

## The Nature of Good Versus Evil: Putting on the Full Armor of God

We live in a time where many, even within the Church, question the existence of good and evil. Just have a conversation with family or friends. Ask them, “What do you consider to be evil? What is the good? How do we know?” *What is the standard that we accept to tell us what is good and what is evil?* Unless they are a faithful Christian, fluent in the Scriptures (a rare thing indeed these days!) and are a moral, upright, self-aware human (even rarer), I’m not sure you could get out of the starting blocks. Every conversation about what is right or wrong, good or evil, fair and unfair, true or false devolves into a litany of self-preference, relativity or expediency. “Is it okay to lie? Cheat? Steal? Do harm to your neighbor?” you ask. “Well, it depends...” the utilitarian says. “My truth is my truth; love is love; you do you...” the hedonistic individualist says. This is the world we live in.

But my friends, there is a good. There is a true. There is a beautiful. It exists and it is found *outside* the heart of man. There is also an evil. First, the good is whatever is in line with God and His will. For He is *completely good. Completely true.* Therefore, whatever...**is** true, honorable, just, pure, lovely, commendable, excellent, and anything worthy of praise is a reflection of God. The good’s source is God and is reflected in His Divine Will (His Law), embodied in His Son, and born out by His Spirit. The qualities or attributes of this good is the fruit of it: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. The good.

*Evil, then, is good’s opposite.* Evil is a perversion of what is good. So, evil is sexual immorality (*porneia*), sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissension, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies...things like these. Literally the opposites of God’s Will. It used to be that people would conventionally accept these “opposites” as evil. *Loosely agreed upon conventional standards of morality.* But no longer. Very often, what is celebrated in every sphere of life (media, sports, corporate America, etc.) **is a perversion of the good (evil) and what is mocked are the things of God.**<sup>1</sup> What is mandated is self-expression and self-determinism and what is mocked is humility (the suppression of the self for another).

But this is not merely an intellectual issue, or a scholarly debate. The blurring or erasure of the lines biology, the attack of God’s will for His creation, the celebration of perversity falls into the realm of **spiritual warfare**. A warfare implies a battle. We are under attack. By Satan. Satan is our enemy who is active against God’s good order and design and active against God’s people. However, we see the battles we fight as merely a culture war, or a fleshly struggle with sin. But as Paul reminds us, **we struggle against unseen forces.** *Ephesians 6:10-12:*

*Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. For we do not*

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<sup>1</sup> A great example is how the rainbow has been high-jacked by perverse groups and is even used inside denominations to show how “inclusive” and “loving” they are. Wicked!

*wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, **against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.***

When we think of “spiritual warfare”, what do we think of most often? Or...let me rephrase...do we EVER think about spiritual warfare? I have talked before about the role of Satan in **PIL**,<sup>2</sup> and how active he is with the different and perverse ways our culture has embraced his ideas. But consider that Satan and his minions are *attacking you*. Maybe some of you might be put off by the “battle” language I have employed. I take my cue from St. Paul. For Paul says we are to “stand against” and “wrestle” the schemes of the devil and the spiritual forces at his disposal. To put on the “full armor” is to equip oneself for real attacks, spiritual attacks. The war we face is real, **but unseen**. The spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. We get the idea of installing a security system in our homes to protect from an intruder. We might lock our car doors when traveling through certain areas of a city. We go to great lengths to protect our passwords. But what about the warfare THAT IS REAL and is a CONSTANT THREAT, but **we can’t see or touch**? 6:13-17a:

*Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm. Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace. In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one; and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication.*

It is crucial to realize that Paul is not calling on a summoning of some kind of inner strength. He calls to be armed with *the external gifts God gives* to undergo such attacks that will happen to all Christians.<sup>3</sup> So, we “put on” or “let ourselves be clothed”.<sup>4</sup> The brilliance of Paul’s exhortation is that the Christian is being equipped not by their own might, *but in what we receive as ones “in the Lord”*. **It is the Lord Who gives these external weapons, that allow us to stand and fight.** We do not put our trust in ourselves but cast our cares upon “Him Who strengthens me.”<sup>5</sup>

The whole or full armor is the panoply, or the “complete equipment of a heavy armed soldier”. The Christian is armed to withstand the “schemes of the devil”. What are his methods? What does Satan use to attack? We have several clues earlier in the letter. Paul warns of **false teaching** (*deceitful scheming* in 4:14) and **the response to anger** (*do not let the sun go down on your anger* in 4:26, *giving an opportunity to the devil*) as being things that we are to be armed

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<sup>2</sup> **PIL** is porneia, general immorality, and licentiousness.

<sup>3</sup> See Thomas Winger, *Ephesians: The Concordia Commentary Series* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2015), 700.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> *Philippians* 4:13.

against. But tying into a topic I have written about last year, I quote from the chapter earlier, where Paul says this (5:3-5):

*But sexual immorality (porneia) and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints. Let there be no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking, which are out of place, but instead let there be thanksgiving. For you may be sure of this, that everyone who is sexually immoral ( pornos)<sup>6</sup> or impure, or who is covetous (that is, an idolater), has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God.*

Here we have Satan’s goal for attacks—that *the saints lose their inheritance in the Kingdom of Christ and God*. That is what the attacks and schemes are to accomplish—to **separate us from the Body of Christ**. This separation cannot and does not come from a failure of God to keep His promises, or an insufficiency of Christ’s sacrifice! But these threats are real and can happen. Paul is in earnest. *This can come only from our rejection of God’s free gift of grace and a loss of faith*. Paul is clear: those who willfully engage in *porneia* and **PIL**<sup>7</sup> unrepentantly are in grave danger. This is exactly what Satan wants. This is why he attacks. This is the spiritual warfare.

But our merciful God gives us His own armor to withstand Satan. The armor is given in baptism and nourished in the Church. That is how we are incorporated into the Body of Christ and how we are clothed. Consider then each of the six “virtues” that we are given to stand firm:<sup>8</sup>

1. The Belt of Truth
2. The Breastplate of Righteousness
3. The Gospel of Peace as Shoes
4. The Shield of Faith
5. The Helmet of Salvation
6. The Sword of the Spirit=The Word of God

In this “armament” the whole body is covered. The corpus is protected by both the breastplate and shield. The head is protected by a helmet. The body is girded by the Truth, and for readiness, we wear the Gospel as “walking shoes” or shoes for the road. But these are defensive weapons or sustaining tools. The idea is not to attack Satan, *but to withstand him*. We are given only one single offensive weapon. The Word of God, which is the Sword of the Spirit. That is our weapon for attack.

As frightening as it is to consider the strength of the enemy, we are heartened to know that our Lord and Savior gives us more than we need to fight (=withstand the schemes) the devil. He has, in fact, defeated Him on the cross and in the resurrection. Our fight, then, is to be covered in Christ and His righteousness and live in His protection and being indwelt with the Spirit. There

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<sup>6</sup> The related adjective to *porneia*.

<sup>7</sup> Again, **PIL** is an acronym of *porneia*, general immorality and licentiousness.

<sup>8</sup> Again see Winger, *Ephesians* 728-754 for a full description of the armor.

are very practical ways this looks and is lived out in the Christian life, whether that be an individual struggle, or our life together in family and the community of faith.

So, where do we encounter these “practical” tools, methods, and virtues? The answer is **where God reveals Himself in His Word and Sacrament**. That’s where we encounter the “full armor of God”. We gather as a congregation to receive the proclamation of Christ, to hear God’s Word read and respond with it ourselves, to pray together, to confess our sins together, to eat and drink the body and blood of Jesus together, to mutually encourage the others by our very presence. In other words, we come to worship. We gather together to receive God’s goodness, His truth, His forgiveness. We are reminded of our identity as children of God and ones baptized into His Body every time we make the sign of the cross. We are strengthened and nourished by the eating of the bread and drinking of the wine, which is the true body and blood of Jesus. Worship is the epicenter; it is the armory.

This worship extends into our daily lives. We read the Scriptures in devotion, we pray, we work and play and rest all in the name of Christ. We live actively according to God’s will and design. We extend the peace of Christ in forgiveness and reconciliation to others. We gather for fellowship and even more study of God’s Word. But know that we are given protection from evil by engaging in and embodying the full armor of God. He has covered us from head to toe for the purpose of preserving us, that we might persevere in the faith until that day when Jesus call us home to Him, or finally, when Jesus returns and once and for all casts Satan and all evil into the lake of fire. Take courage and do not fear! Christ is with you, in you and covers you. You are covered with His righteousness. He will never forsake you in the battles you face.