

The Call *to* Stand



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: *Eph. 6:10–20; Deut. 20:2–4; Rom. 13:11–14; 1 Thess. 5:6–8; 1 Cor. 15:23, 24.*

Memory Text: “Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil” (*Ephesians 6:10, 11, ESV*).

Bleary-eyed, the servant stumbles out of his lodgings and sees an alarming sight—a large, well-equipped and hostile army with “troops, horses, and chariots everywhere.” Speaking to the prophet Elisha, he stammers out the news, along with his harried question, “‘Oh, sir, what will we do now?’”

Elisha responds, “‘Don’t be afraid! . . . For there are more on our side than on theirs!’” a response that fails to register in the face of his servant. Elisha, pulling him close, prays for him: “‘O Lord, open his eyes and let him see!’” The prophet’s prayer is answered immediately. The servant steps to the ramparts again, but this time the veil between the seen and the unseen lifts. He now sees not one army, but two. “The Lord opened the young man’s eyes, and when he looked up, he saw that the hillside around Elisha was filled with horses and chariots of fire” (*2 Kings 6:15–17, NLT*).

In composing *Ephesians 6:10–20*, Paul prays for an enhanced vision for believers so that they will be able to see the full reality of the great controversy and to draw hope from what it reveals to them.

* Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, September 16.

Battle Speech

Study Paul's ringing conclusion to his letter, Ephesians 6:10–20. What does Paul's battle cry mean to us today, as combatants in the great controversy?

Paul concludes Ephesians with a call to battle, urging believers to take their stand in the church's war against evil (*Eph. 6:10–20*). He begins with an overarching exhortation to “be strong in the Lord” (*Eph. 6:10*), which he repeats as a call to “put on the whole armor of God” (*Eph. 6:11*). He supports this call by specifying a purpose (to be able to stand against the devil's schemes, *Eph. 6:11*), and by offering a rationale: the battle is against powerful, spiritual forces of evil (*Eph. 6:12*). In a detailed way, Paul then reissues the call to arms. Believers are to “take up the whole armor of God” in order to stand firm in battle (*Eph. 6:13, ESV*), donning belt, breastplate, shoes, shield, helmet, and sword (*Eph. 6:14–17*). Paul invites believers, now fully armed and ready to enter the fray, to do what soldiers on the ancient battlefield might do—and that is, pray (*Eph. 6:18–20*).

By echoing battle exhortations or eve-of-battle speeches in the Old Testament, Paul speaks of the church's mission in terms of military conflict and weapons. Paul signals this in his first, overarching command: “Be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might” (*Eph. 6:10, NKJV*).

Battle exhortations in the Old Testament (*see, for instance, Deut. 20:2–4; Judges 7:15–18; 2 Chron. 20:13–20; 2 Chron. 32:6–8; Neh. 4:14, 19, 20*) underline the idea that Israel's success in battle does not depend on the superiority of its own weapons or an army that outnumbered its foes. Rather, victory results from depending on the presence and power of God. The key to the Israelites' success was not confidence in themselves but firm trust in God's power and His provision for their success. Paul makes bold use of these themes to exhort believers to be: (1) active in pursuing the church's mission; (2) attentive to the unseen dimensions that impact their lives and witness; (3) cognizant of the divine provision for their success; and (4) always alert to the importance of unity and collaboration among believers.

What should Paul's warning that we fight not against flesh and blood but against supernatural enemies teach us about where our only hope of victory is?

Finding Strength in Christ

Paul ends his letter with a powerful call to battle that draws together themes and ideas important to the letter as a whole. He begins by announcing the overarching theme of the conclusion, offered in the tone of a commander's battle cry: "Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might" (*Eph. 6:10, ESV*). The rest of the passage (*Ephesians 6:11–20*) illustrates and unpacks this large theme.

Read again Ephesians 6:10–20. How do you see the reality of the great controversy, which involves literal supernatural powers, as central to Paul's point? Why is keeping this crucial truth before us so important in our own daily walk with God?

Paul identifies Christ as the Source of believers' strength with his phrase "in the Lord and in the power of His might" (*Eph. 6:10, NKJV*) since "Lord" refers to Christ, as is consistently the case in Ephesians (*Eph. 2:21; Eph. 4:1, 17; Eph. 5:8; Eph. 6:1, 21*). "The Church's strength lies in the almightiness of her risen Lord, the Captain of her warfare."—G. G. Findlay, *The Epistle to the Ephesians* (New York: Ray Long & Richard R. Smith, 1931), p. 398.

Paul uses repetition in Ephesians 6:10, employing the synonyms *power* and *might* to underline his point: the power to be exhibited by the church is not inherent in believers but is derived. It comes from the Lord, from Christ. Paul summarizes here an important theme of the letter, God's power shared with believers (*Eph. 1:19–22; Eph. 2:4–6; Eph. 3:16, 17*). Strength for every current and future conflict is to be found in believers' solidarity with the resurrected and exalted Christ.

While the initial command announces Christ as active in providing strength to believers (*Eph. 6:10*), all three members of the Godhead are engaged in strengthening them for spiritual combat against evil. God (the Father) makes His own weapons available as the "armor of God" (*Eph. 6:11, 13; compare Isa. 59:17*). Earlier, Paul has identified the Spirit as active in strengthening believers. Paul prayed that God may grant you "to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being" (*Eph. 3:16, ESV*). Here, it is the Spirit who issues the sword, "the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God" (*Eph. 6:17*). Also, believers are to pray "at all times in the Spirit" (*Eph. 6:18, ESV*). Paul wishes his hearers to understand that the triune God is fully engaged in equipping them to battle against these evil powers.

The Great Controversy in Paul's Letters

Read Romans 13:11–14, 1 Thessalonians 5:6–8, and 2 Corinthians 10:3–6. How do these verses compare with Ephesians 6:10–20? Why do you think Paul uses this kind of imagery?

In his letters, Paul frequently employs military language and imagery, inviting believers to mimic exemplary, soldierly behavior. While Ephesians 6:10–20 represents his longest and most concentrated use, military language exhibits one of his major ways of understanding the gospel story. Having conquered the “rulers and authorities” at the cross (*Col. 2:15, ESV*), the exalted Christ now works out the results of that victory from His position as exalted Lord over the powers (*Phil. 2:9–11*). Recruiting His followers as combatants in the cosmic war, Christ leads the armies of light toward a grand day of victory (*1 Cor. 15:54–58, 2 Thess. 2:8, Rom. 16:20*). Gathering up Paul’s uses of military symbolism, we see that he understands the conflict between good and evil to be “a long-running cosmic war: battles ebb and flow between two armies which face each other down through the ages until one wins the final confrontation.”—Peter W. Macky, *St. Paul’s Cosmic War Myth: A Military Version of the Gospel* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc., 1998), p. 1.

Paul’s frequent theme of cosmic war is also part of the fabric of Ephesians. In his call to arms (*Eph. 6:10–20*), Paul draws together elements of the cosmic conflict, that he has already used: God’s empowering of believers with immense “power” (*Eph. 1:18–20; Eph. 3:16, 20*); Christ’s victory and exaltation over the powers (*Eph. 1:20–23*); believers as a resurrected army of the once-dead but now empowered by their identity with the exalted Christ and able to fight against their former, dark master (*Eph. 2:1–10*); the church’s role in revealing to the powers their coming doom (*Eph. 3:10*); the use of Psalm 68:18 to portray Christ as the conquering, divine Warrior (*Eph. 4:7–11*); and the call for believers to “put on” gospel clothing (*see Eph. 4:20–24*). When called to put on God’s “full armor,” we are well prepared to understand the central role of cosmic conflict, but, also, we are to remain firm in the assurance that we have of participating in Christ’s ultimate victory.

What are some of the ways that you personally have experienced the reality not only of this cosmic conflict but of the victory we can claim for ourselves in Jesus? Why is understanding His victory for us so foundational to our hope and experience?

Standing on the Ancient Battlefield

Read through Ephesians 6:10–20, noting each time Paul uses some form of the verb *stand*. Why is this idea so important to him?

We must understand Paul’s military metaphor in the context of the ancient battlefield. What did it mean to “stand” (*Eph. 6:11, 13, 14*)? Does the verb suggest a defensive-only posture? Battle speeches included in the writings of Thucydides, one of the great classical authors of battle literature, highlight three successive actions that must occur if a side is to be victorious: (1) soldiers must “close with the enemy,” which means they must march to meet their foes; then, (2) they must attack and “stand fast,” or “stand our ground,” fighting hand-to-hand with their foes; and finally, (3) they must “beat back the enemy” (see *Thucydides, The Peloponnesian War* [New York: E. P. Dutton, 1910], 4.10.1–5).

The key moment of an ancient battle occurred with the second of these three actions, when the two opposing phalanxes came crashing together in “a terrible cacophony of smashed bronze, wood, and flesh,” which ancient author Xenophon refers to as that “‘awful crash.’” —Victor Davis Hanson, *The Western Way of War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), pp. 152, 153. Standing firm, holding one’s ground at this strategic moment, was the great challenge of ancient battle. In the close combat that would ensue, each side would seek momentum for “the push.”

Paul’s call to arms reflects combat in which soldiers were “bunched together, giving and receiving hundreds of blows at close range.” —Victor Davis Hanson, *The Western Way of War*, p. 152. This is confirmed by Paul’s depiction of the church’s battle against its foes as a wrestling match (*Eph. 6:12*; see Thursday’s study) and in his use of an intensive form of the verb “to stand” in verse 13: “that you may be able to *withstand* in the evil day” (*NKJV, ESV; emphasis added*).

This is no relaxed stance! To “stand,” then, is to be vigorously engaged in battle, employing every weapon in close-order combat, a point obvious from the military imagery in Paul’s earlier exhortation to be found “standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel” (*Phil. 1:27, ESV*).

Read Hebrews 12:4. How does this verse help encapsulate what it means to stand in the Lord? What is the corporate nature of this standing, as well?

Wrestling Against Evil Powers

What do you judge to be Paul’s purpose in listing a variety of titles for the evil spiritual powers depicted in Ephesians 1:21, Ephesians 3:10, and Ephesians 6:10–20?

Paul describes “our struggle” (*Eph. 6:12, NRSV*), using a Greek word for the competition between wrestlers (*palé*). Since wrestling was regarded as excellent preparation for battle, this is an appropriate description of the weapon-against-weapon and hand-to-hand combat that takes place when armies clash. Paul is emphasizing the reality of believers’ close struggle against the evil powers.

Here are the titles he gives them:

Ephesians 1:21	Ephesians 3:10	Ephesians 6:12
every ruler (or every rule)	the rulers	the rulers
(every) authority	the authorities	the authorities
(every) power		the cosmic powers over this present darkness
(every) dominion		the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places
every name named		

In his broad descriptions (“every name named,” *Eph. 1:21, LEB*; “the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places,” *Eph. 6:12, ESV*), Paul does affirm that all evil and supernatural powers are subjugated to Christ (*Eph. 1:21*). However, in any battle, it is never a good strategy to underestimate the forces on the opposing side. Paul warns that we do not just confront human enemies, but “spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places” (*Eph. 6:12, NKJV*), led by a wily general, the devil (*Eph. 6:11*). However, while we must be on the alert against our powerful foes, we need not be daunted by them. God is present with us in the battle (*Eph. 6:10*) and has supplied us with the finest of weaponry, His own armor, the “armor of God” (*Eph. 6:11; compare Isa. 59:15–17*). He has placed at our disposal His truth, righteousness, peace, faith, and salvation, and the Holy Spirit (*Eph. 6:13–17*). With God going before us and our being equipped from head to toe in the armor He has supplied, we cannot fail (*Rom. 16:20; 1 Cor. 15:23, 24; 2 Thess. 2:8*).

What should the reality of these supernatural evil powers—against whom we, ourselves, are utterly helpless—teach us regarding why we must grasp hold of the Lord Jesus, who is not only greater than these powers but has already defeated them?

Further Thought: “Our work is an aggressive one, and as faithful soldiers of Jesus, we must bear the blood-stained banner into the very strongholds of the enemy. ‘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.’ If we will consent to lay down our arms, to lower the blood-stained banner, to become the captives and servants of Satan, we may be released from the conflict and the suffering. But this peace will be gained only at the loss of Christ and heaven. We cannot accept peace on such conditions. Let it be war, war, to the end of earth’s history, rather than peace through apostasy and sin.”—Ellen G. White, *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, May 8, 1888.

How does Ephesians 6:10–20 relate to the book of Revelation? The passage exhibits the same basic view of last-day events, or eschatology, as the battle motif in the book of Revelation (see *Revelation 12*, *Rev. 16:12–16*, *Rev. 19:17–21*, *Rev. 20:7–10*). In both, the people of God are under attack by the enemy who is “in heavenly places” and “is active and powerful in the present *aeon*” (or age). In both, the people of God are encouraged by “the picture of the future *aeon*.” Further, “both scenarios explicitly point to the final battle when the enemy will be conquered completely after which the new *aeon* will be established forever,” a new age in which “the final glorious state of the people of God” and “the eternal doom of the enemy” will be evident (see Yordan Kalev Zhekov, *Eschatology of Ephesians* [Osijek, Croatia: Evangelical Theological Seminary, 2005], pp. 217, 233–235).

Discussion Questions:

- 1 When have you most clearly confronted the powers of darkness? What have you found to be the most helpful strategies at those times?
- 2 Informed by Ephesians 6:10–20, how would you minister to someone who seems especially oppressed by “the spiritual forces of evil” (*Eph. 6:12, ESV*)?
- 3 How do we best discern and reject “the schemes of the devil” (*Eph. 6:11, ESV*)? For example, how often do you feel ready to give up your faith because you feel that you are too sinful, too corrupt, to be saved? Who is putting that thought in your head—Christ or the forces of darkness? Especially at times like that, why must you claim many of the wonderful promises we have been given in Jesus?

Finding the Right Words

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY

Alexei Arushanian, a 33-year-old Ukrainian national living in Poland, noticed a Bible and many other religious books in the apartment of the woman whose windows he was installing.

Alexei belonged to a group of church members who distributed Ellen White's *The Great Controversy*. It was a difficult task with few receptive people, and he prayed for an opportunity to share a book in this home.

Then the woman, who was about 40 and lived alone, offered him a cup of tea. Alexei sat and sipped the tea as the woman went about her activities. She sang as she worked. Alexei prayed about what to do. Finally, he spoke.

"I see that you love to read books," he said.

"Yes, I really love to read," she said. "You might have noticed that I don't have a TV. I read all the time."

The woman resumed working and singing.

Alexei had an idea. "Are you a Christian?" he asked.

"Yes, I sing in a choir at church," she said.

"I also go to church, at Foksal 8," Alexei said, giving the address of the only Seventh-day Adventist Church in Poland's capital, Warsaw. "I'm a Protestant. I'm a Seventh-day Adventist."

Seeing that the woman was listening intently, Alexei grew bolder.

"I'd like to give you a gift, a book about the history of Christianity," he said. "It's really interesting."

The woman agreed to look at the book.

As Alexei took his tools out to the car, he worried that she wouldn't open the door when he returned with the book. But she welcomed him back in. She was visibly impressed with the handsomely bound volume, and she immediately began to leaf through it. From the expression on her face, Alexei could see that she didn't agree with everything that she saw.

"It's up to you to accept or reject what's in the book," he said.

The woman accepted the book, saying, "Thank you very much."

The pair spoke a little longer, and Alexei was filled with joy when he left.



He was so happy that he had found a way to give her the book.

"I could have stayed silent," he says. "But she had the right to decide whether to accept the book or not. My duty only was to offer it to her."

This quarter's Thirteenth Sabbath Offering will go to the Trans-European Division, which includes Poland. Thank you for planning a generous offering.