

Ephesians - One Body of Christ

“Where the Real Conflict Lives”

Ephesians 6:10-24

Please turn to Ephesians 6: 10-24. Paul is wrapping up now. This long meditation that he's been giving us on the nature of our salvation. The timeliness of it. When were we called? When did we receive it? Who are we now that we are in Christ? And he wraps it up with this very interesting, maybe even shocking statement. Paul shows us that he knows how to end on a strong note. So here we go. Ephesians chapter six, verses ten through 24.

Finally, be strong in the Lord, and in the strength of his might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. 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 heavenly places. 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, stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace in all circumstances, take up the shield of faith with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one, and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the spirit, which is the Word of God, 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, and also for me, that words may be given to me, and opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel for which I am an ambassador in chains, that I may declare it boldly as I ought to speak, so that you may also know that how I am, and what I am doing. Tychicus, the beloved brother and faithful minister in the Lord, will tell you everything. I have sent him to you for this very purpose, that you may know how we are, and that he may encourage your hearts. Peace be to the brothers and love with faith from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Grace be with all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with love incorruptible.

This is the word of the Lord. Amen. Be seated please.

Well, now, we're arriving at the end of Paul's letter to the church in Ephesus. And he ends on, as I said, a strong note, a powerful note. You might think he's going to kind of slowly back his way out the door, but he does, and he decides, hey, before I'm done, I'm going to talk about marriage. Then I'm going to talk about, being a worker in a workplace with a boss. And then just to close it out, I'm going to talk about Satan and demons, okay? And then then I'll be done.

So Paul is strong, he ends on a high note and notice what his focus is here, what his focus is for the church in Ephesus. So he wants to draw attention to where the conflict that they are engaged in really lies. Having laid out this whole theology of how you get saved and when Jesus called you and how he's calling you and how he saved you, how you should think about your own life in light of today. He now ends and says, but in case you've missed it, you need to recognize where the conflict really lies. And he does that by doing three things.

First of all, he lays out the field of battle. Okay. Secondly, he talks about our armory that we have available to us in this battle. And then thirdly, he ends with the importance of prayer and why prayer matters to this battle.

So let's start with the field of battle in verses ten through 13.

Now, as you know, throughout this letter, Paul has been focusing on the spiritual character of the church, the spiritual character of the Christian life. And so he ends with this final statement where he says, if you want to truly understand the outworking, the implications of the spiritual character of the Christian life, you have to recognize that when we think about the conflicts in within which we are engaged, we shouldn't think about them as merely physical, material things. As a matter of fact, we have a tendency to think about our own conflicts as physical or political or material forces, and human agendas. But it's not really about that. Ultimately, it's actually about a spiritual conflict. And that conflict is with Satan and his demons. And it's with sin both at work in our lives personally, right within our hearts and also in the world around us.

Now, as we've been going through the book of Ephesians, we've been asking this question with Paul, what is the church? How do we understand what the church is? And Paul's giving us a whole variety of ways to understand or to describe what the church is. They go all the way back to verse chapter one. We talked about remember way, way back in August, we delved into Ephesians for the first time. We talked about how we've been called from before the foundations of the earth. We are these elect ones that God has set aside outside of time. Right? And you can't lose God's love. You can't. You. God will never stop loving you because you never started loving you. Remember that going all the way back. He's loved you in all eternity. You are his elect, not by anything you have done. Just because the good and perfect nature of his love. But you're also his child who's been adopted to him in a spirit of sonship. And you're also the body of Christ. He's the head. You're the body. You're doing the work of Christ. He's telling you what to do because he is your head at the right hand of God, the Father Almighty. But you're not just the body of Christ, you're also the Bride of Christ. You're the one who he loves, who he gives his life for, who he comes and he chases after even. Even when she fails, he comes and he finds her and he restores her. But you're not just the Bride of Christ. You're also the bond servant of the Lord, serving the Lord as you would your earthly master. But with so much more honor and glory. You're not only that, you're the temple. You're the dwelling place of God on

earth. And now, finally, Paul says, and you are also a warrior. You're an army. You've been sent out by the high command to advance the kingdom of God over the face of the earth. But this conflict with which you are engaged is a global one, and it is a spiritual one.

Notice Paul uses that language of cosmic powers and principalities, the cosmic powers, the principalities. He talks about in this chapter are not flesh and blood. Okay, now don't get me wrong. Paul does not act as if flesh and blood doesn't matter. This is not some kind of spiritualist or kind of Buddhist type belief where we reject the material world as if it doesn't exist.

He's not saying that. He's saying, oh no, these things exist. But you must understand that they are actually pawns that are being moved around on a chessboard by greater spiritual forces. And yes, that includes Satan, and that includes demons, and that includes sin in your heart, and that it includes the collective nature of sin in the world around you.

There's a saying that I've heard before in the past. It's an oversimplification, but it's there's some truth to it. And it goes like this. There are really three sources of evil in the world. They're Satan. And that would include demons right there. Satan. There's ourselves, right? The sin in our hearts. And then there's the sin of the world outside of us, okay?

And the sin of the world outside of us. That's the focus, really, of the fundamentalist. Okay. Do you know any fundamentalists there? Their main concern is this the world is dirty. We need to stay outside of the world. If you can just keep away from the world, then you'll be good, right? So the fundamentalist focus is on the world, the reformed people.

Right. Our tradition here at Briarwood, the reformed folks, you know, we focus on we focus on the self. Right. What's our first key doctrine? Total depravity. Right. Everything you do, not utter depravity. You're not doing everything wrong all the time. But everything you do, even your best thing is tainted by sin. You see, we look at the self and we say, well, if I can just protect myself, I can just mortify the flesh, then I'll be good, right?

Then of course, lastly, we've got the charismatics, right? That's what I was raised in. I was raised in kind of a charismatic background, and what I hear a lot about growing up as a kid, but a lot about spiritual warfare. Right? It was the demons. It was Satan. Satan made me do it right. It was the devil. The devil made me do it right.

That's the same. As a matter of fact, if you have a sin that you wrestle with, it's probably a demon. I'm like, listen, I know myself well enough now. I know that I've got all the capability for all the sins that you could possibly commit just right here. I don't need an extra spiritual being to create a rationale for why I committed a sin. But here's the thing. They're all sources of evil in the world. Satan, the world, and our own flesh. They're all at work, and they're all a part of this conflict that we are engaged in.

Now, what's interesting about this letter that Paul has written is that if you read his context, this isn't perhaps the letter that we might expect him to write. He's been through all kinds of persecution, right? He's been thrown in jail. He's been left for dead outside of towns. He's been rejected by all of his colleagues. He's been rejected by all of his former friends, the ones who he grew up with. And yet, do you notice how little Paul actually talks about these things in his letters? You know, he doesn't spend a lot of time saying, can you believe what the Pharisees said? That was so unfair. If they really knew the Bible, they wouldn't treat me that way. Right? Does he go on and on about the local authorities and how just corrupt they are, and how they're all just a bunch of fat cats getting rich off the people and they don't even really care about these things anyways. Why are they treating me so poorly? What does he go on and on about the empire of which he is a citizen, right? The Roman Empire and the mistreatment that they are putting on the church and on him himself.

Isn't it interesting how little time he spends on whether or not he got compensated enough, or why was he wasn't able to get to that place, or to this place, and why he was blocked from this or that. If the church had just supported him more, he would have been able to do the things that the Lord had called him to do. It's so interesting though. Paul does not spend time on any of those issues, what does he look at instead? His focus is entirely on the power of Christ at work through the Church of Christ. That's where his focus is. Church. You are the body, the dwelling place, the bride, the child, the servant of God. Go act like it. Go, go! Lay hold of that power that is yours to change the world. Yeah. He recognizes that there are physical, financial, political, relational realities that are blocking him. But he also realizes this. They are not really the ultimate cause of our problems. They are proximal causes, right? They're the near cause, but they're not the real cause.

The real cause is the spiritual conflict that we see around us. And we've got to be spiritually minded. Notice he actually uses the language here. He talks about the darkness or the evil in heavenly right heavenly places. Now, sometimes in the Bible the heavenlies is talking about the throne room of God. Sometimes the heavenlies is just talking about the spiritual world, right? It's depicted as it's a place. It's kind of like, right behind creation. Do you see this in the Bible where perhaps like an angel will show up and somebody will describe, like David does when he's on the threshing floor of a Verona? Okay. If you remember that story and he sees a man. All right, a step out between the heavens and the earth. Okay. And what does that mean? Is, I mean, he had, like, one foot up in the clouds and one foot down on the earth. No, it doesn't mean that it's this depiction of heavenlies that is the spiritual world kind of being right behind the veil. And if you just had eyes to see, someone could pull back the veil, and you'd see what was going on in the heavenlies.

Now, is it true that saying that you can be so heavenly minded that you're no earthly good? I guess so, but if you are heavenly minded and no earthly good, then that means you're not really heavenly minded. You see what Paul is saying is this if you want to actually be of earthly good, you need to be really thinking a lot about the heavens. You need to be thinking about the spiritual world, because that's where the battle really lies. So let's do that. Let's consider the conflict and we want to start with this. I want to start, first of all, with our enemy. What is our enemy now, Paul focuses in this passage on the devil, and we're going to come back to that in a second. But first, I just want to point out, because he's pointed it out so much over the course of this letter, the reality of the spiritual nature of sin in afflicting us, in opposing the work of the gospel. But as we've already said, sin is at work both in us, individually, personally and in the world around us in such a way that if we ignore it, then we're going to be constantly confounded on why people make decisions that ruin their lives all the time, or why do we make decisions that are so destructive.

It doesn't make sense. If I came to it just like a rationalistic modern, I'd say this doesn't make sense. This person isn't applying reason very well. And yet there seems to be another force at work. And that force is the work of sin. Sin is the active or passive. What I mean by that is passive rejection, ignoring the teachings of the God of life, the active or the passive rejection of the God of life. Ever since the fall of humanity in the government, in the system, ever since the fall of humanity in the garden, it has been advancing within us. Sin has been advancing within us. It's been advancing over the face of the earth so that everywhere a good thing happens, it's often followed up with a lot of bad things. It's this incredible ability of humans to mess stuff up, right? Even when we're given wonderful things, you give us understanding of chemistry. Well, we make addictive drugs, right? You give us an understanding of reality at the atomic level, and we'll go, let's make a bomb. Right. There's this just incredible tendency within humans to mess stuff up. And it's true within our own hearts. But it's also true in the culture out there.

There's a cumulative effect of sin. You get a bunch of people together who are dead in their sin, and guess what? They can do more evil than they could do if they were just alone. So we have to understand that first and foremost, our primary enemy, the one who's infiltrated us, is sin. And it's active in our lives, and it's active in the world around us. If you are saved in Christ Jesus, I want you to know this. You are saved of the guilt and the corruption of sin. Okay? But on this side of the new heavens and new earth, right? You will be constantly dealing with this temptation, okay? There will come a time where you have an imperishable body and sin will be done away with. But that is not yet this time. And that's how even in the church we can see roots of bitterness take hold. We can see sins infiltrate into the church from without and come within and hinder us in our work. But Paul focuses on Satan. And I want to talk a little bit about Satan. This morning we're gonna talk a little bit about Satan and about demons.

First of all, we have to acknowledge this anytime that we're doing Satanology, okay? That is actually a field of theology, Satanology or demonology. If you're ever doing that, you have to recognize this. The Bible doesn't tell us much, tells us a bit, but it doesn't tell us much. Okay, first of all, what do we know about Satan? We know that Satan is created. Okay, this is important part. He he's not a another god in the cosmos who shares 50% of the power in God. You know, I don't Il has the other 50% or something like that. These aren't competing equals. Satan is created by God, which means he was created good because all that God created is good, right? It's good. It's sweet. That's what that Hebrew word means. And yet at some point along the way, Satan went from being good to being in rebellion.

Now, I know some of us think we know exactly how that happened because of passages in Isaiah and the zeal, but I would argue that those passages aren't really about Satan. Okay, what do we know? We know that he went from being good to being evil. He became the father of lies. He became the tempter. He became the accuser of the brethren. Now, this is important because we first need to point out he is personal. In other words, if you were to meet Satan, he could say, yes, I am Satan. He he's aware of himself, okay? He's not just a spiritual force. It's not like Star Wars where there's kind of like a dark side of the force. You just kind of want to stay away from this ephemeral, you know, ghostly thing. It's not that he is personal. You can talk to him. He is finite. He's not everywhere. It's important thing to remember, by the way, I think oftentimes Christians feel as if Satan is everywhere. He is not God. He's not omniscient and omnipresent, but he is personal and he is culpable. He's responsible for what he does. But that's important because everywhere where we see Satan emerging in the Scripture, notice what he's doing. He's doing things that will lead to the accusation against the people of God. Okay? Whether he's deceiving, which he's known for, whether he is tempting, which is known for he's called the tempter, whether he is trying, in other words, bringing hardship to you.

What's the purpose so that he can show your lack of faith and accuse you? Gangs? Let me give you three brief vignettes. Okay. Jobe, why is he tormenting Jobe? Because he tells the Lord. Job's not that great. He's just in Jesus celebrating you because you've given him everything he wants. Take it away. He's not going to love you anymore.

Why is he doing that? It's not just because he loves tormenting people. It's because he wants to accuse Jobe. Think about where Satan meets Jesus in the wilderness. What is he doing? He's tempting him right? He's tempting him with the temptation. That is so great. By the way, if we were ever tempted with those things, we would all fail it. Trust me. You have never been offered what Jesus was offered in the wilderness. And yet our Messiah was strong and he defended himself and he won the victory. But why was Satan doing this? So that the accusation might be made the Son of God? He wasn't perfect. Okay. Why does he put us through hardship? Why does he deceive? Why does he deceive Eve? Why does he go to even the garden and say, what

did the Lord say again, I can't remember. Can you remind me? What did he say? Do you see? Can you have any of the trees in the garden? Notice he gets it wrong to do. You can eat any of the trees and he goes, no, no, no, he didn't say that. Why is he deceiving? So that he might accuse. See, Satan's goal is to deceive, to try and to tempt, so that he might accuse the people of God. But notice this he is not acting outside of divine sovereignty. He has to ask permission for everything he does. And this should be a hope to you. By the way, when he wants to go in torment job, he has to ask for permission. After the resurrection, Jesus comes and says, Satan, Peter, Satan has asked to sift you like wheat. He has to ask. There is no temptation that comes to you that your sovereign God has not already said, I'm with you. It's outside. You know, it's in my power. It's within my control. In other words, there's no temptation that takes you outside of God's sovereign reign. And we ought to remember that. I would add on in regards to demons. Again, we don't know much about demons. I've just told you most of what we know about Satan in the Bible.

We don't know a whole lot about demons either. But we do know this. Again, they are personal gain. If we turn to mark chapter five, where Jesus meets the man who is demon possessed on the on the shore of the Decapolis region, the man of the garrisons of the gatherings, depending on how you say it. Okay, where he's the man is standing there on the on the coastline, and Jesus goes out of his way to find this man. If you remember, when he meets him, the man is filled with demons. They even say we are legion. There's many of us like a Roman legion of soldiers. Okay, isn't that interesting? They know that they're there. They're not just kind of like an ephemeral, you know, state of mind or something like that. They go, oh, no, we are not this guy. There's this guy, and then there's us. Now notice another thing. Not only are they self-aware, they are also aware that they have already lost the battle. You notice how Jesus, when he approaches them. Do you remember what the demons say to Jesus? They say, all right, Jesus, let's fight. They say that. Put up your dukes, Jesus, it's time for a fight. And they say, oh, son of the Most High, why have you come to persecute us before the given time? Right?

This is an encouragement to you parents as you're with children who are, you know, maybe afraid of the dark or afraid to go to sleep. And you're always in this conundrum, right? You don't want to come in and tell them, oh, there's nothing to be afraid of, right? Because there are things in the world to be afraid of. Hey, they're not ghosts. It's not Frankenstein, okay? Not vampires. Okay? But there is Satan. There are demons. And yet notice that when the demons meet Jesus, what do they say? Why have you come to persecute us before the given time? The battle's over. There's no conflict. They're saying you showed up early. Okay. And then remember, Christian, Jesus is in you. His spirit indwells you. You have nothing to fear. You can boldly stand against the spiritual forces of this world. Because look at how they respond to the king. And the king says, I'm sending my spirit to dwell within you. One other thing I would just point out about demons is this they are about the work of dehumanization. Okay? They are about the work of

creation. Notice what they do to this man when he gets filled with a thousand demons. Okay? Does he become like some kind of cinematic villain or he's plotting, you know, some kind of taking over of the world now, what happens to him? He loses his family. He loses his friends. He's living by himself in a graveyard where he's probably scavenging like a scavenger animal. No one knows his name. There's probably no, no, no, no more lonely or isolated character in the Bible than this gentleman. We don't know who he is, where he came from. We don't know his story or how he got there. The only community that he has is the village that's far away who hears his wailing as he's scavenging around in the tombs? And Jesus of Nazareth goes out of his way across the Sea of Galilee to find this person and to speak light into the darkness of his existence. You know, there are stories where Jesus meets with Gentiles, and he usually has kind of like a back and forth with them if they're believers. So, like, think of the serial Phoenician Woman where she says, I need this thing. And he goes, oh, but you're just a dog, you know, citing this idea that Gentiles are dogs. And she says, but the dogs get to eat from the tail. He goes, I didn't come for the dogs and came for the children. And she goes, why don't the dogs get to eat the crumbs off of the children's table? Okay, I read that as a kind of playful back and forth. Here's why. What does Jesus say next? I haven't seen faith like this in all of Israel, right? He's doing this little back and forth with her because all of the Pharisees are standing around saying, we are the chosen of God. Right? And as Amos is telling us, as we'll see you this evening, the Israelites are saying, we're the chosen of God. The Lord says no. The one who believes as the child is the chosen of God. And look, she believes this Phoenician woman greater than all of Israel. The reason why I point that out, look at where he comes to find this Gentile man. I think he has to be a Gentile. He's living in a Gentile region. He's hanging out next to a bunch of pigs. Okay, this has to be a Gentile man, the demon possessed man. Notice Jesus comes and finds him, and there's no playful back and forth. There's no kind of, you know, messing around and debating. Jesus just comes and lays hold of him and says, you're mine. And what's the immediate effect? The villagers come out to see him after the pigs have killed themselves. The villagers come out to see him. And what do they do? They see the man standing with Jesus in his right mind. You see, the dignity of the image of God has been restored to him through the proclamation of Jesus Christ. The deliverance of Jesus Christ shows us that demons are not sophisticated vampires, okay? They are about dehumanization. They're about desecration of the thing that God has made that has dignity. So we learn about these opponents sin, Satan, demons. And here's the thing. Every single one of us are caught up in a battle against these enemies.

As a matter of fact, if we could see things as they really are, you know, when you come into church, what's actually happening here? Okay, you're getting dressed up and you're getting in your car and, you know, your kids and kids are screaming, right? The kids always fall apart right before church, right? I know, okay, I have 5 kids so I've experienced it too. There's all these

unique hardships. I do think that is spiritual warfare. But what happens? You're coming in through those doors into worship like a soldier who's coming off of a battlefield where there's a hot conflict. But you're coming in. You're closer toward. I don't care how nice your suit is, your clothes are torn, you're bleeding. You've got bullet wounds. You've got scars because you have been in a battle against Satan and sin and the demons of this world. And when you come into worship, each one of us is coming, wounded and scarred by spiritual conflict, seeking sustenance and healing and rejuvenation so that we can get back out there for the fight ahead.

We have to remember this. This is in worship. This is when you're studying God's Word. You're getting fed your rations to strengthen you for the battle. That's why we need to be doing this not just on Sunday morning worship. We need to be getting together in our Sunday school groups and in our community groups and in our dinner clubs. We need to be getting together older men with younger men one on one or one on three, and older women with younger women to help train them. Those who have been in the battle a little bit longer and can tell you about where the potholes is, potholes are, and where the foxholes are and where the bombs are buried. We need to recognize this isn't just a casual thing that we do just because we consider ourselves religious, but that this is what it means to be in a battle of our lives, the spiritual conflict of the world around us. So we start with the field of battle. Paul moves on to the weapons of faith because he wants us to know that the only solution to spiritual threat is a spiritual armory.

The only way you're going to be able to stand against this conflict, against Satan and sin and the demons, when they come for you and they are coming for you, and they're coming for you right now, the only way you can stand against them is to have weapons that are suitable in that defense. These are the weapons, the belt of truth, the breastplate of righteousness.

You need to know truth. You need to be able to handle truth, to not only know the know it, but to rely on it, to be able to traffic in it in truth and not in deception. You need to have righteousness before you, protecting you. You're striving after cruciformity. You're striving after being formed into Christ. Okay? Being formed in the way that he was formed, having the mind of Christ. Isn't that what Paul says in Philippians? To have the mind of him that strengthens you? You want to have the shoes of. I love how he says this. The readiness of the gospel because you got the gospel message of your victorious King. You should be ready for any conflict. You should wear the helmet of your salvation. Right? You've been saved. That helmet is now guarding who's guarding your most vital parts too. Okay, even ancient warriors knew this. You can get stabbed in the chest quite a bit and they might miss something important. But you can't get stabbed in the head right? This is what matters. You got to protect it with that helmet of salvation over your head, that you might be protected from fatal blows. The shield of faith should protect you. Your faith in Christ. Saving faith, not only having the knowledge of the

gospel, but putting your trust in it and recognizing that it is true. But notice not all of the spiritual armor is defensive. We also have the offensive weapon, and the offensive weapon is the spirit. Now notice what he says here. It's the spirit that is the Word of God.

Okay. Do you realize what Paul is doing here? He's saying you have the sword of the spirit. What's the sword of the spirit? The word of God. If you want to experience the spirit in your life, yes, there is a kind of existential reality of the experience of the spirit. And as we've said before, it's when you say Jesus is Lord and you mean it. That's the spirit saying it within you. And yet, if you're wondering if you're saying spirit, where are you in my life? Okay, Paul is saying, here he is. Here's his word. You want to know what he has to say to you? Just open up. That's what it means to say it's inspired, right? It is breathed out. Spirit of God instilling these words and passing them on to you. Be strengthened in it. Truth, righteousness, readiness in the gospel, faith, salvation, spirit that is the Word of God in prayer. For Christians who are engaged in the spiritual conflict, these are the tools of your trade, okay?

Neglect them at your own peril. Imagine a battle scene. You're in a trench, you know, in World War One. Or maybe you're coming up on D-Day. You know, you're coming up on Omaha Beach and you're amphibious lander in World War two, or you're pushing forward towards the north, the 17th parallel north in Vietnam, or you're in a Humvee driving in to Fallujah. The bullets are flying all around you. The bombs are going off, the ideas are exploding. Your friends are crawling across the ground. They're getting dragged to safety. And imagine you're running along and you've got your weapons, and you're keeping your head down, and you're trying to advance on the enemy, and you jump down into this one foxhole, and there's a guy in there, and you look down and to your surprise, he's just kind of hunched over with a mortar board, and he's filing his nails right. Imagine he's reached down, he's sweating, he's looking around, gets in his back pocket, he pulls out a comb and starts coming his hair right. And he pulls out his phone and he says, what are you doing? And, I just put this post on X and I want to see how many likes I got right. What would you do? You'd grab him by the arm, he'd say, come on, man, get up, get back in the fight. You see, if we neglect the spiritual armory that's been given us to fight against Satan and sin and death, and we do it to our own peril. When you mistake this battle for one that is merely of flesh and blood, when you think the battle is really about how much money you have, or what your political intentions are, or your skills of persuasion, you are not being a realist. I know you think you are, but you're not being a realist. You're showing up with the toothpick to a gunfight. You're showing up terribly, terribly under armed in the conflict. And that's because sin is deceptive. Sin is hard. Sin slides in. And here's the thing about this is why you're in the battle and you don't even know you're in the battle. Half the time, it's because sin doesn't feel like a bullet wound.

I heard one brother say, and I think it's a great line, I have to I don't know who can't remember who was, but I have to give credit. That wasn't me. Okay, so ***this sin feels like freedom until you try to stop, right?*** Sin feels like freedom until you try to stop doing it. And as soon as you stop doing it, what you thought was freedom, you realized this is open conflict right now. You realize you're in a battle when you try to stop and you see what the enemy has done by letting hold of assets, letting hold of you when you try to break free.

You see, we've got to recognize that this is a spiritual conflict, and the only victory that we can have will come through the spiritual armor that the Lord has provided us. And that leads us then to Paul's last point. Notice what he says here. He then says, therefore makes supplication for the saints, brothers and sisters. Make supplication for me. You see, if the battle is primarily spiritual, then our greatest resource is the supply line between God and the church. We've got to keep that supply line open. We've got to keep alert. Luke, notice what he says here. And this is this getting at the kind of urgency of Paul's message. Keep alert with all perseverance. Right. You got to keep alert. Notice what's going on. Yes. You've been saved. Yes. The victory is Christ. Okay. Remember this. This is the hard thing that we have to hold between us. The victory is Christ. He's already won the battle and yet he is completing his victory through us. So keep alert and persevere.

One 20 century New Testament theologian said it like this...

He used the metaphor of D-Day and he was a little closer to D-Day. The we are. He says this in World War Two history. The course of the war changes as soon as D-Day happens, as soon as those Allied troops make it onto the shore in the continent of Europe, the war is fundamentally over. It's just the final fights that have to happen as they now push against a losing Nazi regime deep into Germany. But the war is fundamentally one. And this theologian said, When Jesus comes to earth, when he lives the life that he lives, he resists Satan's temptations. He goes to the cross, he rises again. He ascended into heaven. He sends the spirit down upon his church. That's D-Day, that's Omaha Beach. Okay, the battle is won.

And yet now it's the great privilege and the honor of the church that we get to now be his army. That completes the victory by proclaiming the gospel, by establishing outposts of his redemptive kingdom all over the face of the earth, so that one day, that vision of revelation, right, that vision of revelation will be true and that we don't even need a temple anymore.

Why? Because the whole heavens and the earth are filled with the presence of God. You see, that's what we're striving for. And that's where we recognize as well that the battle is not the same. Across every battle line, there are places where the conflict is hot, and there are places where it's more mundane. We here in the West, we experience a kind of persecution. We experience a kind of opposition from spiritual forces, no doubt. Okay. And yet we have to also

recognize it's not like it is in other parts of the world. It's not like what the church is facing in Nigeria or in North Africa or in the Middle East, or in parts of China or North Korea. Okay. Those are places where the battle fighting is hot.

I was at the prayer breakfast that Karen Ellis spoke out about a week ago -- Brilliant, talk that she gave. But I there's one thing that she said that just really struck with stuck with me. She said this if you are in the West, it is your job to be the nervous system of the body of Christ. Okay, here's what she means by this. What is the nervous system too? It tells you where the pain is in the body is right. It sends the message to the head, right so that you can do something about it. She said, don't feel guilty. Don't sit here in the West in your comfortable church and feel guilty about not being persecuted like other people are in the church. Okay, your job right now, this is what you're called to. Your call is your calling is to be the nervous system that feels the pain of the church and proclaims it yes to the church itself, yes to the world, and ultimately to God. It's our job to pray on behalf of the church. Notice that's what Paul tells them to do here. He says, pray on behalf of those who are suffering, even me, in chains. Why? So that I might be encouraged to go out and continue doing the work of the gospel that I've been called to do. Paul then ends with his final things. He's laid out for us, how the church is all of these things, and how we have to be involved in this spiritual conflict.

And then here's a brief note about his friend as Paul does a friend who is probably delivering the letter. Oftentimes, Paul will send his letter with one of his coworkers, and their job will be both to deliver the letter, maybe even to read it. But then also to then answer any questions that the people might have about how Paul is doing. It seems that that's the role of tick acts in this letter. Here. But then notice he closes on this meditation about the nature of the church and our salvation in Jesus Christ. We've been asking this question what is the church? What is the church? As we've seen over the course of this letter, the church is many things. It is the chosen of God. It is the adopted Son of God. It is the Bride of Christ. It is the bond servant who serves the Lord Jesus Christ. It is the body of Christ of which Christ is the head. It's the dwelling place of God on earth. And then finally, as we see here, the church is the spiritual warrior moving forward, Christ's redemptive kingdom over the face of the earth. Paul wants them to know he's experiencing that conflict even now as he sits in chains writing this letter. But he's telling them, don't be discouraged. Be encouraged by who I am and what I'm doing. Pray for me that I might be strengthened to continue on in it. It's interesting that he opens this letter with a benediction. If you remember way back in August that we read, he opens a letter with grace and peace. Notice he ends with grace and peace. But now he adds another element. It's an element that he's been talking about throughout the letter. It's the element of love says grace and peace and love, incorruptible love. That's what it means to be the church. And to be honest, I can't imagine any more that we could ask for than these things. What a gift it is.

Let us give thanks -- please pray with me.

Heavenly father, we do come before you giving thanks. So we are all of these things in Christ. That is by faith that we might actually be counted as sons of God. It's by faith that we might actually say, look at our husband, Christ, who comes and finds us. It's by faith we might be able to say we are warriors on the spiritual battlefield. And the victory is sure, because the victory is in Christ Jesus. Lord, we give thanks. What a gift! Please, Lord, draws closer to you that as we reflect on these things that we would find our hearts transformed by these things and that that would have effect not only in our lives, but in the life of this church and the life of the region around Birmingham and in the life of the world.

We pray this in Christ's name.

Amen.