

In the local pastors' meeting, we were discussing several Christian leaders who ended their ministry in moral failure. In one case, the person was warned and boldly declared that he was not concerned. He said his relationship with his wife was solid. There was nothing to fear. Another who fell was admired by many for giving his all. My own father was a respected minister, professor and evangelist, but ended his own life after moral failure dominated it.

It is very disturbing. Their failure calls into question the truth that these men proclaimed, which is exactly what the enemy of our soul intended it to do. In case you haven't noticed, we are in the middle of a cosmic battle for the souls of men. We are soldiers in that battle, and soldiers are the target. (1Peter 5:8) **If we lose sight of the spiritual battle that is raging around us and become complacent, we become easy targets.** The enemy lives to see you and everyone you love slide into the captivity of sin, (2Timothy 2:26), because then you are useless in advancing God's kingdom.

Jesus proclaimed that the gates of hell would not be able to stand the onslaught of his soldiers. (Matthew 16:18) Get that picture in your mind. Walled cities were a way to protect your people from an invading army. The gates were usually the weakest part of the exterior, so an invading army would try to burn or ram the gate to break into the enemy's fortress. We often think of this picture in reverse. We see ourselves hunkered down and the enemy ramming our gates. *We* are the invading army. We have the power. (Ephesians 1:19-20) The enemy is hunkered down in his fortress of this world with its lusts and cares. (1John 2:15-17) We are the soldiers filled with the power of the Spirit that are ramming his gates, which are the hearts and minds of his captives, in order to set them free!

That does not mean there are not casualties. The assaulting army often incurs losses as the enemy shoots their arrows of mockery and doubts from the ramparts on the walls. Boulders of compromise and temptation are thrown off the walls do damage. There is the burning oil of false accusations that scar us. Those who let their shield down are easy targets. The casualties discourage us. Even the friendly fire of criticism or gossip from our rear guard can cause losses in our ranks. But we are equipped for this battle with special gear that we'll talk about next week. **We have the invincible King going before us.** (Revelation 19:11-14) We even know the final outcome, and that encourages us to persevere. (Revelation 20:10)

Battle is never easy or without horror. I have never faced physical battle, like some of you have, but I have learned from others that it is usually so horrific that you would rather not bring it to mind. However, we have all been in spiritual battles, and it can be

Commented [notes1]: 1 Peter 5:8 (ESV)

⁸ Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.

Commented [notes2]: 2 Timothy 2:26 (ESV)

²⁶ and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, after being captured by him to do his will.

Commented [notes3]: Matthew 16:18 (ESV)

¹⁸ And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

Commented [notes4]: Ephesians 1:19-20 (ESV)

¹⁹ and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might ²⁰ that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places,

Commented [notes5]: 1 John 2:15-17 (ESV)

¹⁵ Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. ¹⁶ For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride in possessions—is not from the Father but is from the world. ¹⁷ And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever.

Commented [notes6]: Revelation 19:11-14 (ESV)

¹¹ Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse! The one sitting on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war. ¹² His eyes are like a flame of fire, and on his head are many diadems, and he has a name written that no one knows but himself. ¹³ He is clothed in a robe dipped in blood, and the name by which he is called is The Word of God. ¹⁴ And the armies of heaven, arrayed in fine linen, white and pure, were following him on white horses.

Commented [notes7]: Revelation 20:10 (ESV)

¹⁰ and the devil who had deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur where the beast and the false prophet were, and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.

just as horrific. The scars on our soul can be as real. This is a real war. In fact, it may be more consequential in the light of eternity than physical war.

How do we keep from becoming a casualty like these men I mentioned earlier? It seems that just when you think you can stand, you end up falling. (1Corinthians 10:12) Paul's warning to "take heed lest we fall" is a reminder that humility is an essential ingredient to our survival. (1Peter 5:6) Humility keeps us cautious and alert. Success and fame can become the tool of the enemy to get our eyes off the Lord and on to self, and that is when we are likely to sink.

The Apostles Paul and John both saw some fellow soldiers become casualties. (2 Timothy 1:15; 4:10; 3 John 1:9) The Apostles had witnessed one of the greatest casualties, Judas. (Acts 1:16-17) And so Paul gives us the instruction in our passage today. ¹⁰ Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. It is not by your own strength that you stand. The minute you start to think it is by your strength is the minute you stick your head out from behind your shield. You know what comes next.

This reminds me of the story of David and Goliath. It's the account of how little David took on the giant. It's such a great picture of facing the enemy of our soul. Listen to the how and why of David's response to Goliath's taunts. ⁴⁵ ... "You come to me with a sword and with a spear and with a javelin, but I come to you in the name of the LORD of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. ⁴⁶ This day the LORD will deliver you into my hand, and I will strike you down and cut off your head. And I will give the dead bodies of the host of the Philistines this day to the birds of the air and to the wild beasts of the earth, that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel, 1 Samuel 17:45-46 (ESV)

David didn't tell Goliath that he was small but mighty, or that he killed a lion and a bear, or that he was a sharp shooter. He said the LORD would deliver Goliath into his hand so all the earth would know there is a God in Israel. David's confidence was in the LORD. He stood in the strength and might of the LORD. You are undefeatable when you stand in the LORD's strength. Even if they kill your body you win. (Matthew 10:28)

If you've been reading through the Bible with us, you've seen that there were several times when the LORD told people that no one would be able to stand against them. (Joshua 1:5) In other words, when they went to battle, every opponent would die or flee. If you stand in the strength of the LORD that promise is for you too. Every spiritual opponent that seeks your destruction will fail, and some will even be converted while others just have to flee.

There is a big difference between confidence in the LORD that can boldly declare what David did, and self-confidence that is cocky. We may not always know the physical outcome of what is before us, but we are sure of the spiritual outcome. Like the men that were to be thrown in Nebuchadnezzar's furnace, we can have the same battle cry.

Commented [notes8]: 1 Corinthians 10:12 (ESV)
¹² Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall.

Commented [notes9]: 1 Peter 5:6 (ESV)
⁶ Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you,

Commented [notes10]: 2 Timothy 1:15 (ESV)
¹⁵ You are aware that all who are in Asia turned away from me, among whom are Phygelus and Hermogenes.

Commented [notes11]: 2 Timothy 4:10 (ESV)
¹⁰ For Demas, in love with this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica. Crescens has gone to Galatia, Titus to Dalmatia.

Commented [notes12]: 3 John 1:9 (ESV)
⁹ I have written something to the church, but Diotrephes, who likes to put himself first, does not acknowledge our authority.

Commented [notes13]: Acts 1:16-17 (ESV)
¹⁶ "Brothers, the Scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit spoke beforehand by the mouth of David concerning Judas, who became a guide to those who arrested Jesus.
¹⁷ For he was numbered among us and was allotted his share in this ministry."

Commented [notes14]: Matthew 10:28 (ESV)
²⁸ And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell.

Commented [notes15]: Joshua 1:5 (ESV)
⁵ No man shall be able to stand before you all the days of your life. Just as I was with Moses, so I will be with you. I will not leave you or forsake you.

17 If this be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of your hand, O king. 18 But if not, be it known to you, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up. Daniel 3:17-18 (ESV) God *can* deliver us from the physical, but even should He choose not to, we are still spiritually victorious, and that is what really counts. (Matthew 5:12) These guys were strong in the Lord and in His mighty power.

Commented [notes16]: Matthew 5:12 (ESV)

¹² Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

But it isn't just men. Here is a more current story. In Columbia, the Marxist guerrillas realize the Gospel is a major threat to their agenda. They kill the pastors that evangelize in their region. So a woman named Neta, gets on her motorcycle and goes into those areas bringing the word of God. She says they don't notice her because she is a woman. And her standing in the Lord's strength doesn't stop there; she has a farm for the widows and children of pastors that have been martyred so they can raise enough to eat. As soon as she hears of another martyr, she calls the widow to comfort her or travels to where they are, risking her own life to give them comfort in person. She truly stands in the LORD's might power. (VOM July 2011)

Paul continues, *11 Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil.* The Roman soldiers had a set of gear they wore to go into battle called a *panoplia*, a compound word meaning full or whole armor. If one of the pieces were missing, it wouldn't be the *panoplia*. Every piece was essential. Next week we'll get into each piece and its meaning. For now we need to recognize that God provides it and expects us to make the effort to put it on. Without it we won't be able to stand. You might be able to guess that all this armor points back to something of the Lord Himself as Paul just told us to be strong *in* the Lord and *in* His mighty power. Now He tells us to get in the armor. We need the various aspects of the life of Christ to be able to stand.

First, let us be clear that this is spiritual equipment. In another letter from Paul he tells us, *4 For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds.* 2 Corinthians 10:4 (ESV) You don't have to learn karate. We're talking about spiritual warfare. We're talking about the kind of warfare that wins souls to Jesus' side versus the casualties we see when we don't stand in the Lord's power. It is planting those little time bombs of the Word of God. It's exposing the foolishness of Satan's lies, and unmasking his deceptions. It's walking in the Spirit! (Galatians 5:25)

Commented [notes17]: Galatians 5:25 (ESV)

²⁵ If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit.

This passage tells us that the devil has schemes. In a letter to the Corinthians, Paul tells us we aren't ignorant of his devices. (2 Corinthians 2:11) He's been around a long time and he has set himself against God and all that is dear to God, including you and me. Without the protection we receive from the Lord, he would have annihilated us long ago. He would throw things at us that are greater than we could resist, but the LORD limits his actions against us. (1 Corinthians 10:13) Nevertheless, those things the LORD does allow to get through follow patterns that we are familiar with. We can see them in

Commented [notes18]: 2 Corinthians 10:4 (ESV)

⁴ For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds.

Commented [notes19]: 1 Corinthians 10:13 (ESV)

¹³ No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.

Scripture all the way back to the Garden. Satan is a liar from the beginning. (John 8:44) He promises something he can't deliver. He tells us that he can fulfill us. He says physical things will satisfy. He tells us we don't need God. He tells us God's commands are selfish. He tries to get us to doubt God's love. He never will tell you the true cost of yielding to a particular temptation, because then you would never fall for it.

When tempted, we need to remind ourselves of his schemes, his devices, and ask if we are falling for one of them. They are usually subtle. He starts off small. If he can get you to contemplate his temptation, you are on your way to a fall. It always begins in the mind. (2Corinthians 10:5) It enters the mind through the eye or the ear or sometimes right from the old nature that we've allowed to rise up from the tomb and speak to us. (Colossians 3:3)

12 For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. When I was in the business world a customer attacked me verbally. Someone who witnessed it came to me after the person left and gave me a word of wisdom. "That wasn't about you," he said. "It's his anger about a situation. Don't take it personal." That was really sound advice. The person that attacked me was mad because things didn't go his way. I wasn't the cause. In the same way, when we are persecuted or mocked, it is usually about the person's hatred toward all things Christian because they are mad at God for something God allowed in their life or the consequences of their sin. If you look back in the life of many of the renowned atheists and cult leaders, you will often find something about which they chose to blame on God.

They were ignorant of the devil's schemes. They fell for the lie that God let it happen because He is heartless and uncaring. They forgot that sin is the root of all the pain and loss in the world. Instead of blaming the fallen condition of this world and the sin that caused it, they blame God for not intervening. Then when God does intervene in their life, they are mad that He interfered with their plans. They are blinded to the destructiveness of rebellion and the damage it does to our attitude and personality. (1Timothy 5:6)

Our struggle is not with a person, but the influence of the forces that seek to destroy that person. There are spiritual forces doing battle at this very moment. They sow doubt into minds. They blind the minds of people with distortion and lies. (2Corinthians 4:4) We pray before the service because we don't want that influence in this place at this special time when we hear the Word of God. Jesus warned us that there were powers that want to snatch up the Word when it goes out. (Matthew 13:19)

Prayer is one of the ways we do battle in this realm. We unleash the angelic hosts to aid those who will be heirs of salvation. (Hebrews 1:14) We pray for healing for those

Commented [notes20]: John 8:44 (ESV)

⁴⁴ You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and has nothing to do with the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies.

Commented [notes21]: 2 Corinthians 10:5 (ESV)

⁵ We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ,

Commented [notes22]: Colossians 3:3 (ESV)

³ For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.

Commented [notes23]: 1 Timothy 5:6 (ESV)

⁶ but she who is self-indulgent is dead even while she lives.

Commented [notes24]: 2 Corinthians 4:4 (ESV)

⁴ In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.

Commented [notes25]: Matthew 13:19 (ESV)

¹⁹ When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what has been sown in his heart. This is what was sown along the path.

Commented [notes26]: Hebrews 1:14 (ESV)

¹⁴ Are they not all ministering spirits sent out to serve for the sake of those who are to inherit salvation?

afflicted. We pray for clear thinking for the lost. We pray against evil in lives and ask for godly influences. We are dealing with cosmic powers over this present darkness, but we should never fear their power. He that is in us is greater than the one in the world. (1John 4:4) Our confidence is in God. Because these people who were visible leaders fell, we need to remain humbly dependent on God. Still, we fear no evil. (Psalm 23:4)

Actually, we fear God. (Deuteronomy 10:12) We know He is just. We know rebellion will be judged. To fear something is to ascribe power to it. God is all-powerful. (Proverbs 14:27) The forces of evil are powerful, but they are nothing compared to the power of God. In Him we can be fearless.

¹³ Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm. Because we are facing such a battle against such powerful beings, we must remain suited up in Christ. We must stand in His power and might. The only way to survive the war over our souls is to continually be in an intimate relationship with Jesus, the King of kings. He is our refuge. (Psalm 18:1-2)

In the previous chapter Paul said to redeem the time because the days are evil. We are in the evil day, the day of rebellion against God. It is an age that will soon pass. Evil will be judged. Righteousness will remain. (2 Peter 3:13) But in the meantime, we must give our all to stand firm.

The Roman soldier was trained to hold a square meter of ground. When a line was formed, if someone broke through the line, the formation could collapse. We all affect one another. Paul is telling us to stand firm. Don't give up any ground. Since we are empowered by the LORD, we must do all we can to rescue those in darkness. Don't give up time with Jesus in His word. Continue to guard your thoughts. Have a listening ear. Stay in fellowship. Love one another! Stand firm!

We are attracted to the stories of heroes because that is what we are all meant to be in Jesus. We are meant to be those super strong and powerfully equipped ones that stand against the hordes of darkness and rescue the captives. But remember, we aren't talking about people, but rather the influence of spirits of darkness that seek mans' destruction.

We are the mild mannered Clark Kents that tear off our carnal shirt and reveal that we are dressed in Jesus and ready to save the day by speaking the Word of God that silences evil, or by praying that supernatural assistance deliver a soul in distress. We love the unlovely and offer hope to the hopeless. Most of all we give the life changing message of the Gospel to those in darkness.

I'm looking forward to the visual replay of our lives with the 4D glasses that reveal all those spiritual powers doing battle in the presently unseen realm. (2Kings 6:17) Aren't you? Stand firm!

Commented [notes27]: 1 John 4:4 (ESV)

⁴ Little children, you are from God and have overcome them, for he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world.

Commented [notes28]: Psalm 23:4 (ESV)

⁴ Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.

Commented [notes29]: Deuteronomy 10:12 (ESV)

¹² "And now, Israel, what does the LORD your God require of you, but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul,

Commented [notes30]: Proverbs 14:27 (ESV)

²⁷ The fear of the LORD is a fountain of life, that one may turn away from the snares of death.

Commented [notes31]: Psalm 18:1-2 (ESV)

¹ I love you, O LORD, my strength.

² The LORD is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer, my God, my rock, in whom I take refuge, my shield, and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold.

Commented [notes32]: 2 Peter 3:13 (ESV)

¹³ But according to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.

Commented [notes33]: 2 Kings 6:17 (ESV)

¹⁷ Then Elisha prayed and said, "O LORD, please open his eyes that he may see." So the LORD opened the eyes of the young man, and he saw, and behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha.

Questions

- 1 What makes us an easy target?
- 2 Go over the causes of casualty in battle.
- 3 What happens when we begin to trust our own strength?
- 4 Go over some of the examples of people who demonstrated the Lord's strength.
- 5 In what realm do our weapons function?
- 6 What are some of Satan's standard tactics (devices)?
- 7 Just what are we battling?
- 8 How should we use prayer?
- 9 Who do we fear? Why?
- 10 What does Paul command us to do?
- 11 How do we do that?