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Be Strong

"Thy word is a lamp unto my feet,
and a light unto my path."

PSALM 119:105

JOHN WEAVER

WEAVER BIBLE COLLEGE

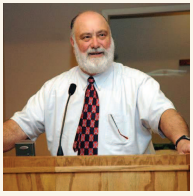
Be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might.

EPHESIANS 6:10, EXCERPT

Christian strength is rooted in grace rather than self-sufficiency. John Weaver considers faith, endurance, hardship, and the believer's confidence in Christ's victory. These messages connect spiritual readiness with disciplined faithfulness, calling the reader to stand firm, teach faithfully, and persist in obedience when the work is difficult.

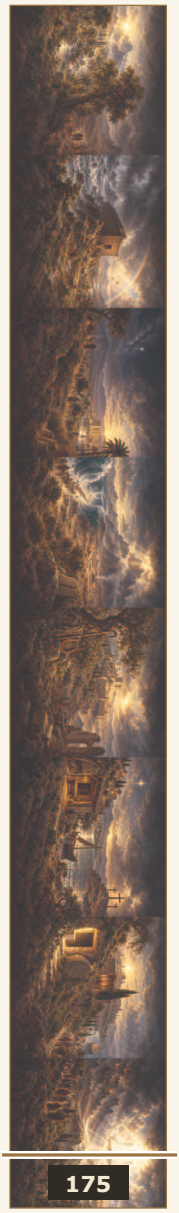
"The beginning of our spiritual strength is when we recognize how helpless, powerless, and weak we really and truly are."

JOHN WEAVER



John Weaver

John Weaver's sermons form the teaching collection presented by Weaver Bible College. This volume gathers his teaching from that collection.



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CHAPTER 1

Be Strong

Part One of Three

Introduction: The Universal Desire for Strength

Looking at Ephesians chapter 6 and verse 10, the Scripture says, “Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might.” I want to begin today a brief series on the subject, “Be Strong.”

Have you ever experienced a desire to be strong? That really and truly is a facetious question, because everyone basically wants to be strong, especially every young man. If not, he certainly desires to be muscle-bound, so to speak. Strength training is very popular today, and it does not matter who you are—male or female, or how old you are—a lot of people engage in what we know as strength training. Regardless of how old an individual is, they still desire strength as well.

One of the confessions, if not one of the complaints, of the elderly is that they have no strength and can no longer do on a regular basis that which they used to do. A good example is Barzillai. When

Absalom had rebelled against David and David had to leave Jerusalem, Barzillai supported David and his men. When David was returning to Jerusalem, he invited Barzillai to come back and be sustained by the king. Barzillai answered him in 2 Samuel chapter 19, verses 34 and 35: “And Barzillai said to the king, How long have I to live, that I should go up with the king unto Jerusalem? I am this day fourscore, that is 80 years old, and can I discern between good and evil?”

"Can my servant taste what I eat or what I drink? Can I hear any more the voice of singing men and singing women? Wherefore then should my servant be yet a burden unto my lord the king?" He is saying, "Look, I'm slipping. I'm 80 years of age. I can't really discern like I used to. I can't taste. I can't smell. I can't hear. And all I would be is just simply a burden, and I don't want to go there and be that burden." Well, Moses himself said in Psalm 90 and verse 10, "The days of our years are threescore and ten, 70, and if by reason of strength they be fourscore years, that's 80, yet is their strength labor and sorrow, for it is soon cut off, and we fly away."

So he said, once you make it past 70, and if you do make it to 80, you are going downhill, so to speak. Well, we understand that. One of the factors of old age is that we lose our strength in a physical sense. But that does not mean that we have to lose our spiritual strength. There is a vast difference. And the truth of the matter is, the older we get in the Lord, the more spiritual strength we should have.

Spiritual Strength vs. Physical Strength

David made this prayer in Psalm 71:18: "Now also, O Lord, when I am old and grayheaded, listen, O God, forsake me not until I have showed this generation thy strength and thy power to everyone that is to come." He was saying, "I'm old and grayheaded, but God, don't forsake me until I have showed your power and your strength to this generation."

We also have to remember Psalm 92:13-14: "They that be planted in the house of the Lord shall flourish in the courts of our God. They shall bring forth fruit in old age. They shall be fat and flourishing."

There is a vast difference between physical strength and spiritual strength. Being older does not necessarily mean weakness in every area, nor does it involve impotency and powerlessness in every area. While we cannot do some things we used to be able to do, through wisdom and knowledge we can accomplish a lot without the strength of youth. It is just that simple. I forget exactly how it goes, but it says, "The treachery of old age will always outdo the strength and exuberance of youth." That is about the truth. Usually, an older person can figure things out and work things out even though he cannot do what he used to do. It is interesting that there are numerous commands in the Bible to be strong, especially in the Old Testament. I am going to show you just two of those before we get started.

Strength Connected to Obedience

But here is what I want you to learn and see: spiritual strength, according to the Bible, is connected indivisibly with obedience. Real strength is related to obedience. In Deuteronomy 11, beginning with verse 8, God says, “Therefore shall you keep all the commandments which I command you this day, that you may be strong, and go in and possess the land whither you go to possess it.” He continues, “And that you may prolong your days in the land which the Lord swore to your fathers, to give unto them and to their seed a land that floweth with milk and honey.”

So He says, “that you shall keep all the commandments which I command you this day.” Why? “That you may be strong, and that you may prolong your days.”

In Joshua chapter 1, strength is still connected with obedience. Beginning with verse 5, God tells Joshua, “There shall not any man be able to stand before thee all the days of thy life. As I was with Moses, so will I be with thee. I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee.” The promise of God’s presence and strength is set in the same context as His command to obey. The Bible therefore connects real strength, prolonged days, and the possession of what God promised with keeping His commandments.

SCRIPTURE READING - Joshua 1:6-9 (KJV)

> "Be strong and of a good courage. For unto this people shalt thou divide for an inheritance the land which I swear to their fathers to give them. Only be thou strong and very courageous, that thou mayest observe to do according to all the law which Moses my servant commanded thee. Turn not from it to the right hand or to the left, that thou mayest prosper whithersoever thou goest. This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth, but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein. For then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, then shalt thou have good success. Have not I commanded thee? Be strong, and of good courage. Be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed. For the Lord thy God is with thee, whithersoever thou goest."
>
> Interestingly, in this short passage, three times God commanded Joshua to be strong. Now, it is impossible to be strong in the Lord without obedience.

Galatians 6:16 says, “And as many as walk according to this rule, peace be upon them, and mercy upon the Israel of God.” If you want to know who the Israel of God is, it is those who walk according to this rule. Those who walk according to this rule have peace.

“Rule” is a very interesting word. The Greek word is kanon, from which we get our English word canon—not cannon, the kind that shoots, but canon. We speak of the canon of Scripture, the Old Testament canon, or the New Testament canon. Kanon literally means a measuring stick, a measuring rod, or a rule. The Word of God, then, is our rule, our standard, our measuring stick, and our measuring rod for obedience. Obviously, very clearly, we must walk in accordance with this measuring stick and measuring rod.

The command to be strong occurs only three times in the New Testament. It occurs many times in the Old Testament, but only three times in the New Testament. Notice that I said “command,” because each time you see it, it is in the imperative mode, which means it is a command. Anytime you see an imperative, it is a command.

The New Testament Commands to Be Strong

I could look at Lorraine and ask, “Lorraine, would you please get me a glass of water?” That is the question I am asking her. But if I looked at her and said, “Lorraine, get up and get me a glass of water,” that is a command.

Steve would not like that, and she probably would not either. But that is the difference between a question and a command. A command is when God simply issues it and says, “This is what you do.” No ifs, ands, and buts. Just that simple.

Now, I want you to look at the three times we are commanded in the New Testament to be strong. We have already looked at one; I will quote it, Ephesians 6. Turn first to 1 Corinthians chapter 16, and then we will go to 2 Timothy chapter 2. As we go to 2 Timothy, I will quote Ephesians 6 again, because these are the three times that we are commanded in the New Testament to be strong.

In 1 Corinthians chapter 16 and verse 13, the Bible says, “Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong.” Then, of course, Ephesians 6 and verse 10 says, “Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, in the power of His might.” And in 2 Timothy chapter 2 and verse 1, Paul says, “Thou therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.” So three times we are commanded to be strong. Notice also that all the terms in 1 Corinthians 16:13 are military terms.

You will also find that all the terms in Ephesians chapter 6, verses 10–18, are military terms as well. That is, they relate to war and to the military.

I am not going to expound 1 Corinthians 16:13 completely and thoroughly because I have already done so. If you would read or listen to Captain Jonathan Davis in “A Combat Mentality,” you will find this verse expounded and explained. Let me remind you of certain things. First Corinthians 16:13 says, “Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong.”

Here is the interesting thing: “Quit you like men.” The word “men” here is a very special word. It is “andrizomai” in the Greek. The word “men” and “man” occurs many times in the Bible, but

usually it is from “anthropos” or “aner.” This is what is known as a “hapax legomenon,” which means it is a word that occurs only once in the Bible. Here you have “andrizomai,” and this word literally means to make a man, to make brave, or to show oneself like a man and as brave. So when he says, “Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men,” he is talking about courageous, brave, bold individuals. It is a special word.

Secondly, the command here to be strong signifies that we are not to give in to weakness—to despair or discouragement, or to faint. We are to maintain our courage. We are to maintain our strength, sustaining and helping one another because we understand that the Lord Jesus Christ is the captain of our salvation and the victor. Therefore, Paul says in 2 Timothy 2:3, “Thou therefore endure hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ.” Soldiers are not to give in, give up, or give out, but to endure cheerfully; likewise, God says that is exactly what we are to do.

Look at verse 13 again: “Watch ye,” “Stand fast,” “Quit you like men,” and “Be strong.” Each is a military term. Verse 13 commands us to be strong. The only thing that is missing is how we are to be strong.

What does it mean to be strong? 1 Corinthians 16:13 is a wonderful verse, but it does not tell us these things. However, Ephesians chapter 6 and 2 Timothy chapter 2 fulfill that requirement, telling us exactly what it means to be strong. We certainly need strength, especially spiritual strength. We cannot discharge our duties, face our foes, or accomplish our task in our own strength. The truth is this: we really do not have any strength. We may think that we do, but we certainly do not. The Bible says in 1 Samuel chapter 2 and verse 9, “He will keep the feet of His saints, and the wicked shall be silent in darkness, for by strength shall no man prevail.” So we truly do not have any strength of our own. Think about what our Lord said in John 15:5: “Without me you can do what?”

Obviously, that means that we do not have the strength to do anything. But notice this: the Apostle Paul in Philippians 4 and verse 13 said, "I can do all things through Christ who has strengthened

me." While we are impotent in and of ourselves, we have the all-powerful God at our disposal.

Acknowledging Our Weakness and God's Power

The beginning of our spiritual strength is when we recognize how helpless, powerless, and weak we really and truly are. Paul was afflicted with a thorn in the flesh, and he besought the Lord three times for that thorn to be removed. In 2 Corinthians chapter 12 and verse 9, Paul said that God said to him, "My grace is sufficient for thee. My strength is made perfect in weakness." Then Paul added, "Therefore will I glory in my weakness and in my infirmities." Why? "That the power of Christ may rest upon me."

Paul is saying that when I realize how helpless and powerless I am, then God is ready to use me. As long as we think we can, we cannot. As long as we think we are able, we are unable. When we reach the conclusion and the truth that we are helpless, powerless, and unable in and of ourselves, then we are ready to be used by God.

The book of Ephesians has six chapters and is perfectly divided. The first three chapters deal with doctrine; the last three chapters deal with duty. Our duties are based upon doctrine. We should always have doctrine to back up what we do and why we do it. In Ephesians chapter 6, beginning at verse 10, Paul reaches the last part of the practical aspect of the book. Although he has told us about our duties, he now tells us how we must perform them. They are not to be performed in our strength, but in the power of God, because we are to recognize the fact that we are weakness personified.

We have mighty enemies and powerful foes. If we are going to face them and defeat them, it must be in the power of God. In Ephesians 6 and verse 10, Paul says, "Finally, my brethren," bringing his argument to a conclusion and teaching us how to perform our duties, "be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might."

First of all, we need to acknowledge our own weakness, our own impotency, our own powerlessness. At the same time, we must confess and acknowledge the power of God, that God is omnipotent. He has all power. That is why the Bible in Psalm 62:11 says, “For God has spoken once, yea, twice have I heard this, that power belongeth

unto God." If we are going to stand and fight, we must stand and fight in the power of God, because we have no power in and of ourselves.

When we stand and fight, we must use the means that God has ordained. At the same time, we must trust Him and look to Him to make those means effectual. If He does not bless the means, the means are useless in and of themselves. For instance, if I were to take a verse out of Proverbs 23, where the Scripture says, "Beat thy child with a rod," and, "If thou beatest him with a rod, he shall not die. Thou shalt beat him with a rod, and thou shalt save his soul from hell."

Now, does salvation actually come through beating someone with the rod? Is one of the greatest examples of evangelism to grab a rod, go out on the street, and start beating the devil out of everybody? Obviously, that is not what the Bible means. Every child that has been whipped does not go to heaven. God is saying that we must use the means—that is, discipline—that He has commanded, but we must trust in Him and look to Him to bless those means and make them effectual. Those who use the means and trust in Him may see that child eventually converted, because His discipline will work for his good and not for his ill. Although we use means, we must seek God's blessing upon those means to make them effectual.

You remember the passage in 1 Samuel 17 where David was going to face Goliath. He went to Saul and said, "Don't let your heart trouble you; I'll go out and I'll fight this man." Saul said, "You're but a youth. And this man has been a warrior from his youth." David said, "I'll take care of it," and Saul dressed David in his own armor.

King Saul was head and shoulders above everyone else. He was a big man. David at this time was probably about fifteen or sixteen years old. Imagine this skinny little youth with all that armor on. David told Saul, "I can't go in these. I haven't proved them. But I've proved this sling. And I've proved God, and I know that he works, and I know my sling works. That's all I need." So David took Goliath down with a sling. It was the means, but it was God who directed that rock and empowered David to sling that stone straight. You have to have the means, and you have to have the power of God as well.

Now look at Ephesians chapter 6, verse 10: “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.” The word “whole armor” here is panoplia in the Greek. We talk about the panoply of God. It simply means the armor of God. This full, complete armor is revealed from verse 13 through verse 18. Obviously, we cannot use partial armor; we have to have the whole armor. In verse 13, he says, “Wherefore take unto you the whole armor of God.” In verse 11, it is “put on the armor of God”; in verse 13, it is “wherefore take unto you the whole armor of God.” In verse 11, “put on” is an imperative, which is a command. In verse 13, “wherefore take unto you” is an imperative, which is a command.

The Nature of Our Warfare

So God commands us to put on the whole armor of God. He explains why we need this armor in verse 12: "For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities and powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places." Paul is not telling us that our battle is not against man. Certainly it is against man in one sense of the word. But the real battle is against those powers that are beyond and behind wicked men, those powers that support them. If this were simply a flesh-and-blood battle, it would be easy in one sense of the word. But it is not. Flesh and blood is merely what we see; what we cannot see is the real motivating cause behind the enemy. Paul identifies these enemies as principalities, powers, the rulers of the darkness of this world, and spiritual wickedness in high places.

Albert Barnes explains this verse plainly: "Against the rulers of the darkness of this world. The rulers that preside over the regions of ignorance and sin with which the earth abounds, darkness. Darkness is the emblem of ignorance, misery, and sin. And no description could be more accurate than that of representing these malignant spirits as ruling over a dark world. The earth, dark and wretched and ignorant and sinful, is just such a dominion as they would choose or as they would cause. And the degradation and woe of the heathen world are just such as foul and malignant spirits would delight in."

"It is a wide and powerful empire. It has been consolidated through the ages. It is sustained by all authority of law, by all the omnipotence of the perverted religious principle, by all the reverence for antiquity, by all the power of selfish, corrupt, and base passions. No empire has ever been so extended or has continued so long as that empire of darkness, and nothing on earth is so difficult to destroy."

Yet the apostle says that it was on that kingdom that we are to make war. Against it, the kingdom of the Redeemer was to be set up, and that kingdom was to be overcome by the spiritual weapons which he specifies. When he speaks of the Christian warfare here, he refers to the contest with the powers of this dark kingdom. He regards each Christian as a soldier to wage war against it in whatever way and wherever he could attack it.

The contest, therefore, was not primarily with men or with the internal corrupt propensities of the soul. It was with this vast and dark kingdom that has been set up over mankind. I do not regard this passage, therefore, as having a primary reference to the struggle which a Christian maintains with his own corrupt propensities. It is warfare on a large scale with the entire kingdom of darkness over the world. Yet, in maintaining that warfare, the struggle will be with such portions of that kingdom as we come in contact with and as actually relate to us.

There are five areas in which this kingdom of darkness relates to us. First, our own sinful propensities, which are part of the kingdom of darkness. Second, the evil passions of others—their pride, ambition, and spirit of revenge—which are also part of that kingdom. Third, the evil customs, laws, opinions, employments, and pleasures of the world. Fourth, error, superstition, and false doctrine. Fifth, the wickedness of the heathen world, the sins of the benighted nations. All these are parts of that kingdom. Whenever we come in contact with evil, whether in our own hearts or elsewhere, there we are to make war.

I want to point something out. Go back to verse 12 in Ephesians chapter 6. He says, "For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places." I

mentioned earlier, if warfare was just simply with flesh and blood, that would be very simple and very easy. But now we are talking about principalities. We are talking about powers. We are talking about things we can't see. Wow! But let me show you something. I want you to turn over just a few pages to the book of Colossians chapter 2, and then we'll go back to Ephesians 1. But look in Colossians 2. This is part of the work of Jesus Christ. Note, if you would, please, Colossians 2 and verse 15. Here's what Jesus Christ has done: "And having spoiled principalities and powers, He made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it." Having spoiled, literally, having disarmed them, He made an example of them and was elevated far above them.

Christ's Victory Over Principalities and Powers

So while we are thinking about principalities and powers, we have to understand that they are already defeated enemies. And if you will turn back to Ephesians chapter 1, Ephesians chapter 1, look if you would please at verses 20 and 21, because here we are talking about the victory of the Lord Jesus Christ. Ephesians 1 verse 20: "Which he wrought in Christ when he raised him from the dead and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places."

"Far above all principality and power and might and dominion and every name that is named, not only in this world but also in that which is to come." So Jesus Christ has defeated and has exposed and disarmed every principality, every power, every dominion. And when he arose from the dead and ascended to the right hand of the Father, he was elevated above and over all of these principalities and powers. So we have to acknowledge that while they are still strong, they're also defeated because Jesus Christ defeated them.

Now, I want you to go back to Ephesians chapter six. I want you to understand that it is only in Jesus Christ then that we have victory.

If you were to ask me, “How do we fight the battle? What equipment do we use?” my answer is that those questions are answered in verses 13 through 18, which we will probably look at more next week. Look at verse 13 again. He says, “Wherefore take unto you the whole armor of God.” Notice: “take unto you the whole armor of God.” Note also: “put it on, that you may be able to

withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand." Now, of course, he repeats from verse 11, "put on the whole armor of God."

The Whole Armor of God and Standing Victorious

Both of these are imperatives. But notice verse 13: "Wherefore take unto you the whole armor of God that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day." The word "withstand" literally means to resist, to oppose, and to counter. If James threw a left hook at me, I could block with this hand and counter with the other. That is what the word means: to resist. It means to fight and to oppose. We need to take the whole armor of God so that we may be able to fight and oppose in the evil day.

Now consider the word "able." He said, "Wherefore take unto you the whole armor of God that ye may be able." The word here for "able" is dunamai, which comes from dunamis. It is where we get our English word dynamite. It means to have the ability, the power, and the strength. We have to take unto ourselves the whole armor of God that we may be able, that we may have the dynamite of God, the power of God.

You remember what the Apostle Paul said in Romans 1:16? "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God to every one that believeth." The word "power" is dunamis—dynamite. It is the dynamite of God. So he tells us we have to have this armor in order that we would be able to stand. The armor gives us the ability, the power, and the strength to stand against what comes in the evil day.

Now consider the word "evil." In the Greek text, there are two Greek words for evil. The first is kakos, K-A-K-O-S. It simply means that which is evil—more truly, that which is bad, worthless, or faulty. It is a word for something bad. But the second word is poneros. Poneros indicates something positively evil, wicked, and vile. It is translated in our Bibles fifty-one times as "wicked," ten times as "the wicked one," six times as "the wicked one," and two times as "evil things." Any time you see the word poneros, it refers to that which is inherently sinful, wicked, and evil in and of itself.

In Luke chapter 11, the disciples came to our Lord and said, “Teach us to pray.” He said, “When you pray, say, ‘Our Father who art in Heaven, hallowed be Thy Name. Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done, on Earth as it is in Heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.’”

The word “evil” is “poneros.” With a definite article, “ho poneros,” it refers to the evil one. Thus, the prayer asks not only for deliverance from the evil one, but also from that which is positively wicked, vile, corrupt, and contrary to God.

Go back to verse 13: “Wherefore take unto you the whole armor of God that you may be able, have the power, to withstand, that is to fight and oppose, in the wicked, vile day.” This is not merely something bad; it is exceedingly wicked. We are living in wicked days. He says, “Wherefore take unto you the whole armor of God, that you may be able to fight, resist, oppose, counter in the wicked, vile day, and having done all, to stand.” “Histemi” is the Greek word for “stand,” meaning to stand as a victor in the contest.

Steve and I have agreed to fight each other. We are not mad at each other; we simply want to fight. We put on boxing gloves, everybody comes to watch, and we start boxing. I come up with a right hook and knock him out, or he comes up with a haymaker and knocks me out. One of us goes to the floor. What does the victor do? He stands. That is exactly what this word means.

Take unto you the whole armor of God, that you may have the power and ability to fight and counter in the wicked day, “and having done all, to stand victoriously.” Stand as the victor, with your foe defeated and destroyed. It does not matter how numerous or powerful the foes are. God says that if we stand in His whole armor and fight, we will end up standing victoriously over our defeated foes.

If you have never read Pilgrim's Progress, I would encourage you to read it. If you've read it, but it's been a long time ago, please read it again. I remember the very first time I ever read Pilgrim's Progress. I even remember where I was and what time it was when I

finished it. I was preaching in Birmingham, Alabama, staying in the basement of a private home, and I finished reading that book at midnight.

Illustration from Pilgrim's Progress

When Christian got over that river and got into the Celestial City, I was overcome with emotion and started shouting. I woke the people up who were upstairs. It is a tremendous book. You should read it to your children, your grandchildren, and your great-grandchildren. It is the book that is second only to the Bible in sales. More people have bought Pilgrim's Progress than any other book outside of the Bible. That does not mean they read it, but they bought it. Unhappily, a lot of people do not read what they buy, but you should read it.

I want to read this one section where Christian meets Apollyon, the devil, Satan. Listen carefully:

"But now in this valley of humiliation, poor Christian was hard put to it. For he had gone but a little way before he espied a foul fiend coming with a field to meet him. His name is Apollyon. Then did Christian begin to be afraid and to cast in his mind whether to go back or to stand his ground. But he considered again that he had no armor for his back. Therefore thought to turn the back to him might give him the greater advantage with ease to pierce him with his darts. Therefore he resolved to venture to stand his ground, for thought he, had I no more in mine eye than the saving of my life, it would be the best way is to stand. So he went on, and Apollyon met him.

"Now the monster was hideous to behold. He was clothed with scales like a fish, and they are his pride. He had wings like a dragon, feet like a bear, and out of his belly came forth fire and smoke, and his mouth was the mouth of a lion. When he was come up to Christian, he beheld him with a disdainful countenance, and thus began to question him. Apollyon: 'Whence come you, and whither are you bound?' Christian: 'I am come from the city of destruction, which is the place of all evil, and I am going to the city of Zion.' Apollyon:"

Apollyon said, “By this I perceive that thou art one of my subjects. For all that country is mine, and I am the prince and the god of it. How is it then that thou hast run away from thy king? Were it not that I had hope that thou mayest do me more service, I would strike thee now at one blow to the ground.”

Christian answered, “I was born indeed in your dominion, but your service was hard, and your wages such as a man could not live on, for the wages of sin is death. Therefore, when I was come to years, I did as other considered persons do, look out if perhaps I might mend myself.”

Apollyon replied, “There is no prince that will lightly lose his subjects, neither will I yet lose thee. Since thou complainest of my service and wages, be content, go back. What our country will afford, I promise to give thee.”

“But I’ve let myself to another, even to the king of princes. How can I with fairness go back?”

“Thou has done in this according the proverb, changed a bad for worse. It is ordinary for those that have professed themselves servants, after a while, to give him the slip and return to me. Do thou so also, and all shall be well.”

“I’ve given him my faith and sworn my allegiance to him. How then can I go back from this and not be hanged as a traitor?”

“Thou didst the same to me, and yet I’m willing to pass by all if now thou wilt turn and go back again.”

“What I promised thee was in my nonage. Besides, I count the prince under whose banner now I stand able to absolve me, yea, and to pardon what I did in my compliance with thee. And besides, O thou destroying Apollyon, to speak the truth, I like his service, wages, servants, government, company, and country better than thine. Therefore leave off to persuade me further. I am his servant, and I will follow him.”

Apollyon said, “Consider again, when thou art in cool blood, what thou art like to meet with in the way that thou goest. Thou knowest that for the most part his servants come to an ill end, because they are transgressors against me in my ways.”

“How many of them have been put to shameful deaths? Besides, thou countest his service better than mine, whereas he never came yet from that place where he is to deliver any that served him out of their hands. But as for me, how many times, as all the world knows, have I delivered, either by power or fraud, those that have faithfully served me from him and his, though taken by them, and so will I deliver thee.”

Christian answered, “His forbearing at present to deliver them is on purpose to try their love, for they will cleave to him to the end. The ill end thou sayest they come to is most glorious in their account. They do not much expect present deliverance, for they stay for their glory, and then they shall have it when their prince comes with his and the glory of his angels.”

“Thou hast been unfaithful in thy service to him, and how dost thou expect to receive wages of him?”

Christian answered, “Wherein, O Apollyon, have I been unfaithful to him?”

“Thou didst faint at first setting out, when thou wast almost choked in the gulf of Despond. Thou didst attempt wrong ways to be rid of thy burden, whereas thou shouldst have stayed till thy prince had taken it off. Thou did sinfully sleep and lose thy choice thing. Thou was also almost persuaded to go back at the sight of the lions. And when thou talkest of thy journey and what thou has heard and seen, thou art inwardly desirous of vain glory in all that thou sayest or doest.”

Christian said, “All this is true, and much more which thou hast left out. But the prince whom I serve and honor is merciful and ready to forgive.”

“But besides, these infirmities possess me in thy country. Therefore I suck them in, and I've groaned under them, been sorry for them, and have obtained pardon of my prince.”

Apollyon broke into a grievous rage, saying, “I am the enemy to this prince. I hate this person, his laws, and people. I am come out on purpose to withstand thee.”

Christian said, “Apollyon, beware what you do, for I am in the king's highway, the way of holiness. Therefore, take heed of yourself.”

Apollyon straddled quite over the whole breadth of the way and said, “I'm void of fear in this matter. Prepare thyself to die, for I swear by my infernal den that thou shalt go no further here while I spill my soul.” With that he threw a flaming dart at his breast. But Christian had a shield in his hand with which he caught it and so prevented the danger. Then Christian drew, for he thought it was time to bestir himself. Apollyon made at him, throwing darts as thick as hail. Notwithstanding all that Christian could do to avoid them, Apollyon wounded him in the head, his hand, and foot.

This made Christian give back a little. Apollyon followed his work amain, but Christian again took courage and resisted as manfully as he could. This sore combat lasted for above a half a day, till Christian was almost quite spent. For you must know that Christian, by reason of his wounds, must needs grow weaker and weaker. Then Apollyon, espying his opportunity, gathered up close to Christian and, wrestling with him, gave him a dreadful fall. With that Christian's sword flew out of his hand. Then said Apollyon, “I am sure of thee now,” and he almost pressed him to death. So the Christian began to despair of life.

But as God would have it, while Apollyon was fetching his last blow, thereby to make a full end of this good man, Christian nimbly stretched out his hand for his sword and caught it, saying, “Rejoice not against me, O mine enemy. When I fall, I shall rise again.” With that, he gave him a deadly thrust, which made him give back as one that had received his mortal wound. Christian, perceiving that, made at him again, saying, “Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us.” With that Apollyon spread forth his dragon’s wings and sped away, so that Christian, for a season, saw him no more.

In this combat no man can imagine, unless he had seen and heard it as I did, what yelling and hideous roaring Apollyon made throughout the fight. He spake like a dragon; and what sighs and groans burst from Christian’s heart! I never saw him give so much as one pleasant look till he perceived he had wounded Apollyon with

his two-edged sword. Then he smiled and looked upward. It was a dreadful sight. A more unequal match can hardly be: Christian must fight an angel. Yet, by handling sword and shield, the valiant man makes him go; a dragon quits the field. When the battle was over, Christian said, “I will here give thanks to him that delivered me out of the mouth of the lion, to him that did help me against Apollyon.”

Conclusion: Dependence on God for All Strength

Here is a picture of a spiritual fight that we cannot ignore: a man conquered in the name and power of Christ, though severely wounded and discouraged. Through faith he caught the sword again and plunged it into Apollyon’s heart. “Wherefore, take unto you the whole armor of God, that you may be able, that you may have the power, that you may have the strength to fight in the wicked day, and having done all, stand victoriously.”

We have no strength of our own; all our strength is in our God. He is omnipotent. This is our confidence, what encourages us and keeps us going. Spiritual strength begins when we see how helpless we are and how glorious and powerful He really is. If we use the means God has ordained, and He blesses those means and makes them effectual, we cannot fail. We will always be left standing victorious on the battlefield, because His victory is our victory.

He has already defeated our enemies, and we stand in Him. Success in the Christian life—I do not care where you are in your Christian life—depends upon the power of God and not on your strength. The same God who preserves us gives us grace to persevere; who calls us enables us to come to Him; who commands us to pray gives us a praying heart; and who commands us to study gives us the desire to study.

Everything we have is in Him, through Him, and for Him. So the question has to be asked: What equipment do we need? What is our armor? How will we fight? You must find out exactly what God commands.

Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we ask for Your grace, mercy, goodness, and kindness. Help us to love Thee, Lord; help us to fight; help us to have on the armor of God; help us to stand strong in the

power of God, giving honor and glory to our Lord Jesus Christ, the great victor, who has already given us deliverance. Help us to praise Thee and honor Thee. In the name of Jesus Christ, we ask and pray. Amen.

CHAPTER 2

Be Strong

Part Two of Three

Introduction and Review

Ephesians 6, verses 10-18, is the second part in the series, Be Strong. Ephesians 6, verse 10, says, "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 wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. Wherefore, take unto you 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 your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness, and your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace. Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith you shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. And take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and

watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints."

Each one of us needs strength; especially, we need God's strength. I hope that you learned from the first message in this series that we are not only weak and helpless, but actually impotent in and of ourselves. Therefore, we are admonished in both the Old Testament and the New Testament to be strong.

As I pointed out last week, however, there are only three passages in the New Testament where we are commanded to be strong. The first is 1 Corinthians 16:13, where the Apostle Paul said, "Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit ye like men, be strong." The second is Ephesians 6:10: "Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord in the power of His might." The third is 2 Timothy 2:1, where Paul said to Timothy, "Therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus."

Last week I covered 1 Corinthians 16:13 and the beginning of Ephesians chapter 6, especially verses 10-13. Today I want to continue with the armor in which we are to stand and be strong.

Christ's Victory Over Enemies

The Word of God teaches us very clearly that, in His strength, we will be able to vanquish all enemies, both foreign and domestic. I pointed out last week how our Lord has actually defeated all His enemies. The Bible says in Colossians 2:15, “In having spoiled principalities and powers, He made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it.” The words “having spoiled” mean literally “disarmed them.” Thus, He has not only defeated them; He has actually disarmed them.

Hebrews 2:14 shows how our Lord destroyed two of the most prominent enemies we have: death and the devil. “For as much as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, He also Himself likewise took part of the same; that through death He might destroy him that had the power of death, that is the devil, and deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.”

The Bible tells us clearly, then, that our Lord has defeated and destroyed both death and the devil. Consequently, death has no fear

for the child of God, and the devil is totally and absolutely defeated. The Apostle Paul said to the Roman Christians, “And the God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you, amen.” He is a defeated enemy.

In fact, Scripture commands us to resist him, oppose him, and fight against him, and we are told that when we fight against him, he will flee from us. James 4:7 says, “Submit yourselves unto God, resist the devil and he will flee from you.” Here is a necessary caution: although we are commanded to resist the devil, the Bible first commands us to submit to God. If we try to resist him in our own strength and power, we are in trouble. We cannot successfully resist and fight against him until we submit ourselves to God and resist and fight in the power of God. Submit yourselves unto God; resist, fight against, and oppose the devil, and he will flee from you.

Now last week I closed with an aspect of Bunyan’s Pilgrim’s Progress. If you have not read it, I encourage you to do so; if you have not read it in a long time, I encourage you to read it again. It is filled not only with doctrine, but also demonstrates practical applications and clearly shows what Christians go through in their struggle to maintain a holy and godly life.

You remember when Bunyan met Apollyon? Pilgrim’s Progress tells us that when he first saw Apollyon, he recognized him as a very horrible, horrific thing coming toward him. His first thought was to turn and go back, until he considered the fact that he had no armor for his back. Then he said it would be best that he stood and faced the enemy. Interestingly, as we go through Ephesians chapter 6, you will find that there is no armor for the back. We must therefore learn to stand and fight.

The Command to Stand

That is why the Apostle commanded, “Put on the whole armour of God.” “Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.” That is why he said, “Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might.”

Today I want to begin with verse 14, because Paul now tells us how we are to stand, how we are to fight, and how we are to resist. In

verse 14 he says, “Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness.” Paul begins this verse with an imperative. An imperative is a command. He says, “Stand therefore”; that is, he is commanding us to stand.

The word stand literally means to be fixed, firmly established, and steadfast. It refers to one who will not hesitate and will not waver. The command to stand fast implies that we are to be watchful, ready for combat, and careful to keep our places, both in our general and particular callings.

We are supposed to be soldiers in rank. If one soldier leaves the rank, he not only endangers his own life, but the lives of others also. So Paul commands, “Stand therefore.” He also tells us how we are to stand. There are two aspects of standing. First, he says, “Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth.”

The Belt of Truth

The loins are generally referred to as the seat of balance, strength, and power. When you talk about your loins, you are basically talking about your lower anatomy, particularly your hips. It is from this position that all fighting, movement, and balance occur. If you cannot control your hips, you cannot control your balance. If you cannot control your hips, you cannot walk or run. So he tells us that we are to stand, having our loins gird about with truth.

You must remember that Peter, in 1 Peter 1 and verse 13, told us that we were to gird up the loins of our mind. He is using this illustration here, referring to the mind. But here it simply says, “having your loins girt about with truth.” In Bible times, they usually wore long, flowing robes. Being girt, or having the girdle of truth, is not talking about a kind of girdle that women usually wear. It is talking about something around the waist.

It is a strong band because, when men wanted to run or fight, they would take their robes and gird them under that waistband. That waistband was also where they usually carried their weapons. So, in order to stand and fight, he says you have to stand gird about with truth.

Please stop and think with me. The very first thing he mentions is truth. Truth is absolutely necessary; it is essential. We cannot stand in falsehood, lies, that which is untrue, or darkness. Truth exposes all lies, all untruths, and all darkness. Only truth dispels error. I am sure that you remember what our Lord said in John chapter 8, verses 30–32: “And as He spake these words, many believed on Him. Then said He to the Jews who believed on Him, ‘If you continue in My Word, then you are truly My disciples and you shall know the truth and the truth set you free.’” Freedom is connected with truth. Slavery is connected with error and falsehood. Therefore, we are to stand having our loins girt about with truth.

What does it mean to stand having our loins girt about with truth? Each one of us understands what our Lord said in John 14, verse 6: “I am the way, the truth, and the life, and no man cometh to the Father but by Me.” Jesus Christ is truth personified. He is truth. Unless we stand in the Lord Jesus Christ, we cannot stand in the truth.

Unhappily, most people are like Pilate, absolutely blind to the truth. In John chapter 18, verses 37 and 38, Jesus Christ was standing before Pilate. Pilate therefore said unto him, "Art thou a king?" Jesus answered, "Thou sayest that I am a king." He went on to say, "To this end I was born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth. Every one that is of the truth heareth my words." Pilate asked, "What is truth?"

Truth was standing in front of him, staring him in the face, and he did not even recognize it. Jesus Christ is the personification of truth. You and I cannot stand in truth unless we stand in the Lord Jesus Christ, for Jesus Christ is truth.

The Spirit of God is also the Spirit of truth. In John 14:17, our Lord said, "Even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him, but you know him, for he dwelleth in you, and he shall be in you." The Holy Spirit is therefore referred to as the Spirit of Truth.

In John 15:26 He said, "When the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you, even from the Father, even the Spirit of Truth." Then, in John 16:13, He says, "Howbeit when He, the Spirit of Truth, has

come?" Thus, three times the Holy Spirit has been called the Spirit of Truth.

When we come to 1 John 5:6, the Word of God says, "This is He that came by water and blood, even Jesus Christ, not by water only, but also by the blood. And it is the Spirit that beareth witness, because the Spirit is truth." So that is four times the Holy Spirit is called the Spirit of truth.

When we are commanded to stand, therefore, having our loins girt about with truth, obviously we must stand in the Lord Jesus Christ. We must stand in the power of the Holy Spirit, for the Spirit is truth. But let me go a little further. Do you realize that the Bible is referred to as the Word of Truth? For instance, in John 17:17 our Lord said, "Sanctify them through thy truth, thy Word is truth." The Apostle Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 6:7, "By the Word of Truth, by the power of God, by the arm of righteousness on the right hand and on the left." And in Ephesians 1:13, "In whom also that you trusted after you heard the Word of Truth, the Gospel of your salvation." Thus, the Scriptures are called the Scriptures of Truth. If we are going to stand in truth, we must stand in the Lord Jesus Christ, in the person and power of the Holy Spirit, and in the Word of God.

Here is a good question: If we are to be girded about with truth and are to stand in the Lord Jesus, in the power of the Holy Spirit, and in His Word, from where are we to learn His Word? The Bible answers that. In 1 Timothy 3:15, Paul wrote to Timothy: "But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and the ground of truth." The church is to be the pillar and ground of truth. Its primary function is to promote and proclaim truth. Truth is to be primary; truth is more important than anything else.

I have had people tell me, "Well, the reason I go to such-and-such church is because they have a wonderful music ministry." I like music as well as anyone, I suppose. But you can have a wonderful music ministry and no truth. I have had people tell me, "Well, we go to such-and-such church because they've

Someone says, “We have a wonderful children’s program.” Really? What they are saying, in one sense, is, “I don’t have to babysit them; I have someone else who is going to babysit them.” But what are your children being taught? And what are you listening to from the pulpit in order for your children to go to that children’s ministry?

The point I am trying to make is this: I am not against teaching children. Obviously, I am not against good and godly music. But truth is absolutely essential. If you do not stand in truth, you are going to stand in falsehood and error, and that is exactly what your children are going to learn.

It is the responsibility of the Church to proclaim truth. It is not the responsibility of the Church to entertain you, to entertain your children, or to have all kinds of programs. It is the responsibility of the Church to preach and proclaim the truth, which is Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit, and the Word of God. Preaching and teaching the truth is the main function of the Church.

Now, why is it that most Christians do not stand in truth? Why do we not stand with our loins girt about with truth? There are several reasons. One reason most Christians cannot stand girded with truth is that the modern churches have failed to preach the truth. We preach everything but truth, and I will be absolutely honest.

I have talked to preachers and asked them about certain doctrines: “Have you preached this?” They answered, “Well, I believe it, but my people would not stand for it.” If I cannot preach the truth, I might as well leave if they are not going to listen to it. I would rather go to someone who would listen to it.

I can translate that for you. When preachers say, “I would like to preach this, but my people will not stand for it,” they are saying, “Our church is in debt up to its eyeballs, and if I start preaching this, people are going to leave. Then we cannot make the sinking-fund payment, and we are going to lose everything. So I am going to cut corners and compromise the Word of God in order to keep the building.” That is one reason people cannot stand and gird about with truth: they are not hearing truth, nor are they hearing the whole truth. By the way, a half-truth presented as the whole truth is an untruth.

Paul said that he was free from the blood of all men because he was not shunned in declaring them the whole counsel of God. Another reason why most people do not stand girt about with truth is that some simply do not want truth. They refuse to listen to it. I have had professing Christians tell me—and I am giving you an accurate quote—"My mind is made up and I don't want you confusing me with a bunch of scriptures."

What can you do with someone like that? There is something known as cognitive dissonance. You have heard or been taught something all your life, and then suddenly you hear truth that contradicts everything you have ever heard and been taught. Your mind says, "That can't possibly be true." And yet it is. After a while, you begin to consider it and wrestle with it, and then you discover that you are wrong. That is cognitive dissonance. Many people are that way. They have been raised a certain way and taught to believe a certain thing; when truth confronts them, they simply say, "It cannot be truth."

If we are going to succeed in our battles and in the ultimate war, we have to stand with our loins girt about with truth. Now watch verse 14 again, because there is a second aspect: "Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth and having on the breastplate of righteousness."

The Breastplate of Righteousness

The breastplate was the piece of armor that protected the chest. Sometimes a portion extended upward to protect the throat. It protected the vital organs—the lungs, heart, diaphragm, and sometimes even the throat. Notice that it is called the breastplate of righteousness. That which protects us in this area is righteousness.

There are two types of righteousness. First, there is the positional and perfect righteousness we have in Jesus Christ. Paul said in Philippians 3:9, "And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is according to the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith." Jesus Christ came and was completely, perfectly, and totally obedient to God. He fulfilled all the law of God, satisfied God's

righteousness and holiness, and God the Father evidenced this by raising Him from the dead and seating Him at His own right hand.

In Jesus Christ we are absolutely perfect. He has given us a perfect robe of righteousness. When our Father sees us, although we are sinners and full of faults, failures, and sins, He sees us through the robe of righteousness of Jesus Christ. Thus, we have a positional, perfect righteousness in Jesus Christ. Secondly, there is a practical and personal righteousness that stems and flows from that positional and perfect righteousness.

The Bible tells us in Proverbs 11:30, “The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life.” You can only act righteously if you have been made righteous in Jesus Christ. If you have not been made righteous in Jesus Christ, you cannot live or act righteously. First John 3:7 says, “Little children, let no man deceive you. He that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous.” If we are doing righteousness, it is because we have been made righteous, even as Jesus Christ is righteous. Our practical, personal righteousness stems from and flows from obedience to our Lord, who has given us a positional and perfect righteousness.

Ephesians 6:14 says, “Stand therefore, having your loins girded about with truth, having on the breastplate of righteousness.” The breastplate of righteousness. I have tried to explain what that refers to positionally and practically, but there is also a practical application. Albert Barnes writes, “The breastplate defended the vital parts of the body, and the idea here is that the integrity of life and righteousness of character is as necessary to defend us from the assaults of Satan as the coat of mail was to preserve the heart from the errors of the enemy. It was the incorruptible integrity of Job and in a higher sense of the Redeemer Himself that saved them from the temptations of the devil. And it is as true now that no one can successfully meet the power of temptation unless he is righteous, as that a soldier could not defend himself against a foe without such a coat of mail. A want or a lack of integrity will leave a man exposed to the assaults of the enemy, just as a man would be whose coat of mail was defective or some part which was lacking.”

The king of Israel—he's talking about Ahab—was smitten by an arrow between the joints of his harness, or the joints of the

breastplate. Many a man who thinks he has on the Christian armor is smitten in such a manner. There is some defect of character, some want of incorruptible integrity, some point that is unguarded. That will be sure to be the point of attack by the foe.

David was tempted to commit enormous crimes that stain his memory, and Peter to deny his Lord. Judas was assailed for want of the armor of righteousness through his avarice, or greediness. By some want of incorruptible integrity, in a single point, many a minister of the gospel has been assailed and fallen. We need a righteousness which God alone can give, the righteousness of God our Savior, to make us perfectly invulnerable to the errors of the foe.

What he is saying is absolutely true. We are going to be attacked at our weakest point. If there is a point in our lives where we're lacking in character, integrity, or righteousness, that's where we're going to be hit. That's why David was tempted through Bathsheba, Peter denied the Lord out of fear, and Judas betrayed and sold the Lord Jesus Christ for 30 pieces of silver.

You remember what was said of Judas? They were complaining because this ointment was poured out upon our Lord. Judas said, "Why? Why waste this ointment? This ointment could have been sold for 300 pence and given to the poor." You would think he really cared about the poor, but the next verse says, "This he said, not because he cared for the poor, but because he was a thief and bare the bag." He was the treasurer; he was a thief, covetous, greedy. That was his lack of integrity and character, and that's exactly where he got hit.

The Bible tells us in 1 Thessalonians 5 in verse 8, "But let us who are of the day be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love, and for an helmet the hope of salvation." I'll cover that a little bit later. The breastplate of righteousness deals with the principle and practice of righteousness. We must be made righteous in Jesus Christ before we can walk righteously before Him. Our righteousness is demonstrated in our obedience to the Word of God. Righteousness is nothing more than that which is approved by God, that which God calls good, right, just, and honorable.

If there is no righteousness in us—if there is no practical and personal righteousness—then we are giving the enemy a fair advantage to attack us wherever he so pleases. He tells us to stand, and we are to stand with our loins girt about with truth and having on the breastplate of righteousness.

The Shoes of the Gospel of Peace

Look in verse 15: "And your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace." The word "shod" means to bind or to put on. When we shoe a horse, we put a metal disc on his hoof; we bind it to him. So we are to have our feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace. The word "preparation" simply means to be in readiness, to be prepared.

It relates to our condition. It is much like the directive God gave in the first Passover, in Exodus 12 and verse 11. You remember what God told the Israelites? He said, "And thus shall you eat it with your loins girded and your shoes on your feet and your staff in your hand. You shall eat it in haste. It's the Lord's Passover." They were to eat dressed and ready to leave, because that is exactly what they were going to do. So we are to have our feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace. This means that we are willing, ready, and prepared to proclaim it, defend it, and protect it.

Moreover, it is the foundation upon which we stand. When you fight, it is best to fight on even ground if possible. If you are fighting on uneven ground, then you have problems as well. Our feet are shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace: the solid foundation on which we fight.

I find it very interesting that the apostle is talking about the gospel of peace and fighting at the same time. We fight standing on the gospel of peace. Paul is teaching us that we are to be in a fighting mode when it comes to the gospel of peace. It is like that dictum, "peace through superior firepower." We proclaim peace, we desire peace, and we pray for peace, but we will fight against all adversaries in order to protect and proclaim peace. So he tells us that we are to have our feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace. And notice verse 16.

The Shield of Faith

Another part of the armor is this: “Above all, taking the shield of faith wherewith you shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked.” The shield of faith is absolutely indispensable; it is necessary to quench all the fiery darts of the evil one. The illusion is to those that shot fiery arrows or missiles at another. The Christian must have a way of protecting himself from missiles: the shield of faith.

Matthew Poole said, “Fiery darts. It seems to be an allusion to the poisoned darts some barbarous nations were wont to use, which inflamed the bodies when they hit. By them he means all those violent temptations which inflame men's lust. These fiery darts of temptations faith is said to quench when by the help of grace obtained of Christ it overcomes them.”

Albert Barnes said, “Faith here is made to occupy a more important place than any other Christian grace.” Look back at verse 16: “Above all.” Paul is already speaking of standing and having your feet shod. Now he says, “Above all.” This is vitally important.

Barnes comments, “Faith here is made to occupy a more important place than either of the other Christian graces. It bears to the whole Christian character the same relation which the shield does to the other parts of the armor of a soldier. It protects all and is indispensable to the security of all. As in the case with the shield, the shield was an ingenious device by which blows and errors might be parried off and the whole body defended. It could be made to protect the head or the heart or thrown behind to meet an attack there. As long as a soldier had his shield, he felt secure. And as long as a Christian has faith, he is safe. It comes to his aid in every attack that is made on him, no matter from what quarter. It is the defense and guardian of every other Christian grace, and it secures the protection which the Christian needs in the whole of his spiritual war.”

This shield of faith is vitally important. Verse 16 says, “Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith you shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked.” The shield of faith actually works. You shall be able—you will have the ability and power—to block all the fiery darts of the wicked one if you use it. Stop and think about that.

You need the shield of faith. It is able to quench, thwart, and overcome anything thrown at you.

We are to stand with our loins girded with truth, wearing the breastplate of righteousness, our feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace, and having the shield of faith.

The Helmet of Salvation and Sword of the Spirit

In verse 17, "And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God." Clearly, two pieces of armor are enumerated here. First, he talks about the helmet of salvation, and then he talks about the sword of the Spirit. No soldier would ever go to war without either.

Some old helmets were made of leather, even thick leather. Later, they were made of bronze or some type of metal and fitted to the head. Everyone has seen, I suppose, the picture of a Spartan soldier whose helmet comes down, with a piece that even covers the nose and protects it. This helmet was designed to protect the soldier from all kinds of things.

Often helmets were decorated with a feather, crest, plume, or something similar. But the helmet protected a soldier from a war club, an axe, or even a sword. The Apostle said in 1 Thessalonians 5:8, which I quoted earlier, "But let us who are of the day be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love, and for an helmet, the hope of salvation."

The word "hope" in the Bible is totally different from the way we use it today. Someone could ask me, "Are you going to Virginia tomorrow?" and I could say, "I hope so." "Are you going to have a good trip?" "Well, I hope so." I say that because I do not know whether I will be able to go or whether I will have a safe trip. I am hoping for it.

But when the Bible uses the word "hope," it is something absolutely certain: steadfast and sure. The Bible tells us that we have an anchor of the soul within the veil, both steadfast and sure. Biblical hope is a settled, absolutely certain foundation. Just as the helmet protected the soldier in battle, the hope of our salvation, because it is certain, protects us. A soldier would not fight well without hope of

victory. Why would you fight if you did not hope that you would win? When we speak of the hope of salvation and of being in a battle, if for some reason I lose my life in that battle, I may not participate in its victory, but I have not lost, because to be absent from the body is to be

We are present with the Lord. In other words, there is that eternal hope that we have. You remember that when our Lord was on the cross, He said, “It is finished.” He completed the work of our salvation. There is nothing I can add to it and nothing I can do. He said, “It is finished.” We must never give up, and we must never give in, because we trust in the person and work of Jesus Christ. That is why the Bible says in Colossians 1:27, “Christ in you, the hope of glory.” He is our hope.

Next, he said in verse 17 that we are to take the sword of the Spirit. No soldier would ever go into battle without his sword. The ancient sword was usually a short, double-edged, sharp sword. It was used not only for stabbing but also for slashing and cutting. It did not have a long, thin, slender blade that would break easily; it was usually shorter and thicker, a blade that you could really go to work with. The sword was basically a close-quarters combat weapon.

They had artillery in the Bible—arrows. That was for long-distance fighting. They may also have used slingers, because you can sling a stone a long way. But when you got to a sword, it was up close and personal. It was close-quarters combat.

Now, we are talking about the Word of God. Look in your Bibles to Hebrews chapter 4, verses 12 and 13. No matter how sharp a soldier’s sword is, the Word of God is sharper: “For the Word of God is quick and powerful and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even the dividing asunder of soul and spirit and of the joints of the marrow and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of him with whom we have to do.”

I could take a short, sharp sword and do you harm. I could mutilate you, chop off your arms, your legs, or your head, or split you open. But the sword of the Spirit, according to Hebrews 4:12,

pierces even the dividing asunder of the soul and spirit, and the joints and the marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and the intents of the heart.

The sword of the Spirit is the Word of God, which we must use. I love the comment by that old Puritan, John Trapp, in reference to the sword of the Spirit. He said, “Wherewith our Savior beat the devil on his own dunghill,” that is, the wilderness, fetching all out of that one book of Deuteronomy. He was talking about Matthew 4, where our Lord was tempted in the wilderness and simply quoted from Deuteronomy in response to every temptation. He beat him on his own dunghill, obviously.

The sword is an offensive weapon. Yes, it can be used defensively, but it is also an offensive weapon, usually reserved for close combat. Many of us do not really know how to use the sword, and I am talking about the Word of God. We are commanded to take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God.

Many Christians do not know how to use their weapon. Many Christians are slow to use the Bible. Many Christians neglect their weapon. A weapon unused is worthless; a weapon neglected is useless. We have to come to a place where we can master the Word of God to the greatest ability and the greatest extent that God gives us, in order that we may use it.

Do you remember that passage from Pilgrim’s Progress where Christian was fighting Apollyon? Apollyon knocked him down and was on top of him. What did he say? “Why are you quoted Scripture? When I fall, I shall yet rise again. Rejoice not against me, O mine enemy.” When he finally defeated him, what did he say? “Yea, we're more than conquerors through him who loved us.”

It is the Word of God, which is the sword of the Spirit. We need to use the Word of God in defending ourselves and in attacking the enemy. The sword of the Spirit is the same sword that our Lord uses against His enemies. In Revelation 19:11, the sword of the Spirit is in action: “And I saw heaven open and behold a white horse. And he that sat upon him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he doth judge and make war. His eyes were as a flame of fire, and on

his head were many crowns; and he had a name written that no man knew but he himself. He was clothed with a vesture dipped in blood, and his name is called the Word of God."

We are talking about Jesus Christ: "And the armies which were in Heaven followed him upon white horses, clothed in fine linen, white and clean. And out of his mouth goeth a sharp sword, and that with it he should smite the nations, and he should rule them with a rod of iron, and he treadeth the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God, and he hath on his vesture and on his thigh a name written, King of kings and Lord of lords."

Note, if you would, verse 15: "And out of his mouth goeth a sharp sword, that with it he should smite the nations." What is that? It is the word of God. Now, look at verse 18. The Apostle Paul has told us about the armor that we need in order to be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. We need to have our loins girded about with truth, the breastplate of righteousness, and our feet shod with the preparation of the Gospel of Peace. We need to take the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit. But he adds this in verse 18: "Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints."

The Necessity of Prayer

In other words, in light of the armor that God has given us, we must not only make use of it; we must pray that God would make it powerful and effectual on our behalf. He has given us the means. He must make those means effective. The power is not ours; it is God's. That is why he said, "Put on the whole armor of God." Why? Verse 10: "Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of his might." This is the armor that he has provided, and this is the armor which he will make effective.

He says, "Praying with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit." There must be prayer. Then he said, "Watching thereunto"; there must be watchfulness. "With all perseverance"; there must be perseverance, but it is God who must make it effectual. So we are to pray for ourselves, our brethren, and our fellow soldiers,

watching—that is, being vigilant—and doing so with all perseverance and supplications. Let me make just an application or so.

Application and Conclusion

We need all of God's armor. One part will not help us; a few parts will not help us. We might say, “I will take the helmet of salvation, but I do not need anything else.” Really? What if that fiery dart happens to hit me in the heart? I need the breastplate of righteousness. I need every piece of armor that God has ordained.

We need that armor to defeat our fleshly desires, our fleshly lust, the pride of life, and our wickedness. We need it to protect us not only from enemies that are domestic, but from enemies that are foreign. We need to learn to pray warfare prayers, to pray against the enemy, and to pray that God would empower us to stand against him. We need to pray prayers like Psalm 7:9: “Oh, let the wickedness of the wicked come to an end, but establish the just.” That is a warfare prayer. I read some of those imprecatory Psalms where David talks about the enemies of God, and he says, “Break their arm, O God.”

"Break out their teeth in their mouth." You break a man's arm, you break his power. You break his teeth, you destroy him, at least temporarily. He's out of the fight. And that's exactly what David is doing. He's praying these warfare prayers, and he's saying, "Lord, give us the victory. You use your power. You enable us to stand."

The older we get, the more we realize how helpless and weak and impotent we really are. In one sense of the word, that is a very, very good thing. You look around at these young men. They think they're never going to die, never going to get sick, and are always going to be strong. Once you start getting older, you're going to realize you're going to get weaker and weaker and weaker. And the more you find it absolutely necessary to lean upon the Lord and be strong in Him and in the power of His might.

For without Him, we can do nothing. Be strong. The only way you're going to be strong, according to Ephesians chapter 6, is by putting on the whole armor of God and seeking Him to make that armor effectual in your daily life.

Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we bow to Thee. We thank You for Your Word and Your truth. We pray, Lord, that You would help us and enable us to put on this armor, to stand in it, and to use it for Your honor and Your glory. Make it effectual and powerful in our lives, and help us, Father, to glorify Thy great and holy name. In the name of Jesus Christ, we ask and pray. Amen.

CHAPTER 3

Be Strong

Part Three of Three

SCRIPTURE READING - 2 Timothy 2:1-7 (KJV)

Introduction and Review

2 Timothy chapter 2, beginning with verse 1:

"Thou therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men who shall be able to teach others also. Thou therefore endure hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life, that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier. And if a man also strive for masteries, yet is he not crowned, except he strive lawfully. The husbandman that laboreth must be first partaker of the fruits. Consider what I say, and the Lord give thee understanding in all things."

We have been commanded to be strong. We have seen our own impotence, weakness, and helplessness, and we have seen that

power belongs unto God. He is our strength, and we are to live in His strength and in the power of His might. God has ordained the armor in which we are to fight. We cannot fight in our own strength, and, like David, we cannot fight in Saul's armor—that is, our own armor. We have to fight in the armor of the Lord. The fights we lose are probably because we are fighting in our own armor instead of the armor God has provided.

I encourage each one of you to read Ephesians chapter 6, verses 10 through 18, daily, noting each piece of armor, how it is to be put on daily, and how it is to be applied so that we can live in the strength and power of God.

We do not become experts with our weaponry in an instant, nor do we become experienced without constant use and repetition. The same is true spiritually. We must know Ephesians chapter 6, verses 10 through 18, like the back of our hand. The smaller battles we face prepare us for the larger and more exhaustive battles. No one will stand faithful and true in a horrific battle until he has learned to remain faithful and true in the smaller battles. That is why the Bible in Zechariah chapter 4 and verse 10 asks, "For who hath despised the day of small things?" When we begin to despise small things, we do so at our own peril.

The Command to Be Strong in Grace

We have covered 1 Corinthians 16:13, where God says, "Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong." We have covered Ephesians 6:10, where Paul said, "Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might." Today we come to 2 Timothy 2:1, where Paul says, "Thou therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus." We have been commanded to be strong in the power of the Lord and in His might. Now we are commanded to be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.

Is there any difference between the command to be strong in the power of God and in His might and the command to be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus? I believe that these two commands are reciprocal. If you are strong in the strength and power of God, obviously you are strong in the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. If you

are strong in the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, then obviously you will be strong in the might and power of God as well.

The phrase, "be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus," teaches us, first and foremost, the source of grace. Grace is found only in Jesus Christ. There is no other source for saving grace, overcoming grace, persevering grace, or any other kind of grace. All grace is bound up in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Secondly, this verse teaches us about the sufficiency of grace. It says, "be strong in the grace that is in our Lord Jesus Christ." There is plenty of grace to make us strong. Our Lord does not hoard His blessings, but freely bestows them upon us. Ephesians 1:3 says, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ." Every blessing that we have is in Jesus Christ. Moreover, Romans 8:32 says, "He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?"

Ask yourself this question: If God has given us His greatest gift, His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, what makes you think that He would not give you the lesser gifts? Notice what he said: “He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?” Everything that we are, everything that we have, and everything that we ever will be is because of the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Outside of Him we are absolutely nothing. John Trapp, the old Puritan, said, “Weak grace may evidence pardon of sin, but it is strong grace that can overcome the temptations of Satan and bear up the heart in strong consolation. The blessing upon the man in the first creation was increase and multiply. In the second creation, it's grow in grace and be strong.”

Since you are in 2 Timothy, look in chapter 1 and verse 7. The Bible says, “For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind.” We have been talking about being strong, not only in the might and power of God, but strong in the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power, love, and a sound mind.

How do we know whether we are strong in the grace of Jesus Christ? How can we tell whether we are strong in the strength and power of God? The Apostle Paul gives us several answers, ways to consider, apply, understand, and test our strength. Look at the pictures the Apostle has laid down. First, in verse 1, he said, "Thou therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus." How do you know whether you are strong in that grace? Look at the next verse.

Test 1: Faithfulness as a Teacher

He said, "And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also." First of all, if we are strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus, if we are strong in the might and power of God, there will be faithfulness as a teacher in our lives.

Whether you are a pastor, or a preacher, or a Christian—you just simply call yourself an ordinary everyday Christian—you are a steward. You are a steward of the truth. And the Bible tells us in 1 Corinthians chapter 4 and verse 2, "Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful." Faithfulness is an attribute of someone who is strong in grace and someone who is strong in the power and might of the Lord. Every true teacher wishes to communicate truth.

We want to reproduce that which we know in others. This is especially true when it comes to communicating what you and I would call biblical principles. What are the greatest failings in our day and time? One of the greatest failings in our churches, and among pastors and preachers, is simply this: a failure to teach the truth in such a way that the truth can not only be understood, but applied and practiced in daily lives.

So the problem is this: you may go to a church and hear a good sermon, walk out, and say, "But how does that apply to me? How am I to live? How is that to change my life?" If you are really interested in communicating the truth, there is a strong desire in you that others know the truth as well. What the Apostle Paul is telling Timothy in verse 2 is that he is to make sure that truth continues by

finding faithful men, communicating that truth to them so that they may be able to teach others also.

Now let me tell you an implication in this verse. Here is basically what Paul is telling Timothy—good South Georgia lingo—"You ain't gonna live forever. You better pass on what I taught you. You better pass it on to faithful men who will be able to teach others as well." Paul told him to find faithful men. This term "faithful men" does not simply refer to men of faith, that is, men who are believers, but rather it refers to men who are believers who are faithful.

Men who have consistent, constant track records, men who are known for their faithfulness. Once you find a faithful man, and especially a man who has an ability to teach, you are to communicate this truth to him.

God does not expect a pastor or a teacher to chase his pupils down and cram truth down their throats. Paul tells Timothy, "And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men." These are men who are going to come consistently, regularly, and faithfully to hear the truth expounded, taught, and applied—men willing to sacrifice their time, sit and learn, and study. Those are the men that you are to teach. So it is not just faithful men that he was to teach, but men of ability, men who had the ability to communicate. That does not necessarily have to be a pastor.

It can be a regular Christian who happens to have the gift of teaching as well. But not everyone can teach. Simply because a man has been ordained does not mean that he can teach. Just because a man has a university degree does not mean that he can teach. The truth of the matter is this: I have known men with earned PhDs that could not teach their way out of a wet paper bag. Teaching is a gift of God.

In 1 Timothy chapter 3, the Apostle Paul lays out qualifications for a pastor, for a teacher. He says, verse 2, "A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behaviour, given to hospitality, apt to teach."

I could take the Bible and show you where every one of these characteristics, every one of these attributes that God requires of a

pastor, is required of every Christian with one exception: “apt to teach.” Are you required by God to be hospitable? Of course you are. Are you required to have good behaviour? Yes. Are you required not to be given to much wine? Of course. Are you required to know how to run your own house? The answer is yes. Are you required to be blameless? Yes. The only difference is this: all of these traits should be found in a pastor preeminently, eminently displayed in him. But the only difference between a pastor and the regular Christian is that he has to be apt to teach.

The Greek word is didaktikos, meaning apt and skillful in teaching. Here is a man not only ready to teach but adept at it. Teaching is his life; he lives it and breathes it. He cannot continue without it. Sometimes it is difficult to demonstrate to people the passion a real Bible teacher has. I am serious.

I have a good friend who was poor for the longest, but found out how to make money and is now making money hand over fist—chunks and chunks of money. He called me and wanted me to get involved, but I finally told him, "Look, I'm not interested."

Certainly, I want enough money to pay my bills and enough to live on. Those are necessities. But I have no desire to be wealthy or rich. My desire is simply to preach and teach the Word of God. That is what I live for, long for, and like to do. He said, "Well, if you have all this money, you can do what you want to do." I am already doing what I want to do. It is just that simple.

The word actually means someone who gives his life to teaching. Timothy was looking for men of integrity, faithfulness, and ability to ensure that the preaching and teaching of the Word of God continued. The true line of succession is found in good men qualified to preach and teach, who have the Spirit of Jesus Christ—not merely in someone who has a degree, or who happens to be ordained or receives some honor from a university. It is in someone who is faithful and has the ability to teach.

When God told Moses in Numbers chapter 27 that he was to be gathered to his own people, as was Aaron, He pointedly told him, "Moses, you are fixing to die." Do you know what Moses' first request was when he found out he was going to die? It also happened to be

his final request. Moses asked, "And Moses spake unto the LORD, saying, Let the LORD, the God of the spirits of all flesh, set a man over the congregation, which may go out before them, and which may go in before them, and which may lead them out, and which may bring them in; that the congregation of the LORD"

Moses asked for someone to lead and teach the people. That is what he wanted. So the first picture the Apostle Paul gives us by which we can test whether we are strong in the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, or strong in His might and power, is the driving force of faithfulness in a teacher to communicate and continue the truth.

We have to ask ourselves: Do I desire to communicate the truth? How strong is that desire? Am I faithful in that desire? Do I want that more than anything else? You should want that truth communicated to your children, your grandchildren, your friends, and your neighbors, so that you take every opportunity to teach. Then you have to ask yourself: Am I willing to faithfully attend the teaching and preaching of the Word of God so that I may learn and communicate?

The very first picture He gives us in 2 Timothy 2:1 is that of the faithfulness of a teacher. But if you look in verses 3 and 4, here is a second picture. He says in verse 3, "Thou therefore endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ."

Test 2: Endurance as a Soldier

"No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life; that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier." Have you ever considered hardness as a Christian virtue? We often consider compassion, love, and meekness, but we seldom hear of hardness. And yet the apostle says that we are to endure hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. The Greek word here is kakopatheo, and it refers to enduring hardness, suffering, trouble, afflictions, hardships, and troubles.

What Paul is trying to tell us is this: If we are going to be strong in the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and strong in the power of His might, that does not mean everything is going to be a bed of roses. In fact, in 2 Timothy 1:8 Paul tells Timothy, "Be not thou therefore

ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me his prisoner: but be thou partaker of the afflictions of the gospel according to the power of God."

The power of God does not keep you from afflictions; the power of God will enable you to endure and survive those afflictions, but it does not keep you from them at all. So he tells us that we are to endure hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ.

I think it is so appropriate. He said, “These are matters on which it is highly necessary for us to meditate. We see how many there are every day that throw away their spears, who formerly made a great show of valor. Whence does this arise? Because they cannot become inured to the cross. First, they are so effeminate that they shrink from warfare. Next, they do not know any other way of fighting than to contend haughtily and fiercely with their adversaries, and they cannot bear to learn what it is to possess their souls in patience.”

He says there are too many who have already thrown away their weaponry. Soldiers often endure great privations and afflictions. As ministers of Jesus Christ and as Christians, we have to understand that the Christian life is not necessarily a bed of ease. We are going to face innumerable hazards, dangers, afflictions, and sufferings, but they have to be patiently endured. We have to learn to endure hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ.

That means the things that happen to us that we do not like are not going to make us cease serving Him or cease being faithful. We will endure hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. Verse 4 gives another requirement: “No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life; that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier.” This is not a prohibition against other interests or projects by which one provides for himself and his family.

According to Acts 18, Paul was a tentmaker and made tents to support himself. Peter was a fisherman, and Luke was a physician. This verse does not prohibit working and supporting ourselves and our families. It does prohibit becoming entangled and over-engrossed in our work and in supporting ourselves, so that we forget our duties and responsibilities as a soldier. Matthew Henry,

commenting on this passage, says: “A soldier, when he has enlisted, leaves his calling and all the business

A soldier must attend his captain's orders. If we have given up ourselves to be Christ's soldiers, we must sit loose to this world. Although we must employ ourselves in the affairs of this life while we are here, we must not become so entangled with them that they divert us from our duty to God and the great concerns of our Christianity. Those who will war the good warfare must sit loose to the world, that we may please Him who has chosen us to be soldiers.

Every one of us will confess that the world is not our home. We can confess with Abraham that we are pilgrims and passing through. We need to learn to sit loose. Isaac Watts was a great hymn writer and Christian. He also wrote “Am I a Soldier of the Cross?” and that hymn illustrates what the Apostle Paul is telling us in verses three and four:

“Am I a soldier of the cross, a follower of the Lamb, and shall I fear to own His cause, or blush to speak His name? Must I be carried to the skies on flowery beds of ease, while others fought to win the prize and sailed through bloody seas? Are there no foes for me to face? Must I not stem the flood? Is this vile world a friend to grace, to help me on to God? Sure I must fight if I would win; increase my courage, Lord. I'll bear the toil, endure the pain, supported by Thy Word. Thy saints in all this glorious war shall conquer, though they die. They see the triumph from afar by faith's discerning eye. When that illustrious day shall rise, and all Thy armies shine in robes of victory through the skies, the glory shall be Thine.”

“Must I be carried to the skies on flowery beds of ease, while others fought to win the prize and sailed through bloody seas?” No. “Are there no foes for me to face?” Of course there are. We are to endure hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. We are not to entangle ourselves with the affairs of this world to the extent that we begin to think this world is our home or that we are going to be here permanently. We are not.

J. William Jones was a pastor, preacher, chaplain, and author. He was a chaplain in the War of Northern Aggression for the

Confederacy. He wrote Christ in the Camp, a wonderful book that everyone should read.

He tells about the two great revivals in the Confederate armies, where approximately 150,000 men were converted. He was appealing for chaplains to come and preach to the soldiers. He wrote to the churches:

"Send us the names of good men. And here I repeat, we want none others. Our object being not merely to fill up the regiments with nominal chaplains, but to fill the vacancies with efficient, working men, we want effective gospel preachers whose burden shall be Christ and Him crucified. It is a common mistake to think that anyone will do to preach to soldiers. The great business of the chaplain is to preach Christ publicly and from tent to tent. And the temporal welfare of the soldiers should be made subordinate to this. We want men physically able as well as willing to endure hardships and privations. If a chaplain would live up to the full measure of his usefulness, he must be with his regiment on the weary march, frequently resigning his horse to some footsore soldier, lie with them around the bivouac fire after evening prayers are over, be drenched on the outpost, or face the pelting snowstorm, divide with some hungry soldier his last hard cracker, and in a word share with his regiment whatever hardships they may be called on to endure. Now, if a brother is physically unable to endure these hardships, he had best not enter the work. But there is no question that many a delicate brother would have his health permanently improved if he would thus learn to endure hardness as a good soldier."

Can you imagine the average pastor today walking mile after mile in the snow and rain, sharing his last hard cracker with some hungry soldier and doing without? Yet that is exactly what the Apostle Paul says: "Thou therefore endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life; that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier."

God tells us to examine ourselves, determining whether we are strong in the grace that is in Jesus Christ and in the power of His might, by seeing whether we are faithful as a teacher and whether we endure hardness as a soldier.

Test 3: Discipline as an Athlete

If you look in verse 5, He gives us another picture: “And if a man also strive for masteries, yet is he not crowned, except he strive lawfully.” In other words, there must be discipline as an athlete. One of our greatest failures today is a failure in discipline. Normally speaking, athletes are very disciplined, especially if they have a desire to win. Anyone who has watched gymnastics must consider that young ladies and young men put in hour after hour of practice.

The same is true of a weightlifter and of men and women who run track. We lack the discipline. Years ago, a missionary came to our church who was also a concert pianist. I asked him if he would play for us, and he graciously consented and sat down at the piano with no music in front of him whatsoever.

For an hour straight he played—hymn after hymn after hymn. Music seemed to flow out of his fingers. He was barely touching the keys, and yet such wonderful music was coming out. When it was over, I went up to him and said, "Brother, I would give anything to be able to play the piano like that." He said, "Really?" He practiced eight hours a day, six days a week. All of a sudden, I had no further desire to be a concert pianist. The only reason he was that good was because he was that disciplined.

Now look at verse five: "And if a man also strive for masteries." The Greek word for "strive" here is from athleo. I hope that word sounds familiar to you, athleo. The noun is athlos. It is where we get our word "athletic" from, and it literally refers to a public contest—to one engaged in public games, someone contending for a prize. "If a man also strive," if he is contending for masteries, "yet is he not crowned, except he strive lawfully." The word "crowned" is stephanos, which means to encircle with a crown, to be crowned as a victor.

The Apostle Paul uses a very clear illustration in 1 Corinthians 9: "Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain." He is probably referring to the Grecian games. You may have a hundred men racing, but only one is going to reach the prize. You have to run so that you can win.

"And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things." That is, he is disciplined. "Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible." Then he says, "I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air: but I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway."

What does he say? “I discipline myself. I am temperate. I keep my body under subjection.” He wants to continue to preach, teach, and serve the Lord, so he keeps his body under subjection.

Discipline is absolute. Discipline is needed, necessary, and required. One of the problems we have today is such a lack of discipline in our lives. It is not that we do not discipline our children; we do not even discipline ourselves. We start something and then quit. We cannot concentrate anymore. We have become so addicted to watching television that we can hardly pay attention to anything for more than fifteen seconds—thirty or forty at the most—because then a commercial comes on.

If we are going to be strong in the grace that is in Jesus Christ, strong in His strength and in the power of His might, we have to learn discipline.

Look back to 2 Timothy 2:5: “And if a man also strive for masteries, yet is he not crowned, except he strive lawfully.” If you are going to win the crown, you have to strive lawfully. You have to play according to the rules. The word “lawfully” is the Greek word nomimos, referring to that which is lawful and agreeable to the law.

I read this week—I believe it was in England—and got a chuckle. There was a homeless man, and they were having a big race. I forget how far it was, but it was a pretty good-sized race. A homeless man found a number that had fallen off one of the racers, put it around his neck, and joined the race. He ran the last mile or so of it.

He came in third and won a big prize, until they found out he was not the man who had signed the number. Then they arrested him for fraud. We laugh and smile at that, but it is the truth. If we do not strive lawfully, we are not going to win. There are many preachers, pastors, and Christians today who are violating Scripture and God's

law, following humanistic standards and thinking somehow they are going to win. No, they are disqualified. I do not care how big your ministry is, how many people attend, how much money you make, or how much money you give. If you do not follow the Scriptures, you are disqualified. It is just that simple. If a man is going to strive for mastery, he is not crowned unless he strives lawfully. Everyone understands this.

If a hundred of us are running a mile-long race, and I happen to know a shortcut, so I leave the course, cut through the woods, come out in front of everyone, and break the string, have I won? No, because I cheated. I did not play according to the rules. That is exactly what the Apostle Paul is saying. If we are going to be strong in the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and strong in the power of His might, then we must have faithfulness, hardness, and discipline in our lives.

There is something else, and this one is probably the hardest. Look in verse 6: "The husbandman that laboureth must be first partaker of the fruits."

Test 4: Patience as a Farmer

Here is patience as a farmer. There will be faithfulness as a teacher, hardness as a soldier, discipline as an athlete, and patience as a farmer. The picture Paul uses presents a twofold truth: labor, work, and effort, followed by patience in receiving and enjoying the harvest. Here is the first truth: labor must precede the harvest. In order to reap, one must sow. One must not only sow; he must nourish, weed, water, and wait. This is the inevitable law of harvest. Without work, no harvest will be acquired.

The Bible warns us over and over against slothfulness. Let me give you another word for slothfulness: laziness. How about another word? Indolence. Another word? Worthlessness. The truth of the matter is that we have sired a generation of people today who have no idea about a Biblical work ethic.

Talk to any employer, and they will normally tell you that everybody wants a paycheck, but nobody wants to work. There is an old joke about teasing someone: “We know, we know—you have to

back up and put your hand out to receive your paycheck." They say you are just not working; you are worthless, is what it amounts to.

When Scripture talks about a farmer, it is talking about hard work, for sure. We have failed to teach everyone a biblical work ethic. Let me remind you that work is not the result of the fall. There was work before the fall. Work merely became onerous and more difficult because of our sin, but there was work before the fall.

Let me give you some verses on slothfulness. Some of these are very humorous to me, but all of them are true. Proverbs 18:9 says, "He also that is slothful in his work is brother to him that is a great waster."

My parents and Alice's parents grew up during the Great Depression, as did other people we have known. Those who were alive then learned to save practically everything and make things work. When I was a boy on the farm, almost everything was held together with haywire. We wired it up and made it work. When my father quit farming, he gave me a Ford 5000 tractor. On the right wheel, where the steering rod joined the ball joint, the rod had come out, and Dad had wired it together with haywire. I took that tractor home and used it for years.

Every time it would fall down, I would put it back up and wire it again. Until one day a mechanic friend came by and said, "I can fix that." I said, "Well, do so then." He fixed it, and it has been working ever since. I am simply saying, those people knew how to make things work, and they did.

The Bible said, "He that is slothful in his work is brother to him that is a great waster." In other words, if you are lazy, if you are indolent, it is just as the Scripture says: a slothful man will not even roast that which he took in hunting. Why go hunting? Why waste your time if you are not going to eat what you kill?

Then Proverbs 19:24 says, "A slothful man hideth his hand in his bosom, and will not so much as bring it to his mouth again." He is too lazy to eat. Too sorry to eat. Proverbs 21:25 says, "The desire of the slothful killeth him; for his hands refuse to labour."

Here is a slothful man: "I sure would like to have that new four-wheel-drive truck. I sure would like to have that new house. I

would like to have that new furniture." But he will never have anything. Why? Because his hands refuse to work. He will sit there and lust, covet, and desire, but he will never have anything because he is ashamed to work.

Proverbs 22:13 says, "The slothful man saith, There is a lion without, I shall be slain in the streets." Any excuse will do to keep him from work. He might get hurt there, but he might get hurt at home, even falling out of bed. Solomon said in Proverbs 24:30, "I went by the field of the slothful, and by the vineyard of the man void of understanding;" and it was full of nettles and overgrown. He will not take care of anything. Proverbs 26:14 says, "As the door turneth upon"

“As a door turneth upon his hinges, so doth the slothful upon his bed.” He just rolls over, will not get up, will not get out, and will not work. The Bible says in Hebrews 6:12, “That ye be not slothful, but followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises.”

It is the great law of the harvest that the husbandman must work before he receives the harvest. It is not merely that he must be the first one who partakes; he must work before he partakes. Included in this picture is patience. There is no one in this room who has planted a garden one day and harvested it the next day. You do not plant a vineyard one day and pick grapes the next day. You do not plant plum trees one week and pick plums the next week. There is a time of waiting, a patience required for the crop to mature.

That is why the Bible says in Galatians 6:9, “And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not.” In 2 Thessalonians 3:13 he says, “But ye, brethren, be not weary in well doing.” You cannot expect a harvest without working, and you cannot expect a harvest without patience.

So here is what God is saying: if you want to know whether you are strong in the grace that is in Jesus Christ, whether you are strong in the Lord and in the power of His might, check yourself. Is there faithfulness as a teacher? Is there hardness as a soldier? Is there discipline as an athlete? Is there patience as a farmer? Judge your

life according to these illustrations, and you can determine exactly where you are in grace and in the strength of the Lord.

Now let me make some applications. The last picture the apostle gives us is that of a husbandman, or farmer, who labors for his crops. I was raised on a farm, and I know this: many times farmers need help. We cannot always do everything ourselves. When I was a boy, we had as many as two hundred folks working on our farms in one day.

Of course, things have changed a lot since then, since all the big, heavy machinery is around. But back then, you needed lots and lots of help. So, when you talk about a farmer needing help, that means this: God has given each one of us a talent and abilities. We must learn to work together to produce the harvest that God demands, wants, and desires. There is no way in the world I can do everything by myself. Nor can Gary, Steve, David, or anyone else. We have to have help. I can plow my garden, Andrew may plant it, Alice may water it, pick it, and put it up; but each one of us must do something.

The Corinthians were fighting over preachers. Some liked Paul, some liked Apollos, and some liked Peter. Others tried to be a little more spiritual and said, "Well, I just like Jesus." Paul asks, "Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man? I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase. So then neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase. Now he that planteth and he that watereth are one: and every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labour."

It does not matter whether you plant, whether you water, or whether you harvest; every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labour.

You remember when Ziklag was captured by the enemy and burned with fire. David had his family there, his wives and his children, and he had six hundred men. They had their families there as well. All their wives and children were stolen, as well as whatever goods were in that town. The men were ready to stone David, though he had nothing to do with it. He inquired of God, asking, "Shall I go after them?" God said, "Yes." David said, "Well, I'll recover all," and

God answered, “Yes, you’ll recover everything.” Everyone was upset because their wives and children were gone.

When they came to one of the rivers, or creeks, two hundred of the six hundred men could not go forward because they were so weak from weeping and crying over the loss of their wives and children. Four hundred went with David, and the Bible tells us that David recovered everything. He recovered every woman, every wife, every child, and everything that was lost. David recovered all.

As they were coming back, some of the children of Belial said, “We’re not going to give those two hundred men who stayed by the river anything but their wives and their children, and that’s it.” David said, “Ye shall not do so, my brethren. But as his part is that goeth down to the battle, so shall his part be that tarrieth by the stuff: they shall part alike.” David made it a rule from then on.

Not everybody can fight; some people have to tarry by the stuff. But they are going to part, and they are going to part alike. That is exactly what the Apostle Paul is saying in 1 Corinthians chapter 3.

If you want to know how strong you are in the Lord and in the power of His might, and how strong you are in Christ Jesus and His grace, consider what Paul said in 2 Timothy 2:7: “Consider what I say; and the Lord give thee understanding in all things.” Stop and think about these illustrations, and may God give you understanding in all of this.

Conclusion and Application

If we are going to examine ourselves, we have to examine ourselves according to the Word of God. We must ask ourselves: Are we willing to be faithful teachers? Are we willing to endure hardness as soldiers? Are we willing to discipline ourselves as athletes? Are we willing to be patient as farmers? How willing are we?

The way to judge yourself is not by some man or by some man's standards, but by the Word of God. For the Bible says in Galatians 6:16, “And as many as walk according to this rule, peace be on them, and mercy, and upon the Israel of God.” The word “rule” is the Greek word kanon, which means a measuring stick or measuring rod. Thus,

as many as walk according to this measuring stick, peace and mercy are upon them and upon the Israel of God.

We have to examine our lives in light of the Word of God and in light of these illustrations Paul has given us: a teacher, a soldier, an athlete, and a farmer. We can compare, consider, and determine whether we are strong or weak in the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the power of God and His might.

Father, we ask You in the name of Jesus Christ for Your grace, help, mercy, and truth. Make us strong. Help us to be faithful as teachers, to endure hardness as good soldiers, to be disciplined as athletes, and patient as farmers. Give us grace that we may serve Thee acceptably with reverence and godly fear. In Thy name we pray, amen.

Source Notes

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