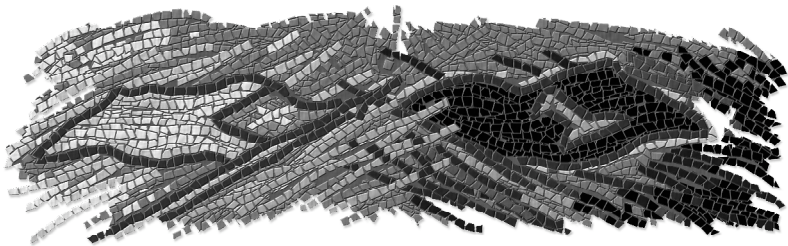


# The Christian Warfare



## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Isa. 35:4; Dan. 10:19; Luke 22:31; Rom. 7:15-20; Eph. 6:10-12; 2 Tim. 4:7, 8; Rev. 12:9.*

**Memory Text:** "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" (*Ephesians 6:12, NKJV*).

**T**he reality of the war. The Bible begins with two great accounts. First, God created a perfect world and placed Adam and Eve in stewardship of this perfect world (*Gen. 1:27, 28*). Second, Satan led Adam and Eve into a rebellion against God, bringing that world and the entire humanity under the curse of sin (*Genesis 3*). The Bible also proclaims two great accounts of good news. First, God sends His Son to this earth to die for the sins of the world and reconcile the fallen humanity unto Himself (*2 Cor. 5:14-18*). The Cross and the resurrection of Christ ensure the ultimate destruction of sin and Satan at the end of the world. The second part of the good news is that God will create the new heaven and new earth as the home of the saints (*John 14:1-3*).

Between these accounts the Inspired Word traces the perils and the progress of the great war between Christ and Satan, a war that we are all involved in. This week we look at Paul's words on how we can be victorious.

**The Week at a Glance:** How real is the Christian warfare? Ultimately, what kind of battle are we in? What are some of the wiles of the devil? Where and how do we fight this enemy? What promises do we have of victory over Satan?

*\*Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, December 17.*

## Finally . . . the War

Paul begins his narration of the Christian warfare with the words “Finally, my brethren” (*Eph. 6:10*). The word *finally* makes a forceful point. Thus far, Paul has outlined how God has redeemed us from sin through Christ, sealed us by His Spirit, brought us into a fellowship of unity, and made us a family of God. As members of this new family, God expects us to “walk worthy of [His] calling” (*Eph. 4:1, NKJV*) by putting away the old sinful life; by putting on the new transformed being; by walking in purity, in love, in light, in wisdom, and in godly relationship with all. The Christian life and walk should be in the fullness of the Holy Spirit (*see Eph. 5:18*).

But there is a demonic, evil spirit working against the Christian. Satan desires to have us, as he did Peter (*Luke 22:31*). So, Paul says, “Finally, my brethren,” get ready for the daily battle against Satan.

The word *finally* provides a summary or a conclusion. But the Greek word can be rendered better by the phrase “From henceforth” or “From now on.”

**Read** Luke 22:31. What do you think Jesus meant when He said that Satan desired to “sift” Peter? What does it mean when Satan “sifts” a person?

**Read** Ephesians 6:10. As Paul begins this exhortation, what’s his point? How are we to fight? What hope does God’s Word give us that we can be victorious?

Paul has spoken of God at work in Christ for us. The coming of Christ in history has introduced a new and powerful dimension in the cosmic battle between God and Satan. Christ’s victory over Satan on the cross has become the basis of the believer’s acceptance before God. But the believers should know that their journey to the kingdom has just begun. “From now on,” they have many battles to fight, a cunning enemy to contend with, and a war to win “against the wiles of the devil” (*Eph. 6:11*). “With full assurance of faith we may expect that He will unite His omnipotence with the efforts of human instrumentalities, for the glory of His name. Clad with the armor of His righteousness, we may gain the victory over every foe.”—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, p. 111.

**Think about a time you were victorious in a spiritual battle and a time you failed. What made the difference?**

## “The Wiles of the Devil” (*Eph. 6:11*)

Paul’s description of the spiritual warfare begins with a general warning to be aware of the “wiles of the devil” (*Eph. 6:11*).

What are the wiles of the devil? The devil does not always or necessarily attack the believer in the most obvious and evil ways. Often his ways are subtle, and his appeals may appear to uphold higher and nobler motives. Note two examples: First, the high motive he offers in his temptation to Eve in Genesis 3:1-5; second, the eagerness to establish the Messianic kingdom on earth with which he filled the mind of Judas.

In his book *The Screwtape Letters*, C. S. Lewis presents a series of imaginary letters that Screwtape, a senior demon, writes to a junior partner not experienced in the skillful art of tripping the saints. For example, when John is praying for his mother who is suffering from rheumatism, Screwtape advises the junior demon not to cause John to lose faith in prayer. Instead, John should be encouraged to pray for his mother at all times; meanwhile, John’s attention should be diverted from the necessity of massaging his mother’s aching joints.

In another letter, Screwtape suggests that Christians must be encouraged to worry and fret over great and grave issues in order to divert their attention from real and immediate problems. The name of the game, says Screwtape, “is to have them all running about with fire extinguishers whenever there is a flood.”—(London: Collins Clear-Type Press, 1956), pp. 128, 129.

**Look up the following texts: How, in each case, can we see how Satan works? Do any of these methods seem especially familiar to you?**

*Job 2:9*

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*Zech. 3:1*

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*Mark 4:15*

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*Luke 22:3*

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*2 Cor. 2:10, 11*

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*1 Thess. 2:18*

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*2 Pet. 3:4*

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*Rev. 12:12*

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## The Enemy We Face

**How** does Paul describe the enemy we face? What is he really saying to us about the kind of battle we are engaged in? *Eph. 6:12*.

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First, our primary enemy is not “flesh and blood” (*Eph. 6:12*)—that is, not human. Selfishness, pride, egotism, and anti-Christian hostility are all forces Christians have to contend with, but there are cosmic powers greater than all these working to disconnect our relationship with God.

Second, our enemy is described as “principalities,” “powers,” and “rulers of the darkness of this age” (*vs. 12, NKJV*). They are “spiritual agents from the very headquarters of evil” (*vs. 12, Philips*). The description is frightening but real, indicating superhuman, cosmic, demonic forces that contend for our allegiance in opposition to God. Whose shall we be? Satan’s or God’s? That’s the central pursuit of the Christian warfare, the great controversy between Christ and Satan.

Satan is our adversary. A relentless and formidable foe, he is a vicious fighter, lurking “about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour” (*1 Pet. 5:8, NKJV*). He is the accuser (*Rev. 12:10*), a liar and murderer (*John 8:44*). He has sinned from the beginning (*1 John 3:8*), perverts the way of the Lord (*Acts 13:10*), “deceives the whole world” (*Rev. 12:9, NKJV*), wars against God’s remnant church (*Rev. 12:17, NKJV*), persecutes the saints (*Rev. 2:10*), can appear even as an angel of light (*2 Cor. 11:14*), and, at the end of this age, will lead all those opposed to God in a final battle to overthrow His rule (*2 Thess. 2:4-10*). It is against this superhuman being and his army of fallen angels that Christians are engaged in a constant and continuous warfare. “In every soul two powers are struggling earnestly for the victory. Unbelief marshals its forces, led by Satan, to cut us off from the Source of our strength. Faith marshals its forces, led by Christ, the author and finisher of our faith. Hour by hour, in the sight of the heavenly universe, the conflict goes forward. This is a hand-to-hand fight, and the great question is, Which shall obtain the mastery?”—Ellen G. White, *Sons and Daughters of God*, p. 328.

**In your own life, how have you experienced this struggle between these two forces? In what ways is the battle manifested? How well does Satan hide? How aware are you of what’s really going on?**

## “Be Strong . . . in the Power of His Might”

The word *wrestle* (see *Eph. 6:12*), as used to describe the Christian warfare, indicates two things. First, it is like a hand-to-hand combat, as in wrestling. Second, the enemy is as close and immediate as the opponent in wrestling. The enemy is both subtle and audacious in his attempts to deceive those who have their faith and loyalty rooted in Christ. Victory in this warfare depends on three fundamental principles of Christian life and faith: “Be strong” (*vs. 10*); “Put on the whole armor of God” (*vs. 11, NKJV*); and “Stand” (*vss. 11, 13, 14*). Today’s lesson will focus on the first essential; the other two will be examined later.

**The** phrase “Be strong” appears in the New King James Version more than thirty times, three of which are in the New Testament. In most cases, the expression signifies God’s call to face fearlessly the enemy in either physical or spiritual conflict. The call suggests that God is saying “Your strength comes from Me. Therefore, be strong, and be not afraid.” Look up the following texts and note the assurance offered in each one, despite the varying circumstances. How could you apply that admonition to yourself and whatever struggles you are now facing? *Josh. 10:25, Isa. 35:4, Dan. 10:19, 1 Cor. 16:13.*

Paul’s call is to “be strong in the Lord” (*Eph. 6:10*). God’s eternal foe can be fought only by his opponents being on the side of God. “‘Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit,’ says the Lord of hosts” (*Zech. 4:6, NKJV*). Spiritual hosts of wickedness cannot be fought by human strength, however great and refined and morally precise that human strength may be, but only by spiritual forces. Nothing short of the power that flows from God through the Holy Spirit will suffice in fighting the evil one. “Without Me,” said Jesus, “you can do nothing” (*John 15:5, NKJV*). To this Paul adds: “Thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ” (*1 Cor. 15:57, NKJV*). His grace is sufficient for us (*2 Cor. 12:9*).

Paul adds one more specific to “Be strong in the Lord.” The strength from the Lord flows from the “power of His might” (*Eph. 6:10, NKJV*). Already, in Ephesians 1:17-21 Paul prays that we would experience God’s power as He displayed it in Christ’s resurrection. In Ephesians 2:1-7 the apostle explains how he hopes we will experience this power. Just as God was able to raise Christ from the dead, so He is able to raise us from death in sin to newness of life in Christ, and it is in this resurrection power that we ought to fight “the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms” (*Eph. 6:12, NIV*).

## “Put On . . . Stand”

**Having** issued the call to “be strong . . . in the power of His might” (*Eph. 6:10, NKJV*), Paul gives what admonition to the believers? What does he tell them to do, and why? *Eph. 6:11*.

In ourselves we have neither the strength of the will nor the tenacity of endurance to face the devil. By nature we are sinners (*Rom. 3:23*). Sin has separated us from God (*Isa. 59:2*), made us its slaves (*John 8:34, Rom. 6:16*), and corrupted our minds and consciences (*2 Cor. 3:14, 2 Tim. 3:13*).

**Look** up the following texts. What role do we have in this battle against Satan and sin? Are we to be passive, or is there a battle we must endure? *Matt. 16:24; Luke 13:24; Acts 14:22; 2 Tim. 2:3; Phil. 4:1; James 5:10, 11; 1 Pet. 4:1*.

Even though Christ has defeated Satan on the cross and gives that victory to us, our new life is not without its perils. As Herman Ridderbos, a noted New Testament theologian, points out: The satanic powers, “however much already vanquished in Christ, have not yet become harmless. But in order to be able to contend against them suitably, the church has received an armor from God, so richly furnished that it is able to continue to stand.”—*Paul: An Outline of His Theology* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1975), p. 392.

It is with this armor that God sends us into battle against “spiritual hosts of wickedness” (*Eph. 6:12, NKJV*). This armor is more than adequate to deal with Satan’s deceptive schemes. Satan is a cunning enemy and will not fight fair. He will use every trick he can—from turning into a talking serpent (*Genesis 3*) to masquerading as an angel of light (*2 Cor. 11:14*). Hence Paul’s twofold admonition: “Put on.” “Stand.”

“Put on” is a command to take something that does not originate with us. Anything that springs from within us is totally insufficient to meet the foe. “Put on” also indicates the idea of permanence; the Christian cannot live for a moment without the “armor of God” (*Eph. 6:11, NKJV*)—and it must cover the entire being, from head to toe, from thought to action. In Ephesians 6:11-14, four times Paul urges the believers to “stand”—hold the ground, resist the enemy, be awake and alert, and never surrender. Victory is ours.

**If you know someone who is going through “hand-to-hand” combat with Satan right now, why not spend time with that person? Besides prayer, what other things can you do to help?**

**Further Study:** *The cosmic war.* “In the Word of God are represented two contending parties that influence and control human agencies in our world. Constantly these parties are working with every human being. Those who are under God’s control and who are influenced by the heavenly angels, will be able to discern the crafty workings of the unseen powers of darkness. Those who desire to be in harmony with the heavenly agencies should be intensely in earnest to do God’s will. They must give no place whatever to Satan and his angels.”—Ellen G. White Comments, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, p. 1119.

*Warfare as a lifelong conflict.* “The enemy will use every argument, every deception, to entangle the soul; and in order to win the crown of life, we must put forth earnest, persevering effort. We must not lay off the armor or leave the battlefield until we have gained the victory, and can triumph in our Redeemer.

“As long as we continue to keep our eyes fixed upon the Author and Finisher of our faith we shall be safe. But our affections must be placed upon things above, not on things on the earth. By faith we must rise higher and still higher in the attainments of the graces of Christ. By daily contemplating His matchless charms, we must grow more and more into His glorious image.”—Ellen G. White, *My Life Today*, p. 105.

### Discussion Questions:

- ❶ As a class, read aloud 2 Corinthians 10:3-5 and discuss what insights you find on spiritual warfare.
- ❷ Satan’s wiles often involve a subtle combination of truth with error (for example, the common tendency to equate material prosperity as God’s approval and blessing on one’s life). What are other examples of this mixture of truth and error Satan uses to deceive?
- ❸ Is there an individual or a group of people your class knows who is in the midst of a deep spiritual struggle? What practical things can you, as a class, do that can show these people your care and support?

# The Reluctant Carpenter

by HECTOR GALLARDO

Hector Gallardo wanted a better life than he could find in his homeland, Chile. So he traveled to Argentina to find work. He was a carpenter by trade, but he wanted something better. He worked hard and started his own business. For eight years life was good, and he did not think about God. Then he was accused of a crime he did not commit and was sent to prison. He spent two years in prison, far from his home and family.

In prison Hector had time to think. He remembered a dream he had as a youth in which Jesus was angry with him. In another dream bad things happened to him. Hector decided that his dreams were coming true. He wondered if Jesus really was angry with him.

One day a fellow prisoner gave him a Bible, and Hector began reading it. He could not understand many things he read, but he doggedly kept on reading. He fasted and prayed as he read the Bible. After one long fast he felt weak, but other prisoners said that his face was shining, and they were afraid of him.

Another prisoner gave him a copy of *The Great Controversy*. He began reading it and found that it contained many new ideas. He compared the book's claims with the Bible and found them to be true.

At last Hector was released from prison. He took his Bible and *The Great Controversy* with him. He wanted to find the people who published the book, a group called Seventh-day Adventists. After searching for several days, he found a small group of Adventist believers. He stayed near the church and worshiped with them, studying the Bible with them, learning more about his new faith. After four months, the group of believers asked Hector to be their leader. But he told them he was not yet baptized. They urged him to prepare for baptism.

Shortly after his baptism, the same voice that had spoken to him in prison told him to return to Chile and share his faith with his family. Reluctantly he packed his few possessions and returned home.

His family welcomed him home, but when he told them that he had become an Adventist, they laughed at him and said he was crazy. It took seven years for his parents and sister to accept God's message and join the Adventist church.

Hector once more works as a carpenter, sharing his faith with those who come to his carpenter shop in Chile. He is satisfied to spend his life where God wants him, even if he never becomes rich.

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HECTOR GALLARDO serves as a local elder in his home church in La Union, Chile.