

STANDING STRONG

EPHESIANS 6:10-18

Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.

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. Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one. 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, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints...

Once a fellow, dressed as the devil, was on his way to a Halloween Party, when it started to rain. The man ducked for cover. He slipped into a nearby church - and walked right into the service already in progress.

When the church members turned around and saw the devil at the door they became frightened and fled.

One lady though caught her coat on the communion cup holder, and couldn't shake loose. As the devil walked down the aisle the woman started to tremble.

He was just a few feet away when she blurted out, "Satan, I've come to his church for 20 years, but I want you to know, I've been on your side the whole time."

I'm assuming, you are on *the right side - the Lord's side*. But we all should be reminded that sides need to be taken! When you became a Christian you enter a battle. There is a spiritual war raging around us...

Understand, *when Jesus became your friend, Satan became your enemy*. As one preacher put it, "If you are sinking in quicksand Satan will gladly pat you on the back of the head." His goal is to rip you off, burn you out, drag you down, and burglarize your blessings.

John 10:10 warns us of Satan's intent, "The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy." Realize, you can't duck the devil, or hope he ignores you and never singles you out. He hates you and he's out to get you. You might not be looking for a fight, but Satan is a bully - and you'll face him whether you want to or not. You need to learn to overcome.

And that's Paul's desire in Ephesians 6. He outlines a three-fold battle plan. First, he helps us understand our adversary. Second, he encourages us to strap on our armor. And third, he readies us with our arsenal.

Our adversary... our armor... our arsenal...

The Christian life is not a playground - it's a battleground - and God wants us **standing strong!**

First, Paul identifies **our adversary**. Often we think the enemy we're fighting is the person we see - *the secular*

media, the pornographer, the drug pusher, the abortionist, the atheistic professor, the bully at school, the angry neighbor, the vindictive boss - but not so.

Our real enemy is spiritual wickedness. As Paul says verse 12, **"we do not wrestle against flesh and blood."**

Our ultimate enemy is the devil and his demonic henchmen. They were once angels, until pride filled their hearts. **Isaiah 14 describes their fall from heaven.**

Satan is now angry and envious. He hates all that God holds dear. And that's what puts you in the line of fire. Now that you are God's child you are Satan's target. Our adversary is the devil and his demons.

And in our dealings with the devil we are prone to make two mistakes. **Some Christians underestimate him, while other Christians overestimate him.**

Satan loves it when you **underestimate** him.

When you to **brush him off as a little imp in red leotards - with horns, tail, hooves, and pitchfork.**

Nothing pleases him more than to be conveyed as a comic strip character. In fact, Satan's greatest achievement is convincing so many people he doesn't exist. Research shows that **62% of Americans believe "Satan is not a living being, but a symbol of evil."**

Yet when I look at the horrible wickedness in the world today it's obvious to me there has to be a devil.

One pastor remarked, **"If you don't believe in the devil try working for the Lord awhile."** And it's true.

Don't underestimate the devil. He's ruthless and rabid. He has no morals or principles. His evil is beyond imagination, and he's extremely experienced. He's been working mischief since the Garden of Eden.

But neither should you **overestimate** the devil.

Satan is not God's equal. The devil is a created being. He's infinitely inferior to his Creator. Understand too, Satan's reach and power are limited by the will of God. In the story of Job he's not allowed to harm a single hair on Job's head without God's permission.

When Moses threw down his rod it turned into a snake. The magicians of Egypt did likewise. **But that's when Moses' serpent swallowed up their serpents. Satan had power, but God had far more power.**

This is why in **1 John 4:4**, the apostle writes to the Church, **"He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world."** In fact, often Satan is used by God to accomplish His purposes. Satan is a pawn in the hand of God - a stooge. **Tertullian called Satan, "God's ape."**

This is why we know it's impossible for a believer in Jesus to be demon possessed. **1 John 5:18** teaches, **"We know that whoever is born of God does not sin; but he who has been born of God keeps himself, and the wicked one does not touch him."** Literally, the Greek reads, **"the wicked one cannot attach himself."**

A Christian can be *oppressed*, but never *possessed*.

Satan can hassle and hinder, but he can't inhabit us. Trust me, Jesus is not into **"time shares"** with the devil.

Many Christians these days give the devil too much credit. Supposedly, everything is the result of a demon: *loneliness, fear, lust*. I read one preacher's list, "the demon of junk food, the demon of excessive talking, the demon of sun bathing, the demon of warts, the demon of disco fever (this is from the 70s), the demon of trying to be cool, the demon of spending sprees, the demon of food gulping, and the demon of baldness."

It's much easier to blame the weakness of our flesh, even our own sin, on the devil. But most of our problems are of our own making. Satan is no mini-god. He has none of God's attributes. He's no threat to God.

That's why, when we encounter Satan, we're told to "be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might."

Face the devil on your own and you're no match. Martin Luther wrote "For still our ancient foe, doth seek to work us woe; His craft and power are great, and armed with cruel hate, on earth is not his equal." But resist the devil in Jesus' name and he's forced to flee.

Colossians 2:15, along with a host of other Scriptures, tell us that on the cross Jesus destroyed Satan and his allies. The devil still launches a skirmish where and when he can, but he's a defeated foe.

When a Christian confronts Satan we never fight *for* victory, we always fight *from* victory. We rely on the victory won by Jesus. Remember Jude 9 when Michael, the archangel, wrestled with Satan over the body of Moses. Rather than

ranting, raving, and name-calling - Michael said simply, “**The Lord rebuke you!**”

Michael kept the Lord Jesus between him and Satan, and won the battle. *He was strong **in the Lord.***

When you stand against the devil in the strength of the Lord, the devil backs down. He realizes he’s no match for us... *But this helps to shape his tactics...*

Since his bold and blatant maneuvers drive us to the Lord where we gain more strength, Satan prefers, not the *frontal*, but the *subtle* assault. He has ways to slip up behind us to cut us off from our spiritual supply line.

The devil’s only hope is to distract us from the Lord, or weaken our faith, or get us too busy to pray.

All too often persecution, or sickness, or calamity cause us to seek the Lord. Satan works to create the opposite effect. He wants us to forget the Lord.

When the big bad wolf couldn’t blow down the house he didn’t give up. He ate bacon for breakfast because he slid down the chimney. The wolf resorted to tricks and schemes. And this is Satan’s strategy...

Verse 11 alerts us to “**the wiles of the devil.**”

Rather than obvious opposition, Satan favors **deception.** John 8:44 calls him “**the father of lies.**” Paul warned the Corinthians that he often presents himself as “**an angel of light.**” He appears in pleasing shapes.

And too, Satan loves to use **fear.**

1 Peter 5:8 calls him “a roaring lion.” In the jungle the roaring lion is the older animal that’s lost its teeth, but still knows how to sound vicious. The roaring lion jumps in front of little Bambi, as she strolls the path.

He strikes *fear* in the *deer*. She retreats the opposite direction right into the teeth of the younger lions.

Satan is like this roaring lion. He uses fear and intimidation to manipulate us. Satan is harmless if we refuse to be afraid, and take a stand against him.

He also uses **dissension**. The word “**devil**” means “**slanderer**,” and he loves to stir up ill will and bitterness between church friends and family members.

Condemnation is also his tool. Revelation 12:10 refers to Satan as “**the accuser of the brethren**.” Satan loves to bury you in guilt and remind you how unworthy you are of God’s favor. Remember, “**Whenever Satan reminds you of your past remind him of his future**.” There’s no condemnation for those who are in Christ.

Lastly, Satan uses **compromise**. It reminds me of the hunter and the grizzly. The hunter was about to pull the trigger, when the bear asked if they could talk...

The grizzly asked the hunter what he wanted out of the situation. The hunter replied “**a fur coat**.” The bear said he wanted “**a full stomach**.” So they compromised.

And both got what they wanted, but in the end, it didn’t work out so well for the hunter. This is what happens when you compromise with Satan - *you lose*.

Billy Graham once said, “The devil is a good devil.” He’s right. He’s good at what he does. He’s tricky, and skilled, and creative, and persistent, and ruthless. That’s why we’re warned of “*the wiles of the devil.*”

And because Satan’s assaults are more *subtle* than they are *frontal*, you and I need special protection.

And God has exactly what we need. Verse 11, “Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.” Before we *get it on* with the devil, you and I need to *strap on our armor.*

Remember Paul wrote Ephesians in a Roman prison cell, accompanied by a Roman soldier. Paul was able to eyeball the soldier and note his protective armor.

He then used the pieces of the legionnaire’s armor as an analogy of the spiritual armor God gives to us.

Paul lists five pieces of spiritual armor that you need to strap on if you want to counter the wiles of the devil - a belt, a breastplate, sandals, a shield, a helmet.

Verse 14 mentions the belt of truth.

The belt worn by a Roman soldier was a wide, thick leather strap that wrapped about the abdomen.

In ancient times people believed the body’s abdominal area was the seat of their emotions. We still talk about “gut feelings” and “intestinal fortitude” and “a stomach full of butterflies.” When a soldier readied for combat his first step was to buckle and tighten his belt.

And this should be our first step. Satan loves to move in the realm of feeling. He plays pinball with our hormones. He exploits sensitivities and insecurities.

It's amazing how our feelings fluctuate - the highs and lows - the ebbs and flows can be dramatic.

Satan toys with our emotions. We go from feeling funky to a funk in a few hours. Satan suggests, "How can you be a Christian if you're not joyous? What's wrong with you? You must not be a Christian after all."

The first lesson every Christian needs to learn is that **faith is based on facts not feeling**. I'm not a Christian because I feel like one. I'm a child of God because He promised if I gave my all to Jesus He'd make me one.

The way to get a grip on your emotions is to tighten up the belt of truth. Tie your life to God's Word - not to mere fickle emotions. When your mood differs from Scripture, believe the Word and manage the mood.

Here's a great poem, "Three men were walking on a wall - Feeling, Faith, and Fact. When Feeling took an awful fall, then Faith was taken back. So close was Faith to Feeling, that he stumbled and fell too. But Fact remained and pulled Faith back - and Faith brought Feeling too." Feelings will often follow faith, but when you let them lead the way you're asking for trouble.

Base your faith on God's truth. You can counter Satan's attacks by tightening up the belt of truth.

Vs 14 also lists **the breastplate of righteousness**.

The breastplate was a single sheet of metal over the upper torso. It protected a vital organ - *the heart*.

And just as the ancients associated the abdomen with a person's feelings or emotions - the heart was viewed as **the seat of the desires**. Even today "*to put your heart into it*" means to show a strong desire.

If you're a Christian you're well aware of the changes God has worked in your heart. When a person comes to Christ they receive **a new heart!** God takes away our old desires and replaces them with new desires.

When I came to Jesus my "*want-to's*" changed.

I'm far from perfect, but since coming to Jesus, God has given me a love for Him and a love for others. I now want to walk with God and please Him. I couldn't say that before. *Jesus has changed my "want-to's"*.

But as I warned, Satan is slippery. He doesn't play by the rules. He ignores your *want-to's* and reminds you of your *use-to's* and *once-dids* and *still-cans*. The devil inflames old passions, and reactivates latent lust.

You're excited about going to church when a former friend shows up with a 12-pack of beer looking to party.

Your old boyfriend happens to be in town, and calls you the day after you had a fight with your husband.

Satan is sneaky. He plays on old desires and conjures up temptations you thought were forgotten.

How do I counter when Satan tries to lasso my heart and pull it away from God? There's only one way - by hiding my heart behind a breastplate of righteousness.

Jesus made me right with God. His blood did what millions of sacrifices failed to do. I need to believe!

It's now up to me to see myself in Christ and to live like it. I've got to believe I belong to God - that I'm truly His child. If I believe, my *want-to's* won't fade - but if I doubt my relationship with God old friends and the old life will lure me away. *Use-to's* will have an appeal.

Seeing myself right with God protects my heart.

And verse 15 mentions **the sandals of peace.**

The Roman soldier wore the ancient equivalent of football cleats - half boots with leather straps. The bottoms were studded. The hobnails provided traction on slippery surfaces, and stability on rocky terrain.

Realize, a soldier's footwear was strategic. He could survive if his belt or breastplate shook loose, but if a soldier can't keep his footing, the enemy can knock him off balance and thrust him through with a sword.

And this is Satan's strategy toward you. He loves to knock us off balance, and confuse our faith. If he can trip us up, or cause us to stumble - he goes for the kill.

Here's how it works... You're cruising through life, doing great - when someone asks you a question you can't answer. It's a point you've never considered.

It throws you for a loop and you begin to doubt...

Or perhaps it's not a question you can't answer, but a situation you can't explain. You pray for a reason, but the heaven's are silent. You start to question whether God is in control - if He's really wise and knows what he's doing - if He loves you after all... Satan has many ways to knock us off stride, and set us up for the kill.

How do I defend myself?

By lacing up *the sandals of peace*. When the path gets slippery or shaky the peace of God steadies us.

All the unanswered questions can never deny the peace of God in our hearts. Many years ago Blaise Pascal spoke of this peace when he stated, "The heart has reasons that reason knows nothing about."

Jon Courson is a pastor in Applegate, Oregon. Years ago Jon's daughter went to be with Jesus in an auto accident. At her memorial service Jon testified of the tremendous peace God had given him. He said when he trusted God, an amazing peace ruled over his heart.

But when he tried to make sense of his daughter's death God's peace vanished. It dawned on Jon. The Bible calls it "the peace that passes all understanding."

In his search for understanding, he had sacrificed God's peace. Jon realized there are times when you can't have both. *Understanding* and *peace* don't always ride together. Sometimes you have to choose.

Did he want *understanding* or want *God's peace*? Jon chose God's peace. *What will you choose?* By lacing up *the sandals of peace* we choose peace!

And verse 16 talks about **the shield of faith.**

The Roman shield was approximately 4' long by 2½' wide. When a barrage of arrows were launched, a soldier could place the shield in the ground and crouch underneath. It offered whole-body protection. This is why Paul says, **“above all, taking the shield of faith.”**

The shield was also made of brass and covered with layers of leather. Before the battle, it was soaked in water. Wet leather extinguished the **“fiery darts.”**

If you've been a Christian for any length of time you know that Satan is also known for his **“fiery darts.”**

1 Peter 4:12 tells us, **“Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you...”** We can expect flurries of trial and temptation from time to time.

How do you respond when Satan's darts are fired in rapid succession? When it's one thing after another?

Don't try to fight off the attacks one by one - there're too many and come too quickly. When you're hit by a flurry of fire grab the shield of faith and hunker down. Hide underneath and wait on God. It's *faith under fire!*

And realize, **the Roman shield was gang-able - they connected. Link shields with another soldier, and it created more protection...** This happens spiritually when believers link up and stand together in their faith.

Believe God's Word is true... Believe His promises are sure... Believe in His faithfulness and truth...

Hide behind your faith and Satan's fiery darts will *fizzle* not *sizzle*. **Faith is everything.** 1 John 5:4, "This is the victory that has overcome the world - our faith."

Then verse 17 **the helmet of salvation.**

His helmet was made of strong metal that could withstand the blow of a hammer or battle-ax. It covered his forehead, and wrapped around his cheeks; then extended downward in the back to protect his neck.

With no helmet he'd become a casualty. Just as no football player would enter a game without strapping on his helmet, the same was true of a Roman soldier.

And it's just as important we strap on the helmet of salvation. Evil thoughts are among Satan's fiery darts.

Often a perverse thought will come out of nowhere.

It pops into my brain, or flashes across the screen of our mind. When a thought enters my thinking it's my choice to hug that thought, and entertain it, and nurture it, and dwell on it - *or reject it as quickly as it came.*

Martin Luther once said that thoughts are like birds. "You can't keep them from flying over your head, but you can keep them from nesting in your hair."

Not all of our thoughts originate with us. Satan can interject evil ideas. He can poison our minds IF we don't protect ourselves... and our protection is strapping on the helmet of salvation. *Don't you think it's time you decided to take control of your thought life?*

The Black College Fund has a memorable motto, “A Mind Is A Terrible Thing To Waste.” Don’t waste a mind.

When I put on the helmet of salvation I’m making a commitment to think pure and godly thoughts. I’m filling my mind with Scripture. I’m fixing my focus on God and the things of God. If you’ll fill your mind with the good and godly - Satan will have a much more difficult time interjecting his garbage. A good helmet is essential.

Notice again verse 11, “Put on the whole armor...” It’s not enough to have armor, if we don’t put it on.

We’ve all heard stories of a driver who didn’t buckle his seatbelt, or a policeman who didn’t wear his vest, or a cyclist who ditched his helmet... And likewise, God’s armor does us no good if we don’t *put it on!*

Go to battle half-dressed, and you’ll leave openings the devil can exploit: *Guard your feelings with God’s truth* - you got a belt... *Protect your desires* - wear that breastplate... *Choose God’s peace* - strap on the sandals... *Above all, have faith* - hide under your shield... *And think pure thoughts* - put on that helmet...

And of course, notice the one part of the body that the armor doesn’t cover... “the back.” God gives us no protection for *the back* because retreat is not an option.

James 4:7 gives us confidence, “Resist the devil and he will flee from you.” The only way you can lose the spiritual battle is to run scared. If you’ll be strong *in the Lord*, put on the whole armor of God, and take a stand against the devil - then he’ll have no power over you!

For God wants to use us to win spiritual victories.

Realize, the armor is defensive. To this point Paul's emphasis has been on *holding ground*, not *taking ground*. But in verses 17-18 Paul lists two offensive weapons - **an arsenal on which we can go on attack.**

Paul speaks of **"the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God"** and **"praying always."** The sword and the shell - the blade and bomb - infantry and artillery. **"The weapons of our warfare"** are the **Bible** and **prayer.**

Hebrews 4:12 tells us, **"For the Word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than a two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart."** It's a spiritual scalpel.

Not a week goes by when someone doesn't say, **"Pastor Sandy, you were talking to me today. It seems you know exactly what I'm dealing with each week."**

Actually, what I do is send the pastors around at night. They hide in the bushes outside your house, and eavesdrop in on your conversations... *No, not really!*

I have no idea as to the specifics going on in your life, *but God does, and He uses His Word to cut to the heart of the matter.* The Bible is unique. When you read it, the author is there helping you understand.

The Bible is a supernatural book. There's power in its pages. It *convicts us of sin*, and *strengthens our faith*, and *cleanses our mind*, and *feeds our soul.*

And Satan is powerless over God's Word.

When the Devil tempted Jesus, the Lord used His Word to drive the enemy away. 1 John 2:14 describes how Christians overcome the evil one, "Because you are strong, and the Word of God abides in you."

Satan's schemes are brought to light - fear is overcome - guilt dispelled - lies are exposed - guidance is delivered - all through God's Word. Nothing is more vital than for you to know, and do, the Word of God.

The Bible is the blade, but prayer is the bomb.

Prayer is the Christian's heavy artillery. Before we confront the devil in hand to hand combat - and even get close enough to him to use the sword of the Spirit - we first need to wear the enemy down through prayer.

Prayer is done behind the lines. In the safety of our home or church we can drop to our knees and lob shells on the enemy. We can beat down strongholds.

We can loosen the devil's grip on another life before we ever go to that person with a kindness or witness.

Recent wars have shown the devastating effects of computer-guided "smart bombs." Today, from the deck of our war ships, the American military can send laser-guided missiles to targets with pinpoint accuracy.

But even more impressive is the accuracy and potency of prayer. On my knees I can go anywhere in the world and have an impact for God's kingdom.

I can help missionaries and populate eternity. I can even bring down governments and change societies, all through

the power of prayer. Martin Luther once said, “My prayer is more than the devil himself.”

Prayer can open the window of heaven and pour out divine blessing. It's prayer that moves the hand of God.

Through prayer we can *blow away a person's excuses, breakdown their defenses, strip away their spiritual blinders, and overcome their stubbornness.*

William Cowper once penned, “Satan trembles when he sees the weakest saint upon his knees.”

Tonight before your head hits the pillow, or tomorrow before you feet hit the floor... open your Bible and strengthen your faith; then drop to your knees and change your world. Let's use the blade and the bomb.

Roy Putnam writes, “It's the fearful who allow the devil to hold high carnival on this planet. Satan sets up his tyranny only because he has not been challenged.”

As Christians we are soldiers in God's army.

Be strong in the Lord, put on the whole armor, grab the blade and the bomb; then stand against the devil. *Jesus has won the victory. It's time we join the battle!*