

The Book of Ephesians
Learning to Use God's Armor, Part 2
Ephesians 6:10-17
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As we learned last week from our study of Ephesians 6, as Christians, we're in a war, and we have to develop the mindset of a soldier. Some of us, some of the ones sitting here among us this morning have had the opportunity to know what the mindset of the soldier is. For many of us however, we've not personally experienced that. Perhaps nowhere is the mindset of a soldier more powerfully and beautifully portrayed than in a personal letter that was written on July 14, 1861, by a Rhode Island soldier named, Sullivan Ballou. I came across this letter a number of years ago. I think I shared it with you then. I saw it again, read it again recently, and I think it's appropriate for us this morning. Sullivan Ballou wrote to his wife:

My very dear Sarah,

The indications are very strong that we shall move in a few days—perhaps tomorrow. Lest I should not be able to write you again, I feel impelled to write lines that may fall under your eye when I shall be no more.

If it is necessary that I should fall on the battlefield for my country, I am ready. I have no misgivings about, our lack of confidence in, the cause in which I am engaged, and my courage does not halt or falter. I know how strongly American Civilization now leans upon the triumph of the Government, and how great a debt we owe to those who went before us through the blood and suffering of the Revolution. And I am willing—perfectly willing—to lay down all my joys in this life, to help maintain this Government, and to pay that debt.

I cannot describe to you my feelings on this calm summer night, when two thousand men are sleeping around me, many of them enjoying the last, perhaps, before that of death—and I, suspicious that Death is creeping behind me with his fatal dart, am communing with God, my country, and you.

Sarah, my love for you is deathless, it seems to bind me to you with mighty cables that nothing but Omnipotence could break; and yet my love of my country comes over me like a strong wind and bears me irresistibly on with all these chains to the

battlefield.

The memories of the blissful moments I have spent with you come creeping over me, and I feel most gratified to God and to you that I have enjoyed them so long. And hard it is for me to give them up and burn to ashes the hopes of future years, when God willing, we might still have lived and loved together, and seen our sons grow up to honorable manhood around us. I have, I know, but few and small claims upon Divine Providence, but something whispers to me—perhaps it is the wafted prayer of my little Edgar—that I shall return to my loved ones unharmed. If I do not, my dear Sarah, never forget how much I love you, and when my last breath escapes me on the battlefield, it will whisper your name.

But, O Sarah! If the dead can come back to this earth and flit unseen around those they loved, I shall always be near you; in the garish day in the darkest night—amid your happiest scenes, in your gloomiest hours—always, always; and if there be a soft breeze upon your cheek, it shall be my breath; or the cool air fans your throbbing temple, it shall be my spirit passing by.

Sarah, do not mourn me dead; think I am gone and wait for you, for we shall meet again. Oh Sarah, I wait for you there! Come to me, and lead there our children.

Sullivan

Sullivan Ballou, who wrote that beautiful, amazing letter, died just one week later at the First Battle of Bull Run. He understood the mindset of a soldier. With all of the joys that he participated in and appreciated about this life, he never lost sight of the fact that his first duty, his first calling, was as a soldier.

That's a mindset that we too must have, a mindset that Paul lays out for us in Ephesians chapter 6. And I invite you turn there with me again. Ephesians 6, beginning in verse 10:

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might. Put on the full armor of God, so that you [may] ... be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual *forces* of wickedness in the heavenly *places*. Therefore, take up the full armor of God, so that you will be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm. Stand firm therefore, **HAVING GIRDED YOUR LOINS WITH TRUTH, and HAVING PUT ON THE BREASTPLATE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS,**

and having shod YOUR FEET WITH THE PREPARATION OF THE GOSPEL OF PEACE; in addition to all, taking up the shield of faith with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil *one*. And take THE HELMET OF SALVATION, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God.

With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints, and *pray* on my behalf, that utterance may be given to me in the opening of my mouth, to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains; that in *proclaiming* it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak.

Last week as we began just to get the sweep of this passage, we discovered that contained within these verses, there are several concepts that sort of lie beneath and support everything Paul says in this paragraph. And without understanding those concepts, it's really hard to grasp what Paul is saying here. So in brief, let me remind you of those foundational concepts we discovered last week.

Number one. The Christian life is war. All around us and within our minds, there is a silent invisible war that is going on. It is a relentless, never-ending war, from the moment we're born in Christ until the moment we die.

Number two. We are in this war together. There's no such thing as a war fought between two people. We are merely foot soldiers, fellow soldiers together in God 's army, and we are fellow soldiers.

Number three. The war is between God and Satan.

Number four. The nature of the war therefore is spiritual, not physical. We're not called to raise arms on some sort of holy jihad, the war is a spiritual war.

Number five. The war between God and Satan is therefore, because it's spiritual, a battle of ideas and thoughts. The battle that's going on between God and Satan, when it comes to us, is waged in our minds. It's a battle of ideas and thoughts.

Number six. Every idea in the universe, every thought that passes through our minds, can be traced either to God or Satan. Ultimately, every concept, every idea, every thought, is either the truth and traces back to God, or it's a lie and traces back to Satan. There are no neutral thoughts or ideas.

Number seven. Christ forever defeated Satan and his demon army at the cross. The good news is, Christ already won the war. We are merely in a sort of mopping up operation, but it will be intense fighting throughout our lives. But the end result is already decided.

Number eight. Our only hope of winning the war is the strength of Christ and the armor of God. That's where we left off last time.

Today, we come to our exposition of the text itself. Those are the sort of foundational concepts that underlie this whole passage. But this morning, I want us to begin to work our way through the text itself. The theme of the paragraph that we've just read together is this: in the war of the Christian life, we can only stand firm in the strength of Christ and the armor of God. If that sounds very similar to the last point we made last week, it's because it is. That's really the point Paul was pressing to, and that's the theme of this passage.

Let me say it again: in the war that is the Christian life, we can only stand firm in the strength of Christ and the armor of God. Now as Paul develops that theme through these 11 verses,—and by the way, all 11 of these verses are part of this paragraph—you might be tempted to think that verses 18 to 20 about prayer is sort of a distinct paragraph. It's not. In the Greek text it doesn't even have its own verb, it's related to this text, as we'll see when we get there. It's part of this passage on the armor.

So, these 11 verses together develop the theme, and they divide into three parts. Let me just show you the flow of the passage. The first part is verses 10 to 13. I've entitled that "Understand our orders." Here we have a sort of general explanation of what our duty is as soldiers. Understand our orders. The second part I've entitled "Put on God's armor." In verses 14 to 17, we had a detailed exposition or explanation of what God's armor really is. Put on God's armor. The third part comes in verses 18 to 20, and I've entitled that Work on our attitude. Work on our attitude. If we're going to be soldiers in God's army, we've got to have the right mindset, the right attitude, for fighting. And we'll discover that that attitude in a word is *dependence*, manifested by prayer.

Today, we only have time to begin to look at the first part of this passage. If we're going to stand firm in the war that is the Christian life, number one, we must understand our orders.

Understand our orders. We are soldiers. The whole passage is built on the metaphor that we are soldiers in the Lord's army. And as soldiers we have been **beg** given very specific orders. Now, let me show you how verses 10 to 13, in sort of understanding our orders, how this breaks down. Paul begins this part by giving us an overarching command in verses 10 and the first part of verse 11, which we will look at today. Then in the second part of verse 11 which, Lord willing, we'll look at next week, he tells us the objective of our orders: what is it we're trying to

accomplish, what's the mission? In verse 12, he identifies the enemy that we're fighting. And then in verse 13, he gives us a summary of our orders as he finishes off this first section. Understand our orders.

So let's look first at the overarching command. Verse 10: "Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might." Well the first thing we have to resolve is, how does this passage, how does this section, relate to the rest of Paul's letter to the church in Ephesus?

As I noted last week, the final section of Ephesians begins with this verse. That's obvious, because Paul begins this section with the word "finally." He uses this word in the same way in five other letters as he begins to sort of wrap things up with the last matters that he wants to address.

But what follows the word "finally" here in Ephesians is not merely another item in a list of subjects he wants to hit; instead, it is the practical application that equips us to do everything else he has commanded us in this letter. How do we know that? Well, this paragraph that I've just read to you is filled with themes that Paul has already touched on and developed throughout the letter. And here at the end this isn't like a piece of patchwork quilt just sort of tagged on; instead, he takes those themes from throughout the letter, he draws them together, as it were, into a perfect package, and he presents the truth in this extended metaphor of us as a soldier.

He's trying to help us see the reality of how all of those things he's talked about become practical in our lives. And I think we'll see that as we work our way through this passage. So this paragraph then, is not disconnected from what has gone before. It's not sort of badly stitched or stapled on at the end, and it really has no relationship to the rest of what we've studied. It is, in many ways, the application of all that has come before.

In fact, can I put this way? We can only successfully live out the commands Paul has given us in his letter to the church in Ephesus if we do what he explains in these verses. You want to live a life that understands your calling in Christ, that understands your true position? You will only be able to do that if you understand what's in this passage.

You want to live in unity, not only in your family, but in the church and with the people around you? You will only be able to accomplish that through understanding this passage. You want to walk in the new life that's yours in Christ, putting off the old self and being renewed in your thinking and putting on the new self? It'll only happen if you come to grips with what's here.

Do you want to walk in love, so that your relationships are characterized by honesty and integrity and concern for the other person? That'll only happen if you come here first. Do you want to

have a home that honors God? Do you want to have a husband and wife relationship that pleases Him, a parent-child relationship that reflects the divine intention? Do you want to be the right kind of employee, the right kind of employer?

All of those things ultimately funnel into this last section where Paul tells us *how*. These are the instructions for how to do everything we've read and studied in the rest of the letter. So it's absolutely crucial that we understand what's going on in this paragraph.

Now, what does his overarching command mean? Verse ten: "Finally, be strong in the Lord." Now, I want to take this apart in its pieces, and then we'll put it back together. But I want you to see, first of all, that this is a command, this is an imperative. There is something we are commanded to do.

But before you can fully appreciate what it is we're commanded to do, I need to give you a brief lesson in grammar. You thought school hadn't started yet. I'm sorry, it's about to start. I was **a** an instructor of English at the college level, and I taught my students these very things. But you need to understand this. The theology of the Bible is contained in two places: the meaning of the words and the grammar. That's where the truth lies. And you can only get to the truth as you understand the meaning of the words, and as you understand the grammar: how those words are interrelated to one another. Grammar is very important. That's my English speech for the day. Now, let's get to the point.

In many languages including both Greek and English, verbs can have what is called both an active and passive voice. When we say that a verb is active or passive, we're talking about the relationship between the subject of the sentence, the grammatical subject, and the doer of the action. What is the relationship between those two?

If the verb is active, it means that the subject of the sentence is actually doing the action. Take this sentence: Tom preached a sermon. Tom preached a sermon. Now in that sentence, obviously, the verb is "preached;" the subject is, the grammatical subject is "Tom." Since the subject of the sentence is performing the action, it's active.

But what if I said this? What if I said, Tom was preached a sermon. Tom was preached a sermon. "Tom" is still the subject, but in that case I am not doing the action, I am being acted upon. We're not told in the little sentence I gave you who was the real doer of the action. Might be a fellow elder. Might be Sheila—not that she would do that, just that I would deserve that. But regardless of who is doing the action, I'm not doing the action, I'm receiving the action. That means it's passive.

Now in English, we know a verb is passive because of the construction. It has a helping verb, *to be*, and then the participle form of the verb. In Greek, the way you know it's passive is by the ending that's tagged onto the word.

In the original language of verse 10—and here's where I'm coming. In the original language of verse 10, the verb translated “be strong,” is passive. Now what does that tell us? It tells us the subject is not doing the action. What's the subject? Well, in any command, any imperative, the subject is an understood *you*. If I say “get up,” or if I say “wake up”—Which I hope isn't necessary.—but if I were to say that, the understood subject is *you*. *You* wake up; *you* get up. So here's a command: “be strong.” He's saying *you* “be strong.”

Now putting all that grammar together, we can literally translate verse 10 like this: *you* be strengthened. You say wait a minute, Tom, why didn't the NAS translators translate it that way? Well, because “be strengthened” isn't good English. We don't really talk that way. And, because the rest of the verse is going to make the point as well. So they chose “be strong,” as did the ESV.

Now why is all this important? By the way, I'm not out here alone. The leading commentators agree that this is passive voice. Why is it important? Because a huge amount of theology rests on the fact that this verb is passive.

If it were active, let me tell you what Paul would be telling you and me. If it were active, here's what Paul would be saying: somewhere inside your own soul, I want you to find the personal energy, the personal power, to become spiritually strong so that you can stand firm against Satan and his armies. You need to somehow muster within yourself, within your own mind, enough will power, enough resolve, so that you, through your own strength, can be strong enough to live out everything I've told you in this letter.

Thank God, that's not what Paul is saying. Because you don't have the ability to do that, and neither do I. Instead, the verb is passive. That means Paul is telling us to cooperate in some way, so that—Are you ready for this?—an external power, a strength outside of us, comes in and makes us strong.

The verb “be strengthened” is in the present tense. That means it's not something you do once. It's not like salvation or some sort of switch you flip, and it's done. It's a continual process. He's saying, throughout your Christian life I want you to do something—and we'll learn what that something is in a moment—I want to do something that allows an external strength to come into your soul and strengthen you for the battle.

Now where does this spiritual strength come from? Look at verse 10: “Finally, be [strengthened] in the Lord and in the strength of His might.” Every time the word “Lord” occurs in Ephesians, it’s a reference to Christ. There are many references. Most of them are clearly Christ. There a few like this one, you might say, well, I’m not sure, so it weighs in on the evidence that this is a reference to Christ. The source of our spiritual strength is Christ. He’s the one with whom we have been brought into union. We’ve talked about that.

Over and over again throughout this letter Paul says, you are “in Christ,” you are “in Him.” What does that mean? Well, we looked at it back when we began this letter. Essentially, that means two things. It means we are so connected to Christ that, number one, He is our representative. Everything He does, we benefit from. And number two, it means that it’s as if, not literally but - in a figurative way of speaking, it’s as if there were a spiritual umbilical cord stretched from Christ Himself into our souls. And His own energy and strength is equipping us and enabling us. So it is from Him that we derive our strength. We are *in* the Lord. We are *in* Christ.

What does Paul mean? “be strong in the Lord” Well, the next expression further explains it: “and in the strength of His might.” Let’s start with the last word there, “might.” This word denotes inherent strength. This is capacity. The Lord has this unlimited capacity of power, inherent strength. It’s like, if you will, -a transformer to which no exterior wires are attached, but it is functioning. It has all of this inherent power. It’s not doing anything with it, but it has this *in* unlimited capacity—or in the case of a transformer, limited capacity. In the case of Christ, unlimited capacity. There’s nothing He can’t do.

As is said of the triune God in Psalm 135, “Whatever the Lord pleases, He does.” Jeremiah 32: “The word of the Lord came to Jeremiah saying, ‘Behold, I am the Lord, the God of all flesh; is anything too difficult for Me?’” The obvious answer is what? No. There’s nothing that God wants to do that He can’t do. The only thing God can’t do, He doesn’t want to do, and that’s act contrary to His character. Everything else that He wants to do, He can do. That’s that inherent power.

Now notice, it says we are to be strengthened “in the strength” of that inherent power. Now that word “strength,” the verb form of that word means “to grasp or to seize or to take into your possession.” So the word came to mean “to rule over.” It’s from this Greek word, *kratos*, that we get the English words like *theocracy*, God rules, or *democracy*, the rule of the people. It means “to rule; to have the power to control, the power to overcome all resistance.”

So what’s Paul saying? He’s saying the believer is to find the strength he needs for daily living in Christ’s power to control and act, a power that has its source in this inherent, unrestrained,

unlimited, unrivaled source of power. It's ours. And that's where I want you to be strengthened, he says.

Now notice in verse 10, there are three different words for power: strong, strength, and might. There's only one verse in all of the New Testament, one other verse, where all three of those words occur together, and that's back in Ephesians 1. You remember what he told us there about the Father? In Ephesians 1, Paul was praying for spiritual illumination. Verse 18:

I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you will know what is the hope of his calling, ... the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, [And then he said this.] [I want you to know] ... what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe. [And that power is] ... in accordance with the working of the strength of His might.

There're all three words. What kind of power are we talking about? The power God used, verse 20, "when He raised [Jesus] from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places." There it's talking about God's power, and certainly as God, Christ has that power.

But when you think about Christ's power—we're supposed to be strengthened with His power—what do you think about? If you wanted to see Christ's power in its most graphic form, where would you go? You say, well, I'd go to His miracles. I mean, think about it: in a word, He quiets the sea; in a word, He stills the storm; He makes water into wine; He raises people from the dead; He restores limbs.

Well, those are all very dramatic, and those are wonderful pictures of what happens to us at the moment of salvation: a once in a lifetime event, dramatically transformed. But those are not good pictures of the ongoing need for power we have every day to live out our Christian lives. Because those people who experienced those miracles only experienced it, for the most part, once in their lifetime.

So where do you go to see the kind of power Christ has that we need on a daily basis? You go to Matthew 4. You go to His temptation. Because there Jesus meets the same kinds of issues we meet day in and day out, and He wins. Here in the temptations of Matthew 4—in fact look at verse 1: "Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. And after He had fasted forty days and forty nights, He ... became hungry. And the tempter came...."

Now understand, that if you put the other gospel records together, it's clear that for all forty days Jesus was tempted. These three temptations are representative of the temptations He had. And they're sort of the climax, they come at the end. In these three temptations, you really have

represented the root causes of every temptation you and I face.

Look at the first one, verse 3. Tempter came to Him and said, “If you are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread.” Jesus, You’ve been forty days without food. You’re hungry. Your body wants food. Give it food outside of God’s will. He’s the one who led You here and told You to fast, but You need food. You can make these breads into stone.

Here you have the temptation to pursue satisfaction of the body’s appetites contrary to God’s Word. Let me ask you a question. Are you ever tempted to pursue the satisfaction of your body’s appetites contrary to the word of God? Of course you are. If you’re a human being, you’re tempted in that way. Have you always had the power and strength to say no? No you haven’t, but Jesus has. You need to be strong in the power of His might.

Look at the next temptation, verse 5:

Then the devil took Him into the holy city and had Him stand on the pinnacle of the temple, and said to Him, “If you are the Son of God, throw Yourself down; for it is written, ‘He will command His angels concerning you’; and ‘On their hands they will bear You up, so that You will not strike Your foot against a stone.’”

Now there’s a background to what’s going on here, but Satan takes Jesus to the highest point of the Temple Mount with the highest visibility. And he says throw Yourself off, and in a moment You will prove to all these people that You are who You said You were. God’s ultimately got a plan to substantiate You are who you said You are, and that is through death and resurrection, but don’t wait for that. Throw Yourself off now, and they will know because the angels will catch You. It’ll be obvious. This is a temptation to pursue personal glory at the expense of God’s glory.

Have you ever been tempted to do that? You ever been tempted to self-promotion? Ever been tempted to make yourself look better with the people you live with, with the people at work, people at school? You always wanting to throw in the best story, make yourself look better than you are? Of course you have. And how have you done with that?

Christ, look at His response. Verse 7: Jesus said... “On the other hand, it is written, ‘YOU SHALL NOT PUT THE LORD YOUR GOD TO THE TEST.’” He didn’t bite. He didn’t give. He didn’t give into the temptation to pursue personal glory and self-promotion over the glory of God.

Look at the third one. Verse 8: Again, the devil took Him to a very high mountain and showed

Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory; and he said to Him, “All these things I will give You, if You [will] fall down and worship me.” Satan takes him, probably to Mount Hermon, the highest point in Israel some 9,000 feet above sea level, and there he allows Him to glimpse something of the extent of the world.

Jesus had grown up in Nazareth, a town of 500, been to Jerusalem and back, and that was it. And here Satan shows Him, in His humanity, all the world: not just the kingdoms then existent, but all the kingdoms that have ever existed and their glory.

And he said, I have the power over these. And to some extent that was true, under the hand of God. And he said, if You’ll fall down and recognize that power, I’ll give these to You. Here’s a way to get what God promised You. You’re going to ultimately get them, but You’re going to have to go through suffering and death, Here’s a way to get it without going through all that. I’ll give it to You if You’ll simply throw Yourself down. This was a temptation to crave and pursue personal prosperity and self-fulfillment contrary to God’s providence.

Have you ever been tempted to pursue prosperity and self-fulfillment outside of God’s will and purpose in your life? Course you have. How did you do? Can you use some help? Look at Jesus.

Verse 10: Jesus said to him, “Go, Satan! For it is written, ‘You shall worship the Lord your God, and serve [only Him.]’” You can’t serve stuff and God, and you’re supposed to serve only God.

What I want you to see is that during those forty days in the wilderness, without food, when Jesus was at his physical lowest point, Satan himself, the devil in person, came, and again and again he attacked Jesus throughout those forty days, culminating in these three ways, in the same kinds of ways that he assaults us day in and day out through his demon force and through his world system.

And Jesus, through the strength of His might, never wavered. And Jesus didn’t resist temptation just for 40 days, but for His entire life. In fact, Luke, when he finishes the temptation account, says, “When the devil had finished every temptation, he left Him until an opportune time.” O, you can bet, Satan was back often in the life Christ. Sometimes he took the voice of Peter, and Jesus had to say, “Get behind me, Satan!” Sometimes he was in the scribes and the Pharisees. Sometimes he was in the people, always bringing temptation. And Jesus resisted it.

If you want to see power that you desperately need, look at how Jesus responded to temptation: an entire life never giving in to the temptation to sinfully satisfy the appetites of His body, an

entire life never giving in to the craving for personal glory and self-promotion, an entire life never giving in to the temptation to pursue self-fulfillment and personal prosperity. And look at His life of obedience. Jesus Himself described it this way: “I always do the things that are pleasing to [the Father].” Can you say that? The amazing thing is that Jesus’ power to live a life of obedience can be ours. That’s what Paul is saying: be strengthened “in the Lord” with “the strength of *His* might.” (emphasis added)

This is the theme of Scripture. There’re several passages that I love that bring this to bear. Look back in 1 Samuel 30. You see it in the life of David, throughout the times of Scripture, people depending on God’s strength and not their own. What do you do when things are about as bad as they can get? Well, in 1 Samuel 30, they’re as bad as they can get for David. He and his men have been staying at a town called Ziklag. They’ve been away, and when they come back, verse 3 of 1 Samuel 30 says,

When David and his men came to the city, behold, it was burned with fire, [So everything they had amassed, all of their stuff is gone.] and their wives and their sons and their daughters had been taken captive. Then David and the people who were with him lifted up their voices and wept until there was no strength in them to weep.

Have life circumstances ever brought you to that point? What do you do? Well it gets worse. Verse 6: “Moreover David was greatly distressed because the people spoke of stoning him, for all the people were embittered, each one because of his sons and his daughters.” What do you do when life gets as bad as it can get? Verse 6: “But David strengthened himself in the LORD his God.” He found his strength somewhere else. He found his strength in God.

What about when you feel life isn’t fair, things aren’t going the way you’d planned and hoped? Look at Isaiah 40. The children of Israel found themselves in that situation. Verse 27, they were saying, “My way is hidden from the LORD [The LORD doesn’t see.], and the justice due me escapes the notice of my God.” Have you ever felt like that? What do you do? Do you do what Isaiah encourages the people of Israel to do? To look at God and remember. Verse 29: He gives strength to the weary, and to him who lacks might He increases power. Though youths grow weary and tired, and vigorous young men stumble badly.

In other words, those that you would expect to be strong, even they can’t stand. “Yet those who wait for the LORD [Literally, the Hebrew texts says, (And I’ve shared this with you before.)] will exchange their strength.” They cash in their weak, puny strength for God’s strength. And then “they will mount up with wings like eagles, they will run and not get tired, they will walk and not become weary.”

Jesus makes the same point about the source of our strength in John 15. You remember the passage about the vine and branches. In John 15:4, He says, Abide in Me, and I in you. As a branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit.

So He's talking here about bearing fruit. How does that happen? He says it only happens through My strength: I am the vine that provides the branches the power to do that. And if you missed it, look how he finishes verse 5: "Apart from Me you can do" what? "Nothing." When it comes to spiritual life, when it comes to bearing fruit of any kind, without Me, Jesus says, you're like a branch cut off the vine.

I have in my yard a vine that I wish 'wasn't there, and I have tried in valiant ways to get rid of this vine. It's lovely for about two weeks a year, and left to itself, you can watch it grow. You can stand there and see this Wisteria vine grow. I cut it back, and two weeks later it's grabbing onto anything that isn't running away from it. But I discovered something. If you really want to take care of those branches that are out there stretching through my yard, don't go cut the branches, because that'll grow back in a few minutes. Go back instead to the vine, to the very source, and cut that branch off. And then all of it, all the way out across the yard, will die and wither. Why? Because its strength has been cut off. Its source of energy and strength has been done. That's how it is with us in Christ. We only have the strength to function spiritually when we're rightly attached to the vine. "[Without] Me you can do nothing." This is the constant theme of the New Testament.

One other passage, 2 Corinthians 12. 2 Corinthians: 12;9. Paul's talking about his thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan. He says, "keep me from exalting myself," to torment me from Satan's perspective, and from God's, "to keep me from exalting myself." We don't know what that thorn was, could have been a health issue, could have been a person. But notice his conclusion. He says I asked the Lord take this thing away, this thorn in the flesh, this problem. Verse 9:

He ... said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for [My] power is perfected in [your] weakness." Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. Therefore [I love verse 10.] I am well content with my weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, [with any kind of trouble,] for Christ's sake; for when I am weak,"

And we're always weak. His point is, when I realize I'm weak, then I'm in a position to be

strong, because I get His strength. You get the point? You can never be strong enough to defeat the world, to defeat your flesh, to defeat the devil. You will never have enough resolve; you will never have enough willpower; you will never do it. Our only hope is to be infused with external power, a source that generates enough power to make us stronger than Satan, stronger than our fallen flesh, stronger than the mindset of the age in which we live.

And there's only one source for that kind of strength in the whole universe, and that's Jesus Christ. His strength has to become ours. This doesn't mean it's going to be ours in perfection, that we're going to live a life without sin. That's why the Bible describes it as a war, a war till the day we die. But we can make progress; we can stand firm; we can see growth in likeness to Christ. But to do it, you and I need a divine transfusion of Christ's power.

Now that brings us to the key question. How? How can we be strengthened with Christ's power? Now remember, it's a command: "be strengthened." So it's His strength. But how does it become mine? The answer is at the beginning of verse 11: "Put on the full armor of God." You see, here is how to gain the strength of Christ.

Paul tells us, but he doesn't just come right out and tell us in plain words; instead, he uses an extended metaphor of us fastening on armor. How can I gain the strength of Christ for myself? He says it's like putting on the full armor of God. Now, the Greek word for "full armor" is *panoplia*, from which we get the English word *panoply*, which isn't a word we use very often. But it does occur in Charles Wesley's hymn (or maybe it's, I forget which of the Wesley brothers), *Soldiers of Christ Arise*. He talks about the "panoply." It means "full armor." It's the complete body armor of a heavily armed, infantry soldier. And it's God's. Put on God's full body armor that goes on a heavily armed, infantry soldier.

How do I put on God's full armor? You say, OK, I get the progression: I'm to be strengthened by Christ's power by putting on the armor. So how do I put on the armor? That only raises another question. In the metaphor, the armor is pictured as going on my body. You know, on my head, on my feet, on my chest. But in reality—and this is what you have to come back to—the armor is not for my body, the armor is for what? My mind. Remember?

Where is the battle between God and Satan fought? It's fought where? In the minds of men. So I have to put on God's armor, and to put on God's armor is to think like God thinks. That's why, when confronted with the temptation, what did Christ do? He quoted Scripture. That doesn't mean you going to get out of temptation by just throwing out a verse. Jesus understood those verses, He applied them to Himself, and He responded to temptation with them. He was thinking God's thoughts.

Now, notice the contrast between verse 10 and verse 11. In verse 10, we are acted upon, we are strengthened; in verse eleven we must act, put on. This is a wonderful correction to our tendency to get out of balance in the Christian life. You see, most of us are tempted to live our lives at one extreme or the other.

On one extreme is the person who depends entirely upon Christ and His strength, and does nothing: well, I, there's nothing I can do. This is where the whole mindset of "let go and let God." I'm just waiting for God to zap me, and some day that will happen; until then, I'm perfectly content to live a life of misery.

The other extreme is the person who is the typical American, who commits himself to work hard: I'm going to do it. I got it. I hear what you said. I got what you taught through Ephesians. I can do this. I can be the kind of husband I ought to be. I can be the kind of wife I ought to be. I can be the kind of employer and employee I ought to be. I'm going to get to it. I've got my to-do list. I've got my book, *Getting Things Done*, and it's just a matter of organizing it and putting it out before me—depending on your own strength and resources.

With verses 10 and 11, Paul dispenses with both of those extremes. And he says you must depend completely on Christ for His strength, but at the same time you're depending completely on His strength, you must put on the armor. There's something for you to do. You're in a war, so start acting like a soldier. There's a battle.

Martin Luther understood the battle between God and the devil. He often wrote that he felt like he was caught between. In fact, one of the best biographies of Martin Luther's life is called *Luther: A Man Between God and the Devil*. In his great hymn entitled *A Mighty Fortress*, he writes, "For still our ancient foe doth seek to work us woe." You believe that? That's what Paul's saying. "And, armed with cruel hate, on earth is not his equal." Not one of us here is equal to what's before us. Luther also understood the ways to stand firm in the midst of this battle, because he goes on to write:

Did we in our own strength confide,
Our striving would be losing;
Were not the right Man on our side,
The Man of God's own choosing:
Dost ask who that may be?
Christ Jesus, it is He;
Lord Sabaoth His Name.

"Lord of armies" is what that means. He's the God of armies. He's on our side. "From

age to age the same, and He must win the battle.” Luther got it. Do you?

So what does this mean for us? It means that we come to God with the same spirit of Saint Augustine, who lived so long ago, when he said in those famous words: Give me the grace [O Lord] to do as you command, and then command me what you will! O holy God, when your commands are obeyed, it is from you that we receive the power to obey them.

That’s the mindset, that’s the spirit with which we approach God. Or in the words of Martin Lloyd Jones: Forget yourself for the time being. Look at Christ and realize the truth about Him and His power. Then realize that His power is available for you. That is the key to it all.

Where is your confidence when it comes to living the Christian life? Is it in yourself? Or is it completely in Christ?

And the second question is, if your confidence is completely in Christ, have you manifested that by putting on God’s own armor? You say how do I do that? Well, we’ll continue to see what that means next week.

Father, thank You for this wonderful passage. Thank You for the reminder of where we really are. Thank You for the reminder, Father, of that in our own strength we can do nothing, that we are hopeless without the strength of Christ.

Forgive us, Lord, for falling on either end of the extremes, for being lazy and waiting for You to do something when You commanded us to do something, to put on the armor. And yet, Father, forgive us on the other end for working and laboring and seeking to obey in our own strength, without this spirit of looking for the strength of Christ to enable us.

Lord, help us to think about Christ, help us to think about His life, about His strength that He manifested throughout His life in the face of temptation, always choosing the right thing, always doing what honors You. And Father, as we think about His strength, may we then seek from You that strength for ourselves to strengthen our own souls. Help us to do that, Father, as we continue to understand this passage, by putting on your armor, making the strength of Christ our own, wearing the armor You’ve given to us.

We pray that You would continue to unfold this passage; make it practical, Father. Help us to see that this is how we do what You’ve commanded us to do. We pray it in Jesus name, Amen.