

## Ephesians 6:10 – 24

<sup>6:10</sup> Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might. <sup>11</sup> Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil. <sup>12</sup> For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places. <sup>13</sup> Therefore, take up the full armor of God, so that you will be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm. <sup>14</sup> Stand firm therefore, having girded your loins with truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness <sup>15</sup> and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; <sup>16</sup> in addition to all, taking up the shield of faith with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming arrows 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. <sup>18</sup> With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints, <sup>19</sup> and pray on my behalf, that utterance may be given to me in the opening of my mouth, to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel, <sup>20</sup> for which I am an ambassador in chains; that in proclaiming it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak. <sup>21</sup> But that you also may know about my circumstances, how I am doing, Tychicus, the beloved brother and faithful minister in the Lord, will make everything known to you. <sup>22</sup> I have sent him to you for this very purpose, so that you may know about us, and that he may comfort your hearts. <sup>23</sup> Peace be to the brethren, and love with faith, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>24</sup> Grace be with all those who love our Lord Jesus Christ with incorruptible love.

### Historical and Cultural Background

- *Spiritual Rulers and Powers*: Paul talks about ‘rulers and authorities’ in 1 Corinthians (2:6 – 8; 15:24 – 28), Colossians (1:16; 2:15), Galatians (4:3, 9), and Ephesians (1:21; 2:2; 3:10; 6:12), in each case in the context of discussing the unity of the global church.
  - <sup>1:20</sup> [God] raised him from the dead, and seated him at His right hand in the heavenly places <sup>21</sup> far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age, but also in the one to come.
  - <sup>2:2</sup> in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience.
  - <sup>3:10</sup> so that the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known through the church to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places.
- *The Metaphor of Armor*: Paul might be drawing upon the standard Roman soldier’s armor. But he certainly intends to make an allusion to Isaiah 59:17, as he does in 1 Thessalonians 5:8. The prophet Isaiah used the language of ‘armor’ to describe the purpose of Jesus’ incarnation into human nature as it relates to righting human injustice and evil (Isa.58:1 – 59:14). Note the intriguing nuances of meaning existing between the Hebrew Masoretic/Dead Sea Scroll version of Isa.59:20, vs. the Greek Septuagint translation and Paul’s quotation of the Septuagint Isa.59:20 in Romans 11:26.

<sup>59:1</sup> Behold, the LORD’S hand is not so short that it cannot save;  
Nor is His ear so dull that it cannot hear.

<sup>2</sup> But your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God,  
And your sins have hidden His face from you so that He does not hear.

<sup>3</sup> For your hands are defiled with blood and your fingers with iniquity;  
Your lips have spoken falsehood, your tongue mutters wickedness.

<sup>4</sup> No one sues righteously and no one pleads honestly.  
They trust in confusion and speak lies;

They conceive mischief and bring forth iniquity.  
<sup>5</sup> They hatch adders' eggs and weave the spider's web;  
He who eats of their eggs dies, and from that which is crushed a snake breaks forth.  
<sup>6</sup> Their webs will not become clothing, nor will they cover themselves with their works;  
Their works are works of iniquity, and an act of violence is in their hands.  
<sup>7</sup> Their feet run to evil, and they hasten to shed innocent blood;  
Their thoughts are thoughts of iniquity, devastation and destruction are in their highways.  
<sup>8</sup> They do not know the way of peace, and there is no justice in their tracks;  
They have made their paths crooked, whoever treads on them does not know peace.  
<sup>9</sup> Therefore justice is far from us, and righteousness does not overtake us;  
We hope for light, but behold, darkness, for brightness, but we walk in gloom.  
<sup>10</sup> We grope along the wall like blind men, we grope like those who have no eyes;  
We stumble at midday as in the twilight, among those who are vigorous we are like dead men.  
<sup>11</sup> All of us growl like bears, and moan sadly like doves;  
We hope for justice, but there is none, for salvation, but it is far from us.  
<sup>12</sup> For our transgressions are multiplied before You, and our sins testify against us;  
For our transgressions are with us, and we know our iniquities:  
<sup>13</sup> Transgressing and denying the LORD, and turning away from our God,  
Speaking oppression and revolt, conceiving in and uttering from the heart lying words.  
<sup>14</sup> Justice is turned back, and righteousness stands far away;  
For truth has stumbled in the street, and uprightness cannot enter.  
<sup>15</sup> Yes, truth is lacking; and he who turns aside from evil makes himself a prey.  
Now the LORD saw, and it was displeasing in His sight that there was no justice.  
<sup>16</sup> And He saw that there was no man, and was astonished that there was no one to intercede;  
Then His own arm brought salvation to Him, and His righteousness upheld Him.  
<sup>17</sup> He put on *righteousness like a breastplate*, and a *helmet of salvation* on His head;  
And He put on garments of vengeance for clothing and wrapped Himself with zeal as a mantle.  
<sup>18</sup> According to their deeds, so He will repay,  
Wrath to His adversaries, recompense to His enemies;  
To the coastlands He will make recompense.  
<sup>19</sup> So they will fear the name of the LORD from the west and His glory from the rising of the sun,  
For He will come like a rushing stream which the wind of the LORD drives.  
<sup>20</sup> 'A Redeemer will come to Zion,  
and to those who turn from transgression in Jacob,' declares the LORD. [Masoretic/DSS]  
[<sup>20</sup> 'A Redeemer will come to Zion,  
And to turn transgression from Jacob,' declares the LORD; LXX translation]  
[<sup>20</sup> 'The deliverer will come from Zion,  
he will remove ungodliness from Jacob,' declares the LORD; quoted by Paul in Romans 11:26]  
<sup>21</sup> 'As for Me, this is My covenant with them,' says the LORD:  
'My Spirit which is upon you, and My words which I have put in your mouth  
Shall not depart from your mouth, nor from the mouth of your offspring, nor from the mouth of your  
offspring's offspring,' says the LORD, 'from now and forever.'

## Questions

1. Where does the phrase 'stand firm' appear?
  - a. Stand firm against the schemes of the devil (v.11).
  - b. Therefore, take up the full armor of God, so that you will be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm (v.13)
  - c. Stand firm therefore, having girded... (v.14)
  - d. The call to 'stand firm' is plural, not singular. It is addressed to the community not just to an individual. Like the Roman army, the church is to close ranks and stand firm together. If they scattered, they would become vulnerable to the enemy, but together the army was strong. What implications does this have for us, especially at those times when we feel stresses and tension in our relationships? How's this relate to the theme of God's new community Paul has written so much about in this letter?
2. Who are the enemies?
  - a. In addition to the New Testament evidence, we have incidents from the Old Testament. In the book of Daniel, there are angels that seem to represent and defend Israel (Michael and Gabriel), and others are connected to Persia, Greece, and other nations. In some sense the others seem opposed to Israel (then) and to the church (now).
  - b. How do they influence us? Probably by promoting a sense of group identity:
    - i. Peer pressure to conform in a certain way to be part of the group
    - ii. Family expectations that make the family's security and honor primary
    - iii. The wealthy and the desire to join them / stay among them
    - iv. Ethnocentrism and/or nationalism and a lower value placed on people from other nations
    - v. Cultural assumptions about people from another ethnicity or social class
    - vi. Oppression and the desire for vengeance against another group
3. To what degree are we supposed to look at each item of armor on this list and draw out some symbolic meaning?
  - a. Illus: MLK asking people to read and reflect on the life and teachings of Jesus EVERY DAY if they wanted to help in the Civil Rights Movement
  - b. First of all, if we first look at the 'breastplate of righteousness' and 'helmet of salvation' in the context of Isaiah 59, it is fairly clear that it's poetic language for Jesus taking on our broken humanity making it his own.
  - c. But we are to be 'in the Lord' in v.10 and 'in the Spirit' in v.18. That is, we take on Jesus' new humanity and make him our defense and offense.
  - d. And his purpose was to undo evil in his human nature, and begin to undo injustice among human persons as we came into his kingdom. We are to continue that work, letting him by his Spirit undo evil in our human nature, and undoing injustice in the world.
  - e. There are some Christians who make a false choice of changing hearts and changing the world's structures. As if by changing hearts, Jesus doesn't have to change structures. But in Isaiah 58 – 59, it's pretty clear that Jesus changes hearts in order to change structures!
  - f. After we understand that, then I think it's possible for us to 'read into' each piece of the armor
4. If the enemies are spiritual, what spiritual weapons and armor do we have?
  - a. The belt of truth
    - i. On a Roman soldier, this was a thick utility belt. Everything hung on it.
    - ii. A Christian depends on truth and hangs everything else on it. Paul might mean the truth about who God is as He's revealed Himself in Christ, the truth about ourselves, or the truth about the story we live in, the one in which Christ is central.
  - b. The breastplate of righteousness
    - i. On a Roman soldier, the breastplate covers your vital organs, for your protection
    - ii. Righteousness meant being within God's covenant and among God's covenant people. You don't have to feel vulnerable for your own self-righteousness. You don't have to hide your life, nor feel like you've always been on the right side of every issue. You can be learning. Because your identity fundamentally is that you rely on the righteousness of God in Christ. You stand in him, not by yourself.
  - c. The shoes of the gospel of peace
    - i. Readiness to move in response to Jesus' love for others, and his mission to the world. We are often ready to move in response to anger, fear, guilt, or anxiety.

- d. The shield of faith
  - i. The typical Roman shield was huge, almost spanning your entire height
  - ii. To absorb 'the flaming darts of the evil one' – those are probably lies. What are some lies about yourself, God, or the world that you're tempted to believe?
- e. The helmet of salvation
  - i. Salvation means rescue from a plight. The plight we've been saved *from* is the corruption of human nature, of the human heart (Gen.6:5 – 6; 8:21; Lev.26:49; Dt.30:6).
  - ii. Illus: 'We have major problems as a nation. Yesterday Ferguson burned. Tonight #Baltimore burns. Tomorrow it will be another city in our homeland. Watching the coverage I'm hearing yet another version of a nauseatingly familiar narrative. Violence by police reciprocated by violence by the community, reciprocated by violence by police reciprocated by.... We resolve to legislate for education, job creation, and systemic overhaul. These are helpful and definitely needed BUT we have done all of these things ad nauseum and look at us!! Without a change of heart these attempts fail us. So what can we say? What can we do? Systems are broken because people are broken and if systems are fixed without hearts being changed the result will be a legalistic attempt that will lack long term results. Our problems are wholistic and common to the human heart. Hatred, prejudice, exploitation, pride, self righteousness, secrecy, and rebellion, manifest itself in the explosions we've seen over the last year, the last century, and the last millennia.'<sup>1</sup>
- 5. Prayer and Preaching – the Word of God, the Sword of the Spirit
  - a. Calling people to Jesus, into his own personal repentance and transformation of human nature
  - b. Notice what Paul is doing – preaching
  - c. Illus: Compare how Scripture condemns interest rate lending (Ex.22:26 – 27; Lev.25:35 – 38, Dt.23:19; Ps.15:5; Prov.28:7 – 9; Ezk.18:10 – 18, 22:12; Hab.2:6 – 7; Neh.5:1 – 15) to banks making predatory loans in Baltimore, contributing to the problems faced by many black residents:

As she describes it, Beth Jacobson and her fellow loan officers at Wells Fargo Bank "rode the stagecoach from hell" for a decade, systematically singling out blacks in Baltimore and suburban Maryland for high-interest subprime mortgages. These loans, Baltimore officials have claimed in a federal lawsuit against Wells Fargo, tipped hundreds of homeowners into foreclosure and cost the city tens of millions of dollars in taxes and city services. Wells Fargo, Ms. Jacobson said in an interview, saw the black community as fertile ground for subprime mortgages, as working-class blacks were hungry to be a part of the nation's home-owning mania. Loan officers, she said, pushed customers who could have qualified for prime loans into subprime mortgages. Another loan officer stated in an affidavit filed last week that employees had referred to blacks as "mud people" and to subprime lending as "ghetto loans."<sup>2</sup>

- d. Note that in 2012, Wells Fargo paid out \$175 million in a pricing discrimination lawsuit. 'About 1,000 Baltimore-area residents are expected to receive thousands of dollars each under a landmark \$175 million settlement between the U.S. Department of Justice and Wells Fargo over accusations of discriminatory lending practices. Under the terms of the deal announced Thursday, Wells Fargo also will provide \$7.5 million to the city of Baltimore, which federal officials credited with first raising issues of discrimination related to bank's subprime mortgages... Wells Fargo brought in more than \$80 billion in revenue last year and nearly \$16 billion in profit. The Justice Department's lawsuit alleged the bank discriminated against African-American and Latino borrowers between 2004 and 2009. The federal government said that black and Hispanic residents

<sup>1</sup> Benjamin Watson, NFL New Orleans Saints tight end, April 29, 2015; <http://joemiller.us/2015/04/nfls-benjamin-watsons-facebook-post-on-baltimore-riots-goes-viral-god-is-our-only-hope/#pcGDQpyELq6IDLRE.01>

<sup>2</sup> Michael Powell, 'Bank Accused of Pushing Mortgage Deals on Blacks', *NY Times*, June 6, 2009; see <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/06/07/us/07baltimore.html>

were more likely to be placed in a subprime loan than their white counterparts even if they qualified for a better loan.<sup>3</sup>

6. So how does this move us to pray for Baltimore right now?
  - a. We pray for God's people to have boldness and courage to proclaim the name of Jesus
  - b. We pray for the Word of God to convict people about the vision of relationship God has for people, including, for example, not trying to take advantage of people through interest rate lending.
  - c. We pray for ourselves to have strength to stand firm with our brothers and sisters in Baltimore. Since most of us can't physically be there, we stand spiritually in prayer with them, and then hope to learn more about the situation and what deeper issues triggered the protests and riots, to take action later.
  - d. It's very likely that the deeper systemic issues that have led to job losses, lower wages, and disempowerment of people in Baltimore, especially the black community, are related to things that you can't protest in order to change. In the Civil Rights Movement, black Christians and their black churches and NAACP chapters were organized and vigilant for a long time before Rosa Parks ever got on that bus. They were prepared for a bus boycott for years. So when it finally did happen, and people needed to get to work who depended on the buses, they coordinated an alternative bus system for a year! (December 1, 1955 – December 20, 1956); see [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Montgomery\\_Bus\\_Boycott](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Montgomery_Bus_Boycott). It wasn't sexy, adrenaline-pumping work. But it was the kind of humble, cooperative work that enabled the bus boycott. That is spiritual work. It's why we need to be reflecting daily on the life and teaching of Jesus!

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<sup>3</sup> Luke Broadwater, 'Wells Fargo agrees to pay \$175M settlement in pricing discrimination suit', *Baltimore Sun*, July 12, 2012; [http://articles.baltimoresun.com/2012-07-12/news/bs-md-ci-wells-fargo-20120712\\_1\\_mike-heid-wells-fargo-home-mortgage-subprime-mortgages](http://articles.baltimoresun.com/2012-07-12/news/bs-md-ci-wells-fargo-20120712_1_mike-heid-wells-fargo-home-mortgage-subprime-mortgages)