

“Standing Firm in Christ”
Ephesians 6:10–18
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We will be looking at Ephesians 6 where Paul is going to give us this final challenge, this call to arms that as Christians we are at war, at battle so we need to stand firm in Christ in the strength of His might. It is appropriate given this is the weekend we celebrate and honor those who have given their lives for our freedom in war. They knew the cost and they have given us the right today to gather together and preach God’s Word. Let’s now look at the text for this study.

Ephesians 6:10–18 says *[10] 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.*

This is the Word of the Lord and it’s the truth.

There I was a junior at Briarwood Christian School in a chapel service on a Tuesday morning and it was a low roar of a bunch of high school students. Dr. Kinard the superintendent of BCS walks up to the podium and I thought this was going to be a good lesson to hear because he speaking that day. Sometimes Dr. Kinard would just stand at the podium and be quiet and let the guilt of talking while Dr. Kinard was supposed to be talking kind of flood over all of us high school students. This day he kind of just stayed quiet and I thought ‘who is still talking?’ Then kind of measuring his words he slowly began to talk. He said ‘Today up in New York City a plane has tragically flown into one of the Twin Towers.’ At first, I thought he was kidding and thought it was a weird thing to joke around about, but perhaps he would use it later as an illustration or something. Then he said ‘let’s start praying for the people in New York, those who were on the flight.’ So this thing was real.

Right in the middle of praying, Dr. Kinard received a phone call and he took the phone call. Everyone was thinking what was going on and then he said to us ‘another plane has hit the south tower.’ They wheeled in televisions and we ended up watching the news the rest of that day. Whether we liked it or not or wanted it or not or knew it or not we saw that we were at war. We had grown complacent and fallen asleep. We have one of the best economies in the world with one of the strongest militaries and our enemy Russia had started to peter out and they were going into a democracy now. We didn’t really have any threats, but without us knowing, we were at war.

In this study, that is what we will be seeing Paul saying to the Christians in Ephesus but to us to today – we are at war. So let’s start by looking at the first verse in our text, Ephesians 6:10 which says *[10] Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might.* The word

‘finally’ here is like saying ‘in conclusion’ to this letter Paul is writing or maybe the better word here is ‘henceforth’ being in reference to all he has just written. So in Ephesians 1, 2, and 3 Paul talks about who we are in Christ, who God made us to be, how the Father chose us before time even began, how He sent His Son once and for all to make atonement for His people on the cross, and how He sends the Holy Spirit to make us alive and unite us in Christ. We are new creations. We have a new identity in Christ through the full work of God. Then Paul says in Ephesians 4, 5 and 6, now because of who you have been made to be in Christ this is how we are to live for Christ and lays that out for us. So with that in mind we come to Ephesians 6:10. Paul wants us to take this posture moving forward.

When I teach people how to shoot, there needs to be a good athletic stance – strong, steady and ready to swivel if attacked and shoot with accuracy. That is the posture of strength we are to take and what are we to be strong in? We are to be strong in the Lord and the strength of His might. The verb ‘to be’ strong is actually a passive verb. It means we are receiving strength and we’re to be continually strengthened from the Lord. It is almost one of the great paradoxes of the Christian life that as we stand in that good, ready to fight position we are only strong to stand as we understand how weak and needy we really are. I not only need Him at the moment of my conversion but I am in desperate need of His grace moment by moment, either until the end of history or the end of my life, whichever comes first. We need to take this humble neediness upon Jesus deepening our relationship with Him if we have any hope of standing firm and strong in the Lord. Let’s continue in the passage.

Ephesians 6:11 says [11] *Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil.* Let’s kind of walk this verse backwards. First, we see we have an enemy, the devil. The devil is a personal demonic being against God and His chosen people. Paul highlights here the schemes of the devil – it is the military strategies the devil uses against God’s people. In any military strategy, never do you go up against the enemy’s strong point. You are always trying to attack and exploit the weak points.

When I was in the military, we did a training exercise out in the deserts of California. I was in this 12-man team and we got attached to this huge tank brigade. There were thousands of people and hundreds of tanks. They were fighting this other huge tank brigade. On this team we had some medium machine guns and some rifles. It would have been lunacy for me and my team to walk up to this column of tanks and start shooting it with our weapons. We actually looked over all the intelligent reports and looked for any kind of weakness we could find. We did all kinds of reconnaissance missions observing the enemy and we found this place we could sneak in at night and sabotage their fuel that made it not work. We didn’t make a big commotion. So now because the tanks couldn’t use the fuel, the enemy was just a bunch of sitting ducks. Now the good force could come in and wipe them out.

Practically what does this mean for my Christian walk? Satan is smart and he is powerful. He is not going to attack us at our strong points. He is going to attack and exploit the weak points. It means I don’t mean to be gazing but I do need to do some open armor assessment. Where am I weak? Where can I shore myself up? Is it gaining more knowledge of the Bible? Start memorizing passages. I recently heard start by memorizing three words at a time. Start an in-depth study of God’s Word. You might not feel comfortable teaching a Sunday school class but do it for you will need to immerse yourself in the Word so take those opportunities to teach. Is evangelism a weak point in the armor? Do you feel that guilt in that area? Simply write out three to five people that you know need Jesus and start praying for them.

Then think about how you can relationally engage with those people. Then think about how can you winsomely, clearly, and lovingly share God's truth with them. Ask God to help you.

Is a weak point in your armor struggling with a particular sin? Find a brother or sister in Christ to hold you accountable. In the army we call them battle buddies or ranger buddies. It was someone who went with you everywhere. They always had your back and you had their back. It is someone you give permission to, to ask you the tough questions, to keep you accountable. They not only ask you about how you're doing in your sin struggle but how you are doing in your quiet times and how did God speak to you. We need each other in this fight and we can't fight alone. God has given us one another so let's use each other as we fight the battle that we have.

Now Paul starts to talk about the enemy threat in Ephesians 6:12 which says *[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.* As an army planner, I spent much of my time looking at the nature of the fight, the battlefield itself and analyzing the threat. I think Paul gives us a short analysis threat here in verse 12. He tells us about the nature of the fight as he uses the word 'wrestle.' That is close quarters combat – hand to hand combat. Paul is telling us that it is an intense fight. We may not always see it this way but each and everyday it's intense. Perhaps you have run out of ammo or lost your knife. It's life or death, right up in your face, intense.

As I was preparing for this study, I got pretty convicted over this part about us not wrestling with flesh and blood. I was reminded of the manual I had to read before I went back to Iraq. It fleshed out that we always fight to win and if we can win the key terrain that would give us a good advantage in the fight. This manual told us it was the people, the Populus that were the key terrain that you could win their hearts and minds by showing them they were being oppressed by these lies, insurgents and terrorists. By showing people the truth you can gain key terrain in the fight. We can go home and they can pick up the fight.

I was also convicted about the recent information of Progressive Christianity and liberal theology creeping into our denomination. I can very quickly make it an us versus them fight. I can quickly make the key terrain the enemy rather than their true enemy – the ones who are oppressing them with lies. God made me with some aggressive bones in my body for I'm always looking for a fight, but I need to go to these people with the truth from God's Word and do it in love. The truth will liberate them from those lies that are oppressing them in that wrong theology.

These personal demonic beings are not omniscient – they don't know everything. They are not all powerful and they are not everywhere at once like our God is. Paul does say they are powerful and they do have limited authority. Because we do have a formidable enemy Paul says in the next verse, Ephesians 6:13, *[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.*

The words 'take up' is a passive verb so we receive the whole armor of God. When I first enlisted in the Army, I went to Fort Benning for infantry officer basic training. The first thing I did when I got there was, I told them I was reporting for duty and they signed my name in. For better or worse I was there and I was now government property. The next thing I did was go to CIF (Central Issue Facility) and that was this big warehouse with all the equipment in it. Basically we stood in this long line holding out our arms and just receive all of our equipment. You would get a duffle bag, rough sack, then helmet, pads and put them in your bag. Then you would take a step and they would give you your plates, body armor, ammo pouches,

grenade pouches and put them in your bag. Then they gave you your uniforms, combat boots and everything else. I remember I was right out of college when I enlisted in the Army and I was looking to find an engagement ring for Mallory and I thought 'look at all this cool stuff I just got for free' although it was purchased with tax payer dollars which I appreciated, but I was expected to get very familiar with all that equipment, and expected to train, deploy and fight with that equipment.

In the same way, if your name is written in the Lamb's Book of Life, you are His and He is yours and you have received the full armor of God. This wasn't purchased with tax payer dollars for it was purchased at a much higher price – the precious blood of Jesus. Jesus is our good Captain and Commander and we receive it all for free, but we are expected to train with it, get familiar with it, deploy with it and fight with it. Let's now look more closely at the specific pieces of armor that we have all received as believers.

Ephesians 6:14 says *[14] Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness.* Realistically you can't put any armor on until you put your pants on and the first piece of armor we receive is the belt of truth – the true truth from God's Word. This is a particular work of the Holy Spirit and how He inspired human authors to write exactly God's Word – the all authoritative, inerrant, infallible, all sufficient Word of God, the Truth. He also gave us eyes to see and ears to hear and a mind to understand God's Truth from His Word. He gave us a heart to believe in the Way, the Truth and the Life – Jesus. It's all received from God. We are to be grounded in the Old Testament and New Testament truth and that's how we view the world. It is not through lens we want to have or the culture's lens but it's through a Biblical lens that I interpret all of reality. This is how we passively receive the belt of truth.

Now actively I'm to be a truth teller. My yes should be yes and my no should be no. When you tell a lie it is like you have to keep telling lies to cover things up and before you know it you're entangled in all these lies. If you're a believer that Holy Spirit will convict you and ultimately you will have to confess those lies and how liberating it is when we confess our sins. How liberating it is when we live in the light, not trying to hide or cover up our sin. That truth truly does set you free. So we are to receive the truth from God's Word and live as truth tellers.

Then there is the breastplate of righteousness and again there is this passive and active aspect to it. We totally receive Christ's perfect record and it's His perfect record that covers my vital organs against the righteous and just wrath of God for it's His record and that's how the Father sees me. He sees Jesus and not me. We not only have that sinless record because of Christ but because He lived perfectly each and every moment for He was perfectly in God's will, perfectly loving God and loving others. That is how I receive that justification from God. This is how I receive my new identity in Christ.

To actively live out that life is sanctification, then I grow and conform to my Savior Jesus Christ. The enemy will try to hurl accusations through sword thrusts, trying to condemn us. It is both the passive and activeness of Christ that deflects all that condemnation and lies. One of my mentors helped me see the distinction between conviction and condemnation. Conviction particularly from His Word shows me my sin and how I need to hunt it down, kill it and grow more and more like Christ. Condemnation focuses on my identity and those are lies telling me I am not who God has told me I am in Christ. Romans 8:1 says *[1] There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.* It is His righteousness and record that covers my vital organs. Let's continue in Ephesians.

Ephesians 6:15 says [15] *and, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace.* I remember being with my 12-man team in North Africa, the Sahara Desert and it was hot. I remember coming around the corner of one of our buildings on our compound and seeing our team sergeant, the enforcer on the team, going off on our engineering sergeant for having flip flops on. Quickly, I looked down at my feet and thought ‘thank goodness I don’t have flip flops on.’ It was kind of towards the end of our deployment and I went to the team sergeant and said ‘it was in the triple digits today, could you kind of give the guys a break’ and he said ‘we have some pretty incredible intelligence reporting that are some threats against us that is kind of eminent and at any moment the men we are working with could turn on us and start shooting up the place, so you’re telling me that you would rather the guys in flip flops and not combat boots ready to fight for any attack that could come in any direction, right?’ I said ‘You’re right, my bad, keep doing what you’re doing, great stuff.’ It was a humbling moment for me, and in the same way we need to stay ready and keep our combat boots on, because we could get attacked at any moment from any direction at any time.

How do we stay ready? Paul says we stay ready given by the Gospel of peace. We need to be ready when those attacks come to preach again to ourselves the Gospel and that brings peace. It’s not up to me anymore. It’s up to Jesus on that cross. That is what truly brings peace and this is how we are passive in this but actively we need to be ready to give an account for the hope that is within us. We need to be ready to share the Gospel with those that need to hear it and with other believers. I need to encourage other believers with the Gospel of who they are in Christ and challenge them in the Gospel of who they are in Christ – how they are supposed to be living in Christ. We need to be ready to give an answer of the Gospel that brings peace in Jesus Christ.

Ephesians 6:16 says [16] *In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one.* The evil one is Satan and his fallen angels, who are demons. They are shooting these arrows. In first century warfare they would dip their arrowheads in pitch, ignite them and shoot them at the enemy. This didn’t make the arrows more lethal or pierce the armor better or kill any better. If anything, it would cauterize the wound if it hit you, but it did instill fear, anxiety and terror against the enemy forces. They could cause little brush fires that would distract them because they would literally have to put out fires when they should be oriented on the battle. Satan does that and tries to distract with all kinds of circumstances in our life to bring in fear, anxiety, terror – by way of pandemics, illnesses, being crazy busy in this life.

The word shield that Paul uses in this verse is not the small gladiator shield but it’s this huge rectangular shield that the Romans used. If you oriented this shield correctly you could cover your whole body which would protect yourself taking away all those vulnerable places the enemy could hit you with. It is the shield of faith – that deep trust and dependence. Our faith and dependence needs to be properly oriented, not of the things of this world or circumstances or even how hard we are believing, but only and ever on Jesus Christ – who He is, full Son of God, full Son of Man and what He came to do for us, paying final atonement on the cross for you and me. That is where we orient our shield of faith, our trust and independence and it’s only because of what Jesus has done for us on the cross.

Ephesians 6:17 says [17] *and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God.* Paul is telling us to make use of our salvation here. The Roman helmet was made of bronze, a heavy metal and it didn’t crack easily when it was hit with something. It was functional and it worked. It had those red plumes, ornate and it was

decorated. It looked good in a military parade. Paul tells us to make use of our hope for salvation. John Stott gives a twofold aspect here of our hope of salvation – there is the now and the not yet. Now I am one hundred percent saved and nothing can touch me because my soul is in the hands of the Lord. They may kill the body but don't fear the one who can kill the body. Nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus (Romans 8:38).

There is also this not yet and future hope in the new heavens and the new earth when we are resurrected in glory and we get that final peace time military parade. We get to see Jesus face to face. This hope that is now and that will be perfected in the future is our hope and that should drive us to be bold. It should drive us to realize that right now we have to make the most of our time. We are on deployment. I had a commander in Afghanistan who had this quote on his door that is from General McChrystal that says; your country didn't send you to war to live regular hours, to live a comfortable, cushy life – your country sent you to war to accomplish its mission, now go get after it. My commander lived that quote to the T and it was a hard year but it went by so fast. In the same way, when we take a step back and look at eternity, we are really only here for a very short amount of time and we have eternity for that peace time parade. That should give us hope and make us bold right now to stand firm in Christ and fight.

Then Paul tells us point blank that the sword of the Spirit is the Word of God. This sword is a short sword that the Roman soldier would use, not this long brave heart sword. The short sword was used for close contact, in defense and offense. The Word of God is used defensively against the temptation of sin that Satan would bring. There is no better example of this than when Jesus is in the wilderness – hungry, thirsty, probably sleep deprived – defending Himself with the Word of God from Deuteronomy 6 and 8 as Satan tempts Him. Not only can He use the Scripture but He knows the God of the Word and the intent behind it, as Satan uses it and twists it ever so slightly to try and tempt Him. We need to know, memorize and study the whole counsel of God and be prepared to defend ourselves in temptation.

We also need to use it offensively for it is a close, personal weapon. In close, personal evangelism we need to continue to gain ground for His glory and His Kingdom. The Word of God is powerful. Our testimony and experiences are great tools that we can use to get people to the Gospel but they are not the Gospel or God's Word. The Holy Spirit works powerfully as His Word is being spoken and used to change people from being traitors, enemies, and dead in their trespasses and sins and bringing them to life as they are being inscribed into a new army for God. We need to use God's Word as we are sharing the Gospel with people.

Paul then leaves this armor metaphor and gives straight forward instruction. Ephesians 6:18 says *[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.* We are to be prayer warriors and I want to point out a few things that Paul says about prayer here. First, we need to recognize our dependence on prayer. It is in the Spirit that we pray and it's only as we are empowered and enabled that we can pray. There are often times I am not in the mood to pray but we need to say 'Holy Spirit give me the words to pray because I can't pray right now' because we need to pray. I am a hundred percent dependent on You even when I am feeling good to pray those things that I need to be praying. We need to be dependent and needy on the Holy Spirit as we pray.

Secondly, we are to pray on all occasions for everything – big or small. I think especially we need to pray on the small things, because it not only shows what we believe of Him being a good and loving Father and that He is sovereign and in control over the most minute detail. But we need to take everything to Him.

Thirdly, let's keep alert with all perseverance and prayer. This is language of night time guard duty. I'll admit on guard duty when things didn't happen for months you could get super complacent. You might start thinking, 'I have this mission tomorrow so I'll just rest my eyes for a bit.' Paul tells us to keep those eyes open, stay alert. Keep your eyes open throughout your day for what you can be praying for and bringing before the throne room of grace. Perhaps you see a person at Walmart having a bad day and you pray for them, it will be amazing what God will bring in your life when you start praying like that.

Fourthly, Paul tells us to pray for all the saints. Yes, we are to pray for the physical needs of all but in the context of what Paul is saying here, we need to pray for one another like we are spiritual warriors in this battle together, because we are. So often I'll pray for the physical things but neglect the spiritual battles that my brothers and sisters are in. I need to be more intentional to pray for the one who is struggling with their rebellious teenager or toddler and pray they would find their identity in Christ and not in how they are being as a parent. Pray they can defend themselves with Scripture and they will use God's Word powerfully when they evangelize people. We should be praying for each other physically and spiritually.

I can't tell you how cool it's been to come home and here people I don't know say 'Hey Westby, I've been praying for you since 2008.' Then I usually say 'We're you in Coach Yancy's Sunday school class?' and typically they would say yes. Coach Yancy was faithful to pray for me as a warrior in danger throughout all my deployments and that's how we should be praying for one another as fellow warriors. We are constantly being attacked and we need to pray for one another as such.

In conclusion, Paul has exhorted and challenged us to withstand the schemes of the devil, the strategies of our enemy and having done all to stand firm. He has taught us how to stand as we put on the whole armor of God and we can speak to our CO (our heavenly Father) at any time. Every commanding officer I had, had an open-door policy but you didn't always take everything to the CO but our heavenly Father, our CO, welcomes it. Take everything to God because He delights in it.

We don't fight as those who don't know the outcome of the war. I can't imagine those who fought in WWII that didn't know if they would come home speaking German or Japanese. When I would plan these small and big missions when I was in the army and in the middle was the concepts I had of the operations with the most important being the one that told us how we would operate. On this slide was a purple star – on the map and the timeline – that star was the decisive point of that operation. If we at this specific place and time on the map could achieve this decisive action then victory was guaranteed. We may suffer losses and keep fighting on but victory was guaranteed.

At a specific place and a specific time, Christ won the decisive point in all of history. He won it for His church outside the gates of Jerusalem over 2,000 years ago, but the battle isn't over. We still have ground to gain and ground to hold for we are still at war and our victory is only found in Jesus Christ who is our Good Captain – the Lion of Judah, the Rock, our Strong place, our Fortress, our ever-present help in time of need and distress. He is the Lover of our souls, Jesus Christ. Let's pray.

Prayer:

Lord Jesus, thank You so much for winning the decisive victory in my life, in Your people's lives and for Your church. Lord, You're the Good Captain for you jump on that grenade for

Your troopers. Remind us today that we are Your soldiers, that we are at war and that we are to stand firm only in You, Jesus. It is in Your precious Name I pray, Amen.