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War is Peace, Freedom is Slavery, Ignorance is Strength.

These famous words from Orwell's 1984 sought to describe a reality of double-speak which power dictatorial leader manipulate language in such a way as to deceive people into following lies that imprison them.

War is Peace, recall Paul's words in Ephesian use the imagery of battle and putting on the armour of God, I think most of us remember this imagery from Sunday school lessons from our childhood.

It is hard for me not to read today's verse in Ephesians and not consider the recent events in Afghanistan.

I was struck this week by the images of the Taliban swiftly overtaking the city of Kabul. within a matter of days and even hours, a group religious extremist displaced Afghan government with little or no resistance from the Afghan military, who either fled or surrendered immediately undoing hard fought gains, the sacrifices of soldiers and families and endangering the many Afghans who hoped that a peace could emerge from such a long struggle.

As experts and observers try to unpack what went wrong, and to forecast what will happen in future of the country even while we see a regrouping of past Northern Alliance and a potential civil war. The future of the country and the region does not look positive.

Do not be surprised that increasingly number of political leaders and and even preachers who will call for a more muscular, masculine, uncompromising engagement perhaps rehashing the now seemingly perennial "Clash of Civilizations" language and logic that has defined the past 20 years.

It is even quite possible that perhaps, our New Testament reading here in Ephesians will be referenced and misinterpreted to making a case to prepare for a battle in every growing clash of civilizations.

The military imagery in Ephesians can be unsettling and there are some who find this imagery problematic, for fear that it can be misinterpreted, for instance the way Ephesians 6:5 has been historically misused to been justify slavery.

I think the first point to emphasize about the spiritual battle that Paul describes is that this not any kind of call to arms or justify violence. And as Christians, we should be under no illusions that our scriptures can and have been in the past manipulated. in Orwellian ways to support the opposite of what is intended. Paul states quite clearly our *battle “is not against Flesh and Blood” “...but against the principalities”* the first or primary authorities and powers in world. We find the Greek word (*kosmokrator*), *kosmos* meaning (world)ly and *krateo* (holders) to “against the world’s rulers of the darkness of this age” For Paul, the battle here is against the very powers and authorities of *cosmos* that seek to hold our minds and or imaginations captive.

This is so important. For while so many leaders who try to sell war as peace, I contend that exactly what Paul is not doing, in fact the opposite of what Orwell describes in 1984.

While Paul is manipulating language and imagery, he is doing so to redeem it. In Ephesians he is showing true peace using the imagery of war.

In a sense, it is like saying to live in Peace is like a War, to have Wisdom is like Ignorance, Freedom is Slavery according to the logic of this world. This logic which is attested to in other parts of scripture has its foundation in what Paul refers to in 1 Corinthians 1:18, “the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.”

The armour he presents us with is metaphorical and it is defensive, protective with aim of withstanding and resisting these worldly powers.

He is urging the Ephesians to fortify themselves “to withstand the evil day to do everything they to resist. In fact, the Greek word used here (*anthistemi*) is where we get the word for *anithistimine*. It is as if we are allergic to outside forces working against us.

The armour that Paul describes are virtues emerging from faith: *truth, righteousness, a willingness to spread the good news of peace, and faith, the helmet (which I interpret as knowledge) salvation, and the power of the spirit*. This armour is not worldly armour or weaponry at all it is an internal fortification.

This makes me recall his words Romans 8.37 “...we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to

come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.” T

And Romans 13.12 *“Let us then lay aside the works of darkness and put on the Armour of light.”*

What we see in Ephesians is a part of larger understanding that those who seek to follow Jesus must have strong convictions but are not called to be strident warriors who trade polemical and physical blow with our opponents. The cross, undoes this logic and understanding of power of this world intentionally, because of who Jesus is.

It is so, so important that we do not misinterpret the intent or imagery of these words in Ephesians. These verses, themselves and broader message of Paul’s theology are clear. The military language by Paul is not a calling us to take over the culture, or to be some kind of “Jesu-fied” version of Taliban, which seeks use, fear, and terror to gain power, and control women’s bodies and to morally police other aspects of life so they fit into an ever narrowing cultural-political agenda.

Paul describes a way in which each believer is personally responsible for armouring themselves through faith and virtues of Christian, (no arms at all) but a in Paul’s words “putting on (clothing ourselves in) Christ” Romans 13:14.

Our only weapon is sharing the good news of Peace. There will always be the temptation, and it is just that, a temptation, that leads to all kinds of evil by replacing gospel message with a literal militaristic understanding often conflating Christianity and Nationalism. Such movements that replace the Gospel with a lie, to gain and exercise power in the world and attain a sense of cultural superiority. These efforts indeed succumb to the powers of this world, not to resist or stand against them, which is the opposite of what Paul is instructing.

Paul reminds us that the Christian way is a resistance to those in the Church or society who would use power or control and use of force.

Our Battle *is not against flesh and blood*, because we as instructed are called by Jesus as in our Gospel reading to eat of his flesh and drink his to share in his life Christ- his humility and sacrificial life which he gave for the world’s sake.

I conclude now with Paul's words to us from Philippians, Chapter 2 verses 6-11.

Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus,

6 who, though he was in the form of God,
did not regard equality with God
as something to be exploited,

7 but emptied himself,
taking the form of a slave,
being born in human likeness.

And being found in human form,

8 he humbled himself
and became obedient to the point of death-
even death on a cross.

9 Therefore God also highly exalted him
and gave him the name
that is above every name,

10 so that at the name of Jesus
every knee should bend,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,

11 and every tongue should confess
that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.

We do not need a muscular brand of Christianity, we need to clothe ourselves in Jesus Christ, seeking to eat of Flesh and drink of his blood, so that we can armour ourselves wage peace peaceful resistance in the world.