



## **Be Strong in the Lord and Stand**

*Series: The Grand Plan of the Glorious God*

Ephesians 6:10-18a

November 28, 2010

Pastor Nick Shaffer

---

As Paul closes this letter to the Ephesians, he does so with a warning and with an encouragement to persevere and stand firm in the face of the schemes of the devil to destroy them and the work of God in them. Here in these closing words of Ephesians 6 we find the clearest definition of spiritual warfare anywhere in the Word of God. Scripture presents spiritual warfare not as bizarre or strange, but as what the Christian life is – a fight for endurance and faithfulness and for the glory of God fully revealed in our lives. Paul is going to show us very clearly that we are in a spiritual battle against a ruthless enemy that is not to be underestimated. Moreover, Paul is going to make clear that apart from employing the armor and the weapon which God has forged for us, we are hopelessly overmatched. So Paul's intent today is to fit us for battle, to teach us to stand firm and to prevail in our life of faith before God. Paul wants us to be ready. Paul is going to begin by making clear to us, first of all:

1) The Reality of the Spiritual Battle We Are In. (v. 10-11a) In closing this great letter, Paul says finally – in light of everything that I have just told you – be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might and put on the armor of God. There is only one thing that you need armor for and that is for battle. Paul is telling us, in light of everything that I have been telling you, you need to know that you are in the midst of a great battle and your opponent is Satan. We are in a great battle with the devil.

What exactly is the devil warring against? He's warring against all that we have been blessed with in this letter. Compare what we learned in chapter 1 -- Satan wars against the eternal plan of God and against Christ's glory. In light of chapter 2 -- Satan wars against the saving and transforming grace of God. In light of chapter 3 -- Satan despises that and wars against our hope and against our joy and security in Christ. Then in light of chapters 4 and 5 -- Satan wars to bring disunity and division in the body of Christ and to destroy the character of the new man in Christ, to entice us into sin, to appeal to our fleshly nature to rebel against God, scattering

the seeds of discord and sin. And in light of what we have seen at the end of chapter 5 and the beginning of chapter 6 -- Satan despises the order and command of God.

In all things, Satan is opposed to God and to God's purposes. Though in an ultimate sense, he has no power to derail or destroy or restrain the purposes and the plans of God, he will do all in his power to war against the Lord and that places you firmly in his crosshairs. Coming to faith in Christ results in every spiritual blessing that we can imagine – we are the recipients of an astounding salvation and all the blessings that go with it, but is also the beginning of a great struggle with the devil and his forces. We must be aware of the battle. (1Pe 5:8) This is why Paul would tell us to be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. We are in a very real battle whether we realize it or not – a battle being fought in our living rooms and kitchens, our bedrooms and family rooms, in our classrooms, our churches, our neighborhoods, our businesses – everywhere and there are casualties in this battle every day. Paul does not want us to be casualties and so he is telling us that we must arm ourselves spiritually for what we are up against. We need armor and weapons which have been forged by God, given by God and which are empowered by Him. Paul is telling us that we need a strength to endure that can only be found in God, a might that resides only in Him. We must put on the whole armor of God and the reason that we must is because:

2) Our Enemy Is Not To Be Underestimated. (v. 12) We are not fighting against flesh and blood. This is a fact that is often forgotten in our churches today. We forget that our battle is not with flesh and blood we are battling spiritual forces and we need to understand some things.

First we need to understand that our enemy is powerful. Whatever else these words mean that are used to describe the spiritual forces, the devil and his demons, which are arrayed against us and seeking our destruction, the words rulers, authorities and cosmic powers clearly indicate that our enemy is formidable. Satan is a fearful adversary. Satan is a powerful foe, a fallen angel. We are no match for him on our own. He has at his disposal a myriad of demons that do his bidding with experience and intelligence. He hates God and opposes all of God's plans. On one hand, he is a powerful enemy. But on the other hand, he is not God. He is a created being and he is a defeated foe and the day is coming when he will be cast into the Lake of Fire, the cross and the resurrection of Jesus Christ have sealed his doom. But right now he is roaming the earth seeking whom he may devour. He despises us and were it possible for him, he would destroy all of God's elect.

Second we need to understand that our enemy is wicked. Jesus said of Satan: (Joh 8:44) Satan and his minions have nothing to do with the truth. They hate the light and shrink from it. Darkness and wickedness characterize their actions. There is no undecided angel or demon in this universe.

Third we need to see that our enemy is scheming. He has strategies and schemes to destroy the people of God and to oppose the plans of God. Seldom are the attacks of Satan or of his demons open attacks. Sometimes they are, for instance in Muslim countries where Christians are beheaded for their faith in Christ. Most times, though, they are indirect and sly. He works in the arenas of human religion, government, culture, media, human philosophy and wisdom to deceive and ensnare, to enslave and destroy.

One of the mainstays of Satan's arsenal is to attempt to impugn God's character and credibility like he did with Adam and Eve. He wants us to distrust God and the most common way he does that is to attack the credibility of Scripture, to attack its reliability, its sufficiency, its worth. Satan lures us into sin by portraying it as pleasurable and by hiding its consequences.

He casts doubt on the gospel, he slanders God's servants who would remind you of God's faithfulness and truth, falsely accusing, slandering, and misrepresenting their hearts and motives. He comes as an angel of light or uses human agents, smooth talking and flattering liars to lead you away from the truth and into falsehood, to undermine your trust in God and to create in you fear, hatred, depression, anxiety.

He schemes to undermine our relationship with Christ by generating trouble in our lives. Satan attacks through doctrinal confusion and falsehood. Christians who are ungrounded in the Word fall easy prey to wrong ideas about the things of God.

He attacks believers by causing divisions, trying to develop and promote an unforgiving spirit in the church. Satan attacks believers by persuading them to trust their own resources and power and not God's. Satan attacks believers by leading them into hypocrisy. One of his greatest

successes in history has been populating the church with religious unbelievers and real believers who are continually, it seems, being disciplined by God for disobedient lives. Last, in a way that encompasses all others, Satan attacks believers by leading them to disobey God's Word. Destruction and ruin are what Satan is after and his power is formidable. We cannot stand against him. We are in desperate need from God and Paul wants us to see that

3) To Stand Firm Requires That We Be Clothed With an Armor and Weaponry That Is Forged and Empowered By God. (v. 13-17) The idea here is to stand our ground. The Greek word for withstand is a military term for holding a position that is under attack and repelling the enemy. It carries with it the idea of valor and bravery to hold your ground because of your allegiance and loyalty to Christ, even if others are shrinking back. William Gurnall, in his 261 chapter exposition called *The Christian in Complete Armor* says: In heaven we shall appear not in armor but in robes of glory; but here they (the pieces of armor) are to be worn night and day; we must walk, work, and sleep in them, or else we are not true soldiers of Christ.

We must put on the whole armor and leave no vulnerabilities for Satan to exploit. We do not need to learn some special tactics or formulas. The answer for the attacks of Satan is quite simple: Take up the whole armor of God and stand firm. What is this armor of which Paul speaks? It is the gospel applied. It is the gospel appropriated. It is gospel armor that Paul is speaking of and the illustration that he is going to use to explain it is one that he has spent a lot of time looking at while he has been under house arrest – the armor of a well armed Roman soldier. Paul says that we must:

Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth (v. 14)...The belt of truth is the foundational piece of the gospel armor and the sense here is this, that having fastened this belt of truth on, you never take it off. Now I want you to try to picture the Roman soldier that is serving as our template. The first thing that he would strap on would be his belt and it was extremely important. The belt secured the loose flaps of the tunic.... As well, the belt was what kept the breastplate in place, allowed the soldier a place to hang the scabbard for his sword, allowed the soldier to use his shield with one hand and his sword with the other without fear of being entangled or tripped up. What is this belt of truth? This belt is nothing less than the very truth of the gospel and the truth of the Word of God applied to our lives, serving as the core of who we are. It is truth understood, truth embraced and truth incorporated into our lives. The Christian's belt is truth. How important is the belt of truth?

It is by the truth that we are saved -- (Eph 1:13). It is by the truth that we are sanctified, and brought to Christian maturity – John 17:17 makes that clear. The truth is the means by which our minds are renewed and transformed, from the ignorance and darkness of our lost condition to a renewed mind – that’s the essence of Ephesians 4:17-24. It is the truth that exposes error and deception. The truth is the basis for Christian unity. It is the truth which edifies and builds up the church. The truth is essential for true worship. Jesus Christ is the truth, and so to turn from the truth is to turn away from Him. It is clear to see why the truth is such an important part of our spiritual armor. Satan is a liar and deceiver and for that reason the truth is a vital part of our defense.

Having put on the breastplate of righteousness (v. 14)... Now the breastplate itself was specially designed and custom fit for the soldier who wore it. The breastplate that Paul was familiar with was brass that was molded or hammered to fit the body. Its purpose was pretty obvious -- to protect the heart, lungs, intestines and other vital organs during battle. It makes the perfect illustration to Paul. In Jewish thinking, the heart represented the mind and the will; the bowels were considered the seat of the emotions and feelings, so it represents the very things that cause a man to act.

So what is the righteousness that this breastplate is made of? Is Paul talking about imputed righteousness or practical righteousness? I think it is both. We need to think of this breastplate as composed of two alloys folded together to form a stronger metal – imputed righteousness and practical righteousness. Follow with me. The key metal in the breastplate is imputed righteousness – that perfect, infinite, sufficient righteousness of Jesus Christ who fully obeyed the law of God and died in our place on the tree, the righteousness that becomes ours at salvation, laid hold of by repentance and faith. (2 Cor 5:21) Imputed righteousness is the first part of the breastplate, the first alloy, if you will, that goes into the fashioning of the breastplate that delivers us for all of eternity and it provides the power for the second alloy, what we call practical righteousness -- a life lived in obedience to the character of Christ as revealed in His Word, the character of Jesus lived out in us as we follow His commands, strengthened by His Spirit. The breastplate is absolutely essential to protect us when we meet sin and the devil.

The Breastplate of Righteousness is God's double sided protection for the Christian. Christ’s imputed righteousness protects our conscience from the guilt of past sin and practical righteousness keeps us from the constant array of temptations and lusts that desire to destroy

us, by allowing us to walk as we should walk before the Lord, silencing the accusations of the evil one with a pure conscience. There is the belt, the breastplate and then there are the shoes.

As shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace (v. 15)... In Paul's day the footwear of choice for the Roman soldier was a thick-soled, semiboot with nails sticking out of it. These shoes served two vital necessities. One, it gave the soldier sureness of footing so he could stand in the midst of the battle. Second, it served as a means of protection against ancient land mines. How does this apply to our gospel armor? Well, the Greek here is kind of hard but the heart of what Paul is getting at is the steadiness and stability that the gospel fully understood produces in the Christian warrior.

A soldier must not lose his footing, or he will surely be defeated in war and what Paul is saying is that the gospel of Jesus Christ produces peace, and this peace gives the Christian warrior a steadiness, a stability which enables him to stand in battle, to stand firmly in the midst of a great battle with turmoil around us, but peace ruling us. We can stand in a battle and be at peace, that's what Paul is saying. What is this peace and where does it come from? The peace of the gospel that Paul is writing about is the peace that has been forged between God and man as a result of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. (Rom 5:1) The wrath of God, which ultimately would have consigned us to hell, has been removed. God poured out His fury and wrath on Christ, who acted as our substitute and God's anger was appeased. Our new status is peace with God. We are accepted by God.

And that peace with God extends to others that are at peace with God. We are reconciled with all our brothers and sisters in Christ. We are in the same family. We are at peace with them. The shoes of peace make us to stand in the battle, therefore, in two ways.

First, when we stand firm in the shoes of peace, we stand against any attempt of Satan to bring disunity and division in the body of Christ by scattering the seeds of discord and sin, but instead we will pursue forgiveness and reconciliation and restoration as God the Father did with us. Second, when we stand firm in the shoes of peace, we will stand against the attempts of Satan to bring to our souls doubt about our relationship to God through Christ. When he says to us: "You are not really reconciled to God. You still sin. He cannot look upon you", we will be able to resist his accusations knowing the reality of the peace that we have with God by the blood of his Son and able to deal with our sin by confessing and repenting of it rather than hiding it from God because we know that we have been fully accepted by Him.

In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one (v.16)...The Roman picture that Paul is using is that of the Roman "thureos" – the shield of battle. The shield was about 2 and ½ feet wide and four feet tall. It was like a big door that was designed to protect the entire body of the soldier. The shield was made of two thick pieces of wood, fastened together, with a thick piece of well tanned leather fastened to the front. They soaked the leather in water so that when the flaming arrows of the enemy hit it, the arrows would be extinguished. One of Satan's methods of attack is to fire at us flaming arrows, fiery darts, seeking to destroy us and those around us. That is why we must take up the shield of faith.

What are these flaming darts of the wicked one? Paul here refers to the temptations of the great adversary; temptations to evil and encouragements to sin. There are as many specific kinds of "flaming arrows" as there are people who have ever faced temptation. Every one of us has our own areas of vulnerability. For some of us, the flaming arrow is an issue of moral impurity, bitterness and unresolved anger, discouragement, worry, despair, disappointment. There are times when doubts and fears and anxieties and blasphemies flow through our minds. With the swiftness of arrows they enter. Attitudes come to us - greed - pride - ego - vanity - envy - hate - lust - prejudice - seemingly out of nowhere - piercing our minds and hearts. What are we to do? Paul tells us clearly, "take up the shield of faith with which you can extinguish all of the flaming darts of the evil one." Extinguish, put out, render ineffective, not a few, not most, but all of the flaming darts of the evil one. What is the shield of faith? It is simply trust in God and in His promises, promises that are superior to every enticement to sin. The shield of faith is the shield of full trust in the character and the promises and the person of God. To take up the shield of faith is to trust fully in God and his Word. When faith in God is your shield, God is your shield. How does this shield work? David wrote in Psalm 18: The LORD is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer, my God, my rock, in whom I take refuge, my shield, and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold. I call upon the LORD, who is worthy to be praised, and I am saved from my enemies. (Psa 18:2-3) When we are besieged by temptation, we take up the shield of faith and call upon the Lord, we bring those temptations before the withering glare of the Word of God and find them to be exposed for the lies and wickedness that they are. And we find, Psalm 18:30: This God--his way is perfect; the word of the LORD proves true; he is a shield for all those who take refuge in him. (Psa 18:30) When we meet these fiery darts with faith in God, not only is Satan withstood and defeated, but we are driven to a deeper experience of the grace and favor of God. When the arrows are flying and we take refuge behind our shield, we come to know aspects of His glory and faithfulness that we did not know before the battle. Next Paul says:

Take the helmet of salvation (v. 17)... In Roman times helmets were made out of two things: solid-cast metal or leather with patches of metal. The helmet protected the soldier's head from arrows, but its primary function was to ward off blows from a broadsword. Paul also referred to the helmet of salvation in 1 Thessalonians 5:8–9...

So then, what is the purpose of this helmet? The idea is that a well-founded hope of salvation will preserve us in the day of spiritual conflict, and will guard us from the blows which an enemy would strike that would steal our courage. A soldier does not fight well without a hope of victory. A Christian could not contend with his foes, without the hope of final salvation; but, sustained by this, he has nothing to fear. Last Paul says we are to take up...

The sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God (v.17)...The sword that Paul would have in mind was the sword that the Roman soldier used, the "machaira" which was a short sword, usually eighteen inches in length at most. It was a sword that was used to parry the opponents' weapon and to deliver a short, killing stroke. This is no flippant analogy that Paul is drawing. It was said that the Roman Empire was forged by the power and precision of the "machaira." The same could be said of the Kingdom of Heaven.

The Kingdom of Heaven is forged by the Word of God, the Sword of the Spirit. This is the only offensive weapon that Paul lists for us here. Now we need to understand what Paul is saying here. When he calls the Sword of the Spirit, the Word of God, the Greek that Paul uses here for "word" is not logos, the word used for the revelation of God in His Word. Instead he uses the word, "rhema". Rhema means the applied word of God. The "sword of the Spirit" is the Word of God applied to a specific situation. This is the great weapon placed in the hands of a believer.

Listen to the words of Charles Hodge regarding the power of the Sword of the Spirit on our battle with principalities and powers: "The only offensive weapon of the Christian is the sword of the Spirit, meaning the sword which the Spirit gives, that is, the word of God. There is nothing to limit this expression. It is that which God has spoken: His word, the Bible. It is sharper than any two-edged sword. It is the wisdom of God and the power of God. It has a self-evidencing light. It commends itself to the reason and conscience. It has the power not only of

truth, but of divine truth. Our Lord promised to give His disciples a word and wisdom which all their adversaries would not be able to resist; in opposition to all error, to all false philosophy, to all false principles and morals, to all the sophistries of vice and sin. To all the suggestions of the devil, the soul's simple and sufficient answer is the word of God. This puts to flight all the powers of darkness. The Christian finds this to be true in his individual experience. It dissipates his doubts; it drives away his fears. It delivers him from the power of Satan. It is also the experience of the church collective. All her triumphs over sin and error have been effected by the word of God. So long as she uses this and relies on it alone, she goes on conquering; but when anything else – be it reason or science, or tradition, or the commandments of men – when anything else is allowed to take the place or share the office of the word of God, then the church or the Christian is at the mercy of the adversary. 'In this sign conquer,' the Apostle may be understood to say to every believer and to the whole church. In this sign, in the word of God, conquer."

Amen to that. The Word of God is the absolutely sufficient weapon of the church of Jesus Christ. The Word itself bears witness (1Pe 1:23-25; Heb 4:12; 2Ti 3:16-17)

The Sword of the Spirit, the Word of God is absolutely sufficient for preaching, for evangelism, for instruction, for counseling, for keeping us from sin, for killing sin, for growing us in holiness, for guidance in our lives. It is this weapon by which all of the designs of Satan are destroyed and brought to nothing. The Word of God applied is the most powerful weapon in all the universe. The Sword of the Spirit is a most awesome weapon. This is the armor of God by which we stand but we cannot miss this last truth that

4) The Life-Giving Power of the Armor of God is Communion With God. (v. 18a) Paul makes this clear by calling us to be: praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. (Eph 6:18a)

Prayer is not the final piece of the armor of God, as some have suggested; it is not an optional addition outside of the armor that he has just described for us. No. Beloved we must understand deep in our souls is that the prayer that Paul calls us to is the very energy that enables the Christian soldier to wear the armor of God, and effectively to wield those weapons that he has been given, specifically the sword of the Spirit, the word of God. The armor that is

given to us, that is provided for us by God can only be used in fellowship and communion with God. We cannot think of the armor of God as something mechanical or magic that if we put it on there is no more left for us to do and that we will be okay. Every single piece, perfect though they are in themselves, will not suffice unless always and at all times we are in a living, vibrant relationship to God and receiving strength and power from Him.

It is prayer that gives power to the one who wears the armor of God and that gives victory to saint on the field of battle, because it is by the prayer of the saints that God engages the battle.

The reason why many fail in battle is because they wait until the hour of battle. The reason why others succeed is because they have gained their victory on their knees long before the battle came...Anticipate your battles; fight them on your knees before temptation comes, and you will always have victory. (R.A. Torrey)

---

© West Salem Baptist Church, 2011

Permissions: You are free to reproduce and distribute this material but you may not alter its contents in any way or charge a fee beyond the cost of reproduction. If you are posting online, a link back to this original document is preferred. Anything beyond these guidelines will require prior approval by West Salem Baptist Church.