

# Attitudes to Work

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<i>Text</i>	Ephesians 6:10-13
<i>Readings</i>	Daniel 10; Ephesians 6:10-20
<i>Theme</i>	We are fighting a spiritual battle and we need the full armour of God to stand firm.
<i>Purpose</i>	To make believers aware of this spiritual battle and to urge you to take up God's armour.
<i>Confession</i>	Belgic Confession Article 12

Congregation,

Sometimes you come across a situation and as you reflect on it you might say; "There's more to this than meets the eye." People may say that about a crime that has been committed, or an accident that has happened, or someone's death. They might say; There's more to this than might appear; more than you might think at first glance.

The Bible tells us that this is true of all the events in this world: It is true of the election of presidents and prime ministers, of wars and conflicts, of appointments at universities and colleges, of books written and films produced. All of these things are part of a much larger picture. There is a great deal going on behind the scenes because we are part of a spiritual battle, a cosmic conflict that is going on.

The Apostle Paul wrote about this in this letter after a few chapters of explaining how we ought to be living – in the church, in marriage, the family, the workplace and in society. We need to live in all these situations aware of the bigger picture and the nature of the battle we are engaged in. This is why he writes; "Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power."

As we consider these verses we will see that:

1. You are in a spiritual battle.
2. You must be strong in the Lord.
3. You need the full armour of God.

First of all, we are part of a **spiritual battle** that is being fought throughout the world. It is a conflict fought on the largest scale you can imagine, involving millions and millions of beings.

But it is also being fought close at hand. The word "struggle" in verse 12 was also used to describe wrestling. In this massive battle going on you have a part to play. You are a soldier in the army, and you will be required to fight person to person, in hand to hand combat.

It is a battle against **spiritual forces of darkness**. This is not a physical battle. It's not a matter of tanks and grenades and automatic rifles. One of our hymns says;

“For not with sword’s loud clashing,  
or roll of stirring drums;  
with deeds of love and mercy,  
the heavenly kingdom comes.”

“Our struggle is not against flesh and blood.” Rather, it is “against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.” JB Phillips translates that last phrase: “spiritual agents from the very headquarters of evil.” There are evil angels at work behind the materialism and secularism and mysticism of our present time.

We read about that in Daniel 10. Evil spiritual powers were at work behind the Persian and Greek empires and they were opposed by the powerful good angels of God, one of whom was the archangel Michael.

There is a battle going on between the good angels and the fallen angels, between the Kingdom of Light and the Kingdom of Darkness.

**It is a battle of world-views**, of first-principles, of life-systems. Abraham Kuyper described this as an antithesis between two totally opposing philosophies. This is more than just a battle against abortion and homosexuality and pornography and violence and crime. We are fighting evil *as a system*. And we are fighting against evil on *a number of fronts*.

On one front we are fighting against *Islam* which has become increasingly militant and aggressive in recent years. Islam has a highly developed strategy for taking over the nations and we need to be on our guard.

On another front we are fighting against the various forms of *New Age religion and Eastern mysticism*. These are counterfeit religions. They have the appearance of a true spirituality but they are false religions. Satan and his evil angels have drawn many into astrology, witchcraft, séances, card and palm-reading, mediums and out-of-the-body experiences.

But the main battle front we are fighting in New Zealand is the world view of *secular scientific humanism*.

By *secular* we mean a way of looking at the world that excludes God.

By *humanism* we mean a world view that put the human person at the centre of everything.

By *scientific* we mean the view that everything can be understood purely in terms of the scientific method without any reference to God or the spiritual world.

Sadly this world view even has the support of some theologians who claim to be part of the church. Liberal theology has explained God away and made the Bible a merely human book and denied miracles and the supernatural.

This has had a great influence in the church. In a recent survey in the US 45% of those who claimed to be born again Christians believed that Satan is only a symbol of evil rather than an actual being. If theologians and preachers in the church have denied or ignored God and Satan it is little wonder when the people of the world do the same.

This world view has dominated Western civilisation for about 300 years and many people are still holding onto it today, even in these postmodern times. This is where the main battle lines are drawn.

### **This is a battle against the Devil's schemes.**

One of the most important aids in fighting a battle is to understand your opponent. It's a great help if you know what the enemy is like, where he might attack, and what he is planning. Think of the time and money America pours into counter-intelligence to try to understand and anticipate terrorist activities and attacks. This is true in our spiritual warfare. The Apostle Paul said that "we are not ignorant of his schemes" (2 Corinthians 2:11). We too need to be sure that we are "not ignorant" but are wide awake, alert, smart, ready.

Satan will use every trick in the book, including every dirty one, to try to destroy your faith and to wreck the church.

- He is out to ruin pastors, elders, deacons, Christian teachers and politicians.
- He rejoices when he can bring about the failure of another Christian marriage.
- He rubs his hands when members of the church argue and bicker with each other.
- He is delighted when he hears believers gossiping and slandering each other.
- He is laughing all the way to hell when he sees Christian schools that are ineffective or troubled by conflict.
- He smiles to himself when he sees believers put their faith in a water-tight compartment so that it has no influence over the rest of their lives.

In his evil efforts he will use every sly scheme to make us apathetic, or lazy, or indifferent, or cynical, or inactive, or to push us to one or other extreme.

In his wicked work he will distort the truth in order to lead people into heresy and error, or to draw people into the sects and cults. Anything to ravage the church and devastate believers. So you need to be alert to his schemes. He goes around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour (1Pet5:8).

So this is a spiritual battle against the forces of darkness that involves a conflict of world views in which we need to be aware of the devil's schemes.

Secondly, to stand in the battle **you must be strong in the Lord.**

**In ourselves we are very weak** – too weak to hold our own, even for a moment. We are only human and the angels, including the evil angels, are much more powerful than us. Remember that Satan is a very powerful angel. Even the archangel Michael "did not dare to bring a slanderous accusation against him, but said; 'The Lord rebuke you'." (Jude 9).

The only way we will be able to stand our ground is to be strong **in the Lord**.

He can sustain us because he is all-powerful. Literally verse 10 reads; "Be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might." Paul is using the most powerful synonyms he can find to describe the majesty and force of the Lord Jesus. That power was most evident in the death and the resurrection of Jesus. In his death he "disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross" (Colossians 2:15). And in his resurrection he was declared to be the Son of God with power. That confirmed his victory over sin and death, as well as over Satan and his spirits.

Remember this in your fight against evil. The Lord Jesus is all powerful. He is in control. "Thine is the battle, thine shall be the praise!" We don't believe in the dualism of the Manicheans, mentioned in Article 12 of the Belgic Confession, as though Satan and God were equal and opposite forces. No, powerful as Satan is, this is not a battle of equals. Satan has already lost the decisive battle that took place at Christ's first coming, and he will lose the next one when Jesus returns. Then he will be utterly defeated and Jesus will be seen to be Lord of all.

So you must be strong "in the Lord". Don't depend on your own strength, but depend on the Lord Jesus. Rely on him. Trust in him.

"We Trust in thee, our shield and our defender  
We go not forth alone against the foe,  
Strong in thy strength, safe in thy keeping tender  
We trust in thee and in thy name we go."

When we are weak, and are utterly dependant on the Lord, then we are strong -in the Lord.

The Apostle Paul wrote; "I can do all things through him who gives me the strength" (Philippians 4:13).

He knew that the Lord had stood by him and strengthened him (2 Timothy 4:17); and so he urged Timothy to "be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus" (2 Timothy 2:1).

You must do the same. This is a command. You need to do something. There is a battle going on. You can't sit back in the barrack playing cards and lying in your bunk with a battle raging around you. You are needed in the battle, at the front. One of our hymns asks;

"Must I be carried to the skies,  
on flowery beds of ease,  
while others fought to win the prize,  
and sailed through bloody seas?"  
*(Psalter Hymnal 465)*

This is not a time to “Let go and let God”, as one popular expression has it. There are times when we need to put all our trust in God and allow him to carry us through. But this is a battle and you need to be there!

Edmund Burke said; “The only thing it takes for evil to prosper is for good men to do nothing.” Don’t sit back when you see evil in the world. Don’t just shake your head and say; “What’s the world coming to?” Rather, be strong in the Lord and enter the battle. Speak up for Christ at school and work, wisely yet boldly; write letters; pray; read; be informed about what is going on.

“Since I must fight if I would reign  
Increase my courage Lord;  
I’ll bear the toil, endure the pain,  
supported by thy word.”

To do this you need, thirdly, to **put on the full armour of God.**

Notice that this is the armour **of God**. Fighting Satan with our own armour would be like fighting a tank division with a cardboard shield and a water pistol!

You must fight fire with fire. You fight spiritual forces with spiritual power. You do battle with Satan equipped with the armour of God. “The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds.” (2 Cor 10:4).

#### **Put on the full armour of God:**

The belt of truth,  
the breastplate of righteousness,  
the shoes of the gospel of peace,  
the shield of faith,  
the helmet of salvation,  
the sword of the Spirit.

The pieces of our armour are the central realities of what it means to be a Christian: Truth, righteousness, peace, faith, salvation and the Bible. This is spiritual armour for spiritual warfare. Without it you are a dead man. With it you are well-armed and well-defended.

But you must **put it on**. You do that by reading the Bible, attending worship, getting along to fellowship meetings; by meditating and reflecting on God’s word, by reading good books about the Bible and what it means to be a Christian in today’s world.

And you put it on with prayer:

“Put on the gospel armour,  
each piece put on with prayer.”  
*(Psalter Hymnal 467 verse 3)*

Paul mentions prayer in verses 18 and 19. Without prayer we are nothing; we are defenceless and weak and feeble.

But if you put on the full armour of God, with prayer, then “when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand” (verse 13).

The phrase “the day of evil” refers to times of trial and temptation. The New English Bible translates it; “when things are at their worst.” Philip writes; “even when you have fought to a standstill you may still stand your ground.”

The word ‘stand’ was a military term that described soldiers holding a critical position, maintaining ground that had been won.

This is God’s promise in this spiritual battle. If you are strong in the Lord and if you put on his armour then you will be able to withstand the schemes and attacks of Satan. You will be able to stand for truth and love and justice and righteousness. You will be able to do this at school, polytechnic and university; in your office and factory; in your home and community. You will be able to do that as soldiers of the Lord Jesus, strong in his strength.

This sense of victory has been powerfully expressed in one of our hymns:

Stand up, Stand up for Jesus,  
Ye soldiers of the cross;  
Lift high his royal banner,  
It must not suffer loss.  
From victory unto victory,  
His army shall he lead,  
Till every foe is vanquished  
And Christ is Lord indeed.

Stand up, stand up for Jesus,  
The strife will not be long;  
This day the noise of battle,  
The next the victor’s song.  
To him that overcometh,  
A crown of life shall be;  
He with the king of glory,  
Shall reign eternally.”

*(Psalter Hymnal 467 verses 1 and 4)*

Amen