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Our Great Enemy **Ephesians 6:12-13**

Intro: In this last major section of Paul's letter to the Ephesians, he now brings everything he has previously said to its logical and practical conclusion. After relaying all the important Christian doctrines and truths, after revealing in glorious detail God's gracious plans and purposes for His people, after showing us how we are to live as Spirit-filled believers; Paul now encourages us to be prepared to do battle! Everything that God has done for us in the past; is currently doing in us today and will do through us in the future, will be resisted by the spiritual forces of evil under the direction and control of our great enemy, Satan. In his introduction to this battle, Paul has instructed believers to first: be strengthened in the Lord's power that is made available to us freely and second, put on the whole armor of God. In short, we must be properly fit and properly equipped to fight this unavoidable battle.

12 – Paul introduced the spiritual nature of the struggle that believers face when he exhorted us to stand against the wiles of the devil in v**11**. Here, he provides a more detailed explanation. Notice that Paul is not calling believers to enter into spiritual warfare; he simply announces it as a fact! If you are a Christian, if you have been born again, you will participate in spiritual warfare. There is no need to volunteer because you've already been drafted. The instant you side with Jesus Christ is the instant you stand opposed to Satan and his schemes.

The term wrestle comes from the Greco-Roman sport that was commonly seen in Olympic style games of that era. The strategy of this type of contest was simple: resist what your opponent is attempting to do to you. It was a constant struggle until one participant was declared the victor. The key to victory is to not be the first to give up. When you wrestle a 500 lb gorilla, you don't quit when you get tired, you only quit when the gorilla gets tired. Every Christian is engaged in a spiritual battle. If you are ignorant of this fact or if you simply choose to ignore this fact, you most likely are not winning the battle.

When Paul says that we don't wrestle against flesh and blood he's not

denying that we do at times actually struggle on the human level. It's obvious that we do. What he's saying is that our struggle is not just on that level. We do have a physical, visible struggle. But over and above that, over and above what we see, there is an invisible spiritual struggle going on against the devil and his forces. We all struggle, we all have problems but we do not have the luxury of thinking that it's all about us! True, it may be happening to us but it's more about what God is doing in our lives and how Satan is fighting against the purposes of God.

The fact that our real struggle is not against flesh and blood is forgotten by many Christians who put all their efforts in that direction and end up fighting the wrong enemy. Our battlefield is not in politics, it's not against poverty moral pervasiveness. Our struggle is spiritual in nature and, as such, the weapons we use must also be spiritual. [II Cor 10:3-4](#) reiterates this point quite well. We cannot see the devil or his legions. Yet, if we are to be successful in this battle, we must be alert to the true nature of it and be equipped to use the armor that is needed.

Dr. Michael S. Heiser has done some amazing studies on this subject of the spiritual world. His initial interest was peaked by a clear reading of [Ps 82](#). The Psalm clearly states that there are gods who were condemned by God as being corrupt in their administration of the nations of the earth. Who are these gods, these children of the Most High and what is their purpose? We see glimpses of them in other OT passages like [Job 38:7](#) that says "the morning stars sang and the sons of God shouted for joy" when God laid the foundations of the earth in Creation. In the ancient Semitic world, *beney elohim* (sons of God) is a phrase used to identify divine beings with higher-level responsibilities or jurisdictions. The term angel (*mal'ak*) describes an important but still lesser task: delivering messages.

Even before Creation, God has company, other divine beings: the sons of God. They're created beings themselves but they are divine (celestial), not human. They witnessed Creation before there were people. They're intelligent nonhumans. The term "sons" indicates that they are part of God's celestial household, just as Adam and Eve constituted God's terrestrial household in the Garden of Eden. It seems that their purpose is to compose a celestial council which God oversees. The workings of this council appears in [I Kings 22](#) when evil King Ahab summons the prophet Micaiah to prophecy concerning his upcoming battle against the Syrians at Ramoth-

Gilead. Micaiah then explains what he saw take place within this divine council before God's throne (19-23).

There are other appearances of these entities in the OT. Dan 4 refers to one of them as a watcher, a term for a divine being (or holy one). In the majority of the passages referring to these created celestial beings their holiness is implied but it is clear from Ps 82 that not all of these beings retained that holy status. Obviously, some had fallen away and had become corrupt and as such, were facing the just judgment of their Creator, a holy God. The specifics of these entities is not made plain in Scripture but God's Word provides enough evidence for us to understand that the spiritual world is real and that it has existed long before our physical world has been around.

After informing us of what our struggle is not, Paul then draws back the curtain of our physical dimension to reveal the true spiritual reality behind whatever battles and struggles we may face. Our enemies are not human flesh and blood; they can't be seen or touched or experienced. Our real enemies are cosmic powers who dwell in heavenly places. Paul uses a variety of terms to refer to our spiritual enemies without providing any specific details. Some see them as being on different levels and possessing different ranks, yet they all have one goal: to knock the Christian down from their place of standing.

It's interesting the way Paul repeats the word against in this sentence. It's not the way one is supposed to write. If a modern editor had gotten hold of Paul's manuscript, they would have deleted the repetitions. But Paul knew exactly what he was doing when he repeated that word; and the Holy Spirit had His own clear purpose when He directed the writing. It's a way of emphasizing that in the warfare of the Christian life, Christians are really "up against it." It's not just a string of things that we should be concerned about. There are our enemies and we must fight against them. We must fight against the principalities, against the powers, against the rulers of this dark world, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.

How are we to understand the nouns that occur in this passage? Some have taken them as if they are ranks in Satan's army. This may be true but it seems that Paul is simply using terms that put the powers arrayed against us together into one united front of evil. The distinction isn't necessarily between the supposed levels of demonic authority but rather between the

various areas of life over which they exert an evil influence.

When Paul talks about principalities, he's thinking about the devil's control over certain regions. A human principality governs a certain territory. Apparently, demons also operate in that way. In fact, they'd have to because, unlike God, they're not omnipresent. They aren't everywhere at once as God is. They're finite creatures, though of great power; so they must be in one place or another (regionally [Dan 10](#)). That's why in some areas of the world the power of Satan is very strong and obvious. In other places, mostly where the gospel has gone, it's comparatively weaker.

What about powers (authorities)? Authority isn't the same thing as rule. Authority has to do with values. When Paul speaks of powers he's saying that the values of our culture, or any specific territory, are demonically controlled. We need to see that the dominant values of our culture—the me first philosophy, pleasure for its own sake, materialism, etc.—are not Christian values but are controlled and manipulated by Satan for his own base ends. We're to be at war against them. Rulers concerns control. So the rulers are those who control what people think and do like the secular media, which control so much of our contemporary moral philosophy. But, it's not just the media but the powers that stand behind even these very powerful figures. The "spiritual hosts of wickedness" mainly refers to the evil of this spiritual control. It's possible to have a holy, beneficent power. In fact, that power exists. It's the power of God in which the Christian is encouraged to be strengthened ([10](#)). But the spiritual forces against which we struggle are not holy or beneficent. They are wicked and destructive.

Now, [v11](#) tells us that all of our warfare is focused on combating the wiles of the devil. At the end of the day, it is completely irrelevant if the particular enemy we face is a principality, a power or a ruler of the darkness of this age. Collectively, they are all members of the spiritual hosts of wickedness; they are all part of the spiritual army that organized and established into ranks and is under the leadership of Satan who directs them against us. I can safely say that I seriously doubt any of us in this room (or anyone we know) has ever been directly attacked by Satan. But, that isn't necessary, of course, because he has a cadre of evil subjects who are ready and willing to do his bidding.

While Paul doesn't provide much detail on these evil entities here, we can

learn more about them from other NT passages. **Rom 8:38** tells us these entities cannot separate us from the love of God. This means there's a limit to their power. **Eph 1:20-21** tells us Jesus is enthroned in heaven, far above all these entities. **Col 1:16** says Jesus created them and **Col 2:10** tells us He is head over all of them. This means Jesus is not the opposite of them, He's completely separate, over and above them. **Eph 3:10-11** tells us that we, the church, are to make known the wisdom of God to these entities (by walking in it) and **1 Cor 15:24** tells us that these entities have an end; one day their purpose will be fulfilled and God will no longer let them work. This means God has a purpose in allowing their work.

Finally, and most importantly, **Col 2:15** tells us that Jesus disarmed these entities at the cross. Therefore, our victory is rooted in what Jesus did, not in what we do. It's not that there is no doing on our part because there is – we are to be strengthened and equipped and we're to take our stand – but our “doing” is only effective and successful to the degree that we appropriate and apply the victory that Jesus has already won. We cannot succeed through any efforts of the flesh; Satan and his army are too powerful for us.

It's very easy to demonstrate this. Just consider the condition of Adam and Eve before the Fall. They were far more intelligent and much wiser than we can ever hope to be. They were more aware of spiritual issues than we are. They were closer to God. Indeed, there was nothing to separate them from God at all for they had not yet sinned. Yet they fell. And what is even more striking, the devil seems to have had very little trouble bringing their defection about. We are much more foolish than our first parents. We're more spiritually insensitive. We're often far from God. And, as to the other side, the devil is undoubtedly a much better informed and wiser devil now than he was then. So although Satan is not a spiritual counterpart to God—he is not omnipotent, omnipresent, or omniscient—he is still a very formidable foe. It is a foolish Christian that thinks Satan can be resisted by human strength alone.

13 – This verse almost exactly reiterates v**11**, with some minor details. 1st, the therefore reinforces the need to take up the full (whole) armor of God, since Paul has just articulated the spiritual nature of our battle in v**12**. 2nd, it says to take up God's armor instead of put on. This isn't a major difference but it does reemphasize the need for believers to be proactive in this. 3rd, in v**11** the armor of God is to be put on so that you can stand against the

devil's schemes. Here, the armor is to be taken up so that you may be able to withstand (resist) and ...to stand. The key idea in both verses is that the full armor of God will enable believers to stand against evil. This speaks of a deliberate resistance on the part of a believer who is properly armed. 4th, v11 speaks of standing against the wiles of the devil while v13 speaks of resisting in the evil day.

This evil day could refer to a specific moment of particular evil, comparable to the day of wrath mentioned in Rom 2:5, which refers to a specific "day" of judgment. Or, it could refer to an epoch or era that is characterized by evil. In the over all context of this letter, Paul is addressing the everyday lives of ordinary believers so it stands to reason that his instruction here is for believers to take their stand against evil is directly relevant every day of their lives. Paul isn't referring to some future day of evil but to an era of evil that is already present. Believers are to resist in the evil day, that is, right now!

Finally, believers are to take their stand in the evil day having done all, or having prepared everything for the contest. This refers to some sort of preparation that enables believers to successfully make their stand against the malevolent forces of evil. Clearly, this refers to acquiring the Lord's strength and accessing the armor of God, making sure that all parts of the armor are in place, properly fitted and secure and generally being ready to engage in the spiritual battle that takes place behind the curtain of the physical world that we see. We can't engage our enemy ill-prepared. What we often fail to realize is that those small difficulties and hiccups that disrupt our lives are simply God's way of preparing us for the larger, more significant battles when they come. We learn to deal with the big problems in life by properly handling the small problems; not flying off the handle; not blaming God for disturbing our peace but recognizing them as small skirmishes that are part of a much larger battle.

God has given His people a calling, a mission and a course to fulfill. II Peter 1:3 tells us that God, by His divine power, has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us...Still, Satan and his army of miscreants will do everything in their power to stop us. When the forces of evil attack and intimidate, we're to stand! We are called to do the Lord's work and to stand against every hint of spiritual opposition. God has given every believer a glorious standing in Christ and we are to maintain that standing, not by our own efforts or in our own

strength, but by faith and through spiritual warfare.

What is our standing? We stand in grace ([Rom 5:2](#)); we stand in the gospel ([I Cor 15:1](#)); we stand in courage and strength ([I Cor 16:13](#)); we stand in faith ([II Cor 1:24](#)); we stand in Christian liberty ([Gal 5:1](#)); we stand in Christian unity ([Phil 1:27](#)); we stand in the Lord ([Phil 4:1](#)); we should stand perfect and complete in God's will ([Col 4:12](#)).

Taken all together, there's a lot indicated by this little word stand. It means we are going to be attacked. It means that we must not be frightened. It means that we must not droop or slouch, nor be uncertain or half-hearted in the fight. There's no place for self-pity in this fight. To stand means that we are at our position and we are alert to the dangers and prepared to face them. To stand means that we do not give even a thought to retreat.

Satan is indeed a terrible enemy. If it weren't for God and the provision He's made for us for this warfare, we would be rightly downcast and discouraged, and we would despair. But we're not to do that. That is why this passage was written. It was written to tell us that, although we face a great and terrible enemy, the victory is not our enemy's but God's. And it's our victory, too, if we arm ourselves as we are told to and persevere to the end.

The conclusion is a simple one—don't trust in yourself. If you trust yourself, as Peter did, you will fall as Peter did. Peter told Jesus, "Even if all are made to stumble, yet I will not be" ([Mk 14:29](#)). But that very night, Peter, who considered himself the strongest of all the apostles, denied his Lord 3 times, on the last occasion even with oaths and cursing. If we trust to ourselves, we will fall. But if we acknowledge our own weakness and thus, turn to God as our necessary defense against Satan, then we will be able to stand against the devil's schemes.

Earlier, we sang the song Same God. The God of Jacob and Moses, the God of Mary and David; this same God is our God too. Only His strength is greater even than that displayed in overpowering Egypt and bringing the Jewish people into the Promised Land. God is the God of all power. Nothing can stand against Him. So although we cannot hope to stand against the forces of Satan in our own strength even for a moment, we can successfully stand against them and defeat them in the power of God. God is our only strength, but He is the only strength we need. 😊