

## **SPIRITUAL WARFARE IN EPHESIANS** © Grahame Martin

The letter to the **Ephesians**, forms the basis of this study of spiritual warfare and other supportive Scriptures from the Old and New Testaments are included. This epistle is named as being sent to Ephesus and the topics and words used confirm that destination. But, since the churches in the province of Asia were facing the same matters, the letter would have been sent to them also. The fact that some of the readers would only “**have heard about the administration of God’s grace given to me,**” indicates a wide readership (Eph.3:2). Although Paul uses Greek and Roman cultural and religious terms in his teaching, the theological meaning behind them is based on God’s earlier revelation in the Old Testament. There are many areas of spiritual struggle in the Christian life and the New Testament generally uses the same Greek words to describe them. This study looks at spiritual warfare in a general way but in books written by the author [*Fighting to Live* (2007) & *Craving for Joy* (2018)] illustrations are found.

1. Struggle with God,
2. Struggle with Satan and evil powers,
3. Struggle with our sinful nature,
4. Struggle between Christians,
5. The Christian’s struggle against the world,
6. The Christian’s struggle with teachers of lies,
7. The Christian’s struggle with fear, discouragement and hopelessness.

The city of Ephesus was “a center for magical practices.” (Clinton Arnold, *Ephesians: Power and Magic*, p.14) Magic spells or charms called ‘Ephesian letters’ were sold and used throughout the Roman Empire. The leading divinity of Asia Minor was Artemis of Ephesus, which “was worshipped more widely by individuals than any other deity known to Pausanias.” (a historian in 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD - Arnold p.20) This goddess was believed to be a mother, fertility and nature goddess, superior in power to all other gods and holding astrological authority. Other gods and emperors were worshipped in her shrine. Because her temple was also a bank, a business and social centre, she dominated cultural and economic life in Ephesus.

The renowned Ephesian philosopher Heraclitus (536-470 BC) wrote that “war is the father of all” (B.53 in Hippolytus) indicating that life is a struggle and the letter to the Ephesians stresses the same thought. Therefore planting a church in Ephesus for Paul was a battle and I agree with Peter O’Brien’s comment that the final section of the armour is “a crucial element to which the rest of the epistle has been pointing.” (P. O’Brien, *The Epistle to the Ephesians*, p.457) Before we look at these various areas of spiritual conflict, the opening verses of worshipping God through Christ will be considered as foundational in it.

**EPHESIANS 1:3.** Spiritual warfare begins with praising (submitting to) the Lord God of the universe; a major theme of this epistle and the reason behind our creation and existence. (Is.43:7, 21) This word for praise is *eulogetos*: to speak good or eulogize which is only used of God in the NT. Jesus said “only God is good,” (Matt.19:17) and we joyfully exalt him who has graciously given Christian believers **every blessing in Christ** (mediated through the Holy Spirit) **in the ‘heavenly realms’**. These include being chosen, forgiven, adopted, redeemed through Christ’s blood, under Christ’s headship, through Christ our peace and the whole armour of God (Eph.6:10-21). Therefore we are **“always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.”** (Eph.5:20) All of these blessings are found in the ‘heavenly realms’ (*epouraniois*) which according to John Stott is “the unseen world of spiritual

reality” (p.35). This is the exact place where spiritual warfare occurs (Eph.6:12). We are thoroughly equipped in Christ to face every area of spiritual warfare and therefore thank God in all things. But most of all we thank God for Christ’s death and resurrection in which he was victorious in the conflict with sin, Satan, the world and death: “The work of Christ is first and foremost a victory over powers which hold mankind in bondage.” (Gustav Aulen, *Christus Victor*, pp.4-5) Other important Biblical passages that mention God’s gracious overcoming ability in Christ are Romans 5:17, 8:37, 1 Corinthians 1:30, Colossians 2:9-10, and 2 Peter 1:3.

This emphasis upon God giving us **his riches** continues throughout the letter (Eph.1:7-8, 18, 23, 2:7, 3:8, 16, 19, 4:13, 5:9, 18) and contrasts with the mindset of the Ephesians who worshipped earthly riches. Ephesus was the largest trading centre in what is now Turkey, being called “the greatest metropolis of Asia” (an inscription in the city); being a terminus of the caravans from Asia. It was called the ‘jewel of the empire’. In 88-86 BC the Roman general Sulla punished Ephesus for participating in a rebellion and fined them 20,000 talents (approx. \$352,000 million) plus payment of and accommodation of his soldiers, showing the citizens were very wealthy. (Plutarch, p.96) But Paul praised God for real riches in Christ as opposed to temporal ones, which tend to become idols (Matt.6:24).

**1. STRUGGLE WITH GOD:** In the Bible we note that many of God’s servants clashed with him. (eg. Jonah - Jonah 3:10-4:1, Jeremiah - Jer.12:1, 20:7, Lam. 3:1-18, Ezekiel - Ez.3:14). Later they realized that God knew what he was doing, although at the time of their clash they did not appreciate it. The almighty Lord of the universe always does what is right, wise, good and loving. The reason for this disagreement is that we were created to glorify God, which is the underlying structure of our being. In Ephesians 1 **“praise”** (*eulogetos, doxe*) is a key topic: v.3; praising God because he blessed us with everything in Christ so that we might be to the praise his grace (v.6-7) and his glory (v.12, 14). If we do not worship God, we worship things, events, concepts, others or ourselves. **We cannot not worship**. Sub-consciously knowing our eternal loss through the fall, we are infected with a drivenness to impart importance to ourselves; seeking the glory we lost. We want to be Lord and set the standard of what is right and wrong from our selfish point of view and this is where we fight with God for his glory. But he is a warrior (Exodus 15:3, Joshua 23:10, Jeremiah 20:11) and it is not wise to fight against God who is sovereign Lord, righteous judge and **“is a consuming fire.”** (Hebrews 12:28-29)

**(a) EPHESIANS 2:1-4.** The primary area of spiritual warfare is humanity's rebellion against God, and Romans 8:7 declares that we are **“hostile (*exthra* - enmity) to God”**. God created humans in his image; in a harmonious relationship with him. When humanity sinned, humans died to God; dead in sins to God, lusting after their sinful desires, following the ways of the world and Satan, so that they were **“objects of (God’s) wrath”**. (v.3) Christ bore God’s anger against sin so that we could have peace with God; a restored harmonious relationship. “God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself.” (G. Aulen)

**(b) EPHESIANS 1:4-7, 2:4-10.** God has, by his grace, **“forgiven our sins”** (rescued us from condemnation), and brought us into a right relationship with himself through the cross: no longer children of wrath but children of God’s love (v.5). **“We have redemption through his blood,”** liberation from slavery. (v.7) The conflict with God is resolved and we are no longer enemies. We are God’s friends forever through faith in Christ; the war with God is over. (Eph.2:16, Col.1:21-22, 2 Cor.5:18-20) This gospel of our salvation is described as adoption (1:5), resurrection from the dead (2:5), and ascension/coronation (2:6). As a result God has showered upon us all of his blessings. (Eph.1:3)

The greatness of God's grace lavished upon us has a habit of being overlooked and the church becomes a battleground as believers are tempted to return to trusting in their own efforts and keeping of the law. (Gal.3:1-14) Without an on-going dynamic faith, the church tends to deteriorate into an institution. We are "**saved by God's grace**" (Eph.2:5, 7-8) and that grace continues in God's pre-planned ministry (Eph.2:10, 3:7-8, 4:7).

(c) **EPHESIANS 1:9-11.** God's ultimate purpose is to glorify himself (v.6-7, 12-14) and "to bring all things (humanity, Satan, demons, sin, death, etc) under Christ's authority" (1 Cor.15:24-26). In conflict with God's purposes, humanity seeks to steal his glory, to exalt ourselves, and control all things. God as sovereign Lord of the whole universe, knows of this theft and is seeking to resolve it by bringing about submission to his perfect will. Ultimately nothing can hinder God accomplishing his purposes of obtaining glory for himself in the church through Christ Jesus. (Eph.3:21)

(d) **EPHESIANS 1:22-23.** Christ is head, provider and protector of the church (the family of God – Eph.1:5, 2:19, 3:14-15) "**placing all things under his feet**": good or distasteful. He is the church's fullness "**filling everything in everyway**". As the church struggles in its rebellious nature against God, it will be only fruitful as it submits (*hupotasso* – military term) to his loving headship and obeying his perfect word. Through Christ's body, the church, God is able to handle every situation and fill (*pleroma*) believers with Christ the fullness of God. (Col.1:19, 2:9)

(e) **EPHESIANS 3:18-19.** God loves us completely (Eph.2:4-7) which the writer indicates we do not fully know. We need "**power** (*ischuos*) **together with all the saints to grasp** (understanding, comprehend or apprehend) **how wide, long, high and deep is the love of Christ.**" (v.18) One would think that all one needed was information or an explanation of what God does in loving us. But we sinful believers need strength to overcome our unbelief and rebellion against God, and die to our doubts so that we will act as those loved by God. The purpose of this power is so that we "**may be filled to the measure of the fullness of God,**" indicating that it is not mere knowledge but belief in, submission to God's love and active obedience as we activate God's amazing grace in daily life.

**2. STRUGGLE WITH SATAN AND EVIL POWERS:** Paul wrote that "**we all followed the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient.**" (Eph.2:2) He was indicating that humans are subconsciously following the powers of this dark world (for which many names are used – rule, authority, dominions, titles, angels, principalities and powers) who were also working behind the opposition to the gospel. Our struggle is "against the spiritual forces of evil," (Eph.6:12) and not against human beings. Some align these with elemental spirits (*stoicheia*: Col.2:8, 20, Gal.4:3, 9), being either personal hostile angelic beings or worldly principles, elements of nature, philosophy and practices. In Colossae these basic religious elements included sacred days, words, rituals, rules, taboos, celebrations, merit earning pilgrimages, etc. (pp.74-75, *Christ and the Powers*, H. Berkhof, pp.158-194, *The Colossian Syncretism*, C.E. Arnold.) We are saved in our struggle to live by God's grace through faith and not these religious forces or activities.

Some people talk of engaging spirits that supposedly control a city, or geographical, linguistic, religious or social area to plant a church there. Some Scriptures seem to indicate such a phenomena (Dan.10) but the Ephesian letter does not teach this. We do note that in Acts 19, Paul cast out demons but, when the false prophets in Ephesus tried to do the same, the evil spirits turned on them. This was the unwise kingdom of the demonic fighting in a confused state against

itself: “**If Satan drives out Satan, he is divided against himself. How can his kingdom stand?**” (Matt.12:26) Satan may be cunning but he is not wise. God planted a church in Ephesus and the Scripture does not say that Paul overcame territorial spirits before he did this. This would be reading an idea into the text that is not present. This battle against the demonic spirits continued well after that initial planting. (Acts 20:28-31, Rev.2:1-7). Yet we do find that Satan works through evil political powers such as some of the Roman emperors, Hitler, Stalin, Mao and Pol Pot.

**(a) EPHESIANS 1:19-21.** God has conquered Satan “when he raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all” the demonic powers. This is an objective fact of history and it does not depend upon how we feel about it. The Lord Jesus overcame him on the cross (John 12:31-33, Col.2:15) and continues to reign over evil forces. When facing spiritual attacks, we thank God for the supreme victory of the cross and stand confidently against the demonic. This fact of pre-conquest is the most important feature of winning in warfare according to military strategists. Sun Tzu wrote, “Subdue the enemy’s army without battle...” (p.79) In other words we conquer an enemy already defeated. This feature of forcing an enemy into an indefensible position and subduing them without a massive loss of life was used by all the great generals down through history: Gideon (Judges 7), Hannibal at Cannae, Julius Caesar at Ilerda, Cromwell at Preston, Napoleon at Ulm, and Allenby at Samaria.

The original readers of this letter in Ephesus and the province of Asia would have been greatly encouraged by Paul’s revelation of the sovereignty of God and his victory over these demonic powers in the cross and the resurrection. This “**super abundant** (*hyperballon*) **and great** (*megethos*) **power**” over the ‘evil spiritual rulers, authorities, principalities, powers, titles and dominions’ (Satan and demons) that oppressed them, is expressed in five words (*dunamis, energeia, kratos, ischuos* and *energeo* – Eph.1:20-21). The very words used by Paul “both appear in the magical papyri and also in a number of inscriptions from Ephesus.” (Arnold, p.73) God’s supreme authority confronts Satan’s deceitful power. Philostratus (200AD) said that demonic activity was well known in Ephesus. (*Life of Apollonius* – 4.10) The Ephesians wrote magical formula to cast out demons (Plutarch, *Moral* 706E) but they were powerless as seen in Acts 19:13-17. They were always seeking new gimmicks to gain power. In the pagan *Paris papyrus* 574 the name of Jesus was stated as a powerful means of casting out demons. On earth, spiritual warfare is endless (Rev.12:17) and Satan may use others as a front to attack us but God always has the last say in spiritual conflict. Satan is a limited being and before he can act against or tempt Christians, he has to gain our sovereign Lord God’s permission. (Luke 22:31-34, Job 1-2, Mark 5:12-13, Eph.6:12)

**(b) EPHESIANS 1:15-21.** Paul prayed that God would reveal to believers his total authority over demonic forces. This “**incomparable great power** (is available) **for us who believe**” in Christ. (Eph.1:19, 6:13, Phil.3:10, 1 John 4:4) In the Scriptures, Jesus faced much demon possession (*daimonizomai*) during his ministry on this earth and cast these spirits out. Just as Jesus was tempted by the devil, so Christians can be attacked (1 Tim.3:6-7) therefore we are to support each other in prayer, lest we lose sight of our overcoming position in Christ. Some teach that Christians can be possessed by Satan, pointing to what they have experienced, but the Scripture presents a different picture. God promises protection as stated in 1 John 5:18, “**the evil one cannot harm the one born of God;**” and in 2 Thess.3:3, “**the Lord will protect you from the evil one.**” Christians base their faith on the word of God and not human experience. The ‘christians’ I have seen possessed by evil spirits have had a doubtful faith; being similar to what Jesus faced in John 2:23-24.

Many traditional religions promote spirit possession and other exotic phenomena, as a means of communicating the power and mind of the ancestors or deities. The possessed go seeking this enlightenment. These are called “altered states of consciousness” by anthropologists who find that they occur at times, when there is a stressful breaking down of the old value system. Psychologists see this as a psychic state but worshippers of the traditional religion call it spirit possession.

(c) **EPHESIANS 6:10-12.** Because of our weakness we are to **“be continually strengthened (endunamoo) in the Lord and in his mighty power (kratos)”**. (v.10) Christians are wrestling (*pale* – only used here in Greek Bible) with Satan in the ‘heavenly realms’, where believers have been blessed with every blessing. Wrestling was common in Ephesus and some sought to be win in this sport by the power of ‘Ephesian letters’. The Ephesians gloried in sport and *Nike* - the goddess of victory was worshipped during their yearly Pan-Ionian Ephesia games. At times this wrestling was held in the temple of Artemis. By faith, we take hold of Christ’s victory on the cross over demonic forces, overcoming them by God’s power. (Rev.12:11) This is ‘hand to hand’ combat, and is seen in the life of many of God’s servants: **“wrestling in prayer”** (Gen.32:22-33, Exodus 32, Col.2:1-3, 4:12, 1 Sam.30:6, Matt.4).

(d) **EPHESIANS 6:11-18.** Christians are **to stand (anthistemi)** on the victory Christ accomplished through the cross and resurrection over satanic powers. **We are by faith to activate the armour of God which is Christ.** The word for armour here is singular. **“Put on the armour of light...clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ,”** (Rom.13:12-14) or **“the new self”** (Eph.4:24). Note the number of times the word ‘stand’ is used in this passage (v.11, 13-14). The historian Polybius (200-120BC) wrote of the centurion as the backbone of the Roman army, evidenced by his standing firm in battle. (History 6.24)

## **GOD’S GIVEN ARMOUR**

## **HOW IT WORKS IN PRACTICE**

### (i) **“The belt of truth”**

Jesus said, **“I am the truth.”** (John 14:6)

**“Your word is truth.”** (John 17:17)

Christ ties up all the loose ends so that we can resist Satan and fight without getting tripped up.

Satan is the father of lies. John 8:44

**“Gird up your minds.”**(1 Peter 1:13)

**“Believe the word of truth.”** (Eph.1:13)

**“Speak the truth in love.”** (Eph.4:15)

**“The truth is in Jesus.”** (Eph.4:21)

**“Speak truthfully to your neighbours.”**  
(Eph.4:25)

**“Live as children of light/truth.** (Eph.5:9)

### (ii) **“The breastplate of righteousness”**

God has given us **“the gift of righteousness.”**  
(Romans 5:17, 4:25, 3:24-25)

Our right relationship with God results in right behaviour (1 John 3:7, Eph.4-6)

**“Put on (activate) the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness.”** (Eph.4:24)

**“Live a life worthy of the calling you have received.”** (Eph.4:1, 5:9)

### (iii) **“Sandaled firmly/prepared to preach**

**the gospel”** (*hetoimazo*) – There will always be opposition to the good news so do not be surprised. **“Preach the good news to all creation.”** (Mark 16:15) Be alert because the most dangerous time is after we have seen Christ win a victory; Satan will counter-

**“Grace was given to us to preach to the nations the unsearchable riches of Christ.”**  
Eph.3:7-11

**“..declare the gospel fearlessly.”** Eph.6:19-20

**“..the gospel of peace.”** (Eph.2:14-18, 4:3)

attack through our pride. (Pro.16:18).

(iv) “The shield of faith” – Our belief in Jesus as Lord, will protect us from the arrows of the evil one (2 Thess.3:3).  
**“Faith in Christ is the victory that overcomes the world.”** (1 John 5:4).  
**“Against all hope, Abraham believed ... he did not waver through unbelief but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised.”** (Romans 4:18-21)  
In the O.T. God is our shield (Gen.15:1, Ps.18)  
This word is the big Roman shield (*thurion*) which is described by Livy (History 21.8).

(v) “The helmet of salvation” - We **“receive salvation through our Lord Jesus”**  
(1 Thess.5:9 **“He who stands firm to the end will be saved.”** (Mark13:13)

(vi) “The sword of the Spirit” - The Bible is the first offensive weapon against satanic strongholds. **“All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness.”**  
(2 Tim.3:16) Jesus and his disciples used Scripture to resist Satan (Matt.4:1-11, Heb.4:12) **“Do not merely listen to the word... do what it says.”** (James 1:22)  
The Spirit gives Scripture a cutting edge.  
(2 Pet.1:21)

This was the short *maxairos* stabbing sword.

(vii) “All kinds of prayer”: This is the second of our offensive weapons. **“We do not know how/what to pray... but the Spirit intercedes for us.”** (Rom.8:26-27)  
**We have confidence to enter the most holy place through the blood of Jesus.”**  
(Heb.10:19) This is praying till we break through our emotional and formal prayers to a face to face relationship with the Father and really pray. This is not a worldly ritualistic weapon. (2 Cor.10:4)  
Prayer is repentance because it is only when we stop trusting in ourselves, rely on God, obey his word, plead with him

**“Through faith in Christ, we may approach God with confidence.”** (Eph.3:12)  
**“You were included in Christ, when you heard the word of truth... having believed you were sealed by the promised Spirit.”**  
(Eph.1:13-15)  
**“That you may know God’s incomparably great power for us who believe.”**  
(Eph.1:19) **“..saved by faith”** (Eph.2:8)

**“It is by God’s grace you have been saved... not by works.”** (Eph.2:8)  
**“You were included in Christ when you heard, believed the gospel of your salvation.”** (Eph.1:13)

This is **“the word of truth.”** (Eph.1:13)  
**“Christ cleanses the church by the washing with water through the word.”**  
(Eph.5:25-26)

**“Praise to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.”** (Eph.1:3)  
**“Asking that God may give you the Spirit of wisdom/revelation.”** (Eph.1:15-23)  
**“Through Christ we both have access to the Father by one Spirit.** (Eph.2:18)  
**“Always giving thanks to God the Father for everything.”** (Eph.5:19-20)  
**“Pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers.”** (Eph.6:18)  
Paul’s prayers in 1:18-21, 3:14-21 are all linked to knowing God’s power in every day life.

to implement his perfect will. (1 John 5: 14-15). Persevering (*proskartereo*) is vital: alert, watching & attentive (*agrupneo*)

Some people do not see prayer as part of the Christian's armour, but Don Carson says that "use of the present participle... suggests a very close link with the armour." (*Teaching to Pray* p.98) All the Roman, Greek and Spartan armies conducted religious ceremonies and prayer preceding battle: "before setting out on an expedition, the army being assembled, the general repeated prayers and offered a sacrifice." (Fustel de Coulanges, pp.156-158, Plutarch, pp.285-286). Paul is teaching a more effective weapon than these pagan prayers. In the letter to the Ephesians, his prayers to the sovereign Lord of the universe have spiritual depth. (Eph.1:3, 15-23, 3:14-21, 6:19-20) "Prayer is given greater prominence within the context of battle with the powers of darkness." (O'Brien, p.483)

(e) **WHO IS SATAN?** Satan is only a created being whose powers and abilities have been delegated to him by God. He is **"the father of lies"** (John 8:44) and will seek to blind the minds of unbelievers as to who Christ is. (2 Cor.4:4). Satan tries to deceive believers that we are not acceptable, when God says we are. We tend to trust in experiences which may be satanic deceptions. God chose us to be holy and the implementation of this will be a battle. Satan will lie to us that he is all powerful to cause us to fear him or trust in gimmicks, ourselves, rituals, techniques, etc. We don't trust in our feelings but in God's unchangeable nature, in Christ's victory on the cross and the resurrection and the word of God. Satan is a murderer from the beginning, seducing people away from God into the judgment of eternal death. (John 8:44) The famous Chinese general, Sun Tzu (400-420 BC) wrote on warfare, "Know your enemy... (and) you will never be in peril." (p.100)

Satan is <u>not</u> eternal like God.	Satan is <u>not</u> all powerful like God.
Satan is <u>not</u> omnipresent like God.	Satan is <u>not</u> all knowing like God.
Satan is <u>not</u> all wise like God.	Satan is <u>not</u> righteous like God.
Satan is <u>not</u> creative like God.	Satan is <u>not</u> loving like God.
Satan is <u>not</u> Lord like God.	

(f) **SATANIC ATTACKS:** Paul suffered from a messenger of Satan, which he called "a thorn in the flesh" (2 Cor.12:7-10). Satan cannot assault Christians unless he first obtain God's permission; as seen in Peter's denial which was a permitted satanic attack. (Luke 22:31-32, Job.1-2) In these assaults nothing can separate us from God's love and protection. (Rom.8:35-39) We also note that in our struggle with Satan, God sometimes gives him "power to make war against the saints and to conquer them," (Rev.13:7) which may seemingly hinder the work of God (1 Thess.2:18). Why? **"There is one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all."** (Eph.4:6) This includes all principalities and powers (Col.1:16) because he has a good purpose in all things (Rom.8:28). Satan may tempt new believers away from the truth, (1 Thess.3:5, Luke 8:12), seek to get a foothold in their lives (Eph.5:27), but they are sealed by the Spirit therefore belong to God (Eph.1:13-14, 4:30, 1 John 4:4). The almighty wise God works through all things, using Satan to strengthen believers, mature them and gain glory for the Lord.

(g) **JESUS IS LORD:** Jesus is sovereign Lord over all things (Eph.1:20-21, 3:1, 4:1) and he rose above all other lords (*kurietetos* – lordships, dominions; v.21). An example of this is seen in Joshua 5:13-15, where God stressed that he was commander of the invasion of the land of Canaan. The Bible tells us not to be diverted by Satan and his power, but to **"fix your thoughts on Jesus"** (Heb.3:1), **"fix our eyes on Jesus"** (Heb.12:2). We must become positively involved

in doing God's will as revealed in Scripture and not to be fearful of nor worried about what Satan is doing. We are aware that Satan is opposing us but our chief concern is to do God's will. Therefore Satan will seek to hinder our lines of communication with our Lord. We are to maintain constant contact with God through prayer: **"pray continually,"** (1 Thess.5:17) **"remain in me."** (John 15:4) The German field marshal Rommel and the French general de Jomini both wrote that a decisive factor in defeating our opposition was to break the communications between a general and his troops leaving them in a state of confusion.

**3. STRUGGLE WITH OUR SINFUL DESIRES: Eph.2:1-3, 4-5, (4:27).** The human heart can be likened to a sleeping crocodile, but if touched, it will instantly attack. We are similarly self-defensive. Our inner nature produces evil thoughts that we do not like or want to own. We try to control them but fail. Paul declared that **"All of us lived... gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature (*sarx*- flesh) and following its desires and thoughts."** (Eph.2:3) According to James 1:13-15, the struggle against the evil desires of our sinful nature is a key issue in our spiritual warfare. "Each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed." Sin starts with us because we were **"sinful at birth"** (Psalm 51:5, Rom.5:12) and sin is not caused by external forces like 'spirits of envy, lies, adultery, etc.,' which are concepts not found in the New Testament. The problem is in our rebellious heart. Our sinful desires war against our soul, (1 Peter 2:11) because they have a hidden agenda of self-mutilation. They are like a hand grenade; when the pin is released destruction is only a matter of time. The city of Ephesus catered for the sinful desires and traded on human weaknesses, being a community "of traders and sailors, of courtesans and rakes, swarming with soothsayers and purveyors of charms." (O. Meinardus in Arnold, p.14)

(a) **EPHESIANS 2:1:** We were born into this world dying physically and dead to God in sins; all of us were lusting after our sinful desires. But because of God's great love for us, this hopeless position has been resolved through the cross and **"we have been made alive with Christ."** (Eph.2:5) This is described in regard to the law, sin and Satan: "God forgave all our sins, having cancelled the written code with its regulations... he took it away, nailing it to the cross. And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross." (Col.2:13-15) We have been redeemed from sin by the blood of Christ on the cross of Calvary and are now alive to God. (Eph.1:7). This redemption is the watershed **"blessing in Christ."** (Eph.1:3)

(b) **EPHESIANS 4:20-23:** Every day we are to **"put off our old (useless) self (man-anthropos)"** (v.22), our sinful desires, (v.22) and **"put on the new (*kainos* – new in quality) self created to be like God"** (v.23). Paul puts this in different terms in Romans 12:1: **"offer your bodies as living sacrifices"** (dedicated to living for God but dead to sin). The Lord Jesus put this in terms of the cross: "take up the cross and follow me." (Luke 14:27). This is put a new way: **"count ourselves dead to sin and alive to God"** which results in God's ultimate goal for us to be Christlike. (Rom.6:11, 8:29) This crucifixion motif is presented as co-crucifixion at Calvary, when Paul declared, **"I have been crucified with Christ"**, and now live for God. (Gal.2:20, Rom.6:6, 2 Cor.5:15)

(c) **EPHESIANS 4:27:** We go on struggling with our sinful nature, which is deceitful (Jer.17:9), and cannot be reformed. (Rom.8:7-8) **"Do not give the devil a foothold"** through lies, anger, stealing, etc., but walk in the Holy Spirit. (Eph.4:17-5:21, Gal.5:16, James 1:14)

(d) **EPHESIANS 1:3, 14, 5:18:** The Holy Spirit carries out God's sanctifying work in us, implementing the victory of the cross and transforming us into **"true righteousness and**



**holiness.**" (Eph.4:24, 2 Cor.3:18) The church is cleansed through washing of the word, and being guided by it. (Eph.5:26, Gal.5:16, Rom.8:12-13) Paul said, let the word of Christ dwell in you richly (Col.3:16) which is presented in other words as **"be filled with the Spirit"** (Eph.5:18). Under their control our right relationship with God will continue as a reality.

(e) **EPHESIANS 1:3-13:** Philosophy was a religion in Ephesus and *Sophia*, the goddess of wisdom, was worshipped there. Philosophers (eg. Heraclitis, Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, etc.) were highly honoured and a bust of Socrates was found in the ruins of Ephesus. They indicated that 'being' was a substance, an essence enduringly present in things, which Paul contradicted, declaring 'being' as a reconciled relationship with God, which is **being united to Christ or being 'in Christ'**. Jesus put this in terms of the branch remaining or abiding in the vine. (John 15) In Christ, he is our righteousness, holiness and redemption. (1 Cor.1:30) This dynamic relationship of being in Christ is foundational to overcoming our sinful nature and being Christ-like. "The divine purpose is said to be 'in Christ'." (P.T. O'Brien, p.59)

**4. STRUGGLE BETWEEN CHRISTIANS: Eph.4:3, 2:14-18.** God created each human being with different fingerprints, eye patterns, DNA, etc., and each has a unique personality. Therefore it can be expected that humans will think differently from one another. The major problem with Christian unity is our sinful nature, (Gal.5:19-21) about which James asks, **"What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you?"** (James 4:1-2) Peter warns us in the context of church relationships; "the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour." (1 Peter 5:1-9)

(a) **EPHESIANS 2:16.** Jews and non-Jews hated one another yet **Christ reconciled them to God and one another through the cross.** (Eph.2:11-21) At the time of the writing of this letter, the Jews were despised because of their belief in their superiority over others. They promoted their laws, religion, food taboos and customs upon others and refused to work on the Sabbath, which is recorded in the satirical poems of Horace (1.4.142f) and Juvenal (14.96-106). Anti-Jewish riots broke out in Alexandria, Damascus and Rome, which may have been the reason for the fact that **"Claudius ordered all the Jews to leave Rome."** (Acts 18:2) This is also mentioned by the Roman historian Suetonius (69-140 AD). Claudius also called Jews a plague. (*London Papyrus of Claudius*) The laws of Rome and Ephesus were based on their idolatrous religion so the Jews rejected these legal systems. The Jews practised their own laws (authorized by Rome – Josephus, Petronius, Dolabella) which separated the Jews from their neighbours and caused this division. Roman writers like Tacitus, Juvenal and Petronius poked fun at the Jewish law of circumcision. (Tet-Lim Yee, *Jews, Gentiles and Ethnic Reconciliation*, Cambridge Uni. Press, 2005, p.81) Christ destroyed the barrier between them by suffering on their behalf the wrath of God against sin; abolishing in his flesh the Mosaic law. (Eph.2:14-15) If the barrier of hostility between Jew and non-Jews could be destroyed by the cross no other social disharmony would be a problem for Christ who is our peace (v.14, 17). The cross has made it possible for us to get along with other people.

(b) **EPHESIANS 2:11-21.** God's purpose was to **unite the two opposing groups in one organism "and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross."** This is the church: the body of Christ. (v.15-16) In Christ's church, we who are many form one body and each member belongs to all the others. We should have equal concern for all. (Rom.12:3-13, 1 Cor.12:12-26) Non-Jews were once excluded (v.12) from the *politeia* (body-politic, commonwealth, citizenship) of Israel but are now fellow citizens (*sum-politai* – v.19) with God's people who believe in His Son. The true nature of Israel is stressed; no longer marked by physical circumcision but circumcision of the heart (repentance). (Deut.10:16, 30:6, Jer.4:4,

Rom.2:28-29, Col.2:11 - Tet-Lim Yee, pp.87-189) But what is more important, Gentiles are included as members of God's household which includes the God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit and holy angelic beings. (v.19). This was radical and cut right across the way of life in the city of Ephesus, where the laws only protected the citizens while foreigners had no rights at all. The citizens of Ephesus worshipped Artemis and derived their rights from the goddess. Owing to the Jews special relationship with Rome (being a licensed religion – *religio licita*), the Jews were allowed to form their own *phule* (tribe: voting & religious block) among the seven tribes in Ephesus. Otherwise they would have had to perform the pagan religious rites as citizens. The Christians appear to have worshipped as a sect under the Jew's license until Nero's persecution. This united group is called a holy temple in the Lord; a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit. (v.21-22, 1 Cor.3:16, 6:19, 2 Cor.6:16-18). Christ in the chief foundation stone of this temple which is built of but not on men. The Scriptures ('apostles' – New Testament, 'prophets' – Old Testament; Eph.2:20) are foundational in the church.

(c) **EPHESIANS 4:1-6.** When the Scripture talks about the armour it addresses the church ("you" plural - v.10, 11, 13), not only individual Christians. The Roman army fought as a group; each soldier dependant upon his fellow soldiers for assistance and protection. In battle the Roman soldiers at times united as one, interlocking their shields at the front and sides as well as a covering (called a tortoise formation). This formation is seen in the opening scenes of the film *Gladiator*. The unity of the church is an effective weapon of defense and attack in spiritual warfare; standing united against the foe. Because of our lack of humility, gentleness, patience and love, Paul stressed that there would be a struggle and we are **"to make every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit"** in one body in Eph.4:1-6.

Unity is a major problem in the church, being mentioned in many of the New Testament letters. God foresaw human disharmony and gave the Holy Spirit to enable us to work together in harmony, because as members of the united loving body of Christ, we were called to peace. (Col.3:15) No one is better than the other, as we both have access to God by the Holy Spirit on the basis of the cross. (Eph.3:18, Heb.10:19) His loving-kindness and the 'other-orientation' of Christianity was radical in Ephesus. People from all over the empire were living in this multi-cultural city as seen in L. M. White's list of grave inscriptions. (H. Koeter, ed., pp.66-79) Christianity sought to incorporate all believers without exception in the body of Christ, while other religions in Ephesus tended to exclude slaves, women and foreigners. **"There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus."** (Gal.3:28, Col.3:11) Christianity is an 'inclusive relationship' whereas others were 'exclusive religions'. This relationship orientation of the Christian church is seen in Paul urging believers to walk in **"fellowship with the Spirit"** be like-minded, having the same love, being one in Spirit and purpose and looking after the interests of others. (Phil.2:1-4) "All of you agree with one another so that there may be no divisions among you and that you may be perfectly united in mind and thought." (1 Cor.1:10) The crunch comes when we do as Paul told the Ephesians: **"submit to one another out of reverence for Christ"** (Eph.5:21).

(d) **EPHESIANS 2:11-12:** Legalism in the church is a problem. Jesus continually struggled with the legalistic Pharisees and they tried to kill him. (John 8:37) These people reduce a right relationship with God to rules and rituals. We note that Paul only hints at this type of people in Ephesians: **"You who are Gentiles by birth and called 'uncircumcised' by those who call themselves 'circumcision'.** (v.11) They named themselves after a ritual and not by their relationship with God. Paul struggled with this in the nearby Colossian church telling them that Sabbaths, sacred days, celebrations, festivals, food taboos, etc., were only a shadow of the reality. The *Epistle of Diognetus* – 2<sup>nd</sup> Century AD, faced this issue too. Such regulations have

an appearance of wisdom, with their self-imposed worship and false humility, but they are all destined to perish since they are based on human commands. They lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence, because **“the reality is found in Christ.”** (Col.2:16-23)

**5. STRUGGLE OF CHRISTIANS AGAINST THE WORLD** (with its unbelief and evil): Eph.2:2: We used **“to follow the ways (*aiwna*) of this world.”** (this present worldly age or spirit of the times or the consensus of godless society). In 17 BC the Roman emperor Augustus honoured *aiwna* (the times, this age) as a god at Eleusis in Greece. (G. Zuntz, 1989) This raises the question, “Did he realize humans deified the status quo, the present political authorities, stable bureaucratic control, the latest fashion, their culture and language?”

James wrote, **“Friendship with the world is hatred towards God,”** (James 4:4) because the world’s values are relative, temporary, biased by the powerful or the majority and not absolute like God’s. As we struggle with the evil pressure to conform to this godless world we rely on Christ who overcame it through the cross (John 16:33). In Ephesians 3-6, we find spiritual warfare is a struggle to bring people to repentance and faith in Christ. (2 Cor.10:3-5)

**(a) EPHESIANS 4-6.** Christians’ conflict with the world, involves a battle with sinful behaviour and evil in the community, the family and in the workplace. In these areas we stand for righteousness, (1 John 5:4-5, 2 Cor.10:3-5) and are not to conform to the thinking of the world. (Rom.12:2) **“Do not love the world nor anything in the world ...the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and his pride in possessions, comes not from the Father but is of the world.”** (1 John 2:15-17) Heraclitus (536-470 BC) was not impressed with the behaviour of the citizens of his city, Ephesus, saying, “The Ephesians deserve to be hanged to the last man.” (B121) He also stated that most are bad but few are good. (B 104) He also condemned their worship of the male sex organ. *Artimas*, a fertility goddess was called the ‘queen bee’ who fertilized all eggs. On her breasts, the scrotums of bulls were sacrificially hung, while many other fertility gods (eg. the Egyptian Serapis, the Syrian Ashtate) were worshipped there. The Ephesians sang hymns to the god of wine, Dionysus, (B 15) which usually resulted in drunken orgies. (P.W. Gosnell, pp.363-371) Paul declared **“Do not get drunk on wine which leads to debauchery. Instead be filled with the Spirit.”** (Eph.5:18) In Roman and Ephesian society, they believed that they could gain a heightened religious experience through alcohol. The Christian is to be under the control of the Holy Spirit resulting in holiness, love, joy and peace. Those under the influence of alcohol lose control, whereas God’s plan is a Spirit empowered self-controlled holy life. (Eph.1:4, 2:3, 4:18-19, 5:3-12, 18).

**(b) EPHESIANS 3:2-9, 6:19-20.** The world belongs to God and we must seek to restore humans to him because Satan is drawing them under his control (1 John 5:19). The worship of the Ephesian goddess, Artemis, was evangelistic and there were 33 outreach temples worshipping her around the Roman empire. (Strabo) Pausanias said that this goddess was worshipped more than any other god or goddess. Paul cheekily planted a church under the idol-worshippers’ noses in their own backyard: **“Grace was given to me to preach the unsearchable riches of Christ.”** (Eph.3:8) He also lived out that gospel before the Ephesians and interceded for them in prayer (Eph.1:15-21, 3:14-21, 1 Tim.2-1-8). Eventually the impact of the gospel on life in Ephesus caused an antagonistic riot. (Acts 19:23-41) The purpose of preaching and living the gospel by believers was to reveal God’s wisdom, not only to the world, but to the powers (good and evil) in the ‘heavenly realms’. (Eph. 3:10, Matt.13:19, 2 Cor. 4:1-6, 1 Thess.2:13)

Christians are to witness, expecting God to transform the world; **“this is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith.”** (1 John 5:4) Our active witness is armour as well as an

offensive weapon (Eph.6:15). In facing resistant people, we need to lovingly persist and refuse to give up – this is a war of attrition. God told Jeremiah, **“Today I have made you into a fortified city, an iron pillar and a bronze wall to stand against the whole land,”** because Israel had become worldly. In this struggle God encouraged him, **“I am with you and will rescue you.”** (Jer.1:18-19)

(c) **EPHESIANS 1:9-10, 3:2-9:** When Paul evangelised Ephesus, it was the centre of mystery religions (Demeter, Dionysus, Cybele, Isis, Mithra) the worship of which were a reaction to the unsatisfying and impersonal nature of the Roman state religion. (J. Ferguson, *The Religions of the Roman Empire*, p.99) The apostle proclaimed *the true mystery of God*; the Lord Jesus Christ. We note Paul used the term ‘mystery’ in other ways but it was always a gentle confrontation to the pagan usage. When a riot took place in the city against the Christians, the authoritative city clerk defended them, **“These men have not blasphemed our goddess.”** (Acts 19:37) To do so could have resulted in death. Paul referred to the Scripture (Col.1:24-26), God’s will (Eph.1:9-10), the union of Jew and non-Jew (Eph.3:2-9), and the union of Christ and the church as mystery (Eph.5:31-32). The mystery is the consummation of all things: Christ in you, the hope of glory. (Col.1:27, 2:2, 4:3) **“God made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure which he purposed in Christ... to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ.”** (1:9-10, Eph.6:19) This passage reveals that not all things were under God’s loving headship but he would eventually bring them under his control. Paul and his fellow evangelists were very sensitive in their witness, taking the pagan term, filling it with Christ (the secret) and presenting God’s mystery within this religious supermarket. It could be misunderstood but he was relying on the work of the Holy Spirit to reveal Christ.

(d) **EPHESIANS 5:5:** When Paul first preached in Ephesus he declared **the kingdom of God** (Acts 19:8), just as Jesus had done, which was confrontational because the Romans had no respect for kings. They had banned their last king, the tyrant Tarquinius in 510 BC., and declared a republic. This was a lie because Roman emperors were autocratic kings by another name. The presentation of Jesus as king had already caused trouble for Paul in the Roman governed city of Thessalonica (Acts 17:5-9). Artemis was called ‘queen of the cosmos’ (*basileis kosmos*). Paul defined the term king and kingdom Biblically, declaring a loving king who ruled over all things in goodness and was no tyrant. (Isaiah 16:5) In his letter to the Ephesians and other Christians in Asia he boldly continued to declare Jesus’ kingdom (Eph.5:5, Col.1:12-13, 4:11).

(e) **EPHESIANS 4:13:** In the ruins of Ephesus there are inscriptions regarding building work at the temple of Artemis on which the Roman Emperor Augustus (27 BC – 14 AD) is referred to as the son of god. Other emperors used this title so that when Paul proclaimed Jesus of Nazareth as **the Son of God** in Ephesus it was confrontational. (Eph.4:13, Col.1:13) The difference is that Paul proclaimed a Son of God who was righteous, good, loving and had conquered sin, Satan and death while the emperors could be vindictive and violent.

(f) **EPHESIANS 2:2-3, 10, 15, 17:** Paul also proclaimed **Jesus as Lord**, which was a title the Roman Emperors claimed. An Ephesian named Apollonius wrote on the tomb of his wife (Acilia) that the emperor Augustus was lord. Artemis was called *kuria* (lord) and other gods (Cybele, Hekate) in Ephesus were called the same too. Paul proclaimed Jesus as Lord who cast out demons, controlled nature, healed sickness and conquered death, which the emperors or deities could not do. He revealed Jesus as a Lord who was loving, good and righteous. A. van Roon wrote, “The exalted kurios is central to this epistle.” (p.259)

(g) **EPHESIANS 2:4-9, 5:23:** On an inscription, written by a leading noble named Aurelius, in the main theatre of Ephesus, the goddess Artemis was called ‘saviour’ (*soteira*). Other gods (eg. Athene) were also called saviour in this city, as were Roman emperors, generals and pro-consuls. During one war a Roman general named Servilius restored peace to Ephesus in 189 BC and the local businessmen built a temple to him, declaring him ‘saviour’. He had saved their businesses and they could now return to stable trading. Salvation in Ephesian terms was of health, wealth, having a family and sporting glory. Paul declared that “**Christ is our Saviour**” and not physical descent, religious works, offerings nor rituals. We are **saved by God’s grace** from sin, Satan, the world and death to live a life of good, loving, holy and righteous works which God prepared in advance for us to do. (Eph.2:5, 8, 10, 5:23)

(h) **EPHESIANS 5:21-33:** Paul said, “**Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ... husbands love your wives... the wife must respect her husband.**” A loving and holy way of life in marriage clashed with the way things were done in Ephesus. In Greek, Roman and Jewish marriage, women were abused and could be divorced without much provocation. If a man found ‘indecent’ (such as not pleasing her husband) in his wife (Deut.24:1), Rabbi Akiba said that she could be divorced. The great orator Demosthenes said that in Greek families, men visited prostitutes, had mistresses and only kept wives to raise children. Rome was no better and divorce was common. One man had had 21 wives and his next wife had already had 23 husbands.

Presenting the gospel to families faced a major problem in the Roman and Greek era, because each family had their own god (dead ancestral spirits residing in the home fire place/hearth – Fustel de Coulanges, pp.26-31). Only the family could worship there and foreigners were excluded. Paul contradicted that by declaring that the “**whole family in heaven and on earth derived its name**” from God the Father (Eph.3:15) and should worship him. It is sin to overlook the divine, immortal Ancestor of the ancestors, who has authority over all mortal earthly fathers.

(i) **EPHESIANS 6:1-4:** Within the Roman empire, fathers had total power over their children regarding life, property and death. Unwanted babies were cast out to die, while deformed or sickly babies were drowned. The gospel of Christ clashed with this attitude and Paul told “**fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.**” (Eph.6:4, Col.3:21) Christians collected rejected babies and lovingly raised them as their own; an action that had a great impact upon loveless Roman society. The fact that divorce was so common must have had a disturbing effect upon children in this era.

(j) **EPHESIANS 6:5-9:** The relationship between slaves and their masters was generally painful because slaves were no more than ‘living tools, a thing’ who could be whipped, killed or thrown out on the scrap heap. Aristotle the Greek philosopher said that there could be no friendship between a master and a slave. The loving teaching of Christ contradicted this attitude and Paul taught, “**Slaves, obey your earthly masters with respect... just as you would obey Christ...masters treat your slaves in the same way... since you know Christ is both their Master and yours.**” (Eph.6:5, 9) The Christians overcame slavery with love and goodness (Rom.12:21), and Paul suggested that the slave master is to love his slave (Onesimus) as “**a beloved brother**” (Philemon 16-17, I Cor.7:20-24, I Pet.2:18-25)

(k) **EPHESIANS 4:7-11.** In this struggle with a godless world, Christ has released some of Satan’s captives and armed them with gifts of the word (the sword of the Spirit – Eph.6:17, Heb.4:12) “**to prepare God’s children for service**”, evangelism, strengthening, and building up of the church. We note this happened in Ephesus because through Paul’s ministry in the hall of Tyrannas “**all the Jews and Greeks in the province of Asia heard the word of the Lord.**”

(Acts 19:8-10) It appears that the converts passed on the good news they had heard and so evangelized the province. Scripture says that these spiritual empowerings or gifts are “**nothing**” unless they are exercised in love (1 Cor.13:1-3).

**(I) EPHESIANS 3:2-9.** The evangelism of a world in spiritual darkness, rebellion and under Satan’s control is spiritual warfare. (Acts 26:17-18, Col.1:13, 1 John 5:19) Jesus commissioned his disciples: “**teaching them to obey everything I have commanded,**” which includes the command to “**make disciples of all nations.**” (Matt.28:19-20) The church needs to disciple all its members for worldwide outreach. We are created in the image of God with a mind to think, so let us use it, to love and plan how we shall reach those who do not know Christ. “**We are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.**” (Eph.2:10) Paul taught that we are to verbally and physically express our salvation in awe and trembling because it is God who is at work in us. (Phil.2:12-13, 1 Cor.15:10)

As we seek to evangelize the world, is the church aware that the world is also seeking to subtly evangelize believers to its standards? It is very common to hear talk of the need of more buildings, money and training programs, being a ‘hand me down’ from the marketing world. In the Vietnamese war, money, troops, equipment and constructions were multiplied in a military strategy that saw victory in terms of dead bodies, material things and territory as conquest. But these methods were counterproductive because the enemy was fighting according to a different philosophy and won. The church need to obey God’s word because only the gospel of the Lord Jesus is the power to bring about salvation.

General Douglas MacArthur regarded Genghis Khan to be the most successful general in human history because he disciplined his soldiers, saying:

He devised an organization appropriate to conditions then existing; he raised the discipline and the morale of his troops to a level never known in any other army... He spent every available peace to develop subordinate leaders and to produce perfection of training throughout the army... they defeated armies overwhelmingly superior to themselves in numbers. (B.H. Liddell-Hart)

**6. STRUGGLE WITH TEACHERS OF LIES: Eph.3:1, 4:1, 14, 5:16, 20:** Because all people have a sinful nature and are dead to God, many will teach their own ideas to gain a following. This may lead to contradiction of the gospel and persecution of believers. (1 Peter 4:12-13) Since Christians have been transformed by the gospel, Jesus said the world will hate believers just as they hated him. (John 15:18-25, Matt. 5:10-12, 10:23, 24:9). Paul tells his readers to be mature; “**no longer infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming.**” (Eph.4:14) When the Ephesian letter was written, mobility was easy because of *Pax Romana* (Roman peace). As a result itinerant teachers and philosophers followed the trade routes with their ideas so that Christianity was in competition with other beliefs. Ephesus had an abundance of temples to emperors, philosophies, and gods from other nations. (Meeks, pp.16-23) During the early years of the church in Ephesus, Priscilla and Aquila took the opportunity to successfully correct the travelling Apollos who had an inadequate understanding of the gospel (Acts 18:24-28). The sons of Sceva (Latin name) were examples of non-Christian teachers and exorcists (Acts 19:13-16) who clashed with the gospel.

**(a) EPHESIANS 4:14.** Christians are in a spiritual warfare with false teachers, because we preach Christ the truth (John 14:6), who is revealed through the Bible which is truth. (John

17:17) We are to correct those of other beliefs gently, praying that they will repent and **“escape from the snare of the devil.”** (2 Tim. 2:24-26) We should not fear these false teachers because **“the One (Holy Spirit) who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world.”** (1 John 4:4) These false teachers are seekers of position, prestige and power, maybe even joining the church to gain converts for themselves – setting a trap of the devil (1 Tim.3:6-7).

Paul warned the elders of Ephesian church, **“I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after themselves.”** (Acts 20:29-30) This became a fact as seen in Jesus’ letter to the Ephesian church (Revelation 2:2, 6)

(b) **EPHESIANS 3:1, 13, 4:1.** Even though the Romans imprisoned Paul, he was not their prisoner, saying that he was **“the prisoner of the Lord.”** He saw his confinement as an action by ‘the Lord God controller of all circumstances’. He taught that as we live for Christ: **“make the most of every opportunity.”** (Eph.5:16, Phil.1:12-13) Godless mankind will persecute, imprison and kill Christians because their righteousness is embarrassingly convicting. God allows these sufferings so that the genuineness of our faith may be seen, giving us access to normally unreachable people (2 Tim.3:12, 1 Peter 1:6-7). God’s grace is sufficient for us to love our enemies, and he is using these painful events to witness to them (2 Cor.12:9, 2 Thess.1:4-7, Eph.6:11, Rom.14:4), and to mature us (James 1:2-4).

(c) **EPHESIANS 2:7, 5:20:** God dwells with and in believers eternally, therefore rejection, pain, sickness, temptation, imprisonment and death does not mean that he has deserted us. **“I am with you,”** is a statement that God stated to almost all of his servants in the Old and New Testament. (Matt.28:20, Acts 18:10, Exodus 3:12, Joshua 1:5-9, Ps.23:4, Rom.8:35-39, 2 Cor.4:8-9) In all these things, God is working good for those who love him and have been called according to his purpose. (Rom.8:28) He has planned that **“in the coming ages God might show the incomparable riches of his grace expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus.”** (Eph.2:7) This grace occurs in opposition, rejection, and sufferings. God’s grace is not based on our worth but on the cross of Christ and God’s eternal nature, therefore we **“always give thanks to God the Father for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.”** (Eph.5:20)

## **7. STRUGGLE WITH FEAR, DISCOURAGEMENT & HOPELESSNESS:**

This is sometimes linked with death when people suffer “the anguish of the grave” (Ps.116:3) or are enslaved by their “fear of death” (Heb.2:15). Behind human insecurity, discouragement and depression lies emptiness without God and the basic human fear of death.

(a) **EPHESIANS 6:18-20, 1:20, 2:4-7.** Fear is one of the main weapons Satan uses to paralyze Christians. The great apostle Paul pleaded, **“Pray that I will declare the gospel fearlessly, as I should.”** (6:20) In the persecution of the early church (Acts 6-8), God used fear to drive the early Christians into neighbouring areas, where they did not remain quiet as one would expect. They overcame their fear and bravely preached the good news. The Holy Spirit encourages and empowers us to have confidence in God because we are his children (Eph.3:12, Rom.8:15). We realize our human weakness and fear failure, humiliation, punishment, the unknown, rejection or opposition of others, pain and death. But ultimately fear is based on not believing God loves and care for us in every situation. The Scripture says we rise above fear by trusting in God (Ps.56:3) and the concrete fact of Christ’s victory over death through the cross and resurrection.

God has not given us a spirit of fear, so stepping out in faith and using the courage God has given us (2 Tim.1:6-7), we tell others the gospel, not loving our lives so much as to shrink from

death. (Rev.12:11) The founder of the Russian Military Academy, Marshall de Jomini, declared “It is the morale of armies (fearlessness in the face of death and confidence in their commander) more than anything else which make victories and their results decisive.” **“God made us alive with Christ when we were (spiritually & physically) dead in transgressions... raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms,”** far above all demonic powers. (Eph.2:4-6, 1:20-21)

(b) **EPHESIANS 2:12.** Underlying human fear is the terror inspired by the inevitability and uncertainty of death: **“all share a common destiny.”** (Ecc.9:1-10, Heb.2:14-15). The hopelessness of the first century was revealed by the poet Virgil describing that they enclosed the soul in the grave, hoping that the deceased might live happily under the ground. (Fustel de Coulanges, p.8) The philosopher Heraclitus of Ephesus wrote that “All that we see when we have awakened is death.” Once a year a ceremony in Ephesus they celebrated the birth of Artemis under a life-giving tree (Rev.2:7), showing a yearning for eternal life. Ernest Becker wrote that “the fear of death haunts the human animal like nothing else; it is the mainspring of human activity.” (p.ix, *The Denial of Death*, The Free Press, 1973) Paul’s letter does not deal with the hopelessness of the Ephesians in their struggle with physical death, but he does mention that they were **“without hope and without God in the world.”** (Eph.2:12) God’s emphatic victory over death through Christ on our behalf is of great encouragement: **“God raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms.”** (Eph.1:20, 2:6) By his death, Jesus overcame the devil who held the power of death; swallowing up death in the victory of the resurrection (Heb.2:14, 1 Cor.15:54). Jesus Christ is the Lord of life and death because he conquered the sting of death by fulfilling the law. (Rom. 8:2, 14:9, Gal.3:13, 1 Cor.15:56)

(c) **EPHESIANS 3:13, 1:10-11, 18-22:** Paul realized that the sufferings he was going through were disheartening to some of his followers. Therefore he said, **“I ask you not to be discouraged because of my sufferings for you.”** He himself had faced these sufferings from a godly point of view when he stated he was **“the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles.”** (Eph.3:1, 4:1) **The sovereign God is working out everything in conformity with the purpose of his perfect will** (Eph.1:11). In this stinking, cold and confining prison God had prepared in advance good works for the apostle to do: witnessing to the guards, ‘being’ Christ-like and praying for those who had heard the gospel. (Eph.2:10, 3:17) Under the most difficult circumstances Paul sought to live the Christian life as one **“worthy of the calling he has received... humble... gentle... patient... bearing with one another in love.”** (Eph.4:1-2) At times he was under great pressure, far beyond his ability to endure but he did not allow the circumstances get him down. He prayed that in his weakness he might be thankful for the greatness of God’s love (Eph.3:18-19); **“always giving thanks to God the Father for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.”** (Eph.5:19-20)

As Jesus’ disciples faced a hostile world with the gospel, he told them, “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you... do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.” (John 14:27) Peace is facing conflict trusting in God. The disciples in Ephesus were suffering similar opposition (2 Cor.1:3-11, 4:8-12, 6:3-10, 11:16-12:10). Paul had already told them about **“the hardships we have suffered in Asia,”** (2 Cor.1:8) and how **“I fought with wild beasts (literal or metaphorical?) in Ephesus.”** (1 Cor.15:32). When Timothy was ministering at Ephesus, Paul wrote to him stressing, **“Fight the good fight of the faith.”** (1 Timothy 6:12). He summed up his own witness as he faced death in Rome, **“I have fought the good fight.”** (2 Timothy 4:7)



(d) **EPHESIANS 2:4-6.** Those who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, **“God has raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus.”** (v.6) Believers can by God’s grace reign with Christ far above their fears, discouragement and depression irrespective of how they feel. (Rom.5:17) From this position of authority in Christ “we are more than conquerors” (Rom.8:37) over the frustrations and tragedies of life. (2 Chron.20:15-23) We note Paul’s encouraging words to Timothy: “endure hardship as a good soldier of Christ” (2 Tim.2:3).

(e) **EPHESIANS 6:23-24, 1:2, 2:14-17, 4:3.** Because of God’s loving sovereignty, we are to lay all our worries before him because he cares for us. Satan is seeking to disturb us so Paul begins and ends his letter by praying for **“grace and peace from God... peace to the brothers, and love from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.”** (v.23) God loves us, will guard us and give us enabling grace, so do not let anything upset our peace. (v.24, John 14:27, 1 Pet.5:5-7, Phil. 4:6-7, 2 Cor.12:9) We believe what God has said in his word and this faith is the victory that overcomes our weaknesses, failures, and the world with its fears, discouragements, tragedies and stressful pressures. (1 John 5:4)

**CONCLUSION:** Paul paints a picture of weak captives being led in triumph in the conquering general’s victory march in 2 Corinthians 2:14: **“Thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumphal procession in Christ and spreads everywhere the fragrance of the knowledge of Christ.”** The Son of God has captured us; so that we are now his prisoners, (Eph.3:1, 4:1) and “ambassadors in chains” (Eph.6:20). We may be tired, in utter weakness, helplessness, culture shock and seeming defeat, but God as sovereign Lord, will enable us. His grace is sufficient for us (2 Cor.12:9). He will ultimately resolve these struggles in his time for his glory (even if it is by our death). We note the key features of 2 Cor.2:14.

- (i) **“in Christ”** – all the resources of God are available in Christ (Eph.1:3, Col.2:9-10).
- (ii) **“always”** – at all times we are being led in Christ’s triumph (Eph.1:20-22, Col.2:15).
- (iii) **“everywhere”** – wherever we are, Christ is in control (Eph.1:10, Col.1:15-17).
- (iv) **“in all things”** – whatever the task or situation Christ will fulfill his purpose.  
(Rom.8:37, Col.1:18-20, 3:17)

In spiritual warfare, Christ declared a basic philosophy of ministry: **“My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.”** (2 Cor.12:9-10) The Christian takes up all God’s resources in Christ (Eph.1:3, 2 Pet.1:3), seeks to live them out and declares, “when I am weak then I am strong.” The Old Testament proclaimed this in different terms: “The battle is the Lord’s.” (Ex.14:13-14, 2 Chron. 20:15-17) In Acts 19:18-20 we are told that the gospel had a huge impact on the Ephesians and converts burnt their sorcery and magic books to the value of \$10 million (approximately). In the letter to the Ephesians, “One of the most striking ways the mission of the church is presented is as an offensive maneuver against the kingdom of evil in the warfare in which the saints are engaged (Eph.6:10-20). The military imagery describes both the task of mission and the divine enabling power for fulfilling the task. The author depicts the mission in the context of spiritual warfare to heighten the expectation of the readers for encountering demonic opposition and their need to continue the mission with the power God will supply.” (Arnold, pp.144-145)

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