

## **Spiritual Warfare Sermon 2: Ephesians 6:10-11a: The Imperatives of Spiritual Warfare**

### **OUTLINE**

Be strong in the Lord  
Put on the whole armour of God

### **INTRODUCTION**

Every Christian is caught up in the most powerful struggle in all time and the universe. Every Christian is called to be prepared and to play their part in this battle. Paul writes His letter to the Ephesians not to a pastor like Timothy or Titus, nor to an individual like Philemon, but to the whole church in Ephesus. His words on spiritual warfare are addressed to everyone in the church, not merely a select few. He writes to mothers, fathers, children, workers not only to intercessors or exorcists. Paul Himself is deep in the fray, he is writing this letter from prison. If you read the letter to the Ephesians to sweeps you up in the wonderful salvation that God is bringing about in His Church. Paul outlines this salvation and its application to us by God's gracious power. He reveals the mystery of the ages, the church made up from all nations. He calls the Ephesians to put off the old life and follow the new. Paul enters into the fine detail of how to apply Godly living in the home and at work, and just when you think he might end the letter, he saves the most important for last. That word, 'finally' in Ephesians 6:10 indicates not a mere after thought but a vital part of living the new life. As normal as being part of a family and working, so normal is it to be a soldier in a spiritual battle.

Having looked at the *perspectives* on spiritual warfare Paul introduces his topic beginning with the two *imperatives* of spiritual warfare found in verse 10-11a, be strong; in the strength of His might, and put on the whole armour. Having given us these commands he gives us the *motives* of spiritual warfare in v11b, 'that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil.' Then Paul discusses the *nature* of spiritual warfare in v12. And then he outlines the *weaponry* of our warfare in the rest of the passage.

### **Be strong in the Lord**

The first command that Paul gives us, 'be strong in the Lord' reveals to us our weakness and the necessity of God's strength for the fight we cannot escape. If we pray in accordance with the Lord's Prayer we would know by meditating upon it that when we pray, 'and lead us not into temptation,' that we are confessing our remaining weakness and confessing our dependence upon God for aid in our fight against sin. Paul's call to be strong is not the same as our saying 'Man up!' He is not telling us to merely change from a non-combative stance to a combative one, or from a place of weakness to place of pretended strength. He is not asking us to manufacture strength but to get it from God.

This is an important emphasis in our age of self-help books. Today we are being told that we are the masters of our own universes and merely have to discover an inner strength that arises from us instead of leaning on the Lord. For example, Oprah Winfrey featured a new author Rhoda Byrne on her show who wrote the book *The Secret*. The basis of this book was what is called in New Thought Philosophy, the law of attraction. The book has sold over 19 million copies and has been translated into over 46 languages. 'The book describes the law as accounting for a magnetic power that is emitted through one's thoughts. The power of thoughts is likened to the power of a transmission tower, which sends out a frequency to the universe and then returns the same frequency in a physical or elemental form.'<sup>1</sup> By this method you can visualise money, cars, relational happiness and many other things into existence for yourself. Christianity teaches us the very opposite of this. We are weak and we need to draw our strength not from our fallen flesh, nor science fiction type notions of the power of thought, but from God.

The key words we need to inspect are the words, 'in the Lord.' When you see the word 'in' linked with the Lord you should automatically think of our union with Christ. This notion of union with Christ undergirds many aspects of Paul's thought. And in seeing this we are directed to the true resources which are ours for the fight that we are in. When we say that there is a spiritual fight, and that we need to be armed for the fight, do you feel like you are missing something, that you need to go out there and get something you don't already have? If so then these words will clear the confusion and bring comfort to you. You see, Paul is directing us to something that we are already a part of, that something that is already ours.

Every true believer is already in Christ. In Ephesians 2:5 Paul reminds us that when we were born again we were united to Christ, that we participated in the power of His resurrection which gave us new life; and in union with Him we are now seated with Him in heavenly places. The power of Christ's resurrection, the power by which He overcame death and overcame sin in us when we were united to Him, Paul tells us is the same power that continues to work within us even now, Eph. 3:20. The strength we need for our fight against sin and the devil is already resident within us by Christ's Spirit. We strengthen ourselves in the Lord not by getting hold of some new teaching or technique but by digging deeper into our union with Christ. This automatically closes all sorts of doors that many are going through. We don't need to learn from a manual on exorcism, or have prophetic visions and revelations of demons over certain areas, no we draw our strength for this fight through the ordinary things like prayer, bible reading, and the ordinary means of grace. All the hubbub about spiritual warfare and many new techniques being offered can make the ordinary Christian feel inferior and ill equipped for the battle we are a part of. However, the truth is, that is you are a healthy Christian who is walking closely with the Lord, rooting sin out of your life, studying your bible, growing in knowledge and participating in the life of the body; God's grace is being poured out abundantly into your life strengthening you for the fight. Be set free from the paths of innovation and new technique to walk in the old paths.

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1 [http://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Secret\\_\(book\)](http://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Secret_(book))

Walking in fellowship with God and His people is the best way to strengthen yourself for the fight for God pours His grace into your life through these means. Listen to William Gurnall who wrote a fantastic exposition of these verses called *The Christian in Complete Armour*, and how he directs you to ordinary things like accountability and fellowship with likeminded brethren as the way to win the fight:

'Be sure to get some Christian friend whom thou mayst trust above others to be thy faithful monitor. O that man hath a great help for the maintaining the power of godliness, that has an open-hearted friend that dare speak his heart to him!

A stander-by sees more sometimes, by a man, than the actor can do by himself, and is more fit to judge of his actions than he is of his own. Sometimes self-love blinds us in our own cause, that we see not ourselves so bad as we are; and sometimes we are oversuspicious of the worst by ourselves, which makes us appear to ourselves worse than we are.

Now that thou mayst not deprive thyself of so great help from thy friend, be sure to keep thy heart ready with meekness to receive, yea, with thankfulness to embrace, a reproof from his mouth. Those that cannot bear plain dealing hurt themselves most; for by this they seldom hear the truth.<sup>2</sup>

Notice the plain means that he sees God using in your life, an honest Christian friend who tells you when you are sinning is the way the Lord strengthens you, it is not by discerning which spirit is possessing which Christian, or by learning the right words of power to say to remove demonic activity in a city.

I guess we really should talk about the way we view the war. Do you see spiritual warfare as a direct confrontation with satan where you speak to him, engage with his forces directly, where you need visions granted by the Spirit to reveal names and places and then you in a type of hand to hand approach address these invisible powers directly? If so I think you are not in agreement with spiritual warfare as it is described in the Scriptures. Spiritual warfare is not a direct spiritual encounter but the humdrum activities of being holy, loving the brethren and preaching the truth. To be effective in spiritual warfare is to endeavour to get better than these things.

Listen to how Paul views spiritual warfare as a pursuit of holiness and unity in Romans 13:12-14, 'The night is far gone; the day is at hand. So then let us cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light. 13 Let us walk properly as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and sensuality, not in quarreling and jealousy. 14 But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.' Notice his emphasis on personal holiness and unity. In 2 Peter 1:3-11, Peter points out the power of God made available to us that we might not fall, notice how it is all bound up not in attacking the devil but pursuing holiness, 'His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, 4 by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire. 5 For this very

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<sup>2</sup> Quoted in *Standing Strong*, by John MacArthur.

reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, 6 and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, 7 and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love. 8 For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. 9 For whoever lacks these qualities is so nearsighted that he is blind, having forgotten that he was cleansed from his former sins. 10 Therefore, brothers, be all the more diligent to make your calling and election sure, for if you practice these qualities you will never fall. 11 For in this way there will be richly provided for you an entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.'

In 2 Cor. 10:3-6 Paul describes our warfare not as engaging with satan and his demons but rather as preaching the gospel, 'For though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh. 4 For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. 5 We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ, 6 being ready to punish every disobedience, when your obedience is complete.' Paul links triumph and preaching again in 2 Cor. 2:14, 'But thanks be to God, who in Christ always leads us in triumphal procession, and through us spreads the fragrance of the knowledge of him everywhere.' The devil is the god of this age who darkens the minds of the unbeliever but when we preach the gospel, God declares, let there be light and the strongman's house is plundered, not by our speaking to principalities but the Spirit anointed preaching of the gospel.

Depend upon the Spirit for holiness, love and blessing in preaching and you will be strong in the strength of His might.

What does it look like to be weak in the Lord? When we forget that greater is He that is in us than he that is in the world and we succumb to lies because we are not preaching the truth to ourselves; when we do not pray for spiritual strength, for even though the spirit is willing the flesh is weak and we ought to pray that we enter not into temptation. When we are neglectful of going to church, when we are at war with the saints, when we are indulging in some new technique or following some guru in spiritual warfare and not the old paths, these will all make us weak, vulnerable and ineffective. This results in a sin entrenched, church alienated, silent witness for a life. If we neglect these things we will have holes in our own defences being vulnerable to seduction, deception and difficulty; we will be a hindrance not a help to our battalion, and we will be ineffective or a stumbling block towards the lost.

Perhaps I should put in an important disclaimer here. The strength of the Lord does not always present itself in the form of triumphant overcoming but often as persistent endurance through loss. Remember Paul's thorn in the flesh and how he prayed to God that it would be removed, but God said, 'My grace is sufficient for you'; sufficient not for a triumphalistic vanquishing of the devil, but a patient and dependent endurance. Success and strength in spiritual warfare are not to be judged by whether you get sick, experience

financial loss, or family breakdown, but God's grace perfected in weakness in emulation of Christ.

### **Put on the whole armour of God**

The second command Paul gives us for spiritual warfare is found at the beginning of v11, 'Put on the whole armour of God.' Now we will deal at length with the individual pieces of the armour so I will not take our time now to deal with these. But let it be emphasized that it is the well balanced life that incorporates, truth, righteousness, peace, faith, hope, the Word and Prayer that will be well equipped and able to stand. Some people are all about truth but neglect prayer and devotions, others are all about peace but neglect righteousness. Paul urges the Christian to be well balanced in all of the things that he puts before them. What parts of the armour do you favour and are well preserved and polished, and which parts lie neglected and in disrepair?

Today however, I would like to draw your attention to the words, 'put on.' This command carries responsibility on our part, there is something that we are to do. We have been speaking about relying on God's strength and not our own. We have been very pointed in rejecting new techniques, but some may have the false impression that we don't have to do anything, that spiritual warfare is something you can neglect because 'the battle belongs to the Lord.' The victory of the battle indeed belongs to the Lord, there is no strength greater than His, we fight against a defeated foe and final victory is guaranteed; but we can see that Christians and churches still fall and fail, and it is not because there is a deficiency in God's strength, but rather in our part of putting on the whole armour of God. The trouble will never be with the armour but our use or neglect of it.

'Let go and let God' is a well known theory of obtaining holiness, but this view is passive where the text calls us to activity. Casting out the demons of lust, anger, or the various sins we struggle with is another quick fix which neglects the true nature of spiritual warfare. Holiness is obtained and sin is overcome not by us doing nothing but by effort, by us applying our strength, by refusal to retreat and give up the ground, by our refusal to stay down. Look at all the activity Paul outlines in v13, 'Therefore take up the whole armour of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm.' Can you see the emphasis on our part, 'having done all.' Now let it be said that we do not trust to our own efforts to bring about the victory but we acknowledge that God employs our efforts as His means to bring about His purposes.

I raise this point because of our fetish for quick fix techniques which sell winning formulas and silver bullets. There is a spiritual quackery that draws your attention away from the things that we actually need to be doing. There must be a daily, deliberate application of ourselves in light of the battle or we will fall. There is a steady discipline with no short cuts that has to be applied to the spiritual disciplines if we are to make headway. There must be a regular personal application of the truth in our lives, there must be the daily pursuit of righteousness, we must preach the gospel to ourselves everyday, we must repeatedly apply faith to the devil's lies, we must faithfully think on our eternal salvation, we must be regular in bible reading and prayer. Remember 2 Pet. 1:5-11, 'For this very reason, make every

effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, 6 and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, 7 and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love. 8 For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. 9 For whoever lacks these qualities is so nearsighted that he is blind, having forgotten that he was cleansed from his former sins. 10 Therefore, brothers, be all the more diligent to make your calling and election sure, for if you practice these qualities you will never fall. 11 For in this way there will be richly provided for you an entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.'

As we wage spiritual warfare according to the bible, we must be strong in the strength we have by virtue of our union with Christ and the ordinary means of grace, and we must not neglect regular discipline and hard work in order to obtain our objectives.