

The Book of Ephesians
Learning to Use God's Armor, Part 6
Ephesians 6:10-17
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We live in a world that is absolutely filled with technology. Frankly it's hard to keep up. So, I'm not going to embarrass anyone by asking how many among us this morning are technologically illiterate. But for most of us we have and use computers. And if you have a computer, you probably have software installed on your computer whose sole function is to protect your information from external threats. We call those external threats, viruses. The vandals who are so creative at producing these viruses are also creative at how they deliver this sort of malicious software to our computers. One of the ways they deliver it is through what is called a Trojan Horse. Essentially, they illegally plant this virus that they've made into a otherwise harmless computer program or software, and then when that harmless program is activated suddenly the virus begins to do its terrible work and to destroy your information.

Do you know why we call that kind of virus a Trojan Horse? You know where that comes from? It's because of a story that was told by the ancient poet Virgil, in his classic Latin epic poem, *The Aeneid*. You may be familiar with the story if not the poem, certainly the story. The Greeks had attacked the city of Troy, and actually laid siege to it during what was called the Trojan War. They laid siege to the city for some ten years. The inhabitants of Troy were locked within the confines of their city surrounded by the Greek army. But the city of Troy never fell.

One of the leaders of the Greeks came up with an ingenious idea. And so, in three days' time, the Greek army built this huge wooden horse. They built it to resemble a horse because a horse was the symbol of the city of Troy. After they completed this mammoth wooden horse on wheels, the entire Greek army abandoned all of the positions that they had taken for some ten years around the city of Troy. They got in their ships, and they sailed away.

But they left this huge wooden horse, and they left one soldier whom they supposedly abandoned there to tell the citizens of Troy that the Greeks had given up on their siege and that they were going home. The soldier who was left convinced the Trojans that the Greeks were gone and that

he alone was left. He told them that the huge horse that had been made and left was in fact a gift to the goddess Athena. Why? Because the Greeks said we'd desecrated her temple while we were here, and we want to insure a safe voyage home, and so we built this as sort of an offering, a peace offering, if you will, to the goddess Athena so that we can get home safely.

If you're sitting there a little suspect of this story, so were the citizens of Troy. A couple of them spoke up and said this might be a Greek plot. In fact, one of them uttered something similar to the famous line from Virgil's poem, "I fear Greeks, even those bearing gifts." But the couple of dissenters were shouted down. And when the Trojans saw that the Greeks had in fact boarded their ships and were sailing away, they pulled this horse into their city as a kind of victory trophy. They had outlasted the Greeks. They had endured a ten-year siege, and now finally the war was over.

That night under the cover of darkness, the Greek army returned on all of their ships, and inside that huge horse was a hollowed area where the Greek commander had stationed a few of his elite troops. And during the night, inside the city walls where they brought that horse as a kind of victory trophy, the soldiers emerged from that horse, opened the city gate, let the rest of the Greek army in. And the result was a decisive victory that ended the Trojan war after a ten-year unsuccessful siege. We still call anything intended to undermine or destroy from within a Trojan Horse.

I tell that story because what I want you to see today is that our committed enemy, Satan himself, routinely attacks our souls by means of a Trojan Horse. The devil and his demons routinely set up external circumstances that are intended to awaken the enemy that resides within our souls, our flesh as the Bible calls it. That part of us as believers that remains unredeemed, our fallenness, has its beach head in our bodies which have not been redeemed. What Satan wants to do is expose us to this external bait that calls out to the enemy within our souls and gets us to sin, and ultimately he wants to destroy us. If we're going to defend our souls against Satan's siege, we have to be alert to his strategies. We have to know his tactics. And that's what we're learning as we work our way through Ephesians 6. I invite you to turn there with me again, Ephesians 6 as we continue our now multi-year journey through this wonderful letter.

We're looking at the paragraph that begins in verse 10 of chapter 6 and runs all the way down to verse 20. But right now, we're studying just the first part of that paragraph. Let me read it for you, Ephesians 6:10.

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might. Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual *forces* of wickedness in the heavenly *places*. Therefore, take up the full armor of God, so that you will be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm.

The theme of the entire paragraph that begins in verse 10 and runs to verse 20 we've discovered is that in this battle that is the Christian life, we can only stand firm in the strength of Christ and with the armor of God. In verse 11, Paul really gets to the heart of his concern. Notice he says he wants us to "be able to stand firm against the devils schemes." As we've discovered the Greek word that's translated schemes there is the word from which we get the English word method. He's referring to Satan's strategies, Satan's tactics. And if we're going to stand firm against them, we have to know what they are.

In 1 Corinthians, excuse me in 2 Corinthians 2 Paul says that we are not to be ignorant of Satan's schemes. We have to know what they are. And so before we continue working our way through Ephesians 6, I've taken just a couple of weeks with you to sort of leave Ephesians 6 and to look throughout the Scripture at Satan's strategies, his tactics toward believers. I've summarized what the Bible teaches about this into three primary strategies - taken all of his varied approaches and sort of synthesized them into what I call Satan's three primary strategies.

Number one, he attacks the Word of God. He attacks the meaning of the Word of God, he attacks the truthfulness of the Word of God, he attacks our obedience to the Word of God. He brings in false prophets as we saw last week, into the church in order to undermine our confidence in the Word of God. He attacks the word of God. Number two, his second primary strategy is he intimidates with fear and persecution. And number three, he seduces with personal temptation. He seduces us with an endless stream of personal temptation.

Now I took two messages to sort of survey how much the Bible has to say about the first of those strategies - Satan's attack on the Word of God. And if you missed either of those studies, I would encourage you to go back and listen to them because they're foundational. But today I want us to look at the other two primary strategies or tactics that Satan uses against us.

The second main tactic he uses, that I just shared with you a moment ago, and we want to sort of look into in some detail, is this. He intimidates us with fear and persecution. He intimidates us with fear and persecution. Now let's just be honest that this strategy is not as common here in America as it is in other parts of our world or has been in other times in history. But it still does happen. And frankly I'm afraid it will become even more common even during the life span of some of the people sitting here in this room this morning. But it was certainly common in the first century. It's been common throughout church history and remains common all around the world today. Our brothers and sisters suffer immense fear and persecution. We live in a bubble here. Our experience is the one that is uncommon. This is one of Satan's very familiar frequent strategies for believers.

Let me show you in the New Testament how this works. Turn with me to 2 Thessalonians 2. Second Thessalonians 2, I'm sorry I meant 1 Thessalonians 2, 1 Thessalonians 2:17. Now watch here, Paul writes this church here that he planted, and he's writing back to them, it's really a new church at this point, and he says to them in verse 17 of 1Thessalonians 2,

“But we, brethren, having been taken away from you for a short while - in person, not in spirit – were all the more eager with great desire to see your face.” [He says, we were taken away, but I wanted to come back, now watch verse 18, this is truly amazing.]
“For we wanted to come to you – I, Paul, more than once – and yet Satan hindered us.”

That is a remarkable statement. This is the Apostle Paul. This is a man of unbelievable personal power, granted him by the authority of Jesus Christ. One of the hand-picked representatives of Christ on earth. And yet he says, I wanted to come and minister to you and Satan hindered us, or prevented us. Satan didn't want Paul to minister in the church in Thessalonica. It's interesting if you take the time to do it and you go through the New Testament epistles, and then go through the letters to the churches in the in Revelations 2 and 3 and see how many times the New Testament says Satan is involved in attacking individual churches. It's really quite remarkable. Very few are unscathed by his attacks.

Here he didn't want Paul to minister to this church, and he prevented him from getting there. How? How did he prevent Paul from ministering in that church? Well we don't know for sure, but likely it was related to what's described in the book of Acts. And I'm not going to for time's sake take you back there, but in Acts 17, the story is told of Paul's ministry in Thessalonica. And while he was there the city officials, because of a mob that was worked up by some, those who were antagonistic to the gospel, the city officials demanded that a man named Jason, who

was a member of that city, pledge the word is actually bond. It's like he took out a bond, it would cost him personally if this happened. He pledged that Paul would not return to Thessalonica. It's very possible that it is that persecution and the result of it that is what prevented Paul. Perhaps through the court system, they tried to get that that bond removed. They tried to get that restraint on Paul removed, a sort of restraining order if you will from the city of Thessalonica and Paul saw Satan in that persecution. Satan intimidates, he persecutes so that he can get us in a point of weakness and undermine the gospel.

Look at 1 Peter. Peter refers to this, 1 Peter 5:8. He ends his letter, his first letter with these words. "Be of sober *spirit*, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour."

Satan is prowling around; he's roaring trying to find a Christian to devour. A lion is one of the four large members of the cat family that roars. They usually roar at night. It's such a powerful roar they tell us the roar of a lion on open plane can be heard for more than five miles. It's it roars certainly to communicate, to announce its presence. But they tell us on occasion a lion roars to paralyze its victim's with fear. I think that's what's going on here in 1 Peter 5. He roars in order to paralyze Christians with fear. And what is the roaring connected to? It's connected to suffering, to persecution.

Look at verse 9. "But resist him, firm in *your* faith, knowing that the same experiences of suffering are being accomplished by your brethren who are in the world." [You've suffered.] "After you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who called you ... will ... perfect, confirm, strengthen *and* establish you."

He's talking to those Christians who are suffering, and he's saying that's Satan's roaring. He's trying to paralyze you with fear.

The same thing happens in Revelation 2. You don't need to turn there, but when John addresses our Lord, addresses through John, the church in Smyrna. Revelations 2:10, he says to them, "Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to cast some of you into prison, so that you will be tested, and you will have tribulation for ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life."

Jesus said to the church in Smyrna you're going to suffer, and Satan is the one who's behind it. He is roaring, he's going to persecute you in order to intimidate you. Satan is always behind the persecution of Christians.

In my lifetime, I've seen the tide change. Today there is this increasing hostility that's mounted towards Christians right here in America. And even in the religiously based South and here in North Texas, there's this rising antagonism in our culture against Christians. Where does it come from? Well I think it comes from an evolutionary culture that is predisposed against a Creator and those who believe in one. I think it comes from a naturalistic culture that rejects the idea of a supernatural intervention in the world. I think it comes from a pagan culture that frankly resents anyone including God saying that's sin, you can't do that. I think it stems from a pluralism. This sort of idea that we ought to equally value all faiths and all religions and to say anything negative is to sin. We live in a pluralistic culture that rejects the idea of exclusivity. One faith, one person, i.e. the Lord Jesus Christ, can't be the only One who's right. They're all right.

I had a friendly discussion with a man in my office who stopped by this week, seemed to have some interest in spiritual things. But he couldn't get over the idea of the exclusivity of the gospel. I told him that Jesus Himself said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life, no one comes to the Father but by Me." Jesus didn't mind being exclusive. But we live in a pluralistic culture that preaches tolerance to the extent that to say anything negative about another religion is a hate crime.

What I want you to see is this. That marginalizing of Christians, that increasing hostility towards us, those things are not accidents. They are not merely the result of human depravity. According to the New Testament they are a result of a concerted, carefully orchestrated plot by none other than Satan himself. His ultimate desire in those things is to intimidate us by fear and persecution to keep our mouth shut about Christ and about the gospel, to keep our faith to ourselves. Because Satan knows, our mission is to make disciples for Jesus Christ. He hates that agenda. And he'll do whatever it takes to sabotage it. And so he will intimidate us by fear and persecution. He'll do it at a national level, he'll do it at a regional level, and guess what, he'll even do it at a personal level in each of our lives.

This kind of fear and intimidation comes into our lives in a variety of forms. Perhaps in your life it comes from an unbelieving family member who ridicules you for your faith. Perhaps in your life it comes from a boss or co-worker who resents what you stand for and is always trying to

find a way to attack you and attack your faith. Maybe in your life and situation it comes from a classmate or a professor or a teacher who delights in trying to make what you believe look foolish. Understand, whenever that happens, our struggle is not primarily against flesh and blood, but it's against Satan and his forces. He's trying to create fear. He's trying to intimidate you into silence. It's always been his plan, and it's every bit as affective today as ever.

There's a third primary strategy that Satan uses against us. Not only does he attack the Word of God, not only does he intimidate us with fear and persecution, but thirdly he seduces us with a relentless stream of personal temptation. He seduces us with a relentless stream of personal temptation. And this is where I want to spend the rest of our time together today. This is one of Satan's most effective strategies, and he uses it everywhere and in all times, not a single one of us has been exempt from this strategy of Satan. He is called twice in the New Testament, the tempter. In other words, he is characterized as a person who tempts, who brings temptation into the lives of people.

Now there are some of our brothers and sisters who are charismatics who have turned this sort of on its head and caused us to reject it. There's a kind of charismatic theology that's sort of borrowed unintentionally, unwittingly from a comedian who's now dead, who's most famous character was a Bible toting woman named Geraldine. And Geraldine used to joke about every sin and every mistake Geraldine made, "the devil made me do it." That joke unfortunately has become an accurate description of how many Christians still see Satan's role. In their minds, not only is Satan behind everything from causing us to be unfaithful in our marriages, but to a bad hair day, and more than that, we are merely his hapless victims. He made me do it, I couldn't help myself.

Now rightly evangelicals have rejected that false view that throws all the responsibility on Satan, and we have instead said we need to accept that personal responsibility for our sin and temptation and that's right, but I'm afraid we have over reacted. If you ask the typical non-charismatic Christian what lies behind the temptations he or she faces, you rarely will hear anything about Satan. In fact, let me ask you. What stands behind the temptations you face? If it weren't in the context of this message so that you knew the right answer somehow involves Satan, you probably wouldn't say Satan. But the Bible teaches that Satan is very much involved in the business of temptation, on both a worldwide level and through his demons on a personal and individual level as well. Satan is the tempter.

How does he carry out this strategy of temptation? How does he make it happen, day in and day out in our lives? There're a couple of ways I want to consider with you. The first way Satan involves himself in tempting believers is by establishing a world system that appeals to our fallenness; establishing a world system of evil that appeals to our fallenness. It's interesting, if you read the gospels, Jesus repeatedly refers to Satan as the prince or ruler of this world. What does that mean? The prince or the ruler of this world. He's also called in 2 Corinthians 4:4, the god of this world. That does not refer to the planet on which we live. It's not talking about planet earth. God is in control of His created world, and He's given control of the world to His Son, our Lord Jesus Christ.

Now occasionally He will give Satan some latitude as He did in the story of Job to bring disasters of various kinds to accomplish God's own end. But God is in control. So, what is it Satan controls? What is this "world"? Well, as you read through the New Testament, Satan is said to control two things. He is said, and they're both translated "world" unfortunately, you have to kind of look in the marginal reference of your New American Standard Bible to see which he's dealing with. But, one is "cosmos," you recognize that word we use occasionally in English, the cosmos. The other is "aion," we don't use that word in English. Let me define both of them for you.

"Cosmos" refers to the evil world system that Satan has created. The structure that he has created that appeals to, according to 1 John 2, "the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life." He's talking about an evil empire if you will, that appeals to evil in the human heart. That's the cosmos in that sense. That's the evil world system.

The other word is "aion." This is a very interesting word. It refers to the prevailing thought of the times in which we live; the times, anytime. In other words, Satan is in control of and is directing the prevailing thoughts and opinions and speculations and aspirations and aims and impulses that dominates a particular time period in history.

Think about our times. What are the prevailing thoughts of our times? What are the prevailing ideas of our times? What are the prevailing maxims of our time? What are the prevailing aspirations and aims and ambitions of our time? Satan is directing and controlling all of that. The world in these two senses is a great source of temptation. He has built this system to appeal to our fallenness. It's not the planet, it's not the people who inhabit the planet; instead, it is a kingdom of evil that Satan has constructed to appeal to our fallenness.

Look at Ephesians 2. You remember when we went through Ephesians 2, and we saw what God has done in our lives. Paul said before we came to Christ, Ephesians 2:2, we were in lockstep, “[we] ... formerly walked according to”, that’s what that means we were in lockstep “with the course”, the “aion” of this “cosmos”, the mindset of this evil world system that Satan has created. We were in lockstep with it. We bought into their ideas, we bought into their thoughts, we bought into everything they were selling. That’s where we were. And Satan was the one in charge of it. Look at verse 2, “according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience.” He is the prince of the power of the air, that is of the demons, and of the mindset or attitude or atmosphere that is now working in the sons of disobedience. This is Satan’s role.

Look over at First John 5. Here John, 1 John 5:19, John refers to this and he says, “We know that we are of God, and that the whole world lies in the power of the evil one.” He doesn’t mean all the people. He doesn’t mean the planet. He means the system that Satan has created. It’s in his lap. It’s his, he originated it, it belongs to him, it’s his pet, if you will. And this system is a real problem. It’s a problem in the lives of unbelievers. It steals the seat of the gospel according to the parable of the tares, or excuse me, parable of the soils in Matthew 13. Someone hears the gospel. They respond they’re like thorny ground. The cares of the age, of the aion choke out that seed, the thoughts of the world around them.

Demas, you remember the co-worker of Paul who looked to be the real deal but wasn’t. What happened to Demas? In 2 Timothy 4:10, “Demas having loved this present aion,” this present age, this present prevailing system of thoughts, “has deserted me.” He went out from us as John says because he was not of us. So Satan uses it in the lives of unbelievers.

But Satan also uses this world system to undermine the spiritual health and growth of Christians. Look at 1 John 2. As John writes to believers, and I hope in the coming year to begin a study of 1 John here on Sunday morning, but let me just call to your attention 1 John 2:15. [He’s writing now to believers, and he’s warning them. “Do not love the world” He doesn’t mean the people on the world, he doesn’t mean the created world, he doesn’t mean you can’t appreciate the beauty of God and the creation, he goes on to define it.] “nor the things that are in the world. If anyone loves the world the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world,” [He says, here’s what I mean by the cosmos, I mean] “the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the boastful pride of life.”

I'm talking about the evil system of sin and desire that Satan has established. And here he's saying ultimately if you love that, and that's all that you love, you're not a Christian at all. But he's also warning us who are truly believers. We can be sucked off by the power of the world. We can be pulled away from our devotion to Christ and develop an affinity toward the world. And we have to be warned. Satan baits us with a relentless stream of personal temptation by creating a world system that appeals to our fallenness. You know this. Everywhere you go, every day you live, as I do, you are tempted by the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the boastful pride of life. Where did that come from? It's Satan's system, and it's a source of temptation.

Now a second way that he seduces us into personal temptation, not only does he create a world system that resonates with our fallenness, but secondly, by producing circumstances in each of our lives designed to appeal to our personal cravings. He creates individualized circumstances in each of our lives designed to appeal to our personal cravings. You see he not only creates this sort of system, that cries out to us everywhere we go through books and billboards through music and movies, through everything in the world we live in, but Satan's attacks are not merely generic. Satan does not have a one size fits all form of temptation. He arranges for us to encounter temptations that are uniquely tailored to our own weaknesses and desires.

You remember in Matthew 4, Jesus is tempted. By the way that's one of the places Satan is called the tempter. And he displays that with Jesus. Now in Jesus' case Satan perfectly suited the temptations he brought against Jesus to Jesus' situation and circumstances. In Jesus' case of course He had no internal fallenness for Satan to sort of play off as we do, but never the less, he crafted those temptations to suit Jesus' circumstances. Think about it. You know I haven't eaten for two hours, and I'm hungry (three hours now I guess). I'm hungry. Jesus hadn't eaten for how long? Forty days. So, what is the very first temptation Satan comes against Jesus with? You know what? You could show Your power by turning those stones into bread. He suited his temptation to the circumstances in which Jesus was.

What about the second one? He knew Jesus claimed to be the Messiah, he knew He was in fact the Messiah, and so he says I'm going to take You to the pinnacle of the temple. You can throw Yourself off, and everybody will know You're the Messiah. He geared his temptation to Jesus' own personal circumstances. And through his demons, Satan does the same to every one of us. In James 1, James describes the process of temptation. It's a fascinating passage; I would encourage you at some point to read it. But in James 1:14, he says this, he says "Each one"

[Each one of us] “is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust.” Very interesting. He uses the language of fishing.

James grew up by the Sea of Galilee, and he understands all of that, so he says we are carried away. That pictures a lure. It pictures drawing something away. In classical Greek it was used to describe the drawing of the fish out of its original retreat. You know it’s there in the reeds just resting in the cool of the day, and there just outside of the reeds or the weeds there on the bottom it sees the lure. There’s the bait. And enticed, that means to seduce. That fish is sitting back there looking at that bait, be it an insect or an artificial lure or a worm or whatever it is, and it’s dangling there and that lure, that external lure excites an internal craving to have that. This is how Satan works. Our cravings attach themselves to some external opportunity.

For example, in the case of David you remember in 2 Samuel 11. He’s on the top of the palace, and he sees a woman immodestly clothed. In the case of Aiken he’s just doing his job going through the city, doing what he ought to do in Jericho, and there he sees some money and expensive clothes. An external circumstance excites that internal craving. In the case of Nebuchadnezzar, you remember he’s walking around the palace looking at the great city he had built, and that external temptation of the magnificent city of Babylon, it brought into his heart an inner craving that exalted the pride that he felt, and he responded.

When it comes to our temptation, understand this, when you are tempted, James says in James 1:14, it springs out of your own internal lusts. Don’t misunderstand the word lust, there it’s not sexual, certainly it includes sexual sin, but it’s much broader than that. It’s craving anything God forbids. There is within our fallenness, there is a part of you, let me back up and say it this way. There is a part of you that remains unredeemed if you’re a Christian. The Bible calls it your flesh. Its beach head is your body. And that part of you that remains unredeemed has, growing out of it, constantly flowing out of it, these unredeemed cravings. You want something that God has forbidden. It’s a part of original sin, you inherited it, and it will be with you until your dying day or until the Lord returns and perfects you. But what happens is, Satan knows that. And he personalizes some external lure that awakens those personal cravings. He knows exactly what bait to bring. Our temptations come from our own lusts, but who supplies the external bait by which our lusts are awakened and enticed? The answer is Satan, either through the world system that he has established or through personally tailored circumstances.

By the way this idea of personally tailored external temptations brought by Satan against us is throughout the Scripture. Let me, I won’t have you turn there, but let me just mention a couple of

them to you. Read Genesis 3. Read the story of the temptation of Eve. He suits her temptation exactly to her circumstance. In 1 Chronicles 21:1, Satan tempts David. David had been very successful, had built this huge army, had been very successful, and Satan uses the scope of his conquest, the size of his army against the pride in David's heart. He uses all that to awaken the pride, he says oh, let's count the people, I mean let's count the army. This just shows how great we are and what we've been able to accomplish, and he was taking that on himself.

In Acts 5:3, you remember Ananias comes with the gift for the church. Here we go. We have this. We sold this piece of land. We want the church to have all of the money because we want people to think well of us. You see what's happening there? Ananias has this internal sinful craving for recognition, to be admired, to be thought spiritual, and Satan dangles the sale of that property and says "ah here's a great chance for you to get some of that, get some of that pride, exalted, for people to think well of you." There're other examples 2 Corinthians 2, an unwillingness to forgive Satan will attack. Ephesians 4:27, when we have an outburst of anger, he will take opportunity through that. First Timothy 3:6, when we too quickly elevate a new convert to leadership, Satan will seize on that. First Timothy 5:15, a young widow who wants to be remarried, Satan will seize on that to tempt her into sin.

Let me ask you pointedly. What are the areas of sin that you consistently struggle with? I don't want you to write them down. Obviously, I don't want you to speak them out, but I want you to think what are the one, two, or three sins that you consistently struggle with in your heart and life? Understand that those cravings come out of that part of you that is still fallen. Out of your flesh as the Bible calls it. But what Satan does is, he finds a way to get you into an external circumstance whereby he can excite that craving. Maybe it's a billboard you see on the way to work. Maybe it's a book you read. Maybe it's a magazine. Maybe it's the internet. Maybe it's whatever. But he finds some external bait to awaken that sinful internal craving. That's his mission. That's his strategy in temptation.

There's a third way Satan uses temptation or a third way he seduces us with personal temptation. Not only does he do so by creating a worldwide system that appeals to our fallenness, not only does he do so by creating circumstances that appeal to our personal cravings, but thirdly he tempts us by trying to turn our personal trials into temptations, trying to turn our personal trials into temptation. God brings trials into our lives. God takes full responsibility. He brings the troubles whether they be the small troubles of daily life or whether they be the huge problems, the tragic circumstances of a death in the family or cancer or whatever. God brings those trials into our life. He does so to strengthen our faith to build our endurance, and to prove the

genuineness of our faith. Not to Him, He already knows whether or not we're in Christ, to us. If we stay through the trial, if we remain faithful to Christ through the trial, it proves to us that we're really Christ's, and it builds our hope. So God intends those trials for good.

He plans to use all the trials in our lives for good. But because we are sinful, because there is a part of us that is still fallen, what do we do? Well a trial comes, and do we always respond well? No. We often respond very poorly. And Satan seizes on that opportunity to turn that trial that God means for good in our lives into sin. There are so many examples of this.

You remember Job. In Job 1 this is exactly what's happening. God brings Job up to Satan. Why? Because God intends to bring a trial into Job's life for Job's good, and frankly ultimately for our good as well, so we can see it and read it and be encouraged by it. God had a good purpose for bringing those trials. Did Satan have the same good purpose? No. Look at Satan's purpose, Job 1:9.

“Does Job fear God for nothing? Have You not made a hedge about him and his house and all that he has, on every side? You have blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions have increased in the land. “But put forth Your hand now, and touch all that he has; and he will surely curse You to Your face.” [There was Satan's plan.]

So, you've got two agenda's going on at the same time. God's agenda is to bring a trial into Job's life for his spiritual good. Satan's intention at the same time is to produce sin in Job's life through those trials. Same thing happens in chapter when God allows Satan to attack Job's health. And, of course, Job's wife was no help; she only encouraged Satan's agenda. Why don't you just curse God and die? But what I want you to see is, in that situation there were these two agendas in the trials. God had an agenda for Job's and our spiritual good; Satan had an agenda to bring Job to curse God. This happens all the time.

Look in Paul's life. Turn over to 2 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians 12. We love this, because here's Paul facing serious trial, and it makes us connect with him because we do. Second Corinthians 12:7. He knew why he had a trial. “Because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations that were given me, for this reason, to keep me from exalting myself,” [There God had a good purpose in bringing these trials into Paul's life. But that wasn't Satan's purpose. It was] “a messenger of Satan to torment me” [Literally to beat me.]

There's this thorn in the flesh. You say what was the thorn in Paul's flesh? You know you've heard everything from his mother-in-law to his physical problems. The most common response to that question is, it may have been a physical problem, Paul refers elsewhere to his eyes, and there may have been some physical malady. There's also, a good case can be made for this being a person; particularly the person in Corinth who is spearheading, under demonic influence, the revolt against the gospel and against Paul. We don't really know, but that doesn't matter, the bottom line is there was this trial, and during the trial there were two agendas. There was God's agenda to keep Paul from exalting himself to humble him and keep him dependent, verse 9 to help him depend on God's grace. And there was Satan's agenda. He was out to torment him. In all of these cases God allowed or sent a test for the spiritual good of the believer. Satan tried to turn that test, that trial, into a source of temptation.

I want you again to think right now for a moment about what are the trials in your life right now. What are the troubles that you're facing? Right now, as you sit here this morning, understand that God ultimately takes responsibility for those trials, and He intends to use them for your spiritual good. He wants to strengthen your faith, to build your endurance, to strengthen your hope that you're really the real thing as you persevere through the trial.

But what does Satan want to do? He would like nothing better than to turn that trial into sin, to make you angry at God, to make you bitter at another person, to bring discouragement into your life, to produce doubt about God and His goodness and His power. That's what Satan wants to do. Be on the alert. This is his strategy. He will tempt you, and one way he will tempt you is by trying to turn your trials into a source of temptation in your life. Be forewarned.

So, those are Satan's primary strategies against believers. He attacks the Word of God, he intimidates with fear and persecution, and he seduces us with an endless stream of personal temptations. Be aware.

Those are his strategies, and I've taken this amount of time to show you those strategies so you can be forearmed, but I also want you to see how relentless, how powerful our enemy really is. He hates you and will do everything he can to destroy your soul. And there is no way on our own that we can ever defend ourselves against such a powerful relentless enemy and keep fighting on all those fronts.

So, what do we do? Go back to Ephesians 6. I love this. Ephesians 6:11. "Put on the full armor of God, so that" [Underline these words] "you will be able to stand firm." You will be able to stand firm.

When we are strengthened by Christ's power, when we put on God's armor, then and only then will we be able, and we will be able to stand firm against all of these tactics and all of these strategies. That's exciting. Listen, Christian there is hope for you. It's okay to be in the battle, but we win. As Winston Churchill once said, "Nothing in life is so exhilarating as to be shot at without result."

But on our own, we are no match for our enemy. We need to constantly remind ourselves that we cannot face Satan's strategies in our own strength and win.

Let me give you one last passage and one last illustration. Peter is a perfect example. I love Peter because frankly, I see myself here, and I see you here. Look at Luke 22. Luke 22. It's the night before our Lord's crucifixion, the night of His betrayal, the night of the Last Supper, Luke 22:31, He says to Peter.

"Simon, Simon, behold, Satan has demanded *permission* to sift you like wheat; but I have prayed for you, that your faith may not fail; and you, when once you have turned again, strengthen your brothers." [Now watch Peter's response in verse 33, here I am, here you are.] But Peter said to Christ, "Lord, with You I am ready to go both to prison and to death!" And He said, "I say to you Peter the rooster will not crow today until you have denied three times that you know Me."

Did you notice Peter's personal resolve? I will never do this. I have made up my mind. I am strong. I can do this. I will never desert you. That night he denied our Lord three times before the cock crowed and probably four times altogether and several times with a curse. And the only reason Peter was not altogether destroyed was Christ's own personal intervention. Did you see it? Christ says, "I have prayed for you, that your faith fail not."

Do you understand what Peter later came to understand that Christ alone is the source of our power to stand firm against Satan's strategies? We have to be strengthened in the Lord and in the power of His might. He has the power. He demonstrated it in His own temptation, never giving in. He demonstrated it in His ministry when He cast out demons and put Satan to flight. He demonstrated it at the cross when in Colossians 2 we're told, He defeated Satan and led Him in triumph.

Here's the bottom line. "Greater is He that is in you, than he that is in the world." And you can only stand firm by being strengthened with the power that He has. How? According to this

passage, by putting on God's armor. Next week we'll continue to work our way through this passage and in the weeks to come see exactly how to do that.

Let's pray together.

Father, thank You for opening up our eyes to Satan's strategies, his tactics. Lord help us not to respond to his attacks on the Word. Help us to be alert and aware. Help us to be strengthened with Christ's own strength to respond.

Father, I pray that You would keep us from being intimidated with the fear and persecution that the roaring of Satan brings in persecution either nationally or Lord individually and personally in our lives when we are ridiculed by family, friends, co-workers.

Father, help us to stand firm against the attacks of Satan that come as temptation, either through the system that he's made or through his personally tailored circumstances meant to appeal our fallenness. Or Father, when he tries to turn the good trials that You bring into our lives into sources of temptation, may we stand firm.

We thank You, O God, that in Christ, by His strength alone, we love those words, Lord, You will be able. Make us able as we further learn how to put on Your armor in the weeks to come.

Father, I pray for those here this morning who are still lying in Satan's lap, enslaved to their sin, loving it, may this be the day Father when You remove the blindness, help them to see themselves,. That someday they will stand before You in judgment and hear those terrible words, "Depart from Me, I never knew you" into everlasting torment.

And Father, may they see the beauty of Christ and the gospel, that motivated by Your love, He came to offer Himself as a substitute and a sacrifice for all those who would believe, and may they turn in faith and repentance to Christ today.

We pray all of this Lord solely through the authority of and in the name of, because we are in Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.