

Commentary

Try first to work out how 6:10-24 fits in with all we've seen so far in Ephesians before you read on ...!

10-12 *Ephesians* ends with a final big application to **stand** (or otherwise fall, presumably): this verse (together with 1:10; 3:10 and 4:3) is a key to understanding the letter. We know that Satan wants to destroy the one-ness God has achieved by sowing doubt, division and despair amongst us (4:27). And we know from 3:10 why he wants to do this: it's because as Jew/Gentile Christians are brought together as one under Jesus, God is giving him notice that He will achieve His end point of 1:10, and therefore that Satan will lose. (Cf Colossians 2:13-15 which makes it plain that God's plan does indeed include the defeat of these rulers and authorities, and his triumph over them.) That we 'stand' is therefore crucial. We must study carefully to learn how to 'stand'.

'The heavenly places' have already featured in Ephesians (but are not mentioned anywhere else in Paul's writings): it's where we are blessed in Christ (1:3), where he is seated (1:20) and we are too (2:6). It is perhaps a surprise to discover now that the rulers and authorities who are also there (3:10) are 'evil': what is evil doing there?! The phrase 'heavenly places' means something like 'the unseen world of spiritual reality' (Stott). From that real realm, the devil and his hoards can watch us (cf 3:10) and seek an 'opportunity' (4:27) to exert influence over us, maliciously shooting 'flaming darts' (16) at us. In particular, he will try to bring about division among the people of God, and we must do our all to thwart him, by maintaining unity.

13-17 In order to 'stand' against them in this cosmic wrestling match, Christians must 'put on the whole armour of God'. What is this?

The first thing to notice is that it is the armour of God (ie what he provides, rather than something we have to do). Secondly, as we read what the different pieces of the armour of God represent, it is a strikingly similar list to 1:13 (and even the word 'believed' in 1:13 is exactly the same word as 'faith' in 6:16). All the pieces of the armour are references to aspects of the gospel: truth, righteousness, peace, faith, salvation, Spirit are all different perspectives of the good news of what Christ has done for us on the cross. And this makes sense in the light of Paul saying in 1:3f that Christians already have 'every spiritual blessing in Christ': there can't be some armour lying around unused somewhere that Christians lack until they put it on. We already have it all, and we have it in Christ.

So when Paul is telling us to put on the full armour of God, he is telling us to stand firm in the gospel. Don't desert the gospel. Don't wander from what Jesus has done for us in the cross. Surround yourself in what Jesus has done for you. In other words (and this is the big point), **it is the gospel that defeats the devil.**

For example, Satan is a liar and an accuser (Rev 12:10): he loves to stand before God and tell tales about us. But the gospel robs him of this power: whatever Satan may still say to accuse us, in Christ we're forgiven, reconciled to God and totally secure. That's why Satan hates the gospel - it cuts his legs away from him - and why he wants to lure us away from it. And that's why Paul is so concerned that we continue to stand firm in the truth of what Jesus has done for us.

But this is even more targetted in *Ephesians*. Paul's great theme in this letter is that we are not only reconciled to God, but also to every other Christian: 'one new man in the place of the two' (2:15). Paul has already told us that when we became Christians we were taught to 'put on the new man' (4:24 literally), meaning that we were to leave behind our pre-Christian, self-centred thinking and behaviour (4:17-19) and act 'after the likeness of God' in maintaining the unity of the Spirit (and Paul has given lots of practical examples of how to do this). We are to stand firm in this truth of the unity of the Christian church. We must not let Satan lure us away from the gospel: he'd love us to focus on Christians disagreeing (as if this somehow shows the cross didn't really achieve what 2:11-22 claims), and he'd love us to get irritated by other Christians' petty foibles (so we don't 'bear with one another in love'), etc. In *Ephesians*, I put on the armour of God as I declare boldly 'I believe in the church - I have been brought together in complete unity with all Christians under Christ as head'. It's that gospel that defeats the devil as he tries his damndest to mess up our oneness.

18-20 So why pray 'in the Spirit'? This is not any different kind of prayer (for example, this isn't about praying in tongues), but an encouragement to use our Spirit-provided access (1:18), to pray in a way that reflects the Spirit's concern for unity (cf 4:3; 4:30). So, of course we'll pray for:

- 'all the saints' (because we're all 'fellow citizens' now cf 2:19);
- those who proclaim this 'mystery' (about how divided people are made 'fellow heirs' cf 3:6).

In other words, our prayer is completely in line with God's always-and-everywhere plan for everything, and how he is working that out now in our world. For this is the Spirit's concern exactly.

21-22 gives the purpose for (Tychicus' visit with) this letter: to 'encourage' you. This goes back to 3:13 and the fact that these Gentile Christians were apparently discouraged because their apostle is imprisoned, and to 4:1 where 'urge' is (literally) this same word 'encourage'. How will this letter bring them encouragement (if it is also bringing them the news about 'how we are', ie 'suffering')? It's because the bigger news is that God has blessed them with every spiritual blessing in Christ ... he has already brought them together under Christ as head, so they are the spearhead of God's great purpose for the world (1:10). What is there to be down about?! This same truth should bring encouragement to us (even if we don't have our apostle imprisoned): whatever the outward discouragements in church life, how wonderfully secure we are at the centre of God's always-and-everywhere plan for all creation.

Group Study Outline

Ephesians 6:10-24 Theme Sentence

In the truth of the gospel, you have all you need to withstand Satan's attempts to destroy your one-ness.

Launching Question:

What reasons do you use to explain why the reality of church life is sometimes hard: shouldn't it all be wonderfully good and exciting all the time?!

Recap

Summarise the message of *Ephesians* from 1:10; 2:11-22; 3:10 and 4:3.

How would you use these verses to help a Christian who is ...

- (a) very worried that the church seems so divided?
- (b) irritated by petty foibles in other Christians?

READ Ephesians 6:10-24

What is verse 10-12 telling us we need to do?

Why?

Why do you think the powers of darkness want to wage war on us (cf Ephesians 3:10, and also Colossians 2:13-15)?

What are some of 'the schemes of the devil', do you think?

In particular, what are the devil's schemes in trying to divide the people of God?

We're told to put on the whole armour of God: list what each piece represents. Read Ephesians 1:13. What pieces of armour are also mentioned in this verse? So what does this verse tell us about the armour of God?

If, as a Christian, I already have every spiritual blessing in Christ (1:3), and if God's armour is mine in the gospel (1:13), how then do I 'stand'?

Read out the paragraph from *Commentary* (on top of p3 of notes) about Satan. We've seen in Ephesians that, through the gospel, God has brought Christians together: how can we 'stand' on that gospel when Satan tries to divide the people of God?

What does it mean to pray 'in the Spirit'? what is his concern in Ephesians? Look closely at who/what Paul wants prayer for: why are these the Spirit's concern?

Thinking it through

The reality of church life is that it can seem divided, and we do get irritated by petty foibles in other Christians: it's sometimes tough! How is Satan behind all that discouragement?

What Satan is seeking to do, and why?

What is *Ephesians* telling us to do to stand against him?

Why did Paul write this letter to the Christians in Ephesus (22)? (cf 3:13; 4:1) How will *Ephesians* actually 'encourage' us in the discouragements of normal (church) life? Let's be specific and very practical in applying these verses ...

Ephesians 6:10-24



The story so far ...

In 1:10b, Paul explains that God's plan is 'to bring everything together under Christ as head' (NIV). It used to be a 'mystery' how God would ever work this out (3:9), but now he has made it plain that by the cross, and through the gospel he brings Jew and Gentile Christian together under Christ as head (2:11-22; 3:6). So, the church now is his public display that he will complete his 'purpose' (1:11) in 'the fullness of time' (1:10), and even the spiritual realm can see this is the case simply by looking at the church (3:10).

This is why Paul says that Christians have it all (1:3f): God has so far achieved his end point for the whole world in us. All that remains for us to do is to 'make every effort to preserve' this 'having been brought together under Christ as head' (4:3). God has achieved it; don't now destroy it.

Since 4:1, Paul has been describing how Christian unity is maintained. It's with humility, gentleness, patience and love (4:2). It's in such nitty-gritty areas as telling the truth, controlling our anger, being honest and kind in our speech, through generosity, with sexual self-control, etc etc (4:25-5:21). It's worked out in the normal human relationships of husband-wife, parent-child, master-slave (5:21-6:9). And it involves a mature church, equipped by truth taught/spoken, and mobilised so that every Christian is engaged in the ministry of building up one another (4:11-16). This is God's new society (4:17-24).

But there is another side to all this: the fierce opposition of the devil. How can we maintain unity when he is so intent on destroying God's work amongst us?

[NSJ]

Ephesians 6:10-24 Theme Sentence

In the truth of the gospel, you have all you need to withstand Satan's attempts to destroy your one-ness.

Application

- **Stand** (- note how many times that word gets repeated!) is the BIG application. Putting on the armour of God means knowing the gospel, being immovable on the truths (eg of ch 2), and living the gospel (eg as ch 4-6 explains). That is how we stand firm in Jesus. It's simple, but it requires all God's strength and his mighty power for us to do it.
- **The enemy.** We now know that the real enemy is not other people but the spiritual forces of evil at work to derail God's plan in this way. We should recognise his work in all those nitty-gritty areas of ch 4-6.
- **Pray** especially for those things that reflect the concerns of the 'one Spirit'.