

Introduction: Be Strong in the LORD (6:10)

10 Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might.

Finally.

Or we might say, “in conclusion.”

Paul is now wrapping up his letter,
but he has one more exhortation.

He has urged us to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which we have been called.
He has reminded us that we are one body,
and that we are called to live as a new household,
a new family that is not defined by being Jew or Gentile,
but a new humanity in Jesus Christ.

We are to speak the truth in love,
modeling the sort of transparency and authenticity
that *should* characterize human relationships.

And this is to manifest itself in our relations as
husbands and wives,
parents and children,
masters and slaves.

In other words, in all our household/economic relations we are to embody the love of Christ.

But this new life in Christ is not an uncontested one.

We must “be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might.”
This is an echo of Joshua 1:6-7, “be strong and courageous.”

The concept of spiritual warfare is rooted in the days of Joshua.
For Israel, spiritual warfare took on a very physical form:
Israel was called to destroy the Canaanites –
to wipe them out from the face of the earth.

But even Israel saw that this physical warfare had a spiritual root –
their task was to uproot idolatry as a sign of the coming judgment.
Because God’s wrath is coming upon the whole earth,
Israel was to demonstrate this as agents of that wrath.

But Paul does not say “be strong in the Lord” to say that that we must be like Joshua,
because he has already demonstrated that Jesus has received the inheritance;
he has already shown that Jesus has been exalted to the right hand of the Father.

Therefore, the call for *us* to be strong and courageous –
to “be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might”
reminds us that Jesus is Lord!

To be strong in the Lord means “be strong in Jesus.”
And because Jesus is Lord,
because our great Joshua is mighty and has taken possession of the new creation,
therefore we are to be strong in him, and in the strength of *his* might,
and we are to wage our warfare with that confidence
that Jesus has already won!

And so Paul describes the nature of our warfare in 6:11-12

1. The Nature of Our Warfare (6:11-12)

*11 Put on the whole armor of God,
that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil.
12 For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood,
but against the rulers, against the authorities,
against the cosmic powers over this present darkness,
against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.*

Because unlike Joshua, we do not wage a bloody war.
Flesh and blood is no true obstacle to the coming of the kingdom.

Our foe is the devil and his minions,
the cosmic powers over this present darkness –
the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.

What is Paul talking about?

Remember that back in chapter 1 Paul told us that Christ has been seated
“far above all rule and authority and power and dominion.” (1:21)

This is referring to various orders of angels in Jewish thought.
Paul is saying in chapter 1 that there are various angelic orders,
but Christ is exalted over the powers of this age.

Then in chapter 2 Paul told us that we once walked in the course of this world,
“following the prince of the power of the air.” (2:2)

Your former master is the prince of this age,
“the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience.”
But you are no longer under him.
You no longer follow the “prince of the power of the air.”
You follow Jesus.

And in chapter 3 Paul declared that what he is doing in his preaching
is bringing to light the plan of the mystery hidden for ages,
“so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God

might now be made known to the rulers and authorities
in the heavenly places.” (3:10)

In other words, Paul has already set up the context for talking about spiritual warfare.

The exaltation of Jesus has already established his kingdom
over the prince of the power of the air.

We saw back in chapter two that the fact that Jesus is exalted into the heavens
means that he is higher than the prince of the power of the air,
because the heavens are higher than the air!

And the fact that we have been seated in the heavenlies in Jesus
means that *we* are no longer under an earthly power (or an aerial power)
but we are under the heavenly power of Jesus Christ himself.

Therefore the rulers and authorities in heavenly places (the principalities and powers)
have been dethroned by Jesus.

Or, to put it more precisely,
the enthronement of Jesus signals their demise.

The problem is that while the resurrection of Jesus signals their defeat,
they don't just get up and walk away.

Why does God allow the cosmic powers to linger here?

Think about the Joshua connection,
particularly in regard to what happened after Joshua died.

Why did God leave some of the Canaanites in the land?

To test his people.

God had commanded Israel to wipe out the Canaanites.

Would they obey, or would they rebel and become like the Canaanites.

Even so, God did not destroy the cosmic powers at the resurrection of Jesus
because he wants to test us!

Will we turn away from our old master, the prince of the power of the air?
Or will we go back to him, like a dog to its vomit?

But also, God has said that he will only destroy the devil at the end,
when he also destroys death at the final judgment.

So spiritual warfare is directed against the cosmic powers.

But also I would point out that Paul conceives of spiritual warfare primarily in defensive terms.

“That you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil.”

The stratagems of the devil – his wily manuevers must be countered.

He rarely comes at you with an open offensive.

He is subtle and deceptive.

But the devil is on the attack.

He wants to ensnare you and draw you back into his service.

Or at least, keep you off balance so that you are distracted from the service of Christ.

This is why Paul describes the weapons of our warfare:

2. The Weapons of Our Warfare (6:13-17)

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 firm.

14 Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth,

and having put on the breastplate of righteousness,

15 and, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace.

16 In all circumstances take up the shield of faith,

with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one;

17 and take the helmet of salvation,

and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God,

What is this armor?

The belt is what keeps you from tripping over your skirt.

Remember that men didn't wear pants – they wore tunics, robes, etc.

The old phrase was “gird up your loins” –

which meant “tuck your skirt in your belt and get ready!”

So your belt is what you tuck your skirts in when you are going to run (or fight).

If you are girded with truth,

then you are well-prepared to face the enemy.

The belt of truth is spoken of in Isaiah 11:5,

where it says

There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse,
and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit.

2 And the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him,
the Spirit of wisdom and understanding,
the Spirit of counsel and might,
the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord.

3 And his delight shall be in the fear of the Lord.

He shall not judge by what his eyes see,
or decide disputes by what his ears hear,

4 but with righteousness he shall judge the poor,
and decide with equity for the meek of the earth;
and he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth,

and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked.
5 Righteousness shall be the belt of his waist,
and faithfulness the belt of his loins.

The LXX translates this “truth shall be the belt of his loins.”

So the belt of truth is something that is worn by the shoot from the stump of Jesse, the Messiah, when he comes in judgment.

What about the breastplate of righteousness?

The breastplate refers to your main piece of armor,
sometimes translated as “a coat of mail.”

The idea is that one of the best protections against the assaults of the devil
is righteousness.

Likewise in verse 17, the helmet of salvation refers to the importance of salvation
for protecting our heads.

These two are linked together in Isaiah 59:

Isaiah 59:17 says of the LORD himself,
“He put on righteousness as a breastplate,
and a helmet of salvation on his head;
he put on garments of vengeance for clothing,
and wrapped himself in zeal as a cloak....
And a Redeemer will come to Zion...”

The shoes of the gospel of peace is reminiscent of Isaiah 52:7,
“blessed are the feet of him who brings good news.”

The image of the shield of faith

is rooted in the frequent use of the shield image in the Psalms:
“the Lord is my shield” (at least 16 times).

All this armor is designed to protect the Lord’s anointed – the Messiah –
when he goes into battle against his foes.

Think of what happened to David:

Saul offered him physical armor.

But that physical armor could not have protected him from Goliath,
because Goliath was not simply a physical enemy.

Goliath was a representative of the devil.

And so David went forth in spiritual armor,
clothed with the breastplate of righteousness and the helmet of salvation,
girded with the belt of truth,
and shod with the readiness of the gospel of peace.

When the Messiah puts on the armor of God,
salvation comes to his people –
and judgment comes to his foes!

So every piece of armor that Paul describes is the armor of the Messiah –
the armor of Christ.

And so therefore, to put on the armor of God is to put on Christ!
But you must not think of this armor as merely external.
Christ is not a garment that fits on to your exterior.

Rather, when you put on Christ, you put on his armor as well.
This is the armor that Jesus used to defeat our enemies!
This is why you can be so confident that this shield indeed quenches
the flaming darts of the evil one!

Therefore *you* need the belt of truth –
for no other girdle will do.
Without the truth – as it is in Jesus –
you are not prepared to fight.

You need to understand who Jesus is and what he has done.
You need to know the truth, understand the truth, and walk according to the truth.

Otherwise in the midst of the battle, you will stumble and fall.

You need the breastplate of righteousness –
both the imputed righteousness of Christ in our justification,
and the infused righteousness of Christ in our sanctification.
Both the legal standing that we receive when we are declared righteous in Christ,
and the real change in our hearts and lives whereby we more and more
die unto sin and live unto righteousness.

You need the shoes of the readiness given by the gospel of peace –
shoes have to do with walking,
and you need to walk in the gospel,
and wherever you go, the gospel needs to go.

As Marius Victorinus said,
“The gospel is to be carried abroad...
But so that all may hear, one must use one’s feet to travel.”

Or as Theodoret put it,
“Your footwear is not put on in order that you may walk about foolishly
but in order to accomplish the course of the gospel.”

It is called the gospel of peace because through the gospel –
through the good news of the death and resurrection of Jesus –
we have peace with God.

You also need to take up the shield of faith,
because only faith can extinguish the flaming darts of the evil one.
These flaming darts refer to temptation, trial, testing.
You cannot reason your way out of temptation.
You cannot argue your way out of cancer.
The only thing that can extinguish the flaming darts of the evil one
is faith - believing God's promises.

And truly the helmet of salvation is the only thing that protect your head from injury.
Without salvation your head will not long remain connected to your shoulders!

And only then, after going through all the defensive armor,
does Paul finally mention your offensive weapon:
the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

You are a soldier in the army of our Lord Jesus Christ.
The only weapon he has given you is his word.
How well do you know it?
The Word of God is sharper than any two-edged sword,
it can discern the thoughts and intentions of the heart (Heb 4:12).
The Word of God lays bare the heart.

You need to learn how to use this weapon,
because by it you can vanquish any foe.

Think of how Jesus defeated the onslaught of Satan
by wisely using the scriptures to combat each temptation.

In the same way, when temptation comes,
do you know the scriptures well enough to respond wisely?

It is important also that Paul calls it “the sword of the Spirit”
because the same Spirit who inspired the scriptures
also illumines the scriptures and helps us to use them properly.

The Spirit both opens our eyes to understand the scriptures,
and also inhabits our prayers to make them acceptable to God.

3. The Power of Our Warfare (6:18-20)

18 praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication.

What does it mean to pray “at all times in the Spirit”?

It means first to be constant in prayer.

Our hearts should be oriented toward heaven,
so that our life is lived as a constant prayer to God.

But it also means that our prayer should be “in the Spirit.”

There are those who pray “in the flesh” –

for some prayer has become a magical charm:

prayer gives me access to the cosmic Santa Claus
who will give me whatever I want.

That is not the way prayer works.

Prayer is not a way to manipulate God into giving me what I want.

You do not bargain with God,

“I will do this if you will give me that!”

Praying at all times in the Spirit

means that our prayers are directed by the same Spirit whose sword we wield.

For this reason there should be a consistency between our prayers and the scriptures.

Because the Spirit will not deny himself!

The better we know the Word of God, the more our prayers will be “in the Spirit” as well.

Because the power of our warfare is the Spirit himself –

especially as the Spirit manifests himself in prayer.

Notice how important Paul thinks prayer is in verses 18-20:

*To that end keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints,
19 and also for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly
to proclaim the mystery of the gospel,
20 for which I am an ambassador in chains,
that I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak.*

Why does he call himself an ambassador in chains?

Because Paul considers himself to be an ambassador of the kingdom of heaven.

He is a representative of Jesus Christ.

While ambassadors were generally immune from imprisonment and death,

Paul realizes that in the midst of war,
sometimes an ambassador’s immunity is denied.

We are involved in a spiritual war.

And sometimes the ambassadors of Jesus are mistreated and killed.

This is why Paul urges us to pray for two things in particular:

- 1) for all the saints,
- 2) for him – and particularly for his preaching.

Earlier in Ephesians 1 and 3 Paul gave us examples of what it looks like to pray for the saints.

When you pray for one another, what do you pray for?

It's okay to pray for those who are sick –
what has sometimes been called “Aunt Tilly’s toenail” prayers.

But when you pray for those who are sick
are you praying that they will grow
in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ?

Are you praying that they will be strengthened in their inner man,
so that Christ may dwell in their hearts by faith? (Eph 3:16)

You see, Paul thinks of our prayers as a fundamental part of our spiritual warfare.
The same Spirit who speaks to us in the Word, also speaks to God in our prayers.

But also I would urge you to pray for the preaching of the word.

Pray for God to continue what he began in the apostolic preaching.

Pray for me,
that words may be given to me.

Your spiritual well-being depends in no small part on what comes out of my mouth.

Your prayers for me,
that I might “proclaim the mystery of the gospel,”
are essential.

I need your prayers in order to declare the gospel boldly, as I ought to speak.

But not only me!

After all, Paul is not calling on the Ephesians to pray for their own pastor –
(though I think their own pastor would be included) –
rather he is calling on the Ephesians to pray for *his* preaching
(in Rome at the time).

Pray for missionaries.

Pray for all pastors everywhere.

Why are the prayers of the saints essential to preaching?

Because the same Spirit who inspired the word,
is the same Spirit in whom we pray,
is the same Spirit who takes the preaching of the word
and makes it effectual in the hearts and lives of those who hear.

When you pray for the preaching of the word,
you are engaging in spiritual warfare;
you are participating in the great commission!

Paul then adds:

Conclusion: Final Greetings (6:21-24)

*21 So that you also may know how I am and what I am doing,
Tychicus the beloved brother and faithful minister in the Lord will tell you everything.
22 I have sent him to you for this very purpose,
that you may know how we are, and that he may encourage your hearts.*

Paul identifies Tychicus as a beloved brother and faithful minister in the Lord.
This suggests that Tychicus is an ordained minister with Paul's traveling presbytery.

He is a faithful "diakonos."

A diakonos (usually translated deacon, servant, or minister)
is one who acts on behalf of another.

The word is generally not used of household servants,
but rather is more closely connected with the idea of the ambassador.

Tychicus has served faithfully as a minister (an emissary) in the Lord,
and Paul says that he will fill in the details of what is happening to Paul in Rome.

And the goal of Tychicus' report is that "he may encourage your hearts."

When we have missionaries giving reports in Sunday school,
make sure that you come and hear what God is doing.
It will encourage your hearts.

Paul concludes:

23 Peace be to the brothers, and love with faith, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

This is a profound ending.

Peace be to the brothers.

This is the traditional "shalom" of a normal Jewish greeting –
although in Christ, because of the gospel of peace,
it takes on new meaning.

Peace and love with faith.

This is what should characterize the church (the brotherhood).
Peace and love with faith.

We have peace with God through what Jesus has done.

And this peace with God should also characterize our relationships
with one another.

But this peace is also characterized by love.

Peace and love go hand in hand.

But Christian peace and love is always found "with faith."

But here Paul is not commanding the Ephesians to have peace and love with faith.

Paul is pronouncing a benediction:
May peace and love with faith be yours
from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Because you are a new household – a new community – a new creation!
Therefore may you be characterized by the peace and love with faith
that characterizes the relationship between the Father and the Son,
between God and his Messiah.

24 Grace be with all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with love incorruptible.
Once again, this is a blessing –
a benediction upon the people of God.

Paul declares that God’s grace is upon those who love the Lord Jesus
with love incorruptible

He is not issuing a command.
He is not putting a guilt trip on you,
“you need to love Jesus more!!!”

You may not feel like your love for Christ is incorruptible.
You may often feel as though your love for the Lord Jesus is ebbing and flowing.
But here Paul wants you to see that if you love Jesus,
you love him with an incorruptible love!
It is not that we loved him first,
but that he loved us and gave himself for us.
And because he has shed his love abroad in our hearts,
because he has loved us with an everlasting love,
therefore our love for him *is* incorruptible!

Nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord!
And if *his* love has been set upon us,
then *our* love for him will never die.

And as we linger on this final word, “incorruptible,”
we are reminded that this corruptible flesh must put on incorruption.
The mortal must put on immortality.

Paul leaves us with a pang of longing!
How long, O Lord?
When will the faith become sight?
Now we have an incorruptible love –
when will that incorruptible love be brought to its consummation?!

How long?