

**Ephesians 6: 10; “Be Strong in the Lord”, Sermon # 1 in the series –
“The Whole Armor of God”, Delivered on July 8th, 2012, by
Pastor Paul Rendall in the Afternoon Worship Service.**

In thinking about our on-going need as a church to grow in spiritual strength and in numbers, and how that might take place, I have become convinced that it will do us all good to think together of the spiritual warfare that we are engaged in. Are we, as a church, winning the spiritual battle that is set against us by the forces of darkness, or are we being defeated? We should all know that because of Jesus Christ our Lord we have overcome the evil one, and we will overcome him if we are a true believer. This is a part of our “holding fast our confession”. But even though this is true, that Christ has overcome the devil on our behalf, in order that we might be saved, it is still true that we need to personally and corporately overcome the devil. It says in 1st Peter 5: 8 and 9 that “Your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour”. It is possible to be saved from your sins and yet be unaware of Satan’s schemes. It is possible to actually be a weak soldier of Christ because you have not learned to “be strong in the Lord in the strength of His might”. And so, this afternoon, I want to commence a series of sermons from Ephesians 6, verses 10-20, in order that you and I might better know how to resist the devil, and be steadfast in our faith. (1 Peter 5: 8 and 9) Whenever any of God’s people get serious about having a greater obedience to God’s word, whenever they become more zealous for the growth of Christ’s kingdom, and whenever they actually begin to reach out to the unsaved people around them, there always comes opposition from the devil and those fallen spirits who are with him. We as a local church must better understand how we can arm ourselves for the spiritual battle that is already upon us, as we are now attempting to follow Christ and preach Christ. This battle for the advancement of Truth can only be engaged in when we have the strength for it. This is what Ephesians 6: 10-20 is speaking of. And so, this afternoon, I would like to speak to you about strength for the spiritual warfare. In this first sermon on verse 10, I will use the outline from William Gurnall’s book, *“The Christian in Complete Armour”*. The material will mostly be my own. In looking at the 10th verse we find 1st – A Familiar Designation – Paul calls the believers at Ephesus – “Brethren”. 2nd – He gives to them, and to us, an Exhortation – “Be Strong”. 3rd – There is a Cautionary Direction annexed to the exhortation. (“Be strong - In the Lord”) And 4th – There is an Encouraging Amplification of the direction when he says be strong – “in the Power of His Might”.

1st – A Familiar Designation – “Brethren”.

The Apostle Paul wants us to be reminded that we are not simply in our own individual spiritual warfare, but that since this is a battle for the advancement of Christ’s kingdom, it should be faced together, and fought together, as an army of

brothers and sisters; an army of brethren. All of Christ's people should see themselves as part of this great army. We are together, soldiers of Christ Jesus; those who are loyal to the cause of Truth and Meekness, and Righteousness. We are those who have believed in His name. We are those who are called to be loyal to the cause of Truth because Jesus has won the greatest victory in this war; the victory He won at the cross of Calvary.

“Onward Christian soldiers, marching as to war, with the cross of Jesus going on before: Christ the royal Master leads against the foe; forward into battle, see His banners go.” “Like a mighty army, moves the Church of God; brother we are treading where the saints have trod.” “We are not divided, all one body we.” “One in hope and doctrine; one in charity.”

This is why we can confidently go into spiritual warfare as brothers. It is because of what Christ has done for us as the Captain of our salvation.” Turn with me over to Hebrews 2: 7-11. “You have made Him a little lower than the angels; You have crowned him with glory and honor.” “And set Him over the works of your hands.” “You have put all things under His feet.” “For in that He put all in subjection under Him, He left nothing that is not put under Him.” “But now we do not yet see all things put under Him” “But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honor, that He by the grace of God, might taste death for everyone.” “For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings.” “For both He who sanctifies and those who are being sanctified are all of one, for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren, saying: ‘I will declare your name to My brethren.’” God’s intention is to put all things under Christ’s feet. He has left nothing which is not placed under His feet. However, we do not yet see all things put under Him.” He is presently reigning now. He is raised from the dead, and He is reigning over all nations and all men, seated at the right hand of the Father on high. But the subjecting of all things to Him by the Father is a progressive work which continues until Christ returns again. The History of Redemption is a progressive work. Christ has won the war to deliver our souls at the cross. And now, during this present Age, He builds His Church, and the gates of Hell shall not prevail against it. His Church has faced many battles and she will face many more battles until False Babylon is destroyed, and all false systems of Truth and Religion are put to shame. But this text here in Hebrews says, “We do see Jesus, having been crowned with glory and honor. Jesus – The Captain of our salvation, was made perfect through sufferings and God has caused us who are being sanctified to become joint heirs together with Jesus.” And for this reason Jesus is not ashamed to call us brethren. And neither is the Apostle Paul ashamed or afraid to address the Ephesian church as brethren.

2ndly – The Apostle Paul gives us an Exhortation – “Be strong!”

That is to say: Be of good courage; be strong and courageous.” This exhortation we often find used in the Old Testament Scriptures. 2 Chronicles 32: 7 – “Be strong and courageous; do not be afraid nor dismayed before the king of Assyria, nor before all the multitude that is with him; for there are more with us than with him.” And Isaiah 35: 4 – “Say to those who are fearful-hearted, ‘Be strong, do not fear!’ We must indeed unite all the powers of our soul and muster all of the courage that we can by faith in Jesus Christ. We must understand, as William Gurnall says, “The Christian of all men needs courage and resolution.” “In fact, there is nothing he does as a Christian, or can do, but it is an act of valor.” (p. 12 – 1974 Banner of Truth edition) We find this truth stated plainly in 1 Corinthians 16: 13 – “Watch, stand fast in the faith, be brave, be strong.” In the KJV it reads – “Watch ye stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong.” The Apostle is plainly giving us an imperative to be courageous and to be strong; don’t be wimpy or fearful. Don’t be passive in your walk with the Lord. Turn with me to Joshua 1: 6. We find here that Joshua is about to cross Jordan and lead God’s people into battle. He has been instructed by God to lead the people of Israel into battle, to drive out the nations of people who are living in the land of Canaan, and what does the Lord say to him? “Be strong and of good courage for to this people you shall divide as an inheritance the land which I swore to their fathers to give to them.” “Only be strong and very courageous, that you may observe to do according to all the law which Moses My servant commanded you; do not turn from it to the right hand or the left, that you may prosper wherever you go.” It is not for the Christian to be cowardly. We are to be strong and courageous – to do what? To drive out the nations and stand in battle against them? No, that was for the Old Testament people of God to do. But these things are still written for our sakes that we may spiritually apply them to ourselves. It is rather that we may observe to do according to all that is written in this Book of God’s law; to apply it to our hearts, and to what we do together as a church. It requires just as much strength and courage to be a faithful Christian as it does to be a captain in the army.

Let’s think about prayer for a minute. It doesn’t seem like a great thing requiring much strength or courage to pray, or does it? You would think that the Muslim is very spiritually brave; bowing down to the ground in prayer three times a day. But let us remember, whatever he speaks in prayer, he is not opposed by the devil; he is simply conforming to demon-inspired social pressure and he is not addressing the Holy and Awesome God of the Bible. The God of the Bible is alone the true and living God. The true Christian knows that prayer cannot simply be read off the bulletin as liturgy or memorized or recited as the Lord’s Prayer week after week. Prayer is a princely duty requiring a humble boldness of faith. The Christian takes hold of God as Jacob did in Genesis 32 and wrestles with Him. He will not let Him go without attempting to receive a blessing. He is reminded by

God's fiery law, which he himself applies to his conscience according to the power of the Holy Spirit while he is praying, that He is still a sinner; He still has remaining corruption. He searches for sin in his own heart. He hunts it down as an enemy. He wonders to himself, "How can I ask for anything from God in light of my sins?" He knows that it is only by faith in Christ that he can boldly and valiantly pray. By faith in His Lord, he lays aside every weight and the sin which so easily besets him, and he comes boldly to the throne of God to find grace and help in time of need. There is no duty in the whole Christian life of walking with God, that is fraught with so many difficulties as prayer. The distractions and the difficulties are strong and they shoot at the Christian through the hedge, as he attempts to send up his prayers to heaven. And Satan will dispute every inch of ground as he goes.

Think also with me about the mortification of sins. It takes real strength and courage to put to death your lusts. Those passions and desires do not lay down on the altar willingly to be slain like Isaac for Abraham on Mt. Moriah. No, fleshly desires like covetousness, uncleanness, evil desire, pride, resentment, and the like, will roar and shriek within you. They will try to convince you that these sins are not significant. Aren't these just little compromises; can't they stay a little longer in your heart? You could keep these sins secretly and nobody would know, nobody would be affected. But remember Achan. He coveted, he stole, he hid, but the Lord found him out. The tasty morsel under your tongue will turn to gravel later on. You will have to pay for it eventually, and eternally if you do not repent. The true Christian knows that it will take Christ's mighty power and grace to repent. It will take real spiritual strength, it will take real spiritual courage, to put your sins to death. Christ gives the believer that courage. The Lord has sent you on a mission, to utterly put to death your remaining corruptions, even as He commanded king Saul to lead the people in doing in 1st Samuel 15. Will you do it? Or will you spare the best of the things which should have been destroyed? No, let it never be! Better to be like Samuel and not listen to the pleas of their king Agag. "Surely the bitterness of death is past." No – bring those besetting sins out- and in your heart hack them to pieces in the presence of the Lord. Show your sinful desires no mercy. Be strong. Romans 8: 13 and 14 – "For if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deed of the body, you will live." "For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God."

But 3rdly – Paul gives a Cautionary Direction to the Exhortation: Be Strong, but let it be "in the Lord".

The Christian's strength lies in His Lord, not in himself. Usually a commanding officer thinks that his strength lies in his troops, or in his own strength of mind or character. If he is weak in character he will not be able to lead them as he should. Or, if his men have a spirit of timidity, they will be broken in battle. Then all will be lost as regards the battle. But in the army of the God's saints, the strength of every saint and the strength of the whole Church lies with

the Lord of Hosts – the Captain of our salvation – The Lord Jesus Christ. God can overcome all of His enemies without our help, but we cannot so much as defend ourselves without Christ’s strength and help. Let me ask you this question. How do you see yourself when you do battle spiritually with the forces of darkness? King Saul, back in 1 Samuel 15 started out well, but later he drew back in the spiritual battle. Turn with me over to 1 Samuel 15, verse 17. “So Samuel said, ‘When you were little in your own eyes, were you not head of the tribes of Israel?’ “Now the Lord sent you on a mission, and said, ‘Go and utterly destroy the sinners, the Amalekites, and fight against them until they are consumed.’” “Why then did you not obey the voice of the Lord?” The answer was, that he was working according to his own wisdom and strength. He was not “little in his own eyes”. Verse 20 – “But I have obeyed the voice of the Lord, and gone on the mission on which the Lord sent me, and brought back Agag king of Amalek; I have utterly destroyed the Amalekites.” But this was a lie, because it says back in 1 Samuel 15: 9 – “But Saul and the people spared Agag and the best of the sheep, the oxen, the fatlings, the lambs, and all that was good, and were unwilling to utterly destroy them.” They were willing to destroy what was despised and worthless, but everything that they thought that they might personally enjoy or profit by, that they saved. Saul had not obeyed the voice of the Lord, but was trying to say that he had. Samuel convinces him otherwise, and says to him in 1st Samuel 15: 28 – “The Lord has torn the kingdom of Israel from you today, and has given it to a neighbor of yours, who is better than you.” “And also the Strength of Israel will not lie nor relent.” “For He is not a man, that He should relent.” Samuel was speaking of David as being the new leader. He would be a man who would see God as the Strength of Israel. Look at what the Lord meant to David in terms of His strength. Psalm 144: 1 – “Blessed be the Lord my Rock, who trains my hands for war, my fingers for battle.” “My lovingkindness and my fortress, my high tower and my Deliverer, my shield and the One in whom I take refuge, who subdues my peoples under me.”

And 4th – There is an Encouraging Amplification of the direction when he says be strong – “in the Power of His Might”.

You and I must often remind ourselves where the strength comes from, to obey God, to preach, to pray, to give, to serve, to love, and to die. We not only begin the Christian life, the Lord seeing us “without strength”, and He coming to us to save us from all of our sins; but we also continue on to do great things for Him in our spiritual battles, through that strength. Turn with me to Psalm 18, verse 28. David shows us here where he got the power to wage war against the Lord’s enemies and his. “For You will light my lamp; the Lord my God will enlighten my darkness.” “For by You I can run against a troop, by my God I can leap over a wall.” “As for God his way is perfect; the word of the Lord is proven; He is a shield to all who trust in Him.” “For who is God, except the Lord?” “And who is a rock except our God?” “It is God who arms me with strength, and makes my way

perfect.” “He makes my feet like the feet of deer, and sets me on my high places.” “He teaches my hands to make war so that my arms can bend a bow of bronze.” David attributes all his military strength and ability to God; not to himself. Let me ask in closing if this is what you do in terms of your fighting the spiritual battle that is set before you? Can you say with holy David, “In the day when I cried out, You answered me, and made me bold with strength in my soul?” (Psalm 138, verse 3) Truly the Christian life is a life of courage, but is courage flowing out of Christ’s grace, which then flows into our souls. May it be so for you dear believer. It can be so for you by faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.