

Ephesians 6:10-20 Be Strong in the Lord! Pentecost 15 September 6, 2015

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Grace and peace are yours from God our Father who gives us strength through our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. Paul closing words warn the Ephesians of their worst enemy and of the best defense in Ephesians 6:10-20 These are Your Words, heavenly Father to give us strength to fight using Your Word. Your Word is truth!

Dear Christian Friends,

There are shows on TV where individuals compete for a prize. It may be singing, dancing, sports, or others. In order to win, a person doesn't just need to be good; he or she needs to be better than everyone else. It takes strength, understanding, and skill to win. The Apostle Paul likened the Christian's life to a competition, but not against other people. It's against the devil and all his evil forces. It seems impossible for us to win against such power. But we have Christ Jesus, our Savior. His Word tells us:

Be strong in the Lord!

First, know your enemies. Paul warned us to watch out for the devil's schemes. He is so cunning, that many people don't realize they are under attack. He is determined for us to suffer eternal loss! With him, there is an army of evil angels, ready to do their part to tempt or trouble us. We are in serious danger. We'll soon commemorate the 9/11 attacks. To this day there is some fear in America because Muslim terrorists are set to attack innocent people. How much more we should be cautious of the devil and his evil forces that use people, movies, and other temptations, and our own sinful natures to harm us spiritually.

Paul wrote, *"Our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against rulers... authorities, ...powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly (supernatural) realms.(v.12)* This is not a fair competition! There is nothing in this physical world that can stop the power of demons. The devil and his forces have brought evil to this world ever since sin began. They will be relentless in attacking us to get us to fall and join them in hell. We must not be overcome by the devil's schemes! He attacks us with false teaching. Paul wrote, *"The god of this age (devil) has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel... of Christ."* (2 Corin. 4:3) The devil is constantly trying to discredit God's Word: what it says about creation, defining sin, how to be saved, or life after death. He will use any way to distort the truth. When Jesus was tempted, the devil even misused the Bible against Him.

The devil's other attack is to cause us to sin or to become discouraged so that we lose our faith. We all sin. But as believers, God calls us to repent and daily seek Jesus' forgiveness. The devil tries to get us so caught up in a sin it controls us, like when King David committed adultery and then murder as his sins controlled him! He lost his faith for almost a year until he finally repented. We must take warning that continual lying, cheating or any sin will harm our faith. Living without repenting is like walking along the edge of a cliff with a 1000 foot drop-off and saying, "I won't fall." Ask King David or the disciple Peter who denied Jesus about falling. Living in sin gives the devil a chance to push us over the edge to destroy our faith. The Bible warns, *"If you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall!"* (1 Corin. 10:12)

Second, put on the armor of God! Starting in verse 14 Paul uses the picture of a Roman soldier armed for battle to describe God's protection and strength for us. *"Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist."* (v.14) The devil is the father of lies. Often he attacks us with half-truths or lies. God's truth from His Word surrounds us like a belt that holds our defenses together against him.

Another protection is *“the breastplate of righteousness.”* (v.14) When the devil accuses us of sin, we turn to Christ who took away all our sins. It is Christ’s holy merits that offer us a place before His throne. The devil constantly tries to get us to think we will not get to heaven since we have failed our God. But, the truth is that Jesus, as our Savior, never failed to do God’s will. His perfect life is credited to us as we trust in Him. We also have our *“feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace.”* (v.15) Footgear for the soldier helped them stand on rough ground. So, the Gospel of peace helps us be ready for anything. Peace is not what we feel, but how God views us now that Christ has forgiven our sins and given us His peace. At the same time, we should know that having God’s peace will put us in conflict with the devil.

The next parts of the armor are *“the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one”* and *“the helmet of salvation.”* (v.16-17) The “faith” here is used to describe what we believe, the teachings of God’s Word. We can use God’s Word as a sure defense just like Jesus did when He was tempted by the devil. Martin Luther wrote, “Though devils all the world should fill, all eager to devour us, we tremble not we fear no ill, they shall not overpower us. This world’s prince may still scowl fierce as he will, he can harm us none. He’s judged the deed is done. One little word can fell him.” Also, when the Roman soldiers stood side by side with their 4 ft. long shields in front of them, they were like a marching wall. So, as we worship together side by side, we encourage each other with God’s Word and prayer. United we stand! The helmet of salvation reminds us that by knowing God’s saving Word the devil can’t harm our minds.

God also provides *“the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.”* (v.18) We cut into the devil’s schemes when believe God’s Word. *The Gospel is the power of God unto salvation to everyone who believes.”* (Romans 1:16) There is one more way we can put God’s armor to use. He wrote, *“Pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests.... Be alert and always keep praying for all the saints.”* (v.18) When we pray in the Lord’s prayer, “lead us not in to temptation” we are praying for God’s protection for all Christians to win the victory. Parents, pray for your children and children for your parents. All of us pray for: relatives, friends, Christian teachers and students, pastors, seminaries, and even for unbelievers that they would come to believe. Paul even asked for prayers while he was in prison awaiting his trial before the Roman emperor that that God would give him boldness to speak.

Third, stand your ground! With God’s Word to understand our powerful enemies and with God’s Word to be our armor, we can stand in Christ’s strength. Paul wrote, *“Be strong in the Lord and in His mighty power. Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes.”* (v.10-11) God sent His almighty Son to become one of us in human weakness. Jesus fought against every temptation just like us. But, He won every time and never sinned. He didn’t even sin while on the cross suffering for us. He died in victory destroying the devil’s hold over us by sin and fear! God has given us His precious Word so that by faith we are connected to the Son of God and all the forces of heaven! When we leave church today, Jesus will give His angels charge over us to keep us in His ways! He has given us His powerful Word that sends the demons running as we use it properly in the name of Jesus. Jesus promised, *“My Father will give you whatever you ask in My name.”* (John 16:23)

The armor Paul listed really focuses on different ways that we can use God’s Word effectively against our powerful enemies. God gives us strength when we depend on Jesus in all things. St. Paul wrote while in prison, *“I can do everything through [Christ] who gives me strength.”* (Philip. 4:13) The devil and evil in our world won’t go away. But, through Christ we can resist them. Christ has forgiven our sins and has won the victory! At death, we’ll say our final goodbyes to the devil and enter heaven and there’s nothing that he can do about it. The joy of winning a competition is exciting. But, it cannot compare to the victory we’ll celebrate in heaven. Christ has given us His strength. We trust in Him. With His Word we win! Amen.