

Strong to Stand

Ephesians 6:10

I played football in my childhood and well into my teen years. And I was on a team that lost a lot. We only had 14 players one year, including this little small kid who maybe weighed 75 pounds soaking wet.

We played the best team in the league from Buffalo – which had about 90 kids – all of them were future NFL players.

I will never forget one play where they scored one of their 12 touchdowns. A big running back was smashing through the line; the linebackers tried to tackle him, and they failed. And then the cornerbacks tried to take him down – they bounced off of him.

This little kid was the only player stopping him from running into the endzone.

I remember looking back and hoping he could trip him up.

But just as the running back was coming toward him, he dove out of the way, and in a high, squeaky voice complained – “He’s too big for me!!”

We have something like this in the first verses of the armor of God in Ephesians 6.

Here is the Christian – weak, vulnerable, still sinning, not glorified, not surrounded by angels to do his or her heavy lifting.

And here is none other than Satan – as we saw last time – the devil, with his powers, world forces, spiritual powers of wickedness in heavenly places descending upon us.

How can we possibly survive such a battle – much less to stand and stand strong, stand firm, stand so as to overcome the evil one?

If this were all there was, my message today would be much shorter – it would RUN! Jump out of the way!

Our two points then are that we are to stand, to stand firm against the devil; and how we can do so – by God’s strength, which is where we are going to begin.

Finally be strong, be strengthened – strong in the Lord; strong from his strength; strong from his strength as your strength.

Verse 10 greets us at the door with his might. And this is echoed several times in the following verses 11 and 13 – able to stand, enabled, empowered; enabled to resist, capable to do all.

This is like opening up an arsenal. These are not just words tossed on top of each other – they are chosen to complement one another other.

The first word “be strengthened” – is the same as being enabled, made capable in 11 and 13. Set that aside a second.

The second phrase is all-important – “in the Lord”; His might, His power, His energy, His armor.

²⁵ "To whom then will you liken Me that I would be *his* equal?" says the Holy One. ²⁶ Lift up your eyes on high and see who has created these *stars*, the One who leads forth their host by number,

He calls them all by name; because of the greatness of His might and the strength of *His* power, not one *of them* is missing...”
Isaiah 40:25-26

But these next two words Paul adds get us into the nature of what we need in Him.

The Lord strengthens you by the strength of his might.

His might is ‘isxus’ – a Greek word from *exo*, to have, to possess. This is might or power in possession.

Out of this possessed power comes ‘kratos’ – power excited into action.

Lenski illustrates it – *isxus* is the arm, the muscle; *kratos* is raising of the arm, flexing of the arm to bring it into action; the result is that first word – *strengthened* – another Greek word for power – *dunamis*; power or energy released – a word often used to describe the miracles in the NT and later applied to dynamite.

This is divine power, supernatural power, unfathomable power. Strength of God in force working in you.

So what a reversal then just like that! Not RUN AWAY NOW, but RUN FORWARD, right? If God is for us, who or what can be against us?

Who then are we looking to for strength? Not ourselves!

It is the Lord. Phil. 4:13 – “I can do all things through Christ who empowers me, makes me strong.”

When I am weak, then I am strong/enabled/capable. (2 Co 12:10)

We need to be crystal clear – the Lord here is none other than Jesus. It is the Father's Son given to you to be all you can be!

How do we know this is Jesus?

Look back at Ephesians 1:19 –

¹⁹ and what is the surpassing greatness (mega) of His power (dunamis) toward us who believe. These are in accordance with the working of the strength (kratos) of His might (isxus)... (Eph 1:19)

This is the same power that made you a Christian. Eph. 2 follows Eph. 1, and what a hopeless lost soul you were in the dominion of the wicked one, dead in trespasses and sins, and facing the living wrath of the living God!

But He who is made head over all things, beneath whose feet all powers have been placed, worked in you who believe.

This is who we look to – the One who already has plucked you out of the mire and fire. He sets your feet upon the pavement of glory so that you may walk with him now; he has put on you a robe, that you may fight for him now.

It is in the Lord Jesus Christ, in union with Him and His finished work for you, that enables you now then to live and to fight for him – and to do so victoriously.

Only as you walk with Christ can you possibly stand firm against the world, the flesh and the devil.

You do not, you cannot empower yourself. Having begun in grace, do you finish by your own flesh what He has begun in you?

That brings us to this all-important question: “**How** do we obtain this strength in the Lord?”

It is in *a way of grace*, a gracious bond that is enjoyed by you with Him.

Paul charged Timothy “You therefore, my son, be strong (dunamis/made capable) in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.” (2 Ti 2:1)

We struggle with being so dependent upon the Lord for everything. Right thoughts, pure affections, and here, strong wills for Him.

The Lord’s power to live the Christian life in general, and to fight the good fight in particular, is not a strength that is beyond our grasp – as though it was hard to obtain, or the Lord is stingy or at least reluctant to give us his mighty power.

The Christian confesses – “I am weak in myself” – but I am strong in another, almighty in the God of my salvation!

William Gurnall says we are to come for his strength “as freely as if it were your own.”

Because it is your own! Will the Lord take such great steps to save you, and not give you what you need? And if you knock and he says no, does that not mean that you don’t really need it?

He can do for you all that you ask, all that you think, all that you imagine; above all of that; far, far above all of that.

It is clear that faith is the ongoing key means for us; we must be eager believers in His Son, which engages His Spirit, by His Word, to strengthen us in the inner person.

No **when** do we know that He is at work in us then? Am I strong this morning as I come into the house of God? Am I experiencing this power in me in my whole life? **When** do I have such strength?

The answer is clear isn't it? You are strengthened when you stand firm, when you strongly resist, when you fight in the armor of God.

That is the aim and the benefit of the might of the Lord – it is effectual in very specific ways, as we will see tonight!

We say with David:

The LORD is my light and my salvation; Whom shall I fear? The LORD is the defense of my life; Whom shall I dread?

² When evildoers came upon me to devour my flesh, My adversaries and my enemies, they stumbled and fell.

³ Though a host encamp against me, My heart will not fear; Though war arise against me, In *spite of* this I shall be confident.

¹³ *I would have despaired* unless I had believed that I would see the goodness of the LORD In the land of the living.

¹⁴ Wait for the LORD; Be strong and let your heart take courage; Yes, wait for the LORD. (Psa 27:selected)

We turn now then to the second point – standing firm.

Proverbs 24:10 reminds us that if you faint in the day of adversity, Your strength is small.

We must find God's strength, the weapons for this fight, the armor to defeat the lion.

And what an active thing this is indeed. Lloyd-Jones says:

‘He is able to do all things through Christ who strengthens me.’ Christ is strengthening him, is infusing power in him, but it is Paul who does all things. It is he who knows both how to be abased and how to abound. Paul has not handed it all over and become a sitting spectator, passively abiding. He is involved, he is the one who is doing all these things. But the glory of it is that I am enabled to do all these things through Christ, who not does it all for me, but Christ who strengthens me. It is a kind of blood transfusion. The power is put into him. He is strengthened. The tasks are not taken out of his hands. But he is enabled to do them because he is being strengthened in this way.

What is it then to stand firm – against the devil’s schemes (11); to resist in the evil day and having done all, to stand firm (13); and one last time, Therefore stand firm – 14a?

It seems to stand firm is close to putting on the full armor of God. Armed resistance, standing in these pieces, is the same as being strengthened by the Lord to oppose the opposition by Satan.

Many have made the mistake to see the strengthening somehow different from putting on these pieces. It is not be strong to put on the armor; it is be strong in the armor. And being strong in the armor, means standing firm and resisting the wicked one.

So look briefly at the pieces in this armor.

First, the father of lies comes at you with deception about who you are in Christ, to shake your identity as His child, Christ’s soldier. Satan will engage you to dishonesty, and compromise. Stand firm having

your loins girt with truth, integrity, and sincerity. Here is your belt that you may move about with freedom and readiness.

The wicked one will come to you to push and pull you to live as you did before the gospel, to walk in disobedience. He attacks you your character as a new creature in Christ, – that is your righteousness, your faithfulness. Keep this breastplate buckled tight. Walk in true commitment in the ways and cause of God.

Paul wrote in Ephesians 5:

Do not be partakers with them; for you were formerly darkness, but now you are Light in the Lord; walk as children of Light (for the fruit of the Light *consists* in all goodness and **righteousness** and truth), trying to learn what is pleasing to the Lord. Do not participate in the unfruitful deeds of darkness, but instead even expose them; for it is disgraceful even to speak of the things which are done by them in secret. (Eph 5:7-12)

Satan will shoot at your gospel feet shoed in peace. That is your assurance and calm in Christ. How he loves to hinder a bold witness and sharing the gospel with stumbling feet. Keep your toes in those boots!

He would then have you fearful, trembling at fiery arrows fired against every generation. Take your shield of faith so such arrows fall harmless upon you. Be brave.

And the helmet of salvation, or the helmet of hope, is the full salvation coming to you at Christ's return. The devil pretends to be king, threatening death. He is happy when you are disheartened, discouraged or brought to despair. Beware! Many of us have tumbled

into Doubting Castle, and stumbled into the bone-filled dungeon of Giant Despair. But what confidence is yours in the cross!

And then the next-to-last piece is the sword of the Spirit, the Word of God. Here, clasp this on your belt – feel its weight, hold that handle firmly, brandish it well! Oh, this is the most wonderful piece indeed, as long as you grab the right end of it! But if Satan knocks it out of your hand, what a goner you are! Your thoughts, your affections, your conscience and your will are all vulnerable without the holy Bible!

Then lastly, the humble carefulness and seriousness of prayer. Besides how all the other pieces are put on, and so you are strengthened; it is all by prayer, by what Paul says is “All-Prayer”, all petitions, all times, in the Almighty Spirit, with all perseverance for all the saints. This is the eye of your watchfulness in the Lord. It is being a watchmen.

This is your spiritual warfare. It is not some kind of a mystical and extraordinary battle with transcendent powers. It comes down to the basics of the Christian faith. Integrity, character, gospel living, shielded by faith, helmeted by hope, and the Word of God on your belt.

This is the full round. From the might of Christ, to the might of Christians resisting the devil and overcoming him.

From **isxus** – possessed strength in the Lord; to **istemi**, *standing*, standing up, standing firmly, and standing perseveringly.

Where is it you find yourself unprotected, weak, or vulnerable? Shore up that place!!

Without it, you will, you must lack confidence. And God is your confidence! Those who trust in the Lord shall never be moved! Do you believe that?

Courage then is what is needed!

The Dutch theologian, A Brakel, defined spiritual strength this way:

Spiritual strength is an undaunted steadfastness of heart, given by God to His children, whereby they, while entertaining a lively hope of acquiring the promised benefits, overcome fear for all danger and opposition, unyieldingly engage in warfare, and courageously persevere in obedience toward God.

The essence of spiritual strength is a valiant steadfastness of heart.

God gives power to the faint and strengthens your heart in these four ways:

- A. First He gives a clear view of the glory and certainty of the benefits to be attained – *fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. (Heb 12:2)*
- B. Second, He gives assurance, deep and rich assurance, of His help to you: Isaiah 41:10 “Fear not, for I *am* with you; be not dismayed, for I *am* your God. I will strengthen you, yes, I will help you, I will uphold you with My righteous right hand.”
- C. God then impresses the mind with the goodness of the matter you undertake, and the ungodliness of those who oppose you – Psalm 118:6, 10. *The LORD is for me; I will not fear; what can man do to*

me? (Psa 118:6) All nations surrounded me; in the name of the LORD I will surely cut them off. (Psa 118:10)

D. God reveals the limits, the feebleness of all which opposes you, if He is for you. How else could Paul speak of all his tribulation as a light and momentary affliction (2 Cor. 4:17)? He learned the secret of contentment in the exceedingly great, rich and powerful grace of Jesus Christ.. *I am exceedingly joyful in all our tribulation.* (2 Co 7:4 NKJ)

This is not just for super-spiritual ones! You are under *explicit orders* to not be bothered about opposition in the world.

“Blessed are ye, when men *shall revile you*, and persecute you, and shall say *all manner of evil against you falsely*, for my sake.”

We are not supposed to care a bit for that. Jesus said.

And He said more: Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.” *Matthew 5:11–12 (KJV)*

I hope this makes you lean into what is in store for us as we look more carefully at these pieces, these weapons, down the road.