

**Sermon preached by Dr. Neil Smith at Faith Evangelical Presbyterian Church,
Kingstowne, Virginia, on Sunday, August 2, 2015**

**WEAPONS FOR SPIRITUAL WARFARE
PART 1: KNOW YOUR ENEMY**

Ephesians 6:10-18

It has been almost four weeks now since I got my new knee. It has not been the easiest four weeks of my life. In fact, at times it has seemed like the longest four weeks of my life. But the Lord has been with us, and we have made it this far by His amazing, abounding grace. I say “us” and “we,” because Mary Sue has shared every moment of this experience with me, including some moments of which I have no recollection. She has been there to comfort me and care for me in my weakness and pain, to encourage me when I get discouraged about the pain and the process, and to be my counselor, cheerleader, chauffeur, and nurse. She does it all with love. In love. I don’t have words to describe what a gift from God she is to me.

Prior to my surgery, I was planning to be back preaching by today. That was before I knew just how painful and challenging my recovery would be, and how long it might take to actually feel well. When all of that began to dawn on me, I was *not* planning to preach today. Pastor David was going to preach ... until he broke his leg this past week. After which I was once again planning to preach today! So, here I am. And I am glad, by the grace of God, to be able to sit here (in this borrowed director’s chair) to speak to you from God’s Word today.

I want you to look with me at God’s Word this morning from Ephesians 6:10-18. I encourage you to follow along in your Bible, or in the pew Bible, or on your preferred electronic device. Let’s give our full and reverent attention now to the reading of God’s holy Word.

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Most of you, I’m sure, have heard sermons before on “put(ting) on the whole armor of God.” Entire books and volumes of sermons have been published on this Bible passage. One 17th-century Puritan pastor named William Gurnall wrote an exposition of these verses (Ephesians 6:10-20) that, in its final edition, ran to three volumes, 261 chapters, and nearly 1,500 pages!

Fear not, my friends. I’m not planning to do anything of the sort. I simply want to give you an overview of these verses today and next Sunday, in the hope that God will use His Word and these two messages to equip, encourage, and inspire you in the spiritual battles you and I face in this world every day.

It does seem (at least to me) that we are in the midst of an unusually stressful season of testing in our church family, with trials and tribulations and troubles of various kinds piled one on top of another. In addition to the challenges created by my knee replacement and now Pastor David’s broken leg, many of us have been dealing with our own particular “thorns in the flesh” (2 Corinthians 12:7) in the form of illness or injury or hospitalization or surgery. Some of us are facing monumental problems affecting our physical, emotional, material, relational, and spiritual well-being – situations that are way too big for us to handle on our own.

You have probably heard it said that God will not give us more in the way of trouble or hardships than we can handle. Friends, that is *not true*. It is simply *not true*. God does absolutely allow us to experience more problems, more challenges, more tests than we can handle on our own, precisely to show us how much we need Him and the resources of His grace. If God never gave us more than we could handle, we might easily be deceived into thinking we don't need Him. Which is the furthest thing from the truth, since there is not a single moment in life when we are not totally dependent on God and His grace.

Though God allows us to experience trials and troubles and tests – the ordinary and not-so-ordinary difficulties of life – in order to increase our faith and to make us more like Jesus, Satan our adversary seeks to use these tests and trials for his own nefarious purposes: to cause us to doubt God, to prod us to turn away from God and His ways, and even, if he could, to cause us to shipwreck our faith (1 Timothy 1:19-20). But God is faithful (1 Corinthians 1:9), and as we trust Him in the big things and the little things, in the ordinary and not-so-ordinary circumstances of life, we discover that He is able – no, *more than able* – to guard all that He has entrusted to us (our salvation from sin) and all that we have entrusted to Him (our lives) until Jesus returns and makes everything right (2 Timothy 1:12).

That everything is not right in the world is intuitively obvious, isn't it? Think Planned Parenthood and the sale of organs harvested from aborted babies. Think same-sex marriage. Think racially-motivated acts of violence. Think Islamic terrorism. Every day the headlines cry out to us that we are engaged in a war. Not just a traditional kind of war against flesh and blood. Not just against armies or terrorists or political enemies. 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” (Ephesians 6:12) that seek to undo us and to overthrow the kingdom of God. Eugene Peterson says it this way in *The Message*: “This is no afternoon athletic contest that we'll walk away from and forget about in a couple of hours. This is for keeps, a life-or-death fight to the finish against the Devil and all his angels.”

There is a high-stakes spiritual war being waged against the church in the world today. There is a war being waged – a *cultural* war, a *spiritual* war – for the soul of America, a war for millions of souls in America and for billions more around the world. Satan, it seems, is pulling out all the stops. It is not a game. It is deadly serious.

Here is a true story: A father in Minnesota answered the phone one day. It was a friend of his 11-year-old son who said, matter-of-factly, that he was having a problem with spiritual warfare. The father asked what he could do to help, but the boy said he wanted to talk to the man's son. Pleased (and surprised) that his son would be asked for spiritual advice, the father later asked his son how the conversation went. “Fine,” his son replied. “He just needed some help getting to the next level of the Spiritual Warfare (video) game.” (Source: Chris Johnson in [Christian Reader](#))

A video game is not what Paul is writing about. He is writing about real life, not virtual reality. He is writing about a real-life spiritual battle against spiritual forces that must be fought with spiritual weapons. And he gives us the good news that God Himself provides us with the weapons we need in this war.

KNOW THE ENEMY

To be victorious in this (or any) war, you have to know who the enemy is. You have to know who you're fighting against. Make no mistake: Our enemy in this spiritual warfare is the devil himself, Satan, who with his legions of demons is totally opposed to God, totally opposed to the Son of God and His saving work on our behalf, totally opposed to the will and purposes of God, totally opposed to the kingdom of God (wanting to usurp it and possess it as his own), and totally opposed to the people of God. He is totally opposed to the church and totally opposed to each one of us because we belong to God. He is against us because Jesus is for us.

Our enemy, the devil, is the accuser whom Jesus describes in John 8:44 as “a liar and the father of lies.” He has been telling lies ever since he lied to Eve in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3).

Paul describes the devil in Ephesians 2:2 as “the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient.” Peter says of him that he is like a lion on the prowl, looking for someone to devour (1 Peter 5:8).

C. S. Lewis, who brilliantly exposed the ways and wiles of the devil in his classic *The Screwtape Letters*, said there are two equal and opposite errors to guard against in thinking about the devil. On the one hand, we must be careful not to take the devil too seriously. On the other hand, we must be careful not to take him too lightly.

If we take the devil too lightly, it will delight him immensely. Listen to what Bonaventure, a 13th-century Franciscan monk, wrote in his biography of Francis of Assisi: “When you are too sure of yourself, you are less on guard against the enemy. Be alert, therefore, for the devil, who, if he can claim even one hair of your head, will lose no time making a braid of it.”

When you're too sure of yourself and you don't take your enemy seriously enough, you're headed for trouble. Which is what happened to the Union Army at the First Battle of Manassas or Bull Run at the start of the Civil War in July, 1861. The Union troops were overconfident. They acted like they were going out to a baseball game or some other sporting event. Members of Congress, their wives, and all sorts of spectators came out from Washington with their lunch baskets to observe the action. But the courage of the Confederate troops led by General Stonewall Jackson, and the unanticipated arrival of Confederate reinforcements, threw the Union Army into a panic, even though the Union force was superior in size.

The Union Army took the enemy too lightly. Way too lightly. They underestimated the resourcefulness and determination of the Confederate army. They were overconfident and unprepared. The result was that they suffered an embarrassing defeat. The first of many.

The lesson to learn from this is that we dare not make the mistake of taking our enemy the devil too lightly. To do so is to court spiritual disaster. On the other hand, we must not take

the devil too seriously. We must not live in constant fear of the devil or ascribe to him more power than he actually has.

Is the devil real? You bet he is. He is as real as the pew on which you're sitting. He is as real as the shortbread Evan Duncan supplies for our coffee fellowship time Sunday after Sunday. The devil is as real as real can be.

And the devil is as diabolical, as evil, as he can possibly be. Is the devil wily? Is he clever? Is he a master of deception? Does he use every means at his disposal to deceive us and to cut us off from a life of fellowship with God and service to God? Yes, yes, yes, and yes.

Is the devil powerful? Yes, he is. Which is why we must take him seriously and put on the armor God has given us. The devil *is* powerful. But he is not *all-powerful*. *Only God* is all-powerful. *Only God* is omnipotent. The devil is not God's equal, regardless of what he would have us believe. The principalities and powers of which Paul speaks, the spiritual forces of evil of whom Satan is the leader, are strong. But the power of God – the power demonstrated in the resurrection of Jesus Christ after Satan thought he had won the ultimate victory by having Jesus killed – is even greater. Incomparably greater.

Next Sunday we will examine the armor and weaponry God has given us for the spiritual battles we face daily in this life. The good news is that God gives us all we need in order to defeat the devil. The good news is that, through the life and death and resurrection of Jesus Christ our Lord, the devil is already defeated. The good news is that, no matter what comes our way in this life, we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us (Romans 8:37).

Know the enemy, yes. Respect his power, yes. Take him seriously, yes. But don't be frightened by him. Don't let Satan intimidate you. Don't let him throw you into a panic. Why? Because his power is limited. Because he is a defeated foe and he will not prevail. Because, as the Bible says in 1 John 4:4: "Greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world."

Thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.