

***Ephesians 6:10-13***  
***Considering the Spiritual***  
*Jimmy Snowden*

*Sovereign Grace Fellowship: Sunday, November 29, 2009*

***Introduction***

As most of you know, I have been requesting sermon topics. We finished our study through the book of Malachi a few weeks ago and will be starting a new series through Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians the first Sunday of the new year. I wanted to hold off starting our series through 1 Corinthians for three reasons: (1) to give both myself and you a break from the serious discipline of a series, (2) to give you a short-term opportunity to have a voice in what I preach, and (3) to give myself a short-term opportunity to freely preach whatever is exceptionally exciting to me at the moment. I have received more than a few sermon topic suggestions. I will definitely not be able to address each suggested topic. However, this morning I am going to be (sort of) addressing a topic suggested by one of you.

I was approached by one of you with a desire to learn a bit more about *angels*. Although we are not necessarily going to be hitting directly upon the topic of angels this morning, we will be discussing issues related to things of the spiritual realm. It is my hope that we will consider, to at least one degree or another, the spiritual realm of which the angels are a part. Let me lay out for you a map of where we are going in this sermon and how we are going to get there. This sermon can be broken up into four different sections (*1. The Text, 2. Gaining an Awareness of the Spiritual, 3. Approaches to the Spiritual, 4. Conclusion*), and I am planning on doing a "Part II" next week. Let us now direct our attention to our four points of consideration.

***The Text: Ephesians 6:10-13***

Ephesians 6:10-13 comes at the end of the book of Ephesians and exists as a sort of final conclusion. We are not going to be doing a detailed exposition of this text, but there are a few things in this text that I would like to hit on. Look at the text with me.

*10 Finally, be strengthened by the Lord and by His vast strength. 11 Put on the full armor of God so that you can stand against the tactics of the Devil. 12 For our battle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the world powers of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavens. 13 This is why you must take up the full armor of God, so that you may be able to resist in the evil day, and having prepared everything, to take your stand.*

Surely, the word 'Finally' is an indication that this is a concluding exhortation in Paul's letter to the Ephesians. The NLT actually translates it thusly; "A final word:". What are the meat and potatoes of this final command in Ephesians? ***He wants them to stand strong in the Lord against the "tactics of the Devil" by putting on the full armor of God.*** The armor of God helps the Christian stand against the "schemes" of the Devil. How does this armor help the Christian stand firm against the Devil? By keeping the believer anchored to his/her 'strong' God.

Notice though, the reminder that he gives them in 6:12; “*For our battle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities...*”. The apostle Paul thought this qualification to be quite important. Why do you suppose? It really is no surprise; as physical people in a physical world we often times only weigh issues on a physical scale. We oftentimes lack any ability to discern spiritual realities. Listen to D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones’ comments on this passage.

“I must never think that my whole problem is confined to that which is within me and in other people. Above and beyond that is this other mighty power arrayed against me, the mightiest of powers apart from God Himself. Not to remember this basic fact is to court certain defeat and disaster. The great trouble with the world today, and with the Church unfortunately, is that they know so little about the devil and the ‘principalities and powers’. Much teaching concerning holiness and sanctification never even mentions the devil and these powers at all. The problem is regarded solely as something confined to ourselves. Hence the inadequacy of many proposed solutions.”<sup>1</sup>

Isn’t this so true? Consider the following all-too-familiar scenario with me: Two Christians who are married begin to experience marital difficulties. The woman (or the man) looks at the woman (or the man) thinking that all of the problems in their marriage stem from his (or her) behavioral problems. He begins to bark and demand that she change her behavior. The woman then becomes suspicious of her husband and blames him and his behavioral inadequacies for the troubles they are experiencing. The couple then decides that they need to start fixing each other’s behavior. They see the problem in their marriage as something behavioral, psychological, and emotional—they see the problem as something altogether physical. Surely, there are certain behavioral, psychological, and emotional issues that need to be dealt with in any marriage, but once the evaluation stops at the physical and does not move on to things pertaining to the spiritual realm... Guess what? The proposed solutions to fix the problem have only to do with behavioral adjustments and psychological healing. While the symptoms of the problem may go away for a season, the true, spiritual issues that were driving the whole saga have not been fixed. This is exactly what DMLJ is getting at in the quote.

Let me say as well that Paul added this much needed qualification because the Ephesian believers were in the same boat. When you go home today, read the book of Ephesians in one sitting and just observe the state of the church in Ephesus. This church in Ephesus was not thriving; they were being rent asunder by all sorts of divisions. In fact, this was Paul’s whole reason for writing this letter to them; to help them fix their unity problems. Paul goes into great detail dealing with the discord between the Jews and the Gentiles in Ephesians 2:11-3:21. Then in 4:1-32 Paul seeks to establish the fact that Christ designed the body of Christ to be diverse, and that if they plan on growing, each member of the body must be embraced, as different as they may be. He then provides a whole list of ethical considerations in 5:1-21 which have everything to do with life in the community. He then speaks to three different sets of interpersonal relationships in 5:22-6:9 (husband/wife, parent/child, and master/slave relationships). Everything in Ephesians

---

<sup>1</sup> D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *The Christian Warfare: An Exposition of Ephesians 6:10-13* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1976), 19.

has to do with life in community. The church in Ephesus needed such instruction because they were accustomed to viewing each other as their greatest enemy.

The Jews were fighting the Christian war as if their greatest enemy was their (flesh and blood) Gentile counterparts and the Gentiles were fighting their Christian war as if their greatest enemy was their (flesh and blood) Jewish counterparts; husbands were fighting their Christian war as if their greatest enemy was their (flesh and blood) wives and wives were fighting their Christian war as if their greatest enemy was their (flesh and blood) husbands; children were fighting their Christian war as if their greatest enemy was their (flesh and blood) parents and parents were fighting their Christian war as if their greatest enemy was their (flesh and blood) children; masters (employers) were fighting their Christian war as if their greatest enemy was their (flesh and blood) slaves and slaves (employees) were fighting their Christian war as if their greatest enemy was their (flesh and blood) masters. The folks in the church at Ephesus needed to be reminded that their greatest enemy is not flesh and blood, and thus their guns should not be pointed at flesh and blood.

This is what Satan wants more than anything; he wants us to point our guns at each other instead of at him. He will scheme and do all that he can to pit God's kids against each other. He knows that if he can get our muzzles pointed at each other, there is no possible way that we can make a concerted effort against him. Satan wants a civil war to break out in God's camp so that we kill each other off. He wants us to battle against each other, mistaking each other as the enemy. This is why the greatest emphasis in Jesus' high priestly prayer is the unity of His followers. He prays over and over again, like a broken record, "May they be one as We are one." (John 17:11; 20-26). Jesus knew that this was going to be one of Satan's greatest attacks against His people, and thus it was going to be one of their greatest struggles.

Paul wants these Ephesian believers to have a correct view of the Spiritual battle. At this point, they are too busy fighting their flesh and blood battles to even notice that an enemy larger than all of them put together has entered the camp. *What Paul realizes is that if we cannot agree on a common enemy, we will never win the battle. If we cannot get all of our guns aimed in the same direction, we will never be able to march on in victory. At this point in the game who really cares about the armor of God. What good does armor and weaponry do an army if it is not used in concerted effort against a common foe?* Paul's purpose here in this qualifying statement is to get their sites on the same target. Right now in the church of Ephesus everyone has a different target, each other. Paul wants to get a different enemy, a common enemy, in their sights.

The first question to ask in the midst of disunity is: Why is my muzzle pointed at my brother and/or sister in Christ? Of course, it must be said, although it is rarely the case, that your muzzle may be pointed at another bro/sis in Christ because he/she is a wolf in sheep's clothing. But this suspicion should never be our knee jerk reaction to our interpersonal relationship difficulties in the body of Christ.

### ***Gaining an Awareness of the Spiritual***

Before arraying the Christian amour, Paul knew that he had to fix the Ephesians' overly physical worldview. They were warring with each other and couldn't see the (proverbial) ***invisible, spiritual elephant in their own church.***<sup>2</sup> Paul knew that to move

---

<sup>2</sup> I know... I know... I butchered that figure of speech really badly.

forward he first had to fix their perspective from a three-dimensional, earth-bound perspective, to a holistic view of reality—including realities of both the visible and invisible realms.

How can you fight against an enemy or defend yourself against an enemy if you are unaware of his existence? And maybe even more importantly; how can you defend yourself against the enemy if you don't know his style and weapons of warfare? So many Christians live their Christian lives without any knowledge or awareness of the greater spiritual battle that goes on around them all the time.

You see, Paul is not just calling these Ephesian believers to some sort of a mere theoretical or theological knowledge of the existence of Satan; rather, he is calling them to a knowledge that will produce action. He is calling them to warfare! He does not want them to merely ascent to the existence of a spiritual realm; he wants their knowledge of the spiritual realm to affect their everyday lives. He wants them to live with a constant awareness of the great spiritual battle that is raging all around them.

Paul makes it quite clear in 6:13 that it is impossible to stand firm against the attacks of the Devil (and his minions) if this armor is not actively put on. Now, before we move along, I must ask; how do you put on this armor? Well, some have taken this command to 'put on' with word-for-word exactness. In other words, they get up in the morning and go through the actions of putting on the 'belt' of truth, buckling on the 'breastplate' of righteousness, slipping on the 'sandals' of the Gospel of peace, sliding the 'shield' of righteousness on their arm, and crowning themselves with the 'helmet' of salvation. They reenact the whole scenario as if this were some sort of a literal wardrobe. This completely misses the point of the armor. The armor is spiritual. The way you put this armor on is by living, believing, and obeying each of these truths. This is merely imagery used by Paul, suggesting that we are to use the truth and righteousness of the Gospel as the weapons of our warfare. Since our enemy is not flesh and blood, our weaponry will not be the sort of weaponry which is used to annihilate a physical enemy. Putting on the armor of God is not a duty that is to be performed once a day, it is to be the posture of your entire life.

***Approaching the spiritual realm*** (1. Complete rejection; 2. Affirm its reality but not its significance for everyday life; 3. Affirm both the reality of it and its significance for everyday life; 4. Complete Obsession)

I want to lay forth for you four different approaches to the spiritual realm that are more or less common in modern day Christianity. They are listed above. I believe that by surveying these four approaches we will be able to better understand how we ought to approach a knowledge and experience of the spiritual realm.

1. Complete rejection: This is just as bad as complete obsession. You may have heard of the statement; "He/she is so heavenly minded that he/she is no earthly good." Well, those in this category are so earthly minded that they are no heavenly good. Not much needs to be said about this approach to the spiritual realm. It is obviously wrong, and is a situation that needs immediate attention. A person who lives in this sort of a consciousness will suffer spiritually. Why? Because they are in the midst of a spiritual war zone with no ability to detect the enemy—yea, they are completely oblivious to the warfare going on around them. Look at what MLJ has to say about those who live in this sort of a condition.

And not to realize that you are in a conflict means one thing only, and that is that you are so hopelessly defeated, and so ‘knocked out’ as it were, that you do not even know it—you are unconscious! It means that you are completely defeated by the devil. Anyone who is not aware of a fight and a conflict in a spiritual sense is in a drugged and hazardous condition.”<sup>3</sup>

How safe would you feel if you found out that our soldiers over in Afghanistan didn’t know they were at war? They just thought that they were going overseas on a cruise as tourists. How safe would you feel if our soldiers had no way to detect enemy fire, always hanging back enjoying the desert sun? I wouldn’t feel too safe with my freedom in their hands. Thank the Lord that our soldiers know that they are in a battle and that they know the tactics of their enemy.

For us to be oblivious to the greater spiritual battle raging on all around is not merely irresponsible, it is to choose spiritual death.

2. *Affirm its reality but not its significance for everyday life*: This is where most of us probably are. How easy it is to be in this place. Those in this slot mentally ascent to the reality of the spiritual battle that is being waged in the heavenlies, and yet they do not allow it to really inform their decisions, their prayers, or really anything much else in their lives. Many arrive at this position by default. They cannot reject the presence of the spiritual realm (because they see it on every page of Scripture) and yet they have never seen a church or group of Christians able to embrace and pursue the things above without falling into ‘obsession.’

So... what do they do? They create a theology and practice out of fear. They know what the word of God says, and yet their fear of being like those ‘crazed, wacked out, bizarre, groundless, undiscerning, super-charged spiritual nuts down the road’ debilitates them from making much of what they know to be theologically true in their everyday lives. We see the excesses and abuses on t.v. complete with hundreds of misuses of Scripture. We see bunches of passion and hoopla but very little doctrine, and very little substance. We see money hungry con artists promising victory over the corns on your feet if you will just send in \$5000 so they can activate your faith to be healed, but a useless handle on the word of God. We see all the excesses associated with those involved in the super-spiritual, ‘so heavenly minded they are no earthly good’ charismatic movement. All we know is that we do not want to go that direction.

The problem with this approach, obviously (at least I hope it is obvious), is that it is a position based off of fear. Fear is never a good expositor of Scripture. Our goal ought not be “safety at all costs.” And, unfortunately, it often times is. This is the reason that many reject the doctrines of grace; they reject it out of fear. I cannot tell you how many times I have heard some one say to me, “So you believe that God chooses who is going to be saved, and that everyone He has chosen will come to Him?” My answer; “You bet ya!” Their response; “What, then, is the purpose of evangelism? If God is going to save those He has chosen, why evangelize?” My response; “Because God tells you to!” Their response; “I just simply can’t believe that. If I say that God unconditionally elects those who will be saved before the foundation of the earth then I have no drive to evangelize because God is going to just save those He has chosen anyway.” How do you respond to

---

<sup>3</sup> D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *The Christian Warfare*, 41-42.

such a critique? Here is my response; “I don’t really care what your logical conclusion is to God’s truth. I don’t make God jump through my finite logical hoops before I believe His word. If God says it, I believe, that settles it.” But I have met many people who have rejected the doctrines of grace out of fear. They are afraid that moral responsibility will be lost if we embrace God’s absolute and unconditional sovereignty in salvation.

I must say that many Calvinists reject the present day, everyday, implications and applications of the spiritual realm in their lives for the same fearful reason. Instead of letting the word of God dictate our lives and thoughts, we only allow God’s teaching regarding the spiritual, heavenly realm to effect us so far. We are afraid that once we open ourselves up to the movement of the Spirit in any sort of supernatural way that we are going to go sliding down the slippery slope off somewhere into Binnyhinnland.<sup>4</sup> We are afraid that we will be labeled, we are afraid that we will be misunderstood, we are afraid that we might open ourselves up to the excesses that we know exist in other such churches. Guess what? All of these fears are valid. And yet, what is our goal; faithfulness at all costs or safety at all costs?

Being faithful at all costs is worth running the risk of abuse, misuse, and gross misinterpretation. Without a doubt, when we are faithful to God’s word, we will be misunderstood. This means that we must do our due diligence to offer clarifications, warn against excesses, and exemplify both a biblical understanding and application of these things. However, Satan will always twist truth, warp application, and throw people toward excesses no matter how clearly and thoroughly God’s communicators cover all the bases. Every doctrine is open to such abuse.<sup>5</sup> However, faithfulness to God’s word is worth running the risk.

I am afraid that this is where most of us in this congregation are at this point. We ascent mentally to the spiritual realm, and yet we tread lightly lest that proverbial camel get his nose under our tent. This is where many Calvinistic and Baptist sorts are at on the spectrum. I was actually disappointed about two weeks ago as I was listening to Dr. R.C. Sproul answer a few ad hoc questions from a conference that he spoke at in Pittsburg in the year 2000. A man asked Sproul whether he should be a part of a deliverance ministry that his church had started. Sproul’s answer on the whole was actually quite good. He started his answer with an extremely candid, “No.” He then went on to explain his answer. At one point in his answer he said,

*“I think that the devil is alive and well... I think at one time in church history... liberalism had us deny the existence of the devil; today we are preoccupied with him. If he can’t beat you one way it will beat you the other. It can’t get you to deny him, or it will get you to assume that he has far more power than he does.”<sup>6</sup>*

---

<sup>4</sup> Okay, maybe that one is a bit too far. Binny-Hinn-Land.

<sup>5</sup> The greatest example of this truth may be Romans 6. Paul, in Romans 6, deals with an all-too-common abuse of the doctrine of justification by faith alone. And yet, we all know that we must not allow these abuses to drive us away from preaching, teaching, believing, living, and embracing these truths with vigor. Faithfulness at all costs and let the chips fall where they may.

<sup>6</sup> This was on 91.1 WVNH, Concord, NH at 6:30 pm on October 20, 2009: <http://new.ligonier.org/rym/broadcasts/audio/conference-q-pittsburgh-2000/> This was a Q and A series during the Ligonier Conference in 2009 at Pittsburg, PA.

To be honest, I was a bit disappointed with Sproul. Although it is true that many in America today give unduly attention to the Spiritual realm, obsessing over it—in the process forgetting that God is also the creator and sustainer of HIS natural and physical realm as well—those who fall into this camp are not Sproul’s target audience. Sproul was talking to people who primarily fall into this second category (after all, it was a question that he answered at his own Ligonier conference, which is attended much more by cessationists than charismatics). And the last thing that people in this second category need to hear is that we are overdoing the things of the Spiritual realm.

You see, if I were preaching this sermon to a neighboring Pentecostal church the whole thrust of my message would be quite different. Specified issues regarding theology and practice can never be treated as a ‘one-size-fits-all’ sort of a thing. Sproul is correct in asserting the fact that there has been a growing awareness and even obsession over Satan and his work, but it is of no help to make such broad, sweeping statements that are far from true on the grand scale of things (and that are especially untrue of his target audience). Yes... although many churches today completely obsess over the existence and work of Satan and his minions, just as many neglect his existence and work. Moral of the story: know your audience. I think a good back-to-back reading of Romans and James will confirm this fact. Paul heavily deals with one abuse of the Gospel (legalism) while James heavily deals with another abuse of the Gospel (antinomianism). Their message is the same, and yet it is packaged differently. Why? Because they were writing to two completely different set of Christians who had a completely different set of issues.

3. *Affirm both the reality of it and its significance for everyday life: I believe that this should be our goal; emphasizing the things that Scripture emphasizes, to the degree that Scripture emphasizes it, and in the way that Scripture emphasizes it.* What is at stake if we disregard this realm according to Ephesians 6:10-13? We will be left open, standing in our own strength, against an enemy much larger than ourselves. We do have to right-size Satan.<sup>7</sup> There is both great danger in being completely obsessed by the fear of him and there is great fear in not taking him seriously enough. Compared to God, Satan is nothing more than a tiny creature worthy of nothing more than a mere snicker. He is nothing more than a speck of dust to God. He was never a threat to God and he never will be. Even before Jesus thoroughly and handily beat Satan on the cross, we know from Job that Satan had to ask permission from God to wreck havoc on the earth. Satan could only do what the sovereign hand of God allowed. He not only had to get permission in regard to what he could, but also in regard to what extent he could do it.

However, compared to us, Satan (along with his minions) is a force not only to be reckoned with, but a force to fear—if we are not standing in the authority and power of God. Left to yourself, if you were to stand toe-to-toe with Satan, you would be a goner with no chance of survival. This, however, is more a testimony to how small we are than to how big Satan is. There is too much at stake for us to merely ascent to Satan’s existence without an ever watchfulness.

Our belief in Satan must lead us to action, intense action. Our view of Satan must lead us to vigorous warfare, putting on the full armor of God so that we might stand in the strength of His might. Our view of Satan and his mininos must bring us to rest in the strength of God, hiding in the shelter of His wings.

---

<sup>7</sup> This is a spin off of Louie Giglio’s phrase in the indescribable video, “We have to right-size God tonight.”

4. *Complete obsession*: This is just as bad as rejection. Those who embrace this sort of a relationship with the spiritual realm come to a place where they end up rejecting God's physical realm. Those in this camp are so heavenly minded that you are no earthly good. I have met so many people who could be categorized under this heading. Sproul is correct in asserting that this category of folks has grown rapidly over the last century or so. (However, this is only true in a certain strand of Christianity.) Those in this camp tend to make Satan almost co-equal with God, spending just as much time fearing an attack from the enemy than fearing God Himself.

If your gaze is on Satan, his minions, and his attacks more than on God, His glory, His Gospel, and His word, you are in this category. I have met so many people who live lives of debilitating fear because of their view of Satan. They feel that they are always under an attack of Satan and his minions; they skittishly make decisions fearing that Satan is influencing every move they make.

My friends, Satan is not this powerful. Yes... left to ourselves we would stand no chance against him, but if we are standing in the strength of the Lord, we have nothing to fear. When you set an ant next to a soda can, the soda can towers over it; when you set a soda can next to a tank, the tank towers over it; when you set a tank next to the Statue of Liberty, the Statue of Liberty towers over it; when you set the Statue of Liberty next to China, China swallows it up; when you set China next to the Sun, the Sun swallows it up. I think you get the point; Although Satan is much larger than us, when set next to God, he is nothing more than a speck of sand in His vast infiniteness. Although Paul attributed his ruined traveling plans to Thessalonica to Satan (1 Thessalonians 2:18) and prayed for boldness to preach the Gospel as he knew he ought (see Ephesians 6:19-20), Paul had no debilitating fear of demonic oppression or possession.

### ***Conclusion***

Are you standing in the strength of the Lord? Are you even aware that you are in the heat of battle? If not, you seriously need to tune your antennas to look beyond the physical realm.

And I must ask in closing, "Where is your muzzle pointed? As a church, as a corporate body, where is our muzzle pointed?" Are our muzzles pointed at each other? Are they pointed at Washington? Are we so wrapped up in politics that we have forgotten that there is a greater enemy than our national leaders?

Before we can even be given our weaponry we must know our enemy, we must adjust our sights. Are you caught up in God's overarching cosmic narrative? Are you engaging as a soldier in Christ's battle or is your head in the sand somewhere, oblivious to the onslaught going on around you? We must be warriors for Christ. But the battle starts with us identifying the correct enemy and sensitizing ourselves to his activity, sticking close to our Savoir understanding that He alone is our refuge, our fortress, our strength.