

Licensed to Kill: Strategies for Killing the Sin Within (Part 5 of 5)

“The Weapons of Warfare”

Ephesians 6:10-18

Mark Vroegop

¹⁰ Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. ¹¹ Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. ¹² 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. ¹³ Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm. ¹⁴ Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, ¹⁵ and, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace. ¹⁶ In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one; ¹⁷ and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, ¹⁸ praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints . . . (Ephesians 6:10–18).

Today we draw to a close our series on the mortification of sin. Next week we will launch into a new major study through a book of the Bible. It will take us up to LIVE|13 – August of next year. We are going to study the book of Exodus, a book that is foundational to the gospel and to our understanding of who God is. The title of the first seven sermons will be “The God Who Hears.”

LIVE|12 and talking about the mortification of sin has been a great series for our church, and I hope that you sensed that our staff worked really hard to bless you with helpful and life-changing material. I want to publicly express my gratitude for Mark Schuitema and Gary Meeks, who drove the small group content; Scott McColgin, a staff member who produces all of our video content, for his work in developing the DVD; and Greg Pilcher, for laying out our materials in a manner that was incredibly useful. These men often minister behind the scenes, and they have served you very well.

About nine months ago, we dreamed of a church-wide conversation on the subject of killing sin. I’m thrilled with what I see happening in our church at so many levels. Here’s one example:

An appropriately proud mother showed me a picture on her phone this week of her seventh grade daughter’s locker in a public middle school. Do you remember the days of decorating your locker? Do you remember the peer pressure issues in middle school? Do you remember the summary of what we’ve been talking about?

*The battle is within;
Daily I must fight;
Death comes from sin,
Killed only by Christ’s might*

Well, this young woman decided to keep the truths from LIVE|12 in the fore-front of her mind and heart every day by creating her own version of that statement and posting it in her locker. I'm thankful for the commitment of a seventh grade student to live this out at school, and I'm thankful for a dad and mom who have the commitment to worship together as a family.

Imagine what could happen if, at every age level, we took seriously the calling to kill sin. Imagine what it would be like if two parallel things happened: 1) we extinguished a passion for sin, while 2) igniting a passion to follow Jesus.

Now over the last four weeks, we've looked at the following issues:

- **Week #1** – The nature of sanctification as distinct from justification and glorification
- **Week #2** – The battle on the inside and how that relates to our position in Christ
- **Week #3** - The liberating truth from Romans 6 that we are "dead to sin and alive in Christ"
- **Week #4** – The role of the Holy Spirit and what it means to "walk by the Spirit"

Our text today is Ephesians 6:10-18, the most flannel-graphed set of verses in the entire Bible, and we are going to discover some of the practical disciplines that set us up for Spirit-empowered, Christ-exalting, life-transforming change.

Let me summarize what I want to show you today: **Killing sin is fueled by daily decisions related to the spiritual disciplines.** In other words, there are certain things that you can do that will greatly help you in your ability to win the battle with sin. So let's see how Ephesians 6 helps us to see this.

The Power and the Battle are Beyond Ourselves

Ephesians 6 is the conclusion of a number of important commands that Paul has given to people in various walks of life about being "imitators of God" (Eph. 5:1). After applying that concept generally – "walk as children of the light . . . take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness" (5:8-11) – Paul then talks to wives (5:22-24), husbands (5:25-28), children (6:1-2), fathers (6:4), servants (6:5-8), and masters (6:9). In each case he gives specific and unique instructions as to what being imitators of God looks like. He calls each group to obedience.

Then verses 10-20 answer the "How?" question. For example, if we take the command to husbands – "Love your wife as Christ loved the church" (5:25) – this text answers the question as to how that is actually accomplished. We have a great text about the method by which we are to fight the battle for obedience, and it applies to more than just wives, husbands, children, fathers, slaves, and masters. This is a concluding word ("finally" – v 10) about the fuel behind spiritual progress.

There are two important things to notice here in verses 10-12.

1. We must be empowered beyond ourselves

The command "be strong" is an imperative verb with a passive voice. Therefore, while it is a command – something we must decide to do – it stresses the idea of receiving strength from an

outside source.¹ Further, this is to be done continually, since it is in the present tense. So the idea is that I am to continually open myself up to the empowerment of God. We are to be “strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might” (v 10). There is something that we do such that we receive, or are impacted by, power.

It has helped me over the years to think of this like a river. Imagine you are standing on the bank of a river with a fairly rapid current. The river has a natural, God-designed power, which is far greater than your power. But you will never benefit or be moved down the river unless you jump in. You must decide to “take the plunge.” It is only after you jump in that you are able to benefit from the power of the current. As you float down the river, you might say, “Look how fast I’m going!” to the people on the shore. But everyone knows that it is the power of the current that is really creating the speed.

Spiritual growth is essentially the same thing. There are many things that you can do to put yourself into the current of sanctification, to place yourself into a position to be carried along by a power greater than yourself.

2. We are in a battle beyond ourselves

The power is not the only thing that is beyond us; the battle is as well. We’ll come back to verse 11 later, so skip ahead to verse 12. We are given a picture, or a window, into what is really going on: The battles we face are actually part of a spiritual war. Notice the following:

- The struggle (a word taken from wrestling contexts) is not merely with human forces
- The nature of this spiritual war is multi-layered: “rulers, authorities, and cosmic powers”²
- The battle is against “the spiritual forces of evil,” a summary term for the multiple layers
- The arena of battle may seem like “this present darkness,” but the real battleground is “in the heavenly places”

When you put these four together, the point is fairly clear. Paul wants us to see more than what is right in front of us and “earthly.” He wants us to see the spiritual issues and forces that are at work behind the world in which we live. In other words, sin is more than just an indiscretion. It is siding with the “dark side.”

Understanding this spiritual battle affects how you view the things that lead to spiritual progress. It means that when you practice the spiritual disciplines, you are engaging in spiritual battle. So “being strengthened” through the spiritual disciplines is not just something you do because it is exceptional. It is what you do because without it, you are vulnerable and powerless.

Let me warn you! The power and the battle are so far beyond you that if you should choose to neglect the care of your soul, it will not be long until you are in a terrible place spiritually and are succumbing to destructive temptations.

¹ Clinton Arnold, *Ephesians - Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing, 2010), 442.

² Making a clear distinction between these three is rather speculative. At best, one might be able to take “rulers and authorities” to refer demonic spirits (cf. 1:21; 3:10) and “cosmic powers” to the spiritual realities (the Devil?) behind the spirits. We are simply not sure, and it really doesn’t impact the point of the text.

I'm not trying to "guilt" you into jumping into the river. Rather, I want to motivate you by helping you understand that without a regular receiving of God's power, you will never kill sin. Many people make the mistake of treating the spiritual disciplines like it is dessert – an optional addition to a meal. The spiritual disciplines need to be viewed like water. Go a few days without it, and you'll be in trouble. Killing sin is fueled by daily decisions related to the spiritual disciplines.

We Fight by Faith and Hard Work

Next we see two parallel themes in the text: faith and work. As you read through verses 11-18, it is very evident that these two aspects are a part of spiritual formation. So when you think of how we fight this battle through the use of the weapons of our warfare, you need to strive to maintain the balance of faith and hard work. Last week I defined walking in the Spirit as **a Spirit-dependent way of life that involves believing the promises of God, choosing to do what is right, and thanking God for the result.** Do you hear the parallel dynamics? "Believe the promises of God. . . choose to do what is right." So what does this look like?

1. We believe what the Bible says about us, sin, and victory

The armor of God is directly tied to something that we've talked about before – that we are to live in light of the spiritual realities connected to being "in Christ." Paul uses similar language in Ephesians 4.

²⁰ But that is not the way you learned Christ!— ²¹ assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus, ²² to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, ²³ and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, ²⁴ and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness (Ephesians 4:20–24).

To "put on" the new self doesn't mean you change yourself. Rather, it means that you live in a manner that fits with who you really are. Every day those who believe in Jesus are to live through the power and identity that comes through Jesus Christ. "Since believers continue to live in the present evil age and face the powerful, strategic, and varied attacks of hostile spirits . . . they need to depend completely on the power of God. Successful resistance means drawing on the *resources God provides* (emphasis mine)."³

What are the resources? This is where Paul uses the armor metaphor:

- **Belt of Truth** – "knowing and appropriating the truth of one's new identity in Christ and developing the practice of speaking and living in the truth."⁴ We must live in truth.
- **Breastplate of Righteousness** – understanding and loving the reality that "there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 8:1). We must live in the glory of being declared righteous.
- **Shoes of Gospel Readiness** – a reminder that this battle is not just about us; it is about reaching the world with the gospel. The urgency of eternal matters must be on our hearts.

³ Arnold, 449.

⁴ Arnold, 450.

We must fight for righteousness so that we can proclaim the righteousness of God through Jesus Christ.

- **Shield of Faith** – “a call to trust in God’s power and His assurances about our new identity in Christ.”⁵ This shield was likely nearly as tall as the soldier, and it was something that one could hide behind or take cover under when attacked from the air. We must take refuge in God.
- **Helmet of Salvation** – protecting the most vital and vulnerable part of the human body with the greatest possible terminology – salvation. Knowing that one’s future destiny is safe and sure, we can fight boldly and confidently (see Rom. 8:28ff).
- **Sword of the Spirit** – like the small sword that every Roman soldier carried with him, so the Word of God is the believer’s primary means of offensive and defensive combat. The Scriptures are “*living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart*” (Heb. 4:12). We must love and live by the Word of God.
- **Praying Always in the Spirit** – often not thought of as a weapon, prayer is the air that Christian soldiers breathe. It is “a foundational and continuous activity that is crucial to deploying all of the armor and weapons . . . just commended to the church.”⁶

This is how you fight. You believe what the Bible says about truth, righteousness, faith, salvation, our Great Commission mission, the Word of God, and the power of prayer. Waging spiritual battle requires an understanding and a belief in what God says about us and the resources available to us. If you do not believe in the resources, then there is no motivation to use them!

Daily spiritual progress is rooted in belief. But that is not all.

2. We must be aggressive in our efforts

The second thing I want you to see here is the importance of your actions. In fact, I want to raise your own expectations such that you realize that spiritual growth and defeating sin is important enough to warrant aggressive, intentional steps.

Notice all the words in verses 10-18 that are action-oriented: “be strong” (v 10), “put on the armor” (v 11), “take up the whole armor” (v 13), “stand therefore” (v 14), “take up” (v 16), “take” (v 17), and “keep alert” (v 18). These are words that imply intentional action. The bias of these words is toward commitment. The tone of these words is one of urgency.

And therein is one of the major problems for many believers. They do not view the weapons of warfare or the spiritual disciplines as being as important as they really are. They view the care of the soul as an optional part of their life. It is nice but not entirely necessary.

⁵ Arnold, 455.

⁶ Arnold, 463.

Kevin DeYoung, in his book *The Hole in our Holiness*, captures this mentality with an applicable camping metaphor:

I've never understood the attraction of camping. Although I have plenty of friends and relatives who are campers, it's always seemed strange to me that someone would work hard all year so they can go live outside for a week. I get the togetherness stuff, but why do it in tents with community toilets? . . . Packing up the van like Noah's ark and driving to a mosquito infested campground where you reconstitute an inconvenient version of your kitchen and your bedroom doesn't make sense. Who decided that vacation should be like normal life, only harder? . . . Camping may be great for other people, but I'm content to never talk about it, never think about it, and never do it. Knock yourself out with the cooler and the collapsible chairs, but camping is not required of me, and I'm fine without it. . . . Is it possible you look at personal holiness like I look at camping? It's fine for other people. You sort of respect those who make their lives harder than they have to be. But it's really not your thing.⁷

Too often we view the pursuit of sanctification as optional.

Sometimes this misguided mindset changes for a time – when we get really scared, stuck, or feel the consequences of our sin. But motivation-by-crisis usually lasts until the pressure is off, and then the old patterns and sins return. For some of you LIVE|12 has created that kind of crisis in your life. Do you know what you are going to have to decide? You will have to decide if you are really serious about life change or if you just want temporary relief. You will have to decide if it is time be aggressive or if you will just slip back into the pattern of apathy – believing that someday you'll get serious, knowing in the back of your mind that it will never come.

You see, I think one of the major problems with spiritual growth in many people is the simple fact that it isn't important enough. We'll plan for retirement, spend hours researching a new purchase, get up early to exercise, brush our teeth every day to avoid bad breath or a hefty dentist bill, and perform countless other daily tasks. Why do we do these things? Because they are valuable to us.

And that is the problem, and it is something we need to talk to God about. We need His help to value our spiritual growth above other things. We need His help to make daily decisions which set us up for spiritual success.

Let me make this very practical. I have found that the mornings are the best time for me to spend time with the Lord. And I've also discovered that if I stay up too late, I'm less likely to spend the time I need with the Lord. So, for me, the battle for time with the Lord at 3:30 a.m. (just kidding) . . . the battle for time with Lord in morning begins with a decision the night before. I need to aggressively go to bed so that I can have time with the Lord. It is that simple. Or hard.

We fight by faith as we believe what God tells us, and we fight with hard work as we make the daily hard choices based upon what is really valuable for our soul. Killing sin is fueled by daily decisions related to the spiritual disciplines.

⁷ Kevin DeYoung, *The Hole in our Holiness – Filling the Gap Between Gospel Passion and the Pursuit of Godliness*, (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Publishers, 2012), 9-10.

Disciplines that Help the Battle

You might wonder why I've waited until the very end to be specific about the disciplines. I've intentionally talked about this last, because without the other pieces in place, you'll do the right things but with no positive, life-changing effect. The way you approach the disciplines is just as important as the disciplines themselves.

Let me give you a list and a brief explanation of the most helpful spiritual disciplines as it relates to killing sin. Keep in mind these are the things that I think throw us into God's empowering current.

Scripture Meditation – The first and most obvious one is the reading of Scripture. 2 Timothy 3 tells us the character and the value of God's word:

¹⁶ All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, ¹⁷ that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work (2 Tim. 3:16–17)

The Bible is the revelation of God to mankind, and it contains the promises in which we can put our hope. It contains the truth that we need to hear and believe.

Notice, however, that I used the term "meditation" versus "reading." There is a huge difference. Meditation involves lingering, thinking over, contemplating, and applying what you have read. Reading and meditation are related to one another in the same way that eating at a fast food restaurant and savoring the flavor of piece of filet mignon are related to each other.

Now there are a number of wonderful Bible-reading plans to aid you in the daily diet and pace in reading the Bible. Dustin Crowe, one of our pastoral residents, has compiled a list on our church blog⁸. I would commend those to you, but keep in mind that the point is to savor the Word, not just read it.

How does Scripture meditation aid in the battle with sin? It reminds us what the truth really is and what promises we should believe.

Prayer – The second note-worthy spiritual discipline is prayer. This is simply when we pour our hearts out to God in worship, confession, and intercession. Jesus provided us an outline of prayer in Matthew 6:9-13, in what is often called the Lord's Prayer. Additionally, we hear His heart in prayer in John 17. The point of prayer in Jesus' life and yours is communion with God.

In my own experience, I have found a few things to be helpful: 1) using a typical outline (ACTS – Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, and Supplication), 2) turning my scripture reading into spontaneous prayers, 3) an easy-to-use list of requests, 4) prayer-walking to keep my mind and heart focused, and 5) praying with others. One of our elders, Brad Schweibold, has a post on our blog⁹ about how he has used 3x5 cards to help him in his prayer life. I would commend it to you.

How does prayer help the battle with sin? It fans into flame the power of the Holy Spirit as we humbly seek God's help.

⁸ <http://www.yourchurch.com/blog>

⁹ Ibid.

Memorization – If you are stuck spiritually, if you are trying to defeat sin, and if you were only going to do one thing – do this! The memorizing of Scripture internalizes the Word of God in your soul such that it shapes your thinking and behavior in powerful ways. In my opinion, this is the “nuclear option” when it comes to the mortification of sin.

Memorizing God’s word makes the Bible come alive and makes it very personal. A young man in our church recently completed the memorization of 1 Timothy, and he reflected on fourteen different ways his life was impacted. If you want to be inspired by his story, you can read it on our blog¹⁰ this week, and you can also read Pastor Dale Shaw’s suggestions on how to memorize God’s word. No one in my world has a memorized more of God’s word than Dale, and I think you could be helped by his counsel.

How does memorizing help us kill sin? It puts the word of God inside our souls – *“I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you” (Ps. 119:11).*

Journaling – I have often said that the problem with our thinking is that we do not think about our thinking. I am a raving fan of journaling because it allows me to carefully examine what God is saying through His Word, what I’m praying about, what I’m thinking about, and how it intersects with my day ahead.

How does it help to kill sin? It forces me to take inventory and examine myself.

Now there are many, many more helpful spiritual disciplines. If you want to do further reading look into a book called *The Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life* by Donald Whitney or *The Disciplines of a Godly Man* by R. Kent Hughes. You’ll find important areas like fasting, solitude, stewardship, worship, service, and evangelism. All of them are helpful in the care of your soul and in the defeat of sin.

The point that I want you to see today is simply that **killing sin is fueled by daily decisions related to the spiritual disciplines**. The mantra of “be killing sin or it will be killing you” is something you live out one day, one decision, one “jump into the river” at a time.

Friends, we are in a battle with more than just what we can see. And there is strength in the Lord beyond ourselves. We fight this battle with faith and hard work. We win this battle one day, one decision, at a time as we use the weapons of our warfare.

*The battle is within;
Daily I must fight;
Death comes from sin,
Killed only by Christ’s might*

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¹⁰ <http://www.yourchurch.com/blog>