
¹⁰ Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His power.

¹² For our struggle is not against enemies of blood and flesh, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.

Ephesians 6:10, 12 (NRSV)

As we begin your reflection on God’s Word this day there are two sets of questions to consider.

The first set of questions has to do with the existence of the devil, and the reality of hell. If you were asked, “Is the devil real?”, how would you answer? Would your answer be, “Yes, for sure?” Or would it be, “I think so”? Or would you say, “I’m not sure anymore”? Or would you say that the devil is some ‘construct’ of an ‘ancient time’ that ‘doesn’t have relevance anymore’?

In a survey conducted in the United States people were asked whether the devil was real. Four out of ten Christians took the option that Satan “is not a living being but is a symbol of evil.” An additional two out of ten Christians said they “agree somewhat” with that perspective. In other words, 6 out of 10 people who claimed to be Christians said that the devil was not real. Of the remaining number, just over 2 out of 10 strongly believed in the existence of the devil (with the remainder not sure, but inclined to agree).

This, of course, is at complete odds to the Bible that the devil is real. One of the most sobering facts about life is that all humans have a supernatural enemy whose aim is to use pain and pleasure to make us blind, stupid, and miserable — forever. The Bible calls him “the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world . . . the accuser” (Revelation 12:9–10), “the ruler of this world” (John 12:31), and “the god of this age” (2 Corinthians 4:4). He is our “adversary [who] prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour” (1 Peter 5:8). We have a real enemy whose aim is to kill, steal, and destroy (John 10:10).

When we hear of the Devil, and the existence of hell and evil, at times we may be frightened. But this is not how we are to feel, for we have real victory in Christ. There is a wonderful well-known promise in the Bible (Romans 8:38-39) that: “neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

The second set of questions we may consider is how we are feeling at this time in world history. We see the dramatic rise of the Taliban in Afghanistan, and wonder what the future will hold for so many people (particular women). We hear of the conflicts around the world leaving hundreds of thousands of people in dire circumstances, facing chronic food shortages. There is growing tension

between 'East' and 'West'. Here in Australia, there is uncertainty in regards to COVID and what the future holds for us. Many people have some sort of 'COVID-fatigue' and a sense of anxiety about what may lie ahead. Is this something you have felt?

It is in contexts such as these (the existence of Satan and evil, together with the trials and troubles of this world) that God's Word speaks clearly to us. The Apostle Paul began the conclusion of letter by saying "Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His power." And this has several dimensions for us.

On the one hand, 'to be strong in the Lord' involves recognising we are in a spiritual battle, and so we are to take up 'spiritual armour'. Our text today is the famous "whole armour of God" passage from Ephesians 6. It begins: "Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. Put on the whole armour of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil."

Martin Luther recognised the attacks of the devil more keenly than most. He took it very seriously whenever a little child was baptised, knowing what was in store for that new Christian for the rest of his or her life. Luther writes: "Remember, therefore, that it is no joke to take sides against the devil and not only to drive him away from this little child, but to burden the child with such a mighty and lifelong enemy."

No matter how young or old you are, no matter how long you have been a Christian—man or woman, boy or girl, pastor or layperson—you are in a battle. It is a spiritual battle. Paul describes it like this: "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."

This is a spiritual battle. The fight is raging on the line between faith and unbelief, between reliance on God and pride in ourselves, between hope for the future and despair of God's mercy. Your enemy Satan will try to defeat you, destroy you, get you to fall away from the faith. He will try to distract you or render you ineffective in the service of the Lord. He will tempt you, allure you, seducing you into great shame and vice. And if that doesn't work, he will try to lull you into spiritual sleepiness and security, getting you to let down your guard. And so we are called to put on "God's Armour", that is, the spiritual protection that God supplies – and note that this is God's armour, not ours. The strength and protection come from God.

Many people assume that the various pieces (the belt of truth, the breastplate of righteousness, the shoes of the gospel of peace, the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit) are correlated to what Paul would have witnessed firsthand with Roman soldiers. And certainly these would have been a reference for Paul, and the people who listened to his sermon. However, each of the pieces of armour have a rich background in the Old Testament where they describe God's armour — the armour God Himself dons to rescue His people.

The most obvious examples are “the breastplate of righteousness” and “the helmet of salvation” (Ephesians 6:14, 17), both of which are drawn directly from Isaiah 59:17. There the prophet says of God, “He put on righteousness as a breastplate, and a helmet of salvation on His head; He put on garments of vengeance for clothing, and wrapped Himself in zeal as a cloak.” Similarly, Paul’s image of “feet readied with the gospel of peace” draws on Isaiah 52:7: “How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, who publishes peace, who brings good news of happiness, who publishes salvation, who says to Zion, ‘Your God reigns.’”

This Old Testament background helps us to see that this ‘armour’ is much more than simply a set of disciplines we must perform to measure up as Christians. It is certainly true that God’s armour describes essential qualities for us to pursue passionately if we are to stand firm under Satan’s assault. Yet the armour is first and foremost God’s armour rather than ours. When we are dressed in the Lord’s armour, we’re wrapped in truth, righteousness, peace, and salvation and are protected by the shield of faith. And Paul says that with this shield, we “will be able to extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one” (Eph. 6:16).

Through the gospel God, as our ‘Divine Warrior’ gives us His equipment which He wore first triumphantly in our place in His definitive struggle against the forces of evil. Jesus Christ is the triumphant warrior over Satan, death, and sin through His faithfulness and righteousness.

Have ever felt that you can’t win your battles on your own? As strange as it may sound, the good news here is that you can’t stand – for you were never meant to fight alone. The Apostle Paul reminds us of the source of power and strength: it is God Himself. It is God who fights for us. The reality is that no human power can stop the devil’s schemes. But God has “disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame” (Colossians 2:15). The same power that raised Jesus from the dead lives in believers by the power of the Holy Spirit, and can empower Christians to fight and win in the spiritual battle.

Paul’s encouragement to “be empowered in the Lord” is not a new thought. It’s a reminder of his prayer that we would “be strengthened with power through His Spirit in our inner being” (Ephesians 3:16). Furthermore, the phrase “in His mighty strength” is a direct reference back to Paul’s prayer in Ephesians 1:15–23 that we would “know what is the outstanding greatness of his power towards us believers, according to the activity of His mighty strength” (Ephesians 1:19).

Where does mighty strength come from? True strength comes from God who “enacted this in Christ, raising Him from the dead and seating Him at His right hand in the heavenly places” (Ephesians 1:20). Christ is alive and is now in that powerful position of victory at God’s right hand. And for believers in Christ, that power is ours. Paul has assured us that “God raised us together with Christ, and seated us together with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus.” And so we share in Christ’s victory, “so that in the coming ages He could demonstrate the outstanding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus” (Ephesians 2:6–7).

We don't need to look within ourselves for this power; we simply need to come before the Father in prayer, to remember that this power is ours, and to receive it from His hand. His victory is now credited to us as if it were our own. Our strength is 'in the Lord'. In Him we have full forgiveness. In Him we have eternal life. Through Him we are given the gift of lives of daily repentance and faith.

There is only one person who has stood against all the schemes of the devil, only one person who single-handedly disarmed all of the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame. That one person is Jesus. And it is in the strength of His might that we fight our battles. It is the armour that He bought with His precious blood that we put on.

And so you can stop pretending that you are stronger than you really are. You don't have to keep trying to look like you have it all together. You don't have to wrestle your own demons alone anymore. Let the Lord be your strength and your shield (Psalm 28:7). Let Him be your stronghold and refuge in the day of trouble (Jeremiah 16:19).

Be strong, but do not forget that where your strength is found. The source of all strength is God in Christ. He is infinitely powerful. His strength is inexhaustible. This is why the Apostle has said He can "boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong" (2 Corinthians 12:9–10). And this is why the Psalmist has said, "My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever" (Psalm 73:26). In Christ, we can know for certain that our God is for us, so who can be against us? As we trust in Him we find that we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. Amen.

Heavenly Father, thank You that You have given me all I need to be victorious in the spiritual battle in which all Your children are engaged. Help me to rely on You and not on my own abilities. Help me to find all I need in You and in the power of Your might, in Jesus name I pray, Amen.