

Be strong in the Lord (Eph. 6)

Part 1

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[00:00:01] Can we read together, please, from Ephesians chapter 6?

Be strong in the Lord.

It's unusual to read expressions like that in the scripture.

Elsewhere, the Apostle Paul writes of strength being made perfect in weakness.

But here is a very positive statement, be strong in the Lord.

And I just want to explore that expression a little bit this evening.

Because it's easy to get strange conceptions about what it means.

It's not a kind of emotional exhortation to pull oneself together.

[00:01:01] It does have a meaning.

Four times in the New Testament, the word is used which here means be strong.

Four times only. And I just want to turn to each one of those to give us perhaps a little bit of background.

And help us to understand what it means. Of course the whole passage that we've read together goes on to explain it. But to be strong in the Lord.

The word actually means strengthen or empower.

Let's look first of all at Romans chapter 4 verse 20.

Speaking of Abraham, he staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief.

[00:02:04] But was strong in faith giving glory to God.

Now there is the contrast.

On the one hand unbelief, on the other hand faith.

On the one hand staggering because of unbelief. On the other hand being strong in the faith that he had.

Next one Hebrews 11 verse 34.

Speaking of some Old Testament saints.

Quenched the violence of fire.

Escaped the edge of the sword.

Out of weakness were made strong. Waxed valiant in fight.

Turned to flight the enemies of the aliens.

[00:03:04] Out of weakness were made strong.

There is the contrast again.

And these are those who in verse 39 are said to have received a good report through faith.

They're not named here all of them. But God knows their names and he's recorded what they did and why. So I think we can see from these two usages of the word be strong.

That this is not something physical. It's something inward. Again the word is used in the second epistle of Timothy.

Chapter 2 verse 1. Thou therefore my son be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.

Strong in the Lord Ephesians 6. [00:04:02] Here strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.

The Apostle Paul is exhorting Timothy to be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.

And that will lead him on to speak of passing on the truth.

To speak of enduring hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ and so on.

I'm sure I find it easier to speak about things that come from the Lord Jesus.

Who he is.

What he's done.

All the resources that there are in him for us. It would be nice if we had time to open up.

The idea of being strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. But I feel there is a need particularly at this present time.

[00:05:07] To think of what it means to be strong in the Lord. And in the power of his might.

And to think a little bit about what Christian warfare is.

So I want to concentrate then just on those 10, 11 verses we've read in Ephesians chapter 6.

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

How do we do that? Well we can know the power of his might by obeying the instruction of the verse 11.

Now before we go into these verses individually.

I think it is right to say that this assumes that as we read them.

As we think about them. As we meditate on them if you like. [00:06:01] We are in the good of what has gone before. Bear in mind that these epistles would have been read out in the assembly to which they are directed.

Some brother perhaps on the Lord's day morning I don't know. But certainly before the whole assembly would read out this epistle.

So those who hear these words.

Would have been taken into the spiritual blessings with which they are blessed in Christ Jesus.

They would have heard something about the wonderful inheritance that they have received in him in chapter 1.

They would have heard about the fact that they are raised up together with him.

And made to sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus.

They would have had some understanding of the blessings into which they are brought.

[00:07:04] But then the epistle after dwelling on these blessings at some length.

Deals with the practical.

Chapter 5 is concerned with the walk of the Christian.

And now and then the early part of chapter 6 is concerned with human relationships. But now the apostle comes to Christian warfare.

And he says put on the whole armour of God.

We are seated in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus. We have some appreciation, some understanding of those spiritual blessings which are ours.

Through that which Christ has done. So what is the point of this armour? [00:08:01] It is because the concern of the devil is to spoil our enjoyment of these things.

That's his object. He can't take them away from us.

But he can interrupt our enjoyment of them.

He can prevent us from getting any real understanding and appreciation of them.

And this in a nutshell is the Christian warfare.

It's illustrated of course in the Old Testament isn't it?

By the book of Joshua. God brought them across the Jordan.

And he promised that every foot, every step that their foot trod upon would be theirs.

He brought them through the Jordan. He brought them into the promised land.

[00:09:02] And before their warfare began, the captain of the hosts of the Lord appeared to Joshua.

Joshua said, are you for us or for our enemies? Nay, but as the captain of the hosts of the Lord am I now come.

An appearance doubtless.

Of the person of Christ in the Old Testament.

The second person in the Godhead appeared there to Joshua.

The captain of the hosts of the Lord.

And he it was who was going to give them their victory. He it was who was going to lead them. He was going to secure it all for them. And what they had to do was to obey closely his instructions.

For now Christ has won victory. He's conquered death. He's conquered Satan. [00:10:02] He's conquered Satan's power. And he's delivered those who were all their lifetime subject to bondage. And you and I simply have to enter into these blessings which are revealed to us. And expounded for us so clearly and so well in this particular epistle.

But there is a warfare. And we have to put on the whole armour of God that we may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. You see it's not exactly the devil they're fighting. It's his wiles.

He is coming.

And he is deceptive. He deceived Adam and Eve didn't he? Very early in the history of man on this earth.

He deceived Adam and Eve.

But what has God said? Oh you won't really die.

[00:11:03] Twisting what God has said.

Putting an interpretation on it.

An interpretation on it to which sadly both Eve and Adam were ready to accept.

How sad that in that early day Eve and Adam were taken in by the wiles of the devil.

And he hasn't stopped. You can trace it all the way through the scriptures. Until you come to the epistles of the Romans. Where in chapter 6 the apostle Paul himself says.

If I can find it. Says that.

That through sin.

I'm sorry it's chapter 7. [00:12:01] I'm sorry it's chapter 7. Wait a minute.

Let's get this right. Because it is quite important. For sin.

Chapter 7 verse 11. For sin taking occasion by the commandment.

Deceived me and by it slew me.

He's speaking of himself as the man in the flesh. Yes Satan is a deceiver.

That Christ has won the victory. That we have to stand against his wiles.

It's not against flesh and blood that we have to fight.

We're not ignorant of his devices. But we have to.

He says 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.

Now those high places.

[00:13:01] If I tell you that the word for those high places. Is the same as in the first chapter. Where it speaks of the heavenly. You begin to get the flavor of it.

Verse 3 of the epistle. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Who has blessed us

with all spiritual blessings. In heavenly places in Christ.

Well this is the place. Where we're told in this verse. Otherwise we would not dare to say it. This is the place where there is spiritual wickedness. Because though a defeated foe.

Satan still has full access.

To the heavens.

To the earth.

Although one day he'll be cast out of heaven. Following that he'll be cast out of the earth. And we'll find his place in the bottomless pit. [00:14:03] But for the time being he has access to it. And he and his fallen angel.

Have access to this. And therefore it speaks here of spiritual wickedness. In the heavenly. These are the things that are going to. Try to trip us up. To rob us of our enjoyment of our blessings.

Of course there are many enemies to the Christian. You may say well what about the will. What about the flesh. Yes indeed.

It's a good study. To go through the book of Judges. There you'll find. About five.

Nations.

Which attacked the children of Israel. Yes they were in their land. But one after another. They brought them into a measure of. Occupation.

And it's a good thing to. Read through the book of Judges. [00:15:02] And to see what each of these. Really means.

The enemies of the Christian.

What about the Moabites. The flesh.

What about the Midianites. Earthly things.

Now we can't sort of go through them one by one. But the book of Judges I think. Will help us to understand. What enemies we have.

The Philistines. The world that gets in among the people of God. But the emphasis of this armour. Is against the.

Spiritual wickedness. In other words.

Those things that are prompted by the devil. It's not so much the temptations of the flesh. What it is.

Is the spiritual wickedness. In all of us.

In all of us.

In all of us.

The spiritual wickedness. [00:16:01] In heavenly places. That can affect us. Can spoil our witness. Can spoil our walk. As well as our enjoyment. Of the things that God has given us. And this is true Christian warfare. And that is why we're exhorted. To put on the whole armour of God. Wherefore.

Says verse 13.

Take unto you.

The whole armour of God.

The things.

Which.

Come in the following verses. There are a complete armour.

We can speak of the items. The articles that make it up. One by one.

But it is a complete unit. It is the whole armour of God. That we put on.

It would be foolish would it not. For a soldier to say. Well I've got a shield. So I don't need a breastplate. Or on the other hand. [00:17:01] And this is even more foolish. I like the look of the helmet. So I'll have two. No use at all.

No it is the complete armour. The panoply.

As it's often called. The complete armour. The whole armour of God. That ye may be able to withstand. In the evil day.

What is the evil day. We might ask.

Was it.

Friday.

When I had a problem. Will it be next Wednesday. When I've got to do something. I'm not looking forward to. No. I don't think it's any specific. Situation.

Any specific attack. I think it's the present day. The day.

In which we live. Why is it called an evil day. Two reasons.

One. Christ was crucified. By the world.

[00:18:02] Christ was cast out. Therefore today. Is an evil day.

It's rejected.

It's refused Christ. The other reason. Is that the prince of this world. Is the enemy.

The enemy has become. The prince.

Of this world.

The lord himself used that expression. Didn't he.

Towards the end of. His. Dissertation to the disciples. In the upper room. He said the prince of this world. Yes. You see.

The Satan the devil. Has. A certain authority in this world. It's not rightful. But he is able to exercise it. And that explains a lot of things. The prince of this world. But thank.

We can be very very thankful. That the lord went on to say. [00:19:02] The prince of this world cometh. And hath nothing. In me.

Well there's the meal offering yes. But there's one who has stood. Against the devil. Who has resisted his while. Who has turned him away. How by use of the word of God. You read the fourth chapter of Luke. See how there the lord. Turns the devil away. By quoting.

Old Testament scriptures. From the book of Deuteronomy. The prince of this world cometh. And hath nothing. In me.

But this is the one who. 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. Yes when you've won the battle. Stand.

In the place.

That you fought for. You see it's easy to make a stand. Over something isn't it. [00:20:01] And then to go back. And act as though. There'd never been any problem. In the first place. I think it's perhaps helpful. To refer.

Just at this point. To a man called Shammah. Remember him.

One of David's.

Lucky men.

To Samuel 23.

And verse 11.

After him was Shammah. The son of Agi the Hararite. And the Philistines were gathered together.

Into a troop.

Where was a piece of ground full of lentils. And the people fled from the Philistines. But he stood in the midst of the ground. And defended it. And slew the Philistines. And the lord wrought. A great victory. Why make a fuss. Over a patch of lentils.

That was poor food wasn't it.

Did it really matter so very much. [00:21:02] If the Philistines. Took the field of lentils.

Yes it did.

Why? Two reasons.

God said.

The land is mine. And it shall not be sold. Forever.

It was his.

It wasn't to be given away. And the things that the Christ. Has secured for us. These spiritual blessings we've been. Referring to.

They're not to be given up. They're not to be given away. The other reason of course. Is that give the Philistine an inch. And he'll take a mile as we say. So Shammah stood firm.

And he defended. His patch of lentils. He slew the Philistines. And the lord wrought. A great victory. [00:22:02] Oh yes.

It was a great victory. It wasn't just a little victory. God considered it a great victory. And this man is honoured. And his name and his actions. Are recorded in God's word. That they might not be forgotten. And that you and I. In the year 2005. Can take note of them. In the previous incident. In that chapter. There's another man called. Eliezer.

And I like the picture of that. Because it said he arose. And smote the Philistines. Until his hand was weary. And his hand clave unto the sword. You couldn't tell. But it ended and the sword began. And you know.

Have you ever known. A Christian.

I've known one or two. And the way they speak. It's difficult to tell where their words begin. And the words of God end. [00:23:01] Because they've made them their own. And that is the way they conduct themselves. And that is the way they speak. Of precious things. Having done all. To stand.

Therefore.

Here we get into the. Particular items. That make up this panoply. Having your loins girt about. With truth.

What does that mean? Well. We heard this afternoon. Did we not?

About the word of God. How it is true.

Having your loins girt about. With truth.

It speaks of.

Being surrounded by it.

Having made it your own. And it also speaks in a sense. Of self-control. When you speak of something being girt. It implies a degree of control. Doesn't it?

[00:24:01] So the Christian warrior then. He has his loins girt about. With truth.

He's made.

The word of God his own. And it governs his work. And it governs his actions. Having on the breastplate of righteousness. Oh yes.

The breastplate of righteousness. What is that?

It's not simply. The righteousness. That is secured for us. But it is.

The practical righteousness. Of one who has applied. The word to himself. These two items. Are those that are nearest. To the body aren't they? The loins girt about with truth. And the breastplate of righteousness. The practical righteousness.

Of somebody who has. Made the word of God his own. And who lives by it. And feet shod with the preparation. [00:25:02] Of the gospel of peace. That's a bit of a surprise isn't it? Because it's.

We're speaking of these items of armour. And here is something quite different. Something.

Gentle I suppose. Is the best word to use. Your feet shod with the preparation. Of the gospel of peace. It's not the gospel exactly. But it's the preparation. Of the gospel.

Of peace.

I know we think of words like. How beautiful.

Upon the mountains are. Those that bring good tidings. Well it may lead to that. But I believe the thought here. Is that.

The feet are shod. In a way that comes from. Maintaining a good conscience.

So that the soul enjoys an. Inward peace.

And can.

The person can go in peace. His walk is in peace. [00:26:01] Because of the good conscience. Within.

If we have a good conscience. This will affect our walk. It will affect.

Our testament.

There's no suggestion. Of armour.

In verse 15.

The feet are not armed. And the reason we're coming to next. Of course.

The details.

That we're reading of here. Are taken from the armour. Of a Roman soldier. Bear in mind that the apostle Paul. At this time.

Would have had plenty of opportunity. Of observing.

Observing Roman soldiers. And he would have been familiar. With. The way they dressed in their. Occupation and the armour. That they would put on. For warfare.

The shield.

I don't know what that conjures up. [00:27:02] In your mind.

But. The shield.

Of a Roman soldier. Is not.

The sort of little thing. That many artists. And many heralds. Have depicted.

It's not a little round thing. The size of a dinner plate. And it's not a nice heart shaped thing. With chevrons and lions rampant on it. No. It's quite big.

If you have it.

If you have in your mind. One of the old fire guards. We used to have. You're much nearer to it. You see the shield. Would stand about. Yes. About as deep as this curtain. Okay. A bit more perhaps. It would have a straight piece. About so long.

And two side pieces. At a bit of an angle. [00:28:01] It would have a handle here. And it would stand up. If you put it down. It would stand.

As it's saying of course. It was light.

It was not a heavy thing. But it was immensely practical. And what.

What did the Roman soldier do with it? Well. He didn't have any armour on his legs. Or on his feet.

So he had this shield. And when the darts come in low. He bangs it down on the ground. Like that.

And he's safe.

And this is the picture here. The shield of faith. Wherewith ye shall be able. To quench all the fiery darts. Of the wicked.

You see the picture. These dangerous. Low flying darts. The things that. We would say test your faith. The things the enemy. Is going to throw at you. [00:29:02] If you have this shield. You put it down. And they bounce off. That is the picture. That is the picture. There is a time. I think.

I don't know everybody I'm speaking to here. I don't know.

At least I know you. But I don't know all your circumstances. Maybe you've been through times. When it seems that. All you have to hold on to is your faith. I know that there remain faith. Hope. And love.

Those three.

And the greatest of those is love. But when you're really up against it. What you have is based on your faith. And there are saints in this world today. Who are suffering. And they're proving that in. Real terms.

In ways that perhaps I don't even begin to understand. [00:30:03] That they are.

They're proving it. Well faith is the shield. That deflects.

The worst that the enemy can produce. And the helmet.

Of salvation.

We know our sins are forgiven. Have we.

Entered into.

Do we enjoy full deliverance. Have we crossed the Jordan. Taken possession. If we have.

Then these things will guard. Our thoughts.

The head speaks of. Thoughts doesn't it. Motives.

People at work used to say things like. Well what drives him. [00:31:03] What drives him. The helmet.

Of salvation.

That will preserve. Our thoughts.

And the sword of the spirit. Which is the word. Of God.

That's the only. Active part of this. Armour if you like. The sword of the spirit. It's the last.

To be.

Mentioned.

And it completes. The armour.

This is the word of God. This is what the Lord used. When he.

Defeated the devil. In Luke chapter four. Or indeed in Matthew. If you read Matthew's account. Of the same incident. The sword.

Of the spirit.

And it is.

The word of God. All these parts of the armour. Have to be.

Put on.

In order that we can use them. [00:32:01] But when we use them. The spirit must have control. And I think perhaps. That is why.

The sword of the spirit. Is mentioned last. These.

Items.

For defence.

Warfare.

Must be conducted. In the power.

Of the spirit.

And guided by the spirit. Not scoring points. Off one another. Not seeking to.

Make enemies.

Not seeking to.

Conduct ourselves. In a. An unpeaceable way. No. Guided.

By the spirit.

We can.

Wield.

The sword.

But. Then you see.

The apostle goes on. And he speaks of. Praying always.

With all prayer. And supplication. You see.

He brings in the need. For watching.

And for prayer.

Why? Because we are not. [00:33:01] Lone soldiers.

And we need to pray. For one another. We must pray for all things. And this is part of the. Instruction.

For Christian.

Warfare.

That we are members of a company. If you read.

If you read.

The book of numbers. For example.

You will see.

Each. Section.

Had its part to play. And no one section. Was independent. Of another.

Well the apostle. Paul here.

Is reminding us. Of the need to watch. And the need to pray. With all perseverance. And supplication. For all things.

And for me.

He says.

He doesn't leave himself. Out of this.

He knew he.

Needed their prayers. And what a privilege it was for them. To be able to.

Serve him.

In that way.

[00:34:01] The Lord will support us. If he wants his saints. To intercede for us. And we must.

Intercede for one another. Paul endured a lot of hardness. And so did Timothy. And he exhorted Timothy. To fight the good fight of faith. And to lay hold on eternal life. He wasn't ashamed for himself. And those things enabled him the more. To know whom.

He had believed. And it's very difficult. And perhaps it's a mistake. To seek to divide our enjoyment. Of the grace.

That is in Christ Jesus. From the position that we hold. As his soldiers. The two things go. Hand in hand.

That is why this. Warfare.

That is why this armour. Is so needful.

Perhaps at this point. We ought to ask the question. Well are we all warriors. Or does this passage that we've referred to. Refer to.

[00:35:02] Some particular. Kind of saint.

Somebody who is. As we say engaged in the Lord's work. By which we usually mean full time. No. All the people of God. Have to put on.

This armour.

When they put Jericho. In the book of Joshua. It speaks of men of war. Men of war.

And that was all of them. That they circled Jericho seven times. In obedience to the word of God. Yes. We're all warriors. None of us.

Are left out.

Even. To use another.

Illustration from the Old Testament. Even the book of Numbers makes clear. That the Levites or the workers. Were to keep the charge. That is that they were to defend. The ark.

It was a matter of life. And death.

[00:36:02] Well. We referred very briefly. To 2 Timothy chapter 2. And let's just end with that. 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. The handing on of truth. Thou therefore.

Endure hardness. As a good soldier. Of Jesus Christ. We referred to that. No man that woth. Entangleth himself. With the affairs. Of this life.

That he may please him. Who hath chosen him. To be a soldier. So there we are. [00:37:02] We've looked at the armor. Now how do we use it? It's spoken.

It's spoken of the sword. Of the spirit.

And now.

Here we have.

Summed up in this verse. Our attitude.

To the things.

Of this life.

We have to be prepared. To endure hardness. At times.

Not all the time. But the soldier. Would not be a soldier. If he would not prepare. For a place.

Enduring hardness. As a good soldier. And that is what at times. We are called on. To do.

Whether we are or not. Let us see to it. That we're in the good of this armor. Of which we've read in Ephesians chapter six.