*2 Tim. 4:8, NIV*). Read Daniel 10:19 over and over until you have it memorized. Write it on a card, including your own name. Then post it where you see it each morning. Share with others how important it is to have God’s peace and power at work in your life, and theirs.

Further Study: *The cosmic war:* “In the Word of God are represented two contending parties that influence and control human agencies in our world. Constantly these parties are working with every human being. Those who are under God’s control and who are influenced by the heavenly angels, will be able to discern the crafty workings of the unseen powers of darkness. Those who desire to be in harmony with the heavenly agencies should be intensely in earnest to do God’s will. They must give no place whatever to Satan and his angels.”—Ellen G. White Comments, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, p. 1119.

Warfare as a lifelong conflict. “The enemy will use every argument, every deception, to entangle the soul; and in order to win the crown of life, we must put forth earnest, persevering effort. We must not lay off the armor or leave the battlefield until we have gained the victory, and can triumph in our Redeemer.

“As long as we continue to keep our eyes fixed upon the Author and Finisher of our faith we shall be safe. But our affections must be placed upon things above, not on things on the earth. By faith we must rise higher and still higher in the attainments of the graces of Christ. By daily contemplating His matchless charms, we must grow more and more into His glorious image.”—Ellen G. White, *My Life Today*, p. 105.

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ As a class, read aloud 2 Corinthians 10:3-5 and discuss what insights you find on spiritual warfare.
- ❷ Satan’s wiles often involve a subtle combination of truth with error (for example, the common tendency to equate material prosperity as God’s approval and blessing on one’s life). What are other examples of this mixture of truth and error Satan uses to deceive?
- ❸ Is there an individual or a group of people your class knows who is in the midst of a deep spiritual struggle? What practical things can you, as a class, do that can show these people your care and support?