



THE HOLY SPIRIT PART V: BATTLE STATIONS

*Jeff Peabody
New Day Church
Federal Way, WA
October 31, 2004*

This morning, we are wrapping up our series focused on the Holy Spirit. We've talked about his character, what he does in our lives, how he speaks to us and how he gives us gifts. Hopefully, we have expanded on our understanding of how he works and who he is.

If we've come to accept the reality of the Spirit's existence and presence in the world, then that opens us up to another discussion. The Bible talks about other spiritual forces, evil ones, that oppose the work of the Holy Spirit. What are they doing? You'll sometimes hear the term "spiritual warfare." What is that all about and what does it have to do with us?

Paul talked at length about spiritual warfare in his letter to the church at Ephesus.

Ephesians 6:10-18

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints.

I didn't deliberately choose which Sunday I would talk about this topic, but I think it's appropriate that it ended up being today, for a couple reasons. First, because it's Halloween. When's a more natural time to talk about evil spirits and darkness than on a day when people are already thinking about ghosts and witches and devils?

Halloween is a bit of a hot button. Some Christians feel very strongly that we shouldn't have anything to do with it, that it has evil pagan roots and our children have no business celebrating the kinds of things Halloween represents. Other people say they're not

celebrating those things -- it's just a chance for kids to dress up and eat candy. Let them have their fun.

Quite honestly, while I understand the first position, I lean more toward the second. Just about all our major holidays – including Christmas and Easter – are accused of having pagan roots, so I think what matters more is what we're doing today, and if people want to let their kids dress up and collect as much sugar as they can, that's not particularly sinister. The chances of anyone turning to the occult because of trick or treating seem rather slim.

Halloween does hold a different danger, though, and that is that we would reduce the devil to a guy with horns and red tights. That we would come to view evil spirits as nothing but pretend. And I think he'd even like us to believe that Halloween is somehow a darker day than others.

The fact is the devil cares very little about costumes, but he would like nothing better than for us to think of him in those terms – as a little harmless scare that isn't real. And he doesn't care what day it is -- Halloween is only one day out of a whole year full of days where evil and darkness have a grip on the world.

That's one reason a discussion about spiritual warfare seems appropriate today. The second reason is a little less obvious, but still worth noting, and that is how close we are to the national election. There are spiritual battles taking place over the direction countries go, and there are other forces at work besides just the democratic process.

For the record, God isn't a Republican. And he's not a Democrat. He's not even American. But we know from stories in the Bible that God does have a hand in politics. He puts leaders in place and he removes them, and while they're in power he works through them to accomplish his own agenda in the world.

Probably the central area of debate in this year's presidential election has been the war on terror. John Kerry and George Bush have very different ideas of what needs to be done. But they agree on one thing: Both will tell you that this is a very different kind of war, like none that we've ever fought in the past. It's hard to find the enemy and it is difficult to secure the country from an attack, because it could come from practically anywhere.

Paul tells his readers that spiritual warfare is a different kind of war. It's like terrorism – it's not what we're expecting. He says we're not fighting against flesh and blood. You can't point to your enemies, because they aren't human. That makes them harder to see, and it makes it harder for us to know how to protect ourselves.

So what is this all about? Maybe you have visions of seances or scenes from the Exorcist flashing through your head. And that's really not it at all. For as “other worldly” as it sounds, spiritual warfare happens on a very understandable level in our lives. We can feel the struggle in the ordinary, day-to-day things. The Christian author Clinton Arnold said this about it:

Spiritual warfare is all-encompassing. It touches every area of our lives—our families, our relationships, our church, our neighborhoods, our communities, our places of employment. There is virtually no part of our existence over which the Evil One does not want to maintain or reassert his unhealthy and perverse influence. Conversely, Jesus longs to reign as Lord over every area of our lives.

There are dimensions to the battle that we will never understand. We're told about battles raging between God's angels and Satan's forces. But we don't have details about that aspect of the fight. But we can easily relate to where it hits home, as we struggle with sin in our own lives.

I'd like to look at four aspects of spiritual warfare this morning. And since Paul is using military language, we'll do the same. I want to talk about being deployed, gathering intelligence, wearing Kevlar and returning fire.

Being Deployed

My brother-in-law went to medical school to become a surgeon, and when he got into the first year, he knew it was going to be way too expensive. So he looked around at his options, and decided that the Air Force would offer the most assistance for him. He would only owe the military 3 years of service after 6 years of medical school and residency.

This past summer, he finished up his last fellowship and was stationed at the Air Force base in San Antonio. And guess what? He received notice that next year, he's on the list to go to Iraq. It caught him by surprise, because when he signed up for the plan years ago, he had no idea he would ever see any kind of combat duty. But of course, that goes with the territory. You join the military and you risk being sent to war.

Paul wanted the Ephesians to know that being deployed is part of the Christian life. You join the Lord's army and you're going to face attack. There's no sitting it out on a base back home somewhere.

Paul says this is a serious battle. He only lists one thing we're not fighting against – other people. But he lists out several things we ARE fighting against:

- against the devil's schemes
- against the rulers
- against the authorities
- against the powers of this dark world
- against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms

Scholars don't have a consensus on whether or not there's any real distinction between the rulers, authorities and powers mentioned. But we don't really need to know any more

than that list. It's bad enough to see how many forces are arrayed against us without going into more detail.

We have to acknowledge the fact that we're in a battle with some heavy hitters and we can't operate under the illusion that it's not really happening.

Addison is playing soccer this year in the "Under 8" division. He plays for the Great White Sharks. So far, most teams have been pretty safe in the water with them. If you've watched much soccer at that level, you know that the kids are still in the learning mode about the game.

A couple of weeks ago, the coach put in a new goalie for the second half who is a pretty good player, but who was having a hard time paying attention to the game back there in the goal. A couple well-placed kicks made it past him, and the parents were doing a good job of making sure the other kids didn't blame him. But it got harder and harder to prevent the criticism, because the goalie didn't have his head in the game. Finally, the other team was closing in for another shot, and at the split second where the player was kicking it in, the goalie was at the other side of the goal practicing his cartwheels.

I can relate to that goalie. Sometimes I forget where I am, and my head's not in the game. I'm off doing cartwheels while the devil's taking another shot at me. Paul says we've got to wake up and pay attention.

Romans 13:11-13

And do this, understanding the present time. The hour has come for you to wake up from your slumber, because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed. The night is nearly over; the day is almost here. So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light.

We are deployed in a fight that has eternal significance. We can't fall asleep on the job.

Gathering Intelligence

One of the most important things to do in this battle is gather some intelligence on our enemy. Time and time again, problems in Iraq have been blamed on poor intelligence. You have to know who you're fighting and how they operate.

How does the devil operate?

First of all, he attacks what he doesn't like.

If God is doing something wonderful and changing your life, you can be sure that Satan isn't very happy about it. It gets back to what we said earlier about his desire to retain some level of influence in our lives. So that's where we can expect him to attack.

I used to hear stories about how church planters experienced all kinds of spiritual warfare because of Satan not liking the idea of new churches being formed and new people putting their faith in Christ. I kind of dismissed those stories as overly dramatic.

But I'm here today to tell you it's very real. Satan doesn't like New Day very much, and he'll do whatever he can to interfere. Sometimes it's through circumstances. The very first public service we were planning I had all my notes in the computer. The Saturday before that service, when we had all kinds of details to worry about, my computer crashed for the first time ever. It was a huge blow and set us back significantly that day, and I firmly believe Satan just grabbed the closest thing he could to prove he was watching.

Other times, attacks have looked different and more personal. We've come home before from a great Sunday morning where lots of good things have happened, only to experience this unnatural discouragement and depression. I'd chalk it up to tiredness or a bad mood, but it has a different quality to it, and I have only felt it in the context of church planting. And I've talked with many other planters and pastors who know exactly what I'm talking about, because they've experienced it.

The point isn't that church planters have a harder life – I'm just using my own story as an example. Satan attacks all Christians, and when good things are happening in your life on a spiritual level, you can know you've got a target on your back.

Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings.

So what are his attacks like? I've already described a couple situations, but in general the devil's strategy can be summed up in two words:

He LIES.

Jesus said this about Satan:

John 8:44

When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies.

His lies can take several different forms:

Temptation – We are led to believe that doing certain things won't really have negative consequences. The benefits of whatever the temptation is are played up so that they are way more important than any harm they might do. That's what happened to Eve when Satan told her eating the fruit would be good and God wouldn't really follow through with his punishment. It's what Christ experienced when Satan tempted him in the desert, promising him things and lying about the consequences.

1 Peter 2:11

Dear friends, I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul.

Temptation is a central battlefield.

Accusation – The Bible calls Satan the “accuser of our souls.” He would have us believe that we’re not good enough for God, and that when we fail, we should give up trying to follow God because we’ll never make it. He’s the one who after tempting us to do something, will turn around and point the finger at us and load us up with shame and guilt. It’s a half-truth – we really aren’t good enough for God. But God already fixed that. Our position with him is secure through Jesus, because Jesus IS good enough, and nothing Satan says can change that.

Deception – Satan would like nothing more than to confuse us and have us believe things about God that are simply not true. Paul talks about “arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God.” The devil loves to throw up objections that will give us a reason to justify not trusting God. He can help us rationalize our lack of faith or our behavior on logical grounds, when the real issue is that we’re not willing to give in to God.

He may also deceive us with messages like “God doesn’t really care about you.” “Nobody understands what you’re going through.” “You have every reason to doubt a God who would let you go through this.” “Life is meaningless.”

Temptation, accusation and deception – three of the most common types of lies used by Satan to wear us down. And he knows EXACTLY when to use each one and where we’re the most vulnerable.

Wearing Kevlar

That brings up the next issue, which I call wearing Kevlar – that bulletproof material. It’s a slight update on the armor metaphor to point out what Paul talked about in terms of protecting ourselves.

Two truths stand out about this protection. First,

It’s provided for us.

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes.

Paul reminded the Ephesians that their strength came from God. This is not a battle we need to fight on our own. It’s God’s armor that he gives us to wear.

The focus this morning isn't really on the different pieces of the armor so much as the war we're fighting. But all the pieces of armor are from God, standing between us and the enemy.

Imagine being under a volley of arrows from Satan. When he tries to deceive us, to tell us lies about who God is, we have God's truth in our hearts to keep us from being taken in. When he accuses us of being failures and says we've committed that sin one too many times to be forgiven, we have Christ's righteousness, his perfection to stand behind. We borrow his goodness. When the devil tries to tell us God is mad at us and we should be afraid for our future, we can point to the good news of the gospel and eliminate those fears. When he shoots those fiery darts of doubt at us about whether God exists or what he can do, our faith becomes our shield. And when he tries to claim us and say we're his, that we'll never break free from the sin we're slaves to, God covers us with his salvation and says "This one is mine now. No one can snatch them out of my hand."

God provides the Kevlar. It's all from him. Our job is what comes next: We need to acknowledge our own need for it.

Paul didn't say anything about self-discipline or will power or trying harder being our armor. We need to come to the realization that our efforts will do nothing to stop Satan.

The movie *The Widowmaker* tells the true story of a Soviet K-19 submarine that had a nuclear leak. The crew needed to go in and repair the reactor, and they put on hazardous waste suits for protection. But the gear is only good for handling dangerous chemicals. It does nothing to stop radiation. And so one by one, members of the crew end up dying. They think they're protected, but it's an illusion.

Our own strength is like those suits in spiritual warfare. We think they're doing something for us, but they're really not. We are only strong in the Lord and HIS mighty power.

Most of what Paul tells us in *Ephesians* is about defense and protecting ourselves from the devil's attacks. But he does mention two key things that are our offensive weapons. This is not totally a one-sided war. We're called to return fire.

Returning Fire

Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

Our first offensive weapon is the Sword of the Spirit. In our very first week of talking about the Holy Spirit, we discussed how the word of God is inspired by Him. There is power in Scripture that the devil cannot resist.

When Christ was tempted, he continually quoted different Bible verses. The devil would pose a question and Jesus would say, "It is written..." As we lean on the word of God and speak it in the face of an attack, the devil is confronted with truth and has to retreat.

That requires becoming familiar enough with the Bible that when tough times come, we have that resource at our disposal. If you're new to reading the Bible, you don't need any big plan – just start trying to read a few verses or a chapter every day. I can't tell you how many times I have thought I was just reading a random passage until later in the day or week something came up and those verses were exactly what I needed.

Let me challenge you this morning to consider doing one of three things this week to start reading your Bible. Option one would be to start with a book like Mark. Look it up in your table of contents and just start reading a little bit at a time. It will give you stories of Christ's life to think about. A second good option that's readable and relatable would be the book of Psalms. You'll learn how to cry out to God in that book. Or, take the verses we've looked at this morning and go back and read them during the week. I know we flip through them pretty quickly here, and sometimes you can't always get to them in time if you're trying to follow along in your Bible. And if you didn't write them all down, you can go out to our web site and download a copy of this message with all the references listed. The important thing is to begin developing an appetite for reading Scripture because it is a primary weapon that will make you stronger just by spending time with it.

A second offensive weapon isn't normally considered part of the official "armor of God" but it's right there in Paul's instructions: Praying in the Spirit.

And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints.

We are to keep a constant conversation going with God. All occasions and all kinds of prayers. I like that. We can talk to God about anything, and we can do it any time. I know prayer feels awkward for a lot of people, but it doesn't need to. Just address God the way you would speak to anyone you respect. It doesn't even matter if you close your eyes or fold your hands. You can pray in the car, pray in bed, pray at work – on all occasions and with all kinds of requests. I talk to God about all kinds of strange things, and he invites and encourages us to talk to him about whatever is on our heart.

Paul says prayer is an important part of our battle, and praying for each other is important in their battles.

Romans 15:30

I urge you, brothers, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to join me in my struggle by praying to God for me.

We want to take that seriously – praying for all the saints. And in the next few weeks, you'll be hearing more about what we're calling the Lifeguard ministry here at New Day. We want to make sure that everyone in the congregation is being prayed for by name, and several people have stepped forward saying they're willing to pray for groups of people in our church and staying in contact to see what needs people have. So you may be

contacted by one of them in the near future, and they'll be checking in to see if there's anything in your life they can be praying for you about.

Prayer makes a difference, not because we are intentional about it, but because the Holy Spirit is praying with us. Prayer and Scripture. Those are the best weapons the church has in the arsenal.

Where is your struggle this morning? We all face battles in one form or another. They are part of the Christian life. Are you having victory or dealing with a little bit of defeat?

Either way, know this: The ultimate victory is sure. We may fail. We will fail. But God won't. Satan has already lost. Because of what Jesus did on the cross, the final outcome is determined and Satan's doom is sure.

Revelation 12:10-11

Then I heard a loud voice in heaven say:

*"Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God,
and the authority of his Christ.*

*For the accuser of our brothers,
who accuses them before our God day and night,
has been hurled down.*

*They overcame him
by the blood of the Lamb
and by the word of their testimony."*

It's not about our ability to fight. It's about what Jesus has already done. He invites us to share in his victory. And that's what should keep us going. Jesus said,

Luke 10:18-20

I have given you authority to trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the power of the enemy ; nothing will harm you. However, do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.

That's the good news. When this spiritual battle is over, we've got a place on the other side – no matter what. It's great that we can enjoy some wins here and now, but nothing can compare to the day when we'll hear him say, "The war is over. Welcome home."