

Ephesians 6:12 *For 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.*

Dear friends in Christ our Savior,

My brother was part of the initial invading force in Iraq in 2003. He was with the 82nd Airborne Division and they were originally tasked with parachuting in to the Sadaam Hussein International Airport in Baghdad to conquer and secure the airport if the regime fell in the first few days of the war. The regime didn't fall as quickly as originally hoped and when the supply lines started being attacked by the paramilitary forces, his brigade was re-tasked to take on those forces and protect the supply lines. It's a good thing too. They found out later that the intelligence about the size and nature of the enemy force at the airport had been grossly underestimated. There ended up being 4 armored divisions of Iraqi soldiers guarding the airport. That would have been a tall task for a brigade of infantry to take on a group that large. Of course, the confident soldiers of the 82nd said, "Well, that would have been a heck of a fight, but we would have won." But it would have been more of a challenge than they were expecting.

In war, generals want an honest, objective assessment of the enemy. They don't want a dramatized exaggeration of what they are about to face nor do they want a report that underestimates the enemy. Having a realistic, objective report of who the enemy is, where he is located, what his weapons are, and what his objectives are gives the general and his command the opportunity to use the correct armor, weapons and tactics that will best defeat that particular enemy. The same is true in this spiritual war which we are fighting. For us to come out victorious in this spiritual war, we need to define exactly who our enemy is and be realistic about the strength of the enemy, the goal of the enemy, the tactics of the enemy along with the nature of the battle. Today, in this short verse, Paul lays out a realistic reconnaissance report of our enemy so that we can be better prepared to do battle against him. When it comes to war, it is essential to **Know Your Enemy**.

The report which Paul offers about our enemy sounds a bit foreboding. *For 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.* We are tempted to think that the problem we have is with people. After all, that is what we can see. Yet what you and I face in this spiritual war is much more dangerous than people. Paul tells us, "*Our struggle is not against flesh and blood.*" Sometimes we focus on the abortionists, the pornographers, the drug dealers, the purveyors of filth, and those who are constantly fighting against us or tempting us. Yet these people are the unwitting followers of the powerful spiritual forces they know nothing about. They will still be held culpable for their choices, but they are acting in the service of evil beings that influence them in ways they don't even realize. This isn't a struggle of person verse person. It's not a political struggle, a social struggle, or an economic struggle. We are battling the unseen spiritual powers of the devil and his demons.

Let's define who this enemy is. While many people in our world have convinced themselves the devil and his demons aren't real, God tells us otherwise. We face a dangerous enemy. We're not talking about fictional ghosts like Casper the friendly ghost. Our enemy is the devil and his demons who are all real and evil and walk 100% on the dark side. These demons are unrepentant followers of Satan whose ultimate goal is to destroy our souls eternally. There is nothing fascinating or attractive or funny or cute about Satan. His goal is to destroy our faith, destroy our hope, and destroy us eternally. The devil is a tenacious, patient, and deadly enemy. He will fight us to our death bed. He will lie in wait looking for a weak spot to exploit. He is not our friend and he is not looking out for our best interest. He is a roaring lion who is looking only to devour us eternally.

That sounds scary! Very few of us like to fight. We want to have nothing but peace and just get along. We don't like the concept of a fight. We want to just walk through life with relative ease and not worry about fighting or standing up against enemies. Yet, here is the reality: the very moment you were enlisted in God's army at your baptism, you became a target. You were entered immediately on the devil's hit list. They are coming after you. One commentator said it this way: "The church is not a cruise ship with the pastor as the master of ceremonies. It is a battleship. We are called to see Satan's strongholds crumble under the power of heaven's artillery. We don't have the luxury of neutrality. We must engage in the fight. A truce will never be called."

Even more scary is the way this battle is fought. Paul said it is, "Our struggle." The word struggle is the word used in Greek for wrestling. It pictures one engaged in an intense struggle against a strong opponent. One commentator wrote, "It is a powerful, pungent word for Paul to use to describe our conflict with the unseen demonic foes that Satan has marshalled to try and destroy us." This word was also used for hand to hand combat. What a picture for our battle against the devil! It is an ongoing, daily battle of continuous warfare involving hand to hand combat using trickery, cunning and strategy. Think about this. The devil personalizes the battle to each one of us. He too relies on his reconnaissance report. He knows us. He knows our tendencies and weaknesses. Every day we are wrestling with his temptations, lies and trickery. We daily fight the internal struggle to live as God's people over and against the desires of our flesh and the temptations of the devil and the world around us to do the contrary. Every day, the devil is trying to chip away at our spiritual armor with the only goal of our eternal and complete destruction. This battle is real and it is easy to grow weary and lose heart as we fight it day after day.

Being realistic about our enemy and the battle that he fights also forces us to be realistic about the outcomes of these battles. We have seen firsthand that this powerful enemy can easily overcome us. Battle as we may, there are too

many times to count where we have been overrun and have given in to the enemy. Whether in a moment of weakness or out of outright rebellion, we've given in to the lusts of our flesh and the temptations of the devil and sinned against God. We've grown weary in the battle and let down our defenses and hurt people with our words and lashed out in anger. We've underestimated our enemy and let ourselves flirt with the temptations he brought and we've been bitten with the guilt and regret that comes with sinning against God. Most importantly, we know the reality of what we deserve for that sin is for the devil to win and for us to be separated from God and condemned with the devil for the rest of eternity.

This whole season of Lent brings before our eyes again the glorious battle our Savior Jesus fought against the devil on our behalf and won. He never lost sight of the enemy or underestimated him as he walked on this earth. Jesus fought the devil with the sword of the Spirit as he used God's word to fend off his attacks. Ultimately, he used the cross as his weapon to defeat the forces of darkness—the devil, the world and our sinful flesh. His death on the cross made payment for our sins. Though it seemed as if the devil won when Jesus died, his death crushed the devil's head as God had promised way back to Adam and Eve. With his resurrection from the dead, God accepted his punishment for our sins. Now, when we fall to the attacks of the devil and lose the battles against him, we need only in repentance and sorrow confess that sin to our Lord and know that we are forgiven of it. While Satan may win more than a few battles along the way, we can go forward confident that he has already lost the war. He has been banished eternally from God's sight and cannot defeat us with our Savior on our side.

This same Savior who won the battle for us has promised that not even the gates of hell can snatch us from his hands! But don't think that doesn't mean that he isn't going to try. Know that your enemy is a tenacious enemy that won't give up as long as you walk on this earth. You don't need to be afraid of him nor do you need to live in fear of him. But you do need to be cognizant of him and on guard. You will need to keep your defenses up and stay in the fight. Understanding who your enemy is, what his ultimate goal is and what weapons he uses helps us to be ready and prepared to fight against. God has given you his spiritual armor to protect you. You have the sword of the Spirit to fight back against his attacks. You are clothed with the helmet of salvation, the breastplate of righteousness and the belt of truth to defend you when he is on the offensive. Most importantly, you have the promise of your God to fight alongside of you to help you overcome. It is important to know your enemy. But know also your Savior, who loves you and fights with you. Amen.