BECOMING A PEOPLE OF GRACE

Study Twenty-Four

Standing Firm against Satanic Schemes

Ephesians 6:10–13

When we entered the Christian life, we didn't walk onto a playground. We stepped into a battleground.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

THOUGH we don't hear bombs bursting in the distance or bullets zinging past us, though we don't see bayonets flashing before our faces, we live every day of our lives on a battleground.

Our enemy is the devil, whom Paul called "the commander of the powers in the unseen world" (Ephesians 2:2). Whether we're young or old, a new believer or a seasoned Christian, our adversary has one goal for us: our downfall. He intends not just to cripple us but to ruin us.

Paul, though, urged us to stand firm against the devil's schemes. Even in the hail of artillery fire that continually rains down upon us, we can be safe. But we can't stand on our own. In this study, we'll discover that the true source of our power and protection lies not in our own strength but in the Lord and His armor. We can prevail against the enemy with our Savior on our side.

PREPARE YOUR HEART

Earlier in Ephesians, Paul prayed that we "will understand the incredible greatness of God's power" which is "the same mighty power that raised Christ from the dead" (Ephesians 1:19–20). As you step into the subject of spiritual warfare, draw upon God's power by asking Him to illumine your mind and embolden your heart. You have nothing to fear with Christ on your side. Put your confidence in Him right now.

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TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

In the last half of his letter, Paul has given several commands beginning with *be*.

- Be humble and gentle (Ephesians 4:2)
- Be patient (4:2)
- Be kind (4:32)
- Be imitators of God (5:1 NASB)
- Be careful how you live (5:15)
- Be filled with the Holy Spirit (5:18)
- Be obedient (6:5 NASB)

One more exhortation rounds out his list: "be strong" (6:10). Read *Ephesians 6:10–13* and highlight the imperatives that follow *be strong*, such as "put on," "stand firm," and "resist."

Observation: Power and Protection in the Lord

In the observation phase of *Searching the Scriptures*, we look for repeated words, synonyms, metaphors, and logical progression of thought.[1] Can you see the progression in Ephesians 6:10–13? Paul first issued the imperative, "be strong" (Ephesians 6:10); second, he explained *how* we can be strong, by putting "on all of God's armor" (6:11). And then he explained *why* we need God's armor (6:12) and the *effects* of wearing the armor (6:11, 13). Let's follow Paul's line of thinking, beginning with our divine source of strength.

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Our Strength Is in the Lord—Ephesians 6:10

What do you observe about Paul's command as it is rendered in the New American Standard Bible: "Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might" (Ephesians 6:10 NASB)? Write down the synonyms you see. Can you hear Paul's theme of God's power echoing from previous verses? Look up *Ephesians 1:19–21* and *3:16–20* and write down what these verses say.

We depend on the Lord's power for every step on our Christian journey—for receiving His blessings (1:3–14), comprehending His mysterious plan (2:1–3:13), and walking in love in all our relationships (4:1–6:4). We especially need God's strength in battling our spiritual enemy. The devil lies in wait at every turn!

> *We are not equipped to stand against an invisible foe. We cannot see him, measure him, or know when his attacks are coming. So God's strength must be our salvation. We are "strong in the Lord." In the Lord is where our strength resides.* —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

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Our Protection Is in the Lord's Armor—Ephesians 6:11, 13

How do we engage God's power? Read Ephesians 6:11 and 13 side by side in the following chart. These verses are similar but contain important nuances. In the space below, write down how the verses complement one another and any subtle differences that stand out.

Ephesians 6:11	Ephesians 6:13
Put on all of God's armor so that you will be able to stand firm against all strategies of the devil.	*Therefore, put on every piece of God's armor so you will be able to resist the enemy in the time of evil. Then after the battle you will still be standing firm.*

We stand firm by putting on God's armor, but why do we need it? Because only spiritual armor can protect us in a spiritual battle. To underscore our need for spiritual protection, Paul pulls back the veil in 6:12 to reveal the invisible forces arrayed against us—who they are and what they do. Let's follow Paul into this unseen world of darkness and get a glimpse of our evil opponents.

> *It is not our armor; it's the Lord's armor. It's something we can't provide for ourselves. We put on His armor. He prepared it for us, and we put it on, just as a soldier would put on armor for the coming battle.* —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Interpretation: Rulers, Authorities, and Powers

Anyone who wishes to follow Christ is in for a "struggle" (Ephesians 6:12 NASB). The Greek word, *pallo*, conjures the image of a wrestling match in which our opponents try to take us down. To stand our ground we first must know our enemies.

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The online commentary by Thomas L. Constable lists the characteristics of our spiritual foes—their authority, strength, worldwide influence, and evil nature. Read *Ephesians 6:12* in multiple versions and consult *Constable's Notes* in netbible.org. In the chart below, write down your interpretation of Paul's descriptions. For additional information, look up the cross-references to find examples of each characteristic.

Categories	Cross-reference	Meaning
Authority: "rulers" (Ephesians 6:12)	*John 12:31*	
Strength: "powers" (6:12 NASB)	*Acts 19:13–16*	
Worldwide Influence: "world forces" (6:12 NASB)	*Matthew 4:8–9*; *1 John 5:19*	
Evil Nature: "darkness . . . wickedness" (6:12 NASB)	*Romans 1:28–29*; *2 Peter 2:17–18*	

Paul warns us in so many words, *Don't underestimate your enemies!* They are not harmless fairytale imps; they are real and powerful. "If we hope to overcome them," writes commentator John R. W. Stott,

> we shall need to bear in mind that they have no moral principles, no code of honor, no higher feelings. . . . They are utterly unscrupulous, and ruthless in the pursuit of their malicious designs.[2]

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To stand firm, we must not only know who our enemy is, we also must know what our enemy does. We'll look closer at the devil's strategies in the next section of our study.

> *Satan operates with a game plan. He uses surprise, unexpected assaults, and tempting thoughts designed to draw us in and trap us. He makes us think one way all the while doing something different. He is brilliant and cunning. He knows what it takes to trip us up, and he is relentlessly on the attack.* —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Correlation: Strategies, Schemes, and Methods

By wearing God's armor, we "will be able to stand firm against all strategies of the devil" (Ephesians 6:11). The Greek word for "strategies" is ***methodeia***, which the New American Standard Bible translates, "schemes."

Paul gave us an example of Satan's schemes in *2 Corinthians 2:10–11* regarding the issue of forgiveness. According to the passage, Paul forgave a certain individual whatever needed to be forgiven. Notice his reason for forgiving. Paul forgave *so that* "no advantage would be taken of us by Satan" (2 Corinthians 2:11 NASB). Apparently, Satan can breach our defenses through our unforgiving attitude. What harm do you think Satan might cause when we refuse to forgive?

Just as harboring anger "gives a foothold to the devil" (Ephesians 4:27), so also an unforgiving spirit leads to discord, divisiveness, bitterness, resentment, and rage—Satan's favorite devices to bind our hearts and keep us from loving like Christ.

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What else did Paul say we can do to gain victory over Satan's schemes, according to *2 Corinthians 10:3–5*? Note particularly *where* the battle takes place.

The enemy seeks to influence our thinking. That's why it's so important to meditate on God's Word. Just as Jesus countered Satan's temptations in the wilderness by quoting Scripture, we can expose his falsehoods and render his schemes powerless by quoting truth to fend off Satan's attacks.

Application: The Effects of Putting On God's Armor

Now, according to *Ephesians 6:13*, what are the effects of wearing God's armor?

What a wonderful promise! When the smoke clears from the battlefield, we will be standing firm in the protection of our Lord. We'll discuss the specific elements of the armor of God in the next study. For now, let's fortify our confidence with four principles.

- *No satanic assault is stronger than God.* We don't have to fear because our defense is God.
- *No satanic scheme can penetrate God's armor.* If we put it on and keep it on, Satan's arrows can't penetrate.

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- *No satanic force can defeat God's work.* God is sovereign, and the conclusion of His plan is decided—He will win the victory!

- *No satanic evil can prevail over the prayers of God's people.* Prayer is our direct line of communication to our source of strength, and no scheme of the devil can cut that line.

Which of these four principles encourages you most today, and why is it encouraging?

Tap your line of communication with your Commander and pray right now for His strength and protection. In what areas do you feel vulnerable, and how do you need Him today?

We need spiritual protection to defend against a spiritual foe. Thankfully, we have the armor of God . . . and more. We have Christ! Conclude this study by singing the second verse of Luther's hymn, "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God," and praising our victorious Lord.

> Did we in our own strength confide,
> Our striving would be losing,
> Were not the right man on our side,
> The man of God's own choosing.
> Dost ask who that may be?
> Christ Jesus, it is He—
> Lord Sabaoth His name,
> From age to age the same,
> And He must win the battle.[3]

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A FINAL PRAYER

Father, You are my mighty fortress, my unfailing defense against the forces of darkness. You are my helper, my shield and protector. Thank You for the promise that in You and Your Word I stand. Keep me confident in Your strength and always standing firm. Amen.

ENDNOTES

1. To learn more about Pastor Chuck Swindoll's *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study, go to the Web page, "*How to Study the Bible for Yourself*."
2. John R. W. Stott, *God's New Society: The Message of Ephesians*, The Bible Speaks Today (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1979), 264.
3. Martin Luther, "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God," trans. Frederick H. Hedge, *The Celebration Hymnal: Songs and Hymns for Worship* (n.p.: Word, 1997), hymn 151.

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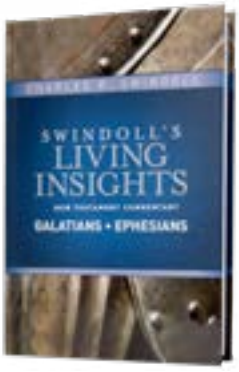

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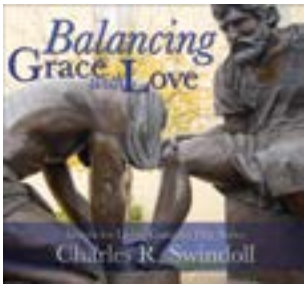

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For the 2020 broadcasts, this *Searching the Scriptures* study was developed by Bryce Klabunde, vice president of *Searching the Scriptures* Studies, based upon the original outlines, charts, and transcripts of Charles R. Swindoll's messages.

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