

We Wrestle Against What? Ephesians 6:10-17

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Have you ever wrestled with something? Tim was a high school wrestler, and pretty good at it, but that is not what I am talking about. Now he wrestles every day of his life. And although I only rolled around on a wrestling mat with an opponent as part of gym class a few years ago, I wrestle every day.

Dear friends, you wrestle every day as well. But your wrestling is not a physical thing, done on a soft mat, in the gym either at school or elsewhere.

God tells us what kind of wrestling we do through Paul's hand in our epistle lesson. *For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.*

That, dear friends, in the daily struggle, is how you wrestle each and every day. You wrestle with your faith. Is God there? How come God does not do what I'd like? How come life is so tough? It seems I believe but nothing changes, why?

You wrestle with the teachings of scripture. Did God really create everything in six 24-hour days and rest on the seventh? Did Jonah really get swallowed by a large sea creature? Is there really a heaven? Is there truly a hell? Do I have to believe everything in the Bible, or can I pick and choose?

We wrestle every week? Did God really say believers should tithe? Did God say I need to be in His house every single week? Do I have to truly love God more than **ALL** other things?

You wrestle with whether or not you should speak out in regard to certain things that our culture is dealing with. Does God begin life in the womb? Is it God's decision which life is valuable, or is it ours? Did God truly create them male and female? Is marriage God's institution, or man's to play with as we see fit?

Someone is probably wrestling with being angry at me right now. But consider this, do these questions have anything to do with how God reveals Himself to us as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit? Isn't questioning life beginning in the womb a questioning of God as Father, and more importantly, an issue with God the Son taking on human flesh in the womb of Mary?

When we wrestle with different issues on marriage, we need to remember that God uses marriage terminology to speak about His relationship to us. It is His institution in which He describes Himself as bridegroom/husband and the church as bride/wife?

Gender/sexuality issues bring into question God's revelation to us as Father and Son.

None of these are easy questions, and while God's Word speaks clearly, we need to treat those on both sides of these issues with respect and kindness.

Indeed, some are wrestling with these issues in their lives, but that is only because we are all wrestling with the sinful desires that try to pin each of us every day. Each and every one of us struggles first of all with the desire to sin. And, then we wrestle with our consciences after we do sin. We all wrestle with the desires of which wage war against the will of God, and we need to remember that *we do not wrestle*

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

You wrestle with whether you should talk about religion with your family or friends. Should I speak out? Should I mention the eternal dangers that could be looming? Or, is it better to keep silent? Those overnight guests are not Christian, do we invite them to join us in going to church on Sunday morning? Or do we tell them we are going and let them fend for themselves? Or do we just say nothing and skip church ourselves that morning, trusting that God knows where our hearts are at, even if we don't speak out?

Dearly beloved of God, the wrestling is real.

Jesus Himself speaks of our wrestling with all these things, from family and friends, to our stance upon the truth of His Word in all situations. Recorded in Matthew's Gospel are His own words.

"A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a slave above his master. It is enough for the disciple that he become like his teacher, and the slave like his master. If they have called the head of the house Beelzebul, how much more will they malign the members of his household! (by the way, they called Jesus Beelzebul, you are the members of his household)

"Therefore do not fear them, for there is nothing concealed that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known. What I tell you in the darkness, speak in the light; and what you hear whispered in your ear, proclaim upon the housetops. Do not fear those who kill the body but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell. Are not two sparrows sold for a cent? And yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. So do not fear; you are more valuable than many sparrows.

"Therefore everyone who confesses Me before men, I will also confess him before My Father who is in heaven. But whoever denies Me before men, I will also deny him before My Father who is in heaven. "Do not think that I came to bring peace on the earth; I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I came to SET A MAN AGAINST HIS FATHER, AND A DAUGHTER AGAINST HER MOTHER, AND A DAUGHTER-IN-LAW AGAINST HER MOTHER-IN-LAW; and A MAN'S ENEMIES WILL BE THE MEMBERS OF HIS HOUSEHOLD.

"He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me; and he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. He who has found his life will lose it, and he who has lost his life for My sake will find it. (Mt. 10:24-39)

Do we confess Christ? Do we cling only to God's Word, even in the face of what seems to be overwhelming public opinion – or especially in the face of family or friends?

Dearly beloved brothers and sisters in Christ, the struggle is real. It is so tempting to keep silent, to go with the flow, to deny what Scripture clearly teaches, to go along with the masses. As a pastor, I am daily tempted to say what itching ears want to hear. It would make life so much easier if I just went along to get along.

It would be easier, but I *do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.*

My wrestling is a struggle for **your** eternal well-being, it is a struggle for **your** soul, but even more than that, it is a struggle for the eternal well-being of **your** body as well. You are not just a soul! God created you body and soul! Christ did not just descend from heaven as a spirit, but took on human flesh – body and soul. Why? To redeem you – body and soul.

There is no such thing as being spiritual without being religious. Christ instituted His church on earth, gave the apostles, and pastors today, for a reason. It is not simply about what you do in your hearts and minds. It is about what God brings to you. Why did Jesus give the means to care for body as well as soul?

His church is one body – to be cared for in the gathering together. And all the individual member are fed and nourished, body and soul, together. ***I am not allowed to do what I want.*** I must feed you the food that is prepared. I must speak the Words I am instructed to proclaim. I am only a steward, entrusted by God with the care and nurture of your body and soul – answerable to Him. Yes, I wrestle daily!

Wrestlers may face their opponents individually, but they are supported by the team. And more importantly, while individual wrestlers may fail – yes, you and I will fall into sin and lose an occasional match – we have won the victory. Christ has overcome the tempter and won for us the victory.

On the cross, Christ took up all our matches – all our sins – in His own body on the cross. There, He defeated them. Victorious, He reigns over them. He cares for you by delivering that victory.

How does God care for you? He cares for you as body and soul – His word enters you through your ears, water makes your body wet, and His body and blood enter with the bread and wine you eat.

Today, He clothes us in His righteousness. He is the armor of God in which you are clothed. How does our text begin? *Be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might.* You are baptized into Christ! You are clothed in Christ! You have heard it before that you are clothed with Christ's righteousness? Well here, Christ is described as your armor – He is all your weapons and defense.

Christ is the truth which is belted around your waist, making you to stand upright and proud in the face of any attacks. It is the Gospel, the good news of your salvation which covers our feet and grants you the peace to walk through life.

Although Satan would attack at range, firing all sorts of darts, slings, and arrows at you, assailing you with all sorts of falsehood and in tribulations, it is Christ in whom your faith trusts. He is your shield and buckler. He has already won the victory, the foe cannot harm you.

The helmet of salvation, Christ, guards your mind, granting peace beyond all understanding to life everlasting.

You are not unarmed; God's Word is a potent weapon. It pierces to the heart of every matter. Christ, the very Word made flesh is the two-edged sword, which has already pierced you, and led you to repentance. He is the sword of healing, granting forgiveness. You are washed in water and the Word.

These are the things in which you are clothed and arrayed to wrestle against the spiritual forces of evil, you are clothed and arrayed for battle in Christ. You are victorious, for you are in Christ the Victor. Amen.