



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of Dan Duncan

Ephesians 6:10-12

Ephesians

“The Spiritual Warfare”

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] Thank you, Howard, good morning. We are continuing in our study in the book of Ephesians, we're on chapter six this morning and we begin a very interesting, very important section of this book on the spiritual warfare. And this morning we will look on the very beginning of this verses 10 through 12 and in the weeks to come, we'll look at the armor that the Christian is to wear. But in this portion, Paul look alerts us to the danger, alerts us to the conflict that we are in and that we need to be aware of. Ephesians 6 beginning with verse 10, Paul writes, '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 steams 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 and the heavenly places.' May the Lord bless this reading of his word and our time of study together. Let's bow in a word of prayer.

[Prayer] Gracious God and heavenly father, we do thank you for your grace and your mercy and we thank you for the scriptures that you have given to us that remind us of your grace and remind us of your power, remind us of the life that we have in your son and the gift of your son. We are especially reminded of that this time of the year. It is a time in which we sing great hymns that remind us of the incarnation, the gift of Christ is coming into this world as an infant, taking to himself a human nature, like our own, yet without sin, growing up among us, in order that he might become the perfect sacrifice for sinners. And so we thank you, Lord, for that great gift of your son and we pray that as we enjoy the weeks to come and this Christmas season, we might focus upon that great truth, the gift of life in Christ, the gift of your son to us and that our thoughts might be drawn to that. Because we're also aware that this is a very materialistic time of the year, a time when people are given to the pleasure and what's called the Christmas season

without any of the spiritual reality of it and it becomes a festive time without any spiritual dimension.

May we not slip into that, but may we direct our minds in a particular way, a special way to your son. Father, we are thankful that this is not something we just celebrate in the month of December, though. This is something for 12 months of the year, every day of the year, we are to rejoice in the gift of your son and we thank you for him. Thank you for what he is to us, a savior and he has saved us, he has saved everyone who has put their faith in him, not only from their sins, but from the domain of darkness, from the power of Satan. And we are reminded of that this morning in our text and we pray that as we study this portion of scripture, this passage about the spiritual conflict that we are in, that you might give us understanding of it. That you might clarify the situation that we are in, that we might make appropriate provision and we might find out strength in Christ and always be alert to the dangers and the temptations that are about us, that we might live lives that honor you, our lives in your strength and your power. We look to you for that. We are helpless of ourselves, but we are not helpless because in Christ, we have his life and his mind. We are sealed with the spirit of God, we thank you for the gift of your son and the gift of the spirit. We thank you for your constant loving care for your people.

Now that care goes out to us in the spiritual dimension and the spiritual needs of life but you also provide for us in the material realm as well and we do live in that realm. We pray for that, Father. We are people with physical needs and we pray that you would make provision for us. We thank you for the abundant provision that you give and confess that so often we lack Thanksgiving for that, but we thank you Lord for our daily bread, we thank you for the very breath of life that you supply us. We thank you for all the good things that we have. We pray for those that are in particular difficulty at this time, with sickness or lack of employment.

We pray that you would make provision for that, that you would provide them with their needs, but also provide them with special encouragement. We pray, Father, for our nation, we pray that you bless it. Bless it materially, bless the leaders of our nation, bless them with wisdom. We pray for our President that you give him special wisdom at this time in which very serious and difficult decisions are being made and have been made. We pray for the men and women who have gone to Europe, particularly Bosnia, we pray that you would protect them. We pray, Lord, for our nation, spiritually, that you might bless it with understanding, with awakening, with a revival, with the knowledge that men and women are lost and need a savior

and that savior is Jesus Christ. May we, as men and women in this assembly be used by you to spread that word.

Make us desirers of doing that, prepare our hearts and prepare our hearts now for that, that we might go out into the community this week can be good witnesses for Christ at work, at school, in the neighborhood, wherever. We pray you bless us to that end now and we pray this evening as we come back that you might bless us as well, as we remember our Lord's birth and his death, his resurrection and his coming again. We look forward to that day. Bless us now, Father, as we sing our final hymn. May it be good preparation for the time of study together. We pray these things in Christ's name, Amen.

[Message] The gospel of Jesus Christ holds out the greatest promises to sinner, the promise of forgiveness, of eternal life, promise of the abundant life, of joy, of peace, of rest. Paul began this great epistle by informing the Ephesians that we have been blessed with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places. We live down here on the earth, but we live with the blessings of heaven and every blessing in the heavenly places. So why is it that down here on these earthly places, Christians, believers in Jesus Christ undergo trials, suffer discouragement, depression, sorrow, why is life often such a struggle? The reason is because while we are at peace with God, we are not at peace, not with the world and not with the prince of this world, we are engaged in a great spiritual warfare. That's the subject that Paul now takes up and it's a very important one. It is a lesson in reality and one that is necessary to understand if we are to understand the reasons for our struggles and the way to triumph in them. In past studies, we have noted that the book of Ephesians falls into to basic divisions. In chapters one through three, Paul deals with doctrine for the most part and then in chapters four through six, he deals with duty.

It's possible to see three divisions, which, the third, at least, is actually a subdivision of the second section, but because it is such an important part of the book and a different part of the book from the other portions, some have outlined the book of Ephesians in three divisions, along lines such as wealth, walk and warfare or as one popular title of a book on the book of Ephesians entitled, 'Sit, Walk Stand.' We sit in the sense that we rest in the blessings that have been given to us, the heavenly blessings. We are to walk in a way that's worthy of our calling and then in chapter six we are to stand against the devil. It's the Christians stand that Paul now takes up and he takes it up almost abruptly, at least it seems that way because he's developed very thoroughly,

this topic of the Christian home and now suddenly he moves to the Christian battlefield. And yet actually, the break between topics is not all that abrupt, because the battlefield is in the home, it is at school, it is at work, it's on the road to work, it's everywhere. It is a spiritual battle and there are no divisions. We can't keep it out with material walls or mere space. It is a spiritual conflict that we are in and it is a constant warfare and Paul now alerts us to it. His instruction is very necessary for us because we live in a materialistic age that discounts spiritual reality.

Harvard professor, Steven J. Gould has written that before Darwin we thought that the benevolent God had created us. Because of Darwin, he says, we have learned that no intervening spirit watches lovingly over the affairs of nature and whatever we think of God, his existence, is not manifest in the products of nature. Others have described human beings as marvelously complex machines. That kind of naturalistic worldview that understands everything in a materialistic, mechanistic way, leaves no room for any unseen reality for spiritual or for the supernatural. But that is one of the enemies most effective ploys. C.S. Lewis had some insight on the nature of the spiritual warfare, which he has given to us in his book, 'The Screwtape Letters,' a book that's made up of a series of letters from screwtape, a senior demon to his junior agent named Wormwood. And in each of these letters, Screwtape instructs Wormwood in the best schemes for tempting and trapping souls. In one letter, he answers the question of whether it is essential for Wormwood to keep his identity secret from his patient, which is the term that's used for the Christian that he has been assigned to tempt and frustrate. Screwtape replies that a question has already been answered by high command. Our policy, he says, for the moment is to conceal ourselves.

Of course, this has not always been so, he writes. We really are faced with a cruel dilemma. When humans disbelieve in our existence, we lose all the pleasing results of direct terrorism and we make no magicians. On the other hand, when they believe in us, we cannot make them materialists and skeptics. Well, our ages of latter kind, we live in an age of materialism and skepticism, at least among the leading intellectuals of our day and Christians can be influenced by that kind of thinking. It's very common in our day and the result of that can be that while Christians may believe the devil exists, they really give little thought to him or very little concern for his schemes and his traps and the result is we leave ourselves vulnerable to his attacks. There are two dangers for the Christians. First, is giving too little thought to the devil and the second is giving too much thought to the devil, having a preoccupation with him,

attributing every problem to him so that we end up with the demon of lust or the demon of drink, the demon of anger, or the demon in the small of your back and that may be a reality, but I think, really, that's too simplistic a view of things.

The devil isn't the cause of every bad thing. There are also the weaknesses of the flesh; Paul deals with that very clearly in Romans 7 and then in Galatians 5:19-21. Jeremiah 17:9 states that the heart is more deceitful than all else and is desperately sick, who can understand it? So we have ourselves to blame, as well. There are really three great enemies, the world, the flesh and the devil but the devil is the arch enemy of the church and he is the energizing force in this world and he is able to influence our flesh in his attack on us. He is real and dangerous and Paul now warns us of his power and instructs us on how to resist in. Verses 10 and 11 are Paul's call to battle. 'Be strong,' he says, 'stand firm against the schemes of the devil.' That's how we're to respond to this great enemy of the church. We're not to run, we're not to hide, we're to stand and we're to hide. Well, how do we do that? How do you fight against an invisible enemy? That's part of what makes the challenge so great. This is no conventional war and as Calvin recognized, that means our difficulties are far greater than if we had to fight against men. In fact, none of us are really up to the challenge.

Satan is far stronger than any mortal on earth, far more clever, far more intelligent than any of us are. And so Paul begins this portion of his letter with the command, 'be strong in the Lord' and that is probably a passive verb, with the sense of be made strong or be empowered, not empower yourself. This is not a spiritual strength that we can somehow draw up from within ourselves. It is be strong within the Lord; find our strengths in him. And then Paul adds, 'in the strength of his might.' That's what God gives us for the fight, his might, which should give us great confidence, great encouragement in the challenge that we face and in the battles that we enter into. He also gives us his weapons. Verse 12, 'put on the full armor of God.' God has not placed us on a battlefield, weak and naked. He's called us to fight and he has made generous provisions for our success. For our part, we are to take up the weapons and we are to stand in his strength and we are to fight.

Leon Morris writes, 'we can drift into sin, but we cannot drift into righteousness.' Being righteous involves a conflict with evil, but we can only have success in that conflict with evil, with the armor that God supplies with the weapons that he has given to us that allow us to defend ourselves and allow us to subdue the evil. The weapons and the armor that he has given are both

defensive and offensive. Paul will explain how we are to use them and how this fight is to be waged with these weapons and the armor, when he gives a full description of that armor and how we are to wear it. But before doing that, he seeks to alert to the danger that we face and in so doing, for the need that we have of wearing God's armor and fighting in his strength. So he first gives a description of the enemy, the enemy that we are fighting against. It is the devil and the powers of darkness. Verse 12, '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 heavenly places.

The enemy is spiritual. It or they dwell in the heavens, in the air, as Paul has said in chapter 2 and they are thoroughly evil. They are the forces of this darkness and forces of wickedness. There is no good at all in them, no bit of compassion, they are holy, wicked and cruel and they move freely on the earth, through the air, between the highest heaven and the earth and their movement has order. The terms that describe them suggest that they are organized like an army, they have ranks, with rulers, evidently as the highest rank and followed by powers and so on. So there's an order to this army. There's evidently a hierarchy among the demons and there are indications of that in other places. In the Book of Daniel, for example, in chapter 10, we read of the angelic prince of Persia and the prince of Greece, who resisted the archangel Michael and delayed him in bringing his message to Daniel. So there's that conflict that's going on behind the scenes, in the air between heaven and earth.

There's a vast and powerful force of spirits, evidently organized according to the regions of the world. Daniel 10 would suggest that and there they exercise their influence under the command of Satan, who is their prince and the fact that he is called a prince indicates that he has great power, he has great authority, great intelligence. John 12:31, our Lord identifies Satan as the ruler of this world. John says that the whole world lies in the power of the evil one. His power is seen in the various descriptions that are given of him throughout the bible. Peter, for example, likens him to a roaring lion, prowling about the earth, seeking someone to devour. In the book of Revelation, he is called the great red dragon and the serpent. So he is a powerful creature and that power is used only for evil and is directed against God's people. Peter called him our adversary and Peter had learned that first hand, before our Lord was arrested and tried and crucified in Luke 22:31, he said to Peter, 'Simon, Simon, behold, Satan has demanded permission to sift you like wheat' and he did.

For all of Peter's confidence and his assertion of loyalty, Satan shook him down so completely that Peter abandoned the Lord and denied him three times. In fact, denied him with curses, made a coward out of Peter; he has that power. He has the power to tempt, he has the power to afflict. Perhaps the most comprehensive statement describing his character and activity is that given by our Lord in John 8:44, where he says that he was a murderer from the beginning, a liar, and the father of lies. He opposes the work of God, he seeks to destroy and he seeks to take worship for himself and to that end he blinds men, deceives them in regard to the truth. He hits the forces of this darkness, as Paul says, and he seeks to keep men in the dark, to keep them in ignorance. That's what darkness signifies, but it also signifies the evil that comes from it, the sin that comes from not knowing the truth of God and living in error and that is what he the master of; he keeps men in that darkness.

In 2 Corinthians 4:4, Paul writes, 'the God of this world, referring to Satan, has blinded the minds of the unbelieving, that they might not see the light of gospel.' He keeps them in the dark, he is the master of the lie, master of counterfeit. 2 Corinthians 11:14, Paul says he disguises himself as an angel of light. It's a mistake to think of the devil as a ghoulish creature with horns and a tail. That's the product of the medieval imagination which Satan has used as a ruse to hide his identity. The popular picture of the devil in red tights, holding a pitchfork is unreal and since rational people can't believe in that, they conclude that, well, I can't believe in a personal devil, because that's what they think of. He hides behind that kind of image and picture because if he can't be believed in, if he is unknown and undetected then he can move all the more freely and strike all the more effectively. Mick Jagger and The Rolling Stones were closer to the real picture when they called the devil 'a man of wealth and taste.' He is that. 2 Corinthians 11, Paul says he disguises himself as an angel of light and his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness. So he doesn't take on the appearance of a fiend, but of a teacher, of a moral and spiritual guide.

So if we want to see where the devil is or look for his influence and where it is most effective, we don't look for it in dens of iniquity, though he certainly has his influence there. He is a murderer and he brings people into those places, but really, the place where he's more effective, where his work is most cunningly worked out, his plans, his schemes are most cunningly worked out are in places of respect. He's to be found in the pulpit or in the lecture, in the corridors of power. That is where his influence is, in so-called servants of righteousness, in

places of wealth, places of taste and we see his influence all around us in those areas. We see in the media, for example, in advertising, we see it in entertainment, where standards of morality are mocked and the truth is ridiculed in the most subtle of ways, where in the words of Isaiah 5:20, 'men call evil good and good evil and substitute darkness for light and light for darkness.' The devil is the master at doing that and so pornography is explained as art and good literature, sin is presented as sophistication, perversion is called gay, killing of the unborn is pro-choice.

Satan's great attack is on the truth and it's on righteousness and he is a master at calling evil good. His efforts are aimed at undermining God's authority, undermining God's will in the world and in the church. So if we are to wage this spiritual warfare effectively, then we must know the truth. We must know God's will because that's what he attacks, that's what he undermines in the most clever of ways. We must know the truth, in order to know the counterfeit. We see that and the importance of that and the nature of his attack in his appearance in the Bible, which is in Genesis 3 and we see in that episode his crafted subtlety. He comes unannounced, he comes without warning and approaches Eve in disguise in one of the animals of the garden, something that's very familiar to her. So it's kind of a disarming way of approaching her, came by somehow manipulating the serpent. And he strikes up a conversation with her, on his favorite subject: theology.

It begins very innocently, it doesn't begin with a blistering attack or a railing accusation against God, but with a question, 'ye hath God said?' He probably said it with some inflection in his voice. Is it really true that God has said that ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden? Is he really that harsh? Is he that stingy that he would deny you all of these good things? No, God had not said that. He had not said, you shall not eat of any tree of the garden, only one tree of all of the trees of the garden, they may freely eat but that one tree was forbidden then. But this is Satan's way, see, he knows the scripture and he twists the scripture and in so doing, he plants a seed of doubt in our minds and a doubt of God's goodness. That's what he did with Eve and with that accomplished, with that seed of doubt planted, then he makes his direct attack upon God's word. God say that you would die if you eat that fruit? That's nonsense, you won't die. In fact, that forbidden fruit is not the way to death, it's the way to life, for God knows that in the day you eat from it, your eyes will be opened and you will be like God, knowing good and evil. In other words, sin is the way to sophistication.

Now, he doesn't say it that way, he doesn't say, 'this is sin' and you need to engage in it, he doesn't call it sin. He calls evil good, but that's the essence of his message and that's what he was teaching her. Sin is the way to sophistication and real life. God's law inhibits, it suffocates, you need to cast it off, you need to break it. Eat the fruit, you won't die, you will be enlightened and fulfilled. He called evil good and good evil. He made sin very attractive. In fact, so attractive that Eve considered it and bit and gave to her husband to eat and they died. It plunges whole human race into sin and misery. That's Satan's way. He is a deceiver and a destroyer, a murderer from the beginning and the father of lies and he's doing the very same thing in a variety of ways today. Notice verse 11, Paul says we are to resist the schemes of the devil. King James version has the wiles of the devil. The Greek word is 'Methodius.' We recognize that word, we get our word methods from it.

Satan has his methods, his schemes, or wiles and not a scheme, but schemes, plural. He has many ways, many methods to deceive us and get us off the truth, get us away from it, get us seeing it in the wrong way. He is very skilled at that. He has been around for a long time and over the millennia, he has learned a lot, knows the Bible, knows it very well and knows how to use it effectively for his purposes, knows how to twist it, how to obscure its meaning. You remember how he approaches our Lord when he tempted him. In fact, that shows you the boldness and the self-confidence that Satan has. He took on the son of God. He took him on with a scripture and he used scripture each of the three temptations and twisted it but our Lord knew the scriptures and fought him with the scriptures and shows us that we need to know it, we need to know the scriptures and we need to know it truly. But he knows scripture, he's able to use in a very clever way to appear as angel of light.

Now he knows human nature, he's been around a long time and he knows our weaknesses and he knows how to deal with us. He knows the perfect methods of attack, he knows how to push the right buttons, get the right effect. So he does that, how does he do it? How does he carry out his schemes? Well, partly by himself, but not completely, not mostly. Satan is not omnipresent, as great as he is, he is a creature and he's limited. We see that in Job 1: 7, where he approaches the throne of God and God says to him, 'from where do you come?' And Satan answered, 'from roaming about the earth and walking around on it.' He can be only at one place at one time, he has a vast network of angels, though, throughout the world, the demons and

they are constantly on the attack, carrying out his schemes, carrying out his plans and doing so very effectively.

In the book of Job, we read that Satan is sometimes allowed to afflict physically. In 2 Corinthians 12, Paul speaks of his thorn in the flesh as a messenger of Satan. So he can afflict the body, that doesn't mean that all illness, or even most illness is from Satan, I don't think it is, but at times, at least, he's had that power. Chiefly, Satan and his angels make their attack on the mind. Paul says in chapter 2, in verse 2, that he is now working in the sons of disobedience. Now he does that by influencing ideas, introducing thoughts into the mind that influence a person's outlook, a person's attitude, a person's behavior. One of the most common of his schemes today, deals with sensuality. That is a desire or a lust of the flesh, but he is able to entice our eyes, he 's able to introduce thoughts that inflame lust and there are many objects around us that he can play upon.

He is the one who produces, as Paul says in chapter 2, the spirit of this age. He is the one who directs fashion in this age in which we live and he has produced a very sensual age with many objects that can entice. So he can direct our thoughts, he can focus our eyes on something that'll catch our attention, inflame lust and if not dealt with immediately and seen for what it is, can lead to tragedy and ruin. He can instill doubts in our mind, as he did with Eve. He can cause us to question God's goodness and the wisdom of God's ways. It may be in something that we read in the newspaper and we read things every day, if you read the newspaper, that can do that. You read about a crimes that's occurred or a catastrophe, maybe a crime against a child, and what happens? You read that, you're appalled at what you read and suddenly there's this question in your mind, how could God allow that? Or a hurricane has occurred or an earthquake has occurred and thousands are homeless and thousands are dead and the question arises in your mind, would a good God permit such things as that?

He insinuates doubts in our minds about the goodness of God, the faithfulness of God, the truth of God's word. Maybe it's through the latest theories of science that we might read that cause you to wonder if the account in Genesis could really be factual. He's always seeking to raise doubts in the minds of God's people about the reliability of God, about the reliability of his word, the reliability of the Bible. You see that very clearly in the experience of Peter. When Peter was with the Lord and the disciples in Caesarea Philippi, he made his great profession of

faith, great statement of faith, great statement of theology when he said that Jesus is the Christ, the son of the living God.

That confession, that truth was a revelation from God, it was inspired by God the Father and yet, moments later, after our Lord informed the disciples that he would suffer death in Jerusalem, Peter who has just confessed that Jesus Christ is the son of God says, 'God forbid it Lord.' He questions the truth of our Lord's statement, of our Lord's revelation. He questions the wisdom of it and how does the Lord respond to what he says? 'Get behind me, Satan.' Peter spoke the thoughts that Satan had inspired in his mind, unwittingly, he didn't know that he was being manipulated, he didn't know where that thought came from. It sounded like a good thought. In fact, as we read it, we might think, 'that's a true friend of our Lord.'

He won't hear about death or pain for you. The Lord says, 'no this is my purpose and to oppose this is to oppose the very revelation of God,' but that's what Satan does. He causes us to question the truth and the reliability of God and those are the lines along which he is attacking us today, causing us to doubt the correctness and the wisdom of his word and that leads to doubting God's faithfulness. Face to face with the trials in life or the possibility of difficulties and we begin to wonder is he really reliable? What if I should lose my job? What if something happens in the future that is really beyond me? Can he take care of me in time of need? We begin to doubt that. Doubts come from Satan. Having them is no sign that you're not a Christian. They are the sign that you are in the spiritual battle.

In fact, Luther, who was subject to them said that without such experiences and without discouragement, no man can understand the scripture. Faith, the fear or the love of God. It's through those struggles that we come to understand more thoroughly the word of God. So God can even use those things, the very attacks of Satan to build us up in the faith. Another of the devil's schemes is fear, which often comes from doubt. Fear can be crippling. It may be the fear of death or the fear of a loss of friends or a job that prevents us from being open about our faith. It was fear that caused Peter to deny the Lord three times. It may an irrational kind of fear, fear of what might occur and there are endless possibilities of what might occur. We begin to hear about those things that do happen, it may be a terrible illness in a child and we hear about that and there's a bunch of that that occurs and we begin to wonder if that might not happen to our children and then we begin to be consumed with that kind of fear or what if I get sick or what if I

lose my job and the list of things go on and on so that people can get tied up in knots over the things that might take place.

And that leads to focusing on that and not focusing on Christ and the consequence, ultimately, is frustration in the Christian life and bitterness. That's Satan's activity. Similar to fear is depression; he depresses the mind. I think there is such a thing as clinical depression, but there's also an attack by Satan that produces that. Martin Luther suffered from this, too. He was assaulted with dread, he was assaulted with despair. Roland Bainton, Luther's biographer, writes that the content of his depression was always the same, the loss of faith that God is good and that he is good to me. I have a friend who, in the past, went through some real struggles spiritually and he said that to me. He said, 'I don't question that God is good, I just wonder if he's good to me.' He struggled with that. Christians struggle with that question; Luther did. In 1527, after a particularly difficult period, Luther wrote, 'for more than a week, I was close to the gates of death and hell. I trembled in all my members, Christ was holy lost.'

He wasn't really lost but he seemed that way to Luther in that period of depression. Depression is one of the devil's wiles. Dr. David Martin Loy Jones, who was a medical doctor by training, but who became one of the great preachers of the 20th century at Westminster Chapel in London, a man I know many of you are familiar with. He passed away some years ago, I think it was in 1981 or 2. He writes about the wiles of the devil and this particular one of depression. And he writes, he does it generally by making us concentrate over much on ourselves.' He keeps us looking at ourselves and examining ourselves, always looking at the past, at something we did in the past, which we should not have done.

He will keep us looking back until we are utterly depressed. We doubt whether we are forgiven. We doubt whether we are children of God, we feel unworthy, we feel unclean, we feel our lives are a failure, that we become miserable and unhappy causes the devil to rejoice. It's one of his great tools, his schemes, to cause us to be depressed and self-consumed and focused on our failure. Lloyd Jones then adds, 'you have no right to remain in such a depression because you are assured by God's own word that if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. He is a God who heals the backslider, he is a God who receives back the prodigal son. How do we know that? We know that because God's word says it, so we must be grounded in God's word. That is what we are to repair to, the word of God, to know it and study it.

Doubts, fear, depression, a sense of failure, these are often the assaults of Satan. He can cleverly influence our thoughts and our emotions and he is an expert at introducing them into our hearts and also an expert at introducing false teaching into the church. He attacks the truth, bringing in error in the guise of truth. Paul speaks of this in 1 Timothy 4:1, where he says that the spirit explicitly says that in latter time, some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and the doctrines of demons. Now they don't come in as the doctrine of demons. Man doesn't get in the pulpit and say, 'I have an interesting doctrine of demons that I want to proclaim to you.' We'd dismiss that immediately. It comes in as light and those who preach doctrines of demons don't preach them as such. They appear as angels of light, as ministers of righteousness. He cloaks such doctrine in light, making it appear to be truth.

So John says in his first epistle, 'do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits.' That means test what's being said in this place. You think that the eyes of Satan are not on this pulpit, they are on every pulpit where the word of God is opened and he will try to present the lie here as well. So I have to be on guard for that, Dr. Johnson does, Mark Newman does, Randy Wood, everyone who preaches the word here has to be on guard for that and you do, too. You need to test every spirit and John, in that context, says the test is Christ. Did he come in the flesh? Is he a genuine man, did the incarnation occur? We are in the Christmas season, we celebrate the birth of the Christ child and according to the word of God, he became a man with a genuine human nature, without sin, but a genuine nature and so the first test is did Christ come in the flesh? Another test that we could add to that is he, the eternal son of God.

Now those who are false will deny these truths, but Satan seeks to undermine every doctrine of scripture and he is relentless and if he cannot succeed there, if he cannot undermine our confidence in scripture, then he will simply try to draw our interest away from it and he has many ways of doing that. In *The Screwtape Letters*, one of the schemes is to get the Christian involved in a cause. It doesn't matter what the cause is, when Lewis wrote that book, it was at the beginning of the second World War and so the cause there was patriotism was pacifism. It doesn't matter which one, but the ploy was to get the patient, this Christian involved in one of those causes, whatever, but get him involved in it so that he feels that it is part of his religion. In other words, this is a spiritual activity and to nurse that along so that eventually, it becomes the most important part of his religion.

Screwtape says, 'it makes little difference what kind of worldly end he is pursuing, provided that meetings, pamphlets, policies, movements and crusade matter more to him than prayers and sacraments and charity. If we can get to that point,' Screwtape says, 'he's ours.' We've got him out of the word of God, we've got him off his knees and we've got him down there at those meetings and fighting those other causes and not developing his spiritual life, then he's ours. It's very easy to allow good causes to become so important that they take the place of what is really important, what is eternal and that is our relationship with the Lord.

Well these are just some of the devil's schemes. He exists and he's always making war on us. We need to know that in order to deal effectively with the devil's many schemes, with the ways in which he seeks to frustrate our relationship with the Lord, to remove our joy and to neutralize our service to Christ. The first step is to realize that we are in a battle and we face a formidable foe. The next is to know God's truth, to know his word and to believe it. Believe God's word, not your doubts, not your fears, don't focus on your failures. God is good and his word is true and God is sovereign. Satan is not, he is powerful. No mere mortal is his equal, but he is still a creature and a mere insect to the almighty, all knowing, all wise, omnipresent, triune God and he can do nothing that God does not permit.

One of the early heresies that the church had to face was dualism and the belief that there are two great and equal powers in the universe, two Gods, the God of light and the God of darkness. God in the ____ [*Inaudible*] the evil God, the God of the material and they are equal in their power and they are engaged in a constant conflict. Well that idea is false. There are many powers in the universe but only one absolute sovereign power and that's God's power. Satan is a mere finite creature and he is a defeated enemy. His defeat was ordained from all eternity and it was accomplished on the cross. In Colossians 2, Paul deals with that. Chapter 1 he points out that Christ is the creator of everything that there is, all the spiritual powers, he has created. Satan is his creation, created imperfect and Satan fell, but he's the creator of all of the powers of the universe and in Colossians 2, Paul writes that God accomplished his defeat through the death of his son on the cross. He points out that, there, he gained forgiveness, the cancelling of our debts of sin and the defeat of Satan.

There he writes in verse 15 that God did this when he had disarmed the rules and authorities. He made a public display of them having triumphed over them through his son. God triumphed over the devil and all of his powers and led him in a kind victory parade, showing his

triumph over him and those evil powers. So on the one hand, Christ is Satan's creator and on the other, he is his conqueror. His power is absolute over Satan and that power, the power of Jesus Christ is for us, for every believer in Christ. That's why Paul says, you're in a great battle, you are in an invisible war, and so be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might, that you may be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil.

And in his strength, we can stand firm and successfully resist Satan's attacks. James says, 'resist the devil and he will flee from you.' Peter says, 'resist him firm in your faith,' and as we do that, firm in our faith, he does flee. We do that firm in our faith by abiding in Christ, continuing in an active, earnest relationship with him, continually looking to Christ, being men and women of study, of prayer, of obedience, that's where our strength lies. Paul gives special attention here, to the dangers of the devil. We are to be aware, so that we can stand, but there is a danger in having a fixation on the devil, of having an excessive and unhealthy interest in and concern about the devil and demons. We are to fix our minds and fix our thoughts on Christ and fill our minds with truth, with whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure.

That is the greatest defense against the schemes of the devil. In Christ, we have a mighty fortress. Do you know Christ? Maybe you're here this morning and this whole idea of a personal devil seems strange, even preposterous. My answer is the entire bible teaches his existence and it is important to believe that but a far greater importance is to first believe in Christ. If you don't, don't believe in Jesus Christ and that, really, is the great evidence of the devil's existence. That's what he does, as Paul says, he blinds the minds of the unbelieving to the gospel, to the person work of Jesus Christ. What you need, if that is your condition, if you are here this morning and you don't believe these things, what you need is a miracle.

Now that's what Christ does. One of the greatest miracles that he ever did was in giving sight to blind eyes and he's doing that today, by opening the eyes of the heart, giving men and women an understanding that yes, that is true, I see it. So look to Christ, look to the light of the world, believe in him who died to release us from our sins and to deliver from Satan's power, receive from him freedom, forgiveness, the life everlasting, through faith alone, not through any work that we do, but simply by trusting in Christ and receiving the gift of life through faith. May God help you to do that. May God help each of us to stand firm against the schemes of the devil, by standing firm in Christ and knowing his truth. Shall we stand for the benediction.

[Prayer] Gracious God and heavenly Father, we do thank you for the salvation that you have given to sinful men and women, undeserving people through the person and work of your son. We come to this time of the year and again, we remember his birth, that he came into the world as an infant, as a baby, what an amazing thing that is. He took to himself human nature, became a man, born of a woman, born under the law, completely human and perfect, one who kept the law perfectly so that he could offer himself up as the sacrifice for sin. He did that, he accomplished salvation and we thank you for that, not only because he delivered from sin and the wages of sin, but delivered us from the domain of darkness, from the power of Satan. We are free from him and now we can not only stand free but stand firm, help us to do that.

Give us the strength and the wisdom to do that with success. We know that you will give us success. Thank you for your grace, for the gift of life in your son and pray that if there be any in attendance, do not know Jesus Christ as savior, open their eyes to that truth, that they may know him, the forgiveness of sins and the life everlasting. We pray these things in Christ's name, Amen.