

Eph 6: 10 Be Strong In The Lord
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Ephesians 6: 10 - 17
Be Strong in the Lord

We're going to continue this morning in the book of Ephesians. Last week I finished what I had to say in the group of teachings I called "Relationships and Roles". We're getting close to the end of this letter. Today we're going to pick up in Ephesians 6: 10 where Paul makes this statement: "finally my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might". And then he begins to describe what he calls the whole armor of God.

Let me just start by reminding you that what Paul says here was a reality to him. I know that may sound extremely basic or obvious. But sometimes, because of the fact that Bible verses can become so familiar to us, and ideas about those verses can become so established in our hearts...we forget that these things were not Bible verses to the men who wrote them. Before they were ever verses in a Bible, they were letters. And before they were letters, they were realities and experiences in the soul's of people like Peter and John and Paul.

So, the question is never simply "what does the particular Bible verse *mean*?". The question is always "what exactly was Paul experiencing of Christ that He was attempting to describe with these words?" Does that make sense? Its amazing how, without even realizing it, we replace a literal experience of Christ in the soul with a an answer to a question in the mind. In other words, we often think that we understand a particular verse if we can say something about what we think "it means".

So what I'm trying to say is that "what a verse means" is never going to be found in words or in explanations or descriptions of things. What this verse means is going to be found when the soul actually encounters and learns the very thing that motivated Paul to write this sentence. THAT is what Paul meant in any particular verse.

So, with that in mind, what did Paul mean when he described being strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might. I know what my natural mind quickly assumes when I read a verse like this. I know what I have read in books or commentaries about standing strong in the Lord. But that's not my question. My question is – what was Paul experiencing in His soul with respect to the power of the Lord and standing in the strength of His might that moved him to write this exhortation to the church in Ephesus.

I think that sometimes it is difficult for us to even begin to understand a statement like this because we are so familiar with standing in our own might and power. We are perfectly accustomed to abiding in our own resources, living according to our own capacities and abilities. And so at the outset, when we read a verse like this we almost always immediately begin to imagine God's strength being added to our own.

God's resources being added to our own. God's capacities or assistance being added to us where we have a felt need.

But I don't believe this is what Paul had in mind. I don't think that Paul was referring to relying on the power of the Lord when our power appears insufficient. This is such a common idea in the body of Christ. But I know for certain that it would be a foreign concept to the apostle Paul.

Just think for a moment with me about how many times we say or think things like this -- "boy, I am really going to need the Lord's help on this one". Or "there is no way I can handle the situation without divine assistance". Or even "I am sure that I am going to screw this up if God doesn't intervene". But as normal and common as these types of sentiments are, they betray a great misunderstanding that exists in our hearts. They expose our enormous misunderstanding in many areas. They expose our misunderstanding of what we are, what God desires, even things as basic as what it means to pray, or what it means to be a Christian.

Those who have heard and seen something of the reality of the cross, and who fellowship together in the truth, are aware at some level of our deception in regards to many of these things. But it is still amazing how many incredibly wrong ideas still float around in our unrenewed minds and define and control our comprehension of our relationship with the Lord.

Let me put a few things very plainly. You were not born again by the Spirit of God to receive assistance. The cross of Jesus Christ, the salvation of God, the indwelling person of the Son, is in no way God's attempt to assist you with your life. I know that we all say, "yes, yes, of course not. That is silly". Well then, why are we still praying for God to fix our lives? Why are we still acting as though we have a life independent of Christ and that God should act on its behalf? Why are we consumed with our goals and purposes and plans that have nothing to do with the life that God has given us in Christ, or his purpose for that life?

You see, it's very easy to quote "not I but Christ". But our prayers and our desires give us away. They demonstrate how we think, and what we think, and why we think it. Why do I thank God for his gift of life and then immediately sit down and continue to plan my own? Why do I read verses that say "you are not your own, you have been bought at a price", and then asked for God's assistance with my plans? Why do I love to talk about the mind of Christ, but then bombard heaven with prayers that are out from my own mind and my own name? These are things that we should consider.

I am saying these things simply to point something out to us. When we read verses like this one in Ephesians 6, we imagine that standing in the strength of the Lord is something that Paul did when he had need of God's strength. We imagine that this is something that Paul learned to do when he was in prison, or when he was in a hard circumstance, being persecuted by the Jews or misunderstood by the church.

But what I'm suggesting to you is that standing in the strength of the Lord, learning to live in the power of his might, is something that Paul came to understand and experience as the manner by which he always lived. It was not an addition to Paul's natural gift mix or abilities. In fact, standing in the strength of God's might excluded Paul's abilities and capacities and natural giftings. Standing in the strength of God's

might meant accepting, and abiding in, the absolute powerlessness of the natural man.

This is what Paul refers to when he mentions in other letters that we are those who put no confidence in the flesh. We put absolutely no confidence anywhere outside of the life of Christ - what He is, and what He is in us. Frankly, I don't think that we really understand much of what this means. In other words, I don't think we have any idea how constant and deep our confidence is in the flesh. I think that we have the idea in our head that putting confidence in the flesh is something that we MIGHT do sometimes...rather than realizing that is what we always do, all the time, wherever the cross has not dealt a death blow to us.

Putting confidence in the flesh, or standing in our own might, is the most natural thing in the world to us. It is what we have done our entire lives. In fact, it is what we are taught to do, instructed how to do, trained to do by other people and by ourselves. This is how the natural man lives. We live drawing upon our own resources. We understand drawing upon our own thinking and our own conclusions. We plan based upon our own strengths and our own goals. We act towards others in the way that we want to be perceived. So often we stand in our own strength and talk about His. We stand in our own capabilities, our own faculties, our own understanding, resources, and ways.

And so when we read a verse that have to do with standing in the strength of His might, the most natural thing in the world is to imagine God extending some temporary assistance, or direction, or ability. But in reality, standing in the strength of His might involves a deep and real parting with everything in which we have stood previously.

We talked about this in a couple of our groups this week. Not exactly in this language. But we talked about this reality. At least this is where my mind was going this week in a couple of the groups when we were talking about losing perspective Christ, or somehow finding ourselves trying to see without a light.

As we grow up in the Lord, there are wonderful times where we feel like we are seeing clearly by the mind of the Lord, seeing with such a great perspective that we know is not our own. It is such a wonderful thing to share the Lord's view. It is such a wonderful thing to stand in his light and to see with his eyes. This is what happens when a soul is growing up in Christ. And I hope that we have all had many experiences of this, and that those experiences are growing to be more constant and more pure.

But if you have had these experiences of growing in the light, then you also had the experience where somehow, for some reason, the light that was shining so clearly in your heart began to fade. Dark clouds came out of somewhere. Perspective slips away, and peace leaves with it. We don't usually notice this when it begins to happen. Normally, we notice it only after the absence of light is defining everything that we see.

So my question is... what is actually happening when this takes place? What is transpiring in the soul? The Light doesn't just dissipate over *time*. Time is irrelevant. God doesn't ever desire for us to lose His perspective. He never takes anything from us. So what happens? Well, the answer to that question has to do with our incredible propensity to turn back to the strength of our own might. It has

to do with the gravity-like attraction of our own capacities and resources. We turn to them without effort. We reach for them without thinking. Usually without even understanding what is happening, we bring the tools of our own resources and capacities and abilities into the Lord's territory, into the Lord's light, and we begin to stand in them.

Ben used an analogy this week that I thought was helpful. It came from the old fairy tale of Hansel and Gretel. He said that wherever the Light of the Lord leads us, it is like we leave a trail of bread crumbs behind us so that we always know the way back.

The author of Hebrews writes about the men and women of faith in the Old Covenant and says of them, "And truly if they had called to mind that *country* from which they had come out, they would have had opportunity to return." Heb 11:15

When we are brought into a greater view by the Spirit of truth, when we have been brought into a greater understanding of life in Christ, we stand and stare at it for a while with fascination and peace and understanding. But then there are all of these bread crumb trails that are all around us. They are the familiar things of ourselves that we are still carrying around in our unrenewed minds. They are the things that we have not yet seen or accepted to have no place in the Light. They are the things we know to be our strengths – the things we think we can do, or understand, or be. Things we think are beneficial, or at least harmless. They are familiar little trails that lead back to ourselves. They all lead back to our own darkness.

We wonder what has happened? We look around in confusion and say "where did my light go?". "Where did my perspective go?". "I could see so clearly on Tuesday, but where did that view go? This meant nothing to me a week ago in the light, but now I am consumed by this natural thing again! This verse was exhilarating to me a few days ago, but now it is just words on a page! This group was true soul fellowship to me last month, but this month it is just a bunch of weirdos sitting in a living room. The love of God was an experience to my soul last night, but this morning it is just an idea! What has happened?"

And in these times we are tempted to say – "why did the light leave?". But we are the ones who have left the Light. We are tempted to say – "who did I let take my perspective from me?". But we took it from ourselves when we followed a bread crumb trail back to our first birth. We took it from ourselves when we decided to stand in something other than the strength of the Lord and the power of His might.

Paul says in Ephesians 6:10 – "be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might". Again, he's not telling us to be strong Christians. He's not telling us to trust the Lord for better circumstances. No. Paul is telling us to repudiate in ourselves all that the cross has made dead to God. In other words, being strong in the Lord begins with being absolutely powerless, recognizing ourselves to be utterly impotent, in ourselves, as ourselves.

We have nothing useful to the Lord. Not anything that is useful in an of itself. **The Lord can become useful to His body in and through us. But we have nothing in ourselves that is useful to Him.** Settle that issue right now if you haven't already. We have nothing in ourselves that He considers to be our "strengths". Please don't ever let a Christian leader tell you differently. Oh, I know it sounds nice for pastors to talk about God using our strengths and creating us uniquely to

function according to our strengths and abilities. But that is absolutely false and humanistic and antichrist.

Where in the Bible do you hear Peter or Paul talking about their strengths? Where exactly do you find a verse that has to do with using your strengths for the body of Christ? Using your strengths to serve the Lord. Let me tell you something. Your strengths in the flesh are quite often your greatest spiritual liability – both to yourself and to the body of Christ. Your strengths in the flesh are generally the areas where you refuse to allow the Lord's entrance. They are the areas where you and I want to mix ourselves with something that must be purely Him.

How many poor Christians have been born again, only to be immediately seduced by the idea that God has great plans for their natural strengths. I say "seduced" because that is exactly what it is. A newborn baby Christian does not have the discernment to realize that such an idea contradicts the Spirit that they just received. A baby Christian cannot yet understand that in the presence of their strength, the strength of God is absent. In the presence of their resources, God's resources will not be found.

And so right away we embark on the wild goose chase of Christian religion. As Paul says to the Galatians in chapter 3 – Who has bewitched you? Having begun in the Spirit, are you going to grow in the flesh? Who sold you this lie? And yet we are so willing to believe it. We were not simply led astray by another. We are the ones that brought the bag of bread crumbs. We are the ones that return like a dog to our vomit, like a pig to the mud.

And I am just like you. Rather than be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might, I return again and again to the strength of my might. The false strength of the flesh. Rather than clothing myself fully in Christ, I have enormous areas where flesh is exposed, flesh is trusted, flesh is retained. And in all of those areas I am not only deceived, but I am entirely deceivable.

I believe this is why Paul goes right from this statement into a discussion about the armor of the Lord. You see, we rarely understand the nature of our battle. We don't understand how effortless and natural it is for us to give ground in ourselves for deception. And so Paul takes a few sentences and describes what must be our position. He describes the necessity for a believer to be fully girded, fully armed and protected, by the truth as it has been established by God in Christ.

Verse 11 – put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. We talked about "the devil's place" several months ago. Where does the devil have place to affect you and deceive you? Wherever you are not fully clothed in Christ. I mean wherever Christ is not formed in you. Wherever there is flesh available and exposed to his influence. You'll never stand firm against the wiles of the devil if you have a big fleshy bulls-eye hanging out of the armor of God. Graphic image, but accurate. The purpose of armor is to cover flesh. Why? Because flesh is where you are vulnerable. Flesh is where a man in combat can be destroyed. Flesh is where how we fall, and where we fall into every time.

Paul says,

Eph 6:12 For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual *hosts* of wickedness in the heavenly *places*.

As I have mentioned before in some of our studies of Paul's letters, I am not entirely sure how he is distinguishing between principalities and power and rules and spiritual hosts of wickedness. In other words, I'm sure he had specific things in mind when he made this list of titles...and I don't know what he knew, or understand exactly what he is referring to with these divisions. But I think the main point can be understood regardless.

We are not really fighting people. Your enemy as a Christian is not the mean guy across the street, or the grumpy boss at the office, or even the Christian leader that taught you incorrectly for years or abused his role in the church. Our battle is not earthly. Some aspects of our battle have expression in the earth – in situations, or in places, or in relationships. But the places, the situations, the relationships, and the people are not really where we fight or what we fight.

But having said that...let me say that I also do not think that Paul is exclusively talking about spiritual warfare here in the way that it has been understood by many in the church today. I mean, I don't think Paul is talking about territorial spirits over cities, or spiritual mapping, or deliverance ministries. I don't think Paul is talking about praying and fasting to understand demonic inroads or to learn the hierarchy and schemes of the fallen angels. If you don't know what I'm talking about when I refer to these things, that's actually a really good thing. Lets keep it that way.

I believe that Paul's point here is pretty straight forward. Our battle isn't against bad guys and bad teachers and bad attitudes. Nor is our battle FOR good natural things, good happy households, good natural governments, good legislation. Our battle is FOR the eternal purpose of God in Christ. It is FOR the heart and intention of God in and for His new creation. And therefore our battle is against the darkness of the natural man and the natural mind that is, and will always be, the rightful territory of the kingdom of darkness.

Where we are not covered in the armor of God by truly knowing Him as our life – where we are not girded in HIS faith, and His righteousness, and His salvation, and His Word, and His truth – then we are fully defined by the flesh and entirely exposed to the influence of the devil. This is our battle. And to fight this battle, we are forever clothing ourselves with the truth of God's finished work in Christ. To fight this battle, we put on, through the revelation of Christ, the full armor of God.

Years ago, I remember reading these verses about the armor of God and wondering what it actually meant to "put on" these things. I mean, I didn't know if I was actually supposed to just say out loud – "Ok God....I'm putting on the helmet of salvation now!". Or if I was supposed to as Him for these things, as though they were individual, unique items that he would put on me? Or if I should maybe act out the process of getting "spiritually dressed?".

But its not like that. You put on the armor of God in the same way that you put on anything that is Christ. Paul has already talked about this in Ephesians 4. Remember? He said we "put off the old man, and put on the new by the renewing of the spirit of the mind." We put on Christ when Christ our life is revealed. We put on the waistband of truth as the truth of Christ becomes more and more what we are walking in. We experience the shield of faith that quenches the fiery darts of the wicked one when faith becomes so real to us that lies cannot penetrate it. Lies begin to bounce off the faith that is established in our heart.

We put on the helmet of salvation when our mind is more and more consumed with and defined by the salvation of God in Christ. When we know not just that we have salvation...but we actually begin to know the salvation that we have...then we are putting on the helmet of salvation. It is the same with all of these aspects of the armor. They are not individual treasures that you search for like in a video game. They are experiences of Christ that we learn to stand in, and experience, and clothe ourselves with by the revelation of Christ.

Our feet walk in, abide in, the gospel of peace. Our words, our actions, our teaching, our fellowship becomes the expression of the sword of the Spirit, the Word of God that is sharper than a two edged sword. We are those who walk and speak and share according to this Word, defined by with Word. Again, there is no way that you can separate any of these aspects of the armor of God from something that Christ is, and is made unto you. These are all aspects of Christ that the soul experiences. These are further illustrations that Paul gives us to explain what he means by telling us to stand strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might.