We Don’t Wrestle People

Ephesians 6:10-12 Finally, be strong in the Lord, and in the strength of his might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. 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.

My youngest son was on the wrestling team in high school. Occasionally, we would get communications from the head coach, and he always attached a quote to his signature at the end of each letter. The quote came from a prolific Olympic wrestler named Dan Gable. He said, “Once you've wrestled, everything else is easy.” He was simply saying that wrestling, in his opinion, is the hardest thing anyone can do. Having watched this sport for several years, I am inclined to agree with him. It is instructive that the apostle Paul uses this sport to paint a picture of the spiritual battle we, as followers of Christ, are engaged in. To be a follower of Christ is to be at war. Our adversary is relentless, deceptive, destructive, and powerful, to name a few. And he hates anyone who is associated with Jesus Christ. Revelation 12 shows us a picture of a war in heaven as Satan tries to defeat Jesus. Satan is defeated and thrown down to the earth. In verse 17 we read: “*Then the dragon became furious with the woman and went off to make war on the rest of her offspring, on those who keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus*.” If you are a Christian, then you are one of His offspring and have entered into this conflict. In a wrestling match, the contest begins with the two wrestlers walking to the center of the mat and shaking hands. The difference in a spiritual conflict is that we can't see our enemy. He is not flesh and blood. Here, we face our first challenge. We can’t see our enemy. Oftentimes we forget this, and as a result we fight each other. All the while our true enemy, Satan and his minions, remain unseen. This results in broken lives, broken homes, and divided churches, to name a few.

The apostle Paul’s counsel to the church on how to engage our adversary in this conflict is for us to pray. He says: *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, 19 and also for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel, 20 for which I am an ambassador in chains, that I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak*. In light of the battle we are in, prayer is our primary weapon. Early in my spiritual journey, I heard someone say: “The kingdom of God advances on its knees.” This statement communicates at least two things. First, it shows our dependence on God to make any progress in His work. The apostle Paul sees this church's prayers as crucial to the work the Lord gave him. We need to continually ask the Lord to make HIs word effective in the lives of His people. Second, it communicates our desire to see His kingdom come and His will to be done on Earth as it is in Heaven. God has ordained prayer as one of the means of advancing His kingdom on Earth. The greater my desire to see Him move in hearts and lives, the greater should be my burden to pray for that.

In Luke 22, we read that the Lord was about to go to the cross, and He is concerned for His disciples, especially Peter. In verse 31, Jesus says to Peter*: “Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat, 32, but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail*.” Peter is entering a time of grave spiritual danger, and the Lord shows us that Peter’s greatest need is not more theological knowledge or more love for Jesus. His greatest need is prayer for strength to stand firm under this attack. My prayer is that the Lord would open the eyes of our hearts to understand the nature of our warfare and give us the wisdom to use this powerful weapon. I wonder if Paul were alive today; he would put a tagline on his letters: “Once you’ve prayed, everything else is easy.”