

Text: Ephesians 4:22-24; 6:10-18

Title: “Detoxing Your Relationships ... Spiritual Warfare”

SERMON BUMPER – Let’s open our Bibles again to Ephesians 4:22. As you’re turning let me ask you to continue to pray for the Transitional Elder Qualifying Council. The seven of us are diligently seeking the Lord together as we follow up on the many men who were recommended by our members who could potentially serve as elders. As you can well imagine, this first group of seven or eight elders will be crucial for the future of our church and we want to find the men the Lord has set apart for this task. We’ve started interviews of potential candidates so please pray for us.

For the last few weeks we’ve been thinking together about “Detoxing Your Relationships.” We need God to show us by His Word how to keep our relationships healthy. And this all starts with our new life in Christ. **Read Ephesians 4:22-24.**

Now from here through the first part of Ephesians 6 we’re taught how to live out our new life in Christ in our relationships. And then Paul brings it all to a conclusion. **Read Ephesians 6:10-18.**

Perhaps you’ve wondered why relationships are sometimes so hard ... why marriages struggle, why children rebel, why we hurt people and why they hurt us. Part of the answer to that is our own sin nature that can easily poison relationships. On top of that there’s the evil culture (the world) we live in that deceives us. But today I’m here to remind us that we are also in a tremendous spiritual battle. We have an enemy dead set on destroying us and those whom we love. He hates God. He hates you. He hates your family. He hates your church. He opposes everything that Christ is doing in your life and in your relationships.

Interestingly, this passage on spiritual warfare comes right on the heels of Paul’s extensive teaching on marriage in Ephesians 5. In the first part of Ephesians 6 he talks about relationships between fathers and children. Then he talks about the relationships between slaves and their masters. And then he wraps it all up by talking about spiritual warfare ... very important!

Ephesians 6:10-11 – Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes.

Notice that we are commanded to be strong in the Lord. Now that's an interesting command. If you're hanging by your fingers from the roof of this building someone can yell at you all day long, "Hang in there. Be strong," but there will come a point where you just can't. Your fingers will give out. But the command is to "be strong *in the Lord*." Now you can do that. You don't have to hold on; He's holding on to you. The one holding you is strong. So be strong "in his mighty power."

We are to "put on the full armor of God." Spiritual protection for you and your loved ones is not something that is automatic. Through faith and obedience we put it on God's armor. You can either trust your own resources, wisdom and strength, or you can put on the full armor of God.

Notice that the goal is to be able to stand. You don't necessarily have to advance or succeed, just stand. Hold your ground and don't give the enemy any opportunity to advance into your life or your family.

The battle is to stand strong "against the devil's schemes," methods and tactics. You see this back in Ephesians 4:26 where we're commanded to manage our anger. "In your anger do not sin. Don't let the sun go down while you are still angry." And then in v.27 it's, "And do not give the devil a foothold." When anger is out of control in our lives and we have bitterness toward another person we are giving Satan a foothold ... an opportunity to destroy us and our relationships. Paul continues in...

Ephesians 6:12 - For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.

Whether you realize it or not there's a struggle, an intense fight, going on against you. And if you think your problem is simply a wayward child, or a demanding boss, or an unfaithful spouse, or an abusive parent, you are not seeing the full picture. Paul said, "Our struggle is not against flesh and blood (people) ..." Yes, our relationship problems are very real and we have to take responsibility for our sinful choices. But we also have a hateful, violent, abusive spiritual enemy who is constantly trying to outwit us, trip us up and destroy our families.

In fact, we are fighting a whole demonic army. These rulers, authorities, powers and forces of evil in the heavenly realms are various kinds of demonic agents doing the will of their master, Satan. So what are we to do?

Ephesians 6:13 - Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand.

There it is again ... stand your ground. Don't surrender an inch to the enemy. Take up the "*full* armor" ... the complete set of weapons and defenses you need for the battle.

Now Paul is writing from a prison, probably in Rome. He is being guarded by what was called the Pretorian Guard, the most elite of Roman soldiers. They were the Navy Seals, the Special Ops, the Green Berets of the Roman army. As he writes Paul is thinking about how they suit up for battle and how we are to suit up for the spiritual battle. There's a battle raging around you; dress appropriately.

So in order to build and maintain healthy relationships we need to recognize we're in a spiritual battle. Then we must stand strong in this battle through the equipment God gives us for the battle. And what is that equipment. First there's ...

1. TRUTH

Ephesians 6:14 - Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist...

Paul starts in an unlikely place ... the belt. If you were to see a fully outfitted soldier you probably wouldn't walk up and say, "Whoa ... cool belt." But the belt is more important than you might think. A soldier in Paul's day wore a tunic, sort of like a poncho. In hand-to-hand combat he wouldn't want his tunic flapping around entangling his arms or legs, so he had a heavy leather belt to gather the tunic at his waist.

And our belt in battle is truth. We prepare for battle by tightening the belt of truth. And truth here means the knowledge of the truth that is revealed in the Word of God. Having the truth wrapped around you like a belt is one powerful way to keep yourself from getting tangled up in the battle. I'm amazed that men and women, husbands and wives, parents and children think they can get by without having serious time in God's Word on a daily basis. We need the truth of God's Word around us like a belt. The next piece of equipment we have is...

2. RIGHTEOUSNESS

Ephesians 6:14 - Stand firm ... with the breastplate of righteousness in place,

No soldier dared to go into battle without the breastplate. This was a tough, sleeveless piece of armor that covered his upper body and all the vital organs, including the heart. Think of it like a Kevlar vest worn by police officers. And spiritually we protect our heart through righteousness.

First we need the *positional* righteousness that comes through Christ. The Bible says in II Corinthians 5:21 that Christ took our sin upon himself “so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” ... so we can be right with God. With the fierce spiritual battle going on around us this is no time to not be right with God. And from this positional righteousness comes *practical* righteousness. Minute-by-minute and hour-by-hour we live in obedience to our Lord. And that righteousness protects our heart in the battle. But next we need the...

3. GOSPEL

Ephesians 6:15 - and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace.

A soldier never goes into battle wearing flip-flops. Remember the goal in the battle is to stand your ground and that depends on good footing. A good pair of boots enables the soldier to march, climb, fight or whatever else was necessary in battle.

And the Gospel of peace is essential for the spiritual warrior going into battle. The Gospel of peace is the good news that believers are at peace with God through our faith in Christ. And Satan will often attack you at this point. Is God really on your side? Are you really saved? Our confidence in the Gospel of peace enables us to stand our ground in the spiritual battle. The next weapon we need in spiritual warfare is...

4. FAITH

Ephesians 6:16 - In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one.

The shield mentioned here is not like Captain America's shield, about two-feet wide. This would have been a shield that was about the size of a small door. The soldier could hide his entire body behind this shield and be protected from flaming

arrows that were shot his way. Satan's flaming arrows come at us in the form of temptations or discouragement or fear. And our shield against the arrows of his assault is our faith ... our trust and confidence in God. Hold up the shield of faith over your family.

EXAMPLE: I think about the story in the Gospels of the four men who had a sick friend. They knew Jesus could heal him, but there was such a crowd in the house where Jesus was teaching that they couldn't get their friend to Jesus. So they tore a hole in the roof and lowered the man's stretcher down to Jesus. And the Bible says that when Jesus saw "their faith" he forgave the man and healed him. You may be the only one in your family with faith ... but God can move mountains when we trust Him. But we also need...

5. SALVATION

Ephesians 6:17 - Take the helmet of salvation...

The picture here comes right off of the battlefield. When the bullets start flying and the bombs start falling grab your helmet. Of course, the purpose of the helmet is to protect the head and the brain. And our minds are where the battles of life are fought. If Satan can get us to lose hope he can defeat us. And our spiritual helmet is the salvation of God, the victory that God has already won for us.

EXAMPLE – In the OT a king named Jehoshaphat received the news that a great army of enemies was coming against him and the people of God. The king and the people cried out to the Lord and God spoke to them through a prophet who said:

2 Chronicles 20:15 - "Listen, King Jehoshaphat and all who live in Judah and Jerusalem! This is what the LORD says to you: 'Do not be afraid or discouraged because of this vast army. For the battle is not yours, but God's.

He went on to say, "March out to battle, but you will not have to do the fighting. Take up your positions; stand firm and watch for the deliverance of God." The Bible goes on to describe how God threw the enemy armies into such confusion that they turned on one another and destroyed themselves. That's the helmet of salvation, the deliverance of the Lord. But we also need ...

6. SCRIPTURE

Ephesians 6:17 - Take ... the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

This sword is not the big sword like you see Arthur pull out of the stone in “The Sword and the Stone.” This is more like a dagger used in hand-to-hand combat. And the Word of God is like a sword. Yes, as we saw earlier the truth of Scripture is an effective defensive weapon. But the truth of Scripture is primarily an offensive weapon.

Hebrews 4:12a - For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword...

I think about Jesus as He was in the wilderness being tempted for forty days. Satan came at Him time after time with temptations. And each time Jesus answered with Scripture. Satan could not withstand the power of the Word of God. And along with that we need ...

7. PRAYER (v.18)

Now this isn't so much the battle equipment. This is the battle itself. This is where the battle for our lives and our families is won ... in prayer.

Ephesians 6:18 - And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints.

ILLUSTRATION – The movie “War Room” is the powerful story of a prayer warrior named Miss Clara. You have probably seen this clip before. We’ve shown before, but it’s the best way I know to show you what it looks like to go to battle in prayer. Watch this: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_WpfkFyG5qQ