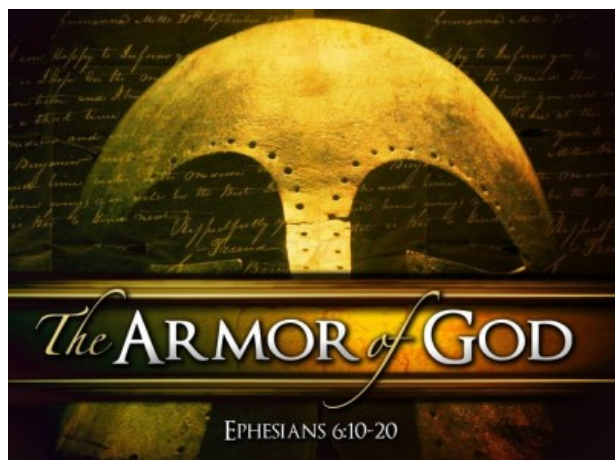


Ephesians 6:10-18b

February 20, 2011 AEMMC



Here we are eight weeks into Ephesians and just finishing our walk through the book.

It feels a little unfair – I think those of us who are preaching are getting the most out of it.

I hope we have at least given you a taste of the richness.

So now we come to the closing chapter, and it feels a bit isolated from the book.

How did we suddenly get to spiritual warfare?

But that feeling of disconnect should warn us

That maybe we haven't been listening so well to Paul.

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Remember back in chapter one Paul told us that God has exalted Jesus

Far above every earthly power and dominion.

He was not talking only about earthly powers – but heavenly ones.

Jesus is exalted above all earthly and spiritual powers.

And when he was seated at the right hand of God's power,

He was exalted as Lord and Christ.

The victory that Jesus won was not only FOR us, but OVER everything else.

Satan has been defeated. And he knows that his time is short.

Now that we have chosen sides, we too are engaged in a battle.

And we see the outcomes around us all the time –

We see broken people, broken marriages, sickness, despair,

Unjust rulers, and more.

And this is not just OUT THERE.. but IN HERE.

We are all broken, all stumbling along this path to God,
And as Betty showed us a couple of weeks ago,
getting saved has given us a new heart, but we carry baggage with us,
And healing is a process, as we work with God and learn more about his grace and mercy.

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Imagine –

How would you survive if this morning you were blindfolded

And dropped off in a war zone.
Still wearing the same clothes.

No training for warfare.

How long would you last?

And how would you prepare today if you knew you were in for battle tomorrow?

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I'm not going to cover every aspect of Christian armor today.

I'm going to focus on TRUTH and the breastplate.

TRUTH is the belt that holds the armor in place.

Righteousness is that which guards our heart.

When we know the grace and mercy of God,

We are guarded against the darts of the enemy.

We are given this new life as a gift from above.

But while our salvation is complete –

Our healing is not. So – we are vulnerable.

We carry more than just physical and emotional baggage /
from our old life into this new life.

We carry a lot of confusion and wrong ideas about God and his kingdom.

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The first error that is common among Christians / is that God is interested in healing our spirits,
But not our souls.

as if Jesus is Lord of the next world / but not this one.

But I assure you – the shalom – the peace – the justice and wholeness -
of God’s kingdom is very much for this world

and not only for the next one.

God is at work among us, around us, in our world

Because God really does love this broken and fallen world.

And so the healing that God wants to bring in this world

is a whole person kind of healing – healing for body, soul and spirit.

And BECAUSE this is true – because God loves us and this broken world,

And BECAUSE God is interested in healing all of creation, not just the spiritual part,

The healing that God wants for us–
and the warfare that comes to us -
come to us in very ordinary and physical ways.

Let me say a little more about this connection, because it’s really important we understand this.

One of the schemes of the enemy is to keep us away from the truth.

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We have inherited from the Greeks and from our parents
some bad ways of thinking about God and creation.

We tend to see matter and the body as evil,
And God and spirit as good.

God doesn’t see it this way. *** Slide_Gen ***

In Genesis 1 we read that “he created all things good” and that he delights in his
creation.

And HOW he created us is equally important.

We are body, soul and spirit.

And our brokenness is also brokenness in body, soul and spirit.

We are whole persons – and healing must come to us as whole persons.

If we think we can have spiritual healing without emotional healing,

We will forever be dragging baggage with us that will hinder our spiritual lives.

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But here is the other side of the coin.

BECAUSE we are whole persons, emotional healing can be a path – a window –

To spiritual healing. All our parts are connected.

When God works on us emotionally, he is working on us spiritually at the same time.

Body, soul and spirit make a whole person.

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What follows from this will connect us back to Ephesians 6.

If healing can come to us in ordinary ways –

If spiritual healing can start with physical healing,

Or if spiritual healing can start with emotional healing..

Then the enemy will also oppose us in all these areas.

The enemy knows that attacking our emotions will affect our spirits.

Just as a sick body affects our spiritual health, so our emotions affect our spirits.

“we do not struggle against flesh and blood.”

This is part of the truth that sets us free –

The belt of truth holds all the armor in place.

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Here in Ephesians Paul has clearly told us what God is doing –

What his purposes are in the world.

His goal is to rule and reign through the church for the sake of all humankind.

I'll say that again:

God's purpose in Christ is to rule and reign in the church for the sake of all creation.

What is the enemy's goal?

To do everything he can to challenge God's rule and destroy God's people.

What we have seen in Ephesians

Is that God's work has been to break down the dividing wall between Jew and Gentile.

Between holy and unholy, clean and unclean.

"Christ is the end of the law for all who believe." *** slide_Work ***

What would be the enemy's goal then?

Simple –

The goal of the enemy is to cast doubt on all the good work God is doing.

Sometimes with a simple question – a simple doubt --

Hmm – is that REALLY God's work?

The goal of the enemy is to put us back under the law.

This is not so hard to do – I wish it was but it is not.

He has centuries of practice and he has our own doubts and fears to work with.

He can use our habits learned from our religious history.

But I think fear is the biggest tool of the enemy.

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Remember that in Ephesians 3 Paul tells us

through the Gospel the wisdom of God

is made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms – to the powers.

In the fullness of time – Christ arrived.

The Cross marks a turning point in human history.

It marks the end of religion // in the face of revelation.

The Cross marks “the end of the law for all who believe”

In the words of Jeremiah

*This is the covenant I will establish with the house of Israel
after that time, declares the Lord.*

*I will put my laws in their minds
and write them on their hearts.*

I will be their God,

and they will be my people. Jeremiah 31; Heb. 8:10-11

But not only that –

It marks the end of worship in temples, the end of Holy places.

And it marks the end of human divisions between holy and not-yet-holy,

Between Jew and Greek, male and female, priest and people.

All these divisions have meaning outside Christ,

But in Christ all things are made new.

Where once sacrifice and priesthood stood between us and God,

That has all changed. Or as the writer of Hebrews put it, ****Slide_5****

because Jesus lives forever, he has a permanent priesthood.

*Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him,
because he always lives to intercede for them. Ch 7*

We have a Heavenly Temple and a perfect and eternal priest –

He always lives to intercede for us

Therefore the dividing wall is gone, our salvation is secure.

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Between law and grace there is a great gulf fixed.

The gulf was humanly impossible. / The distance was infinite.

It required an infinite Man to bridge it. / It required an infinite Sacrifice.

IN Colossians 2 Paul makes the direct connection between

The resurrection – our resurrection with Christ –

And God's triumph over the Enemy. ***** Slide 6 *****

"God made us alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands.

This he set aside, nailing it to the cross.

He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him."

When we were under the law the Enemy had the real power over us

The power of fear and condemnation –

But Jesus is the Victor!! Jesus won!! Hallelujah!

Paul writes, There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus!

Just how radical is the break? Acts 10 and 11.

In a vision Peter sees a sheet lowered from heaven, filled with animals that are unclean. The voice says, "take and eat."

As far as Peter is concerned, this is calling black white, and white black.

His religious rules are *turned upside down*.

Because – let's be clear here – it was ALL ABOUT RULES.

In the OT reality, it was all about rules.

There are something like seven hundred rules around clean and unclean.

Everything has to be done just right – or God might kill you.

Washing and prayers and holy days..
 Things you can touch and things you can't touch.

lists of rules / so we know we are ok with God.

It must have been exhausting!

We talked about the priest entering the Holy of Holies with a rope on his ankle.

And in the NT we see Jesus breaking almost every rule.

He touches a leper.
 He speaks to a woman.
 He heals on the Sabbath.

I don't think we realize just how tough this must have been for those watching.
 No wonder EVEN John the Baptist asks him:

"Are you the one -- or are we waiting for someone else?"

Because Jesus is just offensive!

He hangs out with the wrong people.

He is at parties so much that they accuse him of being a drunkard.

Fourteen times in the Gospel of Luke alone we see Jesus at parties.

Parties in Jerusalem in the first century always involved a lot of food and wine.

IN some ways Jews were like good Mennonites – except for the wine.

And if we walked in on one of these parties, we would be offended.

And so Jesus first miracle is the most offensive –

When the party is already well along, he creates more wine.

The wedding at Cana is a party in Galilee – among fishermen and peasants.

In Galilee they were not particularly religious.

So they didn't really think to stop drinking when they should –
 they kept going until they ran out of wine.

In that culture it was a shame for the host to run out of wine.

What does Jesus do?

Does he worry that some are already drunk?

Does he worry what the neighbors will think?

No – he regards the shame of the host as more important,

And he creates the very BEST wine.

And some of us are offended.

I hope there are designated drivers – for camels.

Jesus doesn't fit our established rules.

What are we *really* thinking?

Jesus, you are not holy enough for me!

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Do you see what a problem this is?

And there are only TWO WAYS OUT. *** Slide 7 ***

Answer No 1

Jesus, you are not Holy enough for me. I'll start my own religion.

Answer No 2

Jesus, I have the wrong idea about Holiness. Will you help me understand?

Remember Peter's vision --

"What God has cleansed, no longer call unholy." TWICE

But what hits me is the place and time for Peter's vision, Acts 10-11

This is NOT immediately after the resurrection.

It is something like 12 years later.

Up to this time, the disciples are still going to the Jerusalem temple to worship.

Which tells us something important – the twelve – Jesus disciples -
are just like us!

Even the disciples / have not really understood just how radical the gospel is.

They have not really seen the wild, abundantly generous God.

They think the Gospel is ONLY for good people: my kind of people -- good Christian people (in this case, Jews).

How wrong they are!

The Gospel is NOT just for religious people who know something about God and who attend church every Sunday.

It is not just for my kind of people - *it is for God's kind of people:*

the broken, the wounded, the weak -
liars and thieves and cheaters...

It is for those who are weak and poor, blind and without hope.

Why? // *Because God loves sinners.*

God really meant what he said in Isa. 61.

He came to set the captives free. Even the most unclean.
He really did come to seek and to save the lost. ***** Slide 8 *****

He did not come to condemn the world –

But that the world might be saved through him.

An old pundit once said: there are really only two ways to get into trouble in the church in our time --

say what Jesus said // or do what Jesus did.

Here we are in Jerusalem – like the Jews we are a religious people.

We face the same challenge the early church faced –

How do we get the Gospel outside our religious circle?

We are going to encounter resistance.

We are even going to be opposed by the Accuser.

In Revelations 12 we read

9The great dragon was hurled down—
that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan,
who leads the whole world astray.

10Then 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 Messiah.
For the accuser of our brothers and sisters,
who accuses them before our God day
and night, has been hurled down.

The Liar.

The Enemy.

What will it look like?

Fear. And accusation. He is cunning – *he will use our own doubts against us.*

We affirm mission as a terrific idea.

But we fear that contact with sinners could be corrupting.

We worry that going among sinners – we might get dirty.

And it shows that we have not understood the message of Jesus.

The raw and radical truth of the Gospel is Emmanuel --

God with us, stooping down to the gutters of the world.

Under the old covenant, if I touch someone unclean, I become unclean.

The truth of the new covenant is topsy-turvy -

if I touch someone unclean, *they become clean.*

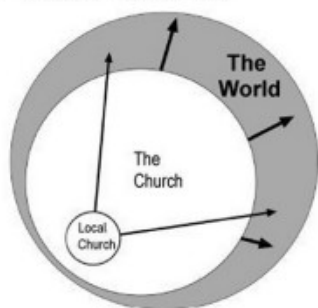
Whoa,. How is this possible?

It is possible because I carry within me / the power that creates and recreates worlds -
the living Spirit / of the risen and glorified Christ.

Only the blood of Jesus / can work this kind of miracle,
and only when it comes into contact / with broken / and fallen humanity.

Remember the GOING church versus the SENT church

The "Sent" Church



"In" but not "of"
"Salt" and "light"
"Counter-culture"

IN the first view, the "Going" church, we live in separation from the world.

Our fear is the same as Peter's fear.

"If I touch someone unclean, then I become unclean."

IN the second view, the "Sent" church, we have a completely different view.

This is radically different. *(see also wells and fences – Hirsch)*

It is rooted in a different view / of God and the world.

IN the second view, if I touch someone "unclean" / *they become clean.*

The first view results in a protected way of living,

It creates Christian silos that have no contact with the corrupt world.

Inwardly, it creates Christian cops,

Who are always on the lookout for signs of worldliness in Christian circles.

The result of the first view is that we focus on sin rather than grace.

We worry about all the wrong things!

And this power / of fear and control,

Comes from what Paul calls the *stoichea* – the fallen powers –

The enemy wants us to live in fear!

Because those who live in fear will live by the law.

They will rebuild the wall so we can feel safe.

And those who live by the law will consider themselves holy

While everyone else is outside the camp.

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The old wineskin is cracked and dry.

The old walls have crumbled and fallen down. Paul writes, ****Slide 10****

*For he himself is our peace,
who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh
the dividing wall of hostility / by abolishing the law of commandments
expressed in ordinances,*

*that he might create / in himself / one new man in place of the two,
so making peace,*

*For through him / we both have access /
in one Spirit / to the Father.*

This is God the warrior – this is God doing spiritual warfare in the world.

/

This new humanity God is creating in Christ / does not know human distinctions.

And the real battle is for the hearts and minds of God's people

To simply follow Jesus on his mission in the world.

The battle is to become a friend to sinners. (between Jerusalem and Antioch)

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We are the Jews of today – the religious ones.

Like the Jews, We are called to carry the Gospel from Jerusalem to Antioch.

In Acts 15 the Jerusalem council faces this challenge.

They begin by thinking they should impose the law on the Gentiles.

Until Peter tells his story.

They decide to ask two things of the new believers:

That they abstain from fornication, and from blood.

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I work with a brother named Michael.

This brother is bold and gutsy. Better yet, he is in the habit of hanging out with sinners.

He spends a good portion of his week with the wrong people.

He even has a bunch of them on his facebook and Twitter account.

This worries some people.

They really worry about him remaining pure.

Never mind that he looks a lot like Jesus in his lifestyle.

So some time past Michael followed **The Onion** -
a website that has some good, but sometimes edgy, articles.

Then Michael ran his Twitter feed through the "Create a Paper" utility.

This utility pulls stuff from the last 24 hours of your Twitter feed,
and shapes it into a Daily News format, using material from your Tweets,

but also -- from the tweets of those you have "followed."

Woe be unto you if you have "followed" the wrong people,
because you are going to get some raw and dark material on your page.

Which is what happened to Michael.

And then someone spotted this stuff – and it hit the fan.

What advice would YOU give to Michael?

"Michael, you are associating with the wrong kind of people."

or maybe, "Even though your heart is right, you have to be more careful."

Others could follow your example and associate with the wrong kind of people."

The second one sounds like wisdom, but neither Jesus nor Paul would have advised him this way.

Look at Jesus example - always with the wrong kind of people.

Didn't he know that his followers would be slandered for this same behavior?

Didn't he know that some would follow his example and fall into sin?

Jesus knew that life in this world is risky and dangerous.

Remember his words in John 15 -

If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own.

As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you.

Remember what I told you: 'Servants are not greater than their master.'

***** Slide 12 *****

Do we think we are greater than our master? We do not belong to the world.

But we are not called to protect and hide our light in safe places; we are called to LET IT SHINE.

The light shines in the darkness -- the darkness has not overcome it.

Sometimes, when we live in fear, we make the sad mistake of method.

We are right in thinking that we are to remain "spotless and clean."

We are wrong when we think that the method / is to separate ourselves from the world.

No, we remain spotless and clean because *the spotless one lives in and through us*.

Do you see this difference?

He sends us out in the world as salt and light --

But the light is not ourselves, it is HIS light in us.

His light –His Holiness – His righteousness.

We go out so that the light can seep into the cracks and crevices - the very life of Jesus.

When we do this, we will be accused and misunderstood,
even as our Savior was accused and misunderstood.

Matthew 5:10-16 *The Message*

You're blessed when your commitment to God provokes persecution.
The persecution drives you even deeper into God's kingdom.

...

And know that you are in good company.

My prophets and witnesses have always gotten into this kind of trouble.

Let me tell you why you are here.

You're here to be salt-seasoning that brings out the God-flavors of this earth.
If you lose your saltiness, how will people taste godliness?

You've lost your usefulness and will end up in the garbage.

Here's another way to put it:

You're here to be light, bringing out the God-colors in the world.

God is not a secret to be kept.

We're going public with this, as public as a city on a hill.

If I make you light-bearers,

you don't think I'm going to hide you under a bucket, do you?

I'm putting you on a light stand.

Now that I've put you there on a hilltop, on a light stand—shine!

Keep open house; be generous with your lives.

By opening up to others, you'll prompt people to open up with God,
this generous Father in heaven.

Len Hjalmarson