

Ephesians 6:10-22

Standing Firm

Eph 6:10-24 (ESV) Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. **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.

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

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.

23 Peace be to the brothers, and love with faith, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. **24** Grace be with all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with love incorruptible.

We are facing a powerful and terrible enemy and we can't see him. Paul says we are "face to face" with this enemy who is not flesh and blood, but his realm is among "the spiritual forces of evil in heavenly places." He is most effective if we do not believe he is even there, he does not exist at all. He can beat us so easily because we are easy marks, suckers for his schemes and methods.

Paul tells us for the second time in this letter to suit up or to get dressed. He told us in 4:24 "to clothe yourselves in your new man that is created to look like God." He says in 4:23 that this "clothing ourselves in the new man" is really a "renewing of the mind." Now he tells us to put on armor. God's armor; it comes with all we need for the battle ahead. "But wait," we may ask, "Why a battle? Isn't this supposed to be the life of victory already won at the cross?" It sure is! We have been redeemed, adopted and sealed. "We have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will..."(1:11). Now Paul commands us to, "be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. Put on the whole armor of God..."(6:11-12). Paul is recalling what he prayed for us when he asked the Father: "that you might know...what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working (strength) of his great might that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places far above all rule and authority and power and dominion." (1:19-21) Paul used the same words, "power, strength and might" that he is using now:

“Finally, be strong (power yourselves) in the Lord and in the strength of his might.”(6:10)
The armor God provides to us, which we have to consciously choose to use, is the answer to the prayer of the first chapter. Paul, of course, is using metaphors, as he loves to do, to tell us this is what the renewing of the mind really means. It is bracing ourselves and teaching ourselves what we truly have in Christ, in the Church, under His leadership. We are empowered and strengthened by the same authority the Father has given to His Son because we are united to Him in the Church. The devil does not want us to believe that. He wants us to engage the battle on his terms. If we do that, he will win every time! In fact, Paul is wording this in a way that says even after we have readied ourselves for battle, victory is not guaranteed all the time. Even if we get knocked down for a time, we will not quit. We will stand. Paul knows this. How? He is in jail. The forces of evil have locked him down, but not knocked him down! He is still serving, and he is wearing the armor. Of course, his Roman guards don't see his armor, just as they do not see the forces that are working behind the scene. And there is the problem.

Many times we are just like the Roman guards; if we can't see, smell, touch or taste it, it must not *“be real.”* When it comes to the Devil, there are two common errors that have plagued the Church. One is we overestimate his power. The devil is the stuff of exorcists, spinning heads, vomiting green bile. The second is we underestimate him, either thinking he is just science fiction, or a funny character for a cartoon. Tom Wright sums it up pretty well:

“I have noticed, over the years, that the topic of spiritual warfare is itself the subject of spiritual warfare. It is as though certain hidden forces would much rather we didn't talk about it, or that we swept it under the carpet. As C. S. Lewis says in the introduction to his famous Screwtape Letters, the general public prefers either to ignore the forces of evil altogether — to pretend they don't exist, and to use cartoon images of a 'devil' with horns and hoofs as an argument to that effect, 'You can't believe in that nonsense, so you can't believe in a devil at all, can you?' — or to take an unhealthy interest in everything demonic, which can be just as bad in the long run.”¹

Even secular writers are noticing how our skepticism of anything truly demonic is affecting our ability to cope with the evil of the last hundred years. Andrew Delbanco is a liberal secular professor of history at Columbia and he wrote this:

“The Puritans thought Satan met his greatest success when he seduced believers into imagining that they were without sin..., but Satan may have managed a greater accomplishment by persuading modern Americans he does not exist at all. A gulf has opened up in our culture between the visibility of evil and the intellectual resources to cope with it. We have no language for connecting our inner selves with the horrors that pass before our eyes in the outer world.”²

We see everything that happens around us as having a natural cause, explainable by scientific method. Crime, racism, greed, war can all be explained as mental illness, social deprivation, poor education or broken homes. Our religious and political beliefs may color our opinion of the causes and the solutions, but as Americans in a wealthy, feel good culture we are at a loss to explain rationally what we see around us. But then we read Paul: *“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.”(6:12) Is Paul just voicing an ancient opinion held by ignorant people in an unenlightened age? That is the way modern western culture sees him. But in non-western societies, like Africa and South America, they accept what they perceive as evil as the reality of spiritual forces at work.

And when Paul uses the word “*wrestle*” or “*struggle*,” he means face to face combat. He uses one of my favorite prepositions to describe the fight—*pros* (προς), which in Greek refers to the face. John uses it in his Gospel when he says: “*the Word was with God, ...He was in the beginning with God ...*”(Jn 1:1,2) Jesus was *face to face with* God from all eternity. He left Him to live among us, to get *face to face with* us. It is the only way He could save us. But we have an adversary called the devil and it is another face to face encounter. But he does not want to save us. He wants get face to face with us to destroy us. How does he work? The people and the institutions we do see are influenced by the one we do not see. Paul says we fight *face to face with* rulers, authorities, cosmic powers, spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly (the unseen) realms. When Paul looks at his Roman guards, he knows they are not his enemies. The Devil behind the guards is the enemy Paul hates.

The weapons the Devil uses against are not all that spectacular. He uses lies and deception, slander and gossip. He brings accusations against us that discourage us. He really hopes these lies and slander make us respond in kind. Then he has won! He uses temptations. He studies us and knows our weaknesses. When we succumb and sin, then comes and whispers to us “Look at what you have done! How can God ever accept you?” leaving us filled with shame and guilt. I can’t say this too often: This is a mind-game. The Devil does not draw attention to himself with works of power. He wants us to think it is all about us. That is why our old methods and our old thinking will kill us, or rather, it will let the devil and his forces kill us. Do you want to see how his methods and schemes work? Go to the first book of the bible. Here is how the Devil defeated and took over the first Sons of God:

The serpent said to the woman, “You will not surely die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate.(Gen 3:4-6)

He lied! “*You will not die!*” Not only did he lie, he is implying that God lies. Why should we trust a God who lies? “*Trust ME!*” is what the serpent is telling her. And he won! Then he sat back to enjoy the consequences. But he wasn’t done. He patiently waited for his next opportunity to bring more chaos and death to God’s realm, which was now his realm.

“The LORD said to Cain, “Why are you angry, and why has your face fallen? If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is contrary to you, but you must rule over it.” Cain rose up against his brother Abel and killed him.” (Gen 4:6-8)

Cain is jealous and angry. He is not getting the recognition he thinks he deserves. He will not lift up his face to the Lord—to be *pros*; face to face with Him. He will not raise his face to God and give up his anger, his demand for the recognition. He refuses to look up and be restored. He is standing defenseless, without armor, before the beast. He believes the lie the devil is whispering in his ear, “*You are better than Abel*

and God knows it!” He lifts himself up against Abel and kills him. When we find ourselves like this we need someone to scream and yell Paul’s warning to us, *“Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and give no opportunity to the devil.”*(4:27) That anger we think is so rightfully ours is the same beast that was crouching in Cain’s heart and mind, telling us we deserve more. And as soon as we sin he ready to accuse us, to tear us apart, to destroy our lives.

We desperately need God’s armor. We have all experienced the enticement Adam and Eve felt; the anger, jealousy and envy Cain felt. It is not hard for any of us to put ourselves in their shoes. The danger is in how we respond. If the armor Paul describes is a series of metaphors describing something we need in our lives, the question is *“What is the armor exactly? Is it something I can really grasp and measure? How do I know if I am truly protected?”* I’ll say it again: It is all about the mind and the heart, and from the heart comes all manner of evil actions. Isn’t that the lesson of Cain?

The armor represents the truth, the righteousness, the readiness, the peace, the faith, the knowledge, the words and he promises we claim to believe. When we think about how the Devil attacks us, with lies and deception, slander and guilt, then we can think about what we need to do to hold out and stand against him. We need both truth and righteousness to defend us and to keep us alert, so we can find ourselves standing up at the end of the day.

The first line of defense is the truth. Paul calls it the belt or the girdle because it is the foundational garment that holds everything together. The King James uses the old idiom and tells us *“to gird the loins!”* That really is a good expression because sometimes the feelings and emotions that seem to get us into the most trouble come from *“gut instincts”* and other desires that drive us to do things that seem to control us. Paul says about the false teachers in Philippi: *“...their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things.”*(Phil 3:19). The mind game! Their minds are not set on truth, so they are driven by the desires of instinct and emotion. Grasping and getting the Gospel message deep into *“our bellies”* protects us. It is the truths of the mind affecting our emotions and desires. We will not be ashamed of our God, we will not fear others opinions of us, and we will keep our focus on the One who died for us. It is the truth *“down in the loins”* that protects us from the lies of the Devil and the deception of his world. This gives us a stability that others will notice.

Righteousness is a breastplate and it covers the heart. Every Christian is clothed with the righteousness of God because we are declared as righteous by God. So why do we have to put it on? Because this righteousness is talking about the outward manifestation of personal integrity and justice toward others. For instance, it is the righteous action we take in the face of anger. We look up to God and ask Him to lead us to do the right thing. *“Be angry and do not sin.”* Without the breastplate, the Devil will fill our hearts with evil, and we will suffer the shame of our acts.

The shoes on our feet mean we are ready to go wherever our Lord leads us to carry the message of peace to all men. This is where Paul drives home to us that we are not *“fighting flesh and blood”* but we are fighting the ideas of the dark heavenly realm that want to create conflict, wars and chaos in the world. Other men and women are not the enemy. They are as trapped in the bondage of darkness and death—just as we once were. How did we escape? By God’s grace! No human can boast. Knowing that, we offer peace. We offer our message of hope and light in the darkness.

Our faith is a shield. Faith is firm and confident trust in God’s promises and the Gospel message. Faith also means our faithfulness to the God we say we trust. The

“the flaming darts of the evil one”(6:16) are the temptations that pop into our minds, the doubts that plague us, circumstances and people that spark the fire of anger that makes us cynical and unkind toward others. I think Paul calls them *“flaming darts”* because the Devil wants us to burn with anger or lust or resentment. It is faith that douses the flames, it is faithfulness that keeps us on our feet. I think this really speaks to the very heart of our defense. It is failure in the face of temptation that seems to beat us more often than not. One of my favorite writers, J. Keith Miller, wrote in *“Habitation of Dragons”* about temptation. I often turn for comfort to a chapter called *“Temptation: A Strong Wind for a Flickering Flame”* when I have failed:

The truth about the Christian life seems to be that no one bats a thousand in facing temptation. As a matter of fact, most of the saints felt their averages were pretty low. We can improve our performance, and I thank God that this is so. But evidently in this life we will always have the occasional experience of succumbing to temptation. The sad truth is that much of the time I am too weak to resist, and my failure is simply a hard cold fact with which I must live. I have to come to God with the horribly uncomfortable feeling of failure. And finally, with no excuses, I force myself to my knees before Him in confession, asking for restoration to a state of usefulness and self-acceptance by His grace.

People who have not had this experience as Christians would make poor counselors for men like me. You may say that I am weak. Of course that is the truth. My question is, “What does a weak but sincerely committed Christian do when temptation gets through his blockers and tackles him with a crippling jolt?” I thank Him for the miracle of forgiveness and the strange new start He can give me. I pull myself to my feet, brush the caked spiritual mud from my clothes and walk into another day as His child.³

Notice how Keith Miller uses a football metaphor; his *“defensive blockers”* similar to Paul’s shield. Some of the flaming arrows will get past the shield, just as some of the tacklers get through our defensive line. No one *“bats a thousand!”* (A lot of metaphors for the Christian life aren’t there?) We must keep in mind, as we follow Jesus in this life, it is not about perfection. It is about progress and repentance. Looking up to God.

The helmet covers the head because that is where the brain is. Lose the brain and the body goes down in a heap. But Paul is not really talking about a helmet and a brain because this is about the mind. This is where we really have to commit to what we know is true. *“If God is for us, who can be against us? If Jesus was willing to die for us, then know that He is FOR US!”* We have to tell this ourselves, to preach to ourselves. We need the reminder every day: Our ultimate victory is certain! When we know for a fact, by faith, that our deliverance is guaranteed, then we can commit to stand firm. No retreat! No surrender! That does that mean no failure? No it means I will get back up—even if I am wounded!

Finally there is the sword, which Paul says is the Word of God. I don’t think he means *The Bible*, as we think of it, with its 66 books in a nice leather binding (or on a fancy iPhone). Such a book did not exist. (And neither did iPhones.) By *Word of God* Paul meant the message of the Gospel: The truth Paul taught and proclaimed. It is the offer of peace—the proclamation of a New King ruling the world and beyond. It is the call to faith in Jesus as we represent Him in the world. It is the words we speak and the prayers we say that helps overcome the schemes and methods of the Devil, just as

Jesus did when Satan tempted Him in the wilderness.(*Luke 4:1-13*) The one thing the sword is NOT. It is not a literal weapon we use to defeat our enemies, to kill them and eliminate them. Sadly, that has been a sin of the Church in earlier times.

Prayer does not seem to be part of the armor of God, but in the Greek Bible the sentence continues on, all the way down to v.20. Whether or not Paul intended that we think of it as part of the armor, I don't know. But I do think prayer is the way Paul wants us to implement the armor. We could say prayer is the atmosphere in which truth, righteousness, faith and proclamation are the most effective. Prayer gives us the spiritual power we need to take up the armor and face the Devil in whatever way he might attack us, whether through people or institutions. Paul says pray continually, habitually, daily and humbly. If prayer empowers the armor to our hearts, minds and loins, then prayer also is what empowers us together as a Church, in our common unity. We pray for any believer, whether mature and seasoned, or young and struggling. We are all in Christ and the Devil hates us all. Paul asked for the Ephesians to pray for him, so he would know what to say, how to say it, and to stay bold in his faith.(*6:19-20*) If Paul needed prayer, how much more do we need it! We need to pray for each other, to pray we stand firm in the faith so we do not give up our ground, and do not compromise our message. Keep in mind, it is much, much easier to hold our ground than it is to take it back after it has fallen into the hands of the enemy. That is the tragedy of the loss in Genesis 3. Adam and Eve did not stand in faith and prayer and they lost everything to the serpent. They were banished from the beauty and the protection of the Garden. But God made a promise. One would come from the woman and crush the serpent's head.(*Gen 3:15*) When Jesus came into the world, it is God becoming a human, born of a woman, and He was sent to take back what was lost, crush the serpent, and bring the beauty and protection of the Garden back to us.

We are all like Adam. We still carry in us the sin of Adam. We are just as easily fooled by Satan's schemes as Adam was back in the Garden. But from the book of Ephesians we see clearly that we are also God's beloved adopted children under His care, with all the provisions of power, might and strength we need to live faithfully. We not only live in a constant struggle with the rulers of this dark age, we also live in a struggle with our baser selves. Martin Luther summarized the gospel like this: *simul justus et peccator*—in Christ we are simultaneously spiritually lost sinners yet fully justified saints in God's sight. John Stott said it this way:

*"The essence of sin is we human beings substitute ourselves for God, while the essence of salvation is God substituting himself for us. We put ourselves where only God deserves to be—in charge of our lives—while God puts himself where we deserve to be—that is, being punished on the cross."*⁴

Paul closes by saying: *Grace be with all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with love incorruptible.*(*6:24*) Those of us who love this same Jesus will outlast death itself. That, after all, is what being a Christian is all about: Loving Jesus with an *undying* (*incorruptible*) love, in response to his *dying* love—*FOR US...*⁵

Dear Father, you give us all the protection we need. Please let others see there is the “ring of truth” as we walk with you, that our lives are righteous because you have declared us righteous. Help us to make peace wherever we go. Jesus, help us in our unbelief, strengthen our faith. Holy Spirit, protect our minds from fears and anxieties and give us the boldness and the humility to speak the Gospel clearly. Give us confidence, Lord that we can overcome the Devil the way that Jesus overcame him in the wilderness, and how He ultimately defeated Satan at the cross, where Jesus did for us what we could not do for ourselves. We call on the name of our Risen Savior. Amen.

¹ Wright, N.T., *N.T. Wright for Everyone: Ephesians* IVP Connect 2009 p.73

² Delbanco, Andrew, *The Death of Satan: How Americans Have Lost the Sense of Evil* Farrar Straus & Giroux 1995 p.2

³ Miller, Keith, *Habitation of Dragons* Word Books 1970 pp.111-12

I think Keith got the idea for the title of the chapter “*Temptation: A Strong Wind for a Flickering Flame*” from Thomas à Kempis “*The Imitation of Christ*”:

“I resolve to meet evil courageously, but when even a small temptation cometh, I am in sore straits. That which seemeth trifling sometimes giveth rise to a grievous temptation; and when I think myself to be secure, and least expect it, I am overcome by a light breath.” (Quote from *Habitation of Dragons* p.112)

⁴ Stott, John, *The Cross of Christ* InterVarsity Press p.160

⁵ Wright, N.T., *Ibid.* p.80