

Ephesians 6:10-13

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[0 : 00] I mentioned this morning that yesterday evening I got an email from Cassia confirming that her visa had been granted for her to come and work here in Bon Accord as our youth worker.

So I shared that as a piece of good news. Now in that email she also said something else, less significant perhaps, but I want to share the other thing she said. She said this, I can't wait to get back to Scotland and come back to freezing Scotland and cups of tea.

Now those of you who don't realize this, Cassia, she's a strange woman. She enjoys Scottish weather. She prefers it to her home and the hot weather that she has there. Now I'm not sure if the golfers at St. Andrews over this weekend are quite as enamored by the vagaries of the Scottish summer.

The championship, as the royal and ancient like to call it, is a battle and after four, or in this case five, grueling days, one of the combatants emerges victorious, having fought through all the obstacles in their way. And I call it a battle because it does involve battling on different fronts. It's a battle with the course, a course that sometimes can appear very benign, but then can bite you just when you least expect it. It's a battle with the elements that's been particularly marked on this occasion. Torrential rain, gusting winds, and battling against these elements. And of course, it's a battle with the other competitors gathered from all over the globe. And then tomorrow evening, there will be one man still standing and savoring the taste of victory, the victory and the savor of a battle fought and won. Paul, as he writes to the Christians in Ephesus, makes it very clear that as

Christians, we are in a battle. And the charge that we have been given by God is that we would stand in our passage. And we're thinking particularly of verses 10 to 13. This charge that we've been given by God is expressed in different ways, but there's this common theme of standing firm. We read in the course just of these two or three verses, take your stand, stand your ground, stand firm, and at the close of the battle, simply stand. This repeated call to stand expressed in different ways, but that uniting theme concerning what the call that is being made involves, what God's charge to us is, that we would stand in the midst of the battle and through the battle until the end of the battle. This evening, I want to consider this call to battle that we might call it as it's outlined in verses 10 to 13.

[3 : 25] The next two Sunday evenings, we'll think about the armor that God provides us in more detail. In these verses, there's talk and there's mention of the armor, but not a description of the armor, and we'll come to the description the next two Sunday evenings. But even these three verses, in fact, four verses, have plenty in them that it will be difficult really to do justice to in one sermon. Martin Lloyd-Jones, more affectionately known by his congregation as the doctor, he has a series of sermons on this passage, and just verse 10, just verse 10, he manages to stretch out to 11 sermons. Well, I'm hoping to do four verses in one sermon, so I'm a lightweight in comparison to the doctor. But if you want more solid, fair, then by all means, you can turn to his series of sermons on this passage. But hopefully, by doing it much more swiftly, even if we lose a little in terms of, hopefully we will get the big picture.

Now, in considering these verses, as I've already suggested, we'll use as our unifying theme, this central call to stand. We've noticed how it repeats itself in Paul's language, this call that is directed to us, that in the battle we are... So let's use that as the way of guiding what we want to say and how we want to consider these verses. And in the outline that you should have received, you'll get an indication of roughly the direction of travel for this evening. And we'll begin by answering this question, or posing this question and trying to answer it. Who are we standing against? The picture is of a battle, and it's not really, we call it a picture, it's more than a picture. The reality that is described is of a battle. Now, in a battle, there is an enemy.

And so that's the first thing we want to think about. What does Paul tell us concerning the identity of our enemy, of our enemies? Any military man, any general worth his salt will tell you about the importance in any battle of knowing the enemy. If we return to the open at St. Andrews, if we consider the old course as, in some senses, the enemy, the one that the golfers are battling against, the knowledge of the course will stand any competitor in very good stead. A golfer who knows nothing of the course will be at an extreme disadvantage. And as Christians, we need to know who our enemies are and what they're like. So who are they? Well, really the question is too prompt. Who is he and who are they? Because Paul identifies one enemy in particular, but then he goes on to speak of enemies in the plural. So we need to identify both. First of all, who is he? Who is our arch enemy? Well, it's very clear. Then in verse 11, read from verse 10, finally be strong in the Lord and in His mighty power. Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against him. So there our arch enemy is clearly identified as the devil. The devil is our enemy. Paul simply takes it as a given, the existence of the devil as a personal being. He doesn't feel any need to argue the case. He takes it as a given that his readers will acknowledge and accept that that is so. And we, of course, gladly do so. We recognize that Paul, of course, is right.

The devil is a personal being, a personal enemy who seeks to destroy God's people and to frustrate God's purposes. We'll see in due course that he's singularly unsuccessful in that, but that is his mission and that is what he seeks to do. So our enemy is the devil. But then Paul goes on to speak of other enemies. Clearly, they're all part of the same team, team Satan. But there are many. There are many who are ranged against us. Notice how he goes on in verse 12. He says, for our struggle, our battle, is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world, and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. There's a whole range of enemies presented here by Paul, a veritable army that stands against us under the direction of our arch enemy, the devil. Now, Paul here doesn't satisfy our curiosity by explaining in detail the identity of each of the enemies and how they relate one to another. What is clear is that they are spiritual beings. He very explicitly says that they are not flesh and blood. By that, he simply means they are not men and women. They are spiritual beings. Now, with the benefit of the broader testimony of the Bible, we can identify them as fallen angels who rebelled against God, but there are many of them described in these different ways by Paul. Now, in identifying who our enemies are, we're also told, who they are not. We do not struggle against flesh and blood. As just mentioned, our enemies are not men and women. And that's very important for us to be very clear on, especially as we maybe consider ourselves to live in a society that is increasingly hostile to the gospel. And of course, that hostility, the face of that hostility, is men and women who seek to go against God, and God's Word, be that in our parliaments or in our society, in the media and what have you. And it's very easy for us to identify our enemies as those bad people who oppose us. Paul is clear that our enemies in the first instance are not men and women. There are, of course, men and women who are enemies of God and who, wittingly or unwittingly, serve the devil in his purposes, largely without any recognition that that is what they are doing. But these people are not ultimately the enemies we battle with. They are, again, unwittingly, they are prisoners that we seek to free from captivity to their evil master. So, our enemies, our arch enemy, the devil, but then this host, this evil host of demons who are at his service.

Now, we were thinking even this morning when we were thinking about Jesus and as he came down from the Mount of Transfiguration and he finds this scene of the disciples unable to cast out the from the poor boy who was suffering greatly. We mentioned there how some today are skeptical of any mention of the demonic. And it is increasingly popular. It's not a new thing. It's been so for long enough, an attempt to, what is said, or the language used, to demythologize the Bible.

[11 : 46] And in that attempt, a futile attempt, but nonetheless, in that attempt, these spiritual forces that Paul speaks of here are sometimes identified with political structures or philosophies that are anti-God. And it suggested that that is really what Paul is speaking about. He's not speaking about personal beings, but about structures, about philosophies that go contrary to God and God's purposes. But Paul's language here doesn't really give us any scope for coming to that kind of conclusion. That said, it is, of course, quite possible that these personal spiritual forces, authorities, powers can make use and do make use of political structures and human philosophies to further their agenda. That certainly is not only possible, but very likely. What are they like? We've identified, with Paul's help, who they are, the devil, our archenemy, but then all his demonic hosts. What are they like? Well, as just mentioned, Paul does not give us a detailed CV for every dark power and authority. He uses all kinds of language here, and there is a curiosity. Well, you know, what's the difference between powers and authorities and the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms, and the language is intriguing, and we're curious as to, well, who does he have in mind, or how do we distinguish some from another? But Paul doesn't help us satisfy that curiosity if indeed we are curious. But what we can do, and what Paul certainly helps us do, is identify three core characteristics of our enemy, indeed of our enemies, variously, not described, but variously identified or named here in verse 12 in particular. Three characteristics. The first one is maybe a very obvious one, but one that we do well to be very clear on, they are evil. Now, evil, again, it's a word that is thought very old-fashioned, but these enemies are evil. They are, to use the language of Paul, the powers of this dark world. They are the spiritual forces of evil, quoting directly the language that Paul uses. Now, I say that the word evil is one that we don't hear used much, but we do occasionally. If there's a particularly heinous crime, then we'll find the media and newspapers employing this word. It's almost as if, well, we need a really strong word, and they'll describe the perpetrator as pure evil. I don't think we really can or ought to describe any man or woman as pure evil, but these forces outlined by Paul are, if we want to use the expression, pure evil. They are intent on one thing alone, and that is destruction.

They have no redeeming features whatsoever. They are spiritual forces of evil. They are the powers of this dark world. They're evil, and secondly, another characteristic that's very clear from what Paul says is that they are powerful. The language Paul uses is the language of power. They are rulers, authorities, powers. Their power, we know, thank God that it is so, their power is not absolute.

They stand under the authority of God, but they are powerful. It's often been said, and rightly so, that the two dangerous, extreme positions we can hold as Christians with regard to the devil and demons is to underestimate or to overestimate his or their power, and there are certain Christian traditions where there is so much focus on the devil and his power that there is an imbalance. There's a sense in which the sight is lost of God's overarching sovereign control and power. But perhaps in our tradition, the danger is rather in the other extreme of underestimating the active evil presence of the devil and his host seeking to do battle to destroy us. And they are active now here in our country. We sometimes say, oh yes, in the third world, under uncivilized countries you have demons, but not in

Scotland. And well, that seems a very bizarre view to take that the demons somehow would say, oh well, no, not Scotland. No, they are real, they are personal, they are here, they are alive and kicking. And they are powerful. Their power is limited, but it is power nonetheless. Just to maybe illustrate the sense in which sometimes, perhaps in our churches, I can't speak for all of our congregations, but generally it's maybe the case that we are guilty of underplaying the reality of and the seriousness of the devil and his toast. Some of you will remember Collins from Nigeria, who together with his family worshiped with us here in Bon Accord a while back. I remember Collins, in one conversation I had with him, he was telling me why he enjoyed Bon Accord, what he thought, what he liked about Bon Accord. And I don't know if this really is very flattering, but I'll tell you what he said. He says, well, I like about Bon Accord is that you're not always speaking about money and the devil. And I think he actually said, you never speak about money and the devil. So, on the one hand, I thought, well, that's maybe good, because I knew what he was coming from. He was coming from a tradition where that's perhaps what is mostly spoken about. Money, money, money, and the devil, the devil, the devil. But I did wonder whether maybe an occasional reference, both to money and the devil, would be appropriate. So, they are powerful, but their powerful is limited.

And then another characteristic that's very clear from Paul's language about these enemies is that they are cunning. Notice the language there in verse 11, put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. In the older versions, it says the devil's wiles.

[18 : 29] And the suggestion here is of cunning in the exercise of his plans and of his opposition. It is cunning.

It is subtle. It is clever. They are cunning. The devil's schemes. What are they? What are the schemes or wiles of the devil? Well, we could spend a long time answering that question. But if we were to limit ourselves just for reasons of time, I think a strong case could be made to say that the current most cunning ploy of the devil is to persuade us, or in any case endeavor to persuade us, as to his non-existence. If I could quote from that lengthy tome of Martin Lloyd-Jones where he speaks about this passage, he argues in the following way, I am certain that one of the main causes of the ill state of the church today is the fact that the devil is being forgotten. And there may be some truth in that. Maybe if I could illustrate how the very concept of the devil is thought of almost as something jocular in popular culture.

I hope not in the church, but certainly by those who surround us. And this is a story of something that happened to me, oh, many years ago when I was working in London and I was attending Coal Abbey Presbyterian Church. And on the Monday evening, there was a study group that John Nichols led, and we would study different things in the course of a year. But at this time, we were going through a book by a Puritan, Thomas Brooks, and the title of the book is Precious Remedies Against Satan's Devices. Now, because it was on a Monday evening and because I worked in the center of London, I had no time to get back from work home to then head to Coal Abbey. So, I had the book at my work, up with my workbooks and folders. And on one occasion, one of my colleagues was looking for some folder that I had, and he was looking for it. And as he looked for the folder, he saw this book, and he took it out, and he read it out loud. And he goes, Precious Remedies Against Satan's Devices. And he just burst out laughing. He thought, what is this all about? He just thought this was just bizarre. Now, this was somebody who wasn't a Christian. I wonder if that title also seems just a little quaint and old-fashioned and unreal even to us as Christians. Precious Remedies Against Satan's Devices. It's a book that precisely deals with the devil's schemes and how we can fight against them. So, what are they? Well, one of them is to persuade us of his non-existence or, in any case, of how inoffensive he is and how lacking in any kind of threat to us. If we want to witness the devil employing some of his cunning against a vulnerable victim, the best thing we can do is to go to the first chapters of Genesis and the account of the fall, Adam and Eve's temptation. There we have the devil working in his cunning way, and he's the same devil. He may have some new tricks, but he basically operates as he has ever done.

There's much that could be said here as to his schemes, but we need to move on. The next question, keeping to this theme of remaining standing, who are we standing against? But the next question, how tough is it to remain standing? How difficult is this battle that we are called to?

I think when we're thinking of how tough it is, we need to think of the duration of the battle and the intensity of the battle. We think, first of all, of the duration of the battle that we are in, that we are called to. The Christian battle, it's very clear from what Paul says here, is a lifelong battle. The passage begins there in verse 10 with the word, finally. Now, it's argued, and I don't claim that this is the definitive way of understanding the word, but some argue very cogently that this word, finally, it can be or it should be understood in the sense of henceforth. And if that's true, then really what Paul is saying is, from now on, this is what you need to do. You know, God has saved you, He's redeemed you, He's brought you to Himself, and now your life, from here on until your death or until the Lord's return. This is your life. From henceforth, you do battle against the devil. This is the life that you've been called to, a life of battle. The end days, the end times that we are living in are a time of battle against our enemy. And it's not only that word that would suggest that that is the duration of the battle. There's other time references. Indeed, there's one time reference in particular that might suggest that a particular day is in mind. Notice in verse 13, we read, therefore, put on the full armor of God so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground. Now, when we read that, we think, well, that seems to be talking about something in the future. We need to be prepared for when the day of evil comes, you can stand. So, it hasn't come yet, but when it does come, you need to be ready. Is the suggestion there, then, that the battle hasn't begun? I don't think so. I think what Paul is recognizing is that in the war, if you wish, there are days of greater and lesser intensity. Within the war, there are many battles, and some battles that are approaching will be particularly brutal, particularly intense. And if you're not prepared for that battle, for that day, when the day of evil comes, that may be a day of evil directed very particularly against the church.

[24 : 51] It may be directed particularly against you as a believer. A battle of an intensity beyond what you've experienced before in the realm of temptation, in the realm of struggling with suffering, different possibilities. When the day of battle comes, you need to stand. So, I don't think Paul here is speaking of one particular day common to all, but simply recognizing that for all of us, individually and corporately as a church, there will be particularly intense days within the whole war that has begun, that we are in, and that will continue until Christ returns.

What about the intensity of the battle? Well, given what we've just said, it's clear that the intensity can vary, but the variation is between less intense and more intense.

It's always a struggle. It's always a case of wrestling. The language of verse 12, for we struggle, or are strugglers, some translations prefer, for we wrestle not against flesh and blood.

It's a struggle. It's a battle. It's a wrestle. Now, that is the intensity of it. Now, of course, the intensity of it can be greatly reduced if we simply give in. If we give in, then it's not intense at all. If we think of wrestlers at the Olympics, imagine if the battle begins, the bell rings, or whatever it is when they're wrestling, and one of them just throws in the towel, well, that wouldn't be intense for that wrestler at all. So, with us, there may be times when it's not intense at all, but that isn't something to be happy about. It may be an indication that we've simply decided not to fight at all. How can we stand against our enemies? Moving on and holding on to this theme of standing firm. How can we stand against our enemies? In the whole of this letter, the letter to the Ephesians, Paul presents salvation as involving both divine grace and human responsibility. And these two elements, the priority, the initiative of God and His divine grace, but then the call to us to act and to participate in God's work, these two elements are combined in this closing section concerning the Christian life as a battle. We stand against our enemy, but only as we lay hold of God's help and as we put in our own effort. Verse 10 speaks very clearly of God's power and of God's help. Finally, be strong in the Lord and in His mighty power. And the help that is needed, because it's certainly needed given the magnitude of our enemy, but the help that is on offer is nothing short of a spectacular. It's very revealing and profoundly encouraging to compare the language that Paul uses here in verse 10 concerning the power that is available to us, that we need to avail ourselves of, with the language that he uses and indeed the same language, the same words that he employs at the very beginning of the letter in chapter 1 and from verses 18 to 20.

Let's just read verses 18 to 20, and as we do, I'll just highlight where Paul uses words there that he then repeats and echoes. Three key words that he uses at the beginning of the letter and then that he repeats at the end. So Ephesians 1 from verse 18, I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which He has called you, the riches of His glorious inheritance and inheritance and saints. And then what else does he pray? And that you may know, His incomparably great power for us who believe. So he's asking on behalf of the believers that they would know that they would experience God's incomparably great power. Then in what follows, he says, that power which is like the working of His mighty strength. And then especially that little expression, that power is like the working of His mighty strength. The three words there in our version translated power, mighty, and strength are the three words that Paul then repeats in verse 10 of chapter 6, translated somewhat differently as strong, mighty, and power.

[29 : 26] But the interesting thing and the very encouraging thing is what does Paul say in chapter 1 is an example of this great power of God. Well, he goes on to give an example in verse 20.

That power is like the working of His mighty strength which He exerted in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly realms. This is God's power demonstrated most dramatically, most powerfully in raising Christ from the dead. And then Paul, as he speaks to believers, and he says, you need power, you need strength, you need might, and it's available for you, he says it's the same power. The same power that was demonstrated in the resurrection, that power is available to you in your battle against the devil and his schemes. The power that is granted to us, that is available to us, that God would give to us, by which God would strengthen us, is nothing less than resurrection and power and how we need that power in the battle. Another commentator who has a helpful commentary on this letter to the Ephesians, Charles Hodge, he contemplates the folly of not availing ourselves of that power. He says, he who rushes into battle without thinking of Christ and trusting in Him and continually looking to Him for strength and deriving all vigor from Him is demented. Not very politically correct, the language he uses, but we have to say, well, that's true. This is what the disciples forgot that we were thinking about this morning. They thought that they could deal with that demon without resting on God's power. They thought they could deal with the demon in their own power in their own power. What folly? There's an irony there because in the older versions, the boy is described with a language that is used to translate the way the boy is described is to describe him as a lunatic. Now, modern versions use, I think, more appropriate language. But it's interesting taking out what Hodge says here that really, if anybody had lost their mind, it was the disciples in imagining that they could deal with this demon in their own strength. They were the ones who were demented. They were the ones, victims of great folly in trying to do that which was impossible to do in their strength, but altogether possible to do in God's strength. It's what the disciples forgot, and it's what we often forget. The strength, the power, the might is all of and from God, and yet our effort is required. God provides the armor, but we need to put it on. Now, we'll think about that more next week. But the simple point being that God graciously provides us armor, but then he says, well, you put it on. A bit like a father or a mother ordering the clothes for their child, and it's all laid out there on the bed. But once the child of a certain age, it would be pretty ridiculous if the child were to say to the mother or the father, you've got to dress me as well. No.

The father, the parents provide the clothes, but the child has to put them on. And so here, God provides the armor. It's adequate armor. It's sufficient armor, but we have to put it on. More of that on another occasion. And having put on our armor day by day, we take our stand. That also is something that we need to do. We need to take our stand. This stand, it's defensive, but the language really certainly comes across as being a defensive posture, taking our stand. But it's not solely defensive.

There is that aspect of defending ourselves against the devil's attacks. He attacks in the area of doctrine. He attacks in the area of our personal morality, beguiling us into sin. And we need to take our stand defensively against his attacks. But in the Christian life, as in other areas of life, attack can also be a very helpful and adequate form of defense. We are, after all, as Christ's church, sent in to what might be called the devil's territory to claim it back for its rightful owner. And in that, we are taking offensive action and movement against our enemy. We know what we're promised by James.

When we resist the devil, when we take our stand against him, what will happen? We're told the devil flees from us. And when he flees from us, there is the opportunity to take territory for King Jesus.

[34 : 16] Finally, when the dust settles, will we still be standing? Paul seems to be looking ahead in these verses. He seems to look ahead to the conclusion of the battle when he expresses himself in this way in verse 13. Therefore, put on the full armor of God, so when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground. And then particularly what follows, and after you have done everything to stand, after you have done everything. And there the language does seem to suggest, when you've come to the close of the battle, be it your own personal life and your battle, be it in the grand scheme of things, when the final day approaches, when you have done everything to stand, at the final day, even if you have stumbled many times along the way, if your trust is in God, if your faith is in Christ, then you will still be standing. In God's strength, then with God's help, you will savor final victory on your feet and still standing. Now, I am sure that on that day and on that occasion, we will have far better songs to sing than anything Elton John can provide. But you could and you will be able to sing triumphantly,

I'm still standing, better than I ever did, looking like a true survivor, because God has kept you standing, and he's kept you there. And on that day, you will stand after you have done everything to stand. And thank God that that is so. Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, we do thank you for your word. We thank you for the manner in which it describes for us in very practical detail what it is that you have called us to. We pray that we would be those clear and conscious as to the battle that we are engaged in, that we would have an increasing understanding of the one who stands opposed to us, but even more importantly, an increasing trust in the one in you whose power is sufficient for us to overcome, for us to remain standing in and through the battle and through to the final day. Help us then, we pray. And these things we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.