

BE STRONG IN THE LORD

The Apostle Paul was a man of purpose who became the number one enemy of the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem. He had tirelessly oppressed the believers in Christ—pursuing them and having them arrested. Then he encountered Jesus on the way to Damascus and with an honest heart he was converted and became an un-stop-able missionary to both Jews and Gentiles. Many Jewish leaders became pillars in the new faith; but a handful pursued Paul everywhere he went and had him beaten, imprisoned, and once after stoning him, left him for dead. He battled storms, shipwreck, poisonous snakes, you name it. Paul learned to endure hardship with joy because of his unshakable faith in God (Paul's missionary trips and trip to Rome are recounted in the Book of **Acts and 2 Cor. 11:22—28**).

Read this principle from **Ephesians 6:10—18** by Paul on how to stand strong against all odds and circumstances: *“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, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints—and (pray) for me, that utterance may be given to me, that I may open my mouth boldly to make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains; that in it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak.”*

I would say Paul had experienced what he preached and in a sense, standing strong in the faith is the Church's corporate assignment. But I only realized this recently, after 65 years of Bible reading, church attendance, numerous short studies, and ministry in my home church and numerous third world countries. I have read this passage and quoted parts of it many times, but never broken it apart like I am going to do for you. In so doing I have gained an entirely new and powerful perspective. After many experiences establishing churches, outlining doctrine, suffering persecution and the hardship of many travels, Paul has finally reached some conclusions which apply to all Christians until Christ returns, and we are going to discuss only those in the above passage. To survive in this spiritual battle **we need to do three things.**

First—be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. This is an instruction. It tells us that we can stand firm and win. The **Book of Job** teaches that Satan is limited to what God allows. The old Testament heroes of faith assure us we can resist evil powers, and enjoy God's protection and blessings. The **entire Bible** tells us that we don't have to bend, bow down or be broken by the devil's assaults (Daniel in the lion's den and his 3 friends in the fiery furnace—the **Book of Daniel**). Remember the lessons on Satan's deadly traps, which give us both warning and principles for victory and blessing.

This **Ephesian** passage urges us to be strong in the Lord (not our own resources); and **Ephesians 3: 17** says that **Christ** dwells in our hearts by faith—so it is Christ's presence and power (not ours) that works in us. In **John 14 Jesus** told His disciples that He was departing earth to prepare a place for them, but He would send the Holy Spirit to comfort them. Might we say the indwelling of Christ's power is the Holy Spirit? And **1 John 4:13—16** says that God dwells in us and we dwell in Him. What more do we need to have the faith to stand in the Lord and the power of His might? We need to study the Bible, pray and worship the Lord in order to have a bonding fellowship with our heavenly Father, and our Savior—and to experience the ever-present Holy Spirit's guidance and power—a sure way to stand strong against every attack of Satan. Remember Paul's word: **“having done all to stand, stand!**

Second—put on the whole armor of God. Our Creator has thought of everything; He has not left us at the mercy of Satan; He has equipped us with the armor and weapons with which we can defeat Satan and overcome every problem we will ever face. The first piece of armor is **truth—Bible truth** which can stop Satan and demons in their tracks. Truth is also integrity or honesty to do what is right morally—no deceit in our daily lives. This personal integrity and Bible truth working together can withstand every lie or deception we will ever have to face. Truth will

strengthen us for battle, and keep us strong in the battle. Truth is like a strong belt which strengthens our waist. We need strong waist muscles to stand, to fight and to resist. Truth will be honored and reinforced by God. Truth will work to support the other weapons. Truth is a building block for personal character, a family, a church and a nation—indeed for the Kingdom of God in Heaven and on earth.

The next piece of armor is the **breastplate of righteousness**. A breastplate protects our heart and other vital organs. Before modern weapons breastplates were made of iron and steel. They could stop a dagger or a sword from inflicting a mortal wound. In the spiritual battle we need to defend our vital organs, in fact our very lives from the lies, deceptions and accusations of Satan. We can't succeed by claiming our own righteousness because we are imperfect beings; but through the death, suffering and resurrection of sinless Jesus, God's righteousness can be applied to our spiritual body and free us from defeat in this life—and eternal damnation in the next. Our task is to maintain fellowship with our Heavenly Father so the breastplate of Christ's righteousness is always in place.

And then we have our feet protected by the **gospel of peace**. Feet are instrumental for action, movement, in outreach to others—in our Jerusalem, Samaria and the uttermost parts of the world. We don't approach sinners like warriors or with bullying tactics or distaste for their life-style. We go in love and show concern for their eternal destiny. Our message is conveyed in a spirit of peace, and we have a message of peace to reconcile sinners with their **Creator-God**. Finally—if acted upon our message will fill the repentant's heart with on-going peace and joy. We need to understand this before letting our feet take us into outreach ministry—and this requires study of the Bible and prayer to prepare us for God's guidance in life.

Next we need to have acquired the **shield of faith**, strong enough to quench the fiery darts Satan and his minions will throw at us—those little temptations, accusations when we falter, lies and deceptions. He lied to Eve in the garden. He blinded Cain to the consequences of pursuing what he wanted, and in anger killing his brother. Strong faith in God that keeps us in line with His will (always for our good) needs to be our guide in life. The troubles that come our way are often the testing of our faith to grow it. Keeping our hearts right with the Lord and growing strong enough in our faith in His purpose and plan for us will keep our shield strong and in place to ward off all of Satan's attacks.

The helmet of salvation is next, and while it is listed near the end, it is also necessary at the beginning. Salvation begins our walk with God, a walk of faith and trust that grows as we pass each test and move on in life. We need to wear this helmet constantly. This we do with regular Bible reading and prayer, church attendance for fellowship with the Lord and other believers—and by meeting temptation with a biblical answer, as Jesus did in **Matthew chapter four**. And at the end of our journey when our body begins to weaken, the helmet of salvation still provides a covering of protection, hope and peace to carry us across the finish line a victor ready for our final destination.

Finally—the sword of the spirit which is the Word of God. It was the Word of God that brought conviction to our hearts; that taught us the basic foundational truths to lead us through life and prepare us for heaven; that helped us wait upon God, trust in God and overcome temptation. As Jesus fought Satan's temptations with God's Word (**Matt. 4**), so believers have God's Word as their principle weapon to use against Satan in our spiritual warfare. In **Hebrews 4:12** we read: *“The Word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intent of the heart”*. That is power personified! The power of God's Word is always available to us.

Third and last—stand against the wiles (deceptions and attacks, accusations, condemnations) of the devil. This we do by observing and wearing the armor of God. If we lay some pieces aside, they will get rusty and stiff—unusable in an emergency. And while not being used the devil will see his opportunity to attack unprotected areas of our lives. It may be like leaving a door open, or not fixing a hole in a protective fence. Eve opened a door by misquoting God's Word and Satan took advantage of that opportunity to adjust his attack. One time I wasn't protected by God's armor and nearly lost my life in a logging accident. Another time I was falsely accused of manslaughter but was wearing the armor of God and after a costly nine day trial the judge dismissed the jury and the case. So, my friend, and future **Mighty Man of Faith**, pay attention to Paul's teaching in **Ephesians chapter six** and prepare yourself to stand—and having done all to stand against the wiles of the devil—continue to stand on God's promises in faith, trusting in God's faithfulness. He will not let you down!

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