

Sunday, August 9, 2026

Be Strong In The Lord

This is the sixteenth in a series of sermons through the book of Ephesians. We have now reached the book's concluding exhortations in verses 6:10-20, where Paul begins to wrap things up and draw together many concepts that he had introduced earlier in the epistle. This section is very rich and is too much to cover in a single sermon. My plan is to consider verses 10-13 today and, Lord willing, the remaining verses in the future.

Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might. Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness; And your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace; Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God: Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints; And for me, that utterance may be given unto me, that I may open my mouth boldly, to make known the mystery of the gospel, For which I am an ambassador in bonds: that therein I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak.

(Ephesians 6:10-20)

As you will recall, Ephesians is roughly structured as chapters 1-3 describing what God has done for us in Christ, and chapters 4-6 describing how we are to live our lives in response to that. So far in the second half of the epistle, the prevailing metaphor has been “walk” – “walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called” (4:1), “walk not as other Gentiles walk” (4:17), “walk in love” (5:2), “walk as children of light” (5:8), “walk circumspectly” (5:15). But in today's passage, we move from “walking” to “standing.” It's time to stand your ground and fight. You might have been under the delusion that it's a trivial matter to obey God. It's not. It's a profound, life-long struggle. And you can't do it on your own.

Be Strong In The Lord

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

This verse harks back to Ephesians 1:19-20, where Paul says that he ceaselessly prays that they would know “what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according

to the working of his mighty power, Which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places.” There he prays that we would know that mighty power, and here he calls us to take hold of that mighty power. It is the same power that was at play in the resurrection and ascension of Christ. And it is available to us, His children. The command is “be strong in the Lord.” It’s not our strength. Nobody is telling you to pull yourself up by your bootstraps and be strong. That’s what the world tells you to do. The Bible tells you to be strong IN THE LORD. Our Lord Jesus told us, “without me ye can do nothing.” (Jn 15:5). But once we have Him, “I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.” (Phil 4:13). It takes strength to follow all the commands that he has been laying down. It takes strength to speak the truth in love (4:15). It takes strength to put away lying (4:25). It takes strength to forgive one another as God for Christ’s sake has forgiven us (4:32). It takes strength to submit ourselves one to another in the fear of God (5:21). And so on. I want to emphasize that this is a command. We aren’t told to sit back and relax and let God be strong on our behalf – we’re told to “be strong in the Lord.” How does one do that? The rest of the passage begins to answer that question.

Put On The Whole Armour Of God

**Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.
For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers,
against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.
(Ephesians 6:11-12)**

We become “strong in the Lord” by putting on the whole armor of God, since the devil will be doing everything he can to hinder us. This echoes 4:24 – “And that ye **put on** the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness.” Again, this is something we’re commanded to do. Put it on! When you’re on the battlefield, armor does no good if it’s hanging up in your closet. This is God’s armor. That is, He is the one who provided it. He is the one who knows everything there is to know about Satan and therefore knows exactly what you need to fight against him. The Greek word here for “armor” is “panoplia” from which we get our English word “panoply.” This is the complete equipment of a warrior, both offensive and defensive. The command is to put on the WHOLE armor of God – you are going to need every piece of it. You don’t get to pick and choose. He’s given you exactly what you need to stand against Satan. No piece is superfluous. Anything that is left out or treated as optional will open an avenue of attack.

The reason for all this is “that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.” Satan is a very wily character. He is smarter than you. More diligent than you. More experienced than you. More patient than you. More devious than you. More relentless than you. He’s

there to play the long game – he'll engage in tactical retreats, for example, only so he can attack you in another way after you've let your guard down. Without the strength of God, you don't stand a chance against him. He will always be looking for ways to attack you. He doesn't care so much how he attacks you so long as he can attack you – he's quite happy to change tactics to accommodate whatever chinks you've left open in your armor. If open hostility doesn't work, he will come in the guise of a kind, compassionate, wise friend. If intense persecution doesn't work, he will attempt to kill your spirit through monotony or prosperity. He will use his wiles to trick you into sinning and then accuse you and condemn you for those very sins. If you think you only need to be concerned with spectacular, extraordinary attacks of Satan, you are sadly mistaken. Remember the immediate context in which he introduces this subject: the rather mundane, day-to-day affairs of family and employment. He will attack you anywhere at any time in any way he can find, and if you're unguarded, you won't even realize you're being attacked. Your job is to have the armor of God on so that you can continue standing. Not standing idly – but standing firm. Standing ready. Standing your ground. Standing victorious. He may hit you with a heavy blow, and while you're reeling from that, he'll hit you with another. And then another. You may be bruised and battered and dazed, but if you don this armor, you will remain standing.

The word translated “wile” is “methodeia” which is where we get our word “method.” He has well-honed and tested methods – strategies and tactics, cunning arts, deceit, craftiness, trickery. Now, I can't possibly go into all the wiles of Satan. Nobody can. They are as varied and diverse as there are people. But I can say a few words that might help.

One of the main themes of the Bible is revealed in Genesis 3:15:

And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.

This verse introduces the conflict between Satan's seed and the woman's seed, which unfolds throughout the rest of Scripture, and indeed in each of our lives. Satan hates God. He hates the Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, he hates the children of God. You are not the ultimate object of his hatred; he hates you because you belong to Christ. Those who aren't manifestly God's children, Satan endeavors to keep away from Christ. Those who are, he endeavors to make miserable, ineffectual, downcast, and distracted from Christ. This is all because he wants to mar the glory of God, especially as it's displayed in His gracious plan of redemption. Christ and His work and His Bride are therefore Satan's primary targets. Since it is through the church that God makes known His manifold wisdom (3:10), it is no surprise that the body of Christ is the object of Satan's relentless attacks. If he can disrupt your communion with Christ in any way, if he can cause you to do something that brings a reproach on Christ, or if he can

introduce confusion, false doctrine, contention, or factions, he would count each of those as a victory. His tactics can include attacking our bodies, our spirits, our minds, our emotions, our faith, our names, our livelihoods, our loved ones, our relationships.

Basically, his strategy is to derail you so you are distracted from the “one thing” that you ought to be pursuing. David puts it like this: “One thing have I desired of the LORD, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the LORD, and to enquire in his temple.” (Ps 27:4). Jesus puts it like this to Martha: “Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things: But one thing is needful: and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her.” (Lk 10:41-42). Paul puts it like this: “Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.” (Phil 3:13-14). The common thread between these passages is that they wanted to be with God. They longed to know the only true God and Jesus Christ whom He sent. The one thing that we should desire and pursue above all else is fellowship with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ – now in this life, and then in the world to come, when we receive our new bodies and are finally conformed to Christ’s image.

Satan’s desire is to disrupt your fellowship with God. And he will succeed from time to time. But he can never take you out of His hand. The beauty of it is that while he may win a battle, he has already lost the war, because we have a Victor in Christ. Perhaps the most vexing thing to Satan is that he can do nothing to thwart God’s eternal plan. This is seen most clearly at the cross where, in bruising the heel of the promised Seed, Satan was participating in the very event that crushed his head. And that same reality plays out for each child of God: everything that Satan does with the intent of hurting us, God has ordained for our good, to save us to the uttermost and conform us to the image of His Son. Remember that Satan can do nothing without leave from God.

Now, this struggle with Satan is called “wrestling.” The implication is that it is close quarters, personal, one-on-one. In a wrestling match, the goal is to pin your opponent to the ground – the exact opposite of standing. But this battle can feel very disconcerting, because it is not against flesh and blood (that is, not PRIMARILY against flesh and blood). At least with flesh and blood, we can see what we’re dealing with. But this involves unseen, demonic forces at work, even when they energize flesh and blood to do their bidding as they “work in the children of disobedience.” (2:2). This is a spiritual realm, filled with an extraordinarily powerful and well-organized host of fallen angels, all gathered in array against you and me. They feel right at home operating in the darkness of this world, where they peddle lies, ignorance, wickedness, violence, and sin – the same realm where we used to be (“For ye were

sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord.” – 5:8). They are in “high places,” occupying that invisible spiritual domain from which they observe, gather intelligence, and strategize, with Satan as the “prince of the power of the air” (2:2) presiding over them.

Does it distress you to know that you have such an enemy? It shouldn’t. On the contrary, it should relieve and revive you – to be forewarned is to be forearmed. And you are armed with the armor of God, and your strength is in the Lord. It would be far more distressing to live where Satan is currently “the god of this world” (2 Cor 4:4) and not know he’s there. When you understand and acknowledge and think about the fact that you have such an enemy, things that may otherwise be inexplicable suddenly start to make a lot of sense, and you have a much better grasp of why you need the very strength of God to survive. On the other hand, if you don’t understand that Satan is a real creature (not just an idea, or a force of evil) and that he presides over a powerful, dedicated, unseen army that is arrayed against you, you will be a very poor servant of God.

I’d like to close this section with just a few examples of Satan’s wiles. I was reading a book the other day by a Puritan named Vincent Alsop. He was addressing the church that he pastored, and this comment stood out to me: *“we have disputed so furiously about truth that we have almost lost the other half of our religion, charity.”* For me, that hits close to home. I began to think that a church doesn’t get into that condition unless Satan is heavily at work. There are myriad stratagems that he can use to achieve such a goal, and as I read that quote, it occurred to me that one very common one is to drive us toward one extreme or the other. Let me give a few illustrations of what I’ve experienced over the years in my own life and observed in the lives of others:

- It’s a good thing to become intimately acquainted with the doctrines that God has revealed to us. But often, Satan ensnares us by pushing us to be fixated on one doctrine so that it eclipses “all the counsel of God.” (Ac 20:27). I’ve heard this referred to as a “pet doctrine” or a “hobbyhorse.” When that happens, every conversation is somehow diverted over to that doctrine, every verse in the Bible is forced to be interpreted in light of that doctrine (no matter how strained or convoluted the interpretation ends up being), and it befuddles us that everyone else isn’t as obsessed with that doctrine as we are. In the natural world, if I only eat one kind of food, I will almost certainly become malnourished; if I only exercise one body part, I will become grotesque and unbalanced. Likewise, a fixation on a single doctrine will eventually result in a distorted understanding of the whole Bible. All the other precious doctrines in the Bible will suffer because of it. Rock-solid, foundational truths will crack and buckle as they are warped and skewed to serve it.

- Similarly, there are many doctrines in the Bible that stand in tension with one another. They aren't contradictions; they may simply be difficult for us to understand how both can be true. For example, God's sovereignty vs. the responsibility of man; God's eternal decrees vs. the working out of those decrees in time; the immutable nature of God vs. the fact that God interacts with His creation, answers prayers, responds to repentance, etc.; "Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you" (Jn 15:16) vs. "Therefore choose life" (Deut 30:19); "I came not to send peace, but a sword" (Mt 10:34) vs. Jesus "came and preached peace" (Eph 2:17); and so on. Satan loves to get us to choose one side and neglect the other. Some of us may take pride in being "black and white" thinkers, or in believing that our powers of logic and reason are especially astute. Satan knows that about us. He will swoop in and convince us to contort and wrest the Scripture until we force it to make sense to us. The problem is that the truth isn't always simple. And why would we think it would be? We're dealing with an infinite God! It's much better to exercise humility and say, "I don't know. I can't explain it all. And I don't have to be able to perfectly understand and explain it to know that both sides are true."
- Sometimes we become so obsessed with what's wrong with other people that we neglect what's right. We become expert at saying what's wrong, but we become shallow and anemic in our understanding of the truth. Let me give a few examples. There are people who know very little about the love of God for lost sinners, other than to identify the doctrine that "God loves everyone and Jesus died for everyone" as a false doctrine. There are people who may be able to describe in exquisite detail what's wrong with faux Christians, but whose fellowship with God is languishing or, God forbid, nonexistent. You may be a busybody in other men's matters, while your own things lie fallen and decaying around your feet. Yes, we must "try the spirits" (1 Jn 4:1) and expose error, but if you're spending inordinate amounts of time trying to find things wrong with others, why are you doing that? To what end? You may be very zealous in exposing error, but it may very well be that Satan has bewitched you and is using that zeal to cause you to be very distant from Christ.
- Sometimes Satan drives us to the extreme of novelty. He will appear as an angel of light (2 Cor 11:14) and convince us that he's shown us some hidden truth or unique interpretation. "You're very special. Nobody has ever had eyes to see this before. This is amazing!" He'll convince us that this is the Holy Spirit giving us special insight into these things. "Hasn't God promised to reveal His secret to His servants the prophets? (Am 3:7). God would never deceive YOU." This is nothing less than Satan playing on our pride and stubbornness, making us feel important, and causing us to rest on our own understanding. It will lead to utter confusion, incoherence, and ultimately division. This type of deception is how many heresies and false teachings have begun.
- Sometimes Satan convinces you that you know something that you can't possibly know, pushing you to the extreme of thinking that you know the secret things of God. This

would be a theft because “the secret things belong unto the Lord our God.” (Deut 29:29). For example, it’s one thing to know that every event that occurs is providentially and sovereignly ordained by God; it’s another to say you know why some particular event occurred, when God hasn’t revealed that. It’s one thing to know that the doctrines of election and reprobation are true; it’s another to say that you therefore know who the reprobate are. It’s one thing to know that Jesus will return; it’s another thing to claim you know when.

Do you see yourself in any of these illustrations? You may notice that the common thread across them is that there is something good in all of them. A favorite tactic of Satan is to take a good thing - a desire to know and explain the things that God has revealed to us, or a zeal for truth - and use it to turn us away from Christ and toward error. And he does this by playing on our unique characteristics – if we’re proud, he’ll give us something to take pride in; if we’re contentious or think we’re gifted debaters, he’ll turn us to bite and devour our fellow sheep under the cloak of “zeal”; if we’re impatient and discontent, he’ll send us down endless rabbit trails. All designed to corrupt our minds “from the simplicity that is in Christ.” (2 Cor 11:3).

The solution to all these dangers is certainly not to abandon doctrine, discernment, or truth. Rather, it is to keep Christ at the center of all things. Doing so will be our protection from these subtle and vicious attacks from Satan. In fact, in Romans 13, Paul evidently equates putting on the armor of God with putting on Christ Himself! “...Let us put on the armour of light... put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ...” (vv. 12, 14). I hope to say more about this in a future sermon, but putting on the whole armor of God is synonymous with abiding in Christ. He is the living reality behind each piece of armor. Loins girt about with truth: Christ is the truth (Jn 14:6). Breastplate of righteousness: Christ is our righteousness (1 Cor 1:30). Feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace: Christ is our peace (Eph 2:14), and He is the sum and substance of the gospel. The shield of faith: faith in Christ alone (Gal 2:16). Helmet of salvation: salvation by Christ alone (Ac 4:12). Sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God: Christ is the living Word (Jn 1:1) and the One who defeated Satan with scripture (Mt 4:4-10). Satan’s desire is to separate us from Christ, so you stand against him by standing in Christ.

Take Unto You The Whole Armour Of God

Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. (Ephesians 6:13)

When I was young, I was taught that when you see the same thing repeated in close proximity in the Bible, that is something to pay special attention to. Here, we have “the whole armour of God” repeated. In this verse, it says “take unto you.” Verse 11 says “put on.” But the idea is

repeated because this is an urgent exhortation from Paul! And when you understand how crafty and dangerous Satan is, I hope you can see why. To be clear, this is not a suggestion; it is another command: “take unto you the whole armour of God.” Receive it! Take it up! It’s available to you, and it’s not doing any good sitting in a heap in the corner. Stop using other means to fight this treacherous foe and make use of what God has wisely provided for you. Pick it up, and put it on! Why? So you’ll “be able to withstand in the evil day.” The word “withstand” means to resist or stand against. The implication is that there will be attacks. And the time this happens is “in the evil day.” He already told us that “the days are evil” (5:16). But some days are more evil than others. That is, some days, Satan seems to be throwing everything he has at you. You don’t know when those days will come. Some days you go to bed and everything is fine. You wake up the next morning and Satan is already shooting his fiery darts at you before you have scarcely opened your eyes, and he proceeds throughout the day to fire more. You have some unnamed dread. You find some piece of news. You’re betrayed by someone you thought was a friend. You have some medical issue. Somebody died. Yesterday you had a strong assurance of your salvation, and today you wonder if you’ve ever even been saved at all! Yes, we all have evil days, and we will not be able to withstand in that day unless we’ve taken up the whole armor of God.

The passage ends with the phrase “and having done all, to stand.” Having done all what? Having taken up and put on the armor. Having withstood. Having fought. Having defended. The idea is, continue standing! People are falling all around you. You continue standing. You just had a victory over Satan? You resisted him, and he fled from you? Keep standing, because you’re not done. He’s going to come back. And in fact, the most dangerous times of your life will be right after a victory, when you think you can lower your defenses.

So, Paul has exhorted us to not rely on our own strength but instead to be strong in the Lord, and we do that by taking up and putting on the whole armor of God. As we’ve seen, Satan’s primary objective is to disrupt our communion with Christ, while God’s provision is Christ Himself, whom we are to put on. But what does this mean in practice? What does the whole armor of God look like? How do I put it on? How do I stand? Those are the questions that I would like to address next time, Lord willing.

It is God that girdeth me with strength, and maketh my way perfect. He maketh my feet like hinds' feet, and setteth me upon my high places. He teacheth my hands to war, so that a bow of steel is broken by mine arms. (Psalm 18:32-34)