



## **Ephesians 6:10-24**

### **“Why The Christian Life Is Hard”**

(Study and Application Questions Included)

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### **“Following Christ From City Center!”**

**EPHESIANS 6:10-24 "WHY THE CHRISTIAN LIFE IS HARD"**

Endure In Face Of Hostile/Intrusive Culture

**1) v.10 SUMMARY COMMANDMENT ON COMMUNAL STRENGTH.**

Military Mindset

10 Finally, be strong (empowered)  
in the Lord  
and in the strength  
of his might.

Read Aloud To Inspire// General To Troops, Arouse Emotions, Disdain For Enemy  
3:7, Concludes Exhortations Begun At 4:1// Col. 1:11  
*In the Lord* = 2:21, 4:17, 5:8, 6:1, 21, To Church As A Body, Not Just To Individuals  
Military Mindset, Call For Valor, "Onward Christian Soldiers, Marching As To War"  
Command: Strength In Him & His Might, God Has Superior Equipment  
Synonymous Parallelism For Emphasis (a-b//a'-b')

**2) vv.11-13 HOW TO BE STEADFAST BY TAKING UP THE FULL ARMOR OF GOD.**

Strategy That Presumes A Warfare World View

**a) v.11 Command To Put On The Whole Armor For Enemy Attack.**

Battle = Philosophical Language

11 Put on the whole armor of God,  
that you may be able to stand

4:24// Is. 11:5, 59:16-17 Command To Don Whole Armor Of Foot Soldier

//2:2, 4:14, 4:27, *Devil Is Sing.*; *Wiles*

Roman Soldiers Were Not To Retreat But Stand In Interlocked Ranks

**b) v.12a Wrong Enemy: Who Is Not Our Foe: Other Human Beings.**

2 Cor. 10:3-5

Many Ephesians Had Used Magical Practices To Deal With Powers

12 For we are not contending against blood and flesh (i.e. other human beings),

Reason: "For"

Gen 32:22-32; Dan 10:10-21

**b') vv.12b Right Enemy: Multiple Spiritual Powers And Colonized Creational Structures.**

Later Misused By Gnostics: Light/Soul Trapped In Flesh By Evil Creator

1) but against the principalities,

//2:1-3, Opposing Powers In 4 Categories

2) against the powers (authorities),

2 Possible Groups: Principalities/Powers, High/Lower Fallen Angels

3) against *the world rulers* of this present darkness,

//5:8, 11, Name For Pagan Deities: Sun/Moon, This Fallen Age

4) against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.

"spiritual beings of wickedness" = "evil spirits"

Possible Rank Ordering From High To Low

**a') v.13 Command To Put On The Whole Armor Of God To Be Able To Stand In The Evil Day.**

Fully Armed With Ethical Virtues = Protection Against Evil

13 Therefore take the whole armor of God,

Emphasis On *Whole Armor*, Conclusion By Rehearsal

that you may be able to withstand (stand firm) in the evil day,  
and having done *all*, to stand

//5:16, *Evil Day* = This Current Age Before The Kingdom/Now

Do Not Give Away Ground Or Retreat, Keep Your Position In The Ranks

Image Is Not Of Aggression But Of Preparation And Resistance

**3) vv.14-20 SIX PIECES OF ARMOR SPECIFIED: ALLEGORY OF ARMOR, VARIETY OF PRAYER.**

**a) vv.14-17 Command To Stand: The Allegory Of The Armor: Individual And Aided Preparation.**

One Who Donned All These Was Making A Statement Of Readiness For Combat

14 Stand therefore,

Wherever You Are Is Your Post, Command To Stand

Appear To Be Two Groups Of Three: 1-3, 4-6

Sequence	Action	Armor	Christian Resources//Fruit Of Spirit/ Virtue
1) having	girded your loins	with (the belt)	(of) truth, Is. 11:5, Apron Under Armor
2) and having	put on	the breastplate	of righteousness, Is. 59:17, Leather/Metal
15 3) and having	shod your feet	with the readiness	of the gospel of peace;// Is. 52:7
16 4) besides <i>all</i> these, taking		the shield (long)	of faith, Wisdom 5:19, Wet, Armor + Note with which you can quench Verbal Assaults
17 5) And	take	the helmet	<i>all</i> the flaming darts of the EVIL ONE. 2 <sup>nd</sup> Name
6) and	(take)	the sword	of salvation, Is. 59:17, From Attendant of the Spirit, which is the word ( <i>rhema</i> ) of God.

Close Combat, Armor + Note , Spoken, News Of Christ

**b) vv.18-20 Command To Prayer As Additional Resource: Armed Soldier To Suffering Apostle.**

//Col. 4:2-4, Command To Pray Communication With Commander

18 Pray at *all* times in the Spirit, with *all* prayer and supplication.

Different Forms Of Spirit-Prayer, Open To Gifts/Guidance

To that end keep alert with *all* perseverance,

Military Language For Watches, Mk. 14:38

making supplication for *all* the saints,

General Intercession For The Whole Army

19 and also for me,

Specific Intercession For Key Leaders, Col. 4:3, Paul As Example Of Soldier

that utterance may be given me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel,

20 for which I am an ambassador in chains;

Vivid Image, 2 Cor. 5:20, Wretched Ancient Prisons, Col. 4:4

that I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak.

Characteristic: True Philosopher: Bold/Frank/Fearless

## WHY THE CHRISTIAN LIFE IS HARD

*“For we are not contending against flesh and blood.....”*

The real battles are not with the people we see and think of as our enemies.

### E P H E S I A N S 6 : 1 2

Perhaps the most difficult thing about Jesus Christ is that he always tells the truth. His love is not the kind that thinks it best to hide the way things are, as if ignorance was bliss. He doesn't give a spoon full of sugar to help the medicine go down in a most delightful way. He's not Mary Poppins. In Jesus love and truth are joined in one remarkable life, and the reason we trust him is that God declared over him the verdict of resurrection- the ultimate act of validation. Jesus is the one-stop shop for God. So if you don't wish to be loved beyond understanding and probed to the core, stay away from this man.

Jesus teaches that we all live in a tough neighborhood with active opposition. Someone's trying to persuade you to distrust God and to embrace vice. Fiery darts are on the way from an invisible foe who has constant intelligence on your weak spots. You experience your thoughts as coming from within, but some are beamed up from below.<sup>1</sup> So if you've ever had a thought intrude upon your consciousness that- if acted upon- would lure you towards evil, it may have been more than simple temptation. If it has force beyond the ordinary, it's likely a fiery dart from the crossbow of your enemy. I have learned to spot such and to resist them by saying a firm *No*, then quoting Scripture as Jesus did in his wilderness

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<sup>1</sup> James 3:14-17 makes the contrast between thoughts that come down *from above* (i.e. from God) and those that are *earthly, unspiritual, and devilish* (i.e. from below). Commenting on John Wesley's sermon "Of Evil Angels" (Sermon 72), Thomas Oden writes, "When an evil thought occurs without any obvious or reasonable connection with a previous thought, there is reason to suspect the work of evil angels" (*John Wesley's Teaching* [Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012] 145.). For a recent theodicy emphasizing human freedom, see Dinesh D'Souza, *God-Forsaken* (Carol Stream, ILL: Tyndale, 2012).

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temptations.<sup>2</sup> Jesus comes to tell us we are of great worth to God and also that we are far worse off than imagined, “I’ve come on a rescue mission, and you need to be rescued!”

Many of you have seen the HBO miniseries *Band of Brothers* which follows a company of U.S. paratroopers through D-Day and beyond. In one scene Lieutenant Richard Winter leads his troops in holding the Germans in the Battle of the Bulge. A soldier leaving the front line pulls Winters aside and says, "Looks like you guys are going to be surrounded."

Winters replies, "We're paratroopers, Lieutenant. We're supposed to be surrounded."<sup>3</sup> And so it is with us. And so it was with Jesus who had a vivid sense of spiritual opposition and the personal angelic power behind the miseries of our world, as did Paul.

The Lord’s Prayer, which maps Jesus’ view of world, begins with a personal address using a family image of leadership and power- *Father*, followed by three imperatives: that God’s name be honored, that God’s kingdom come down with the effect that the divine will is implemented at ground level, after which nothing remains the same. What we most need is not improvement but divine intervention, for this God to be honored at ground level and all resistance removed immediately. Then come three requests for what we need to survive until that great event happens and the long war of history is over. We pray for the kingdom to descend now, but if we have to wait, here are the supplies we need.

First for our bellies, “Give us this day our daily bread.” If life is a gift and all that sustains it, then self-sufficiency is a myth, greed is contrary to the grain of the universe, and hoarding and hiding are signs of unbelief. We are in this *bread and food* thing together, “... give *us* this day *our* daily bread.” Occasionally we Christians fast for spiritual reasons, which is less than daily bread; sometimes we feast for spiritual reasons, which is more than daily bread, but on most days it’s *daily bread* over which we give thanks.<sup>4</sup>

But it is the next petition- about receiving and granting forgiveness- that begins to reveal the depth of the human problem. Even if every one eats, we still have problems. Each time we offer this prayer we acknowledge we habitually sin against God and others. It is our fallen nature, our allergy to God’s holiness and right to made demands on us.<sup>5</sup> We are of

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<sup>2</sup> Matthew 4:1-11//Luke 4:3-13.

<sup>3</sup> PreachingToday.com search under Ephesians 6:10-24.

<sup>4</sup> On the complementary spiritual disciplines of fasting and feasting, see Richard Foster, *Celebration of Discipline* (San Francisco, CA: Harper, 1998), 47-61, 190-201.

<sup>5</sup> The Articles of Religion, “Article VII- Of Original or Birth Sin: Original sin standeth not in the following of Adam (as the Pelagians do vainly talk [Pelagians were the

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great worth, but to call us *good* in an unqualified sense stretches the truth. Jesus has no illusions how hard it will be- even among his friends- to live in peace. He looks at us through clear eyes and says, “Use these words to pray. They will keep you in reality.”

But it gets worse. Even more troubling is the last petition where we admit we are not strong enough to protect ourselves. We live on earth where God’s will is resisted; we are needy and dependent, and to top it off, highly vulnerable on multiple fronts, “And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.” We are physically needy creatures- thus bread. Habitually sinful creatures- thus mutual forgiveness. And under constant assault from forces within and without- thus protection from temptations that lure and the evil that overwhelms.

It’s not a pretty picture of the fallen human person in a disrupted and colonized creation, but it is a true picture. I am not self-sufficient; I have worth but not goodness in any enduring sense; I am an easy target for an immediate diversion and an eventual takeover. If I follow the low-level temptations of sin without principled resistance, they will ultimately deliver me step-by-step into evil and thoroughly corrode my personality.

This is Jesus’ map of human reality built into the prayer he gave us as a model. One theologian has given the map a name; Gregory Boyd calls it a *spiritual warfare world view*,<sup>6</sup> and I find, with John Wesley and the central stream of Christian thinking, that it has great explanatory power. Significant powers are arrayed against us all, and from Jesus we learn how to name and resist them. The Lord’s Prayer tells us where we stand, in what kind of world we live, and it does so with a depth that includes the unseen dimensions of spiritual warfare.<sup>7</sup> John Milton, the great poet of *Paradise Lost*, summed up the issue of Christian world view with admirable clarity when he wrote, “Millions of spiritual creatures walk the

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*positive thinkers* of the early church who minimized sin’s effects and maximized notions of freedom]), but it is the corruption of the nature of every man, that naturally is engendered of the offspring of Adam, whereby man is very far gone from original righteousness, and of his own nature inclined to evil, and that continually” (*BOD 2008*, 61).

<sup>6</sup> Gregory Boyd, *Is God To Blame: Moving Beyond Pat Answers To The Problem Of Suffering* (Downer’s Grove, ILL: IVP, 2003); *Satan And The Problem of Evil: Constructing a Trinitarian Warfare Theodicy* (Downer’s Grove, ILL: IVP, 2001).

<sup>7</sup> For a recent treatment, see Dennis McCallum, *Satan And His Kingdom* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House, 2009). On Jesus’ worldview and practice, see N.T. Wright, *Simply Jesus* (SanFrancisco, CA: HarperOne, 2011), especially “Battling the Satan,” 120-127. For an excellent review, see E. Glenn Hinson, “Historical And Theological Perspective on Satan,” *Review and Expositor*, 89.4.475 (Fall 1992).

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earth unseen, both when we sleep and when we wake.”<sup>8</sup>

We have a transcendent God who invites us to use the address *Our Father in the heavens*. We, however, are situated behind enemy lines on a contested planet where God’s name is misused, where God’s will is done at best in fits and spurts, even by those who know him. Pain is everywhere. In bellies that cry for bread every few hours, in relationships which are never all we want them to be because of the plague of sin and the curse of evil. We hurt each other by what we do- sins of commission, and by the good we fail to do- sins of omission. There are forces let loose that desire our harm. We pray, “And lead us not into temptation,” because there are things we desire that will hurt us, and we pray, “deliver us from evil (or, from the Evil One),”<sup>9</sup> because there is *some one-* or *some thing!* who means us no good. Peter knew this and so wrote in his first letter:

“Be sober, be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking some one to devour. Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same experience of suffering is required of your brotherhood throughout the world.”<sup>10</sup>

A day in which you are not *sober* and *watchful* is a day you may be surprised by your Adversary who is always looking for an opening to exploit. It happened to me just recently, and had I not been jolted awake, it could have been a disaster. It was like I was walking in a fog. I took a fiery dart because I left my *shield of faith* at home that morning. It was a very difficult and emotional day for many reasons. Lots of pain and fears, and so I was unusually vulnerable. I did not don the full protective armor that morning. The dart hurt, but with some immediate spiritual first-aid, permanent damage was prevented. Since then I have been acutely aware of how much I need the Lord’s protection and to listen to the early warning systems of the Holy Spirit about incoming fire. There you are cruising along on auto-pilot, and all of a sudden tumble in a downward spiral of thinking. And while I am aware of emotional dynamics and the lingering effects of unhealed wounds, this was an attack.

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<sup>8</sup> For a recent practical treatment, see Chip Ingram, *The Invisible War* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2006).

<sup>9</sup> The Greek for evil, *poneros*, can be translated as either neuter (thus, deliver us from *evil*, understood as an anti-God force, which is the translation most often used in the Latin West) or masculine (thus, deliver us from *the Evil One*, understood as Satan- the personal focus of evil, which is the preferred translation in the Eastern Churches. It is clear from the Gospel accounts that Jesus understood that evil found its focus and origin in Satan, the Evil One as the wilderness temptation stories indicate, e.g. Mt. 4:1-11.

<sup>10</sup> 1 Peter 5:8-9.

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Understanding this dynamic gives you an extra layer of explanatory power because it deals not just with the visible but with the invisible world with which we are all surrounded.

Fiorello La Guardia, one-time mayor of New York City, got it right when he said, “The Devil is easy to identify. He appears when you're terribly tired and makes a very reasonable request which you know you shouldn't grant.”<sup>11</sup> He doesn't play fair, never has, and the sooner you learn some of his tactics the wiser you will be. When you are either *hungry, angry, lonely, or tired* (h-a-l-t) you should dial up your awareness and pray, because at such times you are highly vulnerable. That little formula (halt: hungry, angry, lonely, tired) has saved me and others to whom I have taught it great grief. It's not the only thing you need to know; it is a good start. I often defeat the devil with a good meal, a time of confession and forgiveness, seeking out Christian fellowship and counsel, and a good night's sleep or a vigorous workout. Rather than him laughing at me, I laugh at him, and he hates it!

As sinners, we all can make a mess of life, and with the help of the Evil One and his underlings an even bigger mess, some of which lasts for generations till broken by the power of Jesus Christ. Patterns of alcoholism, addictions, incest, perversions, poverty, unbelief, occult and magical practices, curses, false religions, even some illnesses: all these run in families, often with explicitly spiritual causes that normal means of counseling and help cannot address.<sup>12</sup> One of the powerful arguments against sin and evil is the toxic legacy they leave for children, grandchildren, and at least two generations beyond that. Breaking a legacy of iniquity and setting up a legacy of blessing is one of the most powerful things you can do. Will your decedents call you blessed, or will they still be wading through the muck of sin and sloth you shoveled down upon them? Some of this down-flow is inevitable in that we all damage our children, but much is avoidable. Will you pave the way or block the way?

Did you know you are on-file? Just as you have a unique DNA, fingerprint, and retina, so you also have a unique *temptation profile*. Your family history and patterns of sin, your choices and weaknesses, are all fed into strategy sessions on how to trip you up and turn you away from Christ. How else do you explain the moral disasters and bad judgments of life? We all know people who seem to live under a cloud. Nothing ever goes right for them,

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<sup>11</sup> *Leadership*, Vol. 16, no. 2

<sup>12</sup> Inventories are available in Francis McNutt, *Deliverance from Evil Spirits* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker/Chosen, 1995), 161-183; James S. Wallace, *The Occult Trap* (Colorado Springs, CO: Wagner Publications, 1994), 211-230. It is important to rule out medical and mental health issues before moving to spiritual diagnosis. A team approach is preferred. I have found that leading people through confession, forgiveness, and the renunciation of alien spiritual bonds is often enough.

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and there are reasons. Sin and stupidity and mindless living go a long way. But there is also the *X Factor*, as if someone knew what would draw you and was actively setting up situations to take you down. You don't have to go looking for temptations, they will find you, and who is behind that? If you desire what God forbids, all sorts of opportunities soon cross your path. Martin Luther observed he went to bed each night with the fifth petition, "And forgive us our debts," and woke up with the sixth, "And lead us not into temptation." Every day we enter the fight again and need a military mindset. Just as fishermen know what lures bass go after, the Evil One and his underlings know what's attractive to you. Bad news: someone is trolling for you! Good news: forewarned is forearmed. Therefore, says Peter, "Be always sober; be always watchful."

The Apostle Paul agreed with Jesus' depth perception of our condition and wrote in Ephesians 6 that our real enemies are not other human beings, whom he described collectively as *flesh and blood*, but the devil and his multiple, interlaced layers of fallen angels, all forming a hierarchy- or *lowerarchy!* of evil intent.<sup>13</sup> Note in verses 10 through 12 that all the titles are plural and that four distinguishable layers other than Satan are catalogued. Our enemy is a creature, not the equal of God but perhaps of Michael the archangel- so any ultimate dualism is out, and not omnipresent, but with a web of intelligence and influence extending across creation: *principalities, powers, world rulers, spiritual hosts of wickedness in heavenly places*. We don't see them, but they are there. Listen again to Paul's analysis because he agrees with Jesus:

"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 wiles of the devil." And the natural response is Why bother? The reason is given in verse 12, "For we are not contending against flesh and blood, but against the principalities, against the powers, against the world rulers of this present darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places."

In these verses Paul names the devil plus at least four layers of opposition against whom we take our stand in Christ. This is why we need the whole armor. The belt of truth is the practical content of Scripture that holds things in place. The breastplate of righteousness is faith in Christ and what he had done for us. The sandals of readiness means

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<sup>13</sup> John Wesley dealt with the angelic realm explicitly in his sermons "Of Evil Angels" (Sermon 72 and thus not part of our formal Doctrinal Standards) and "Of Satan's Devices" (Sermon 42 and thus part of our Doctrinal Standards). These may be found at <http://gbgm-umc.org/umhistory/wesley/sermons>. Wesley's thinking is aptly summarized in Thomas Oden, *John Wesley's Teachings* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), "Spiritual Creation: Of Good Angels, Of Evil Angels," 139-147, 157-169.

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you are prepared to go and share your faith with anyone. The long shield of faith is to interlock with the shields of others to fend off the enemy's flaming arrows of temptation. The helmet of salvation is to protect your thinking, and then- finally- comes the only offensive weapon in the array, the sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God when it is spoken.<sup>14</sup> Scripture in your mouth has power! It's what Jesus used with such effect.

For Paul, the armory of a Roman soldier is the image of the prepared believer, and it only makes sense if every day's a battle. Leave off a piece, and that's where you'll get hit. Abandon the Bible, and truth soon becomes relative and fuzzy. If you stand in your own confidence rather than Christ's, you will soon be ashamed. Miss a moment of witness and your conscience condemns you. Forget the shield of faith and you'll soon find yourself giving into temptations you'd long ago conquered. Forget your helmet and your thinking becomes confused. With what will you resist temptation if you do not speak the Word of God which you've memorized? This armor is our comprehensive protection, and we need all of it every day because the other team never quits. The *New York Times* reported eight years ago:

"Since the war started, more than 2,300 American soldiers in Iraq have been hurt in combat, many by artillery shells and homemade bombs that spray shrapnel. Bulletproof vests and helmets protect vital organs. But... doctors say that severe facial injuries, along with wounds to the arms and legs, are becoming a hallmark of this war."

Dr. Jeffrey Poffenbarger, an Army neurosurgeon, commented, "There's that little area between where the helmet ends and the body armor starts. We're seeing a lot of guys getting hit right there, right in the face."<sup>15</sup>

We are commanded to put on the armor and enter the day prepared. And if we don't, we shouldn't be surprised at the wounds we receive and the casualties we observe. If I had to divide Christians into two camps, it would be between those who know life is an ongoing spiritual battle that requires training and skill and equipment, and- on the other- those who are unaware there's a battle at all. You hear things like, "All this Satan stuff is just primitive mythology. Jesus was a man of his age. We need not be captive to such outdated concepts. After all, we are modern people. It's all a metaphor."<sup>16</sup> They sing *Onward Christian Soldiers* as a tribute to earlier generations, but when the song is over they act like civilians.

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<sup>14</sup> For a treatment of the armor, see McCallum, *Satan And His Kingdom*, 119-130.

<sup>15</sup> Preaching.com search under Ephesians 6:10-24.

<sup>16</sup> See the various opinions in Mary Jacobs, "Does Satan really exist? Many United Methodists see evil as more subtle?" *United Methodist Reporter*, July 11, 2003, found at [www.umportal.org/main/article.asp?id=3808](http://www.umportal.org/main/article.asp?id=3808).

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**Ephesians 6:10-24 ..... 10**

Have you ever had an alien thought intrude into your mind? Maybe something like *Quit praying*. Quit reading your Bible. Quit tithing. Quit speaking of Jesus with love. Quit attending worship. Quit struggling against sin. Quit humbling yourself in repentance. Quit extending forgiveness. Quit serving others. Quit battling racism. Quit being generous with the poor. Quit examining your soul. Quit seeking the truth. Quit using your spiritual gifts. Quit listening to conscience. Quit being troubled over this world. Take a break. You deserve it. Nothing much is at stake. You won't be missed. Ever heard those voices? I have, and if you listen for a day, then a week, then a month or more, you will be lulled into spiritual sloth. Nothing I know will keep you as alert as an awareness of your weaknesses and a sober respect for the one who's after you. He hates it when we spot his schemes because his best work is done in the shadows, his best lie being that he doesn't exist at all!

On December 8th, 2004, a question from a young soldier touched off a media firestorm. Secretary Rumsfeld had come to deliver a talk to troops in Kuwait. Army Specialist Thomas Wilson asked, "Why do we soldiers have to dig through local landfills for pieces of scrap metal and compromised ballistic glass to up-armor our vehicles?" Specialist Wilson felt vulnerable, as if sent into battle without proper protection. As Christians, however, we shouldn't have that fear. Our Supreme Commander generously equips his troops with the belt of truth, the breastplate of righteousness, the gospel of peace, the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit. But it's up to us to put them on and put them to use.<sup>17</sup> And if we don't, casualties multiply.

I once looked a woman in the eye and told her, "Your enemy is not your husband. He's a Christian like you, struggling as best he can. Your enemy is the Evil One and the deep patterns of sin and chaos in both your lives, some of which you inherited (what was done *to* you), some of which you created (what was done *by* you)." It may feel like other people are my enemies, but Paul says it's not the whole story. What we need to see is not the surface but the hidden depth, as in verse 12, "For we are not contending against flesh and blood." Our battle is not with people but with the spiritual powers under whose influence they live.

In other words, things are not as they appear on the surface of life. Science and history are valuable tools, and much is to be learned from them. But after you've exhausted all the learned disciplines and all the other *ologies*, don't forget the science of God, *theology*, which for Christians is rooted in Scripture. And if Jesus, Peter, and Paul tell me I am weak and easily led astray, if they tell me evil is focused in a malevolent personal reality who delights in the pain of this world, I believe them. The classic Christian doctrine of evil has

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<sup>17</sup> "Troops Put Thorny Questions to Rumsfeld," CNN.com (12-9-04).

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great explanatory capacity.<sup>18</sup> How do you account for the pain, horror, and evil that consistently weaves itself in and out of the human story? The human fall was logically preceded by an angelic fall, which is why a Tempter slithered into innocence of Paradise.

Secular reasoning which leaves the world flat and without spiritual height and depth is just not sufficient to explain human experience. I prefer a biblical world view and a classical Christian mind set which lets science have its place in an ordered world but refuses to let its limiting methodologies tell me what cannot be. Just because you can't see it or measure it or control it or predict it doesn't mean it's not there. The Lord's Prayer is chock full of *invisible realities*: God the Father for one, the coming kingdom for a second, heaven for a third, the power of forgiveness for a fourth, and the reality of the Evil One for a fifth. We are sotted in the invisibles of the spiritual life when we pray this prayer. We are crying out to the invisible and waiting upon the unseen.

Every time we take the Lord's Prayer on our lips we are relocating ourselves in a truthful place under the North Star of the soul and affirming the truth of what Jesus says about God as Father, about the future, and about our dangerous present situation. The Lord's Prayer shows us where we stand. We stand under an open heaven and on a contested battleground. The world looks like a war zone because it is, and so it ever shall be until God's kingdom rolls in to swallow and transform this tormented planet, and until that day we are to be an army, not just an audience.

So the title of this sermon, *Why The Christian Life Is Hard*. Why is that? Because we are weak and frail by design, because we are caught in a deadly web of sin from which we cannot extract ourselves, and because there are hostile forces arrayed against us which are much more intelligent than we are and have been at the business of spoiling God's good creation for quite a long time now. We need help, which is why Jesus offered us this model prayer. We are all in trouble and all encouraged to cry out: *Our Father, our daily bread, our debts, our temptations, our adversary...*

Things are not, however, as bad as we could imagine. The sun still rises, rain falls, the earth is sustained, marriages are contracted and children born, joy erupts in beauty, life in all its complexity goes on because of the deep goodness and toughness built into creation. So we see that sin and evil- terrible as they are- are held at bay by God's providence and not allowed to utterly destroy the good creation. Satan is a fallen angelic creature on a measured

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<sup>18</sup> For an astute treatment of *the powers* from a theologian who denies Satan as a personal reality, see Walter Wink, *The Powers That Be* (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1998); and for a more orthodox reading, Jeffrey Burton Russell, *The Prince of Darkness: Radical Evil And The Power Of Good In History* (Cornell, NY: University Press, 1988).

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leash and the clock is running on his demise. Polluted rivers heal themselves eventually if the pollution stops. Regulation and self-renewal are built into the deep structures. But everywhere is the overlay of spiritual corruption, and we have never known our world without it. Which is precisely why it's so hard to believe what Jesus is telling us about ourselves and our world. Until we meet him and catch a glimpse of his alternative kingdom, this is all we've ever known.

I know you'd like it to be some other way. I would too, and someday it will. But for now ignorance is not bliss; ignorance of the spiritual conflict is blindness, and it does not serve you or the church's best interests. If Jesus is right, and our faith says he is, there is nowhere to hide; we are all combatants til we die. James R. Edwards recounts a story:

“Wilmer McLean was a farmer in the Shenandoah Valley in 1861. That spring two armies met on his property- the Union army under General McDowell, the Confederates under Beauregard. The bloodiest war in American history began at Bull Run, a creek on McLean's property. McLean was not at all sure why the armies were fighting, but he was quite sure he didn't want them on his property, so he decided to sell and go where the war would never find him, to the most obscure place in the state- or so he thought: an old house in the village of Appomattox Court House. Four years later Grant was pursuing Lee and sent a message asking him to meet and sign a truce. The place where they signed the peace that ended the War was Wilmer McLean's living room!”<sup>19</sup>

Some things you can't get away from. There is no place this side of heaven where you get to avoid the twin challenges of temptation and evil. There is no rear to this war, no square inch of life that is not contested. Our fallen world is wired for moral corruption, therefore we must learn to pray and pray seriously, “Lead us not into temptation,” then go about the business of avoiding those things and of helping others avoid them, which means you must have a daily plan *not to sin*, especially in areas of chronic failure, what are called *besetting sins*. Only the foolish play with sin and see how close they can get without being burned. It is not a sign of spiritual strength but of spiritual foolishness to toy around with what God said must be avoided. As the corny joke says, “What happened to you, Fred?”

“Well George, I broke my arm in two places.”

To which George replies, “Well, Fred, I think I'd stay away from those places.”

Our world is currently ruled by an intruder who has squatter's rights and is immensely angry an eviction notice has been served in Jesus' death and resurrection. Sin is forgiven;

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<sup>19</sup> James R. Edwards, *The Divine Intruder* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2000), 154.

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**Ephesians 6:10-24** ..... **13**

temptation is to be avoided and resisted, but evil must finally be cast out by a superior power. The presence of evil calls for the power of deliverance, thus the words Jesus gave us, “but *deliver us* from evil.” When we give into temptation again and again, a mental and physical stronghold is formed, an unholy habit which we soon justify. Jesus is no longer the Lord of that area of life. So if we build a house of compromise, we should not be surprised when someone, or several someones, take up watch there to torment and shame us. Give Satan a hair, and he will soon weave it into a braid and eventually into a strong rope to bind us to our sins. It is then that we live into the meaning of the petition, “but deliver us from evil.”

You may not be, but the church over its history is serious about this stuff. It’s the reason for our first United Methodist baptismal question:

“Do you *renounce* the spiritual forces of wickedness (the problem is *up there*: invisible evil), *reject* the evil powers of this world (the problem is also *out there*: a fallen culture), and *repent* of your sin (the problem is unavoidably *in here*: my dark, little heart!)?” To which the candidate answers, “**I do.**”<sup>20</sup>

So don’t tell me the United Methodist Church does not officially confess such things. *Spiritual forces of wickedness? Evil powers of this world? Your sin?* What do you think those words mean? They are straight out of the Scriptures. They invoke a biblical world view, which includes *the great invisibilities* and *the great battles* we have discussed.

It is to avoid failure that Jesus taught us to pray, “Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.” It was to avoid spiritual defeat in the church that Paul wrote, “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 craftiness of the devil.” Are they right? I think so, and so have most of the pastors and theologians until quite recently. Let today be the day you woke up and took up the battle for your own soul and for the cause of Jesus Christ in the world. A militant mind set is required.

If any one tells you that Jesus Christ is true and faithful, they are a disciple.  
And if anyone tells you the Christian life is easy, they are not accurate.  
If this message has amused you, you have missed the point.  
If this message has intellectually offended you, then you are on the right track.  
And if this message has sobered you, you have heard it correctly.  
May the Lord open our eyes to see beneath the surface of life.

Phil Thrailkill, Main Street UMC, September 23, 2012

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<sup>20</sup> *The United Methodist Hymnal*, 34.

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**STUDY AND APPLICATION QUESTIONS**

**Ephesians 6:10**

1. How is verse 10 like the speech a general gives to the troops before battle or the pep talk a coach gives to players before a playoff game.
2. Where does the strength come from? How do we draw strength from the Lord? How is a disciplined training regimen part of what it means to draw strength?

**Ephesians 6:11-13**

3. Notice the circular form of vv.11-13. There are references to *armor* and *stand* in vv. 11, 13 and a contrast between enemies in v.12a, v.12b. This is a distinct paragraph.
4. Have you ever felt the presence of evil or had an encounter that frightened you?
5. What chances does a soldier or police officer have without their armor and gun? How is that like an unprepared Christian?
6. In what sense are human beings not our real enemies. See v.12.
7. Why does Paul refer to so many layers of demonic opposition in v.12b.
8. What does it take for us to *stand* and to *take a stand* in v.13

**Ephesians 6:14-20**

9. How many pieces of armor are there?
  10. Go on the internet for a drawing of a Roman soldier. Can you match the armor?
  11. In an allegory there is a one-to-one correlation between the image and the thing to which it points. What does each piece of armor stand for? Why is it necessary?
  12. Note that various forms of prayer are the final piece of armor in vv.18-20.
  13. Paul ask prayer for himself in v.19? Why is this a good thing? Why is it important to offer up special prayer for pastors?
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**PRAYER**

The Lord be with you.

**And also with you.**

Let us pray:

**Almighty God, our heavenly Father,  
you have made us for yourself and for the fellowship of the Holy Trinity,  
and our hearts are restless and searching till they find rest in you.  
You have promised that if we drew near to you,  
you would draw near to us and claim us as your people.  
Because of your great love in Jesus Christ,  
we dare to draw near to your holiness and majesty with confidence.  
May your Holy Spirit bring down upon us the kingdom that is above.  
Illumine the Holy Scriptures as they are read and preached,  
and may we feel the flame of divine love  
burning in our breasts and changing our deepest desires.  
Speak to us as we wait in silence before you. You are our God.  
Amen. (All pray in silence, seeking the presence of God.)**

**JOURNAL YOUR THOUGHTS & QUESTIONS  
ON THE THIS TEXT AND SERMON**

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**CALL ME AND SHARE YOUR INSIGHTS!**

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