

Apr 6/25 Leader's Guide - Ephesians 6:10-24 "Standing Firm"

Read Ephesians 6:10-24

Paul opens this last section of his letter to the Ephesians with the word finally, which in original language meant henceforth. What he's saying is, that as we live out the new humanity we have in Christ this will be the ongoing reality for the follower of Jesus – we will find ourselves entering into a battle with unseen forces (Satan, the devil, the demonic) that are hell bent on undermining the new humanity in us.

1. How do you personally make sense of the language of Satan and the demonic in the biblical record?

This is a question to get the spectrum of responses to this language up to the surface so that you know the lay of the land in your group. This will enable you to guide the discussion with an awareness of your group's sensibilities.

C.S. Lewis said in his opening to his book the screwtape letters, that there are two equal and opposite errors when it comes to the devils. One is to disbelieve in their existence. The other is to believe and have an unhealthy and excessive interest in them. You likely will have such polarized convictions present.

The western response is often to "demythologize" this language. We often say that this was a premodern culture grasping at explanations for things they didn't understand. We now have physiological and psychological explanations for such things, we have diagnosis. Or we see in this language an attempt to describe the systemic evil that exists within systems and institutions and ideologies that becomes more evil than its constituent parts. Now that we have language to describe such systemic evil we don't need the language of the demonic we say.

It would be profitable to note that the church outside of the west finds great hope and freedom in such language for it helps them makes sense of and respond to realities that they are very much aware of.

2. The primary scheme (vs. 11) of the Devil is contained in the name – devil meaning liar or deceiver, Satan meaning accuser. The central work of the evil one is to use all means necessary to undermine the truth, the truth about ourselves, the truth about Jesus. Discuss.

This question may naturally flow into the next so if it does let it take its natural course.

You could look at the biblical record to see this pattern. The serpent with Eve (Genesis 3:1-7) the devil with Jesus (Matthew 4:1-11, though you will read this later in the study)

You could explore the example from Ephesians 4 – here is an unedited version of that from the sermon.

Paul in chapter 4 said – don't let the sun go down on your anger – don't give the Devil a foothold.

Just think of it - someone wrongs you – your angry – and instead of facing it head on trying to work it through to restored relationship – you let the sun go down on that anger - you sit with it – stew on it – rehearse it over and over again - bitterness and resentment start to grow – you begin to attribute to the

person who has wronged you all sorts of motivations – begin to read back into things they've said and done in the past through the lens of this current hurt – you reinforce their wrong – as you reinforce your innocence – now the possibility for reconciliation is far further removed – you had the anger to begin with – but as you let the sun go down on it – as you sat with it who invited you to rehearse the wrong – who birthed the motivations you attributed to them – who brought you to see their character through the lens of that hurt? And whose to say any of it is even true?

3. In the Christian life there are two truths that are meant to be held in dynamic tension. The holiness and the grace of God. His holiness brings us to see that we are far worse off than we had imagined. In his grace we see that we are far more loved than we could have dared dream. The primary lies of the enemy are to disrupt that dynamic tension. Those lies are temptation and accusation. In temptation the enemy diminishes the holiness of God and up plays his grace resulting in an elevated view of ourselves that leads us to do and think things that unravel us. In accusation the enemy diminishes the grace of God and up plays his holiness resulting in a diminished view of ourselves that leads us to do and think things that unravel us. Discuss.

Here is an unedited portion of the sermon that gives some examples of this to provide some starters for your discussion:

In the 17th century Anglican pastor Thomas Brooks wrote a book entitled precious remedies against Satan's devices - in it he reflects on some of the common devices of temptation and accusation

In temptation – as I said - the enemy disrupts the dynamic tension by diminishing holiness – playing up grace – perhaps showing you the bait and hiding the hook – oh if you do this thing - here are all the benefits – but the benefits are all short term pleasures – that's the bait – the hidden hook? - the long-term misery borne of doing that thing – taking that path...

Or perhaps he'll help you rationalize your sin as virtue – I'm not greedy - thrifty – I'm not nosy – concerned – I'm not an alcoholic – sociable...

Or he'll turn your attention to the sins of others – particularly those of Christian leaders – well if their doing that thing – I can do this thing...

Or get us bitter about suffering – I've been through so much – I deserve this pleasure

Or - of course God will forgive me for this - that's his job – I have a friend whose wife left him for his best friend – ruining two families – not only do they believe God will forgive – but this was part of God's plan all along – his best for us - borne of the lie of temptation – downplay his holiness – up play his grace – resulting in an elevated view of ourselves – leading us to think and do things that unravel us...

How about accusation? Where the dynamic tension is disrupted as the enemy leads us to focus more on his holiness than his grace – accusation pushes us to obsess over past sin – the damage done that can't be undone.

Or planting in our minds the thought that our current circumstances are punishment for past sins – so that we say – well this wouldn't have happened unless God was mad at me – in some circles that lie of the devil is falsely called biblical theology – so let me affirm – your circumstances are not God's punishment for sin – sure they may be the natural consequence of sin – but not God's added punishment

– your sin was dealt with at the cross.

Another accusation comes by way of implanting the thought – if I were a real Christian - I wouldn't be having these thoughts – struggles - desires.

At its core accusation is where Satan gets us to focus more on your sin than your Savior – parenting books will tell us that a child needs to hear four to five compliments for every one criticism - otherwise they'll grow up hating themselves – because criticisms lodge in our hearts before compliments do – brooks would say - look at your Savior five times for every look at your sin – in accusation the Devil wants you to look at your sin far more.

4. (vs. 10) What does this verse tell us about our inability in this, and God's ability?

By beginning here Paul is wanting to let us know that Yes – we have an enemy – yes – we have one who wishes to undermine the new humanity in us at every turn – but do not be fooled – he is too strong to deal with on your own – but in Jesus you have the ability – in Jesus you have the authority – in Jesus you have the strength – so be strong in the Lord – and receive the resources you have been given – the armour of God...

5. (vs. 14-17a) What truths are we meant to “put on” to combat the lies of the enemy? Give some examples of what this might look like.

Here is an unedited section of the sermon to help provide some substance for your discussion of this section:

Neil T Anderson – one of I think the most helpful authors on this subject – speaks of such spiritual warfare as a truth encounter – when the enemy speaks lies – combat it with truth – put on the belt of truth

The truth about what?

Put on the breastplate of righteousness – made of solid metal – covering the vitals front and back – put on the truth that in Christ you are a new creation – made right with God through faith – so that when God looks at you he sees the goodness and righteousness of his son – by the Spirit you have put on the new self – you are being made new – with these truths the devil can't drag up your past – can't point to your remaining sin – to accuse – tear down - for – in Paul's words from Romans – there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus – put on righteousness

Put on the shoes of peace - the Roman soldiers footwear was made of leather – securely wrapped around the ankles to provide greater mobility and support – studded with nails to prevent slipping – many historians attribute the success of the Roman armies to this footwear – put on the shoes of peace – root yourself in the truth that we have peace with God through Christ – the devil cannot move us from that location in Him – accepted - loved – forgiven – chosen – delighted in – put on peace

Take up the shield of faith – this word referred to a large rectangular shield – curving around the body – providing almost total coverage – the surface wrapped in leather – such that when enemy combatants would fire small arrows wrapped in twine – dipped in pitch – set alight – where wooden shields would be

consumed – these leather ones were impenetrable

Take up the shield of faith – that as the darts of temptation and accusation fly – they will fall ineffectually against faith – not intellectual ascent - relational trust – modelled on Jesus' pattern in the desert – no no no – this is who I am – this is who my Father is – in Him alone will I trust.

Put on the helmet of salvation - made of heavy metal – coated inside with felt or sponge – able to withstand the blows of all but the heaviest of axes – put on the truth of your salvation – a salvation that has a past - a present - a future – in Jesus we have been saved – are being saved – will be saved – you are saved – your forgiveness has been won at the cross – you've been adopted by his grace – you are being saved – the spirit is making you new – shaping you to reflect a new humanity – you will be saved – new creation is coming – and you are an heir of his glorious future – put on salvation...

Read Matthew 4:1-11

6. (17b-18) In reflection on the pattern of Jesus in the desert what does it mean to use the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God and pray in the Spirit (prayer consistent with the word of God) to combat the lies of the enemy?

Again an unedited section to provide substance for conversation:

Take the Sword of Spirit – a short sword – brandished for close encounter – in this battle for your mind – you need such a sword – the sword of the spirit – which the word of God – like Jesus in the desert locked in combat – responding to every challenge – every temptation – with – it is written – it is written – it is written

And finally pray at all times in the Spirit – how is this different than any other prayer? – well if the sword of the spirit is the word of God – then praying in the spirit – is praying in step with the truth of God's word - taking hold of temptations and accusations – lies – and praying truth into them

What would that look like? Well it depends on the accusation or temptation – if it is condemnation over past sin – pray into it the truth that there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus – if it is that you are feeling alone – adrift – unsure of God's presence and love - pray into it the promise that Jesus will never leave you nor forsake you – if it is that you are wallowing in shame – how could God love me when I've done – said – thought – been - pray into it the truth that you are In Christ a beloved child – delighted in – chosen – if it is that you are deeply anxious for your future – pray into it the truth that Jesus is coming again to make everything new and in Him that future is ours.

7. We are encouraged to be strong and to put on the armour so that we might stand. What would this standing look like practically?

Standing is about not being moved – we are not in this battle meant to move forward – that is the spirit's work in us – we are meant to stand. To stand – not be moved by the lies – but rooted in the truth. To stand – not relinquish any of the new humanity we have been given. To stand – not give up any of the ground in us that has been won by the Spirit. Stand.

Resources for putting on the armour:

1. <https://www.navigators.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/navigators-armor-of-god-updated-2024.pdf>
2. <https://storage.snappages.site/QJWDMK/assets/files/Who-I-Am-In-Christ.pdf>
3. <https://thecove.org/blog/the-full-armor-of-god-how-to-pray/>