

**WINNING
THE WAR TO
WALK WORTHY**

**A DEVOTIONAL EXPOSITION
OF EPHESIANS 6:10-18**

TIMOTHY W. BERREY

INTRODUCTION

If Romans is the Mount Everest of the New Testament, Ephesians is its K2 (the second highest peak in the world). Although I have long appreciated the richness of Ephesians, my realization of its beauty deepened in 2014 when I began preparing for a week of lectures on this epistle. Since then, I have lectured through Ephesians a few more times, and individual passages in it numerous times.

One part of Paul's letter to the Ephesians that caught my eye was the section on the armor of God (6:10-18). As I have worked through his letter, I have pondered the connection between this armor section and the previous sections concerning the church's worthy walk (4:1-6:9). I have come to see that the war we need armor for is the war to walk worthy. Walking worthy is not a stroll through the park; it is a fight to the death, and thus Paul uses battle imagery to cap off his exhortations on the church's walk.

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This book is short and definitely not the end-all of expositions on Ephesians 6:10-18. However, my exposition of this section of Ephesians is not the shortest. Warren Wiersbe's *What to Wear to the War* is shorter.

At the opposite end of the length spectrum is William Gurnall's massive 1200-plus page *The Christian in Complete Armour*. John Newton reportedly commented, "If I might read only one book beside the Bible, I would choose *The Christian in Complete Armour*." I spent most of 2019 reading 2-3 pages a day in order to finish the book, and found it worth every minute. Gurnall nourished me on an almost daily basis from the pasture of Ephesians 6:10-20—and pulled in passages from all over Scripture in the process.

Jerry Bridges comments in *The Pursuit of Holiness* that we readily make vague resolutions toward change but are reluctant about actually committing ourselves to any specific action. Here are his exact words (from Chapter 10, "The Place of Personal Discipline"):

We are prone to vagueness at this point [specific application of Scripture] because commitment to specific actions makes us uncomfortable. But we must avoid general commitments to obedience and instead aim for specific obedience in specific instances.

I vouch for the accuracy of his comment on the basis of personal experience! For this reason, I include a "Battle Checklist" section at the end of each chapter to force you to think some *specific* thought or undertake some *specific* action. Victory Lists at the end of the book allow you to chart times you "put your armor on" and obeyed.

Introduction

The church is fighting a war to walk worthy, and it is sometimes hard to tell whether we are winning or losing that war. But if we will heed Paul's words to the Ephesian church, we can "win the well-fought day."

Ephesians 6:10-18

Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the 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. Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God; praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints.

A ROMAN SOLDIER IN BATTLE ARRAY

Photo taken by the author outside the Ephesus Archaeological Museum in 2018. Note the short sword and full-sized shield, which are exactly as Paul describes in Ephesians 6:16-17.



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THE WAR

Like it or not, believe it or not, feel it or not, you and I are in a war. That is why Paul ends his letter to the Ephesians by using the imagery of a soldier putting on his armor for battle.

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 (6:13).

Paul uses war imagery in some of his other New Testament letters.

The night is far spent, the day is at hand. Therefore let us cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light (Rom. 13:12).

But let us who are of the day be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet the hope of salvation (1 Thess. 5:8).

These references reinforce that we are in a war. But what is the nature of the war? Who are we fighting? What is the objective of this war? General Douglas MacArthur once said, “In war

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there can be no substitute for victory.” Obviously we are fighting to win—but to win what?

The section in Ephesians on the armor of God comes at the end of almost three chapters that discuss how a believer should walk (chs. 4-6). Paul actually introduced these three chapters by admonishing his readers to “walk worthy of their calling” (4:1). The “calling” Paul refers to is not their vocation or occupation. “Calling” is rather his way of summarizing the salvation that God called them to enjoy in His Son and the privilege of being part of the church, the body of Christ.

THE WORTHY WALK

This calling should result in a changed life—a way of life worthy of the salvation they have received and worthy of their great Lord. Paul does not leave his readers in doubt as to what that worthy walk is but expounds on it in five sections.

Maintain unity with other Body members (4:1-16)

The worthy walk is, first of all, to walk in unity with other Body members. This requires qualities like humility, meekness, and patience. It normalizes actions like lovingly tolerating fellow believers and making every effort to maintain unity in the body of Christ. Strife, quarreling, self-promotion, and contention have no place in the Body.

Live like the new creation in Christ that I am (4:17-32)

The worthy walk is, second, to live differently from the way you and others around you used to live. As a recipient of heavenly blessings, you will no longer be able to walk in stride with your countrymen here on earth. You have learned Christ, and He has

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taught you a different kind of walk. Paul specifies five areas where you ought to see change: lying, stealing, sinful anger, hurtful communication, and malicious attitudes and actions. Now, instead of lying, you always speak the truth. Instead of stealing, you work and give to others. Instead of harboring anger, you resolve it. Instead of destroying other people with your words, you build them up; and instead of maliciously seeking revenge against those who have hurt you, you plague them with kindness and forgiveness.

Love others the way God has loved me (5:1-2)

Similarly, your worthy walk issues forth in a life of love toward those around you. You cannot help it! You have experienced the love of both the Father and the Son. You have especially experienced the self-sacrificing love of Jesus who gave Himself up for you. Ultimate sacrificial love does not just mean giving chocolates or roses, but giving up self in meaningful service to others. If you are in Christ, you are the recipient of that kind of love, and you desire to love others in the same way.

Refuse to have anything to do with “dark” behavior (5:3-14)

The worthy walk brings other lifestyle changes. Paul lists several examples of dark behavior—things like sexual immorality, covetousness, filthiness, foolish talking, and crude joking. This darkness is common place in our world. In fact, one could argue this is central to it. In modern culture, sex sells everything from canned tuna to watches. Virtually no comedian can resist inserting some sexually inappropriate innuendo into his comedy routine. Evidently man’s bent toward immoral behavior has not changed in the almost 2,000 years since Paul wrote his letter to the Ephesians.

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But these are works of darkness, not the works of those who will inherit the kingdom of light. In the worthy walk there is now no place for dark behavior; it should never be named among you. Not at all! You are now a child of light, and you must make sure that the things you do please the Lord—that your actions are good, right, and true.

Adhere faithfully to the Lord's will as a wise and Spirit-filled member of Christ's body (5:15-6:9)

In addition, the worthy walk takes life seriously. Life is a go-around-once opportunity to accomplish maximum good for the sake of the Lord Jesus Christ. You are not to indulge in things like wine that are addicting, rob you of self-control, and, at the end of the day, leave so many penniless, hopeless, and homeless.

Rather, allow the Spirit to control you. Always! His control of you will usher you into a life filled with edifying singing, heartfelt worship, constant thanksgiving, and Christ-pleasing responses to your varied life relationships. It does not get any better than life in the Spirit!

WHY WALKING WORTHY IS A WAR

All that we have described above portrays the worthy walk of the believer. Your new proclivity as a regenerate child of God is to walk worthy. You and I are a divine workmanship, created in Christ for good works.

For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them (2:10).

The War

So here's where the riddle comes in.

Why is it so challenging to walk worthy? Given that every spiritual blessing in heavenly places is ours, why is it difficult to walk in unity with other Body members? Why do many members remain at odds with each other? Why, for example, do we even joke that church splits are the best ways of planting new churches? Why are there business meetings in good conservative churches where one member slugs another?

Or why the struggle to walk as a new creation? Why does the pull even exist to lie again, steal again, or harbor anger again? We learned Christ; those things should have no place in our lives anymore.

Why is it difficult to give ourselves up in love for others? Why do we hang on to our privileges and rights? Why does unfair treatment or others' selfishness bother us?

Why do we so often waste the one life we have on things that do not matter? Instead of redeeming opportunities, we squander them. Instead of pursuing the will of the Lord, we pursue our own. If God's will conflicts with ours, we quickly rationalize our excuses as to why what we want actually is God's will.

Why do we seem to be addicted to everything except the control of the Holy Spirit? Why, for example, are we drawn to surf the internet when we could be worshipping the Lord or singing meaningful Christian songs? What has caused Christ's body to look so much like the world it was freed from?

Obviously, the answer is not a simple one-liner. (And we do not want to overlook the powerful pull of our flesh toward satisfying ungodly desires.) But let's focus on the answer that

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our text in Ephesians 6:10-18 highlights: we have an enemy called the devil who radically opposes our walking worthy.

Try to think like the devil for a moment.

(Only for a moment.)

What would you do if you wanted to destroy the body of Christ? Of course, your first goal would be zapping the church out of existence, but that will not happen. Not even the gates of hell will prevail against the church (Matt. 16:18). Furthermore, Christ as the Head of the church works to present the church to Himself as a spotless Bride (Eph. 5:27). God planned before the foundation of the world to form a Body for His Son (1:3-14). Clearly, the church won't disappear any time soon. Satan knows that.

But, if you were Satan, what you could do (and no doubt would do) is attack every facet of the worthy walk outlined in Ephesians 4-6:

You would attack the church's walk so that its members do not *look* or *act* like the body of Christ.

You would stir up conflict between Body members.

You would push believers to fall back into old man behaviors, such as lying, stealing, and the like.

You would search out opportunities, such as unresolved anger, to get a foothold in Christian lives and rip them apart (4:26-27).

You would entice Body members with the works of darkness.

You would present these works of darkness as innocent, valid, appealing, or—if need be—comical, so that God's people will find humor in things that are inappropriate and tolerate things that are shameful.

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You would pack people's lives with distractions so that they do not have time to contemplate God's will for them.

You would provide ample opportunities to fritter away time in meaningless activities.

You would create alternative activities or pleasures that bring patterns of addiction to keep believers from being Spirit filled.

The end result?

The body of Christ no longer looks or acts like the body of Christ. It goes through all the rituals of being Christ's without laying hold of the transforming power of being His. An untransformed church exposes itself to mockery from unbelievers and unwittingly provides a platform for demonic hordes to chortle at the idea of the church as the "wisdom" of God (3:10).

After all, "outsiders" watching do not see any alteration in the lifestyle of Body members. By all outward appearances and actions, these Christians resemble their unsaved neighbors, the only difference being that they are busier on Sundays. Other than that, Christians quarrel with each other, trash talk others with their mouths, live in malice toward their spouse, complain about everything and everyone around them, seek maximum leisure, pursue materialistic goals, make inappropriate jokes, and enjoy questionable entertainments—just like everyone else does.

When the church walks like the world around it, Satan has won a great victory. He cannot stop God's plan for the church, but he can keep the church from living out its identity as the body of Christ.

As he closes his letter to the Ephesians, Paul employs battle imagery because Satan is fighting the church's worthy walk. He

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is fighting *your* worthy walk. And the chief combatant you and the church fight is not flesh and blood.

For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places (6:12).

The problem is not primarily Hollywood or your neighbor or your boss or even the economy (you feel forced to cheat every now and then just to survive). The problem is not primarily your spouse or your children or even social media with its incessant demands on your time. Behind each of those visible things is an invisible mastermind who uses those circumstances against you.

At the same time, we must avoid swinging the pendulum too far toward a “devil made me do it” mentality; we never have an excuse to demonize people who constantly irritate, annoy, or frustrate us. But we need to adjust our strategy if we are going to win this war. We have to get the right enemy in our sights.

Military strategists understand that a victory in war is not just the result of a larger army or newer equipment. You must put your army in the right place. You need to use new equipment in the right way. History is full of victories won by generals whose army was smaller or less equipped than their opponent. (Hannibal is a prime example.) Neither all-out effort nor sheer numbers win the day.

The little island of Corregidor in the Philippines guards the mouth of Manila Bay and was heavily fortified by the Americans before World War I. One of the gun batteries installed there could hurl a 1000-pound shell almost eight miles, and the

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largest could shoot a shell 16 miles. Yet in World War II, all the money invested in fortifying Corregidor hardly paid off. Why? Corregidor's massive guns were sea guns, built to loft shells that would pierce the decks of ships. World War II was largely fought from the skies. America had heavily fortified Corregidor, but not with the anti-aircraft equipment needed to prevent the Japanese from taking the island. You have to know your enemy and how he will attack if you want to win the war.

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So, how do we win the war to walk worthy? How should we strategize to ensure that we, our families, and our churches reflect our identity as members of the Body of our risen Lord who is not only Head of the church but also Head over all things? Paul answers this question in our text, Ephesians 6:10-18. In the last three chapters, Paul has urged the church to walk worthy of its calling. He wraps up his message by using battle imagery—by depicting a soldier putting on armor for war and standing against an enemy. His point? To portray what Christians must do to emerge victorious in the war to walk worthy. And—here's the encouraging shot in the arm—to assure them that they *will* emerge victorious if they adhere to the strategy that he lays before them.

On whom we must depend (6:10)

In Ephesians 6:10-18, Paul sets forth a threefold strategy to win the war. Each prong of this strategy gives a specific command. The first prong is to *be strong*, the command in verse 10. The verse then proceeds to tell us on whom we should depend for that strength.

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What we must put on and why (6:11-13)

The second prong of Paul's strategy is the command to *put on* the whole armor of God (v. 11). Verse 13 then repeats the command in similar terms. The bulk of verses 11-13 consists of explaining why we must put on the whole armor of God. Simply put, we must wear the armor so that we will be able to stand against the enemy we face. We will never stand in our worthy walk if we do not first put on the whole armor of God. Our enemy is far too cunning and far more powerful than we are. We will never overwhelm him with equipment of our own making or a strategy born of our own planning. We absolutely must put on the whole armor of God.

How we must stand (6:14-18)

But once we put on that armor, we are to *stand* (v. 14). Think of *stand* here in terms of not backing down from anything Jesus intends His body to do or to be. *Stand*, Paul's third command and the third prong of his battle strategy, is the first word of verse 14 (even in Greek), and it is the command which the rest of our passage hangs on. Paul then catalogues the various pieces of the armor of God, but not as a command to put them on. He has already told us to put on the whole armor in the previous verses. He delineates the pieces here in a way that assumes we have already put them on. We must stand and we can stand, but only if we have already put the pieces of the armor on. A wise soldier straps on his equipment before the battle begins!

Paul's three-pronged strategy to win the war to walk worthy has a natural progression. First, look to the Lord for strength. Only when strengthened with His might will you feel confident enough to put on the whole armor of God. And only when you have donned the whole armor of God will you be able to stand

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against your enemy. This is Paul's strategy for winning the war to walk worthy.

We will now unpack the nuts and bolts of this strategy as we work our way through Ephesians 6:10-18.

BATTLE CHECKLIST

Only checkmark the boxes if you can do so honestly.

- I have heard and responded to God's call to salvation.
- I am willing to *war* in order to walk worthy.
- I will not shift the blame for my failures to Satan, but I will watch for ways he is working to trip me up.
- One of the chief ways in which Satan is trying to spiritually trap me right now is _____.
- I have looked in my Bible and marked the three commands that form the three prongs of Paul's strategy to win the war to walk worthy: " _____ " (v. 10), " _____ " (v. 11), and " _____ " (v. 14). (Review this chapter if you need help finding the answers.)
- I have asked the Lord to use my reading of this book to render me marked assistance in winning the war to walk worthy.