

Sermons through

Romans

Walk In The Day

Romans 13:11-14

Part Three

The Armor of Light

With Study Questions

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And do this, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep; for now our salvation is nearer than when we first believed. 12 The night is far spent, the day is at hand. Therefore let us cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light. 13 Let us walk properly, as in the day, not in revelry and drunkenness, not in lewdness and lust, not in strife and envy. 14 But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts (Romand 13:11-14).

Review

Some of the observations we've made in this short passage is how there are certain times/environments where spiritual and moral darkness reach higher levels of intensity. In light of this we are called to awake out of sleep, or spiritual drowsiness. We need to recognize the seducing effects of the world by which we are surrounded. There is a call to walk properly, as if it is daytime and everyone can see all we do-knowing that God sees us. True Christian integrity is that which you do when no one else is looking.

The Apostle puts forth revelry, drunkenness, lewdness, lust, strife and envy as particular examples of walking in darkness. As the Proverbs teach, we should not go by the door of such things. We should rather run from these, and other sins, as a gazelle seeking escape from a predator.

We also spoke of the two ways one is to put on Christ. We are to put on Christ by faith in such a way that when God sees us, He sees only the righteousness of Christ. This is the gospel, that we

...be found in Him (Christ), not having my (our) own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is

through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith (Philippians 3:9).

But in the current passage, the putting on of Christ is parallel to putting on **“the armor of light”**. It is the subject of donning of Christ in this manner that I would like to conclude our short series. What does it mean to put on Christ as an armor in terms of obedience, of fighting the good fight? How does one do this?

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 devolves into despair. A friend who was privy to the numerous dramas gave me a word of encouragement. He recognized the sanctifying effects of ordeals and suggested 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 some close friends, my wife and I shared a short list of some of these challenges. 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, as if you're a gorilla. 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 informed that we are new men and women 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). Again, we see the two types of putting on Christ.

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 Paul 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 reminds his readers of things he wrote in 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. Paul had this experience himself, to which God answered:

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. ¹⁰For 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; ²he 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

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

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 antagonist, 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.

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 gird our waists with the truth. 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 us 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.

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)?

We are to **“shod your (our) feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace.”** To seek to be strong in the Lord without ever living in light of

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

the **“gospel of peace.”** We are not prepared for battle if we forget the gospel. It would be walking barefoot through a minefield.

We are to take **“the shield of faith”**. There were a couple of different types of shields during Paul’s day. When Paul mentions the shield of faith he writes of a shield which covers the entire soldier. We must ever walk in faith and our faith should cover every category of our lives-family, church, business, recreation, economics, politics, art, etc. We must not be double-minded (James 1:8; 4:8).

The **“helmet of salvation”** (like the gospel) 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. God graciously calls us to gather weekly since we are so inclined to forget these wonderful things.

Paul concludes with the offensive weapon of the **“sword of the Spirit, which is 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 known and uttered.

Paul completes his thought by exhorting us to pray **“always”** and 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. Review Romans 13:11-14. How can certain environments be darker than others? What does it mean to walk “as in the day”? What are the ways we can “put on Christ” (page 2)?
2. Can things go wrong and still be going well? Explain (page 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 (pages 4, 5)?
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 7)?
7. What are the attributes necessary to be strong in the Lord (pages 8, 9)?
8. What does it mean to be strong in the Lord (page 9)?

