

*"The Blessing Of God's Strength"*  
Ephesians- Blessed Beyond Belief- Part 8  
9/11/11  
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## **Introduction:**

### **Begin:** Video: *9/11: 10 Years Ago*

Today we remember the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the terrorist attacks on our country. We can all remember where we were when we heard this news and saw those shocking images on TV of the World Trade Center towers falling and a gaping hole in the side of the Pentagon. We can all remember how we felt as news unfolded about who had perpetrated these murderous atrocities.

September 11, 2001 changed our world. Thousands of people died and tens of thousands of people continue to grieve those lost today. Our economy has never been the same. You feel 9/11 when you look at your 401K, when we see unemployment numbers, and when we look at an, even now, bleak economic forecast. But, even more importantly 9/11 began a War on Terror that continues today. Thousands of American soldiers, militants, and many of civilians have lost their lives in this battle of good vs. evil across the globe.

Question to ponder this morning: *What if I told you that our fight in the War on Terror is not primarily with Al-Qaeda or the Taliban or Sadaam Hussein or any other terrorists or countries that harbor them?*

You might say- *Come on...what are you some sort of liberal? Of course it is—these are the people responsible for terrible tragedies like 9/11. These are the people that have waged what they refer to as "jihad" around the world. How can you say our fight is not first and foremost with these evil people?*

We'll talk more about that in a moment. But, I want to apply this same principle closer to home. I want to ask you to imagine yourself in a conflict with your spouse. You're in a discussion and things are getting a little heated. Your spouse is angry and you feel their frustration with you is unjustified. You begin to react and the conversation begins to spiral out of control. *What if I told you that your spouse is not your main adversary in this conflict?*

What if you're at work or here at church. You are working on a project with a someone and in the midst of working together on something that person corrects something you were doing. They take a decision you made or a way that you had done something and they change it. You begin to get annoyed. Maybe you even say something...the person gets offended. You're offended at what they did and that you are offended. Now you avoid them whenever possible. *What if I told you that your co-worker is not your main adversary in this conflict?*

I want to show you an interesting and important passage in Scripture today. And, one of the main lessons of this passage of Scripture is that **in any situation in life there is more going on than meets the eye**. Especially when you are struggling, when peace is lacking between you and any other person, when you are facing temptation...**there is more going on than meets the eye**.

Today, if you are discouraged...if you are struggling...if you are at odds with anyone...**there is more going on than meets the eye**. The Bible says your trials are not primarily explained by your circumstances. Your relational struggles are not primarily explained by the trouble you have getting along with that other person.

**Here is what is really going on. And, here is what to do about it.**

### **Ephesians 6:10-17**

*<sup>10</sup> A final word: Be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. <sup>11</sup> Put on all of God's armor so that you will be able to stand firm against all strategies of the devil. <sup>12</sup> For we are not fighting against flesh-and-blood enemies, but against evil rulers and authorities of the unseen world, against mighty powers in this dark world, and against evil spirits in the heavenly places.*

*<sup>13</sup> 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. <sup>14</sup> Stand your ground, putting on the belt of truth and the body armor of God's righteousness. <sup>15</sup> For shoes, put on the peace that comes from the Good News so that you will be fully prepared. <sup>16</sup> In addition to all of these, hold up the shield of faith to stop the fiery arrows of the devil. <sup>17</sup> Put on salvation as your helmet, and take the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.*

The Bible says that any struggle we face in life has a spiritual component. Here are three truths to keep in mind to win spiritual battles.

#### **1. Our Strength Is Found In God.**

*<sup>10</sup> A final word: Be strong **in the Lord** and in **his** mighty power.*

I'm not sure if it is because we don't really understand our real enemy, or because we can't see the evil one and his forces... or because we are just inherently arrogant and independent thinking we can take care of ourselves... **but many times we're trying to live life and fight our battles- seen or unseen- in our own strength**. Paul is real clear here—we are to be strong **in the Lord...and in HIS mighty power**.

Throughout this series, we've looked at Scripture and its teaching that God places His Holy Spirit into every believer. The Holy Spirit is an unlimited source of blessing and spiritual power available 24/7 to the Christ-follower-- *God's power for us who believe him!*

## **Ephesians 1:19-20a**

*<sup>19</sup> I also pray that you will understand the incredible greatness of God's power for us who believe him. This is the same mighty power <sup>20</sup> that raised Christ from the dead...*

The fact that real strength is found in God says so much about how we should live every day.

- When you encounter a problem- what do you do? *Do you pray first?*
- When you are emotionally or physically tired—*Do you pray first?*
- When you want to give up on a relationship or you don't feel like you can trust people anymore- *Do you pray first and ask God to work His strength though you?*
- When you dream or think about the future—*do you pray first? Do you dream God-sized dreams or only allow your dreams to stay within the confines of what you can accomplish on your own?*

Next week we're starting a new series- *Sun Stand Still*. The premise behind this series is that because we naturally live out of our own strength rather than tapping into God's power we end up just trying to survive the day or make it home through rush hour in one piece. Instead of living boldly for God and seeing God do incredible things in and through our lives—the goal of the day becomes just keeping the kids from burning down the house.

***Instead- why are we not seeing God's power coursing through our spiritual veins and becoming visible because the things we were seeing God do in and through us can only be attributed to His power at work?*** Steven Furtick writes in *Sun Stand Still* (pg 7):

*...If you ever encounter a theology that doesn't directly connect the greatness of God with your potential to do great things on His behalf, it's not biblical theology. File it under heresy.*

*I'll take it further: If you're not daring to believe God for the impossible, you're sleeping through some of the best parts of your Christian life.*

*And further still: if the size of your vision for your life isn't intimidating to you, there's a good chance it's insulting to God.*

But, more often than not, I find myself whining and complaining. Obstacles seem too big to overcome. Relational hurts seem too deep to love again. Failures color dreams instead of hope. Physical or spiritual or emotional exhaustion seems to outweigh spiritual vitality. ***Whenever this happens...whenever I live in this perspective—I can know I'm living out of my strength and am far from drawing on God's power.*** Trusting in my own strength is a dead end. I may drive for a time...but eventually I'm going to run out of gas...and running out of gas could even cause a crash.

The solution is to tap into God's strength...and stay there.

### **Psalm 33**

*<sup>13</sup> The LORD looks down from heaven and sees the whole human race.*

*<sup>14</sup> From his throne he observes all who live on the earth.*

*<sup>15</sup> He made their hearts, so he understands everything they do.*

*<sup>16</sup> The best-equipped army cannot save a king, nor is great strength enough to save a warrior.*

*<sup>17</sup> Don't count on your warhorse to give you victory—for all its strength, it cannot save you.*

*<sup>18</sup> But the LORD watches over those who fear him, those who rely on his unfailing love.*

*<sup>19</sup> He rescues them from death and keeps them alive in times of famine.*

*<sup>20</sup> We put our hope in the LORD. He is our help and our shield.*

*<sup>21</sup> In him our hearts rejoice, for we trust in his holy name.*

*<sup>22</sup> Let your unfailing love surround us, LORD, for our hope is in you alone.*

### **Application:**

**How do you start your day?** I was trying to think this week—*how do you get God's power?* This is a really poor question. *If you are a Christ-follower- you have God's power living in you.* A better question is *How do we access God's power.*

I just don't know any other way than by meeting with God and spending time in His Word and with Him in prayer. I do not want to create modern day religious laws—we have freedom and liberty in Jesus. I don't want to put burdens on you—Jesus said that His yoke was easy and His burden was light.

However, from the bottom of my heart, I think this is true: *How do you know if you're living in your own strength? You can ask yourself two simple questions: **Did (I) you read your Bible today? Did I spend quiet time in prayer with God today?***

## **2. Our Real Enemy Can Be Known But Not Seen.**

*<sup>11</sup> Put on all of God's armor so that you will be able to stand firm against all strategies of the devil. <sup>12</sup> For we are not fighting against flesh-and-blood enemies, but against evil rulers and authorities of the unseen world, against mighty powers in this dark world, and against evil spirits in the heavenly places.*

*<sup>13</sup> 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.*

The first thing we notice in this section is that you and I have a responsibility. Paul gives us an instruction...a battle plan... and he repeats himself so we know he means it: *Put on all of God's armor...put on every piece of God's armor...*

God has given us a strategy to fight—God has resourced us with what we need to defeat our enemy. We have a role, a job, a task. God doesn't put the armor on for us.

He makes it available...but He doesn't put it on us. We must do that. We must make the decision, take the time, make the effort, prioritize, realize the importance of living in His strength and strapping ourselves into His armor.

We have to tap His strength and get dressed in His battle gear...but one other key is necessary to defeating our enemy. ***We must know who he is.***

It is always tougher to fight well and win a battle when you a) don't know your enemy and/or b) can't see him. To win, you have to know who you are fighting and it helps to see them for what they are.

I love to wrestle with my kids. One thing they love to do is jump on me when I don't see them coming. Nothing brings my boys more joy than surprising (and hurting) their dad by jumping on me, knees first, when I don't see them coming.

Paul wants us to see our enemy coming. He identifies him (and his forces) and gives us our equipment to battle so that we can *stand firm against all strategies of the devil...* **Notice this- the devil has strategies to defeat you.** Folks, we've got to wake up and realize that there are spiritual battles being waged all around us and you, I, we are being attacked. The devil and his levels of demons (this is what vs. 12 is referring to) are on the warpath.

Peter warns his readers (1 Peter 5:8):

*Stay alert! Watch out for your great enemy, the devil. He prowls around like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour.*

Jesus was aware of this spiritual battle. He loved His disciples so much that He prayed for them in John 14:15. He said: *I'm not asking you to take them out of the world, but to keep them safe from the evil one.*

Jesus knew that the intention of the Evil One is to devour. I find that a lot of Satan's schemes can be described in words that begin with "D". He wants to **destroy**. He wants to **disrupt** your plans for good for God. He wants to **discourage** you in your life and mission. He wants to **distract** you from loving God and people with all the attractive things of the world. He wants you to **distrust/doubt** God. He wants you **depressed**. He wants you to **disobey**... We could go on...

***Application:***

**A. Have you thought about the spiritual components to your life battles?**

- When you are in tension with a loved one... *Satan wants to destroy peace.*
- When you are frustrated or facing obstacles or setbacks to your dreams or plans you are trying to work out for God... *Satan wants to distract you... he wants you to give up...he wants to get you out of the game.*

**B. Are you ready to strap on God's armor? The goal is to resist the enemy in the time of evil.**

**God's promise:** *Then after the battle you will still be standing firm*

### 3. God Gives Us Resources For “Operation Spiritual Victory”.

Every war or significant operation within a war has a name. Our response to 9/11 became known in the Defense Department as the “Global War On Terror” (changed in 2009 by the Obama Administration to the “Overseas Contingency Operation”). Part of this effort has been Operation Enduring Freedom – Afghanistan and Operation Iraqi Freedom.

You and I are in a spiritual battle every day. Here is God’s plan for “**Operation Spiritual Victory**”. He has given us His power. He has unveiled our real enemy. And, He has equipped us with defensive equipment and an arsenal that is powerful enough to thwart the devils’ best efforts to distract you from God’s way, discourage you from God’s peace and hope, and derail you from fulfilling God’s agenda.

Think about Paul as he is writing this. He’s in prison with Roman soldiers as guards all around him. He’s looking for a word picture to communicate God’s defensive and offensive strategies against the devil. The soldier’s battle gear is the perfect illustration!

*<sup>14</sup> Stand your ground, putting on the belt of truth and the body armor of God’s righteousness. <sup>15</sup> For shoes, put on the peace that comes from the Good News so that you will be fully prepared. <sup>16</sup> In addition to all of these, hold up the shield of faith to stop the fiery arrows of the devil. <sup>17</sup> Put on salvation as your helmet, and take the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.*

- **The “belt of truth”:**

In the Roman dress, the belt held everything together. Without it certain parts wouldn’t be supported and would fall off. It is like Paul is saying that truthfulness, or integrity in everything, is essential to build the trust of others and please God. Paul shares this in other places in Ephesians.

**Ephesians 4:15** *Instead, we will speak the truth in love, growing in every way more and more like Christ, who is the head of his body, the church.*

**Ephesians 4:25** *So stop telling lies. Let us tell our neighbors the truth, for we are all parts of the same body.*

Paul could have been emphasizing truth for a variety of reasons. We must be truthful in our relationships. Healthy relationships are built on complete trust—that we can trust our friends are being completely honest with us.

But, Paul is also talking about the importance of truth to our faith. We must know God’s truth. We must be able to apply it to life’s situations and circumstances. We must be able to explain it to other people. God’s truth keeps us from being influenced by evil and drawn away from God’s plan by Satan’s lies or bad theology.

- **The “body armor of God’s righteousness”:**  
Body armor protects a soldier’s most vital organs. This has all sorts of possible applications.
  - God’s righteousness **gives us peace with God**. Satan can never mess that up. We have unlimited access to God through prayer.
  - God has given you His righteousness. You can know **you are forgiven**- there is no condemnation.

#### **Romans 4**

*<sup>5</sup> But people are counted as righteous, not because of their work, but because of their faith in God who forgives sinners. <sup>6</sup> David also spoke of this when he described the happiness of those who are declared righteous without working for it:*

*<sup>7</sup> “Oh, what joy for those  
whose disobedience is forgiven,  
whose sins are put out of sight.*

*<sup>8</sup> Yes, what joy for those  
whose record the LORD has cleared of sin.”<sup>[b]</sup>*

- **We have been accepted** as righteous- **we must accept others!**
- There should be no conflict with others as we have been forgiven and accepted- we must do the same for others.
- When we live righteously- we avoid the natural consequences of sin, the disruption in our relationship with Jesus, and the guilt associated with going against God’s plan.

Righteousness saves us from all kinds of pain!

#### **Ephesians 4:1**

*<sup>1</sup> Therefore I, a prisoner for serving the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of your calling, for you have been called by God.*

- **The shoes of “peace that comes from Good News”:**  
We’ve already said that God’s blessings in salvation are peace with Him and peace with others. But- think about shoes...shoes are for protecting your feet while moving. Shoes move us forward. This piece of the battle gear (along with the sword) is also an offensive weapon. God’s peace that comes from the Good News is what we want to advance with our lives.

#### **Isaiah 52:7**

*How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of the messenger who brings good news, the good news of peace and salvation, the news that the God of Israel reigns.*

***Are you sharing God’s peace by sharing the Good News with others?***

- **The “shield of faith”:**

The shield is for defending against fiery arrows shot at the soldier from a distance or blows from a sword up close. The shield is mobile and can be placed anywhere in front of the body to protect.

Our faith in God and in God’s truth, righteousness and peace (that we’ve already talked about) is our protection. Satan will try to shoot arrows of life that lead us to want to doubt God’s goodness, God’s perfect plan, God’s love for us. He will shoot arrows that cause us to be cautious about stepping out in faith and risking for God or moving forward with the Gospel of peace.

We must move forward in life by faith. We must protect the vitality of our relationship with God through faith. We must protect the vibrancy of our service for God through faith.

**Psalm 33:20**

*We put our hope in the LORD. He is our help and our shield.*

- **The “helmet of salvation”:**

The helmet protect our head. It protects our central operating system- our brain. It protects where we think and feel and where all stimulation for forward movement comes from.

God’s salvation bring peace with God and fellow believers for today. It gives us purpose for living. But, it also brings hope for the future. It also brings the assurance that what we see now is only for a time. What we have to look forward to for eternity with Jesus pushes us forward in life and God’s work.

- **The “sword of the Spirit”:**

This is our main offensive weapon- the powerful sword of the Spirit. The sword God uses to convict us and thwart the efforts of Satan is His Word.

**Hebrews 4:12-13**

*For the word of God is alive and powerful. It is sharper than the sharpest two-edged sword, cutting between the soul and spirit, between joint and marrow. It exposes our innermost thoughts and desires.*

Jesus modeled for us that the best strategy to defeat temptation and Satan’s other schemes is to know and apply God’s Word to our lives. We must also help others know and understand how God’s Word applies to their lives.

***Are you reading and studying God’s Word?*** Illustration: 21 Day Fast.