

Be Strong In The Lord

Ephesians 6:10-20

With Study Questions

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8/25/2013*

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Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. ¹¹ Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. 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*. ¹³ Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. ¹⁴ Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness, ¹⁵ and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; ¹⁶ above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one. ¹⁷ And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God; ¹⁸ praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful (staying awake) to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints – ¹⁹ and for me, that utterance may be given to me, that I may open my mouth boldly to make known the mystery of the gospel, ²⁰ for which I am an ambassador in chains; that in it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak (Ephesians 6:10-20).

Introduction

I don't mean to complain, but sometimes life can be like a Cineplex where every theatre is playing Schindler's list. Respite is elusive. Melancholy seeks to evolve into despair. A friend who was privy to the numerous dramas gave a word of encouragement, deducing from the sanctifying effects of ordeals, testings, temptations and sifting that God must have great plans; "just because things are going wrong" he explained, "doesn't mean they're not going well!"

Having dinner with another couple, my wife and I presented the short list of some of these challenges (none having to do with our marriage, lest you be concerned). Christians should not be shocked at difficulties or

even tragedy – it is common to man. One needn't travel too far or search too deeply to stumble across the barbs and bristles in life. A few days after our dinner, I received a small parcel from the couple containing the uplifting gesture of a keychain. On the keychain was the inscription "BE STRONG IN THE LORD" from Ephesians 6:10. It was encouraging. Then I asked myself, what does that mean, to be strong in the Lord? In what context does the Bible say such a thing and how do I go about implementing what amounts to a command. It is, after all, in the imperative.

I thought I would read the short epistle and sneak up on the verse with my satchel full of context that I might more fully grasp the call of this great command. The survey looked something like this:

The Survey

The Apostle Paul offers three chapters of information revolving around the blessings bestowed upon the saints, **"every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ"** (Ephesians 1:3); He writes of the **"redemption through His (Christ's) blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace"** (1:7); Paul prays that we might know **"the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power"** (1:19); He gives the wonderful news that we have been **"made alive"** (2:1) according to God's **"rich mercy"** and **"great love"** (2:4); that Christ **"himself is our peace"** (2:14);

Paul labors that we might know **"the unsearchable riches of Christ"** (3:8); he **"bows (his) knees to the Father"** (3:14) that we might be **"able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height – ¹⁹ to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God"** (3:18, 19). For three chapters the saints are given news – it's like the reading of a will where the lawyer keeps heaping the riches of your inheritance upon the pile. It's as if the news is so rich and heavenly that the apostle must pause at the end of chapter 3 and offer a benediction before moving on with his letter.

Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in

us, ²¹ to Him *be* glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen (Ephesians 3:20, 21).

Finishing the benediction with an **“Amen”** Paul now launches into a new direction, calling us to **“walk worthy of the calling” (4:1)** of which we just read for three chapters – you’ve been made upright, quit living as if that’s not the case. The news is now accompanied by the challenge – the call of a sanctified life.

We are informed of the goal and the gifts given to equip us in this call that we might reach this **“unity of faith” (4:13); “to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ” (4:13);** Having been essentially informed that we are new men in Christ, we are now told to **“put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness” (4:24).**

He then becomes specific, no doubt addressing behaviors in the church that had come to his attention – **“lying, anger, stealing, corrupt words, bitterness, fornication, covetousness, drunkenness,”** etc. (4:25-5:20). Could things have been getting uncomfortable in the church as this was read? If not, perhaps the squirming would begin in the middle of chapter 5, where moves from specific behaviors to specific relationships.

Paul writes of how husbands and wives should view their stations, efforts and goals for one another (5:21-33); the children are admonished to obey their parents and fathers are warned against provoking their children (6:1-4); Servants are to obey their masters and masters are to quit **“threatening”** and keep in mind that they have their own **“Master”** in heaven (6:5-9).

His ink well running dry he begins his conclusion with the word **“finally” *loipou*** – of chapter 6:10. How could this not be a psychological and emotional roller coaster for the members of this church or any church? Paul had taken them from the glassy sea of the riches of heaven to what must have sounded like pointed accusations of their dismal failures. So we have the joy and praise for three chapters followed by three chapters of guilt and weakness, you wonder if some had not lost a bit of focus in the introspection, only to re-engage when Paul writes **“finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and the power of His might.”**

Strong In The Lord

“Be strong” doesn’t sound like ‘let go and let God’. It sounds more like something a manager would say to his boxer between rounds when he sees his athlete faltering – desiring to quit. Throwing in the towel is not an option. Of course in boxing, sometimes throwing in the towel (quitting) is the wise move. The match is lost and there is no chance – he’s tired, injured and simply beat. But Paul does not grant that alternative. You will continue to engage, you will fight and you will win. We can be assured of this because the sentence is not merely “be strong” but **“be strong in the Lord and the power of His might.”**

Paul had written of **“the immeasurable greatness of His power”** (1:19); how Christ is **“far above all rule and authority and power and dominion”** (1:21); in the benediction he wrote of **“the power at work within us”** (3:20). Paul beckons his readers to the first three chapters that they might remember who they are and what belongs to them. It can safely be said that Paul is drawing a great distinction between how enfeebled his readers might feel with the reality of their condition. Not only do they not want to come out for the next round, they don’t want to get out of bed. They feel weak, tired and drained. It doesn’t matter:

But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. ¹⁰ For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong (2 Corinthians 12:9, 10).

My own fatigue doesn’t hamshackle the power of God. The power of God, like an engine which spoke all things into being from nothing, then redeemed that very creation is said to be at work within us. **“Be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might”** is not an empty slogan. We are told to fight and we are promised a sure victory.

Blessed be the Lord, my rock, who trains my hands for war, and my fingers for battle; ² he is my steadfast love and my fortress, my stronghold and my deliverer, my shield and he in whom I take refuge, who subdues peoples under me (Psalm 144:1, 2).

It's been said,

Christ is the source of that spiritual strength which through faith is communicated to all his people. To be strong is our duty; to be weak is our sin. Strong trust, strong courage, strong endurance, strong hope, strong love, may all be had from him, if only our fellowship with him be maintained in uninterrupted vigour.¹

A Suitable Armor

It was perhaps here that Paul, adjusting his chains for comfort, took a closer look at the guard to which he was shackled and noticed his battle gear. We're in a battle which requires armor. Christians are to don the **"whole armor."** But it must be a suitable armor. So before listing the components of the battle gear, we must know who we are actually fighting.

From **"the wiles of the devil"** we must infer that there is a powerful, crafty and intellectual evil with whom we contend. It is not **"flesh and blood"** but a **"spiritual wickedness"**. That's why, when it gets right down to it, we must deemphasize whether I feel strong or weak. It's a categorical error. A sprained ankle may sideline me in a basketball game but it has no power to keep me from winning the academic decathlon. The spiritual armor does not contain a shot of adrenalin or a pocket full of cash.

We must also recognize that as awful the situation or evil the person, that is not the terrain of the true battle. These things are merely the fiery darts. We must resist being frustrated and angry at the fiery darts of life and know there is an evil bowman.

¹ *Ephesians*. 1909 (H. D. M. Spence-Jones, Ed.). The Pulpit Commentary (258). London; New York: Funk & Wagnalls Company.

To be **“strong in the Lord and in the power of His might”** we must recognize that it is not strength as man would measure strength.

Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the Lord our God (Psalm 20:7).

God knows where the true battle is and He has graciously provided the appropriate rigging that we might **“stand”** and **“stand against”** the evil and hardships of this sin-filled world. If we wish to be strong, we need to take the armor out of the closet and dress for battle. We are **“to leave nothing undone that can contribute to the success of the battle; then we shall be able to stand, or stand firm.”**²

The Stand

“Stand therefore” (6:14) is another imperative, and then Paul begins his list. Time restricts us from going into minute detail regarding each virtue, nor do I think it is necessary to overly emphasize how the attribute relates to the particular aspect of the armor. That righteousness is a breastplate because it guards our hearts may fit well but I think is not entirely necessary to Paul’s point.

Suffice it to say that if we wish to be **“strong in the Lord”** we must know and embrace the **“truth”**. Certainly Jesus is the Truth (John 14:6) and all this is for naught apart from that. But here I believe Paul is speaking of sincerity of mind – to be an honest person. We are to know guile when we see or hear it and rid our minds of it. The devil is a liar and the father of lies (John 8:44). If we have the guts to be honest it will shed enough light to keep from the snares and traps of sin.

Next Paul writes of the **“breastplate of righteousness.”** Again, there is a righteousness bestowed by the grace of God, the righteousness of Christ that comes by faith (Philippians 3:9). But that is not Paul’s point here. Like the word seems to indicate, it means to do right. To know what God has called us to do and do it. It’s not all that complicated.

² *Ephesians*. 1909 (H. D. M. Spence-Jones, Ed.). The Pulpit Commentary (259). London; New York: Funk & Wagnalls Company.

He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God (Micah 6:8)?

One of reasons I don't hold to the truth or righteousness above referring to the person of Christ or His bestowed righteousness is because it is found in verse 15 where the gospel is mentioned. I suspect that when the encouragement of "be strong in the Lord" is given, it is most often directed toward a meditation on the good news that we have peace with God by the blood of Christ.

What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things (Romans 8:31, 32)?³

The difficulties of this world are such trifles to the glory which awaits those who have been prepared for eternity by the gospel of peace.

For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us (Romans 8:18).

The shield of which Paul writes is one which covers the entire soldier. The gospel, faith and the helmet of salvation should ever be foremost in our minds and hearts – a daily, conscious resting upon His promises, recalling His sacrificial love, mercy and grace. These things are not to slip our minds in our daily actions and trials. If we allow that, then the fiery darts of doubt, anger, lust, discontent can burrow their ways into our hearts and lips.

How great a forest is set ablaze by such a small fire (James 3:5)!

³ *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*. 2001 (Ro 8:32). Wheaton: Standard Bible Society.

Paul concludes with the offensive weapon of the word of God. To be strong in the Lord does not mean that we ever take a defensive posture. The word of God is a powerful and searching instrument, exposing sin and granting redemption. It is the wisdom of God and it must be known and uttered.

Paul completes his thought with a prayer request that he **“may open his mouth boldly to make known the mystery of the gospel.”** In chains, surrounded by ridicule, contempt and eventually martyrdom, he wanted the resolve to lovingly, yet boldly say the things that need to be said.

To be strong in the Lord and the power of His might is no sedentary activity. It means to recognize the enemy, to walk in integrity, to consciously and continually set our minds upon the power and victory of the gospel, to be prayerful, watchful, persevering, taking a stand whether in plenty or hunger, abundance or need, joy or sorrow, prosperity or chains, life or death.

Questions for Study

1. Can things go wrong and still be going well? Explain (page 2).
2. Should Christians be shocked when difficulties come their way (pages 2, 3)?
3. What does the Apostle Paul seem to be emphasizing in the first three chapters of Ephesians (pages 3, 4)?
4. What new direction does the Apostle Paul take in chapter 4 of Ephesians (page 4)?
5. Do you ever feel like you don't have the strength for the task? Does that mean God is incapable of working in and through you? Explain (pages 5, 6).
6. Who is the true enemy and what is he like (page 6)?
7. What are the attributes necessary to be strong in the Lord (pages 7, 8)?
8. What does it mean to be strong in the Lord (page 9)?