

# Spiritual Warfare



# Spiritual Warfare

A BIBLICAL AND BALANCED PERSPECTIVE

Brian S. Borgman  
and  
Rob Ventura



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*Spiritual Warfare*

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# Contents

Foreword by Steven J. Lawson . . . . .	vii
Preface . . . . .	ix
Acknowledgments . . . . .	xi
Introduction: One Side of the Horse or the Other . . . . .	1
1. Be Strong in the Lord . . . . .	7
2. Put On the Full Armor of God . . . . .	15
3. The Schemes of the Devil . . . . .	23
4. The Nature of Our Conflict . . . . .	33
5. The Belt of Truth . . . . .	41
6. The Breastplate of Righteousness . . . . .	49
7. The Gospel of Peace Footwear . . . . .	59
8. The Shield of Faith . . . . .	65
9. The Helmet of Salvation . . . . .	73
10. The Sword of the Spirit . . . . .	79
11. Warfare Prayer . . . . .	87
12. Warfare Prayer and Proclamation . . . . .	97
13. Spiritual Warfare Debriefing . . . . .	105
Appendix 1: The Sovereignty of God and Satan . . . . .	111
Appendix 2: Can a Christian Be Demon-Possessed? . . . . .	117
Appendix 3: Christian, Pray for Your Pastors! . . . . .	121



## Foreword

The Christian life is not a playground. Rather, it is a battlefield of spiritual warfare. The closer we follow the Lord Jesus Christ, the more we advance to the front line of the conflict. This is the sobering reality that confronts every believer. No Christian can afford to be ignorant of the threatening schemes of spiritual combat, not when so dangerous an enemy is seeking the destruction of our faith. It is critical that we be well informed regarding Satan, who prowls about as a roaring lion seeking someone to devour.

There are three formidable foes with which we contend—the world, the flesh, and the devil. *The world* refers to the evil system around us that is opposed to God. *The flesh* is our old nature that is likewise opposed to God and can do nothing to please Him. *The devil* is a fallen angel who presides over the kingdom of darkness. Satan's strategy is to use the world and the flesh to throw our Christian lives into devastation. The moment a person is converted to Christ, he begins to meet opposition from the devil in his Christian life. His faith is constantly under attack. No believer is exempt from this warfare as a conscientious objector who can escape being drafted. Every disciple of Christ is thrown into this arena of conflict.

It is for this reason that I am grateful for this book, *Spiritual Warfare: A Biblical and Balanced Perspective*, by Brian Borgman and Rob Ventura. These two authors have done an excellent job of expounding Ephesians 6:10–20 regarding what every Christian must implement as one enlisted into active service. With theological precision and pastoral care, Borgman and Ventura carefully handle the biblical text as they apply this key passage to the lives of their readers. I believe you will be greatly profited by this book as you read it—and more than that, live it.

May the Lord use this work for the strengthening of believers as they wrestle against the forces of darkness. To God be the glory for the decisive victory He gives to His faithful soldiers.

*Soli Deo Gloria,*  
Steven J. Lawson  
senior pastor  
Christ Fellowship Baptist Church  
Mobile, Alabama



## Preface

If we were on a battlefield in Iraq or Afghanistan and forgot we were in war, we would be dead in no time. Awareness and vigilance are critical for survival. It is sad that we, as followers of Jesus, so easily forget that we are in a war—an invisible war, but a real one nonetheless.

This book is the effort of two pastors who want to remind the church of this war. It is our desire to help Christians to be equipped and to think and fight biblically in a practical way. What would our churches and families look like if we took the spiritual fight seriously? What would our marriages look like if we remembered that our battle is not against flesh and blood? What would our evangelism look like if we were wide-awake to the battle that rages? It is our prayer that the Holy Spirit will use this book to encourage and equip the church to be strong in the Lord and the power of His might.

— Brian Borgman

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My good friend and mentor, Pastor Jim Domm, always says, “The Christian life is like standing on the head of a pin. You can easily fall off in any direction.” As a pastor who believes these words to be true, I have always tried to expound various biblical subjects with proportionate theological precision in order to assist God’s people in being spiritually balanced in their walk with the Lord.

One subject in the Word of God that individuals have often handled with imbalance is the topic of spiritual warfare. While teachers on the subject have emphasized certain elements, unfortunately, they have frequently omitted key components, leaving Christians

either ill equipped or ignorant for this great fight of all fights. I pray that what I have contributed to this book accurately reflects the whole counsel of God to the end that His great Name may be praised and His people genuinely helped on their way to heaven.

— Rob Ventura

# Acknowledgments

## *Brian Borgman*

A Nevadan and a Rhode Islander (originally a Long Islander) collaborating on a book is a display of the diversity in the body of Christ! I thank Rob Ventura for his love and enthusiasm for Christ and His people and their good, as evidenced by his contribution to this book.

I thank God for the faithful saints of Grace Community Church, who love Christ, His Word, and one another. Remember, we are in this battle together!

To my fellow elders: I thank God that we fight side by side in prayer and the ministry of the Word.

I also want to thank my former professor Clinton Arnold, who was one of the first to teach me how serious this war is.

To my wife, Ariel, also known as Wonder Woman, I am proud of you and thankful that I am in this battle with you.

I affectionately dedicate this book to my parents, Steve and Linda Borgman, who were in Christ before me. I love both of you and thank God for you.

## *Rob Ventura*

Brian, it has been a joy coauthoring this book with you. Working with you and learning from what you have written have truly blessed my soul.

Jack Buckley, my co-pastor: Thanks for all that you do to make my writing the best it can be. Your work is outstanding and has been a true help to me.

In addition, I want to thank D. Scott Meadows and my son Joshua Ventura, who both had a part in making very valuable edits to my rough drafts. I greatly thank you for your diligent labors.

Thank you, Rob Freire, for reading through the entire manuscript and making excellent changes and corrections throughout. Your attention to detail is much appreciated.

Dr. Robert Burrelli, Michael Ives, Jim Sole, Tony Vuolo, and Mark Slater read the entire final draft and provided helpful feedback. Brothers, I thank you for taking time out of your busy schedules to do this.

To the congregation that I pastor in Rhode Island, Grace Community Baptist Church: What I have contributed to this book comes from a series of consecutive expository sermons that I preached to you on the subject at hand. Thank you for your warm reception of that material.

Special thanks to Reformation Heritage Books. Your commitment to the Word of God and to publishing Christ-centered, God-honoring literature makes collaborating a true delight. Particular thanks to Dr. Joel Beeke, Jay Collier, Steve Renkema, David Woollin, and Annette Gysen. You are all dear co-laborers in the Lord.

Finally, my cherished family: I thank you for freely sacrificing your time with me so that I could write this book. I love you all very much.

I dedicate this book to all of the spiritual soldiers in Jesus' army throughout the world. Continue to fight the good fight of faith knowing that "the God of peace will crush Satan under your feet shortly. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. Amen" (Rom. 16:20).

## INTRODUCTION

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# One Side of the Horse or the Other

Living the Christian life is not merely about mastering one truth or even a set of principles. Rather, it is learning to think and act biblically. We must be reminded of certain truths frequently so that we don't become unbalanced or myopic in our view of the Christian life. One such truth is that we are in a war of the most serious nature, and that war is not with flesh and blood but against spiritual forces of darkness. This vital truth ought to shape our worldview. Unfortunately, some Christians almost completely ignore the reality of this war. Others, however, seem to give it far more attention than Scripture does. There is certainly a danger in both extremes. C. S. Lewis makes precisely this point in his famous work *The Screwtape Letters*: "There are two equal and opposite errors into which our race can fall about the devils. One is to disbelieve in their existence. The other is to believe, and to feel an excessive and unhealthy interest in them. They themselves are equally pleased by both errors and hail a materialist or a magician with the same delight."<sup>1</sup> Making a similar observation, Martin Luther once noted that Christians are often like a drunk trying to get on his horse. First, the drunk falls off one side, only to climb back up and fall off the other side. Given the stakes in this war, we cannot afford to fall off either side.

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1. C. S. Lewis, preface to *The Screwtape Letters* (New York: MacMillan Company, 1944), 9.

## THE TWO EXTREMES

Since the eighteenth-century Enlightenment, the worldview of the West has grown increasingly closed to the supernatural. Consequently, many people today deny a world that God governs in which the devil and his demons are our enemies. This worldview is called *naturalism*. In this view, everything has a natural cause, and nothing exists beyond what we can see with our eyes. The biblical worldview, however, clashes with naturalism and not only embraces a sovereign God who rules over His world and the events of our lives but also acknowledges Satan and demons. As Christians, we might have a biblical worldview in certain areas, but perhaps our perspective is more naturalistic than we realize. When we adopt this perspective, we view the universe as closed and leave little room for the supernatural. Although we may give credence to God's providence, the spiritual and supernatural do not factor in much in the way we view everyday life.

In contrast, proponents of the other extreme treat spiritual warfare as the lens through which they perceive everything. Those who hold to this view attribute virtually everything that happens to demonic activity and spiritual warfare. This worldview is built more upon fictional books and movies than the Bible. David Powlison notes, "A great deal of fiction, superstition, fantasy, nonsense, nuttiness, and downright heresy flourishes in the church under the guise of 'spiritual warfare' in our time."<sup>2</sup>

Some false teachings include demon-possessed Christians,<sup>3</sup> formulas for exorcisms, binding the devil,<sup>4</sup> rebuking demons, and mapping their physical location. Many of these ideas have little or no biblical foundation; in fact, in the central New Testament passage

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2. David Powlison, *Power Encounters: Reclaiming Spiritual Warfare* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995), 13.

3. See appendix 2 of this book for a discussion of whether Christians can be demon-possessed.

4. In Ephesians 6:11, the apostle Paul writes, "Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil." If we could bind the devil, why would Paul call us to put on the whole armor of God to stand against him?

on spiritual warfare (Eph. 6:10–20), the apostle Paul makes no mention of any of these things. What they all lack is solid scriptural footing, and while many people throughout the ages have attempted to build doctrinal skyscrapers on such chicken coop foundations, these structures inevitably fall under their own weight. Their end is like that of the man who builds his house upon the sand, only to have it destroyed by rain, floods, and wind (Matt. 7:25–27). The personal ramifications are tragic.

Doctrinal excesses like those just described often lead to an imbalance in the Christian life that magnifies one aspect of biblical truth to the minimization or exclusion of the rest of Scripture. These imbalances often result in the eclipsing or ignoring of such biblical truths as the believer's responsibility for his or her own actions, remaining sin in the Christian, the character-changing power of the Spirit, and the centrality of the gospel. The danger here is not that we might neglect spiritual warfare but that we develop a truncated view of the Christian life in which we wrongly blame Satan and demons for every problem we face. If we are to live sound and stable lives as believers, then we desperately need a biblically balanced understanding of spiritual realities and the spiritual warfare to which God calls us. Anything else will be disastrous.

## **THE BIBLICAL HISTORY OF SPIRITUAL WARFARE**

Spiritual warfare has existed from the beginning of human history. The events leading to the fall of Adam in the garden were the inception of the battle.<sup>5</sup> Satan twisted God's Word, challenged His authority, and lied to our first parents. After the fall, God promised continued warfare and ultimate victory. God said to the serpent,

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5. Such passages as Isaiah 14:12–14; Ezekiel 28:12–19; Luke 10:18; Jude 6; and Revelation 12:9–12 seem to indicate that the devil was originally created as a perfect angelic being that dwelt in heaven with God, yet was removed from this lofty estate with a third of his angels because of their rebellion. For further discussion of this topic, see Wayne Grudem's *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 412–14.

And I will put enmity  
Between you and the woman,  
And between your seed and her Seed;  
He shall bruise your head,  
And you shall bruise His heel. (Gen. 3:15)

The struggle between the serpent and the woman would continue with their seed. Finally, the serpent would have a bruised head (a fatal blow), and the seed of the woman would have a bruised heel (an injury), but not permanently. Theologians call this the *protoevangelion*, “the first gospel.” The seed of the woman is ultimately Jesus Christ. Although there would be a battle between those who follow Satan, such as Cain, and those who follow God, such as Abel (1 John 3:10–12), and there would be a battle between Satan and those who follow Jesus (1 Peter 5:8; Rev. 12:6–17), the ultimate battle would be between Satan and Christ (Rev. 12:1–5). Part of Christ’s mission when He came to earth was to overthrow the work of the kingdom of darkness.

But Jesus knew their thoughts, and said to them: “Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation, and every city or house divided against itself will not stand. If Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself. How then will his kingdom stand? And if I cast out demons by Beelzebul, by whom do your sons cast them out? Therefore they shall be your judges. But if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, surely the kingdom of God has come upon you. Or how can one enter a strong man’s house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man? And then he will plunder his house.” (Matt. 12:25–29)

Every time Jesus cast out a demon, healed the sick, or raised the dead, He was assaulting the kingdom of darkness. Jesus was entering the strong man’s house, binding him with His superior strength, and plundering his stolen property. We see this, for example, when He freed the woman who had a demonically induced disability for eighteen years. The synagogue ruler objected to the healing since it was on the Sabbath; however, Jesus responded, “Ought not this woman, being a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan has



bound—think of it—for eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the Sabbath?” (Luke 13:16).

Jesus’ ultimate overthrow of Satan, however, took place at the cross. Certainly, the work of Jesus on the cross is multifaceted. There are so many dimensions to His redemptive work that we cannot narrow it to one truth. However, one aspect that we cannot overlook is that at the cross, Jesus was stripping Satan of his power and performing the ultimate rescue operation.

Now My soul is troubled, and what shall I say? “Father, save Me from this hour”? But for this purpose I came to this hour. Father, glorify Your name.

Then a voice came from heaven, saying, “I have both glorified it and will glorify it again.”

Therefore the people who stood by and heard it said that it had thundered. Others said, “An angel has spoken to Him.”

Jesus answered and said, “This voice did not come because of Me, but for your sake. Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be cast out.” (John 12:27–31)

The cross was an act of judgment evicting the ruler of this world. Years later, the apostle John would reflect on the incarnation and death of Jesus with these words: “For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil” (1 John 3:8). According to John, this means that part of our salvation experience is deliverance from Satan’s power and kingdom.

Having disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it. (Col. 2:15)

Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage. (Heb. 2:14–15)

Now, as followers of Jesus, we live in the tension of the “already” and the “not yet” (a subject we will discuss in detail in chapter 2). That is, we have been delivered from Satan’s dominion through the finished work of Christ, yet we still battle. Part of our struggle in

this life is that we must fight against Satan and his forces in the world. One day our victory in Christ will be fully realized: “The God of peace will crush Satan under your feet shortly” (Rom. 16:20). But until that time, we must keep in mind the following truth: we are wrestling not against human beings but spiritual powers (Eph. 6:12). Scripture commands us, therefore, to be alert because our enemy the devil is seeking to devour us (1 Peter 5:8).

How we think about this battle is critical to how we fight it. We cannot emphasize enough the significance of Ephesians 6:10–20, which is the basis of this book. This classic passage gives us a biblical framework for spiritual warfare. On the one hand, it frees us from the misconception of a closed, naturalistic worldview that understates our spiritual battle. On the other hand, it provides us with a sane approach that avoids overstating it as well. This text gives us a perspective on spiritual warfare that can dramatically shape our daily lives, showing us how to engage rightly in this great war.

Our approach in this book is straightforward. We will present what Paul says about fighting this fight in Ephesians 6:10–20. Along the way, we will explain each piece of armor and practically apply its truth to our lives. Our primary focus will not be Satan, but Christ, who is the victor over all.

### **FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION**

1. When we consider the subject of spiritual warfare, what are the two extremes we need to avoid? Why might we gravitate toward either of the extremes?
2. How have you fallen off the horse on one side or the other (as Martin Luther put it)? What truths will keep you from falling off?
3. What do you find encouraging about the history of this spiritual war?
4. What area of your thinking or living was directly challenged by this history?

## Be Strong in the Lord

*Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might.*

— EPHESIANS 6:10

Our first step in successfully waging spiritual warfare is recognizing our weakness and the Lord's great strength. Self-sufficiency is a killer in this battle; dependence on Christ is crucial. Ephesians 6:10–20 repeatedly reminds us of our insufficiency for this fight. We need strength (v. 10), weaponry (vv. 11; 14–17), and lines of communication with our Savior for aid (vv. 18–20). These means are external to us. Without them, we have inadequate strength to stand against principalities, powers, the rulers of the darkness, and spiritual hosts of wickedness. Left to ourselves we would soon crumble in the heat of battle. We are simply deficient for the task. However, God loves His people and never leaves them defenseless.

As we now consider Ephesians 6:10, attempting to clarify its meaning and apply its truths, let's consider this verse in its overall context. The book of Ephesians divides neatly into two parts. The first is a doctrinal foundation, and the second builds on that foundation with practical application of those doctrines to the life of the church. This follows Paul's typical pattern in his writings: the indicative (a declaration of what God has done in Christ) followed by the imperative (what we are to do in response). Paul's practical application begins in Ephesians 4:1 and reaches its climax in 6:10–20, a cosmic perspective on the Christian life with the believer engaged in spiritual warfare.

As Paul draws his letter to a close, he begins this new section with the word finally. We should find it interesting that the crowning section of the epistle, this grand finale, focuses on spiritual warfare. It is significant that the apostle cannot end this letter, which he has filled with so many magnificent truths, without instructing his readers about the great ongoing threat they face. In order for us to understand why he ends on this note, we need to know something about the Ephesians and their city, Ephesus.

### EPHESUS, THE SPIRITUAL CITY

Ephesus was a thriving metropolis on the west coast of Asia Minor, ranking alongside Rome and Alexandria as a major Roman city. According to legend, Amazons (giant female warriors) founded the city. This well-known legend influenced Ephesian culture religiously and socially. The population of Ephesus was estimated at more than 250,000 in the first century, which made it the third largest city in the empire. An advanced city, it boasted an amphitheater that held twenty-four thousand people, baths, gymnasiums, and a medical training school. It also hosted the *Koina Asias*, the common games of Asia. Beyond its sophistication and technological development, it was also a spiritual city. The chief religion of Ephesus was the cult of Artemis Ephesia (Greek name) or Diana of Ephesus (Roman name).

The Artemis cult was predominant throughout Asia Minor. The *Artemosian*, the temple that housed the multibreasted figure of Artemis, was constructed of marble and measured 93,500 square feet. Each of its 127 marble columns stood sixty feet high. The temple was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. Clinton Arnold explains, “The worshipers of Artemis extolled their goddess as supreme in power, a ‘cosmic’ power that was believed to be superior to that of any other deity, astrological fate, and evil spirits.”<sup>1</sup>

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1. Clinton E. Arnold, *Ephesians Power and Magic: The Concept of Power in Ephesians in Light of Its Historical Context* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992), 39.

Ephesus was also the center for magical practices. Bruce Metzger notes, “Of all ancient Greco-Roman cities, Ephesus was by far the most hospitable to magicians, sorcerers, and charlatans of all sorts.”<sup>2</sup> The famous *Ephesia Grammata* (Ephesian letters) were words written on amulets that the people used as charms, believing that they brought protection from the powers (evil spirits) or gave them help in times of distress or need. Furthermore, Jewish involvement in power and magic was pervasive.<sup>3</sup>

When Paul arrived in Ephesus, an event recorded in Acts 19, he found a metropolis trafficking in the occult and the powers of darkness. The Ephesians lived with a worldview that was completely open to supernaturalism. Magic, demons, and spiritual power were very real to them, and many were involved in occult practices. Paul ministered there for three months in the synagogue and two years in the school of Tyrannus (Acts 19:8–10). During this time, the word of the Lord was shining forth in Ephesian darkness. Many were coming to faith in Jesus and repenting of their sorceries: “And many who had believed came confessing and telling their deeds. Also, many of those who had practiced magic brought their books together and burned them in the sight of all. And they counted up the value of them, and it totaled fifty thousand pieces of silver. So the word of the Lord grew mightily and prevailed” (Acts 19:18–20).

In Ephesus, the gospel began to have a serious impact on the religious scene. The city was so deeply committed to Diana, both religiously and commercially, that when people were converted and stopped buying idols, a riot broke out because of the loss of revenue (Acts 19:21–41). This riot happened just as Paul was planning to leave the city. By this time he had ministered three years among these Ephesian believers (Acts 20:31). He knew them well, and he knew their struggles. Since it is common for believers to deeply

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2. Quoted in Arnold, *Ephesians Power and Magic*, 14.

3. Dr. Clinton Arnold, a leading New Testament scholar and expert on Ephesian spirituality, has detailed these practices. Arnold’s *Ephesians Power and Magic* is his academic work on the subject; *Powers of Darkness* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1992) is his popular treatment of the subject.

regret their wicked lives before Christ rescued them, it could be that their occultist pasts were haunting some converted Ephesians. Perhaps they even lived in fear of the spiritual powers with which they had been acquainted.

As we come to Ephesians 6:10–20, we see that the apostle does not dismiss the realities of the powers, like a parent reassuring a child that there really is not a monster under his bed. Rather, he validates spiritual realities and equips the believers for the battle at hand.

### **SUMMARY EXHORTATION: “BE STRONG IN THE LORD”**

Paul’s command to “be strong” means literally “be strengthened, or be made powerful.” Paul has good reason to begin this section of his letter this way. As soldiers in Jesus’ army, we will face many battles and hardships on our way to heaven. At times, we will feel besieged and utterly exhausted. We will keenly feel temptation and suffer battle wounds. Therefore, we must be provoked to pursue spiritual strength and power. A feeble or cowardly disposition in spiritual warfare will be detrimental to our success. It will cause us to regress. In light of this, Paul calls us to be mighty men. He wants us to enter this battle courageously and with great hope. This call to be strong is a constant one in Scripture. As Joshua was commanded to “be strong and of good courage,” or to be “very courageous” (Josh. 1:6, 7, 9) and David “strengthened himself in the LORD his God” (1 Sam. 30:6), we must do the same.<sup>4</sup> If we would triumph in our walk with Christ as we engage in spiritual battle, we must seriously heed this exhortation.

Paul’s charge to “be strong” is in the passive voice in the original Greek, which means that this empowering is something that is done to us from an outside source. This tells us that we dare not look to ourselves for strength in this combat. We do not draw stamina for spiritual battle from within or by flexing our muscles from without. Rather, Paul calls us specifically to be “strong *in the Lord*.” Here is

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4. In addition to these references, see 1 Corinthians 16:13 and 2 Timothy 2:1.

where we find our strength—in the Son of God Himself. What a glorious thought! Paul points us to Christ as the all-sufficient source of our strength, who, by His mighty power, gives us all that we lack. As believers we can do all things through Christ who strengthens us (Phil. 4:13).

But there are other nuggets of truth in these words. The command “be strong” is also in the present tense, indicating that in Christ we have constant, ongoing supplies of all that we need for spiritual warfare. Jesus is our continual refuge and strength, our very present help in trouble (Ps. 46:1).

Yet what does it mean to be strong in the Lord? In summary, it means to maintain an ongoing awareness that the Lord Jesus has superabundant stores of strength for us, and, as we realize this, we draw from that strength continuously. The idea is that by virtue of our union with Christ, we utilize the strength that is inherent in Him. Our Lord has all we need for warfare. Though we are weak, He is strong, and He perfects His strength in our weakness (2 Cor. 12:9). Therefore, as the battle rages on, we are to look to Him for help, for His “divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness” (2 Peter 1:3).

Paul consistently reminded the Ephesians that the power of God in Christ was available to them, so it should not be surprising that he now calls them to make good use of it. This power is nothing less than the power of Jesus Christ demonstrated in His resurrection and exaltation (Eph. 1:19–20). Since we have been raised with Him and are seated with Him (Eph. 2:6), that power is ours in Him.

We do well to pause and ask ourselves if we are persuaded of this reality concerning our Lord. How we view Him will be a major factor in our regularly going to Him to “obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need” (Heb. 4:16). Never forget that Jesus is no longer the Suffering Servant of Jehovah dying on the cross. Rather, He is the exalted King of heaven and earth reigning on high (1 Cor. 15:20–25)! Jesus is the risen Head of the church who fills “all in all” (Eph. 1:23). He is the One in whom dwells “all the

fullness of the Godhead bodily” (Col. 2:9). We are not to file these truths about Christ in some dusty theological cabinet. Instead, they are to prod us to action. This knowledge about our Lord is to drive us to the One who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think. It should remind us that the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds (2 Cor. 10:4). So avail yourself of this power in Christ (Eph. 3:20–21). Daily cast all your cares upon Him, for He cares for you (1 Peter 5:7).

In Ephesians 6:10, the phrase “and in the power of His might” amplifies and expands what it means to be strong in the Lord. These words take us back to Ephesians 1:17–23, where Paul describes his prayer for the Ephesians:

that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come.

And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.

Here we see Christ’s unrivaled power in His resurrection, ascension, and exaltation. No other power compares with it, and Christ is its great focal point. The Father exerted this divine power in raising Christ from the dead, thereby destroying the inferior power of death. This divine power was subsequently exerted in Christ’s enthronement, resulting in His being seated at the Father’s “right hand in the heavenly places” (1:20). The right hand is the



place of honor, power, victory, and authority. Christ Himself is far above “all principality and power and might and dominion” (1:21). Paul uses these terms to refer to evil spiritual powers in Ephesians 6:12. Christ is also surpassingly above “every name that is named” (1:21). Here, Paul includes those names the unsaved Ephesians invoked in their incantations to harness spiritual powers. The central message of the apostle here is clear: Christ is higher than and far superior to all powers that exist, including every demonic and spiritual power!

Christ as the exalted and enthroned Lord rules over all. The entire spirit world is subject to Him, “not only in this age but also in that which is to come” (1:21). Jesus inaugurated the age to come at His first advent. He will consummate the age to come at His second advent. Christ will reign in the age to come. However, He presently reigns in this age. Murray Harris notably says, “The resurrection proclaims ‘He lives—and that forever’; the exaltation proclaims ‘He reigns—and that forever.’”

Jesus’ resurrection, exaltation, and reign demonstrate the surpassing power vested in His person, and this power is already ours in Him. This is what the apostle says he wants us to be aware of in Ephesians 1:18–23. This omnipotent power conquers all the spiritual forces of every age. There is nothing lacking in it. This power alone will see us through our battles with the devil.

If we have been injured in spiritual battle, we should ask ourselves if we have been relying on the power we possess in Christ. In and of ourselves, we are not fit for this great fight. We do not have the necessary strength or skill to oppose Satan and spiritual forces. We are not as strong as we think; sadly, our experience confirms this. Nevertheless, in spiritual union with the risen Lord, we have His infinite power and strength by faith. Ephesians 6:10 calls us, then, to be humble, dependent warriors constantly going to Christ, the captain of our salvation, for this mighty power. It calls us to recognize our native deficiency and to see His great spiritual sufficiency. This is the essence of Paul’s opening exhortation. Charles Hodge put it this way: “He, therefore, who rushes into this conflict

without thinking of Christ, without putting his trust in him, and without continually looking to him for strength, and regarding himself as a member of his body, deriving all life and vigour from him, *is demented*.... When we are weak, then are we strong. When most empty of self, we are most full of God.”<sup>5</sup>

### FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

1. What parallels do you see between ancient Ephesus and the society in which you live today?
2. In your own words, describe how Ephesians 1:18–21 is relevant for you in your daily battle.
3. The authors say, “Self-sufficiency is a killer in this battle.” Explain how you can fall into a pattern of self-sufficiency. Discuss why this is dangerous and how you can cultivate dependence upon the Lord.
4. Because of all that Christ has gained for us in His life, death, resurrection, and exaltation, what should our attitude be as we engage in spiritual warfare?

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5. Charles Hodge, *Ephesians* (1856; repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1991), 275–76.