

THE SOVEREIGN GOD AND THE MYSTERY OF HIS WILL: A STUDY OF EPHESIANS

(LESSON ONE HUNDRED AND EIGHT)

“BE STRONG IN THE LORD”

EPHESIANS 6:10-12

10 Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might.

11 Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.

12 For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.

Warren Wiersbe was an American theologian, pastor, author and general director of the *Back to the Bible* radio broadcast. In his introduction to the section of Paul’s letter that we are now turning our attention to, **Weirsbe** wrote the following:

“Sooner or later every believer discovers that the Christian life is a battleground, not a playground, and that he faces an enemy who is much stronger than he is—apart from the Lord...As Christians, we face three enemies: the world, the flesh, and the devil (**Ephesians 2:1-3**). ‘**The world**’ refers to the system around us that is opposed to God, that caters to ‘the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life’ (1 **John 2:15-17**). ‘Society apart from God’ is a simple, but accurate, definition of ‘the world.’ ‘**The flesh**’ is the old nature that we inherited from Adam, a nature that is opposed to God and can do

nothing spiritual to please God. By His death and resurrection, Christ overcame the world (**John 16:33; Galatians 6:14**), and the flesh (**Romans 6:1-6; Galatians 2:20**), and the devil (**Ephesians 1:19-23**). In other words, as believers, we do not fight **for** victory-we fight **from** victory! The Spirit of God enables us, by faith, to appropriate Christ's victory for ourselves."

In this section of his letter, Paul sets forth his analysis of the Christian life. And in His analysis, the Christian life is a life of struggle, a life of conflict, and a life of warfare. Every believer has been called into a life of "active duty" and the "**Lord of hosts,**" the "**LORD of Heaven's Armies,**" expects every believer to respond courageously, armed with the truth of His Word, and in the strength of the indwelling Holy Spirit. We must remember that the victory has already been won at Calvary. **Our goal as believers is to learn how to live, walk and fight in the light of that certain truth.**

Wiersbe says that in this closing section of his letter, Paul discusses four topics-**The Enemy, The Equipment, The Energy, and The Encouragement.** If believers understood and consistently apply the truths relative to these four topics, they will be victorious over the "world," the "flesh" and the devil.

Wiersbe goes on to explain that, "The intelligence corps plays a vital part in warfare because it enables the officers to know and understand the enemy. Unless we know who the enemy is, where he is, and what he can do, we have a difficult time defeating him. Not only in **Ephesians 6**, but throughout the entire Bible, God instructs us about the enemy, so there is no reason for us to be caught off guard."

The first topic that Paul deals with is **The Enemy (Ephesians 6:10-12)**. In verse **10** he writes, "*Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might.*"

The **New English Translation** renders the verse as follows, “*Finally, be strengthened in the Lord and in the strength of his power.*”

By his use of the word “*Finally,*” Paul is not indicating that he is ready to close his letter. The Greek word translated “*finally*” literally means, “as for the rest.” In every case, the use of this Greek expression has the idea of something left over. Paul’s “*Finally*” comes at the end of his systematic doctrinal presentation in which he carefully outlined the believer’s **election, predestination, adoption, calling** and **position**, as well as the basics of the Christian walk. In this closing section he is saying in effect, “In light of all that God has done for you; in light of the glorious standing that you have as a child of God; in light of the great plan of the ages that He has made you a part of; in light of the program for Christian maturity and growth that He has given to you; in light of the life that God calls you to live, and in light of the filling of the Holy Spirit and your walk by the Spirit, “*Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life*” (**1 Timothy 6:12**).

Brothers and sisters, spiritual warfare is the inevitable consequence of a life lived “in Christ” and filled with the Holy Spirit. The more effective a believer is for the Lord, the more he or she will experience the attacks of the enemy, for the devil does not waste his ammunition on believers whom he does not consider to be threats to his kingdom.

If we study **Ephesians 6:10-18** in the absence of the great doctrinal truths and practical exhortations dealt with in the preceding chapters, we may become confused and frustrated, for in this section of his letter, Paul issues a number of “warfare” instructions. But these instructions are all based upon the foundation he has established in the preceding sections.

Remember that the first three chapters of the letter contain **doctrinal instruction**. In these chapters, Paul informs the Ephesian believers about what God has accomplished for them in Christ, and all that they have become in Christ, as well as the resources that He has placed at their disposal to help them to live victorious Christian lives. In **Ephesians**

1:3-14 Paul gives us a wonderful summary of all the blessings that accrue to us “*in Christ.*” The **New Living Translation** renders the passage as follows:

3 All praise to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realms because we are united with Christ.

4 Even before he made the world, God loved us and chose us in Christ to be holy and without fault in his eyes.

5 God decided in advance to adopt us into his own family by bringing us to himself through Jesus Christ. This is what he wanted to do, and it gave him great pleasure.

6 So we praise God for the glorious grace he has poured out on us who belong to his dear Son.

7 He is so rich in kindness and grace that he purchased our freedom with the blood of his Son and forgave our sins.

8 He has showered his kindness on us, along with all wisdom and understanding.

9 God has now revealed to us his mysterious will regarding Christ—which is to fulfill his own good plan.

10 And this is the plan: At the right time he will bring everything together under the authority of Christ—everything in heaven and on earth.

11 Furthermore, because we are united with Christ, we have received an inheritance from God, for he chose us in advance, and he makes everything work out according to his plan.

12 God’s purpose was that we Jews who were the first to trust in Christ would bring praise and glory to God.

13 And now you Gentiles have also heard the truth, the Good News that God saves you. And when you believed in Christ, he identified you as his own by giving you the Holy Spirit, whom he promised long ago.

14 The Spirit is God's guarantee that he will give us the inheritance he promised and that he has purchased us to be his own people. He did this so we would praise and glorify him.

Remember also that the “**practical section**” of the letter begins in **Ephesians 4:1** with a call to, “*lead a life worthy of your calling, for you have been called by God*” (**New Living Translation**). In chapter **5** and verse **1** we are exhorted to, “*Imitate God, therefore, in everything you do, because you are his dear children*” (**New Living Translation**). Verse **2** urges us to “*Live a life filled with love, following the example of Christ.*” In verse **8** we are told, “*For once you were full of darkness, but now you have light from the Lord. So live as people of light!*” In verses **15-18**, we are instructed to live by the Spirit:

15 So be careful how you live. Don't live like fools, but like those who are wise.

16 Make the most of every opportunity in these evil days.

17 Don't act thoughtlessly, but understand what the Lord wants you to do.

18 Don't be drunk with wine, because that will ruin your life. Instead, be filled with the Holy Spirit.
(**New Living Translation**)

Both the doctrinal instructions and the practical exhortations, are all intimately connected with our waging of spiritual warfare.

Paul says to the believers in Ephesus, “*Be strong in the Lord.*” The words “*be strong*” are the translation of the Greek word **endunamoó**: (**en-doo-nam-o'-o**) which means, “to make strong, endue with strength, strengthen.” The idea is to cause one to be able to function, or do

something. The word can refer to physical strengthening, but it is more often used with the figurative sense referring to spiritual or moral strengthening. For example, in **Romans 4:20** Paul writes the following concerning the patriarch Abraham: “*He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God*” (**King James Version**). The words, “*was strong*” are a translation of the word **endunamoó**. Here Paul is arguing that the promise of God to Abraham that he and Sarah would produce a son, was one that, humanly speaking, was impossible to fulfill. But Abraham, instead of wavering in unbelief, was endued with strength from God to believe that what God had promised He was able to perform.

The command to “*Be strong*” is in the **present imperative** in the Greek. Paul like a general overseeing his troops prior to a battle, issues a command that believing soldiers are to obey continually, in light of the fact that the conflict they are engaged is a long, drawn out one.

Believers are to allow the Lord to strengthen them and they are also to strengthen themselves in the Lord. The source of the strengthening in both cases is the same. The source is of course, the indwelling Holy Spirit. In **Ephesians 3:16** Paul prayed for the believers that God would grant them to be “*strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man.*” It is the Holy Spirit Who strengthens us with power in our inner being as we learn to surrender our will to His. The more the believer surrenders to the Spirit’s influence, is the more he or she will be strengthened, and the more he or she will be enabled to strengthen himself or herself in the Lord.

The command to, “*Be strong,*” by itself, could have the effect of encouraging believers to rely on their own self-effort at being strong, but the qualifying phrase, “*in the Lord,*” helps us to understand that we have to depend on the Lord for the supply of that strength. The phrase “*in the Lord,*” defines the strengthening as Christian strengthening. It is strengthening that can only be realized because of the believer’s union with Christ.

Brothers and sisters, we cannot empower ourselves for this spiritual struggle. We must be willing to surrender to the Holy Spirit and allow ourselves to be strengthened. Spiritual battles are not natural. They require supernatural spiritual strength. This dynamic process is synonymous with being continually filled with, or controlled by, the Holy Spirit (**Ephesians 5:18**) and continually walking by the Spirit (**Galatians 5:16**). The result of being filled with, or controlled by, the Spirit, or walking by the Spirit, is an abundant supply of supernatural strength in order to live a supernatural life.

In **Philippians 4:11-13**, the Apostle Paul explains how he had come to learn about his source of spiritual strength. He writes,

11 Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content.

12 I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: every where and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need.

*13 I can do all things **through Christ which strengtheneth me.***

In verse **13** Paul identifies Christ as his source of strength. The word “*strengtheneth*” is a translation of the Greek word **endunamoó**, the same word that is translated “*be strong*” in **Ephesians 6:10**.

In commenting on this verse, **J Vernon McGee** made the following insightful comments regarding **Philippians 4:13**: “When Paul says all things, does he literally mean all things? Does it mean you can go outside and jump over your house? Of course not. Paul says, ‘I can do all things in Christ’—that is, **in the context of the will of Christ for your life**. Whatever Christ has for you to do, He will supply the power. Whatever gift He gives you, He will give the power to exercise that gift. A gift is a manifestation of the Spirit of God in the life of the believer. As long as you function in Christ, you will have power....Now Paul is not saying that we can do all things. I can’t jump like a

grasshopper can jump. When I was in school I was the high jumper, but I can't jump anymore. You see, I can't do all things, but I can do all things which God has for me to do from the time He saved me to the time He will take me out of this world."

Brothers and sisters, we are commanded to live victoriously over sin, but we have no ability in and of ourselves to fulfill this command. We can only live victoriously, because whatever our Lord has commanded us to do, He gives us the strength to do it. We can do "*all things*" because Christ is continually supplying the strength that is needed to do "*all things*."

As one commentator explains, "We are enjoined to defeat Satan in our warfare with the evil one. We can do all things through Christ, for **He is the victor**. We are commanded to be lights to the world, to be witnesses for Jesus Christ. We can do all things through Christ, because **He is the light**. We are commanded to love the brethren. We can do all things through Christ, because **He is love**. All that Jesus Christ is...can be manifested through us, because it is God who works in us both to will and to do of His good pleasure."

Paul says, "*Be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might.*" The Greek word translated "*power*" is **kratos: (krat'-os)**, which refers to manifested power, or power that is put forth in action. It is strength in operation. The idea is of power that overcomes resistance or whatever stands in its way.

The word "*might*" is a translation of the Greek word **ischus: (is-khoos')**, which refers to inherent power or force. It is that strength which one has in possession or ability. The word emphasizes the ability to accomplish something, not necessarily the accomplishment of the thing. The idea is of the active strength of the might that is inherent in God. We may think of **ischus** as God's latent power. It is His ability to function effectively.

While **kratos** (power) refers to strength in operation, **ischus** (might) refers to inherent strength. The two words describe the power that is available to believers as a spiritual power that is energetic, inherent in God, and able to overcome resistance.

In other words, God has vast reservoirs of might that can become actively operational as power in our daily lives. But His vast reservoirs of might will **not** become actively operational as power if we are passive. His might becomes actively operational as power in our daily lives as we step out in faith, relying on Him to work mightily in us.

John MacArthur says that, "The Christian life is a question of availability and appropriation. Know three things: First, it's a war; second, the power to win is available; and third, you have to appropriate that power. You can choose to be impotent and fruitless, even though residing in you is the power to do beyond what you can even ask or think (**Ephesians 3:20**). You could be lethargic, indifferent, and cold, drifting in and out of church, and still be in heaven for all eternity by the immeasurable grace of God. But if you choose to live that way, you will forfeit the blessing God has for you in this life. And you will fail to glorify God to the extent that you should. You can turn your back on all the available power, blunt the energy of the Spirit of God, and say no to the incomprehensible work that God wants to do through you if you so choose."

Brothers and sisters, Paul is informing the believers in Ephesus that they all have within them sufficient resources of spiritual strength and power to overcome "the world," "the flesh," and the devil. There are however, two conditions that each believer must meet in order to benefit fully from these resources. Firstly, the believer must always be conscious of the fact that his or her strength is in the Lord, and in Him only. Secondly, he or she must utilize every piece of the armour of God. God would not have commanded believers to "*stand*" if He had not provided them with all the resources that they need to stand and be victorious. By

faith in God's Word, every believer can daily walk in the victory of the Cross as more than conquerors.