

The Kingdom of God in Biblical Perspective
“Today’s Church in Today’s World”
Ephesians 6:10–20
Dr. Harry L. Reeder III
April 12, 2015 – Morning Sermon

There are two groups of 6’s in this reading and I would like to see if you can spot them. Ephesians 6:10–20 says [10] *Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. [11] Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. [12] For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, 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. [13] Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm. [14] Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, [15] and, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace. [16] In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one; [17] and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, [18] praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints, [19] and also for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel, [20] for which I am an ambassador in chains, that I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak.*

The grass withers, the flowers fades, God’s Word abides forever and by His grace and mercy may this His Word be preached for you.

Our ministry theme for this is Thy Word is truth and we finished the first series in this theme in the last study of What the Son of God says about the Word of God. We went to seven passages of Scriptures and seven statements that Jesus Himself makes about the Word of God. We are now headed to a second series of sermons in our theme this year and this will be looking at one text. We will take a look at the Kingdom of God and the Word of God by looking at what the Word of God says about the Kingdom of God. We will also look at what relationship the Kingdom of God has with the Word of God. We will be using Matthew 13 to do this starting in the next study and we will look at the seven Kingdom parables found in that chapter. We will start with the parable of the sower.

I want to take this study as a transition from the series we have just completed to the one we’re going to do and to take the time to speak to the matter of why we’re taking the time to speak of the supremacy and sufficiency of God’s Word. God’s Word is true, inerrant, infallible and it is our only rule of faith and practice. This study will allow me to do a very important part of my duty as a pastor and also to discharge to you my heart of taking on today’s church in today’s world.

This passage in Ephesians is an interesting passage of Scripture in that on the one hand says the Christian life is a matter of warfare but secondly it tells us to get in the battle. The third thing it tells you is that you can’t fight the battle without the Lord. The fourth thing it tells you is you need the armor of the Lord. The fifth thing it tells you is that you need the strength of the Lord that is given by the Holy Spirit but waiting on the

Lord is not passivity. There are many statements in this passage that say 'put on...put on...put on...give yourself to...' so it's not passivity but activity. It's very clear that we're in a spiritual warfare for he tells us time after time we're waging war against cosmic powers or spiritual forces in heavenly places. This passage also enumerates for you six exhortations that are similar and six elements of the Christian armor.

I want to go through all that with you but initially I want to take the time to look at one statement. Perhaps I can start this way. When I went to seminary there were about four or five things that all attending that seminary did. One was that we all bought a blue blazer and khaki pants and I still have mine. The second thing is we would buy the same books and one of those books was William Gurnall's book The Christian in Complete Armor. It is sixteen hundred pages and it is his sermons on Ephesians 6:10–20. Gurnall and the rest of the puritans weren't trying to do this to tell you this was the model for expositional preaching but when the puritans dealt with God's Word for God's people they kept driving at a couple of things in that day.

One of the things was that the puritans wanted people to always know their family. There are fathers and mothers of the faith in the family and the church is full of brothers and sisters in the Lord. You choose friends but you don't get to choose your family. God chose your family, put them together and He has given you His church. We are supposed to love one another, encourage one another, worship together and bear witness together. We are community of believers, a family.

The second thing is the church is the body of Christ and they love that diversity and unity. There is one body with one calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism but we're individual parts and very diverse in many ways yet that diversity comes in unity as we stay on message, on mission and in ministry together all indwelt by the same Holy Spirit.

The third thing is the church is an army and they spent a lot of time on this. It is an army that is going forth under the mission that their Captain has given them. It is an army engaged in battles to fight a war that has already been won yet the battles will cost lives, be very real and sure. It is an army that is under assault. Jesus told us that we're going to be under assault. They persecuted Me and they will persecute you. Why aren't you persecuting the church? It is because God the Father by His grace gave you a love for Christ and His Word therefore you love Christ and those who love His Word but they don't love Him or His Word. If they don't love His Word and would have persecuted Him how much more will they persecute you, those of us whom He has chosen to give life to? How do you respond in that day? Do you respond with anger against them or do you have the battle cry of love? Do you run from the fight or do you get in the fight and fight the way the Lord has designed to fight with the armor of the Lord and weapons of the Spirit?

There are two things within us that usually happens. There are a lot of people going around to pick a fight but God's people aren't supposed to pick a fight. We are also not to run from a fight but when you get in the fight you don't fight like the world. You fight it with the armor of the Lord, on your knees in prayer and you fight it continually and constantly to win the day for truth and to win the adversary to Christ. That's the way you fight it, in and for Christ in the lives of others. One of the things I know about the guys who went to seminary is that very few of them read the book by William Gurnall because it is a tough book to read.

I want us to work our way through this passage in a very general way and not in any way as deep as Gurnall's book. I want to start by looking at that statement 'do not be ignorant of the schemes of Satan' (Ephesians 6:11). When I was a kid I loved the sweet science of pugilism and I used to watch Joe Lewis, the Brown Bomber and Rocky Marciano. I loved this interview I read about Joe Lewis where they were asking him how he does away with his opponents so quickly. He said "I know what they're going to do before they know what they're going to do." He studied the films of his opponents to see how they would fight and on some when they dropped their right foot they would next throw a certain punch or when they dropped their left foot they would throw this certain punch. He knew when they fainted one way where they would go next. He knew what they were going to do before they knew what they were going to do.

That's what Jesus is telling us through the Apostle Paul inspired by the Holy Spirit of God five different times in the New Testament and this is just one of those times where he says not to be ignorant of the schemes of Satan. Know his strategies and basically from the Word and church history you see two strategies of Satan. Strategy number one is intimidation and strategy number two is infiltration.

With strategy number one he has two targets of intimidation. He wants to intimidate the leaders of Christ's church. Realize that our Savior has won the victory. He defeated at the cross our sin. He has paid for the sins of all of His people. You have to know He has defeated Satan, sin and the grave but you also need to know that in His sovereign plan while He has defeated Satan He has not yet destroyed him. While He has bound him, he is not paralyzed. While He has circumvented what He is allowing him to do, there are things he is allowed to do and one of those things under the sovereign hand of God is to rage against Christ's church.

Satan has and continues to use two instruments. One is the beast of the sea, the power of the state and the beast of the land, the power of an apostate church. The apostate church is working with the power of the state, constantly to say 'He is not your Savior but the state is your savior' and an apostate church supporting the state as your savior instead of exalting Christ alone as the Savior. This has been happening throughout the ages, ever since Christ ascended and will intensify as you get to the end of the age. Therefore what will the state do in those matters or what will the culture do? They will intimidate.

Here is Christ who rises from the grave. The disciples turn into 120, then 3,000 then another 5,000 where they are all getting added in every day. What did Satan do? The evil empire strikes back. How? They do it through persecution. There was persecution against leaders. There is the death of Stephen and James. There was persecution against the church where they were all scattered from Jerusalem. Although when Satan scattered the church from Jerusalem that just scattered them to Judea, Samaria and the utter most parts of the world but that is what he is doing, attempting to intimidate the church.

Strategy number two is infiltration. Paul warns the church at Ephesus by saying "When I leave you Satan will attack you." In Acts 20:29-30 Paul says [29] *I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock;* [30] *and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them.* In other words, he'll infiltrate the leadership with false teachers and leaders and he loves to infiltrate the membership. He loves to get the church to fight each

other with gossips, slander and factions. How can a team win if they are fighting each other in the locker room? If he can just keep the church from the unity and the message or with personal differences and petty preferences then he can separate them and that's what sin does.

My guess is that God has brought some to read this today because He is working in their heart and they are wanting to know how they can be right with God. They are thinking their life is empty and all that the world has promised them is nothing but emptiness. God in His providence brought them to this but what Satan doesn't want is a church when they come that is on mission on message and in ministry. So he will try and intimidate the church. He will intimidate the leadership and membership, the fellowship. He would love to infiltrate the church so that it gets off message, off mission and out of ministry in order to survive and be applauded by the culture. That's what he desires to do. Jesus warned us about this saying there will be many false teachers and leaders and people even claiming to be Me. Don't listen to them. John says to test the prophets to see if they are from the Lord. So realize that Satan's two strategies are intimidation and infiltration.

Now I want to go a step further. In today's church in today's world who are the allies who are doing Satan's strategies? Who are the adversaries of Christ and His church who are doing the work of Satan in intimidation and infiltration? Here are the four allies in today's world facing today's church. The first ally who is working on intimidation is theocratic fascist Islam. We are witnessing the seventh caliphate, arguably, in an attempt to move Sharia Law throughout the world either by coercion or conversion with the power of the state with the power of the sword. There are basically two rivals in this caliphate movement and one is called ISIS and one is Iran. They are two different segments, one being Sunni and one being Shia in Islam and they are vying for ascendancy in this but it is a movement that is directly opposed to the truth of the Gospel and to the church.

This last week 148 of your brothers and sisters were in a college and were told by the terrorist organization of this Islamic caliphate movement that if they come out they will be safe. This was in Kenya and they walked out and were killed for Christ. Twenty plus on a sandy beach in the Mediterranean who just simply went to Libya for work, professing Christians were killed not because they were Egyptian citizens as our government said, but because they were Christians. It has come out that one of them was not a Christian but when he saw the others stand for Christ he actually committed himself to Christ on that sandy beach and then died.

For most of us here in America we have a hard time identifying with that because you and I have lived in cultural affirmation. We have lived in a culture that affirms Christianity historically but what I'm speaking of in the persecution against the church throughout the world is the norm and we have been in an abnormal situation. We have been in a blink of peace for a couple of hundred years and I think it's because of two reasons. Number one is the effective witness of the Gospel of Jesus Christ in the church of Christ in the early formation of this country as salt and light in terms of what was introduced through this culture through an effective church. They were never the majority but they were salty and they showed a lot of light which greatly effected this country therefore we have enjoyed the blessings providentially.

The second reason is because of that this country's founding documents welcomed the freedom of religion in general and has allowed the church of Jesus Christ to function in the public square with the freedom of religion. I'm not a prophet nor the son of a prophet but currently you are seeing two things where the church is losing its saltiness and its light and therefore is not affecting the culture with our current brand of Christianity and light.

Then secondly you're seeing the rise of another enemy that is designed to intimidate the church that you face in this culture and that is secular fascist humanism. Secular humanism has no place for religion. Religion in general is to be eradicated and particularly its desire is to eradicate Christianity. Right now they can't do this so what they are doing now is the secular humanist is attempting to quarantine Christianity. So you can have your Bible study and worship service in your church but you can't take what you believe into the public square. We will reinterpret the first amendment of freedom of religion to freedom to worship. They say what Christians believe is opinion and therefore you keep that in your building on that day for that hour but it can't come out here. One writer said the objective is the closing of the American mind and the closing of the public square.

The word fascist is a very technical term and it means the power of the state. The Islamic movement, the caliphate is using the power of the state, whether it's ISIS or Iran. Secular humanism is now using the power of the state. If you attempt to be consistent where you will not participate in a neo-pagan ceremony even though your business is related to such ceremonies but you say you can't engage in that for that's a matter of my conscience before the Lord, you are now liable to lose your business, your home and everything else, with the power of the government and all its abilities with the sword, prison and taxation.

If you don't believe what I just said to you contact Brendan Eich, the previous CEO of Mozilla who has just lost it all or a great grandmother Barronelle Stutzman who has lost her business because she would not participate in a pagan ceremony. She could not do that in the freedom of religion. She had great relationships with the people and loved them but in freedom of conscience could not participate in that so that great grandmother has lost everything. Kevin Cochran, the African American fire chief in Atlanta, just in terms of what he was doing with his church and what he wrote, now he has no job, as the government upheld by the state in the city of Atlanta has removed him. He is a man who has been noted with nothing but excellence in his performance. Ask Wes Modder who is a chaplain of the navy seals who has lost everything in his multiple years of service simply because he will only hold to and affirm that sexuality belongs in marriage and marriage is one man and one woman for life. Talk to the businesses in Indiana where the governors and governments of Connecticut and New York said they would put them out of business by not participating with any business with your state. Watch the corporate elite bring the financial penalties simply for holding to what is true.

You will face that same fascist power when you go to get a job or to keep a job. Not long ago in the interview you would have said "I'm married and I thank the Lord for marriage and I believe sex is to be celebrated in the context of marriage and anything else outside of marriage is wrong no matter who it's with or unique it is or exotic it is." Twenty five years ago they would have put a check on the application indicating a good

man but now if you say that you won't get the job or you'll lose the job with the drive for unfettered sexual eroticism.

So what will the church do in that moment of intimidation? What will the believer do under such intimidation? The intimidation allies are coupled with the infiltration allies. The two infiltration allies are theological liberalism and church growth pragmatism. Those are the allies of Satan that he uses in order to get the church off mission, off message and out of its ministry.

Let's take theological liberalism. I know there are Christians found in theological liberal churches that have denied the inerrancy of God's Word, the exclusivity of the Gospel where you're only saved by Jesus but you need a Savior. Ritual can't save you. You can't save yourself. You only need Christ. Liberalism denies the exclusivity of Christ as Savior, denies the necessity of grace for salvation, and denies the supernatural presence of God in this world that are called signs, wonders and miracles. I believe that theological liberalism is the most virulent religious movement against Christianity. It is much worse than any other cult because it is held by those who at one time had confessions that were faithful and it's confusing. Secondly, it's worse because they still use the same vocabulary we use but they do not mean the same thing. Thirdly, is because it takes out the very essentials of the Gospel of saving grace in Jesus Christ and the truth of His Word as inerrant, infallible, supreme, and sufficient for all matters of faith and life in Christ. Therefore I think it is the most absolute profound enemy.

I know there are Christians in theological liberal churches. I know there are faithful churches in theologically liberal denominations. I also know that theological liberalism is the most virulent enemy that is infiltrating our seminaries, colleges and then pulpits. Then the way the pulpit goes is the way the church will go.

The fourth ally is church growth pragmatism. There is no one here who loves church growth more than me. I love statistics and I was praising God when I heard He gave us the greatest faith promise we've ever had and that 51% of our membership has participated in faith promise. I'm grateful for every new member who comes into the church. However we must always remember that statistical growth is never the objective but it is a consequence of a faithful church that's on message, on mission and in ministry. The desire is for 3,000 to come to Christ with more and more coming to Christ every single day but that's the consequence.

The objective is to be faithful to Christ but once church growth becomes the objective and you're in a culture that determines what you believe is superstitious and ridiculous then it's a matter of time that pragmatism with the end justifying the means become a primary focus. The end is when you want to get people and if the culture doesn't like what we believe about marriage, the family or other things then the church begins to modify the message just so they can keep numbers or increase them or it will begin to modify the methods where the preaching of the Word or discipleship are no longer important but entertainment becomes the focus.

A letter I received the other day said "Harry, if you and Briarwood don't change your mind you will be on the wrong side of history. You better get on board with the changing definitions of marriage and sexuality." I want to be on the right side of God and not history for God is the One who writes history and He writes the last chapter of history. When He writes that last chapter of history, I want to hear 'Well done, good and

faithful servant.’ In order to keep the numbers though church growth pragmatism opens the door to theological liberalism.

When Jesus went to the cross He saves His people from their sins, He defeated Satan and thirdly, He purchased His church. He said “I will build My church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it.” I am not worried about the church prevailing to the end but I am concerned about the PCA and Briarwood being a part of that prevailing church in the end. I don’t want them to go the way of others. I want us to stay on message, in ministry and on mission and that’s what I’m asking God for because I want Him to win people to Christ. I don’t want to polish a monument called Briarwood. I want it to be a part of a Kingdom movement of God’s Gospel of grace. I don’t want the applause of the culture to modify our message, the affirmation of the culture to modify our mission, but I want us to go to the supremacy and sufficiency of His Word, to Christ and to the glory and majesty of His sovereign grace in order that we might move forward in and for Jesus Christ in this world.

As we look to do that here is what you can be assured of. No church will ever die from culture sponsored homicide. The church will not be murdered but local churches, colleges, seminaries and denominations do die but they die from theological suicide as they drink the cup of a modified message of theological liberalism thinking it’s the remedy for the survival of the church. You are actually drinking the poison that kills the church and the denomination.

Some ask me if intimidation doesn’t work then why does Satan keep doing it? I think Satan knows that intimidation isn’t going to stamp out the church but he does know that intimidation from the culture or the state can cause a church to modify its message and it opens the door infiltration. So that while intimidation won’t destroy the church it actually creates the environment where the church begins to get fearful and it leaves its mission and message in order to be applauded by the culture or accepted by the state and allowed function by the state. When it does that it begins to lose its way and now is open to the enemy of infiltration.

So here is the takeaway in closing. We need to stay on message, on mission, and in ministry being fixed on Jesus. It is that simple. Here are three little walk-aways to go with this. When you move out to stay on message, on mission and in ministry the best defense is a relentless offense. So let’s leave here with personal evangelism. Go out into this world and win people to Christ. Yesterday I received a phone call from a young man who is out on an internship and he said “Pastor, I was reading my Bible and up came an atheist who said ‘what are reading and can I get to heaven?’ so I began to talk with him.” I was more excited that he was excited about being in the game. He wasn’t in the locker room any more. He was in the game, sharing the Gospel with people, planting seeds, through personal evangelism. We need to be sharing the Gospel as much as we can and everywhere.

Secondly, get involved with small group disciple making. We have to learn to think Biblically. We have a culture out there that has bought into the myth that sex makes your life. We need to demythologize sex for our kids. Sex is not your messiah or your savior. Right now sex is the unfettered pursuit of sexual eroticism and is the driving force in this culture for we sell hamburgers, cars, cereal and everything we can with it. Then the whole point is forget about this sex in marriage and just go get it anywhere you can, at any time you can with anybody you can for there is happiness yet all it is, is death.

We have to disciple our people to understand the great gift of God in Biblical sexuality is between a man and a woman within marriage and everything else outside of it brings death. There is a God who forgives, transforms and changes so that gift like every other gift can be used instead of becoming an idol that destroys. That's what we do in small group disciple making – we teach people from the Word of God.

We need to stay focused on the basics so that God's people are brought to Christ, in Christ, develop a Christ-centered life view, a Christ focused lifestyle and a Christ focused life love. The love of Christ compels them to develop the mind of Christ to develop the life of Christ and then the world will see, not simply people who are arguing for marriage, sexuality and sanctity of life but they see a people in community who are practicing it and welcoming them to it in Jesus Christ. I'm willing to get into the public arena and do the debates but if we do evangelism and disciple making and God's people have a Christ-centered life view, lifestyle and life love as we're taking the Gospel to them, then that's what will turn a culture. We need not to reclaim America for we now need to go out and claim America with the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

That means we also need to do church planting and revitalization. Just this year we have developed partnerships with the Presbyterian church of Brazil, of Ireland and three Presbyterian churches of Japan to do church planting and church revitalization. Your faith promise giving is enabling us to do that but not only in the world for we have our own Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria to do church planting and revitalization throughout our country. Put embassies of the kingdom in this Kingdom of the church of Jesus Christ.

Finally, we need prayer and the Word. I'll close with this passage in Ephesians 6:13–17. There are six pieces to the whole armor of God. Do you know where that armor comes from? Do you know who it is who arms you? You are the armor bearer so who is the Armorer? Who is it that is helping you? It is the Holy Spirit who is giving you the strength to do that. Where do the arms come from? Where is the armory? It is the Word of God.

Ephesians 6:13–17 says [13] *Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm. [14] Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, [15] and, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace. [16] In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one; [17] and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.*

It says to fasten the belt of truth and what is truth? It is the Word of God. Then it says to put on the breastplate of righteousness. Where do you find out where right living is? You find it in the Word of God. Wear the Gospel of peace as shoes. Where do you find out about the Gospel? You find it in the Word of God. Take up the shield of faith. Where does faith come from? Faith comes from hearing the Word of God. Put on the helmet of salvation? Where do you find the message of salvation to put on your head? It's from the Word of God. Take up the sword of the Spirit? What is the sword of the Spirit? It's the Word of God. The Word of God is the armory from which the Holy Spirit arms you then you go out with the armor of God.

You not only have six instruments for the armor put six times it says to pray. We have small groups of prayer all over this church so get in one and pray with persistent,

intercessory prayer. “God bring an awakening, not simply let us hold the line on marriage but bring an awakening for men and women to come to Jesus Christ.” We are not going to pick a fight or run from a fight but when we fight the fight we want to win our adversaries and God, help us to win them by staying on message, on mission and in ministry. We will meet the adversaries but we will resist him and he will flee from us. Christ is the Victor. Let’s pray.

Prayer:

Father, thank You for the moments we could be in Your Word and thank You for the privilege to walk our way very briefly through an absolutely overwhelming text and trying to apply it for today’s church in today’s world. There may be some reading this now that You are working in their lives and they heard through this message that Jesus Christ goes to the cross and when they own Christ the world will be against them but take courage because Christ has overcome the world so may they come and put their trust in Jesus who overcomes our sin, the world and our flesh. It is He who gives us new life. Father, for us as Your people, help us not to play the ostrich and go bury our head and think everything is going to be okay. We’re not going to pick a fight but we’re not going to run from it either yet when it comes we want the armor of God. We will rage against Satan and resist him and he’ll flee from us but for those who are serving him we want to win them so give us the mind, life and heart of Christ and fill us with the love of Christ as we live by the truth of His Word for I pray in Jesus’ Name, Amen.

Power Point

Two Strategies

- I. Intimidation
- II. Infiltration

Four Adversaries

- I. Intimidation #1: Theocratic Fascist Islam
- II. Intimidation #2: Secular Fascist Humanism
- III. Infiltration #1: Theological Liberalism
- IV. Infiltration #2: Church Growth Pragmatism

Life Takeaway

Stay on Message-on Mission-in Ministry
Fixed on Jesus

- The Best Defense is a Relentless Offense
- Church Planting and Revitalization
- Prayer and the Word