

Hope Christian Church  
D. Todd Cravens  
6 September 2015

Sermon Series: *The Book of Ephesians*



# Be Strong in the Lord

How to Stand Firm in the Strength of His Might

**(Ephesians 6:10-20 ESV)**

*<sup>10</sup> Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. <sup>11</sup> Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. <sup>12</sup> 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. <sup>13</sup> 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. <sup>14</sup> Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, <sup>15</sup> and, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace. <sup>16</sup> In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one; <sup>17</sup> and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, <sup>18</sup> 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, <sup>19</sup> and also for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel, <sup>20</sup> for which I am an ambassador in chains, that I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak.

## A Concluding Call for All

Paul is bringing his letter to a conclusion and as he does, he issues a call. He issues a call to action. This call is a call for all. This is a call for everyone who is a follower of Jesus. These are Paul's final words in this letter and thus they carry weight of a final challenge.

Paul now moves his attention from believers within the context of the household (husbands and wives, children and parents, servants and masters) to all believers within the context of the world. He broadens his focus outward from the home and into the condition of society as a whole. As Paul brings his letter to a conclusion, he wraps it up with some vital information which these Ephesian believers, as well as all believers, need to know. What Paul wrote so long ago was needed for the Ephesians in the first century and it is needed for us in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. This concluding call is a call for all. Let all who have ears to hear, hear these words, receive them, and then act upon them.

## Be Strong in the Lord

Paul's aim is clear. He states it in verse 10.

### Ephesians 6:10 (ESV)

<sup>10</sup> Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might.

The imperative, "be strong," is in the passive voice. It could be translated, "be strengthened, or be made strong."<sup>1</sup> Paul's point is that *believers cannot make themselves strong*. The strength that Paul desires for believers to have is a strength that another must give them. And Paul makes clear exactly who it is that must provide them with this strength. It is the Lord Jesus who makes them strong. Believers are to be strong **in the Lord**.

---

<sup>1</sup> O'Brien, Peter Thomas. *The Letter to the Ephesians*. The Pillar New Testament Commentary. (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1999), 460.

Paul's desire is that his readers be strong, but not strong in some generic sense. He wants them to be strong *in the Lord*. He wants them to possess strength that is not inherently their own. He wants them relying on a strength that comes from outside them, that comes from the Lord. He does not want his readers relying upon their own strength, but upon the strength of the comes from the Lord.

In ourselves, apart from God, we are not strong enough to live the Christian life. We do not have the heart to obey the good commands of God without him first giving us a new heart.<sup>2</sup> The holy life to which God calls his people cannot be happily lived without the ever present help of the indwelling Holy Spirit. If you try to live a holy life based upon human will-power alone, you will consistently fail. Mere human effort never leads to actual holiness, only despairing hopelessness. It is only through faith in Christ and the strength of the Lord that he provides that Christians will ever have the kind of strength Paul is here speaking of.

We are reminded that it is only through faith in the person and work of Jesus that we are united to him. If there is no living faith in Christ, then there is no vital connection with him. It is only when we confidently trust in his power and ability that we are brought into union with him as he gives us his own Holy Spirit and pours out the Spirit of himself into our spirit. Paul is writing and reminding us that strength and power only come from the Lord and through our union with him.

## Christians Live Within a Context of Conflict

Paul's desire for the Ephesian believers is shaped by the context in which they live. Paul has a view of the world in which they live. Look closely at his worldview. His understanding of the world motivates him to call for a supernatural strength. Paul is calling for all the people of God to receive into themselves a strength that we do not naturally have. The reason for this is that *Christians live within a context of conflict*.

The need of hour for the people of God is for a supernatural strength that only comes from the Lord. The world Paul describes is not one that is by default open and affirming of the will of God the Father nor of Christ Jesus the Son. This world does not welcome the Christian worldview. The world Paul speaks of is one that is hostile to all who follow the commands of Jesus as they have been revealed in the Bible.

### **(Ephesians 6:12 ESV)**

*<sup>12</sup> 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.*

---

<sup>2</sup> Dt 29:4; Ez 36:26-27.

Notice the strong language he uses to describe the world. It is a world of *wrestling* (v.12) against *strong* and *authoritative powers*. It is a world of “*present darkness*,” marked by “*spiritual forces of evil*.” In verse 11 he notes that this evil opposition is led by a *scheming enemy* who is the *devil*. He sums it all up in verse 13 by saying that this day is an “*evil day*.”

This reminds us of what Paul wrote earlier in 5:16, “*Make the best use of the time, for the days are evil*” (5:16). Paul’s default description of the world is one that is dominated by the devil, darkness, and evil.<sup>3</sup> Thus, for those who would call themselves ‘Christian,’ this world is a context of constant conflict. And so we can understand why Paul is calling for Christians to “**be strong in the lord and in the strength of his might.**”

## We Live in A Dark World: Check Your Batteries

If this was an accurate description of the days in which Paul and the Ephesians lived, is this any less accurate than the days in which we live? Are things any better? Paul is describing our world. This world is not our home. As Jesus said this world is under the “*dominion of darkness*” with the majority of people being ruled by the “*power of Satan*” (Acts 26:18).<sup>4</sup> We are strangers and exiles in this land.<sup>5</sup> We cannot allow ourselves to get comfortable here.

Therefore, since we live in a world in that is constantly in conflict with our heavenly Father and our suffering Savior, then we must prepare for this conflict. If you know difficulty is coming your way, then wisdom would call out to you to prepare. Only the foolish would fail to take action.

If you live on Cape Cod or Nantucket and the National Weather Service sends out an alert that hurricane Fred will hit at midnight, then do you ignore the warning and keep sipping lemonade on your patio? No. You put down your lemonade and you put up the plywood over your windows and secure everything loose and light. If you knew darkness was falling, then wouldn’t you be sure and check your batteries?

It’s very easy for us to see the wisdom of preparing for physical storms. It’s much more difficult for us to see the wisdom in preparing for spiritual storms. Some of us don’t believe there are spiritual storms. Some of us think it’s just a little too reactionary or extreme to talk about spiritual warfare. Some of us are content to ignore the reality of spiritual conflict and just chalk up to living in a fallen world. It is true that we live in a fallen world. And this fallen world is one that is dominated by spiritual forces of darkness and evil and the scheming enemy, called the devil and Satan, who is relentless in his desire to kill, steal, and destroy the light of the gospel as it would shine through the lives of the people of God. And so Paul calls us to action.

---

<sup>3</sup> Paul called Satan is the “god of this world” (2 Cor 4:4). Jesus referred to the devil as “the ruler of this world” (Jn 12:31). The apostle John affirmed that “the whole world lies in the power of the evil one” (1 Jn 5:19).

<sup>4</sup> See also Col 1:12; 1 Ptr 2:9.

<sup>5</sup> 1 Ptr 2:11.

## A Call to Stand Firm

Paul, under the influence of the Holy Spirit of God, sends out a call for the people of God to prepare for battle.

Ephesians 6:11 (ESV)

<sup>11</sup> *Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil.*

Notice that the goal is that **you may be able to stand** against the schemes of the devil. Paul uses the word 'stand' three times and 'withstand' once. This is massively important to him. This is massively important to God. He wants Christians to be able to **stand**. He mentions it first in verse 11 and then twice in verse 13 and again in verse 14.

Ephesians 6:11, 13-14 (ESV)

<sup>11</sup> *Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil.*

<sup>13</sup> *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. <sup>14</sup> Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness,*

God wants his people to stand through the battle. The verb means "to cause to remain in place,"<sup>6</sup> "to maintain one's stance; not giving ground."<sup>7</sup> The imagery of the word means having the strength not to give in to the attacks of the devil. Standing firm means not losing ground or backing down in a fight. It refers to having the strength to endure through the attack of the enemy.

Paul yearns for you to stand and not fall. So does our Lord. Oh that we would yearn to stand against Satan with as much vigor as determination and strength as did our Lord and Savior.

## We Are Not Removed from the Battle, But Strengthened to Go Through It

It does not mean avoiding the fight or being removed from it, but rather having the strength and power to be sustained *through* it. God could destroy Satan in one breath, but he does not. He will one day, but that will be the final day. Right now Jesus possesses "all authority in heaven and on earth."<sup>8</sup> Jesus right at this moment is seated at the right hand of the Father...

---

<sup>6</sup> Louw, Johannes P., and Eugene Albert Nida. *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains*. Vol. 1 (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 727.

<sup>7</sup> Kittel, Gerhard, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich, eds. *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*. Vol. 7. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964) 653,

<sup>8</sup> Mt 28:18.

(Ephesians 1:21-22 ESV)

<sup>21</sup> far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. <sup>22</sup> And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church,

Satan is powerful, but he is not omnipotent like Jesus is. And yet God has chosen not to simply blow him off the map, which he could do in one blink of an eye. In the end, Jesus will speak one word and destroy Satan.<sup>9</sup> But he has not chosen to do that right now. Instead he has chosen to put his Holy Spirit within his people and through them, i.e. through us, to fight Satan and all the powers of this present darkness.

Though Satan come against the people of God, God has provided the means necessary to hold your ground thorough it. The question is, will we avail ourselves of this strength? If you are relying upon him to provide his strength and power to you, then it is possible to stand against the evil enemy and not give in to his lies. And every word that Satan will speak is a lie.

## Christians Confronted by a Scheming Enemy

Satan's lies are revealed in that he is called a *schemer*. Verse 11 alerts us to the fact that **Christians are confronted by a scheming enemy**. The word 'scheme' means "crafty planning with the intent to deceive."<sup>10</sup> The Greek word is *methodeia*. From it we have our word 'method.' Notice the malicious intent of the devil.

Paul is teaching us that our enemy thinks about how to make us fall. He intends our destruction and plans to make us fall. There is wicked planning that takes place within the demonic halls of hell. C.S. Lewis was not wrong in the premise of *The Screwtape Letters* as he imagined the elder demon, Screwtape, coaching the younger demonic nephew, Wormwood, in how best to tempt humans.

Mention of the "schemes" of the devil reminds us of the trickery and subterfuge by which evil and temptation present themselves in our lives. Evil rarely looks evil until it accomplishes its goal; it gains entrance by appearing attractive, desirable, and perfectly legitimate. It is a baited and camouflaged trap.<sup>11</sup>

A schemer is a liar. Every temptation is essentially a lie. Jesus said of the devil, "There is no truth in him. Whenever he speaks he lies because he is the father of lies."<sup>12</sup> Our enemy is a

---

<sup>9</sup> Rev 19:15-21.

<sup>10</sup> Louw and Nida., 759.

<sup>11</sup> O'Brien, 464.

<sup>12</sup> Jn 8:44.

liar. If we would have any hope of withstanding his attacks, then we must know our enemy. The first point Paul teaches is that he is a liar.

## Christians Are Opposed by Spiritual Entities

Another truth about our enemies is that they are spiritual not physical. Christians are opposed by spiritual entities, not physical ones.

### **(Ephesians 6:12 ESV)**

*<sup>12</sup> 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.*

Notice first that Paul includes himself in this struggle. He writes that “**we**... wrestle... against... spiritual forces...” Paul knows this battle himself. He is not excluding but including himself in this fight against temptation and sin. He too struggles against the dark forces of this dark world as they seek to take us down.

How comforting to know that Paul himself, despite the mighty way in which God used him, was also susceptible to the struggles of the flesh. We find his most personal description of his own battle against sin and temptation in Romans seven. If you find yourself weary in your fight against your own propensity towards sin, then read Romans seven. Better yet, memorize it. Memorize the whole chapter. Memorize it and mediate on it.

As you read it you will realize how intensely personal his battle was.

This is probably why he used the word ‘**wrestle**’ (v.12). This is the only place this word is used in the Bible. The word means “to engage in intense struggle, involving physical or nonphysical force against strong opposition.”<sup>13</sup>

The word communicates the close and personal nature of these dark attacks. They are not the distant attacks of missiles launched from miles away. They are personal attacks in the frightening nearness of hand-to-hand combat. Our wrestling against sin and temptation is so near to us that we can almost reach out and touch it.

Our enemies are not flesh and blood. Our enemies are not physical, they are spiritual. Our enemies are not other people, but the demonic forces that stand behind the beliefs to which people hold. Our battle is not against people who disagree with us or have differing world views. Our fight is with the *rulers, authorities, cosmic powers, and evil spiritual forces* that stand behind them. If all we see in this fight for holiness is what we see, then we do not see

---

<sup>13</sup> Louw and Nida, 495.



the root cause of this conflict. If you want to make significant advances against a spiritual enemy, then you must look beyond the physical and see the spiritual realities that lie beyond them. If not, then you're simply shooting at a decoy.

Because our enemies are spiritual, we must therefore fight with spiritual weapons. Because our enemies are supernatural, so we must fight with supernatural strength if we are to withstand them. It is because of these truths that Paul is calling for followers of Jesus to be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might.

## Christians Are Supplied with Seven Spiritual Weapons

What are Christians to do in order to stand in the evil day? If the people of God are to win a spiritual wrestling match, then we must be fitted with the spiritual weapons of God. And God has supplied his people with seven spiritual weapons in order to withstand the evil day. If the believer will put on all of this armor, the whole armor of God, then and only then will she stand firm.

(Ephesians 6:13 ESV)

*<sup>13</sup> 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.*

Paul understands the need. He calls for Christians to **put on whole armor of God** in order to stand against attack. The phrase "whole armor" or "full armor," "referred to 'a complete set of instruments used in defensive or offensive warfare' which was worn by a heavily armed foot soldier."<sup>14</sup>

Paul uses the language of war to communicate the danger and seriousness of the situation in which they lived. Perhaps these believers were not aware of their desperate situation. However, it is a context of conflict and battle and Paul is calling them to prepare. He wants them strong for the battle. Peter had the same desire.

(1 Peter 2:11 ESV)

*<sup>11</sup> Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul.*

How should believers prepare for battle? How are they to be strengthened? The way to receive this strength from the Lord is by **putting on the whole armor of God**. God has supplied armor for his people. Paul is calling for all armor to be put on and to be utilized. He names seven items that comprise the spiritual weapons with which we are supplied.

---

<sup>14</sup> O'Brien, 462.



### 1) **The Belt of Truth (v.14)**

The belt of truth, like the belt of the pants, keeps your pants up and enables you to move quickly. If Satan is a schemer, then he is also a liar. If he is a liar, then the clearest way to combat a lie is to know the truth. It's embarrassing to believe a lie. Having yourself wrapped in truth will keep you from being tangled in a lie.

For example. Satan comes to you and tells us you need X in order to be happy and content, where X is something God has forbidden. That is a lie. You don't need X because God has said you don't. So you should respond with the truth, "*My God shall supply all my need according to his riches in glory*" (Phil 4:19).

Paul probably thought of this phrase because he had read it in Isaiah (11:5), but there it a belt that belongs to Jesus. In this we get a hint of what it takes to live like Christ. You have to be dressed like him. And he gives us his own weapons in order to live this life to which we are called.

### 2) **The Breastplate of Righteousness (v.14)**

The breastplate protects the heart, which is of critical importance in keeping one alive. Even so righteousness protects the believer from the death that awaits all the unrighteous. The breastplate of righteousness is mentioned in Isaiah 59:17 and it belongs to God himself. This again points to the fact that God gives his own righteousness to his children to protect and save them. Living joyfully in the righteousness of God is being made strong in the Lord.

Remembering that we are righteous in Christ will keep us from toying with sin. If we are righteous in Christ, then we know that God has accepted us and that he will never be turned away. The gift of righteousness means we can know that we are loved by God and have passed out of death and into life; out of judgment and into blessing.

### 3) **The Shoes of Readiness by the Gospel of Peace (v.15)**

This imagery also comes from Isaiah (52:7).

*(Isaiah 52:7 ESV)*

*<sup>7</sup> How beautiful upon the mountains  
are the feet of him who brings good news,  
who publishes peace, who brings good news of happiness,  
who publishes salvation,  
who says to Zion, "Your God reigns."*

The Isaiah passage refers to the Lord himself and those who proclaim a message of reconciliation between God and man, possibly referring to messiah. Having shoes on is not specifically a weapon, but it does point to a readiness and nimbleness of movement that would be required of any soldier. The children of God need to be ready to proclaim

the peace of the gospel of Jesus Christ to a lost and dying world even while we ourselves may be under attack by the spiritual forces that oppose us. We do not fight with flesh and blood, but we stand so that we may set them free from being "held captive to do the will of Satan."<sup>15</sup>

#### **4) The Shield of Faith (v.16)**

The "shield of faith" is likened after the Roman shield which was large enough to protect the whole body of a soldier. Faith itself is the shield which protects the believer by deflecting and extinguishing "*all the flaming darts of the evil one.*"

This means that when you are under attack, you call to mind a promise of God and believe the truth of that promise and cling to it. For example, when you are being tempted and you feel like it is too much to bear you call to mind 1 Cor 10:13.

(1 Corinthians 10:13 ESV)

*<sup>13</sup> No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.*

You believe this and you don't give in to the temptation. In stead, you look for a way out. This is what taking up the shield of faith looks like.

#### **5) The Helmet of Salvation (v.17)**

Here again Paul draws on the imagery of Isaiah 59:17. In that prophetic book, Yahweh's warrior puts on salvation like a helmet to protect the head. Here Paul envisions the believer being given salvation by God which serves as a cherished protection to the head.

God wants you to know that you are saved and stop wasting time doubting your salvation. There are dozens of verse written so that you can know for certain that you have in fact been given salvation. I'll only mention one.

(Romans 10:9 ESV)

*<sup>9</sup> because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.*

#### **6) The Sword of the Spirit (v.17)**

The sword of the Spirit is the word of God. Every other piece of armor thus far has been defensive or preparatory. The word is the only offensive weapon. And note that it is the "*sword of the Spirit.*" It is the Spirit who makes the the word, as a sword, effective and powerful. Though the believer should know to use the sword, it is the presence of the Spirit within the believer that causes the word to be effective.

---

<sup>15</sup> 2 Tim 2:26.

The word translated 'word' here is *rhēma* and not Paul's usual word, *logos*. The two words are often used interchangeably, but *rhēma* most often refers to the spoken word rather than to the written word. If this is the case here, then Paul is probably meaning the proclamation of the gospel, which is probably the case since, in verses 19-20, that is exactly what he is referring to. In short, Paul is indicating that when we speak the gospel, it is the work of the Holy Spirit to take that word and make it effective and powerful to effect faith and salvation.

So, if this is true, then when you are tempted, speak out loud a verse that you have memorized. Say it out loud. Do an experiment. Try this.

Paul gets this notion from Isaiah 11:4 where messiah, with the Spirit resting upon him, strikes the earth with the rod of his mouth.

## 7) Persevering Prayer (v.18)

The final weapon in the armor of the Christian is persevering prayer. This is prayer that continues "**at all times**," and is "**alert with all perseverance and supplication for the saints**." The kind of prayer Paul recommends is constant and takes place *at all times*. This means it persevere through all circumstances and does not fail in times of difficulty. It is also prayer that is directed toward the needs of others. This prayer offers requests *for all the saints*.

## Conclusion

The Lord wants you to be strong, not in your own strength, but in the strength that comes only from him and which he will abundantly supply.

We live in hostile environment. Those who will follow in the footsteps of Jesus will find themselves living in a context of conflict. We live in a dark world, which is not our true and lasting home. Therefore we must prepare.

Our enemies are spiritual, supernatural, scheming, and real. Our enemies are not flesh and blood. We will not stand against such enemies unless we put on the whole armor that God has provided for us. God wants us to stand and so we must take up our armor. If we will be victorious over spiritual enemies, then we must use spiritual weapons.

Though he easily could, he has chosen not to completely remove our ancient enemy. Instead he has chosen to fill us with himself so that we may join him in this fight against evil. He has chosen to equip us to be strengthened through this fight rather than removing us from the fight.

He has given us seven spiritual weapons in this fight; Truth, Righteousness, the Gospel of Peace, Faith, Salvation, the Word, and Prayer. If we fail to take up these weapons we cannot win. However, if do take them up, then we cannot lose.

Be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might.  
Be strong in the Lord and fight the dark forces of the night.

Be strong in the Lord and stand firm in the evil day.  
Be strong int he Lord and resist Satan and watch him run away.