

September 17, 2006  
Pentecost 15

*"Be Strong in the Lord"*

---

### **EPHESIANS 6:10-20**

---

**F**inally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. <sup>11</sup> Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. <sup>12</sup> For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. <sup>13</sup> Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. <sup>14</sup> Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, <sup>15</sup> and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. <sup>16</sup> In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. <sup>17</sup> Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. <sup>18</sup> And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints. <sup>19</sup> Pray also for me, that whenever I open my mouth, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel, <sup>20</sup> for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should.

Our country is at war with terrorists scattered in different parts of the world. It is so frustrating to fight an enemy that can hide in caves, live with women and children in villages and suburbs, and blend in with people in the surrounding community.

Satan is like a terrorist. He is good at hiding where people cannot see him. He disguises himself, even masquerading as an angel of light. Satan is destructive. He has one goal that he pursues relentlessly, 24/7. He wants people to spend eternity with him when he is cast down into the lake of fire on judgment day.

Satan is also very good at convincing people to not take him seriously. According to recent article in *Newsweek* magazine, most of the people in this country believe in God. I read somewhere else that only about 60% believe in the devil as he is revealed to us on the pages of the Bible. Just as it would be dangerous to ignore terrorists and hope they go away, it is even more dangerous to ignore what the Bible tells us about Satan. Jesus called him the father of lies and a murderer from the beginning. Rather than ignore the devil, let's listen to what the Apostle Paul tells us in Ephesians about taking up the fight and being strong in the Lord. The battle is tough but the Lord is strong

### **The battle is tough**

We cannot minimize the difficulty that we will be facing every day in our lives. Paul writes, "Be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God so that you can take up your stand against the devil's schemes." The devil has schemes and methods that are very well coordinated. Satan is not all powerful, he is not all knowing, and he is not

present everywhere at the same time. That is only true of God. Yet, he possesses amazing ability to set traps, to devise temptations and to work together with other evil spirits to get in our heads and confuse us and even undermine our faith in Christ. If you think we are overstating the case, then just read again from Luke 4 and listen to how clever the devil was in the temptation that he set forth in front of Jesus. "Turn these stones into bread. Satisfy your hungry. Your heavenly Father would love to feed you and satisfy your hunger." Jesus had to quote from Scripture to defend himself. "Man does not live by bread alone but by every Word that proceeds from the mouth of God."

It is tough fighting against Satan. He has clever strategies based on information that he gathers from his legions of followers that surround you. You thought cookies on your computer were bad for providing personal information to some solicitor. Satan has gathered his files on you and me, lots of information. He can network with his evil spirits and share information with you at warp speed. Am I exaggerating the case? Not, at all. Listen to what Paul says: "For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms." We cannot see Satan and his evil spirits. He cannot be everywhere at once, but he sure is well connected with other evil spirits. No place is safe, even worship on Sunday morning. Did you ever have an evil thought even while you were worshipping? Where do you think it came from? Did it just come out of the air or drop down from the ceiling? In a way it did. It came from the powers of this dark world, and from the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.

Harold Lindsell, in his book *The Devil, the World and the Flesh*, has these chilling words to say about Satan. "Wherever there is mischief afoot, Satan is sure to be involved. He is the one who precipitates wars, encourages people in their lusts, causes them to question the Word of God, and tells them they can play with sin and win. He stands by every drunkard's side. He peers out of every window of every house of prostitution. He watches over the shoulder of every thief. He feeds words into the mouth of every blasphemer. He controls the mind and thoughts of every pornographer. He sits beside the statesmen in the chancelleries of the world as they decide the destiny of nations. He attends the meetings of the United Nations. He laughs silently beside the graves of his victims and claps his hands in glee when people slide into eternity without the knowledge of Jesus Christ."

Satan's greatest victories come when he can keep people from trusting in Christ for their salvation. He strives to convince us that our good works are acceptable enough for a holy and righteous God even though they are shot full of the filth of sin. Satan loves to see us underestimate sin in our lives by ignoring it completely, justifying it, minimizing it, or even trying to do some good to compensate for the bad we have done. I am holding in my hand two water bottles. The one pure bottle represents the work Jesus has done to rescue me from sin that is pure and holy, the blood of Jesus that cleanses me, the robe of righteousness that covers me. The other bottle represents my former belief in impure efforts to make myself acceptable to God. Satan is such a good salesman. He sells people on the lie that bad is actually good enough for God. Look at all the strange and evil things people are doing in the name of religion. His greatest joy is taking people who once followed Jesus and leading them back to their old ways of being without hope. Ephesians 2 says we once lived the ways of the world and ruler of the kingdom of the air.

So, what are we going to do about this red alert that we are in every day of our lives? Will

we ignore it? Will we minimize it? Paul gives us the answer when he says to us, "Be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power." I read a story recently about a man named Lucas who was walking in the dense jungle brush. A large python snake attacked him and wrapped itself around his body and began squeezing the life out of him. No one was near to help him, so he did the only thing he could to rescue himself. He bit down hard into the snake's back, harder and harder until the snake released its hold. He destroyed the snake, and took it home and ate it with his family. Would you not agree that is going from a defensive position to the offensive?

## **The Lord is strong**

Dear Christian, be strong in the Lord. Trust the armor he has provided to protect you. Put on the full armor of God. "Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after have done everything to stand." Our soldiers in Iraq and Afghanistan wear protection around the bodies and their heads. The Apostle Paul is picturing for us a Roman soldiers well equipped for battle. The armor and protection the Lord has for us is good. It will get the job done. That is where your strength is found not in yourself. When David stood up to the mighty giant Goliath he said with confidence, "I come against you in the name of the Lord almighty, the God of the armies of Israel whom you have defied."

What a privilege it is to wear the full armor of God and be ready for every onslaught of evil. "Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waste." The Roman soldier wore a large belt around the waste to hold the rest of his armor and protection together. This large leather belt also protected the inner organs of the body. We have the truth of God's Word to defend ourselves against the lies of Satan. If you are going to defeat an enemy you have to know where he is going to trick and deceive you. That's the first important step on the field of battle.

Be strong in the Lord. Put on the beautiful breastplate of righteousness. The breastplate protects the heart and the lungs, the vital organs of the body that are always in danger on every battlefield. Dear Christian, you wear a beautiful robe of Christ's righteousness. In your baptism you have put on Christ. "As many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ." Covered with Christ's righteousness and saying, "I am baptized" you can charge into the battle of unrighteousness and self-righteousness where ever it manifests itself in your life.

Be strong in the Lord. Look at the shoes you are wearing "with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace." Roman soldiers could walk for miles because they had good shoes. They were swift on their feet in battle because they had good shoes. Dear Christian, you have shoes that fit you for the battles of life this week. You have the gospel of peace. You know where you stand with your God through Jesus. You have peace with God through your Lord Jesus Christ. That makes you want to charge into the war against any sin and temptation that might lurk in your life, cutting it off and destroying it before it takes advantage of you.

Be strong in the Lord. "Take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish the flaming arrows of the evil one." The shield referred to here is the large Roman shield that

was used in a phalanx to provide protection from arrows. Faith in God's Word and his promises provides protection from the fiery arrows of temptation Satan shoots your way. As Luther wrote in his hymn, "Tho devils all the world should fill. All eager to devour us. We tremble not, we fear no ill. They shall not over pow'r us. This world's prince may still, Scowl fierce as he will. He can harm us none. He's judged the deed is done. One little word can fell him."

Be strong in the Lord. Put on the helmet of salvation. The Roman soldier wore the helmet to protect his head from blows and arrows. Life on this earth has more than its share of blows and hard knocks. Be strong. You have a helmet of salvation. You know where you are going when you die. As we sing in the hymn, "And when the fight is fierce, the warfare long. Steals on the ear the distant triumph song. And hearts are brave again and arms are strong. Alleluia! Alleluia!"

Be strong in the Lord. Look at the sword that has been placed into your hands. It is the sword of the Spirit, the Word of God. Jesus showed us how to use that Word of God when he was tempted. Every new day we are privileged to spend time in the Word. That equips us to not just be on the defensive, but to go on the offensive, using God's word to stop the temptation.

Be strong in the Lord. The power of prayer has not changed. "And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. Great belt. Great shoes. Great chest-protector. Great helmet. Great sword. Great opportunity for prayer. Great Savior. With Jesus the devil does not stand a chance. Be strong in the Lord. Amen."