

Ephesians 6:10-20
September 2, 2018 – 15th SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Be Strong in the Lord

✠ **Recognize the enemy.** (vv.10-12)

✠ **Gear up with God.** (vv.13-20)

In the Name of Jesus our Savior, the Captain of our souls, dear soldiers of the cross:

In cultures that honor valor and bravery warriors try to convince the enemy that their worst can't hurt them. In the early 1970's there was a mural depicting Native America warriors dancing around a pole. Each was attached by a rope tied to eagle claws sticking in his chest. The longer they danced, the tighter the ropes pulled. The bravest warrior was the last man standing. Pain could not stop him.

The brutality of hand-to-hand combat escapes most of us today. We're more likely to face cyber attacks where someone fakes a bank, demanding private information to restore your account. Or the IRS that never calls, for some reason gives you one last chance to respond – to a cyber thief. Some stay off computers all together, yet banks claim you're safer paying online than sending checks in your mailbox.

Worse than danger to bank accounts? Worse than enemies of our country within and without? Our loving Lord and Champion Savior faced death unflinchingly, took the worst from hell, suffered God's raging justice against our sins – and conquered all. On Easter morning Jesus was the first, last and only man to stand on His own after defeating death. Still He stands as our Savior who can communicate to warriors and gentle souls the world over about enemies unseen. He constantly sends His Holy Spirit in worship and Bible Class to train us for combat. His good and gracious will says, **Be Strong in the Lord.**

✠ **Recognize the enemy.** (vv.10-13)

This Fall attacks are aimed at teenagers. In secular colleges, expect God fearing professors to be few and far between. As one WELS professor in a public university said, his colleagues on the faculty would try to “destroy every prop of faith these kids have.” Yet the greater danger may lie in some religious schools where human opinion trumps God's Word. A tiny twist can make error sound right, then destroy your faith and shackle your soul in guilt. *“For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the world rulers of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.”*¹ Personal opinion looks like a shiny sword, but proves too brittle to defend your soul. You can end up believing the Bible is “just a matter of interpretation.”

Some among us remember the excitement of suiting up for a championship contest. You look around the locker room at teammates and hope everyone has his head in the game. You may even find comfort in the fact that your best teammate is nationally recognized. He's just trying to encourage all of you to step up and do your best before the game begins. A good coach will **Recognize the enemy** is not so much the other team, even if yours has most of the talent. Your head and heart have more to do with the outcome than game time and sports skills. All the money spent on new uniforms won't put the ball in the goal or sink a single basket. The best shoulder pads and helmets don't win ball games. And yet you need protection especially in the bloody battles for your soul. Before a prevent defense and successful offense you need to **Recognize the enemy**. And we need to remember in this contest for our souls none of us can stand alone. Keep your eyes on our Champion. *“Put on the full armor of God, so that you can stand against the schemes of the Devil.” “Be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power.”*

¹ EHV ~ *Evangelical Heritage Version* (<http://wartburgproject.org>) © 2017. NPH: 800-662-6022; also Amazon-Kindle.

✠ Gear up with God. (vv.14-20)

“For this reason, take up the full armor of God, so that you will be able to take a stand on the evil day and, after you have done everything, to stand.” The best weapons in the world do no good unless they’re in the hands of well trained soldiers. Realize every morning is another day of battle when God wants to guard your soul and Satan wants to steal it. The stakes are as high as heaven and as deep as hell. You can only ***stand*** when you have on ***the full armor of God***. Think you’re standing? Be careful.

“Stand, then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist....” In the days when most men wore robes this was very clear. Now a pastor can walk up the inside of his robe to demonstrate. ***“Gird up your loins”*** (KJV), i.e., *pull up your robes*, then run the way of God’s commandments, not tripped up by sin or self-righteousness. God’s ***truth***, His Holy Book of books makes you ready and reckless God’s way.

“Stand...with the breastplate of righteousness fastened in place....” God’s ***righteousness*** protects your heart, from which come all sorts of evils. (Mark 7:21f) We suffer in our hearts and stomachs when guilt tries to overwhelm us because of our sins. But God’s gift of credit from Christ’s perfect life covers all our dark thoughts, our doubts, our anxiety. (Psalm 32:3f,11) Joyous victory is in Christ alone.

“Stand...with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace tied to your feet like sandals....” Before we believe, heavy guilt drags our feet in pain, too busy with our toes to get up and spread the Gospel of God’s forgiveness in Christ. We want someone else’s children to go to foreign lands as missionaries or work at church. Only the Gospel of forgiveness firmly fastened to our feet makes us run with abandon this race for souls, including our own. Fear and anxiety run away, for ***“Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee.”*** (Isaiah 26:3 KJV)

“At all times hold up the shield of faith, with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming arrows of the Evil One....” A documentary on ancient warriors said the Celts first fought the Romans (Battle of Allia, 390 BC) with a tactical advantage. Early Romans had small shields vulnerable to the long lances of the Celts. A century later, Roman shields (θυρεοι ~ *doors*) reached almost to the ground, protecting the full body of each heavy armed warrior. So equipped they overpowered the Celts. (Vadimo, 283 BC) In ***full armor***, soldiers of the cross, ***“Be still and know that I am God.”*** (Psalm 46)

“Also take [receive] the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.” Satan schemes to make sin look harmless and enjoyable, then fires flaming arrows of guilt on our heads for falling again. Hope in Christ protects our head like a *helmet* from an accusing conscience. Focused on Him, we wield the double-edged ***sword*** of God’s Word, cutting and healing. (cf. Psalm 149:6ff)

Paul knew clear communication was vital. Unless he set forth God’s commands against sin and Christ’s full, free proclamation of forgiveness, all is lost. The Apostle Paul begged for prayer in these last verses; how much more your own pastors, professors and teachers today? ***“At every opportunity, pray in the Spirit with every kind of prayer and petition. Stay alert for the same reason, always persevering [pressing forward] in your intercession for all the saints. ¹⁹Pray for me also, that when I open my mouth a message will be given to me that boldly reveals the mystery of the gospel, ²⁰for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may speak about it boldly, as it is necessary for me to speak.”***

Victory awaits because Christ our Commander is always praying for us. He never sleeps because He loves us so much. The enemy cannot penetrate or outflank us with Christ on guard. ***Gear up with God*** in Bible Class, worship, personal and private devotions. Word and sacrament are Christ’s invincible weapons of choice. ***“In all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”*** (Romans 8:37–39 NIV84)

Be Strong in the Lord. Let your life be one continuous, glorious, triumphant “Amen!”