

It's Time for Strength

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The expectations that you bring to life will inevitably create the sense of perspective that you have as you go through life and as a believer in Christ, if you have an expectation that Christ saved you in order to make your life easy and prosperous and free of difficulty and that his primary responsibility is to remove obstacles out of your way, you're going to have a certain expectation of ease in life and then when life inevitably does not work out that way, you'll struggle and you'll wonder why things are like they are. "Why am I struggling because I expected the Christian life to be easy. I expected that Christ would deliver me from my problems and my problems would go away and I would just live in this blissful sense of happiness until I was ushered on a chariot of fire into heaven." Well, you all know by sad personal experience that life isn't like that and so something is wrong and what many teachers will do is say, "Well, the problem is with you because you do not have sufficient faith. If you had enough faith, you would not be experiencing these problems and God would deliver you." All of that is bogus. It's a complete misrepresentation of salvation. It really has nothing to do with biblical truth whatsoever and we're going to see that as we turn to Ephesians 6 this morning. Ephesians 6:10 and 11 will be our text for this morning and I invite you to turn there with me.

For those of you that are new to our church, those of you maybe visiting for the first or second time, we are completing soon a verse-by-verse study of the book of Ephesians which we began some 12 to 18 months ago and we are coming up to this concluding passage that begins in chapter 6, verse 10 and 11. Look at it with me where the Apostle Paul, speaking to Christians says,

10 Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might. 11 Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil.

And we'll save this text for exposition later but verse 12 you need to see as well, it says, "For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places." Paul says as he's wrapping up this exposition, this exhortation to the church, he says, "We are in the midst of a struggle," and therefore he says, "You be strong in the Lord. You be strong in the strength of his might." So right there in a simple presupposition that Paul says, "Well, we are having is struggle, aren't we?" Right there in

the text you see that there is an expectation that there will at times be a struggle to your Christian life and just knowing that it's like that can be a great encouragement to you. You say, "Oh, well, if my expectation is that there will be a struggle in the Christian life because I'm walking through this life as a Christian and there is a spiritual realm that intersects with life that is filled with spiritual forces of wickedness," then all of a sudden you're going to view life from a completely different set of expectations and it's going to drive you rather than to a despairing sense of, "I must not have enough faith," when the struggle comes, you say, "Oh, I need to abandon any sense of dependence in myself and cling once more afresh to my Christ and to find strength in Christ and not in myself." And that's what we're going to see as we go along here this morning.

Paul opens this passage up and he says, "Finally." Look at it there with me, chapter 6, verse 10, he says, "Finally." He is signaling that he's turning the corner and he's bringing the letter to a conclusion. That's very important. He is rounding third and heading for home, you might say, with what he's about to say but he's bringing home something of great significance that wraps up the totality of what he said. He's bringing into final focus the totality of what he has said from the very beginning of the letter. If you understand that much as we move into this passage, you're going to be way ahead of the game in understanding what's going on. Paul is bringing to focus what happens now that he has completed his exposition of Christian doctrine and his exhortation of Christian duty in the first three chapters of Ephesians.

You know, I just like looking out and seeing you guys and this is a great time of love for me to be able to share these things with you as your pastor and to just know that what God's word has to say to you in some of the struggles that you're going through and knowing the struggles that life brings to each one of you, it's weird, in one sense, the dynamic that goes on when you're standing here and you look out and you're preaching to the same people week after week and you know the challenges and the doubts and the struggles that you're going through and to have this great sense of expectation that God is going to bless you in the next 50 minutes because you know, speaking as the speaker, you know that what's about to come is exactly what each one of you needs to hear. In each of your situations, what you are about to hear is exactly what you need and I'm so glad that you're here today. So just know that as I'm speaking to you today, that this is exactly the text that God has appointed for you to hear today, hear it with a sense of expectation and know that if you're a Christian that the Holy Spirit dwells within you in order to give a special measure of supernatural power to bring this home to your heart. So it's with a great sense of love and expectation that I share these things with you. I'm so excited to be able to do this. There is nothing greater in my life than to be able to do this with you week by week. So as we articulate the truth of the passage, that's the spirit in which we receive it from our Lord here today.

Beloved, what you must do is you must see Ephesians as a whole to grasp the significance of the text that we're going to look at, those two verses, verses 10 and 11. Just by way of a brief, really quick overview, in Ephesians 1, 2, and 3, what Paul basically said was God has saved you and he has giving you new life in Christ. He praises God for that, he says, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ

who has blessed you with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ." And he is just magnifying God because God has been so gracious and so powerful to give you spiritual life when you were dead in your trespasses and sins. And Paul's heart is bursting with praise to God for what he has done in the lives of his readers and we step into the place of those readers today. We step into their sandals, as it were, as those who have received a like precious faith. God has also saved us as Christians and now we stand in their position and what Paul said to them 2,000 years ago is the same thing that we need to hear today. So what Paul does in those first three chapters is he says, "Let me explain to you exactly what God has done. It was not of yourselves. It was by grace through faith and now God has given you, has appointed for you a life to live where you can glorify him." That's the first three chapters in a nutshell. As he pivots into chapter 4, verse 1, through chapter 6, verse 9, what's he doing except saying, "Here's how you must live now as a result of this. In the church, in your character, in your marriage, in your parenting and in responding to your parents, in your workplace, here is the way that salvation works itself out in the particular details of your life." And if you want to review all of this, there are 66 messages on our website that would cover everything that I just said in a little bit more detail. And the whole sum of all of that is now completed. Paul has wrapped it all up. He said here's who you are and here's what you must do.

Now, he sends you off, as it were, he sends us off into daily life having explained the doctrine, having explained the duty, now he's sending you out into daily life to implement this in the circumstances that God has appointed for your life at this particular day, at this particular season in your life. And what does he do? And, oh, I'm probably going to lose it here in the next couple of minutes if I let myself go and I just may let myself go because I feel like doing that. Paul here is bringing all of this to a conclusion and if the prevailing sentiment of 21st century churches was true, you would expect Paul to give you a lighthearted closing with a few chuckles thrown in because, after all, we want to be cool and we want to be happy and we want to make things seem light and easy and let it go down nice and in a refreshing way. Within the past year with churches within 30 minutes of this area, I've seen churches who were doing a rodeo; I've seen churches who had pastors on the platform doing the Ickey Shuffle in a Bengals uniform; I've seen them doing other manners of foolish things designed to entertain and to make people laugh; pastors dancing and riding bulls in their auditorium. Beloved, let me ask you a question: does that begin to communicate the fact that the Christian life is serious and it is a struggle? Does it begin to take seriously the doctrine and the duty that the inspired word of God has brought to us in the book of Ephesians? Or does it communicate something else? Oh yeah, the other thing that just popped into my mind. I knew they were three things, the other thing is the Super Bowl of preaching where you have competing speakers and a guy in a football referee uniform throwing flags when supposedly the guy says something wrong. This is not serious, you get that, right? This communicates that there is nothing really too significant at stake and we can do and entertain you and everything is really cool and so after we've talked about doctrine and duty, we'll put on a show and send you out with the expectation that everything is just going to be a big chuckle on your way to heaven. Beloved, I ask you as you look at the text here in Ephesians 6, is that the attitude, does that properly communicate the spirit of what Paul is saying here in Ephesians 6:10 and 11? Answer that question for yourself and answer it

well because the answer to that question will determine what you expect out of a church, out of a pulpit; if someone is going to be speaking for God, you will look for something depending on the way that you respond to what I just said.

And yeah, do you know what? I get upset about it. I get a little bit passionate about it. Why? Because as I was saying earlier, because I care for your soul; because I want things to go well for you; I want you to grow in Christ; I want you to have a wondrous entrance into heaven and to have the Lord Jesus greet you with a sense of affirmation. And I know that the dogs that are doing the entertainment like what we're describing are leading people in masses away from that and so I can't speak about that without getting a little bit involved in what I'm saying. And what you have here in the text in front of you right now, you can read it with your own eyes and see what you should expect.

How did Paul treat the truth that he had just said? Look at verses 10 and 11 with me again. He says, "Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might." Why do you need to be strong? Because you're weak. Why do you need strong? Why do you need might? Because it's a battle. Why does it need to be in the Lord that you find your strength? Because Satan is real and there are supernatural forces of wickedness seeking to destroy you. Does a rodeo communicate that? Does a referee on the platform communicate that? Does a pastor doing the Ickey Shuffle communicate that to you? I'm not upset with you, you get that, right? I'm trying to warn you of the environment in which you live so that you would know to flee it and come to the truth that we find only in the Scripture. That's why we say these things. We need to be protected. We need to understand. We could add another dimension to it in the church that just continually asks you for money, money, money, money, money. Give me your money. Are they communicating to you a concern for your soul that you're in the midst of a spiritual battle that could destroy your soul and so they speak to you with urgency? Yeah, they are urgent all right, they're urgent to get their hand in your wallet but who is telling you the truth of God about the concern of your soul? We find that only in the Scripture.

So having set that aside and set the stage like that, beloved, Scripture says it will be a struggle for you in your spiritual life. You know that by personal experience if you been a Christian for any length of time and now God's word brings help to you. God gives you the sense that you are sufficient in Christ for the task at hand. Two things that Paul tells you in this text that completely set you up to be able to walk through the struggle as a victorious soldier in Christ.

Let me give you one more example and just to give you a ridiculous hypothetical that will help you. There are veterans in our midst, people that have served our country in the military. Thank you for your service. Our forces are engaged in combat overseas. Can you imagine in light of what we were saying about, first of all, Paul says that there is a spiritual battle going on and the stakes are high and the forces are lethal, spiritually speaking, can you imagine those of you that have, as I do, you have a child that is serving our country, can you imagine if our armed forces sent people into Afghanistan and the way that they train them and the way that they sent them out was to put them in a clown suit and put a big red nose to go out and face a force, to go out and face an enemy that

was designed for their destruction, and that their military training was a comedy act? Well, we're talking here today about something that transcends wars of men and we're going to treat it as a joke? You understand why inside I'm collapsing and weeping inside, right? That's not right. The men who are doing that are traitors to God and they are traitors to their audience. Where are the pastors who reflect the Puritan mindset that I speak as a dying man to dying men. My time will be gone soon enough and yours will be too. Where is the urgency that reflects that eternal matters are at stake, I ask you?

So with that in mind, now having said all of these things, what I want you to understand is that what we're about to embark on is a great encouragement to you, to know the truth and to know the reality of the battle and to know that you're equipped for it is a source of great encouragement. It gives you a sense that, "Okay, I know what the reality is. I know what Christ calls me too. I know how Christ has equipped me." So you're ready to move into that struggle with a sense of confidence and expectation that Christ is with you but you know how to fight the battle. It won't be with a clown suit on, it will be with the full armor of God clothing you for the battle that he has called you to.

Two things that I want you to see here today, first of all, using kind of the military language that Paul uses here as he talks about the armor of God, first of all, beloved, what should you do as a Christian now that the totality of Ephesians has been laid out before you? Point 1: take your position. Take your position. Here's what you need to understand, my friends, you need to understand that godly living requires strength that goes beyond your human ability. Godly living requires strength that goes beyond your human ability.

Look at chapter 6, verse 10 with me, "Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might." There is such an incredible amount of content packed into these two verses. First of all, beloved, I want you to see something really important: your Lord who has made himself known through this word speaks to you through this text, Ephesians 6, and gives you a command. This is an imperative from God upon your soul. Not a suggestion. Not a fluffy little devotional thought. This is a command and it's actually an ongoing command here in verse 10 at that. God commands you. Scripture compels you to draw upon the Lord Jesus Christ as a consistent matter of your approach to life. One writer said it this way and he's drawing a contrast between a sense of self-sufficiency and self-dependency and abandoning that and consciously depending on Christ and drawing upon the spiritual resources that are ours in the Lord. The writer said that in this passage you breathe out your dependency, your self-dependency, and you breathe in your dependency on Christ: not me, you. That kind of sense. God holds you accountable to draw upon Christ as a consistent pattern of your life. Now, I know that many of you feel weak as you're walking through life and you feel the struggle and the weight of it and, like I say, that's to be expected. You are weak. I am weak. We are weak. Beloved, that weakness, in the midst of that weakness, the command that comes to you is you be strong in the Lord. In other words, you remind yourself that you have been supernaturally saved by a Christ who is with you and has promised to sustain you through the time and you draw upon that. You remind yourself of that. You depend upon that. You lean on that.

Now, some teachers and this is a great technique to sell books, some teachers, oh, I'm just beside myself with the things I want to say today. Some teachers love to display their doubts in the pulpit, their failures in sin, and to talk about these things and they do it because it's supposed to be authentic and connect them with their audience; instead of expositing God's word, they exposit the struggles of their own empty soul and, "I question this, and I wonder about this and how could God do that?" and it just becomes a weak insipid display of self-centered thinking. Well, beloved, honestly, compare that to what Paul says here is a command to every Christian, not just pastors, he said, "You be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might." When you hear a sissified man talking like that, you ask yourself, "Is this manifesting the strength of the Lord that Scripture calls us all to?" Ask yourself that and say, "No, it's not. Well then, why am I listening to this drivel. Let me move on to something else," because what that kind of preaching does, it might sell books because people have been dominated by an Oprah mindset and everybody just wants to emote and connect emotionally; it might do that but do you know what it does in the life of a Christian? It injects confusion and weakness instead. It sends cannonballs at the foundation of why people walk with Christ. It doesn't communicate strength. It doesn't communicate manliness. You know, Scripture says, "Be a man," 1 Corinthians 16. So this passage, this little brief passage gives us a great window into what's happening around us, doesn't it? You bet it does.

Moving from speakers to individual Christians and now maybe just being a little more directly pastoral to you here: some Christians easily excuse their own unfaithfulness to Bible reading, Bible study, prayer, meeting with God's people. They've got 1,000,001 excuses as to why I can't do it today. I can't do it there, and yet they claim a cloak of spirituality to that. They glorify their own mediocrity. They redefine faithfulness to those things, to those principles, to those means of grace. They redefine faithfulness as legalism and say, "I'm not under the bondage of law to those things." So they abandon the very means that God has given to make Christians strong: his word, his prayer, fellowship with other believers, and so their weakness becomes that which they parade and excuse.

For those of us in this room, for those of you listening on the live stream, not so. Not with you. This is not how we live as Christians. This is not the way that we respond to our Christ who gave himself on a cross to redeem us from our sins. Beloved, what you need to do, what you need to embrace in your heart, what you need to say to yourself is, "I am going to rise to the command of this text. I am going to rise up to it. I am going to be strong in the Lord. I am going to be strong in the strength of his might." And when you continue on and when you look at the Scripture, you see how important this is to Paul at this point. Remember, he's done expositing the doctrine. He's done exhorting us to duty. And what's the take away now that all of that is finished and behind us in the text, look at what he says. Look at what he says, verse 10, I want you to see the whole context of it even though we're not going to cover all these verses today. Verse 10 he says, "Now finally, in light of everything I've said, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might." Verse 11, "You'll be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil." Verse 13, "Therefore, take up the full armor of God, having done everything, stand firm." Verse 14, "Stand firm therefore." You see, this is a trumpet call to Christian character. It's a

clarion blast saying, "Come and be a soldier for Christ. Be strong in him, not accepting weakness and mediocrity and insipid leadership from those about you."

Here's what you need to see, beloved: this is not a call to self-confidence. That's the last thing that it is. It is a stark reminder that your strength as a Christian is outside of you. Your strength belongs and comes from Christ himself, not from inside your own resources. What does that mean? It means that you must consciously draw upon Christ. You must remember who the sovereign Lord of the universe is. You must remember and draw upon the fact that this sovereign Lord who says, "No one will ever pluck you out of my hand," is the one who has saved you and you trust in him. You rely on Christ. You set your confidence in the future based on the fact that Christ is Lord of all. He is Lord of your soul and you don't go by and interpret life by what you see with your physical eyes. You rest in that which has been revealed in Scripture to you about the Lord who saved you and changed you. You're strong in Christ and you remember that.

Now, some of these things are just so logical it's almost painful. These things just flow from one another in the ordered nature of God's word. You say, "Okay, I'm going to be strong in Christ. I embrace that, in the strength of his might." Well, ask a question then: how strong is he? How strong is Christ? Do you know what? Paul spent his whole letter building up to this point, laying the foundation to be able to answer exactly that question. Go back to Ephesians 1 and let me remind you of one glorious text that we studied far too long ago. Ephesians 1, Paul is praying beginning in verse 15. He says in verse 16, I am making mention of you in my prayers. "What are you praying, Paul? Clue me into your prayer life. An apostle is praying for me? What are you saying?" He says, "I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, would give to you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him." He's praying for your understanding. Verse 18, what specifically is he praying? He says, "I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you will know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints," and look how verse 19 clues right into what we're saying here in chapter 6, "and I pray that you would know the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe." He's praying that God would open your understanding and expand your mind to somehow embrace the power that is at work in you. And what is that power? Verse 19, "These are in accordance with the working of the strength of His might." Be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. What is that strength? What is that might? Verse 20, it's the might that "brought about Christ, when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places."

How strong is Christ? Resurrection strong. So strong that death cannot hold him in its clutches. That's how strong Christ is. You want a sense of power? I know some of you don't like thinking about the kinds of things that I'm going to go into here but just stay with me even if it makes you a little uncomfortable. Imagine, if you would, going into a cemetery, going into a graveyard, maybe standing next to the grave of someone that you loved that has gone on before you and you miss them, and from the depths of your burdened heart you look at that grave and say, "Loved one, come out. Loved one, come out!" What's going to happen? Nothing. Nothing's going to happen. Why? Because you

do not have power over death. Do you know what happens when God speaks to death? Do you know what happens when Christ speaks to death? What happened with Lazarus in the tomb? Christ went to that tomb and said, "Lazarus, come forth!" And what happened? Lazarus came forth. Christ said, "Unbind him and let him go." What happened when death personifying it, put Christ in the tomb? What did Christ do? He came out. Death doesn't have that power over him. What Paul is praying here in Ephesians 1 is saying, "I want you to understand and I'm asking God to help you understand that the power that is at work in your Christian life is the same power over death; the same power of the resurrection that raised Christ from the dead is the exact same power that raised you from spiritual death and gave you a new nature and new life in Christ." He says, "I want you to understand that that's the power that's at work in you." That's how strong Christ is.

Look over at chapter 3. Paul prays in a similar manner once more. You see, Paul is engaging spiritual realities in earnest serious prayer. Draw your cues, beloved, about what 21st-century ministry should look like not by what everybody's doing but by the cues of the text. That tells us what ministry should look like. And what's the apostle doing? The one personally appointed by the resurrected Christ, what does he do as he is interacting with Christians? He says, "For this reason I bow my knees before the Father." He's praying once more and what does he pray in verse 16? "I pray that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power." You see it again: strength, might, power inside. He says, "I'm asking God to strengthen you with power through His Spirit in the inner man so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; and that you, being rooted and grounded in love, would understand the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God. Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think," here it is again, "according to the power that works within us, to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen."

Power wrapped in an unbreakable cord of God's love for your soul. That's the strength that we draw upon. Power that has been manifested to humanity through the resurrection of Christ, which by revelation God has said is the same power that saved you, understand that that power is at work in you and the reasons that God did this is because he has this incalculable, unselfish love that seeks your spiritual good. Paul says, "Oh, Father, help them by their spirit to see it, to grasp it," and now as we get to chapter 6, we see why this was so crucial. There is a high call of God on our lives. There is a high duty to us that we are insufficient to meet on our own. Not only that, it's not just a matter of human limitations, we are in the midst of a spiritual battle with Satan and spiritual wicked forces arrayed against us designed to make us fail. Paul knows all of that. He knew where he was going in this letter when he was praying and now here in verses 10 and 11, he says, "Oh, beloved, be strong in the Lord, in the strength of his might." He has already told you how strong that is, that's resurrection power. That's prevailing conquering love for your soul. Look outside of yourself and find that power.

Do you know what this means, beloved? Do you know what this means? Do you know? Do you know what this means? I'll tell you what this means: it means that Jesus Christ as he is revealed in the Scriptures is sufficient for you to live a godly life. You don't need a lot of human programs. You don't need human wisdom. You don't need human psychology mixed into the mix. All that does is break down what makes it strong. Christ revealed in Scripture is sufficient for you to live a godly life. Look at chapter 6, verse 11, he says, "Put on the full armor of God." So here in verse 10 it was a command to a way of life. He said, "As a way of life, you be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might." Now it's a different verb tense in the original language in verse 11, now it's a verb tense, it's an imperative that communicates urgency. It says, "This is really important. It's urgent that you act on this now, that you settle this in your mind and you make a decisive move in this direction. You put on the full armor of God." He goes on in the rest of the chapter to describe what that full armor is. We'll look at that in the next two or three weeks but basically he's saying, "You take on the complete equipment, the complete spiritual resources that God," watch this, "has already given to you. Take that, appropriate it and go into battle so that you can succeed in your spiritual life; so that you would glorify God in the midst of this world which is under the control of the evil one," 1 John 5.

Here's the thing, beloved: not everybody does this. Not every Christian does this. Beloved, here's what you need to see: oh, beloved, it doesn't happen automatically. If it happened automatically and every Christian lived this way, there would be no need for the command; there would be no need for an imperative from the inspired writing of God's word from Christ's apostle commanding you to do this if it just happened automatically. So Paul knowing this, says, "I command you in the name of Christ, take up the armor of God so that you will be able to stand firm against of the schemes of the devil." This requires spiritual effort on your part. This is a call for you to consciously recognize, oh, there is just so much here, you must consciously recognize that you are a finite creature in the midst of a supernatural battle. You must realize that you have indwelling sin that tempts you away from this battle, that calls you to compromise in truces with the devil. You must realize that there are hostile forces arrayed against you. You recognize all of that and you say, "I can't do this on my own. I am weak. I am mortal. Time is flying by and I am spiritually mediocre," because only from that position will you begin to say and from a sincere, earnest, urgent heart say, "O God, help me to appropriate that which Christ has done. O God, I remember that in Christ there is resurrection power. O God, I see in your word what you have called me to do. O God, help me to rise to the occasion and be that which you would have me to be." Just as Paul prayed, "Father, strengthen me, strengthen those I love, strengthen those in my church, strengthen my elders so that they would live this way in the power of Christ because on our own we can't do it."

What does that do except drive spiritual pride out of your heart. You know, the reason that professing Christians are indifferent to Scripture and indifferent to a life of prayer, the reason that they are indifferent is because there is settled self-sufficiency in their heart. They say, "This isn't that important." That's why Christians live that way, it's because they don't even see the battle. They don't see the need for the resources and so

they just kind of saunter along, and if they don't like the sound of battle, well, they'll go someplace where the sound of battle isn't being sounded and they'll laugh at the Ickey Shuffle on the platform, laughing themselves all the way to slumber and spiritual defeat. Well, not for you, beloved. Not for you. Recognize that there is a command on your soul to strengthen yourself, to be strong in the Lord and to draw upon that and to realize that the way that he has done that is revealed in his word and is drawn upon in prayer. So, really, and in fellowship with his people, so really you do have to ask yourself as you realize these things, you do have to come and you really have to humble yourself and say, "Let me take an honest look at my life. What is the role of God's word? What is the role of prayer in my life? Where does fellowship with God's people fit into my order of priorities?" And in that, you will see whether you are seeking to be strong in the Lord or not, and the fact that that's convicting to some of you, I can't help except to let that call you as that convicts you, to call you out of your self-sufficiency, your pride and indifference and to be strong in the Lord while there is still time.

And what do you do? This whole point was know your position, take your position, what is your position? Chapter 1, verse 3, Paul opened it up this way. Beloved, even as you're feeling the conviction of some of these things, understand that God has met you with grace already and has supplied everything that you need to respond properly and to move in a different direction going forward because it says in verse 3, chapter 1, verse 3, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ." God has already given to you everything that you need to live a godly life. Now he calls you, now he commands you, now he impels you, take it up and live that way. And, beloved, I just have to kind of wrap this all up here, having said these things, now that you have heard these things, you are accountable for them and if you know that you have lived a spiritually mediocre life, you're at a fork in the road in response to God's word here. You can't go out and live the same way you've been living as if what God says in his word really isn't that important. Put on the full armor of God. Take your position. Strengthen yourself in the Lord.

That's point 1. Now, here's a question for you: why is it so vital for you to humbly draw upon those resources? Why is it so important? Point 2, we said take your position, number 2: know your opposition. Know your opposition. You live for Christ in the midst of supernatural hostility against him and against you. Look at chapter 6, verse 11, Paul says, "Put on the full armor of God, so that," here's why, "so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil." You see, beloved, the biblical world is not materialistic in the sense that all that is real and all that exists can be summed up by what we can see, touch, and feel and what we experience with our physical senses. The world as it truly exists is not simply like that. It's not simply materialistic. There is more to reality than what you experience in your observations and with your powers of human thinking. Scripture presents to us a spiritual realm that is populated with wicked forces that actively oppose Christ and Christians who live for him. Satan, the devil, is identified by name here in verse 11 and, look, I realize that for skeptics and the atheists who mock us and talk about slinging their different arrows against us, I realize that they would laugh at this and do you know what? I don't care. I don't care one bit about that. What I care about is what God's word says because this is reality, this is truth, and what God's words

says is over and over again, it presents the devil as a real, spiritual, evil, supernatural being. He is a real, powerful, supernatural opponent, watch this, with deceptive and destructive schemes to hinder us in our walk with Christ. You can't see him. You can't feel him. You can't smell him. And so the very purpose of your life is being resisted by a force that is supernaturally greater than you and is designed on your destruction. Paul says, "That's why I want you to take your position in Christ. That's why you need to be strong in the Lord."

And what can we say about Satan? What is Satan like? Well, what has he done over the course of time? In the garden of Eden, he cast doubt on God's goodness and truthfulness and flowing from that was the fall of humanity. Later, he tempted Christ to sin. Scripture says he deceives people through false teaching. He blinds their eyes to truth. He draws men away from God through the central forces of our society. That's what you're up against. Scripture emphasizes this elsewhere. Peter said in 1 Peter 5:8, he said, "Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour." Who is he looking to devour? You. Pastor Kent Hughes said it well, he said, "Satan is immensely powerful imitating God's power and presence with his demonic hosts. He is evil beyond our comprehension and without conscience or principle. He is diabolically cunning and he is after us with all of the forces of deception and division and destruction, taking no prisoners, delighting in our harm."

You know, sometimes in times past, I have thought, perhaps I've heard people say, "You know, why does Satan do this when Christ has conquered him at the cross? If he knows that his end is doomed, why does he do this? Why doesn't he just give up knowing the outcome?" Well, it's a measure of his evil, it's a measure of his wickedness, it's a measure of his malice that he doesn't care. Even if time is short, even if the result is fixed, he is delighted to wreak whatever havoc, destruction, deception and harm and difficulty and discouragement upon us that he possibly can while he has the opportunity to do it. It's frightening. It's sobering. It's humbling. You say, "I can't even see this happening." That's right. "What am I supposed to do then?" Well, if you're not a Christian, do you see how you should flee to Christ for salvation not only from your own sin but flee to Christ for salvation from the supernatural force arrayed against your soul? If you are a Christian, do you see how much you need to be strengthened in the Lord, strengthened in his word and drawing day by day, hour by hour, moment by moment on the power of Christ and saying, "Lord, help me here. Give me discernment there. Help me be godly here. Forgive me there." And your whole life is just a breathing in and out of dependency on Christ.

When did you last think that way, beloved? When did it last occur to you that you needed the power of Christ to defend you against Satanic forces? That window of time is a measure of your need for spiritual growth and your need to abandon your self-sufficiency. You see, your Christian life is part of a greater conflict between God and Satan. God's going to win. Satan's destruction is sure but in the meantime, this is the realm in which we live and the call of our Commander upon us is, "Be strong for the battle." That's why you must be strong in the Lord. You are too weak to survive Satan on your own. People wonder why did that pastor fall into sin? He was preaching God's word week by week by week? Well, he may have been doing that, he may have been doing his

exegesis but do you know what? He wasn't walking in the strength of the Lord and that's what exposed him to defeat and to shame and to be fallen on the battlefield. It's more than just going through motions. Beloved, you cannot walk in a manner that is worthy of Christ unless you are drawing upon him day by day, moment by moment.

So you must humble yourself. You're not sufficient. Did you hear me? You are not sufficient for what God's word calls you to. You must confess your spiritual inability and consistently draw on Christ and his word and in prayer. Only then will you win the battle against this supernatural foe. Beloved, God has given you the armor. Now he commands you, he calls you, "Put it on and go forth." No more excuses for mediocrity. I'll say it one more time, beloved, as a plea to you, as though I'm begging you in your Christian life, if you don't care, know that your elders care and therefore beg you: no more excuses for mediocrity in your spiritual life. It's time for strength against the foe.

Let's bow together in prayer.

Our Father, corporately we confess our weakness and our need for Christ. Corporately we thank you that the power of the resurrection is at work in our own lives and that it is a greater power than Satan could ever muster, "Greater is he who is in us than he who is in the world." And yet, Father, the foe is real and the battle is real and so we ask you to strengthen us in the might of Christ, in the might of his resurrection, and help us to stand firm against the many schemes of the devil. Father, I pray for that person who has been convicted by this. Convict them all the way to repentance and faith in Christ, O God. Save their soul now. For the believers who have been convicted saying, "Oh, I'm in Christ but, wow, do I see how I have taken things for granted and been careless in the battle," to strengthen them, Father, with a sense of conviction that puts away decisively once for all spiritual mediocrity and takes on the armor of God and says, "I've got to reorient all of my priorities to give myself to God's word and to prayer in a way that is fitting of what I am called to." Help them to that end, O God. And Father, as we're praying, we would ask you for a spirit of repentance to come upon your broader church, especially in our wicked and depraved country. God, how can it be that churches naming the name of Christ could make their primary focus laughs and entertainment and lighthearted things when the house is burning down all around them and your word so clearly calls us to battle? How can that be, O God? Have mercy on your people. Father, we could never persuade people to do it differently. We don't have that power. That's part of the deception but, God, we ask you for the sake of the name of Christ, for the sake of your people who have been lulled to sleep, send out a trumpet call that would awaken us all to be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

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