

STANDING STRONG IN THE LAST DAYS
Ephesians 6:10-20

INTRO: Recently, my son-in-law drove us to Edmonton to a doctor's appointment for my wife. And as we were coming back, I said, "This year I've had a more difficult time coming up with a subject for a message on New Year's day. It is traditional for us to have a service on New Year's and usually I challenge you to something like reading through the Bible, or some subject on the significance of days or such like. But this year I struggled. And as we drove they gave me various ideas. Let me give you some of those: What does it mean to live right? Seeking the truth; Sunday morning Christians; Standing fast in the last days and Living in perilous times. I began to memorize Ephesians 6:10-20 and decided to speak on that and then I found I could call it, "Standing Fast (or strong) In The Last Days", and that it included most of the other ideas. Our passage is Ephesians 6:10-20, and so I invite you to turn to that passage.

Our subject this morning is, "Standing Strong In The Last Days." It is good for us to be reminded from time to time that we have a big enemy. It is also good to be reminded that the Lord Jesus has defeated Satan, and that we can overcome Satan through the Lord Jesus Christ. There is nothing good to be said about this enemy unless one goes back to when he was still one of God's high ranking angels. But he fell, and the names used for him in the Bible give us an indication of his character. He is called, Satan, meaning an adversary; devil, a slanderer; the god of this age; the prince of this world, that is of all the lost; the prince of the power of the air; the ruler of darkness; the dragon; the deceiver; Apollyon, meaning the destroyer; Beelzebub, the prince of demons; Belial, vileness or ruthlessness; the wicked one; the tempter; the accuser of the brethren; an angel of light; the liar, or the father of lies; a murderer; the enemy and being like a roaring lion. All of that does not make for a pretty picture.

Now, might I ask you this morning, do you see Satan as a real being? Do you see his demons as those beings ever present and all around us? Or do you see these beings as real, but far away? Or do you see them as nearby and even maybe attending you?

Paul will warn us in this passage about Satan, and his demonic host, and show him as our ever present enemy. And what Paul gives us in this passage is a command regarding how we are to face this enemy, and then the means of fulfilling that command. We will only be able to rush over this subject. But here is a reminder for this new year we have just entered.

I. THE COMMAND TO BE EMPOWERED

A. What We Are To Do

We look then first at the command as Paul gives it in verse 10. If you are a Christian, and if you are making progress in your Christianity, you will come under the attack of some of Satan's demons, you can rest assured of that. He will destroy you if he can. He is a very real threat. So Paul, in beginning this very important section says, "Finally my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might."

I want to translate this verse as I see it from the original language and I don't have time to make a defense for it. But this is how I feel it would best be translated, "Finally my brethren, be empowered in the Lord; even in the strength of His might." Let me just say that it is striking that the verb 'be strong' or as I have translated, 'be empowered' is passive in voice, not active. That is a very significant difference. We cannot make ourselves strong, but we can do something that will cause us to be strong. And second, the word translated 'be strong' is the word *dunamis* which speaks of power or ability.

Now it is noteworthy that we are to be empowered in the Lord *and in the strength of His might*. We have three words for strength or power in this verse. First, we are to be empowered. It is the word we heard of before, 'dunamis', from which we get our word dynamite. It is ability. To be able. There are many things we cannot do because we are not able. We are not able to stand against the devil. We must be empowered or enabled, and we are enabled in the strength of God's might. We cannot battle with Satan on our own. We cannot overcome him on our own. We must be enabled by the strength of God's might. It is

simply amazing that we can tap into God's great ability and the power of His might. But how do we do this? Well, verses 11-12 will give us the general method and the reason. Verses 13 and on will give the details.

B. How We Are To Do It

Our question now is, if we are to be empowered in the Lord, and that must be done to us; what do we do in order to get empowered in the strength of His might? Well, verse 11 tells us in general what to do. How do we become empowered? How do we become enabled? Well, the command that follows tells us how (read 11). We are to put on the whole armor of God.

C. Why We Are To Do It

But, we ask, what is this armor all about? Why is it important that we have such great strength? And the answer is immediately given. It is that we might be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. Why must we be spiritually empowered, not physically? Note now the reason given in verse 12 (read). We are in a spiritual battle, not a physical one.

Let me quote here from another message I did. I wrote, *"The Greek word for wiles here is methodias. It is not hard to see what English word we get from this word. It is methods. It is instructive that the word "wiles" is in the plural. He does not simply use one method. The methods are multitudinous and they are masterfully employed. Just when you have one thing conquered in your life another comes along. And it seems that with Christian maturity come different methods.*

A method is a manner or way of proceeding with something which is according to plan. For example, in the world there are many kinds of diseases and sicknesses. I have heard that the doctors have a way they use to determine what method will be the best to deal with a particularly difficult case. They have what is called the round table. A number of doctors meet. The case is given and then these doctors discuss the matter and come up with the method that will be used in that particular case.

I think that gives us a good picture of what may happen in the spiritual world. Picture with me this

morning, a round table of demons. This day it is you or I that is the case. You or I are discussed. Our weaknesses are discussed. Suggestions are made. Demon so or so has the case and what he wants to do is destroy us (John 10:10 The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill and to destroy...) And so our every weakness is considered. Our strengths are considered. Various methods are considered. Some are eliminated and some are considered further. And when everything has been discussed, all the pros and cons have been considered, the decision is made to attack with such or such a method.

And now there we are. Like Job, (or like Peter we saw in the last message) we are totally unaware of what has happened in the spiritual realm. Our day begins beautifully and then before noon, every kind of difficulty seems to have set in. By evening we are so discouraged we hardly know what to do. Tomorrow is Sunday and somehow every feeling resists the idea of going to church and so we sleep in. And then you talk with someone. They are from the same church and they speak negatively about so and so. The seeds of Satan are going deeper and deeper.

Sunday comes and we stay home. And then we stay away for two weeks and so on. Our Bible reading begins to die away. Our prayer life begins to slip. Everything is going according to plan. The methods or schemes of the evil one are working. And then, lo and behold, you or I meet up with another Christian. This is a spiritual Christian and he or she detects something amiss and talks to us about the Lord. We still have no idea of what is going on but something is changing. And then a deep longing sets in for peace with God and the long and short of it is that we come back on track.

Did the case I set out seem to be too fantastic to be true? Read the book of Job. And listen again to our text, "Put on the whole armor of God that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil." Not only will what I have described happen to many, but one person will go through hundreds possibly thousands of attacks from the evil one. And for this reason Paul writes, "Finally my brethren, be empowered in the Lord and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil." The empowering of God is to enable us to stand against the well thought out schemes of the devil.

Let me give you a few examples of the wiles of the devil and there are many more. D. Martyn Lloyd Jones says that such things as discouragement, anxiety, lack of assurance and worldliness are just a few of the wiles of the devil. Do Christians get caught up with things like that, and many more? You see, if Satan cannot keep us from becoming Christians, he may be able to keep us powerless. A powerless Christian is not a threat to him, and many times he is even a help to the powers of darkness.

So from verse 12 we learn that we are in a huge battle, and it is spiritual in nature, not physical. By far the biggest percentage of the mankind lies fully in the sway of the wicked one. And much of Christianity is kept powerless by the things he has either been able to withhold from them or in which he has defeated their stands.

So we go to verse 13. I see this verse as somewhat of a conclusion to the previous verses. I do not want to take time to give my reasons for this, but I feel that the first sentence in this verse should end after the word *day*. Let me read it like that: "Therefore, (because we do not wrestle against flesh and blood) therefore take up the whole armor of God that you may be able to withstand in the evil day" end of sentence.

So we must ask, just what is this evil day? There are many answers given to that question, but I think we all face evil days. Every once in a while, it seems, Satan sees an opportunity to get us and we meet an evil day. Jesus had an evil day after He fasted for forty days. Peter had an evil day the night Jesus was taken. Job had an evil day. My wife pointed out to me a while ago that after Jesus had fasted for 40 days and Satan had tested him, Satan left him for a season. The NKJV says he left until an opportune time. When Satan has an opportune time, he will always come again. Many preachers have fallen into immorality in an evil day. Many Christians fail the Lord in an evil day. Oh, to be on guard.

In the NT, believers who are able to withstand in the evil day are called overcomers. The Nike brand of our day gets its name from this word translated 'overcomers' in the NT. It is to get the victory. Overcomers get the victory in the evil day. They are able to withstand the evil one.

II. THE COMMAND TO STAND

We go now to verse 13b, which, as I said, I think a new sentence begins here. Here we are commanded to stand. So I will read 13b together with verse 14, "And having done all to stand, stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth..." Here is the command to stand. Paul will now show us in detail what it means to put on the whole armor of God and how to stand against the onslaught of the wicked one.

A. Being Girded With Truth

How do we stand against Satan? Well, first of all, Paul says, "And having done all to stand, stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth..." Some day I would like to speak on the subject of taking stands. There are many things we need to stand on. There are many stands Christians give up under the onslaught of Satan, and through that Christianity is greatly weakened.

But we will move on to being girded with truth. When it talks about being girded, it speaks of a belt, which I understand was from 2-4 inches wide. Zondervan Pictorial Bible Dictionary says it, "...was frequently studded with iron, silver, or gold.... This type of girdle was sometimes supported by a shoulder strap and provided a means whereby various articles such as a scrip (or wallet), sword, dagger, or other valuables could be carried.... The girdle, whether made of cloth or leather, was a very useful article of clothing in that it so frequently entered into so many activities of life. When one was to walk, or run, or enter into any type of service he 'girded himself' for the journey or task at hand. Thus it was that girded loins were a symbol of readiness for service or endeavor", end quote.

So we see that the belt was most important. Take the belt off, and the soldier was missing enough equipment to lose against an opponent. We have talked about the importance of truth in many messages. Truth is discussed in many ways, but what I believe is important to what the Bible calls truth is that truth is that which conforms or corresponds to reality. Once one begins to question what reality is, one has entered the field of philosophy (or foolosophy, as LEM called it) and one has exited what is essential to Biblical truth. Second, truth is propositional. It

can be put into propositions. As I see it, truth has two major parts to it. For example, $2+2$ is not a truth. If you have only $=4$, that is not a truth either. When you have $2+2=4$, now the $=4$ corresponds to the $2+2$ and you have a truth.

I would liken truth in the Christian life to the important navigational instruments on an airplane. I was given an article put out by Environment Canada which said, "If you're ever tempted to take off in marginal weather and have no instrument training, read this article first before you go. If you decide to go anyway and lose visual contact, start counting down from 178 seconds. How long can a pilot who has no instrument training expect to live after he flies into bad weather and loses visual contact? Researchers at the University of Illinois found the answer to this question. Twenty students "guinea pigs" flew into simulated instrument weather, and all went into graveyard spirals or rollercoasters. The outcome differed in only one respect; the time required until control was lost. The interval ranged from 480 seconds to 20 seconds. The average time was 178 seconds—two seconds short of three minutes."

I ask, how can a Christian stay on track without checking on truth? If he does not know the danger of living by feelings when the fog sets in, and when those feelings are in conflict with the instrument of truth, how will he make it? Listen to Proverbs 23:23, "Buy the truth, and do not sell it, Also wisdom and instruction and understanding." There we have four of the Christian pilots instruments; truth, wisdom, instruction and understanding.

Let me give a word to parents here. Teach your children to tell the truth. Never let them get away with a lie. Lies are horribly damaging. Lying fits together with words like murder and adultery and so on. Teach your children to tell the truth.

2. The Breastplate of Righteousness (14b)

But, we must move on. When we face the evil one, and face him we will, we will have to learn to read and trust the instrument of truth. But not only must we have the truth for Paul says we are to stand having

put on the breastplate of righteousness. You see, we must put this on before we can stand the onslaught of the evil one. The breastplate covers the vitals of the body. The body can withstand an arrow in the legs or in an arm, but it cannot withstand an arrow in the stomach or heart or lungs. The breastplate is absolutely essential to stand against the evil one.

Now righteousness is a long word, but its meaning is not complicated. Righteousness is simply doing right. Righteousness provides us with a very valuable instrument of warfare against our foe. It is the breastplate.

So in our picture of the Christian soldier, righteousness is a breastplate. To sin. Say to lie or do wrong things with those electrical gadgets and the internet today, all such things weaken our breastplate and we will slowly crumble under the power of the wicked one. Jesus taught us to pray, "...and deliver us from evil..." I think a literal translation reads, "...and deliver us from the evil one..." And how does God deliver us from the evil one? Well, by our learning the truth and by our obedience to it! We cannot stand there when we do not spend time in the truth, or when we live wrong! That is an impossibility. And to put on the breastplate of righteousness we must first know the truth as to what is right.

3. The Gospel Footwear (15) *

We move on to verse 15, and the Gospel footwear. It says, "...and having shod your feet with the preparation of the Gospel of peace." This phrase is difficult. The difficulty comes with the word 'preparation'. There are two main views of what is meant here. One, we are to have our feet shod with preparedness at all times to share the Gospel. There are various arguments that well support that view which I will not take time for.

The second view takes this word translated 'preparation' in its second sense of a foundation. Vine says, "If that is the meaning in Ephesians 6:14, the gospel itself is to be the firm footing of the

believer..." In other words, the Gospel is this soldier's foundation or sure footing.

Now in the context I prefer the second view, though the first would clearly be true, but I think that is not what is in mind here. The context is standing against the wiles of the devil. ****Add here** But it is further instructive on how the word gospel is modified in our sentence. It is the 'gospel of peace.' When you have that truth, that gospel that produces righteousness, and which is the source of peace, that peace will give to this soldier traction that not even Satan himself can push over. When a man has true peace, peace from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, it helps him to face anything. This peace, the peace the Gospel brings is an absolutely essential part of the Christian soldier's gear. It is like cork boots to a logger; or good running shoes to a racer and so on.

4. The Shield of Faith (16)

We have come now to the shield of faith. It is worth noting that it says, "...above all, taking the shield of faith..." Now one might wonder why this point is not first if it is above all. But certainly before one can take up the shield of faith one must have come to what truth is as regards the spiritual life of man. There are myriads of views and which one is right? Let me recommend a sermon on sermonaudio.com/lhec called "Ten Proofs That The Bible Is The Word Of God." Before one can have the true faith, one must find the truth. That is one of man's greatest dilemmas.

But having come to the truth, one now has a lifetime of learning and growing in faith. Many years ago when I preached on this passage I missed an important truth right here. You see, when we talk about faith in light of the Christian life, one may speak of saving faith (Eph. 2:8-9, Rom. 3:22); or one might speak of the Christian's gift of faith (Rom. 12:3, 1 Cor. 12:9), or one might speak of the Christian faith as opposed to all other faiths or beliefs. This last one speaks of the whole of the Christian faith and includes creation, salvation and on and on. And in our passage before us, in the original it says we are

to take up the shield of THE faith. That, I believe, is the sum total of the Christian faith.

There are many things important for us to do in order to take up the shield of faith. As much as possible, we must read and study the Word of God ourselves. We must fellowship with other true Christians. We must sit under the teaching and preaching of sound doctrine. We must learn to meditate on the Scriptures. Then we must obey the truths we learn. These are absolutely essential to taking up the shield of the faith.

5. The Helmut of Salvation (17a)

Then, in 17a we are instructed to take the helmet of salvation. Consider for a moment, the importance of the head on the body. You can transplant many parts of the body, but you cannot transplant the head. In the Bible, it uses various body parts to seek to explain the immaterial parts of man. For example, it says, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your mind." When it says, "...with all your mind..." the word is not actually mind. It is the word 'dianoia' which I would translate literally as a *thinking through*. It is only one aspect of the heart, or the mind, which has more parts to it. In Scripture, it is the word 'heart' that speaks of the mind. For example, Scripture says, "As a man thinks in his heart, so is he." The heart is the physical organ that is likened to the mind in the immaterial. And the organ in the body where the mind does its work is the brain. As the heart is the vital center of the physical body, so the mind is the vital center of the soul. Shut down the physical heart and man is finished physically. Shut down man's mind in the immaterial, and he is finished. Thus, when you shut down the brain in man's body, you have what we call a vegetable.

God and Satan are at war. The place where that war takes place is the mind of man. And if you picture him as a soldier, it is the head that houses the most crucial place as far as strategy and such in warfare. It is in the heart, or the mind, which is governed by the physical brain while we are in this body, that the Scriptures give direction. It is there that all

decisions are made for good or for evil. It is there that God or Satan win.

Now look at our soldier as we have him thus far. He has girded his clothing with his belt, the truth. On it he can hang other things he will need in battle. He has the breastplate of righteousness on. He has his feet shod with good shoes for the battle. He has the shield of faith. But his head is bare. You can imagine what the enemy would immediately go for, if he did not cover his head. And so Paul instructs the Christian to put on the helmet. And he calls it the helmet of salvation.

Now this word salvation is important. What aspect of salvation does it refer to? What tense of salvation does it refer to? Past, present or future? Well, we do not have much time to spend here. Let me just say that only four times in the NT does the word 'salvation' occur in the neuter gender and that is the case here. My conclusion is it refers to all of salvation in all its tenses and senses.

It is our salvation that protects the most important area of our body, the place of the mind. You will remember that when David went against Goliath, that he went for the one unprotected area of Goliath's head. And by doing so, he beat a man two or three times his size. And if Satan can get us in our mind, we are finished. So the helmet of salvation is a very crucial piece of God's armor for the Christian.

6. The Sword of the Spirit (17b)

The last piece of the soldier's equipment Paul mentions is the sword. It is the only offensive piece. And we are clearly told what Paul meant by the sword. It is the Word of God. Many times I have challenged you to read through the Word of God and many of you are doing that. I cannot overstress the importance of that. Read your Bibles! Then seek to learn to understand it as much as you can and learn to use it against the forces of darkness!

[Only if time: Now I thought if I had time I would mention one other thing here. We have talked about taking up the shield of THE faith. It is the sum

total of the Christian faith that deflects all the fiery darts of the wicked one. I understand that when the enemy first advanced, he would shoot fiery darts over the defenses of the city. These fiery darts were burning and whenever they hit something flammable, they would start a fire. If any part of the body was exposed, the clothing would start burning. Or other important things in the city might start burning, threatening the whole city if the darts were not dealt with. And if one left one's stand against the enemy to fight these fires, now one was distracted and in more danger of being hit by a fiery dart.

And what I want to add here is that the fiery darts are not the actual battle. They are the preliminary actions to the real battle. Once enough damage was done by the fiery darts, now the enemy would be able to enter the city, and hand to hand combat would take place. This was the real battle. And it is when this real battle takes place between us and the spiritual enemy, that we must know how to use the sword of the Spirit.

-Now remember that this is a spiritual battle. And we must fight this battle with spiritual equipment. And this sword is the sword of the Spirit. That is the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit battles against Satan, but He uses us to do so. And in order for the Holy Spirit to be able to overcome Satan, we must know the Word of God so that He can use us to fight through. This sword, is the sword of the Spirit.]

7. Prayer (18-20)

In years past I have stressed again and again the importance of prayer. Let us just note it in verses 18-20 before we close (read). All of spiritual battles are to fought in the context of prayer.

CONCL: So we conclude for this morning. We have just entered 2015. And this morning we have considered the subject of standing strong in the last days. We are in the last days! We have an enemy that will destroy us if he possibly can. And if he cannot destroy us, he will keep us as useless as possible. And if you will become useful in way for the Lord, you will meet this enemy.

Satan has many methods, and many demons. Let me encourage you to press on and to do what Paul instructs us to. First, put on the belt of truth. Buy the truth and sell it not, says the book of Proverbs. Truth costs; and we can be tempted to sell it. But the very first piece of armor mentioned is truth. From the truth we learn what righteousness is, and when we live right, it becomes a breastplate to us. Then comes the shield of the faith; the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit.

And in all of that, we are to pray always with all prayer and with all supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints. That is how to stand fast in the last days, as Satan puts on his last great efforts against the Church.