

Strong in the Lord

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[0 : 0 0] This is the evening service at Holy Trinity on the 3rd of June 2001. The preacher is Danny Saunders.

His sermon is entitled Strong in the Lord and it's from Ephesians chapter 6 verses 10 to 17.

It would be good if you could leave your Bible's items as we look at this passage together tonight. It's page 952 of your pew Bibles, Ephesians 6, chapter 10 to 17.

This is an action-packed passage and it's also quite challenging. So why don't I just pray again for us and add our prayers to that song and to Paul's prayer previously.

Dear Lord, we do thank you for your word. We thank you that it does reveal your truth to us. I pray now that you would reveal that to us, Lord, and that you would remove any blindness from our eyes as we look into your word tonight together.

[1 : 1 3] Please be with me now as I speak. In Jesus' name, Amen. Well, I remember from my days playing football that after training for the week, the seniors in the reserve sides would be read out.

The senior team would then go into this tiny little room. It wasn't very big at all. And we're at the back of the change rooms. Here we'd face a whiteboard with slogans and statistics and teams, things written all over it.

And the coaching staff would then meticulously go through each player and look at the weaknesses and strengths of their opposition and give encouragement and ideas for the game and how to play on that person that week.

Then once all the opposition was analysed and discussed, there'd be some final sort of revering up, motivational talk, and then we'd walk out of the rooms or fight up for the game in a few days' time.

We'd joined the team. We'd done our pre-season training. We'd trained all week, rain, hail or shine, and we'd put in those hard yards.

[2 : 2 0] We'd analysed the team we were going to play against. We were ready for the game. We were ready to take our stand against the opposition. In much the same way, our reading through Ephesians has been our training for the Christian life.

In the first few chapters, Paul sets out God's fabulous plan and the mystery of salvation. Once we understand our salvation through faith in Jesus, Paul goes on to instruct us in training and discipline for the Christian life.

We've learnt how to live as Christians. We've learnt how to live together in a community, the church. We've received training in how to live as families, how to live as parents, how to live as children, how to live as husbands, how to live as wives, and we've even received training about how to live in working relationships, both slaves and masters.

After all this, Paul says, finally, Christian, now that you've done your training, take your stand.

Get ready for war. Finally, Christian, now that you've done your training, take your stand. Get ready for war.

[3 : 41] We must realise that as Christians, we're called to do battle, to warfare, to wrestling, to a struggle. When you become a Christian, you become a soldier in God's army, standing against all the evil of Satan's empire.

And so Paul says in these opening verses, finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his power. Put on the whole armour of God so that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.

Paul reminds us that the Christian life cannot be lived without a spiritual battle. See, the devil wants us to think that because of our knowledge of theology or our good deeds or our evangelical heritage, that we can be strong Christians.

But really, there's no such thing as a strong Christian. We're all weak and sinful creatures. We must realise our sickness and our need of help.

On our own, we can do nothing. But in our Christian walk, we must seek to be strong in the Lord and in the power of his might. The first chapter of Ephesians tells us that God put this power to work in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places far above all rule and authority and power and dominion.

[5 : 03] Ephesians 1, 20 to 21. And chapter 2 says that even when we were dead through our sins, God made us alive together with Christ. So Paul's already told us that we've been made alive in Jesus.

He has forgiven us and Jesus has already won the war against Satan and his powers and he now sits far above them. What remains then is a running spiritual battle where Christians are constantly struggling against the devil and all his forces of evil and these battles will rage until Jesus finally returns to destroy evil forever.

So here in verses 10 and 11 we must remember the solution for victory in this struggle. Before we get carried away with the fight and our armour and everything, Paul shows us the solution right up the front.

He says we must live in the power and strength of Jesus and put on the armour of God and secondly we must remember that Jesus has already won the war. Our aim is only to stand, to persevere to the end.

This is repeated by Paul four times in this passage. Stand against the wiles of the devil here in verse 11. We stand on that evil day and having done everything to stand firm in verse 13 and stand therefore and put on the armour of God in verse 14.

[6 : 27] So our aim is to stand, stand firm. All the armour that is provided to us, apart from the sword, all the armour that is provided to us is defensive.

We stand firm in what God has already done for us in Christ. It's not our effort. Our aim is only to stand. We can't strengthen ourselves for this fight.

We must be empowered by God. But notice that even though we can't strengthen ourselves, God doesn't just do it for us. We do have some responsibility in this, so we must be strong in the Lord.

We must put on the armour of God. God supplies everything we need, but we must live in it and put it on. This means that we must live in a constant union with Jesus.

Only through a real and meaningful relationship with Jesus will we be able to live a victorious Christian life. Otherwise, I fear you've probably already been defeated. So only through a real and meaningful relationship with Jesus will we be able to live a victorious Christian life.

[7 : 35] Otherwise, we may already have been defeated. So this is our responsibility. We must live our lives in a meaningful relationship with Jesus. Only then can we be strong in him.

We must remember our Lord's words to us in John's Gospel. He said, I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me will bear much fruit because apart from me you can do nothing.

So we must live in Jesus. Remember these words, I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit because apart from me on your own we can do nothing.

So the big picture here is that we are engaged in this spiritual battle against the devil and all that is evil but we can stand in the strength and power of Jesus and in his victory at the cross and also in the armour of God.

The details then are in the specific individual bits of armour and in understanding the wiles or the tricks of the devil so that we can take our stand against them. So the big picture is that we are engaged in this spiritual battle against the devil but we have Jesus that we can stand in and his armour and then the little individual small picture is all the bits of armour individually and what we do with them and in understanding the devil's tricks.

[9 : 03] Well Friday night I don't know if anyone was watching but the kangaroos had a fantastic win over the bulldogs. It was a great win. One of the keys that game was the tagging role that John Blakey had on Brad Johnson.

Johnson hardly got a touch or game. Now this probably doesn't mean anything to anybody unless you're really interested in football but when a team goes out to play they would have looked at each player and tried to get a good match up for that player.

Sometimes they might even put a tag on that player which means that person's job for the whole game is just simply stop that person getting the ball. They sacrifice their game for the good of the team and this is just one of the tricks of modern football.

Other tricks are flooding the back line and putting all your players down there and all sorts of things. So just like a football team analysing its opposition and looking for a way it can win, we should also have some idea about our opposition.

We must analyse the tricks of the devil and have some idea about them. The Greek word for devil is diabolos which means slanderer and Satan is a Hebrew name which means adversary.

[10 : 09] The devil's main aim is to accuse us, to slander us as his name suggests and to try to make us feel guilty and unworthy of God.

He does this in many ways. He's a liar and he will use his lies to blind people to the truth of God. He lied to Eve in the beginning and he continues to lie to us today to try to get us to turn away from God.

His lies and accusations trick us into fear and denial of God and so we see Peter's denial of Christ after Christ's arrest and our own fears of what people might think if they know that we're Christians.

The devil attacks us with evil and impure thoughts and then accuses us of being unworthy or unholy. Having bad thoughts doesn't mean that you're not a Christian.

This is what the devil wants you to think. Thoughts that you hate and that you wish you didn't have are probably from the devil. Our armour will counter the devil's accusations and we must stand firm in what Christ has done for us because the devil will continually hurl evil thoughts at us.

[11 : 19] These are his fiery darts, his flaming arrows that Paul speaks about here of the evil one in verse 16. Are the flaming arrows a temptation in whatever form it comes to you?

The devil tries to bring us down with depression, discouragement or its opposite, pride and arrogance. Then there's worry and anxiety, worldliness, the desire for wealth or power or the rousing of our lusts and passions.

Lastly, the devil hates the church of God and he loves to instigate false teaching. It says in 1 Timothy that in later times some will renounce the faith by paying attention to deceitful spirits and the teachings of demons.

So liberal theology is not new. The devil's always encouraged this sort of thing. He loves nothing more than creating confusion and disarmony, trouble and chaos in the church.

The devil wants to destroy you by separating you from God and he would do everything in his power to stop you from worshipping God, from obeying God and living for God and so he constantly lies to us and accuses us.

[12 : 33] You're not worthy. How could God love you? Or it's opposite. You're so good. You don't need Jesus. Go off and do this or that.

Have some fun for yourself. You deserve it. Sure, modern psychology may be able to explain and treat some of these tricks of the devil.

And I'm not suggesting that it's as simple as blaming all our problems on Satan. But the Bible is clear that the devil is involved in this activity and we would be blind to our opposition and spiritually ignorant if we thought that the devil was completely innocent in these matters.

There's only one thing for us to do. Be strong in the Lord and in the power of his might and take up the whole armour of God. Be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might and take up the whole armour of God.

You see, Paul doesn't want us to be ignorant of our opposition and so he describes the enemy for us in verse 12. He says, our struggle is not against enemies of blood and flesh but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.

[13 : 52] Paul's our coach. Before we go out to fight, he gets out his whiteboard and he sets out the opposition for us. He says, don't worry about blood and flesh, but rather analyse the strengths and the weaknesses and tricks of the devil and his rulers, authorities, powers and forces.

Don't underestimate the enemy or you'll seek to stand in your own strength or your own understanding and arguments. Don't take this seriously and you have already swallowed one of the lies of the devil and you'll be on your way to failure.

Just like any general who can persuade the opposition to underestimate him, Satan must love the ignorance of Western society. He wants to blind people's minds to the truth.

He encourages this. When no one takes the devil seriously, he can do whatever he pleases. Screwtape, a senior devil, writes to Wormwood, a young junior devil, I don't think you'll have much difficulty in keeping the patient in the dark.

The fact that devils are predominantly comic figures in the modern imagination will help you. If any faint suspicion of your existence begins to arise in his mind, suggest to him a picture of something in red tights, with horns or a pitchfork and a thin moustache.

[15 : 21] the patient can never believe in that and he will soon forget his suspicions. Well, it's true that our society does live in ignorance of the devil.

The devil has become a marketing tool or at best an enemy in an episode of Charmed or Buffy or the latest computer game. evil. The problem with these views is they are not consistent with the truth of the Bible or the experience of evil that we see in the world and that we see in our lives today.

Our secular media and society will on the one hand attribute certain acts to evil like Hitler's genocide or other mass killings or sexual and physical abuse of children.

And so, for example, we had the Columbine High School killings a few years ago where we got these sorts of headlines in our papers. The faces of evil. Yet on the other hand, secular society doesn't believe in the existence of a real personal force of evil who is personified in Satan and who is active in the world today.

Our society lives with this inconsistency because it can't explain evil and because there's lost belief in the truth of the Bible. The Bible teaches us clearly that behind the evil in the world there lies a personal devil and demonic forces.

[16 : 55] We are told that Satan is a fallen angel from passages in Isaiah and Ezekiel. And in Luke's Gospel, Jesus says that he saw Satan fall from heaven like a flash of lightning. The story of this fall is found in Revelation chapter 12 where Satan and his angels lose the war in heaven and are thrown down to earth to wage war against those who follow Jesus.

What's clear from these passages is that evil is not merely a force but is personal. Satan fell before the creation of the world and existed before the Garden of Eden.

The result of the fall of Adam and Eve was that the fallen sinful world became part of Satan's kingdom. And this is why Satan is described in places in the Bible as the ruler or the god of this world.

And this is why Paul says that our fighting is against the cosmic powers of this present darkness and the spiritual forces of evil. Don't be fooled by the devil's tricks and lies.

Western society has been sucked in by the devil and we see this in the current interest in the New Age movement. This label, New Age, has led many people into accepting blindly occult practices and teaching simply because they are wrapped up in Eastern mysticism or spirituality and they might use clever marketing.

[18 : 13] Occult is a word that means secret or mysterious, supernatural knowledge or power which at its core is basically evil and occult practices seem to be behind most New Age activities.

The devil meanwhile sits back and just rubs his hands with glee as people get lost in the deception and the lies that the New Age occult practices teach such as palm reading, tarot cards, astrology, channeling and spirit guides, consulting mediums and the dead, crystals, uji boards, witchcraft, sorcery and mantras.

All these are expressly forbidden in scripture and will only lead away from the truth of the Bible. We must be careful that we not give the devil a foothold in our lives by taking part in these types of activities or believing the lies that would suggest that all religions are the same or that there's no bad spirits.

We hear Screwtape again instructing the young Wormwood, world. I have great hopes that we shall learn in time how to emotionalise and confuse their spirituality to such an extent that they, without knowing it, will believe and trust in us while all along closing their minds to belief in God.

The energy of the universe, the worship of health, sex and well-being and some aspects of psychoanalysis may prove useful if we can produce our perfect work, the new age materialist, the person not just using but worshipping what are vaguely called forces while denying the existence of spirits, then the end of the war will be in sight.

[20 : 00] C.S. Lewis wrote the Screwtape Letters, where those passages come from, in 1942. But if he could see the Western world's fascination with the new age today, he may well be saying that the end of the war is in sight.

We can't ignore Paul's warning to us. We must develop a healthy respect for the enemy. We must face the problem of evil. evil powers and forces of darkness, a real devil tricking us, lying and accusing, tempting us to sin, throwing flaming arrows, hurling rubbish and abuse.

How are we going to cope? What can we possibly do against such a powerful enemy? Well, we don't need to be discouraged. We don't need to be scared.

We don't need to be overwhelmed. Because we stand strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. And we can put on the whole armour of God. Therefore, take up the whole armour of God so that you may be able to withstand on that evil day and having done everything to stand firm.

Take up the whole armour of God so that you may be able to withstand on that evil day and having done everything to stand firm. Well, having explained the big picture of this struggle and this battle to us, Paul now gets to the specific pieces of armour.

[21 : 38] And so firstly, in verse 14, we're to stand therefore and fasten the belt of truth around your waist and put on the breastplate of righteousness. The first piece of armour that the Christian puts on is the belt of truth.

This means a belief in and knowledge of the truth as it is found in Jesus Christ and the Bible. Your life as a Christian is built on a foundation of truth.

Jesus is the truth and he sets us free from lies so that we see the world and life as it really is. We don't build on speculation or philosophy or ideas or theories.

We build on God's revealed truth to us. This should be a settled conviction for you and a truth that is understood and taken on for yourself.

It will govern the rest of your life so that you also have truth, integrity, honesty in your own personalities. Your own truthfulness is a reflection of your faith in the truth of Jesus.

[22 : 41] The belt of truth protects us from the lies, deception and accusations of the devil. We're not condemned or guilty as Satan accuses but we are accepted by God.

This is the truth. If all our thinking is governed by this truth then when an attack comes we will be ready. Paul warns us in chapter 4 of Ephesians not to be tossed to and fro by every wind of doctrine, by trickery and scheming but to speak the truth in love.

How do we put the belt on? We put on the belt of truth by consistently reading the Bible, listening to sermons and talks, coming to church, reading Christian books, going to small groups and Bible studies and any other way that will help you learn and grow in truth and knowledge.

This is what we have to do. Next in verse 14 we put on the breastplate of righteousness. This is the righteousness or justification that comes from God through what Jesus has done for us on the cross.

Jesus is our substitute taking our sins so that we can be forgiven. This breastplate of righteousness is not our own doing, our own goodness but is given to us by God.

[23 : 57] We stand before God not condemned but accepted as his children. God says, you're okay. You're on my team. This is our greatest spiritual defence against Satan's accusations and it also gives us the confidence to stand firm.

God loves you. You're God's child. You don't have to be guilty. The blood of Christ has made you righteous. Because we are free as God's children, we are also free to live a righteous life in a relationship with God.

When we draw near to God, he will draw near to us and when we resist the devil, he will flee from us. So just like cultivating truth allows us to stand against the devil's lies, cultivating a righteous character will help us to stand against the devil's false accusations of guilt and his temptations and slander.

It should be clear though that God first gives us his truth and his righteousness but the result or the effect of living with these things in your lives is that you will have truth and righteousness in your own characters.

The armour is what God gives us in Jesus. We cannot rely on our own efforts because they will always be tainted by the fall. Next in verse 15 we are told that as shoes for your feet put on whatever will make you ready to proclaim the gospel of peace.

[25 : 23] This is about knowing and telling the gospel. Part of our armour is the readiness to tell the good news to others. Notice that Paul calls this the gospel of peace. Even in the midst of this great struggle a Christian who is standing sure and firm in the gospel won't slip or fall during the battle.

And when you face struggles of your own, even death, you can be full of peace, sure of eternal life and forgiveness from God. This is the gospel of peace. Also any struggle that we face won't prevent the good news from being heard.

The message of peace and reconciliation will go out. It is the gospel of peace. Put on whatever will make you ready to tell the gospel. If someone asked you to explain the gospel to them, could you do it?

Do you know what you'd say? How are your shoes? Are you ready to tell the gospel? Or do you have holes in your shoes? Do you have holes in your evangelism?

Are there holes in your apologetics? Are you concerned or even scared about how you would answer a question about religions or about suffering? Well, that's okay, but be prepared for it.

[26 : 39] Read a book about it. Do you fear talking about your faith or the gospel? Go to everyday evangelism course Thursday nights. The last two weeks were about explaining the gospel and handling tough questions.

This is part of our armour. We must do whatever it takes to have a sure footing. When it's the middle of winter in Melbourne on a cold, wet afternoon at the MCG, you don't run out on the oval with short studs.

You find the longest studs you can to make sure that your footing is secure so you don't slip at that crucial moment. When you're under attack from a non-Christian throwing all sorts of false arguments and philosophies at you, you need to know the truth of the gospel and you need to know how to answer tough questions.

You should do whatever it takes to gain the confidence of knowing that you're ready to tell the gospel and ready to answer tough questions. Always be ready to give a defence to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you.

The devil both fears and hates the gospel because it is the power of God for salvation to those who believe. So when we declare the gospel, we strengthen our defence.

[28 : 05] Well, in verse 16, with all of these, we take the shield of faith with which we'll be able to quench all the flaming arrows of the evil one. The fourth piece of armour in verse 16 is a shield of faith.

God first gives us faith. This is his great work of grace in making us Christians. Ephesians 2 verse 8 says that by grace you have been saved through faith.

And this is not your own doing. It is the gift from God. We stand firm by our faith in what Jesus has done for us. God gives us this faith and we show this faith by our trust and reliance on Jesus, by standing firm in him.

We don't rely on ourselves or our own strength. Your faith will quench Satan's attacks on you. These attacks will be powerless as you stand in faith.

Well, faith in Jesus will mean praying to God. Faith is looking towards God in prayer, knowing and trusting that he hears our prayers when we pray in the name of his son. We must also live out this faith.

[29 : 09] If we really trust Jesus, we will serve him and his people. We'll be active in church and we'll put our faith into action wherever God may call us to do so. Well, our arm is now taking shape.

We stand with truth, righteousness, the gospel and faith. And now in verse 17, we take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the spirit, which is the word of God.

So the helmet we wear as Christians is salvation. The message of the Bible is that God saves us. All of us have sinned and fallen short of God's standard of perfection.

Yet God loves us so much that he sent his son Jesus to die for us so that if we believe in him, we can have salvation. This has nothing to do with how we live, our good works or our own efforts.

We are all in the same position as someone whose life is obviously corrupt and evil. We are no better than anyone else. We have all turned away from God.

[30 : 22] But Jesus died and received from God all the punishment our corruption deserves. When Jesus rose from the dead, he rose offering his pure life as a substitute for our corrupt life.

This is the gift that has been given to us. Earlier in Ephesians, Paul tells us that it is by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing.

It is the gift of God, not the result of works, so that no one may boast. Christ. And even when you were dead through your sins, God made you alive together with Christ.

The armour of God is for Christians. This assumes that you stand in Jesus. You stand in your salvation. You trust what Jesus has done for you on the cross and you have accepted Jesus in your own life, asking for his forgiveness and desiring to live for him.

Your salvation as a Christian is not in doubt, both now or in the future. When you wear the helmet of salvation, you can be sure that the enemy is already defeated.

[31 : 37] Finally, in verse 17, we come to our only offensive weapon, our only attacking option. And this is the sword of the spirit, the word of God, which is the Bible.

The words of the Bible have the power to destroy the tricks of the devil. We're told in Hebrews that the word of God is living and active. It's sharper than any double-edged sword.

And our greatest example of this is Jesus. When he's tempted by the devil in the desert, he defends himself and he attacks Satan with the words of God from Scripture. We don't live on bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.

Don't put the Lord your God to the test. Worship the Lord and serve him only. When lied to, accused and tempted, we must drive Satan away with words of Scripture, just like Jesus did in the desert.

We have to learn verses from the Bible for this purpose. We have to memorise Scripture and learn verses that are going to help us. God guarantees us that if we resist the devil, he will flee from us.

[32 : 47] This is God's armour that he's given us. Truth, righteousness, the Gospel, faith, salvation and now the Bible.

We have all these things when we stand in Jesus. So on one level, there's nothing for us to do. We stand in what God has already done for us.

However, it's then our responsibility to stand and grow in these things, to bear fruit as we abide in Jesus. This armour is our foundation for life.

We should know it and take care of every piece of armour that we have and learn how to use every piece with confidence. Are you wearing each piece of God's armour?

Are you standing firm against the tricks and flaming arrows of the devil? Or is your back line weak? Are there holes in your defences? To stand as a Christian and to know each piece of armour requires planning and effort.

- [33 : 56] Develop spiritual goals and ambitions. This might be an aim to have a quiet time with God every day. Plan to put on the armour by devoting yourself to God through prayer and reading the Bible, through seeking God through those things.

Read and meditate on the Bible daily. Develop a plan to grow and stand as a Christian. Read books on apologetics. Go to courses. Learn how to answer tough questions to strengthen your confidence in the Gospel.

These things don't just happen to anybody. You have to make them happen. You have to be ambitious for Jesus and his kingdom. Not just for your own career, for owning a home or for getting married or having a family.

Be ambitious for Jesus and for your own Christian welfare. This passage tonight contains both an encouragement and a warning to us.

Be warned. If you don't stand strong in a relationship with Jesus and put on God's armour, you won't stand. Your battle is already lost and you won't last as a Christian.

- [35 : 04] You will be miserable and defeated in your Christian life. Be encouraged. If you plan to live in the Lord, then the strength of Jesus is your armour.

He goes ahead of you and he's already won the victory over Satan. When your battle comes, Jesus will be with you and you will stand. Let's pray.

Let's pray. Dear Father God, thank you that in Jesus and in your word, you have given us everything we need to stand firm and to resist the devil.

Father, we thank you for the salvation we have received through what Jesus has done for us in dying on the cross and rising again as our perfect sacrifice.

Lord, we ask that in Jesus and in your word, you have given us the salvation we have received through and that in Jesus and in your word, you have given us the salvation we have received through that you would remove that blindness and help that person see the light of the glory of Christ so that they can accept the salvation that you freely offer us.

- [36 : 24] Lord, we thank you for your armour and we pray that we would be faithful in doing whatever we have to do to devote ourselves to you, to live in your strength and power and to put on your armour.

We pray that we would be active in seeking ways to increase our knowledge and use of your truth and righteousness, your gospel, your faith and salvation and that we would use the Bible as a sword.

In all these things, Lord, we pray that we would stand firm in you and avoid the devil's tricks and flaming arrows. Having done all this, Lord, help us to stand firm and persevere to the end.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.