



# THE CALL TO ARMS

SERIES: THE RESTORATION OF MANKIND

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Ephesians 6:10-13  
Twentieth Message  
Brian Morgan  
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In his book, *Everything We Had*, an oral history of the Vietnam War, Al Santoli tells the story of a medic welcoming new recruits at the hospital:

A couple of us were just kind of hanging loose out in front of the main hospital building, which was a big, corrugated-tin pre-fab. About forty new guys were lined up there to have their shot records checked before being sent to their units.

The guys were all new, their first couple of days in-country, and they were all wondering what it was going to be like. Joking, smoking cigarettes, grabbing each other in the line—it was pretty loose. I mean, nobody was saying, “Straighten up. Stand in formation,” none of that. People were just kind of leaning up against the building.

All of a sudden, four choppers came in and they didn’t even touch down. They just dumped bags. One of the bags broke open and what came out was hardly recognizable as a human being. For those of us that were just sort of standing there looking in the direction of the new guys...it’s not the kind of thing you laugh at. Irony or satire...things get beyond words. All the guys stopped laughing. Nobody was saying anything. And some people were shaking and some people were throwing up, and one guy got down and started to pray.

I said to myself, “Welcome to the war, boys.”

What a shocking introduction to the war for these young recruits!

Many new Christians have been similarly shocked to discover that when they signed up as new recruits for Christ, naively expecting life to become like a vacation in Eden, they ended up getting shot at like tourists in Miami. They fell victims to violence, sickness, slander, and betrayal. I imagine the devil must say to himself, “Welcome to the war, people!”

It is in this vein of spiritual warfare that the apostle Paul concludes his letter to the Ephesians. Paul has been demonstrating how God in the cross of Christ created a new humanity through the pouring out of his Spirit on the Day of Pentecost. The key element in this new spirituality, we learned, is submission under Christ, one to another: submission in our marriages, homes, and work places. But in our text today, we come to an abrupt and dramatic change of scene. Tranquility gives way to war, peace gives way to battle. This scene, in the words of John Stott, records “shocking reality harsher than dreams.”

But, there is good news, too. Things are not out of control. The apostle declares that God is bringing about redemption in the midst of a great global conflict. As we look at these closing texts today and next Sunday, therefore, the following four questions come to mind:

1. Do we know there is a war going on?

2. Do we know who the enemy is and what he intends to do to us?

3. Do we have an overall strategy for battle?

4. Do we have practical steps for implementing our strategy?

First, I would like to recommend three books which deal with this subject of spiritual warfare in much great detail than I can accomplish in two messages. Ray Stedman’s book, *Spiritual Warfare*, gave me as a young Christian a very balanced framework for dealing with temptation, sin and the strategies of the devil. I recommend it highly. The second book is the classic by C.S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters*. Someone once said to Lewis, after reading this book, “You’re a theological genius. How did you learn all the subtleties of Satan’s strategies?” “I merely examined my own life!” was the great writer’s honest response. The third book, *Reversed Thunder*, by Eugene Peterson (some consider him the country’s foremost theological poet), sets out how to worship God in the here and now through the imagery of the book of Revelation.

Now we come to the apostle’s text, Ephesians 6:10-13:

**Finally, be strong in the Lord, and in the strength of His might. Put on the full armor of God, that you may be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenlies. Therefore, take up the full armor of God, that you may be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm.**

This brings us to our first question.

## I. Do We Know There Is A War Going On?

### (a) The Nature of Life Is a Struggle

Paul says there is an invisible war, one of constant struggle and wrestling, going on throughout every moment in time. He introduces this theme of spiritual warfare with the word, “finally.” This does not mean “in conclusion.” This word is an adverb meaning, “for the remaining time.” In other words, the whole period between the first and second comings of Christ will be characterized by spiritual conflict. Many Christians say that wars and rumors of wars, earthquakes and famine portend the last days, but my response is to quote my daughter’s favorite expression, “Wake up and smell the coffee!” It has been the last days for the past two thousand years. Such signs have been manifest ever since the resurrection and ascension of Jesus.

For example, first century Jews would have been famil-

iar with the siege of Massada, the bar-Kochba rebellion, and the terrible conquest of Jerusalem by Titus when 2.5 million Jews were killed. Recording his own experience, Paul says he “fought the wild beasts of Ephesus” (1 Cor. 15:32). I think he was vividly recounting the scene when 40,000 Ephesian idol-worshippers, reacting against the gospel of Jesus Christ, chanted for two hours, “Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!” almost causing a riot. The apostle barely escaped with his life on this occasion.

Let us not be naive. This text puts the final nail in the coffin of the prosperity gospel’s deceptive claims of health, wealth, and ease. Our text also unmasks the wishful thinking of Eastern religion’s Nirvana, which holds that we can escape the conflict through meditation. And it unmasks the lie of Christian Science that holds there is no sin, no battle, and no victims, only wrong thinking. There is a war going on! Commenting on this text, Martyn Lloyd-Jones said: “It is a stirring call to battle...Do you not hear the bugle, and the trumpet?...we are being roused, we are being stimulated, we are being set upon our feet; we are told to be men. The whole tone is martial, it is manly, it is strong.”

And what is the source of this war?

### **(b) The Origin of the Conflict**

**“I will put enmity between your seed and her seed; He shall bruise you on the head, And you shall bruise him on the heel.”** (Genesis 3:15)

These are the words which God uttered to Satan following the fall of mankind and the devil’s usurping the administration of earth. Here, God placed enmity, an active hatred, between Satan and the seed of the woman. The rest of the Bible is the story of that hostility: the seed of the devil warring against the seed of God. Ever since God uttered that prophecy of the devil’s final end, Satan has lived in a state of paranoia. Fearing that every male child born would be the one who would, according to God’s promise, bruise him on the head, the devil immediately set out to try and destroy the seed of God. The Old Testament records these stories: Cain murdered his brother Abel; David’s royal line was constantly under attack, etc. These then are the origins of this war that is under discussion here in Paul’s letter.

But, following the advent of Jesus Christ, we are now in a quite different stage of the battle. Christ has come, and he intends to completely take over of the earth from Satan’s rule. In the words of Revelation, “The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign for ever and ever” (Rev. 11:15). Christianity is not some minor, privately-held religion. It is a faith that is lived out in the open, in the heat of battle and conflict—a conquering faith.

### **(c) What Stage Is the Campaign In?**

In the gospels, Jesus predicted that he would attack the strong man (Satan), overpower him, remove from him all his armor on which he relied, and then distribute the plunder (Luke 11:21-22). The cross was the decisive battle in this campaign. It was the cross that broke the back of the devil. This is what Paul was referring to when he wrote in Colossians, “When He [God] had disarmed the rulers and authorities, He made a public display of them, having triumphed over them through Him” (Col. 2:15). What this is saying is that the deciding battle has already been fought.

All that is left is a mop-up operation. Christians can announce freedom to the captives because Christ has overthrown the tyrant.

Hear again the words of Revelation: “The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign for ever and ever” (Rev. 11:15). And this peace is not merely an armed truce, like what passes for peace today. Let us remind ourselves of Paul’s wonderful pronouncement in Romans 16:20, “And the God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet.” The enemy has been conquered on his own turf; and the job of Christians is to liberate his captives.

### **(d) Implications of the Battle**

Christians are the sole answer to the terrible evils of the world. Government can’t solve these intractable problems; neither can educators. Christians are the only ones who are privileged to liberate the captives of Satan. So, what kind of lives should we be living? Are we living in light of this reality, that we are part of God’s liberating army? Do we truly sense the high privilege and calling that we have the solution to the problems of sin and evil? It is recorded of that noted Puritan, Colonel Hutchinson, that as he foresaw the approach of the Civil War, he “deliberately gave up most of the sports and diversions in which he had previously indulged, as mistimed and no longer in place.” While there is nothing intrinsically wrong with taking legitimate time for rest and leisure, we would do well to remember that Satan does not take breaks from the war. The battle is real and constant.

Next, Paul gives the identity of the enemy, saying that “our struggle is not against flesh and blood.”

## **II. Do You Know Who the Enemy Is?**

**...the devil. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenlies...**

### **(a) Not Against Flesh and Blood**

Tragically, throughout history the church has fallen into the mistake of doing battle with the wrong enemy. When we treat victims of the enemy as the enemy, however, in God’s eyes we look as ridiculous as Don Quixote tilting against the windmills.

It is not difficult to illustrate. The Vietnam War was in full swing when I arrived at Stanford University, a young Christian and a freshman, in 1968. Back in those days, the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) were organizing demonstrations against the war, taking over classrooms on campus, etc. I was incensed at the disruption in my education, and determined to do something about it. So I joined a counter-group, Young Americans For Freedom, to fight against the SDS plan to shut down classrooms. When we heard that the SDS planned on taking over Encina Hall on campus, I tried to recruit a group of football players to stand in front of the hall, but none of them would agree to come. I finally recruited about 15 freshmen to come with me instead. As we stood in front of the hall, accompanied by two policemen, the SDS group headed toward us. There were 500 of them! I was terrified. Although I had organized our counter-demonstration, I fled. Then I watched as the demonstrators broke down the doors and trashed

the building. I learned something that night: I was fighting the wrong enemy, with the wrong weapons, and I was fighting on their terms. If we insist on doing this, we will always go down to defeat.

The lesson is obvious: our battle is *not* against flesh and blood. Therefore, Christians should never take sides according to the flesh. If they do, their actions will polarize people and impede God's rule. We must remember that no side is immune to sin. The enemy is neither Republican nor Democrat, liberal or conservative. Malcom Muggeridge said of the two Berlins (before the Wall came down), that evil permeated both sides of that infamous wall. He referred to the divided city as "two rival towers of Babylon confronting each other, one of power, the other of affluence."

Our enemy is not flesh and blood, so let us not be tempted to take sides and seek, according to the flesh, to align the kingdom of God against men and women.

### **(b) But Against Spiritual Forces of Darkness**

**...but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenlies...**

Notice how each phrase in this section builds in intensity. What an awesome power confronts us! There are forces behind the evil that we see on every hand. Paul refers to them as "rulers." They have been around a long time, and they are highly organized, functioning in networks covering the whole earth. What is even worse, we can't see them because they are located in the "heavenlies." We're not in their league. If we take them on in our own strength, it's like taking on the Mafia. We can't just take on the local drug dealer and expect to deal with him alone. Behind him stands a vast network of dealers on the local, state, national and international levels. The destruction of mankind is the aim and object of these "spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenlies."

The OT book of Job is an excellent illustration of these forces at work. In the opening scene of the book, the Sabeans kill Job's herds of oxen and donkeys, and his servants. Next, fire from heaven (probably lightning) kills his sheep and his servants. Then an attack by the Chaldeans kills his camels and his servants. Finally, a fierce wind levels his house and all his children are killed. But, according to the book, the power behind all of these natural and human phenomena was Satan himself. The devil is a murderer. But murder for him is not a pointless exercise; it is designed to prove a point. Satan had taunted God, "Does Job love you for nothing! You've put a hedge around him..." In other words, Satan was charging that Job loved God merely because of the many blessings which God had bestowed upon him. Satan was saying that there was nothing higher worth living for than what man could get out of God and life—a hedonistic view of life. So every time the murderer strikes, a holy battle is being staged: Does man love God for what he can get out of him, or because God is worth loving?

The story of Job is not the exception, it's the norm. I will illustrate by reading a letter from Todd Poulter, our missionary in Nairobi, Kenya, who wrote in his letter in May of this year:

Monday afternoon, I left the meetings to attend a memo-

rial service for Stephanie Martin, the 3-year-old daughter of colleagues, who died of malaria. Tuesday afternoon, Karla greeted me with the news that a Kenyan neighbor had been murdered. Wednesday, we learned that a missionary who arrived here only a month ago had run into and killed a young girl. Thursday, a colleague shared with us the news that his elderly father had just passed away. And then Saturday morning, we learned of the death of a dear friend by his own hand. Death from illness, murder, old age, involuntary manslaughter, and suicide, all in one week. What is God doing?

In these tragic and seemingly untimely incidents, however, God was making a holy stage upon which he will prove that his loyal presence and his love are better even than life itself. Martin Luther's words, from his great hymn, "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God," seem appropriate here:

*Let goods and kindred go,  
This mortal life also,  
The body they may kill,  
God's truth abideth still:  
His kingdom is forever.*

So there is our enemy. It is Satan himself, not, as we are often tempted to believe, someone made of "flesh and blood." We would do well to remember that his kingdom is highly organized and invisible; that he is bent on our destruction; and that we are not in his league.

This brings us to our second question.

## **III. Do We Have An Overall Strategy For Battle?**

### **(a) Don't Hide in the Church**

Many are tempted to withdraw from the fight when they learn the identity of their powerful enemy. They want to run for cover and hide in a cozy den of Christian fellowship. But this text says that it is impossible to hide from the devil. He is invisible, and his power penetrates everywhere. Religion, as a matter of fact, often becomes a welcome home for him. We remember that Jesus received more blows from his own countrymen than he ever did from the cruel Romans. Following Satan's direct attacks on Job's family and on his body, the devil worked indirectly through Job's three friends who hurled at him false accusations, shrouded in orthodox theological terms. Their words did more damage and caused more pain to Job than Satan's direct attacks. The pain of accusation always cuts deeper than the stripes of the rod.

Christians can't hide in the church.

I had a letter recently from Jim Foster, our missionary in Romania, which will help illustrate this point. Jonathan, Jim's brother-in-law, publishes a newspaper of the writings of Traian Dorz, the great Romanian poet. (This newspaper also prints the Sunday morning messages given here at PBC/Cupertino. They are translated by a Romanian brother who worships with us.) In his letter, Jim says that the opposition to their work now comes, not from the Romanian authorities, but from the church of the land:

A young girl about 23 years old has been trying to organize a young people's group for prayer, singing and Bible study. The priest said that they can only do this in the

church building regardless of the temperature (usually between 20-32 degrees in the winter, as none of the Orthodox churches are heated at all). He will not let them pray out loud because, of course, only the priest can talk to God for the people. He says that Bible study is not necessary or even correct because only the priest can interpret or understand the Word of God. He will not even sit down with them to teach a study.

In her frustration, after two years of this, she was at a train station near her village and she saw a stack of our newspapers. She saw Jonathan's name as the editor and invited us to start a Lord's Army meeting in their village. We met with her and some of her young group and decided to start with an evangelistic meeting in the town hall. When we came, the priest had already told his congregation that it was wrong for any of them to go, for it was sin to meet outside the church building. The church was the only place Jesus came and that people would not be saved outside of the building. So we attempted to hold the meeting in the church, and David spoke on Ephesians 2:1-10. The priest was outraged. Later Jonathan was slandered by others in the Orthodox church because he has relationships with foreigners and publishes their writings; he is called the Trojan Horse in the Orthodox Church. Later he was called to a meeting where they held a tribunal and verbally attacked him for two hours. The result of the meeting led to an official excommunication. It would be good if the brothers at PBC would pray for us on a regular basis as we are expecting the fire to get hotter.

It is clear that Christians cannot hide from the fight. How then should we respond?

#### **(b) Join the Army of Liberation!**

**Be strong in the Lord, and in the strength of His might. Put on the full armor of God...Therefore, take up the full armor of God.**

Christians should join the army of liberation! Our armor is given to us, not for hiding in foxholes, but to defend us from counter-attacks while we are on the offensive. In light of the danger involved, we need the full armor of Christ in order to stand. So the battlefield is the safest place for us! Spirituality is better learned in battle than anywhere else. This is where we truly learn to put on Christ—all of him!

A reading of the book of Psalms is very helpful here. Many of the psalms were penned in the very heat of battle. Martial songs, they testify that the greater the danger, the greater the intimacy with God. David, you will remember, made a critically wrong decision once. In the spring, when kings go out to battle, he decided to stay home. What followed, of course, was his adulterous affair with Bathsheba and the murder of her warrior husband. "We are safest in the fight!" says Eugene Peterson.

As Paul was writing this very letter in Rome, the capital of Satan's stronghold, chained to a Roman guard, the apostle was winning the battle as he witnessed to his captors of the Savior whom he served. Pray that God will send you to places you never dreamed of going, that you, too, might be involved in liberating captives. Perhaps you will liberate the captive who sits behind the door marked "Boss." You may be involved in freeing captives in your local

school. Perhaps you will journey to places overseas where you have never traveled before. Don't settle for defensive Christianity. You are much safer taking your place in the front lines.

#### **(c) When Attacked: Stand, Stand, Stand, Stand!**

Expect to be attacked yourself. There is a cost involved. And when the attack comes, adopt what Ray Stedman used to call the "infallible posture," given in Paul's word: *Stand*. Don't run. Don't lash out. Don't fight fire with fire. Stand! For emphasis, Paul uses the word four times. If you stand, the devil will flee from you.

I seldom get sick, but last week, as I prepared for this message on spiritual warfare, I became ill. On Friday I still had nothing on paper, so I got on my knees and prayed that God would bless me that day by showing me that he was alive. I was gathering illustrations from our missionaries to illustrate this material, and I had forgotten some of the details of a story that Dudley Weiner, our missionary in Paris, had told me concerning their first weeks in France. Ten minutes after I prayed, to my amazement, Dudley telephoned me from France!

This is the account of their battle as they attempted to plant a church in Paris. Dudley was to learn that the city boasts more licensed Satanic priests than pastors. When the Weiners were making their way to the city a few years ago, Dudley's wallet was stolen from their car. Shortly after their arrival, his wife Janet was hit by a car while she was walking. Then their car was broken into again. A few days later, while Janet was sleeping in their apartment, someone broke in and stole her wallet. A month later, their car was broken into yet again. Everything was stolen, and the thief left a pentagon-shaped pin, a Satanic calling card, as it were. It was as if Satan was saying, "Welcome to the war, Dudley." On a number of other occasions both Dudley and Janet woke in the night and sensed a strong, demonic presence in their bedroom. Then both of them fell very sick. They were still feeling ill when a severe thunderstorm hit the city, but they began to praise God and pray to him. As they were praying, they heard a loud crash. A tree in the little park across the street from their apartment had come crashing down. When at last the storm finally came to an end, they said they could physically feel the demons leave. They had followed the apostle's advice: they did not flee, they put on Christ, and they *stood firm*.

Imagine yourself as a new recruit to Christianity. Paul, the battle-scarred veteran of the faith, awaits you and greets you with this letter in hand. "Welcome to the war," says the great apostle of the faith. "The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet."

*The great dragon was thrown down...and his angels were thrown down with him... "Now the salvation, and the power, and the kingdom of our God and the authority of His Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren has been thrown down...and they overcame him because of the blood of the Lamb and because of the word of their testimony, and they did not love their life even to death." (Revelation 12:9-11)*

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