

Pastor Steven J. Cole  
Flagstaff Christian Fellowship  
123 S. Beaver Street  
Flagstaff, Arizona 86001  
[www.fcfonline.org](http://www.fcfonline.org)

## STANDING STRONG, STANDING FIRM

Ephesians 6:10-11

By

Steven J. Cole

October 5, 2008

© Steven J. Cole, 2008

For access to previous sermons or to subscribe to weekly sermons via email go to: [www.fcfonline.org/sermons](http://www.fcfonline.org/sermons)

Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture  
Quotations are from the New American  
Standard Bible, Updated Edition  
© The Lockman Foundation

October 5, 2008  
Ephesians Lesson 55

Standing Strong, Standing Firm  
Ephesians 6:10-11

General Dwight Eisenhower once said (source unknown), "War is a terrible thing. But if you're going to get into it, you've got to get into it all the way."

I sense that many Christians are defeated in their Christian lives because they are not *seriously* engaged in the warfare to which we are called. J. C. Ryle saw this in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. He wrote ("Soldiers and Trumpeters," *Home Truths* [Triangle Press], 1:90), "The saddest symptom about many so-called Christians is the utter absence of anything like conflict and fight in their Christianity." He went on to say that they go through the motions of attending religious services each week. Then he added (*ibid.*), "But of the great spiritual warfare,--its watchings and strugglings, its agonies and anxieties, its battles and contests,--of all this they appear to know nothing at all."

Perhaps they came to Christ under a false "sales pitch." They were told, "Jesus will solve your problems. He will give you peace and joy. He will give you a happy family life. Come to Jesus and enjoy all of these blessings and more. He promises you abundant life." And so they signed up for what they thought would be a wonderful life of peace and happiness.

All of those claims are true, but they're only half of the picture. Jesus promised to give us abundant life (John 10:10), but He also said that He was sending us out as sheep in the midst of wolves (Matt. 10:16). That picture might not fit your idea of an abundant life! Jesus promised peace, but in the same breath He said that in this world we would have tribulation (John 16:33). He assured us of His love, but He went on to say that the world would hate and persecute us (John 15:12-13, 18-21). In Ephesians, Paul has just shown how the Spirit-filled home is a glorious picture of the loving relationship between Christ and the church (5:18-33). But he continues by telling us that the Christian life is nothing less than warfare against the hideous enemy that Luther called "the prince of darkness grim."

It is vital for your survival as a Christian that you realize that when you became a Christian, you were drafted into God's army. Daily you are engaged in a battle with an unseen spiritual enemy that seeks to destroy you. Otherwise, when trials hit, you will think that something is wrong. You will wonder why God has allowed this. You won't understand the reality of your situation.

I have seen even pastors that think that because they are serving the Lord, He should bless them by keeping them from conflict and personal attacks. So when they are criticized or slandered or when problems hit their families or their churches, they run from the battle. They don't understand that when God blesses a work, the enemy will increase the attacks against it. When a man's ministry is effective, the enemy will work overtime to bring him down. It may be through internal problems in the church or through key leaders who turn against him or through discouragement or through temptation to moral failure. When Paul was in Ephesus, he wrote (1 Cor. 16:9), "for a wide door for effective service has opened to me, and there are many adversaries." He did not say, "*but* there are many adversaries," but rather, "*and* there are many adversaries." Adversaries go along with open doors for effective ministry!

So the apostle Paul closes his letter to the Ephesians with this great section on the Christian's warfare. Martyn Lloyd-Jones wrote two volumes of sermons on these verses. The Puritan, William Gurnall, wrote almost 1,200 pages of double-column, small print on them (*The Christian in Complete Armor*)! I promise to be briefer than either of those great expositors! The text falls into three sections: (1) The explanation for the fight (6:10-13); (2) The equipment for the fight (6:14-17); (3) the effecting of the fight (6:18-20). Today we will only look at the first half of the first section, where Paul makes the point:

You must be strong in the Lord and put on His full armor,  
so that you may stand firm against the enemy.

"Finally" means, "for the rest," and shows that this section is built on what precedes. Paul is saying, "Based upon your glorious position in Christ (chapters 1-3) and in light of the worthy walk to which you are called (chapters 4-5, plus 6:1-9), I want to conclude

by explaining to you the serious conflict in which your faith necessarily engages you." Because you are fighting in the Lord's army...

1. You must be strong in the Lord.

Paul piles up words for strength in verse 10, using three of the four words that he employed in 1:19-20. There he mentioned "the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe. These are in accordance with the working of the strength of His might which He brought about in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places." Also, in 3:16 Paul prayed that God would grant you ... "to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man." As in that verse, the verb in 6:10 is probably passive, meaning, "be strengthened in the Lord" (Peter O'Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians* [Eerdmans/Apollos], pp. 460-461). In other words, we are not strong in ourselves. Our strength comes from the Lord.

Yet, at the same time, I think that there is an active (Greek, middle voice) sense to the verb, in that we must take the initiative to be strong in the Lord. This is illustrated in the life of David. While he was on the run from Saul, David had wrongly allied himself with the Philistine king and was about to go into battle against Saul and the forces of Israel when God intervened. David and his men were sent home from the battle. But they arrived to find their city burned with fire and their wives, children, and possessions taken captive by the Amalekites. At that point, David's men were so embittered that they were talking about stoning him.

Then, in the middle of the verse, there is a great hinge that turned things in a new direction (1 Sam. 30:6b): "But David strengthened himself in the Lord his God." What a dramatic turnaround! David was almost down for the count. God's promise to make him king seemed null and void. "But David strengthened himself in the Lord his God." The Lord graciously directed David to pursue the raiders and recover all of their families and goods.

That same strength is available to every Christian. You may be at your lowest point. You may be discouraged. It may seem that God's promises are not true. But no matter how much may seem to be against you, you can "be strong in the Lord and in the

strength of His might." You can strengthen yourself in the Lord your God. How?

A. To be strong in the Lord, you must be in the Lord.

I won't belabor the point, but I need to say that Paul's command to be strong in the Lord rests on his first two chapters, where he makes it clear what it means to be *in the Lord*. To sum up his treatment, he wrote (2:8-9), "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast." To be *in the Lord* means that He has saved you from God's judgment by His grace alone through faith in Christ alone. Salvation is not based on anything that you have done or deserved. As we have seen, one of Paul's frequent expressions in Ephesians is the phrase, "in Christ," or "in Him" (1:3, 4, 6, 7, 9, 10, 12, 13). You cannot begin to understand what it means to *be strong in the Lord* unless you truly are *in the Lord* through saving faith in Jesus Christ.

B. To be strong in the Lord, you must know your own weakness.

This is a continual, lifelong process that begins at salvation. We cannot trust completely in Christ to save us until we come to some awareness that we are helplessly, hopelessly lost and unable to save ourselves by our own good works. As Spurgeon put it, we must see that we are convicted and condemned, with the rope around our neck, before we will weep for joy when Christ pardons us (*C. H. Spurgeon Autobiography* [Banner of Truth], 1:54).

But then we must go on to grow to know practically our own weakness so that we take refuge in the Lord's strength. Jesus taught this by using the analogy of the branches abiding in the vine, and said (John 15:5b), "for apart from Me you can do nothing." Peter needed to learn this lesson. He boasted that although everyone else would desert Christ, he would remain true. But the Lord allowed Peter to go through his terrible denials so that he might not trust in himself, but in Christ alone. The apostle Paul had an amazing experience of being caught up into heaven itself. Because of this, to keep Paul from exalting himself, the Lord sent a messenger of Satan to torment him. The lesson that Paul learned was (2 Cor. 12:10b), "for when I am weak, then I am strong."

Our pride blinds us to our true condition. It makes us think that we have some measure of strength in ourselves. Pride makes us think that the longer we are Christians, the stronger we become. But we never become stronger in ourselves. In reality, the strong Christian is one who has come to see more and more of his own weakness and propensity towards sin. That awareness drives him to depend all the more on the Lord's strength. To be strong in the Lord, you must know your own weakness.

C. To be strong in the Lord, you must know the Lord's strength.

Satan is a powerful foe, but he is only a created being, whereas God is the eternal, almighty Creator of the universe. If the Lord so willed, He could annihilate Satan in an instant. He has already defeated him at the cross and resurrection of Jesus (Col. 2:15). In His perfect timing and plan, He will throw Satan into the Lake of Fire, where he will be tormented forever and ever (Rev. 20:10).

From start to finish, the Bible proclaims the mighty power of God. He spoke the heavens and earth into existence out of nothing. He delivered His people from Pharaoh's clutches through the miraculous plagues and the parting of the Red Sea. He sustained them in one of the world's harshest environments through the pillar of cloud by day and fire by night, where He provided daily manna and water from the rock. When fierce enemies threatened to annihilate His chosen people, time and again the Lord provided deliverance. In one of the most dramatic instances, Sennacherib's army had Jerusalem surrounded. It looked like Israel was doomed. But in response to Hezekiah's prayer, the Lord sent His angel who killed 185,000 enemy troops in one night (2 Kings 19:35).

Often throughout Scripture, the Lord reminds His people of the obvious, that nothing is too difficult for Him (Gen. 18:14; Jer. 32:17, 27; Zech. 8:6; Matt. 19:26; Luke 1:37; Rom. 4:21). Paul has already spoken of God's great power towards us, as seen in His raising Jesus from the dead and enthroning Him at His right hand (Eph. 1:19-20). Paul has prayed that we would know the power of the Holy Spirit in the inner man, so that Christ might dwell in our hearts through faith (Eph. 3:17). Proverbs 18:10 declares, "The name of the Lord is a strong tower; the righteous runs into it and is safe." To be strong in the Lord, you must know His strength in a

practical way, because you have repeatedly taken refuge in Him and seen His great deliverance in your life.

So to be strong in the Lord, you must be in the Lord through faith in Jesus Christ. You must know your own weakness and you must know His mighty strength. Then Paul adds,

2. You must put on God's full armor so that you may stand firm against the enemy.

A. Standing firm against the enemy is the result of putting on God's full armor.

"Stand" is a key word in this section. He repeats it in verses 11, 13, and 14. Also, the word "resist" (6:13) comes from a Greek compound word from the root, "to stand," meaning literally to stand against. It's a military term for holding on to a position that is under attack. It implies the courage to hold your ground because of your allegiance to King Jesus, even when others may be fleeing from the battle because the enemy seems so strong.

An incident about one of David's mighty men, Shammah the son of Agee, illustrates standing firm in the battle (2 Sam. 23:11-12): "And the Philistines were gathered into a troop where there was a plot of ground full of lentils, and the people fled from the Philistines. But he took his stand in the midst of the plot, defended it and struck the Philistines; and the Lord brought about a great victory." Because of his allegiance to David, Shammah stood firm and he fought, but the Lord brought the victory.

We rely on God's strength and use His armor, but we must take the initiative to put on the armor and stand firm in the battle because we love Jesus. It's not a matter of "letting go and letting God," where you are passive and God does it all. Nor is it a matter of gritting your teeth and doing it yourself, with occasional assistance from God. Rather, it is a blending of His power and our striving. As Paul puts it (Col. 1:29), "For this purpose also I labor, striving according to His power, which mightily works within me."

Many have suggested that Paul got the idea of putting on the full armor of God from the Roman soldier that was chained to him as he dictated this letter. That may be, but it also may be that he was meditating on Isaiah 11:5, which says of the Lord, "Righteousness will be the belt about His loins, and faithfulness the belt about

His waist." Or, Isaiah 59:17, "He put on righteousness like a breastplate, and a helmet of salvation on His head."

The armor is just a graphic way of saying what Paul says in Romans 13:14, "But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts." In other words, Christ Himself is our armor. He is the belt of truth (John 14:6). He is our breastplate of righteousness (2 Cor. 5:21). He is the gospel of peace that we stand on (Eph. 2:13-14, 17). He is the shield of our faith (Heb. 12:2). He is our helmet of salvation (Titus 3:6). He is our sword, the word of God (John 1:1). He is our full armor, capable of protecting us from every onslaught of the devil.

Putting on God's armor means that in every trial and temptation by faith you appropriate Christ's strength in place of your weakness. By faith you cry out to Him for deliverance and strength to persevere. By faith you rely on His promises, even as Jesus defeated Satan by quoting Scripture (Luke 4:1-13).

B. Stand firm against the enemy by growing in biblical understanding.

There are three things here:

(1) Understand God's full provision.

I've already touched on this, but I remind you that Paul wrote the first three chapters of this letter to set forth the necessary doctrinal foundation of all that God has provided for us in Christ. Strong Christians are doctrinally grounded in the truth of Scripture. Unless you know the Word well, as Jesus did when He defeated Satan, you will not stand firm in the evil day.

(2) Understand Satan's schemes.

Martyn Lloyd-Jones preached 26 messages on this theme (*The Christian Warfare* [Baker]). *Schemes* (in Greek) occurs only here and in Ephesians 4:14. But using a synonym, Paul states (2 Cor. 2:11), "so that no advantage would be taken of us by Satan, for we are not ignorant of his schemes." If you're ignorant of his schemes, the devil will be able to take advantage of you. His schemes invariably use cunning and deception. He often works through secular culture, to carry us downstream with the prevailing ideas of the day. In our day, many Christians are deceived by the ideas of postmodern-

ism, which asserts that there are no absolute truths in the spiritual or moral realms (except for the absolute that there are no absolutes!). Satan launches repeated attacks on the credibility of Scripture, whether through evolution or by attacking the person of Christ. Satan lures us into sin by portraying it as pleasurable and by hiding its consequences. He uses discouragement, pride, selfishness, the love of money, lust, and many other traps to lure us away from the Lord. To stand firm against the enemy, we must understand his schemes.

- (3) Understand where to stand firm and where to be tolerant of differences.

If Satan doesn't get us through his scheme of going along with our tolerant culture, he pushes us off the other end by making us intolerant of anyone who does not agree with us on every point of doctrine. I know of a man who claims to have "biblical discernment," but his entire "ministry" consists of critiquing godly men over minor differences in doctrine or practice. I once received a newsletter from another man (I should have saved it, but threw it away in disgust) who ranted on and on about how a seminary professor believed that a particular Hebrew verb came from a certain word root. But this man was setting the record straight that the professor was wrong! Really, who cares?

Standing firm against the schemes of the devil means that we stand firm on the core doctrines of the faith. We cannot budge on the Trinity, the person and work of Christ, biblical salvation, or the inspiration and authority of Scripture. But the Scripture also tells us to show tolerance for one another in love (Eph. 4:2). That verse implies that we will not always agree with one another on every point of doctrine or on every method of how to go about the Lord's work. To stand firm, grow in understanding of where to do battle and where to be tolerant of differences.

Thus, standing firm against the enemy is the result of putting on God's full armor. We stand firm against the enemy by growing in biblical understanding. Finally,

- C. Stand firm against the enemy with biblical practice.

In other words, put into practice what you believe. Test your armor by gaining some victories in real life situations. Resist temp-

tation. Avoid Satan's traps. Get out of your comfort zone and do something where you have to trust God to get you through. As Hebrews 5:14 states, "But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil." Or, as James 1:22 puts it, "Prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers, who delude themselves."

### Conclusion

I read about a missionary years ago in the jungles of New Guinea who wrote the following letter to his friends back home:

Man, it is great to be in the thick of the fight, to draw the old devil's heaviest guns, to have him at you with depression and discouragement, slander, disease. He doesn't waste time on a lukewarm bunch. He hits good and hard when a fellow is hitting him. You can always measure the weight of your blow by the one you get back. When you're on your back with fever and at your last ounce of strength, when some of your converts backslide, when you learn that your most promising inquirers are only fooling, when your mail gets held up, and some don't bother to answer your letters, is that the time to put on mourning? No sir. That's the time to pull out the stops and shout Hallelujah! The old fellow's getting it in the neck and hitting back. Heaven is leaning over the battlements and watching. "Will he stick with it?" As they see who is with us, as they see the unlimited reserves, the boundless resources, as they see the impossibility of failure, how disgusted and sad they must be when we run away. Glory to God! We're not going to run away. We're going to stand!

How about you? To stand firm against the enemy, you must be strong in the Lord and put on His full armor.

## Application Questions

1. How can a Christian become more attune to the reality of the spiritual conflict?
2. How can we grow wise in understanding Satan's schemes?
3. How can a Christian find the balance between using appropriate methods versus trusting in God alone?
4. Where is the balance between being tolerant of believers that differ from us and yet not compromising on key truths?

Copyright, Steven J. Cole, 2008, All Rights Reserved.