

# Once Weak, Now Strong

**THEOLOGICAL THEME:** God strengthens His people to stand against the enemy.

Most Christians are familiar with the story of David and Goliath in 1 Samuel 17. Many times we ponder this historical narrative and see ourselves in the place of the shepherd David. But what if we ought to see ourselves in the place of the Israelites? Frightened, intimidated, passive, weak. We look at our enemy and realize we don't have what it takes to defeat him.



What are the dangers of reading the Bible and always putting ourselves in the role of the hero of the story?

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Enter the Good Shepherd from Bethlehem, Jesus the Christ. He faces off against death, hell, and the prince of the power of the air—and He defeats them all. Then, as with the Israelites after the slaying of Goliath, we get to enjoy the victory purchased for us, the victory we did not and could not accomplish for ourselves. After David stood victorious over Goliath, his countrymen jubilantly stormed the enemy camp and plundered all their goods.

This is a great illustration of spiritual warfare for the Christian. We get to work *from* victory, not *for* victory. The victory is won by Christ. Now we get to take dominion out of the conquest He has already accomplished, declaring His lordship and staking claim for His dominion in every sphere of existence.

In this session, we will learn how God has exchanged our weakness with His strength in preparing us to stand firm in battle against our true enemy, Satan and his forces of evil. We have been given spiritual armor from God that enables us not only to stand firm against his attacks but also to advance the gospel no matter the opposition we face. We wage war against the enemy and against his designs and his minions as the church's final victory march, celebrating the win Christ has achieved for us.



## Voices from Church History

“Resolved, never to give over, nor in the least to slacken, my fight with my corruptions, however unsuccessful I may be.”<sup>1</sup>

—Jonathan Edwards  
(1703-1758)

## 1. Strengthened to Stand Against the Enemy (Eph. 6:10-12)

Satan is a fantastic student of humanity. And he should be because he's been at it for centuries. Millennia actually. Satan understands our weaknesses, blind spots, and vulnerabilities. He knows which sins we struggle with the most and what often and easily irritates, frustrates, and distracts us. He knows what we desire, the fleshly longings of our hearts. And everyday, Satan takes all of this information that he has been gathering for so many years and puts it to work, playing all the angles he can exploit in order to bring us down. He is at work every minute of every day to make sure we fail.

Do you ever think about it that way? The enemy is often more conscious of our weaknesses than we are. And he will do whatever it takes to get us to neglect our faith and forget the grace of God. If he can get us to stumble or use us to get others to stumble, he will not let up until he's done it. All because he hates Jesus and wants to see Jesus' glory obscured in the world.

## 99 Essential Christian Doctrines

### 32. Angels

Besides the creation of humanity and animals, the Bible also speaks of other beings that God created—angels, who are also referred to in Scripture as “sons of God,” “holy ones,” “spirits,” “principalities,” and “powers.” In the original languages of the Bible, the word *angel* carries the meaning of a messenger, which indicates one of their primary reasons for existence. Angels carry out a number of other functions throughout Scripture: bringing God glory, carrying out God's plans and purpose, and reminding humanity that the unseen world is real.

It is for this reason that Paul's words are so strong on the subject of the spiritual war. This is not something we can afford to be nonchalant about. The apostle Peter warned us: "Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour" (1 Pet. 5:8). Here is how Paul informed our preparation in Ephesians 6:10-12:

*<sup>10</sup> Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. <sup>11</sup> Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. <sup>12</sup> For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.*

The first rule of warfare is practical awareness of the enemy. First, our enemy is the devil, not our fellow man. This is important because we often mistake the unbelieving world as our battle targets. But Paul said we don't war against "flesh and blood." Because sin is in all of us, even those justified by the blood of Christ cannot carry out the fight against other sinners justly. The ground is level at the foot of the cross. Unbelievers, by definition, are unenlightened to the things of the Spirit, but they are not our enemy in this war.

Second, we also need to remember the enemy's position. He attacks us from the spiritual realm. Very often, Christians try fighting the devil's wiles in the devil's ways. We assume, for instance, that legalistic behavior will solve our sin problems. But the devil is totally fine with all of us becoming more "religious" so long as we don't actually love Jesus. No, we cannot wage a spiritual war with human strength. We have to be "strong in the Lord," operating under "the strength of his might." We can't do it in our own power.

## 99 Essential Christian Doctrines

### 33. Demons

Demons are angelic beings who sinned against God and now continually work evil in the world today (Job 1:6; Zech. 3:1; Luke 10:18). Demons oppose God and seek to destroy His work, as seen in the Bible's description of Satan, the head of demons, who seeks to "steal, kill, and destroy." Though demons have power, they are limited by God's control and can only act within the constraints of what God permits. In the end, all of the demons will be cast into the lake of fire, for which it was originally created.



Why can it be so tempting for us to take the fight to other people instead of the true enemy?

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Because we are engaged in a spiritual war, we need spiritual weapons to protect ourselves and fight our enemy. We also must wear spiritual armor not just so we can be protected but also so we can stand with strength. To visualize this, Paul used the image of a Roman soldier in the next section, which the first readers would have been quite familiar with. Roman soldiers were not given shields, helmets, and swords to cower in a corner. They were given this armor to stand strong and fight in battle. And we have been given spiritual armor for the same reason—so that we can stand with God’s strength as we defend ourselves. Our enemy is great, but our God is greater. We don’t have to hide in fear from our enemy; we can stand before him. But we can’t forget that when we do stand, we need to stand with our full armor on and rely on God’s strength to win the battle.



When can we be tempted to take off our armor? Why?

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What are some ways you have found strength from the Lord to withstand the ploys of our enemy?

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## 2. Strengthened to Stand Firm in Spiritual Battle (Eph. 6:13-17)

*<sup>13</sup> Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm. <sup>14</sup> Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, <sup>15</sup> and, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace. <sup>16</sup> In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one; <sup>17</sup> and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God,*



Why do you think the shield that protects us from the devil is our faith and not our works?

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In what ways does salvation serve as a helmet?

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Paul gave us the blueprint for holistic protection against an unholy attack. We are to cover ourselves head to foot with God's armor for protection in the midst of the fierce battles we will face. But remember, this is God's armor, not ours. You will notice that every piece of armor listed corresponds to something God does and supplies. God gives it; we wield it.

- The belt is the knowledge of God's truth.
- The breastplate is Christ's righteousness.
- Our feet are to be covered with the good news of Christ's work on the cross and resurrection from the tomb.
- The shield represents the faith given to us by God, through which we have received His grace and live in it (Eph. 2:8).
- The helmet is salvation, God's gift to us.

- The sword is the Holy Spirit Himself, working through His own breathed-out Scriptures.

At each point of satanic attack in His own temptation experience, Jesus responded with Bible verses, specifically from the Book of Deuteronomy (see Matt. 4:1-11). The Word of God—all of it—is powerful, sharper than a two-edged sword (see Heb. 4:12). The Word of God not only keeps us alive with spiritual nourishment but vanquishes the lies of our devilish accuser.

## Voices from the Church

“The only offensive weapon that a believer carries is the word of God—and that weapon has more than enough power to wound and defeat the enemy.”<sup>2</sup>

–Yusufu Turaki

Take a moment to sketch your understanding of the armor of God as Paul described it, and note some ways to remind yourself to take up this armor daily for the spiritual battle we face.

Sketch	Notes

### 3. Strengthened to Prevail in Prayer (Eph. 6:18-20)

Paul ended his examination of our spiritual armor by calling on us to saturate the battles we fight in with prayer.

*<sup>18</sup> praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints, <sup>19</sup> and also for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel, <sup>20</sup> for which I am an ambassador in chains, that I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak.*

In prayer, we are not commanding the Spirit or summoning the Spirit like He's a cosmic butler. In prayer, we are not in the place of control but in the place of *submission*. Through prayer we bare our hearts, minds, and souls to the God who wants to be our friend and deliverer. And the more we do this baring, the more we will experience of His power, even in our lowest and weakest of moments. Prayer is essentially weaponized weakness.

No, prayer isn't magic; it is expressed helplessness. It is a verbalized acknowledgment of our own lack of power, of our own weakness. And it is in our weakness that God's power is perfected (2 Cor. 12:9).



What does it mean to “keep alert” in prayer?

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How should understanding prayer as expressed helplessness shape the way we pray for ourselves and others?

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#### Voices from the Church

“Prayer is the heart of spiritual warfare.”<sup>3</sup>

—Clinton E. Arnold

We can't miss the way God wants us to prevail. We are to prevail in the same way that Paul desired—in advancing the gospel. With all of the talk about being protected with armor, we cannot forget that our mission is to advance the gospel, not guard it from others. Our prayers must be centered on this reality. We are protected so that we can stand firm against the enemy's attacks, and as God's armor repels each one, we have opportunities to make the gospel known to those around us.

Apart from Christ, we can accomplish nothing. But *in* Christ—having prevailed through Him over the enemy, having been strengthened to withstand spiritual attacks, and having direct access to His powerful presence through prayer—we are more than conquerors. Because of the blessings of the gospel, we who once were weak are now eternally strong!



Paul mentions twice the need for boldness. Why do you think he asked for prayer specifically for that attribute?

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Why must boldness for the sake of the gospel come as a result of prayer instead of being something we work up on our own?

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## Conclusion

We are in the middle of a war, and we need to put on the spiritual armor God has given us and always be ready to fight. The good news is that the result of the war is not up to us. The war has already been won by Christ, so we fight from victory, not for victory. We put on the full armor of God so we can be equipped and ready to join in with God as He advances the gospel of peace into a world of spiritual strife.

**CHRIST CONNECTION:** The apostle Paul commanded Christians to be ready to engage in spiritual battle against the powers and principalities of this world. Because Jesus died and rose again, victorious over evil, we follow in His steps—not fighting for victory but fighting from victory.

# HIS MISSION, YOUR MISSION

**MISSIONAL APPLICATION:** We are called to put on the full armor of God so we can be equipped and ready to take the gospel of peace into a world of spiritual strife.

1. How should we view people in this world who don't know Jesus, and how will that affect the ways you respond to them?

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2. What steps will you take to prepare for the spiritual battle you face everyday as a follower of Jesus Christ?

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3. Write a prayer in the Spirit for your fellow group members to be bold in speaking the message of the gospel in the world.

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3. Mark Taylor, *1 Corinthians*, vol. 2B in *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: B&H, 2014) [WORDsearch].
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2. Corrie ten Boom with Elizabeth and John Sherrill, *The Hiding Place* (Bloomington, MN: Chosen Books, 2015) [eBook].
3. Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Life: What on Earth Am I Here For?* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012) [eBook].
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