

HOW TO BE A STRONG CHRISTIAN

Ephesians 6:10–24

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The wealth, walk, and warfare of the believer. The armor of God. How to be a strong Christian. “Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God. And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints. Pray also for me, that whenever I open my mouth, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should. Tychicus, the dear brother and faithful servant in the Lord, will tell you everything, so that you also may know how I am and what I am doing. I am sending him to you for this very purpose, that you may know how we are, and that he may encourage you. Peace to the brothers, and love with faith from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Grace to all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with an undying love” (Ephesians 6:10–24, NIV).

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The letter of Paul to the Ephesians really teaches in its essence three key principles for successfully living the Christian life. Watchman Nee saw these three principles some years ago and put them into three words: “sit,” “walk,” and “stand.”

The first three chapters which describe our wealth in Christ also tell us to sit in Christ. We are already seated with Christ in heavenly places. The Christian life begins with the work that God has already done for us. The Christian life does not begin in a frenzy of activity or duty or works. It begins by sitting, by placing all of our weight there. When you sit upon a chair, you place your weight upon the chair. So the Christian life begins by placing our weight upon Christ. After we have learned to sit and to rest upon Him, then we walk. In Ephesians 4:1 through 6:9, Jesus Christ tells us practical guidelines for our walk, for our Christian life. Then the third posture we have in this letter is the posture of standing. That is, in the Scripture that we have read. Four times in this short passage we are told to stand. We are to occupy what God has given us and to not retreat nor to let Satan make inroads.

Too many Christians today are mowed down by a failure to stand their ground in the Lord. We sit and walk and stand all at the same time. There are simultaneous dimensions to our Christian experience. If we only sit and do not walk, then we rest so much in grace that we do not contribute any practical good to this world. If we walk and do not sit, we become insecure and uncertain of our walk and our salvation in Christ. And we cannot stand really without successfully walking and sitting. We become strong, Paul says, as we put on God’s full armor, so that, having sat with Christ in heavenly places, we are now walking with Him, we can stand by, putting on the full armor of God so that we may know the devil’s schemes. The devil is our adversary, our slanderer, our accuser. The person who continually reminds us of our failures and who attempts to deceive us. He is a disordered personality.

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You see the marvelous indication of that disorder when you look at the Lord's teaching of the parable of the man who sowed good seed in his field, but at night, while he was sleeping, the enemy came and planted weeds. Someone has to be sick to get up in the middle of the night and plant weeds. There's no normal person I know of that would do an activity like that.

The whole personality of Satan is disordered. He works through rulers and authorities and spiritual rulers in heavenly places. Because, unlike God, Satan cannot be everywhere at one time. He is not omnipotent. He is not omnipresent. He is not all-powerful. He must rule through principalities and powers.

So Satan is our opposer. We wrestle, not simply against circumstance, against the human flesh, but behind the stage of our lives, there is the direct wrestling with the satanic power force. If we are to be a strong Christian, we must learn to combat and know how to put on God's full armor.

Notice it is God's armor and not our armor. It is the armor he has intended.

I think our Christian life will considerably improve if we won't use our own techniques or advice, but put on the armor that God intended for us instead; because He's got a lot of it to give to us if we will put it on.

Paul doesn't say what to put on underneath the armor. The assumption is we already have something on. A robe. I think it's assumed that before we put on the armor of God, we must be dressed in a robe. The Scriptures even talk about the dress of the saints in heaven. We are really to be dressed in Christ's righteousness. We can't put on the armor of God effectively unless we have had the experience of being cleansed from our sins and of having a standing with God in grace.

I. The first thing that would go on the Roman soldier was the belt or the girdle.

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The purpose of the belt was to draw the robes up. The robe could have been one down to the feet. But unless you have a belt on, you're going to be tripping on your robe and you're not going to have the freedom of movement, as you get involved in combat or battle or moving around. The purpose of cinching the belt was to gird yourself so that in the activity of battle you have complete freedom to maneuver any direction you want. The soldier's first duty, in terms of getting on his armor or his dress, was to fasten this around his waist.

Paul says, "This is our first duty as a believer as well. We must put truth around us." It is so important to put truth around our lives. Because if we are living our own lives with our family experience, with other persons, or even with God, by playing games that are dishonest, we do not have freedom of movement to maneuver with the enemy. He knows that there are dark patches in our life that he's got us trapped in. If there is something that I have learned about Satan that will absolutely drive him out of your life is that there are two things he cannot stand. One is love. Expressions of love. And he cannot stand truth. Truth is like having a thousand-watt light on the corner of a dark parking lot. He just cannot maneuver at all when the truth is on.

A number of years ago, a young girl wound up at our church. She'd been kicked out of the car the night before by her boyfriend. They were on drugs and alcohol. She was from a Christian home, a Baptist background. She wound up on the lawn of some people who came to our church, and they brought her to church that morning. Her parents met her at church to pick her up. Her parents did not know what was going on in her life. They did not know the circumstances in which she had come to us. She had made a commitment of her life that day. I said, "If you will just tell your parents the truth, tell them everything and get it clean between you and them, God will give you real victory in your life. But if you try to live by creating false impressions, you're going to get tripped up in your Christian experience." I wish I could say she really made a clean

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break with them but she didn't, and sure enough, within weeks she was back to what she was before she had ever come. She had refused to put truth around her waist. And as a result, she had no freedom of movement in Christ.

God calls us to really keep the light on the enemy and put truth around us. So, the first thing we do with our Christian armor, if we want to be effective in spiritual warfare, is to make sure that truth is cinching up the trailing parts of our life.

II. The second thing that went on the Roman soldier was the breastplate.

The purpose of this was to create an inner defense. If somebody is shooting an arrow, the first thing the arrow's going to hit is the shield. If it's deployed properly, the first thing to stop the arrow will be the shield. But sometimes, the shield is not deployed properly and the arrow gets past the shield and it will hit the breastplate, strike the heart. So this shield is really the inner defense. The inner defense of the Christian is really integrity or character. It is what we are in our true selves. When you have integrity, your life is really put together in Christ. We can resist attacks coming against us.

It does not always pay to have integrity. You will take your lumps in business—in the world, at times you can get ahead by cutting corners and lying and falsifying contracts and the like. The Christian is committed to integrity. It's striking to later read Paul's prison experiences. How many times he talks about living before God with a clear conscience. What happens if we don't have the breastplate of righteousness on? The enemy can really get in and attack our lives when we are playing games with God and with ourselves.

III. The next item to go on is the shoes.

It's possible that these also had kind of shin guards with them. They're very light. They're not heavy, boot-like kinds of things. Again, if they were heavy boots, they wouldn't provide a real

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quick movement. It's kind of hard to fight in any sort of warfare with bare feet. If you've got tender feet like me, you've got to be careful when you walk around on anything but carpet. And also, women, high heels are not the kinds of things you wear for spiritual warfare, either! You want to wear something that has the ability to get you from one place to another quickly. Paul is therefore telling us that we're to wear the right shoes, shoes that are ready to take us to spread the gospel of peace. In other words, we must think of our feet as always being ready to move quickly on any occasion where there might be an opportunity to share the gospel of Jesus Christ.

What the apostle Paul is saying here is be alert in your mind, to take advantage of opportunities. I marvel at my own lack, my own slowness, of taking advantage of an opportunity. I've been praying recently in my life, "Lord, whenever there's a slight open door for witness or sharing or ministering to someone, help me to not just wait around until more breaks. But help me to quickly go through that opening that is there. Make my feet fitted to do it quickly and to share the gospel of peace." With truth in the center of you, and with character in the heart of you and your feet shod for the gospel of peace, you are about half armed—not quite half armed.

IV. The next thing you must take is the shield of faith.

It's possible that a Roman shield was 4.5 feet long and 2.5 feet wide. They were almost body size. Some of the Roman shields were coated with leather, and were treated in such a way that some of the instruments of war were fiery darts, flaming missiles that were shot against a person. The leather and whole armor was treated in such a way that the fiery dart would hit it and fall to the ground without of course injuring the soldier who was defending himself. The purpose of the shield of faith is to get out there and to defend against the missiles coming in. What the apostle Paul is saying in our lives is that faith is a vital part of our armaments. Faith is our outer defense.

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It is where we first meet the missiles that are set against our way. The arrows of the enemy will fall at our feet if we will use faith.

There are times in which, if you don't get faith out there, what happens is that the arrows begin hitting you, and this is where it pays to have integrity on. This is why some ministries get in trouble. They have a lot of faith, but if they don't have integrity backing up the faith, and if the shield of faith drops, they're going to get hit real hard. Faith is meant to get out in front. With faith, we stop the initial invasion of the enemy.

V. There's another instrument that goes into warfare. That is the helmet.

Scripture says we need something solid on our heads. Salvation is a protector for us. When a missile comes, if we miss it with the shield, if it is higher than the breastplate of righteousness, it will fall against the helmet and not injure us. Those of you who ride motorcycles know how important this is. The head is vulnerable. That's the case of the doubts of the enemy that come against our mind. We're to put over our mind the helmet of salvation, realizing we are truly God's people. I must get it in my head that God will protect me and care for me.

VI. The next piece of the armament is the sword, the sword of the Spirit.

By the time all is on, one has to use both hands; one for the shield and one to rip out the sword. There's really nothing idle about the soldier in his warfare activity. The sword, of course, represents God's Word in our life. It is the only offensive weapon that is involved. The armament is not for long-range fighting. This armament is all for hand-to-hand, close contact. That is the way with most of our spiritual struggle. It's not long-range, long-distance. But it's close at hand. It's the besetting sins that come against us.

The sword, which is used to represent the Word of God—we have to think about the way in which God's Word can be used in our lives. I think of Scriptures that God has made especially

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meaningful to my life. It's a sword in my hands against the enemy. The Scripture of all the Scriptures that has had most meaning for me is a strange Scripture. It's not the kind of Scripture you would normally use for meaning. It's, "Thou art Peter. You are no longer called Simon, your name is Peter" (see John 1:42). Why does that have significance? Because the first moment in which Jesus saw Simon, in John 1, He renamed him. He called him a rock. He saw Peter in *faith* as one day Peter would be in *fact*. He began calling him a rock long before he'd ever arrived at it. The Lord has made that very real in my own life, in letting me know that He sees us from the standpoint of faith. Therefore, when I am involved in situations which are over my head, when I fail, I remember that the Lord speaks words to me, like He spoke to Peter, which give me a higher view of myself than I feel like I really am at that moment. That's been a sword against discouragement and the inferiority complex that has at various times scourged my life. We use the sword, the Word of God.

The whole armor is on. Even the cape, which is not mentioned in Paul's words. We'll let the cape stand for the idea of praying at all times for all things. Notice, in verse 18, "Pray in the Spirit in all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests." Once you get the armor on, the armor is not sufficient in and of itself. If you go into museums and see armor, unless there's life inside the armor, the armor is no good at all. The armor needs an animating principle.

So Paul is saying, "When you have all the armor on, it is still of no use at all unless you are praying at all times in the Spirit." You cannot succeed in battle if your communication lines go down. The way we succeed is to keep our communication lines open with God. Pray.

But the prayer is in the Spirit. I'm not sure I know all that's involved in praying in the Spirit.

There are several things, though, that may be involved. First, to pray in the Spirit means to pray something differently than what we might normally as human beings think a situation might

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require. Paul, when he writes the Ephesians, is in prison. It would seem to me that praying in the human spirit would involve telling the Ephesians to pray for him, that he would get out of prison quickly. That the concentration of human energy would be, “Get me out of this place. I’m not comfortable. It isn’t good for me. And I want out of here.” But that is not his prayer, interestingly enough. His prayer is “that whenever I open my mouth, words may be given to me so I make fearlessly known the mystery of this gospel, for which I have been an ambassador in chains” (Ephesians 6:19-20). His praying in the Spirit is to see what God requires in that situation. To look away from what the normal human tendency might be and just say, “Lord, get me out of this quick. To say, instead, “God, what do You want to accomplish in this? Where is Your Spirit at work and what will most glorify Your name?” That’s part of what it means to pray in the Spirit. So in any situation we’re in, we’re looking first of all at the concerns of God.

Praying in the Spirit can also be a reference, in Paul’s language, to praying in other tongues, unknown tongues. A means of edification, a means of building up oneself on the inside.

Ephesians 6:11 and 13, twice refer to the full or whole armor of God. You cannot successfully stand against the enemy with only a part of the armor. It takes the whole thing.

I want to lead you in a visualization. See yourself however you arise in the morning. Whatever way you’re accustomed to waking up. Picture yourself just after you’ve woken up. Take what I’m going to say and try to remember it so, as you awaken in the morning over the next seven days, you can begin developing a reflex in your life to put on the armor God wants you to put on. The first thing I’d like for you to see is that Christ himself comes and puts a garment upon you. That garment is the garment of salvation. You are clothed in Him, fully complete and righteous. See the garment being placed upon you. If you didn’t do another thing in your life, if you died at that moment, you’re ready to go meet Christ.

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But the time is coming when you've got to get out of bed and you've got to go do the things that are necessary for that day. So there are some things that are going to be necessary for you to be a strong Christian during the day.

Reach in your mind for the sash—the rope, the belt—that will now gather up that loose robe and firm it up. See the rope as honesty in your life. As you begin putting that rope around you, could you ask yourself, are there dishonesties in my life? If there are, would you at that moment bring those dishonesties to the Lord and say, “Lord, I bring the dishonesty to You and I want to be girded with truth today so that I have freedom of movement.” I want you to pray that the Lord will show you, on a step-by-step basis, how to get out of dishonesty if you're in it. How to get out of it with maybe a member of your family, a wife, husband, child, parent. How to get out of it with maybe an employer, or employee, or some other relationship. So that, in the mid-section of your life, you're completely girded around by truth. You're not trailing any lies at all.

Everything is cinched in. See that? The belt of truth around you.

Now that you've got the belt on, put the breastplate of righteousness on. As your hand reaches against your chest, it's touching something very hard. The Lord is wanting to say to you, through this, “I'm putting integrity, righteousness upon you.” The enemy is going to come and try to distort your motives and distort your actions and he's going to try to find a way for you to put that defense down so he can get to you. He's going to want you to take shortcuts in your life. He's going to want you to take moral shortcuts. He's going to want you to reach out for pleasure now rather than obedience to God. The Lord wants you to put the breastplate on.

Then I'd like for you to think of putting something on your feet. Which kind of shoes do you wear? Think of practical shoes. Maybe even jogging shoes—something that will get you quickly from one place to another. I'd like you to dedicate your feet to the Lord. Say, “Lord, help me be

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quick today to walk in whatever door is opened for me. Where there is a need or I can be of help somewhere and I can bring Your peace, let my shoes be representatives of Your peace today.

Blessed are those who bring the gospel of peace.”

Then I want you to pick up the shield of faith. Hold it before you and say, “Lord, are there things in my life that I’m facing that seem bigger than I and maybe they’re so big I think they’re bigger than You? I take the shield of faith. It’s my outer defense. I’m going to believe that with You, all things are possible. I’m going to believe that the difficulties of this day, to whatever degree, can be faced with you. I may be facing an impossible situation. But I take faith and I hold it out there.”

Then I want you to take the helmet of salvation and put it on your head. Realize that God’s got you protected with His salvation in your head. There’s nothing that can hurt or harm your head.

Then I want you to visualize taking a sword and putting it on and now, both your hands are engaged. One hand is holding a shield, and the other is ready for the sword. Ask the Lord, “What particular Scripture do You want to give me for this day? With what Scripture do You want me to wage warfare this day?” If you don’t have one, recite a psalm, some Scripture you know, and ask the Lord, as that day comes along, to bring the Word of God to your mind as you need it.

Then pray. Pray that God will bless you in that day and use you for His glory and His honor.

Praying over the situations you face that day, realizing you now have your armor on. Then watch the God of peace be at work in you. The victory is ours.

I want to encourage you to carry that visualization. Notice there is no armor for the back of the soldier. So don’t turn your back and run. Keep your face facing forward. Also realize now where the term “prayer warrior” comes from. Prayer warrior probably arises out of this passage. This is

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what it means to be a prayer warrior—to have these various pieces of garment on, and to effectively use them in your life.

I hope that's given you a better visual understanding of what Paul is speaking of in Ephesians 6.