

Pete and Jo Ong are our link missionaries in Malawi. They have been seeking to build a nursery school in Muslim area. This is a great opportunity for ministry in this area. They have bought land and started building but they have found out that there has been mismanagement of the funds. They have had to sack the managers of the project and they have to look for new managers to run it.

In an email Pete writes, *“Outreach to the Muslim community is always a challenge here in Malawi and so in a sense, we are not surprised by the spiritual attack but yet we are always caught off guard by just how Satan chooses to attack.”*

1. A Spiritual battle

He begins his email with the words from our Bible reading:

¹²For our struggle 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. (Ephesians 6:12)

Ephesians 6:11 refers to the *“Devil’s schemes.”* The Bible confirms that we are under spiritual attack. The enemy is not people (*“flesh and blood”*). It’s *“the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.”* The Devil may use evil people or evil governments but ultimately it is a spiritual attack and what we need is spiritual weapons to defend ourselves.

How does the Devil attack us? In Malawi the work on the Nursery school has had to stop because of what the old managers had done. The Devil can stop God’s work through people’s evil actions. The attack can come from governments which oppose God’s work or persecute Christians. The Devil can cause conflict between Christians.

Pete in his email goes on to say, *“We don’t even have the words right now to describe how we feel - anger, discouraged, disappointment, gutted, saddened, ... are just a few words.”*

The devil will seek to discourage us, lead us to give up. When things go badly or when we feel we have failed we can easily feel like giving up.

We need to recognise this as a spiritual attack. It is Devil trying to undermine our faith or stop God’s work. When do you find this happening in your life?

That’s when we need God’s armour. We need spiritual weapons *“to take our stand against the Devil’s schemes.”* (6:11)

All sorts of things can hit us in life and discourage us, cause us to doubt God goodness, or cause us to sin: sickness, conflict, when someone hurts us, unanswered prayer, etc. Recognise these things as the Devil’s schemes. He’s trying to pull you away from God and from serving God.

We need to read this passage in the context of whole letter. The letter is all about God’s purposes to draw us together in unity as his people. 2:19 says, *“You are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God’s people and also members of his household.”* God is drawing people of different backgrounds together to be one in his family.

So in 4:1-3 Paul calls us to make every effort to keep this unity that we have been called to.

"I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. ... ³ Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. (4:1, 3)"

Then from 4:17 on he tells us what this involves:

Speaking truthfully to each other (4:25)

Not letting anger control us (4:26)

"Do not give the devil a foothold." (4:27)

These are the areas he will attack us.

Not steal but work so we can give to others (4:28)

Only say words that will build others up (4:29)

Get rid of bitterness, rage, anger, slander, malice. (4:31)

Be kind and forgiving to each other (4:32)

Love each other as Christ loved us (5:1)

No sexual immorality (5:3)

Husbands and wives must love each other (5:22-33)

He talks about family life. (6:1-9)

These things are God's will for us as God's holy united people, God's family. God's will works out in these practical every day areas of life. But it is right in these areas that the devil attacks us. We see conflict in some churches, dishonesty, stealing (in Malawi), Christian marriages not truly loving, Christians and even Christian leaders falling into sin.

The attack is real and too often the devil is winning. How lightly we say the Lord's Prayer, *"Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil."* With no thought that there is any real danger! No. The spiritual battle is real. But we are not helpless.

2. God's Power is available

There is a lot of debate about how to generate power in Australia today. Should we use thermal, solar, wind, or hydro power? How can we do it so we don't destroy the atmosphere? One thing is certain. Modern society needs massive amounts of power to function. Country would come to a standstill without electric power. In the same way we depend on God's power if we are to remain faithful to him and resist the devil.

Paul begins by saying, *"Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power."* (6:10)

Again we need to read this in context. He has already told us about God's power. *"¹⁸ I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know ... [God's] incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is the same as the mighty strength ²⁰ he exerted when he raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, ²¹ far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every name that is invoked, not only in the present age but also in the one to come."* (1:18-21)

Look at this passage beside the words in Chapter 6
"... seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, ²¹far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every name that is invoked, not only in the present age but also in the one to come." (1:20-21)

"¹²For our struggle 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 realm." (6:12)

Christ is seated reigning over all these powers. He has won the victory over these powers. We don't need to win the victory. We just need to depend on his power.

In Chapter 3 Paul prays that God might *"strengthen you with power through his Spirit."* (3:16) And he concludes his prayer, *"²⁰Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, ²¹to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen."* (3:20-21)

Do you get the idea? God's power can help us. We are weak but we don't need to be defeated. He is at work within us if we let him and if we use the armour he has given us.

3. Put on the full armour of God

Think of a battle scene from Roman times, people fighting with swords, spears, clubs and arrows. Now would you walk into a battle like this with no armour? A Roman soldier was equipped with the armour needed to survive in battle. What sort of armour do we need?

When I was at University it was during the Vietnam War. Some of my friends were conscripted and sent to Vietnam. My number didn't come up so I wasn't called up but if I had been sent to Vietnam I would have wanted to have all the armour I could get. It was a war zone and people were being killed there.

We are in a spiritual war zone and we need God's armour. Pauls says, *"Therefore put on the full armour of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand."* (6:13) God's armour will enable us to stand against the devil's attack but we have to put the armour on. And we need to put the full armour on.

Ned Kelly had some amazing armour but it didn't cover him completely. He was vulnerable and so he was shot. We need to put on all the armour God supplies to cover us completely - not just some of it.

"Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist." (6:14) 1:13 tells us that the word of truth is the gospel, the message of salvation. Do you really understand gospel of Christ's death and res? Have you embraced the message of this gospel for yourself? Are you confident of your standing before God now and for eternity? If not you are not ready for the battle. Find out. Do a Christianity Explored course. Talk to one of us. Don't go into battle unprepared.

We can't look at each of the pieces of armour, just some of them.

"Take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one." (6:16) Flaming arrows is a good description of the devil's attack that may fly at us from unexpected directions. It can be deadly. Faith is an effective shield against these attacks. Faith means a firm trust

in God's promises to us. Do you know the promises of God's word? Could you recall them when times of difficulty come? Do you have that shield ready?

"Take ... the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God." (6:17) Are you regularly studying the word of God? How well do you really understand it? If you are not in a group why not join one to dig deeper into God's word? Grasp that sword more firmly.

Finally Prayer: *"¹⁸ And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord's people. ¹⁹ Pray also for me, that whenever I speak, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel."* (6:18-19) We can't stand against the devil in our own strength. It is only by depending on God in prayer that we will remain faithful. Prayer is vital if we are going to stand.

Paul was in prison when wrote this letter. *"in chains."* You can imagine what a Roman prison was like. He asks these people to pray for him. But he doesn't ask that he will get out of prison but that he will be able to fearlessly preach the gospel. What do you pray for? Do you pray that God will change you and use you? - or that he will change your circumstances? Do your prayers ask for help in the battle with temptation and sin?

Do you pray for others people in the battle? Paul says to pray *"Be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord's people."* (6:18) Do you pray for those who are on the front line of preaching the gospel that they will *"fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel"*?

If you are using the internet you have to watch out for scam emails, viruses and other evils. You know your computer is under attack.

Do you believe that you are under spiritual attack? Do you believe it is real? That the Devil is trying to undermine your faith and destroy God's work?

Be alert but not alarmed. God is powerful. He has provided all the armour you will need. But stop and think what else do you need to do to be ready for battle?