

Lesson #13

**Ephesians 6
and
The Weapons of Warfare**

In Ephesians 4:1-6:9 the apostle provided us with a list of responsibilities for Christian living. The moral issues that he begins to address in 6:10 and following extend beyond simple questions of right and wrong and thrust us into the heart of a larger, indeed, *cosmic* battle in which our enemies are not primarily other human beings but spiritual beings of indescribable evil intent.

Much of what Paul will say, at least in terms of the imagery of a soldier fully arrayed in battle armor, is taken from Isaiah (11:4-5; 49:2; 52:7; 59:17) which describes the armor of God and His Messiah. "The Isaianic references depict the Lord of hosts as a warrior dressed for battle as he goes forth to vindicate his people. The 'full armour of God' which the readers are urged to put on as they engage in a deadly spiritual warfare (v. 11) is Yahweh's own armour, which he and his Messiah have worn and which is now provided for his people as they engage in battle" (O'Brien, 457).

The various virtues and other items connected with these pieces of armor have already figured prominently in earlier portions of Ephesians: truth (1:13; 4:15,21,24,25; 5:9), righteousness (4:24; 5:9), peace (1:2; 2:14-18; 4:3), the gospel (1:13; 3:6), the word of God (1:13; 5:26), salvation (1:13; 2:5,8; 5:23), and faith (1:1,13,15,19; 2:8; 3:12,17; 4:5,13).

The best way to approach this crucial passage is phrase by phrase, verse by verse.

1. ***"Finally"***

"Finally, after all I've said, after all the doctrine, the exhortations, the rebukes, the encouragement, here is one more thing. I've saved it for last, not because it's least important, but because it's the greatest threat. Something threatens to undermine and subvert everything we've talked about. So pay close attention!"

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| Some suggest that "finally" means "from now on" (cf. Gal. 6:17) or "for the remaining time," referring to the period between the first and second comings of Jesus. I.e., the idea is that from now on, at all times until Jesus comes, we are at war. Be alert. Be armed. There is never a truce or ceasefire. Satan takes no holidays. He observes no Sabbath rest. There may be times of greater and lesser intensity, but never a time to relax or let down your spiritual guard. |
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2. ***"Be strong in the Lord"***

The verb is best taken as a passive: "be strengthened" or "be made strong" (with the implication, "by God"; cf. 3:16). The simple exhortation "Be strong!" is both dangerous and useless. Self-reliance in spiritual warfare is suicidal. Believers do not strengthen themselves. Our strength must come from an external source, namely, the Lord. The strength of an earthly general is in his troops. But in the Christian life, the strength of the troops is in their general! See Joshua 1:6-9 (esp. v. 9b). The exhortation to "be strong and courageous" is grounded in the reassuring promise that "the Lord your God is with you wherever you go" (v. 9b).

- "Moreover David was greatly distressed because the people spoke of stoning him, for all the people were embittered, each one because of his sons and his daughters. But David strengthened himself in the Lord his God" (1 Sam. 30:6).

- "Listen, all Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem and King Jehoshaphat: thus says the Lord to you, 'Do not fear or be dismayed because of this great multitude, for the battle is not yours but God's'" (2 Chron. 20:15).
- "I love Thee, O Lord, my strength" Ps. 18:1).
- "For who is God, but the Lord? And who is a rock, except our God, the God who girds me with strength, and makes my way blameless?" (Ps. 18:31-32).
- "For Thou hast girded me with strength for battle; Thou hast subdued under me those who rose up against me" (Ps. 18:39).
- "The Lord is my strength and my shield; my heart trusts in Him and I am helped; therefore my heart exults, and with my song I shall thank Him. The Lord is their strength, and He is a saving defense to His anointed" (Ps. 28:7-8).
- "But as for me, I shall sing of Thy strength; yes, I shall joyfully sing of Thy lovingkindness in the morning, for Thou hast been my stronghold, and a refuge in the day of my distress. O my strength, I will sing praises to Thee; for God is my stronghold, the God who shows me lovingkindness" (Ps. 59:16-17).
- "O God, Thou art awesome from Thy sanctuary. The God of Israel Himself gives strength and power to the people. Blessed be God!" (Ps. 68:35).
- "Turn to me, and be gracious to me; oh grant strength to Thy servant, and save the son of Thy handmaid" (Ps. 86:16).
- "The Lord is my strength and song, and He has become my salvation" (Ps. 118:14).
- "Blessed be the Lord, my rock, who trains my hands for war, and my fingers; my lovingkindness and my fortress, my stronghold and my deliverer; my shield and He in whom I take refuge; who subdues peoples under me" (Ps. 144:1-2).

The "strength" to which Paul refers is none other than the "strength" he described in Eph. 1:19ff. which raised Jesus from the dead and exalted him above all authority!

The same trio of Greek terms is used in both passages: *dunamis*, *kratos*, and *ischus*. Cf. Eph. 3:16; Col. 1:11,29. So, how strong is God? Is he weaker now than He was in the first century? Have His spiritual muscles atrophied? Is God out of shape?

How might we obtain this "strength", this "power"?

- through prayer;
- by fasting;
- by making certain that biblical truth is forever flowing in our spiritual veins;
- through the fellowship and encouragement of other Christians;
- through praise and worship;
- by partaking of the Lord's Supper;
- through the anointing and filling of the HS; and,
- by adorning ourselves with the armor of God (Eph. 6).

3. ***"Put on the full armor of God"***

We aren't born (or born again) with the armor on! We must *put* it on. Also, once put on, the armor should never be taken off, even if we think hostilities have subsided. Walk in it, work in it, sleep in it, eat in it! It is

never safe to disrobe. Talking about the armor, describing the armor, declaring the importance of the armor, is never enough.

“Satan's advantage is great when he catches our graces napping!” (William Gurnall, p. 77). Cf. Luke 4:13.

Most believe the imagery of "armor" came to Paul from his observation of the Roman soldier to whom he was chained (6:20). Also in his mind, no doubt, were two OT texts: Isaiah 11:4-5; 59:15b-19. God is himself a warrior fighting to deliver and vindicate His people. The supernatural armor which God himself wears has been graciously made available to us. In other words, it is the armor of God not simply because He gives it, but because *He wears it!* It may also be that the imagery of “putting on” the armor of God is “the functional equivalent of putting on the new humanity (cf. 4:24)” (Lincoln, 442).

4. ***“that you may be able to stand firm”***

This goal for which we arm ourselves is repeated four times in this paragraph (vv. 11, 13 [twice], and 14). Clearly Paul wants us to be immovable and steadfast and unshaken by the attacks of the enemy. Cf. Eph. 4:14. He means that we are to hold our position, to resist, to refuse to surrender ground to the enemy, to preserve and maintain what has already been won. Lincoln’s comments are worth pondering:

“The decisive victory has already been won by God in Christ, and the task of believers is not to win but to stand, that is, to preserve and maintain what has been won. It is because this victory has been won that believers are involved in the battle at all. They are in a decisively new situation in contrast to their previous condition described in 2:2,3, where there could be no battle or resistance because they were in total bondage to the enemy. So the call to the readers to stand against the powers is also a reminder of their liberation from the tyranny of these powers. The major victory has been achieved, but the eschatological tension with its indicative and imperative characteristic of Paul’s thought remains. Believers must appropriate what has already been gained for them and do so against continuing assaults, and this is not automatic. Indeed there may be minor defeats along the way; hence the urgency of the imperatives. The writer’s focus, however, is not on the possibility of such minor defeats but on the ability of his readers to make the assured outcome of the overall battle their own by standing and maintaining the ground that has been won” (442-43).

5. ***“The schemes of the devil”***

The word translated "schemes" = lit., *methodeias* ("methods"), i.e., wiles, tactics, stratagems, secret agendas. The plural of this word “suggests attacks that are constantly repeated or of incalculable variety” (O’Brien, 463). What are they? Temptation, accusation, intimidation, division and other such assaults against individual believers and the church corporately. But are all Satan's "methods/tactics" explicitly revealed in Scripture?

Q: "If YOU were the devil, what tactics would you employ?"

6. ***“Our struggle”***

The Greek term translated "struggle" = *pale*, used only here in the NT and never in the LXX. It means "wrestling" (cf. verbal cognate *palaio* in Gen. 32:24).

Q: Why did Paul use a sporting term in a context pertaining to armor and military preparedness? Why didn't Paul use the term *strateia* = warfare (2 Cor. 10:4; 1 Tim. 1:18) or *mache* (2 Cor. 7:5; 2 Tim. 2:23; Titus 3:9) or even *agon* (Phil. 1:30; Col. 2:1)?

A: Wrestling was an extremely popular event in the athletic games held in Asia Minor, particularly in Ephesus. Thus "in contrast to the flesh-and-blood wrestling, with which the readers of Ephesians would have been quite familiar, the true struggle of believers is a spiritual power encounter which requires spiritual weaponry" (Arnold, *Powers of Darkness*, p. 117).

Ephesus was famous for the magical arts, principal among which were the "Ephesian Letters" (*Ephesia grammata*). These six magical terms/names (*askion, kataskion, lix, tetrax, damnameneus, and aisia*) were alleged to possess power that would ward off evil spirits. People used them as either spoken charms or written amulets to obtain power and to protect them from harm.

According to one popular story of the day, an Ephesian wrestler was unbeatable in the ancient Olympics because he wore the "Ephesian Letters" around his ankle. When this was discovered by the officials it was removed, after which he proceeded to lose three consecutive matches! Paul may have been alluding to this story with his use of *pale*. Arnold (117) explains:

"The allusion could have proved an effective way of communicating to the converts that they should no longer 'put on' the Ephesia Grammata as an amulet (i.e., turn to magic), but should now 'put on' the armor of God (i.e., the power of God). Furthermore, they would also understand in a fresh way that the struggle in which they have been enlisted as Christians is against supernatural 'powers' -- in fact, the very supernatural 'powers' who were summoned to their aid by the Ephesia Grammata are now the attacking opponents which they need to resist!"

7. ***"Our struggle is not against flesh and blood"***

By "flesh and blood" Paul means humanity (Mt. 16:17; Gal. 1:16; Heb. 2:14). Behind and beneath the daily, earthly struggles with people and institutions and ideologies is an unseen spiritual battle. However, this is not to suggest that Paul intends an absolute negation (cf. Luke 10; esp. Eph. 4:14). The point is not to deny that we have earthly and human antagonists. The point is that even when we do fight them, Satan lurks behind their efforts (see Mt. 16:23).

8. ***"Our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places"***

- principalities/rulers (*arche*) - a ruler must have someone or something over which to exercise dominion (Eph. 1:21; 3:10; 6:12; Col. 1:16; 2:10; Rom. 8:38).
- authorities (*exousia*) - again, authority, by definition, demands a subordinate (Eph. 1:21; 3:10; Col. 1:16).
- world rulers (*kosmokratoras*) - used only in Eph. 6:12. Their realm as well as their character is referred to as "this darkness," something from which believers have been delivered (see Eph. 5:8; Col. 1:13).
- spirituals (or, spiritual forces, spiritual hosts) of wickedness in the heavenly places – it may well be that this is not a separate class of cosmic powers but rather a general term for all the preceding spirits and an indication of their locality.

If all angels and demons are of the same type or rank or carry the same authority, why are they described by such a variety of terms? It would also seem that with difference in rank comes difference in power, task, etc., although we must be careful of unhealthy speculation. Remember this: our struggle is against **subjected powers!** See Eph. 1:19ff.

We should take brief note of a trend since WW II of identifying these "powers" not with personal spiritual beings, i.e., demons, but with structures of society and thought: tradition, custom, laws, authority, religious systems, economic philosophies, political parties, governmental organizations, etc. This view has been popularized by the writings of Walter Wink (three books in particular: *Naming the Powers, Unmasking the Powers, and Engaging the Powers*). This view cannot be supported by the evidence in Paul's writings. However, as O'Brien points out, "to reject the *identification* of the powers with human traditions and sociopolitical structures . . . is not to deny that these supernatural intelligences work through such agencies" (469).

9. ***"In the evil day"***

This phrase appears nowhere else in Paul in precisely this form, although "the present evil age" is found in Gal. 1:4 and in Eph. 5:16 Paul said "the days are evil." Commentators usually point to one of three possibilities or a combination of them:

- It is synonymous with "the evil days" of 5:16 and refers to the whole of this present age between the two comings of Jesus.
- It refers to a single day of unique tribulation just before the coming of Christ.
- It points to critical times in a believer's life when demonic activity is especially intense and focused.

O'Brien is probably correct when he says that "the apostle is not only speaking of this present time between the two comings of Jesus, but is also alerting believers to the dangers of the devil's schemes on critical occasions in this present evil age. There may appear to be times of reprieve for Christians, but they must not be lulled into a false sense of security, thinking that the battle is over or that it is not especially difficult. They must always be prepared and put on the full armour of God, for the devil will attack when least expected" (471-72).

We now turn our attention to the six pieces of armor.

1. ***The Belt of Truth*** (v. 14a)

The "belt" or "girdle" was not simply a strip of cloth around the waist or even a narrow belt to hold up one's pants! It was a leather apron that helped protect the lower part of the body. It had two additional functions: a) it was used to hold the sheath for one's sword, and b) one's tunic would be tucked into it whenever fighting or running (cf. 1 Pt. 1:13). In the OT God is described as girded with might (Ps. 65:6) and also as girding the psalmist with strength for battle (Ps. 18:32,39).

What does Paul mean by "truth"?

- a. *Jesus* is the truth (John 1:14; 14:6; Eph. 4:21; see also Romans 13:14). Thus we pray: "I put on the Lord Jesus Christ; I clothe myself with His character; I am filled with His power; I am committed to pursuing His purity."
- b. The *Bible* is the truth (2 Tim. 2:15). Successful spiritual warfare begins with the question: "Do I accept the Bible as God's Word, inspired, infallible, inerrant, the sole authority for belief and practice?"
- c. The *church* is the pillar of truth (1 Tim. 3:14-15). The church provides protection, reinforcement of biblical virtues, encouragement, stability, guidance, etc.
- d. Objective truth of Christian *doctrine* is essential (John 17:15-17; 2 Cor. 4:1-2; Eph. 4:14-15). Satan will always flourish in the midst of theological ignorance.

There are two areas in particular in which demonic lies are most prevalent and powerful:

- 1) lies about God (character and attributes);
- 2) lies about yourself (who you are, your identity and position in Christ, your authority/power).

e. Truth may also refer to *truthfulness*, speech and behavior; the absence of duplicity, hypocrisy; no lying or deception (Eph. 4:25; 5:9); perhaps also the ideas of faithfulness and loyalty (cf. LXX of Isa. 11:5).

2. ***The Breastplate of Righteousness*** (v. 14b)

The "breastplate" (*thoraka* from which we get "thorax") usually extended from the base of the neck to the upper part of the thighs, covering what we would call the abdomen or trunk.

Is this righteousness "objective" (imputed) or "subjective" (imparted)?

a. Objective righteousness = the breastplate of our justification, our righteous standing/position through faith in Christ; our legal holiness (Phil. 3:3-8; 2 Cor. 5:21; Rom. 3:19-24).

b. Subjective righteousness = the breastplate of experiential holiness of life (Eph. 4:24; 5:9).

"Victory begins with the name of Jesus on our lips. It is consummated by the nature of Jesus in our heart" (Francis Frangipane).

3. ***Shoes of the Gospel*** (v. 15)

This is a reference to the half-boot or military sandal worn by the Roman legionary. Hobnails or studs underneath provided stability. Two interpretations have been suggested:

a. We are to shod/fit our feet with preparation or readiness for the gospel of peace, i.e., we are to be prepared and ready to proclaim the glorious gospel of peace (1 Pt. 3:15; Isa. 52:7; Rom. 10:13-15).

The gospel is the power of God by which people are set free from Satan's captivity and tyranny (2 Cor. 4:3-4; Eph. 2:1-2; Acts 26:18). See especially Rev. 12:10-11.

b. The NIV takes the other view, namely, that our feet are to be fitted "with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace." Thus, it isn't readiness to proclaim the gospel but readiness that is produced in us by the gospel. More specifically, the peace which the gospel produces is to prepare us for Satan's attacks.

Peace? (1) Peace with God (Rom. 5:1-2; Col. 1:19-22). (2) Peace of God (Phil. 4:6-7). (3) Peace with others (Rom. 12: 18).

Therefore, the reference is either to *the peace in the gospel* which we proclaim or to *the peace of the gospel* which we experience. Paradoxically, it is in the midst of spiritual *warfare* that we are called on to proclaim spiritual *peace*!

4. ***The Shield of Faith*** (v. 16)

The "shield" refers to an oblong device @ 4 ft. long and 2 ft. wide. It was made of two layers of wood glued together and covered first with linen and then with hide. It was then bound on top and bottom with iron. Its purpose was to defend against the incendiary missiles of the enemy, i.e., arrows dipped in pitch, set aflame, and launched.

What are the "missiles/darts/arrows" of the Evil one? O'Brien believes they depict "in highly metaphorical language, every kind of attack launched by the devil and his hosts against the people of God" (480). I believe Paul's focus is more narrow:

- the sudden and unexpected eruption in our mind of vile images and thoughts that shock and surprise us (such that are obviously and undeniably contrary to our most basic desires);
- words and pictures that disgust you and violate your God-given sense of propriety/morality leap into your mind; e.g., blasphemous thoughts about Jesus; revolting images of sexual perversity; suicidal urges; compulsive thoughts of doing horribly violent things to family/friends; unaccountable impulses to rebel against God, against one's family, against one's church; subtle insinuations against God's character/goodness; false feelings of guilt.

Frequently, people report these things to occur while reading the Bible (not newspapers or magazines), while praying, while praising God. This aggravates feelings of personal guilt and worthlessness, insofar as such occasions are regarded as spiritual ("What kind of person am I that I would have such thoughts/fantasies at precisely the time I should be loving and worshipping God?").

Q: "How do I know the difference between the fiery missiles of the evil one and the sinful activity of my own flesh?"

A: "My own evil desire will probably be all too familiar to me, a predictable pattern I've battled with. The HS is also quick to convict me of my own sinfulness. Flaming arrows, on the other hand, come like a shot out of the blue, with a nearly irresistible intensity. With such assaults there is also often confusion and excessive guilt, especially if it was an angry impulse which unleashed its fury on another person" (Tom White, 72).

Q: "What is the 'faith' to which Paul refers?"

A: "There are at least 3 kinds of Christian faith: 1) *saving faith* (product of the new birth); 2) *sanctifying faith* (the fruit of the HS), which comes in two forms: a) our faith/belief in the truth of God's Word (faith in the doctrines of the Bible) and b) faith in the trustworthiness/goodness of God himself; 3) *supernatural faith* (a spontaneous gift of the HS). Paul probably has in mind the second of these: sanctifying faith (1 Pt. 5:8-9; 1 John 5:4).

Observations on faith:

- 1) Faith, in and of itself, does not protect us against Satan. Rather, it is the object/focus of our faith: God and his powerful presence in our lives (Prov. 30:5; Ps. 5:12; 2 Sam. 22:3).
- 2) Nevertheless, it is we who extinguish the fiery darts of the evil one through faith. We are active. Faith is something we do.
- 3) Faith functions as a shield of protection in several ways:
 - a. Heb. 11:24-26 - it was Moses' faith in the glory of the coming Christ and the rewards of obedience that enabled him to say No.
 - b. When Satan whispers, "God may have cared about you once before, long ago, but His interest in who you are is gone," you lift up the shield of faith and say, "That is impossible. God is immutable. He cannot change. His concern for me is eternal. What He has promised me He will fulfill."
 - c. When Satan whispers, "God doesn't love you anymore; not after you've failed him so many times," you lift up the shield of faith and say, "That is impossible. God's love for me can't cease to exist, for He demonstrated it when He gave his Son to suffer in my place."

d. The shield of faith functions whenever we say to the enemy, "I'm going to believe God when He tells me that there is great gain in godliness and therefore I will not fall prey to your seductive temptations."

The shield of faith functions each time we hold up the truth of the Scriptures under the onslaught of Satan's lies.

5. *The Helmet of Salvation* (v. 17a)

The principal battleground in spiritual warfare is in the mind. Hence, we have need for a helmet of protection, a "spiritual hardhat," if you will. The helmet of the Roman soldier was made of iron or bronze with a sponge of some sort lining the inside.

The "helmet of salvation" is most likely a reference to the *assurance* of our salvation: "That which adorns and protects the Christian, which enables him to hold up his head with confidence and joy, is the fact that he is saved" (Charles Hodge).

Satan knows he can gain a major strategic advantage over us if he can sow the seeds of doubt in our minds concerning our relationship with God.

In every instance of serious and sustained demonic attack that I have encountered, the individual was plagued with doubt concerning his/her salvation.

"Such is Satan's envy and enmity against a Christian's joy and comfort, that he cannot but act to the utmost of his strength to keep poor souls in doubt and darkness. Satan knows that assurance is a pearl of such price that will make the soul happy forever; he knows that assurance makes a Christian's wilderness to be a paradise; he knows that assurance begets in Christians the most noble and generous spirits; he knows that assurance is that which will make men strong to do exploits, to shake his tottering kingdom about his ears; and therefore he is very studious and industrious to keep souls off from assurance, as he was to cast Adam out of paradise" (Thomas Brooks, *Heaven on Earth*, p. 130).

To put on the "helmet of salvation," therefore, means to live in the knowledge and assurance of the truth expressed in Romans 8:1,31-38 and Hebrews 13:5-6.

There is nothing Satan can do to alter or undermine the fact that we are saved. Not "angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. 8:38-39). But, what he can do is erode our assurance and confidence that we are saved. Our salvation, our standing with God, does not fluctuate or diminish with our success or failure in spiritual battles. But Satan is determined to convince us that it does.

See also 1 Thess. 5:8-9 in which our "helmet" is the "hope of salvation." In other words, this assurance of salvation is not simply a confidence *now* that I'm saved *now*, but also a confidence *now* that I *will be* saved later.

Excursus on 2 Corinthians 10:3-5

The fact that we need a helmet for combat points to the urgency of guarding our minds/understanding/thinking/thoughts.

1. *The Nature of our Weapons*

a. NIV - "For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does." I.e., we live and minister in flesh and blood bodies, but we repudiate the standards and values of the world; we do not utilize its tactics/schemes to achieve our goals.

b. Our weapons have divine power, not human/worldly/fleshly power. Lit., *donata to theo*, which can be taken one of four ways: 1) made powerful by God; 2) divinely or supernaturally powerful; 3) powerful in God's perspective; or 4) powerful for God. In any case, on any view, our weapons work! They are divinely effective. They get the job done because God works in/through them.

c. What are our weapons? Since our adversaries are spiritual, so, too, must our weapons be spiritual. E.g., truth, righteousness, faith, assurance of salvation, the Word of God, prayer, praise, etc. What are the world's weapons that Paul repudiates? Human ingenuity and wisdom, showmanship, flash, charm, powerfully persuasive personalities, eloquence devoid of the spirit.

2. *The Purpose of Our Weapons*

What can our weapons do?

a. They destroy "fortresses" (NASB) or "strongholds" (NIV). See Prov. 21:22 (the people in a city would build a sturdy outer wall for security; inside it they built a *stronghold*, a massively fortified tower to which they could retreat as a last line of defense).

b. To what do "fortresses/strongholds" refer? Verse 5 gives the answer: (1) "arguments" (NIV) or "speculations" (NASB) = lit., thoughts, plans, intentions. Cf. 2 Cor. 2:11; 4:4; Rom. 1:21; 1 Cor. 3:20. He is saying that his/our weapons "destroy the way people think, demolish their sinful thought patterns, the mental structures by which they live their lives in rebellion against God" (D. A. Carson); (2) "every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God" (NASB), "every pretension that sets itself up against the kingdom of God" (NIV). I.e., every arrogant claim, every haughty or prideful thought, every pompous act that forms a barrier to knowledge of God. I.e., every argument used to rationalize sin and unbelief and delay repentance.

In sum, our warfare is aimed at dismantling and tearing down the sinful reasoning and rationalizations which are strongholds by which the mind fortifies itself against the gospel.

Arnold (*Three Crucial Questions*) argues that "the critical thrust of the passage is directed against christological heresy. . . . Therefore, in its original context, *demolishing strongholds refers to changing wrong ideas about Christ in the minds of believers who have been influenced by demonically inspired teaching*" (54-55).

c. "Taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ," i.e., ideas/notions/plans are taken over and transformed as they come into a new allegiance.

Two additional issues:

First, some have misinterpreted/misapplied this text as if it spoke of cosmic level spiritual warfare (i.e. territorial demons). "Strongholds" and "high and lofty things" have been taken as referring to demonic spirits. But the enemies in view are *ideas and arguments and philosophies and excuses that are antithetical to the kingdom and glory of God*.

Yet, again, who is behind these thoughts? Who inspires them? See Eph. 2:1-3; 4:17-19 "darkened" by whom); 2 Cor. 4:4 (how are they blinded if not by being deceived with philosophical and religious lies?); Acts 26:18; 1 Tim. 4:1-2.

Second, contextually Paul is talking about "strongholds" in the lives/minds of non-Christians. But do Christians have them too? Yes. Such intellectual/philosophical/moral enemies to the kingdom of God don't automatically disappear when we get saved.

A stronghold is "a mindset impregnated with hopelessness that causes us to accept as unchangeable something we know is contrary to God's will" (Silvoso). Or again, strongholds are negative patterns of thought that cripple our ability to obey God and thus breed feelings of guilt and despair.

They are burned into our minds either through repetition over time (such as occurs in an abusive, incestuous relationship) or through a one-time traumatic experience.

The solution is in experiencing the truth of Rom. 12:1-2 and Eph. 4:20-24. (1) Fill your mind with God's Word (memorize Scripture). (2) Affirmations of your Christian identity. (3) Phil. 4:8. (4) Challenge every negative/destructive thought the instant it enters your mind; evaluate it in light of the Word.

(We return now to the weapons . . .)

6. ***The Sword of the Spirit*** (v. 17b)

The "sword" (*machaira*) refers to the short (12-14 inches) straight sword used in close combat. Another term (*romphaia*) refers to the long sword. Satan not only launches fiery missiles from afar, he also moves in close for hand-to-hand combat!

It has been argued that since the sword is our only offensive weapon, spiritual warfare is largely, if not exclusively, defensive. But: the sword was the only offensive weapon a Roman soldier carried! The point of the armor was to prepare a soldier for fighting in battle, in whatever form that battle might be.

The Spirit is not himself the sword. The Word is the sword. This sword is "of the Spirit" in the sense that it is the HS who gives power both to the written and spoken Word of God. This raises the question: "To what does the 'word' refer?"

The "word" here does not refer to the "word" of John 1:1 (the *logos*); i.e., it is not a reference to Jesus Christ. There are two terms in the NT for "word" - 1) *logos*, and 2) *rhema*.

People have often insisted that *logos* = objective revelation of truth that ultimately became the written word of God (the Bible). *Logos* = general, collective body of truth. *Rhema*, on the other hand, = a specific spoken word, an individual utterance, a declaration or saying. *Logos* = the written Scriptures, whereas *rhema* = the application of the written word to specific situations or circumstances, in accordance with the immediate need of the moment. In sum, the *logos* = the always/objective Word of God, whereas *rhema* = the now/subjective Word of God.

Problem: the two terms are often used interchangeably in the NT.

E.g., 1 Pt. 1:25 (*rhema*, instead of expected *logos*); Rev. 12:10-11 (*logos*, instead of expected *rhema*). *Logos* is frequently used with reference to individual, spoken utterances (Mt. 7:24; John 2:22; Eph. 4:29; 5:6; and especially Eph. 6:19). And *rhema* can be used of the collective body of truths that comprise the gospel (Eph. 5:26).

We should always be cautious about drawing theological conclusions based solely on an alleged distinction between terms. Nevertheless, having said that, I do believe Paul is talking about the spoken word of God here in v. 17. Three reasons:

(1) The majority of cases where *rhema* is used in the NT = individual utterances/sayings.

(2) Satan cannot read our thoughts/minds, hence the need to speak aloud our resistance to his efforts.

Basis? a) No text says he can read our minds. b) He is a creature and therefore has limitations. Satan is not God! c) Such knowledge is portrayed in the Bible as peculiar to God. Knowing the heart/mind/intents/thoughts/motives of a person is an ability or prerogative reserved for God alone (Pss. 139:1-4, 23-24; 26:2; 7:9; Jer. 17:9-10; Rom. 8:27; 1 Cor. 4:5; 1 Thess. 2:4; Heb. 4:12-13). d) Otherwise, there would be no place of unassailable communion with God.

(3) We are to wage war and resist the Enemy as Jesus did in Mt. 4, by speaking it aloud (the "word" which Jesus spoke [the *rhema* which proceeds out of God] was Scripture. Must it always be so with us? Cf. Mt. 10:19).

In summary, there are three primary ways in which we wield the sword of the Spirit:

- We PROCLAIM the Word (as Jesus did); cf. Rev. 12
- We PRAY the Word (Eph. 6:18-19; Acts 6:4; John 15:7)
- We PRAISE with the Word (i.e., sing the Scriptures)

Excursus on Warfare Prayer

Prayer is the power behind the armor!

"Restraining prayer, we cease to fight;
Prayer keeps the Christian's armor bright;
And Satan trembles when he sees
The weakest saint upon his knees." (William Cowper)

EXCEPT ON RARE OCCASIONS, GOD WILL NOT INTERVENE TO GIVE YOU DAILY VICTORY UNLESS YOU ASK HIM TO. If Paul believed that God would give him strength, clarity and courage to preach apart from the intercessory prayers of the Ephesian church, he would never have penned vv. 18-20!

The relation of vv. 18-20 to the preceding context:

Contrary to what some have said, prayer is not the seventh piece of spiritual armor. Nor is it the way we wield the sword of the Spirit (which is the Word of God). Grammatically, both "praying" and "keeping alert" (v. 18) are connected with the verb "stand" (v. 14). In other words, prayer is that which characterizes and permeates the whole of the Christian soldier's activity: "Take your stand, praying, . . . Put on the belt of truth, praying . . . Put on the breastplate of righteousness, as you pray . . ." etc.

Observe the four "All's" of prayer

1) **We are to pray "with ALL prayer and petition"** (v. 18a).

The different kinds/types of prayer available to us include silent prayer, audible prayer, public prayer, private prayer, both short and long prayers, prayer with fasting, prayer with feasting, prayer with praise, petition, intercession, rebuke, doctrinal praying, emotional praying, resisting-the-enemy praying, prayers of thanksgiving, confession, prayer for healing, for help, for courage, etc.

As prayer pertains specifically to spiritual warfare, consider six forms it may assume:

a. Praying for ourselves and others to be given insight and understanding into who we are in Christ and what is ours through faith (Eph. 1:15ff.).

b. Prayers of resistance and rebuke of the enemy. E.g.,

"Satan, I rebuke you in the authority of Jesus Christ. I declare your works in my life destroyed. Jesus triumphed over you in the wilderness, on the cross, and in the grave. His resurrection has sealed your fate. I triumph over you now in the strength of his name. I resist and rebuke your efforts to oppress, afflict, or deceive me. I remove from you the right to rob me of the joy and fruit of my salvation. Through the power of the blood of Calvary, I command all powers of darkness assigned to me, sent to me, or surrounding me now, to leave. Go where Jesus Christ orders you to go, never to return" (Tom White, 116).

c. Prayers of protection, to shield, guard, support,, etc.

"Lord, I commend and entrust _____ into your watchful care. May your glory surround and protect him/her. May you drive away the enemy and deliver him/her from all evil and temptation and every attack of the evil one."

d. Prayers for the places where you go, stay, live (especially when traveling or in a strange location). E.g.,

"Lord, I claim this place for your purposes. I stand on the truth of your Word: 'The scepter of the wicked will not remain over the land allotted to the righteous' (Ps 125:3). I believe you have given me this place. I dedicate it to you, and ask you to fill it with your holy presence. I separate myself from any iniquity that has occurred here in past times. I apply the power of Jesus' blood to remove any desecration of God's name in this place. I ask you, in Jesus' authority, to set watching angels around this property for your purposes, protecting your servant from the work of the evil one" (White, 118-19).

e. Prayer for the demonized when you are ministering to them. E.g.,

"(1) that the demons may be cut off from all communication and help from other demons and Satan,

(2) that the demons would be confused and weakened in their hold on the person,

(3) that the person would be strengthened in his faith to understand his position in Christ and to trust and obey the Word above his feelings,

(4) that the person may be able to distinguish between his thoughts and feelings and the thoughts and feelings of demons,

(5) that the person might recognize the demonic presence and not be confused, but seek the proper counsel and help,

(6) that God would protect and guide His child and set angelic forces at work to break up every scheme of the enemy" (Dickason).

f. Prayer for angelic support/ministry/protection (Daniel 10:10-12; Acts 12:5-8).

Don't be obsessed with "how" you pray. It betrays the assumption that prayer is a kind of religious formula or magical incantation that requires just the right words to prevail. People often think that the wrong words will anger God or frustrate him and provoke him to say "No" to their requests. Remember Romans 8:26ff.

2) **We are to pray "at ALL times in the Spirit"** (v. 18b).

"In the Spirit" = (a) in tongues (1 Cor. 14:14-19); (b) as the HS prompts; (c) in the strength/power the HS supplies; (d) always asking the HS to remind you of truths in the Word relevant to the matter at hand; (e) always asking the HS to cleanse your mind of sin and fill it with purity.

3) **We are to pray alertly "with ALL perseverance and petition"** (v. 18 c).

Cf. Mark 13:32-37; 14:38; Luke 21:34-36.

4) **We are to pray for "ALL the saints"** (v. 18c).

Everywhere, for everyone. Out of sight, but never out of mind or heart. Observe Paul's need for this (vv. 19-20)! Paul generally closes his letters with a request for prayer for himself (see Rom. 15:30-32; Col. 4:3; 1 Thess. 5:25; 2 Thess. 3:1-2; see also 2 Cor. 1:11; Phil. 1:19). "Like every nervous preacher, he desires 'the liberty of the Spirit to express it (i.e., the gospel) freely, clearly, and boldly'" (O'Brien, 487).