

Be Strong In The Lord

Ephesians 6:10

With Study Questions

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Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might (Ephesians 6:10).

Introduction

Like many quotations assigned to famous people, the quote, “The definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over and expecting different results” was not likely said by Einstein (or Ben Franklin or Mark Twain). We like to attribute quotes to smart people because it adds to the credibility. It should also be noted, it is not even true. The definition of insanity is the state of being seriously mentally ill. Having gotten that all out of the way, it is a pretty true statement, nonetheless. To put it in more biblical words:

As a dog returns to his own vomit, So a fool repeats his folly (Proverbs 26:11).

Please excuse me if I seize upon the tradition of resolutions as we near the end of 2019, but it is not a bad exercise to take inventory of our routine practices and seek to better them as we move into a new era. I will take this opportunity to remind all of us, that we are in a fight. To be sure a spiritual fight—even a war, but a fight nonetheless. And if we find ourselves continually losing the same battles, we may wish to reconsider our strategy.

One of the jobs of a pastor is to anticipate the enemies that he and his congregation might face and seek to put forth the wisdom of the word as it applies to those things. But this morning, as a sort of broad stroke, I would remind us that, whatever that enemy (or enemies) might be, we are called to be “Strong in the Lord.”

Perhaps I can begin with a personal testimonial. 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.

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 children of God, **“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. Live in a manner consistent with who you are!

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 reflect momentarily on 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. Consider Paul’s own testimony when God chose not to remove the thorn in Paul’s flesh.

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 hamstring 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 and ultimate 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

Here I might add that we are not merely fighting for Christ, we are fighting with Christ. He is not in some tower. He is with us in battle and we are to ever feed upon Him.

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" (Ephesians 6:11)**. 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" (Ephesians 6:11)** we must infer that there is a powerful, crafty and intellectual evil with whom we contend. It is not **"flesh and blood (Ephesians 6:12)"** but a **"spiritual wickedness" (Ephesians 6:12)**. 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. When you have a spirit of retaliation, you are forgetting where the battle is truly fought. There is a temptation to answer the fool according to his folly (Proverbs 26:4). We must resist being frustrated and angry at the

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

fiery darts of life and know there is an evil bowman. As a parent, a counselor a coach, I have often observed people swayed and overtaken by their spouse, team-mate, co-worker. To be sure, there are times to respond. But always with the recognition of a deeper battle against spiritual darkness (Ephesians 6:12, 13).

To be **“strong in the Lord and in the power of His might” (Ephesians 6:10)** 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 (Ephesians 6:13, 14)”** 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

Paul builds upon his battle metaphor of being **“strong in the Lord”** we must know and embrace the **“truth” (Ephesians 6:14)**. 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). We are very much surrounded by lies. Let us never underestimate the power of falsehoods and let us never engage in them.

Next Paul writes of the **“breastplate of righteousness” (Ephesians 6:14)**. 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, but it can be very challenging.

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)?

Let us never forget that this entire battle must be fought in the light of **“the gospel of peace” (Ephesians 6:15)**. In this respect, the battle is already won. And it should be the desire of every Christian, not so much to

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

beat the enemy, but to win the soul. The **“shield” (Ephesians 6:16)** of which Paul writes is a shield which cover the entire soldier. Our faith should not fall into some small category that we call our religion. There are many paths to our hearts. They all must be guarded.

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.

Paul concludes with the offensive weapon, **“the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God” (Ephesians 6:17)**. 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 understood and proclaimed.

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 needed 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)?