
Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of his might. Put on the whole armour of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. Therefore take up the whole armour of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.

(Ephesians 6:10–13)

Introduction

I have a friend whose daughter is a member of their local high school cross-country team. It is a very good team with lots of top provincial runners. She was very excited recently when, as a member of the team, her placement in a race counted towards the team's overall victory.

In cross-country, at least in the United States, several people can run for a team, but only the first five from each team to cross the finish line count towards the team's score. The lowest score wins. Though she did not finish first, or even first on her team, yet her efforts secured the victory for the team.

Many perceive distance running as an individual sport, but from this illustration we can see that it is *not*. Every team member matters. When it comes to a race, they really are *in it together*.

Though the top runners usually get the attention, still, without the whole team working together, there is little chance of team victory. So, if team members refuse to gather for practice, if they don't take care of their health, if they don't show up for the races, the team suffers—together. A cross-country team with a healthy sense of community realizes they are *in it together*.

The words in v. 10, "my brethren" (not found in most newer translations), capture the corporate nature of this final passage in Ephesians. (Even if the words are not in the original text, the corporate burden is undeniable.)

Paul has been speaking to a community of believers, and the same holds true as he comes to the end of the epistle. This is not an individualistic exhortation, even though each individual member of the church must pay heed to it. Rather, Paul is concerned about the corporate welfare of the church as they face an "evil day" (v. 13), Paul reminds them that they are in this together. We need this reminder, again and again.

As a church, we recently hosted a counselling conference, which served us well as a reminder of this truth. I want to build on that today.

In this study, I want to help us to see that we are *in this together*. To be more specific, we are not cross-country runners together, we are counter-cultural soldiers together. We are exhorted to *soldier together*.

Overview

Quite obviously, this passage metaphorically points to the Christian as a soldier. The concept of warfare and of being armed for it makes this abundantly clear. The Christian church (and I want to emphasise *church*) is in an intense conflict – and we are in this conflict *together*. *We are soldiers together*.

We are in the Lord's army. And though the old hymn is losing popularity for being too "militant," nevertheless we must exhort one another, "Onward, Christian Soldiers."

Let's note several characteristics of *soldiering together*.

We are Worshipping Soldiers Enlisted Together

Even if the words "my brethren" are not original, vv. 10–13, clearly carry a corporate emphasis. "You" in vv. 11, 13 is a plural word, and he employs the plural "we" in v. 12.

The New Testament clearly emphasises that believers are enlisted as soldiers. "No soldier gets entangled in civilian pursuits, since his aim is to please the one who enlisted him" (2 Timothy 2:4). "Enlisted" means to gather or select as a warrior. We are enlisted in God's army. And we have been gathered *together* into this army.

We have been graciously gathered together in order to worshipfully work together (Ephesians 1:3–4; 2:1–5; 2:8–10). When conscripted, you don't choose those with whom you serve. So with the church. The captain of our salvation wisely gathers his people. So, submit one to another (see 5:21).

This is us. Love the church you are with. Appreciate the battalion in which God has placed you. Serve your Captain by serving others. It's not about you. Don't go AWOL. Do what you have been summonsed to do.

This is why church membership matters. Lone soldiers don't make it through the conflict. This is why it matters that you gather. This is why it matters that you be equipped. This is why it matters that you watch out for one another. Pray with Paul:

We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is fitting, because your faith grows exceedingly, and the love of every one of you all abounds toward each other, so that we ourselves boast of you among the churches of God for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that you endure.

(2 Thessalonians 1:3–4)

We are Warring Soldiers Engaging the Struggle Together

Paul urges: “We do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places” (v. 12).

Here, Paul teaches us that the evil one and his devils are together against us and we are to be together as we struggle and stand against them. Two kingdoms are in conflict, two systems (worldviews) are in opposition, two armies are at war. Together we fight in the “evil day.”

What is the “evil day”? Salmond defines it as “any day of which it may be said, ‘this is your hour, and the power of darkness.’” Ferguson, citing the New English Bible, pastorally adds that it is “‘when things are at their worst’ (NEB) – because of the ‘devil’s schemes’ (v. 11).”

In other words, this is not speaking eschatologically, as we might say, but rather of those times of especially intense onslaughts. Let me suggest some real life examples of such evil days.

We recently held a meeting at our church with those who are involved with orphan-care and have adopted. Many shared of the great struggles they are facing. It can be a difficult thing to care for orphans, often involving great heartache. Many of those at that meeting were experiencing an evil day.

Those who have lost loved ones know what it is to experience evil days. Those who carry the shame from a fall experience an evil day. Those who can’t seem to get over the hump of sinful habits are in an evil day. The same can be said for those who have lost their heart for God and for others, and those who face what seems to be a completely hopeless marriage, and those whose ministries seem completely powerless, fruitless and even, to a degree, hopeless, and those who pray and pray and pray and yet see no answer, who see no respite on the horizon, and those who agonise over wandering, even apostate children, and those who live with chronic pain and chronic heartache, and those who live in places where it is considered criminal to be a Christian, and those who face economic impoverishment, wondering how they will make ends meet at the end of the month, or the week, or even at the end of the day, and those who live in places where their ethnicity makes them vulnerable, abused, disrespected and treated as a nobody, and those who seem to be friendless in this hostile world, and those plagued with a lack of assurance of their standing before God, and those who, for whatever reason, live with a sense of dark despair and where the thought of ending their life is all too often an inviting thought, and those who have been betrayed by a loved one.

It is when we face such an evil day that we are to be strong in the Lord and in the power of his might. We must then put on the whole armour of God and stand. We face these as *soldiers – together*.

Together, we face a powerful, because pervasive and perverse, enemy. “The principalities” refers to those in dominion (cf. Jude 6). “Powers” speaks of those with jurisdiction. The “rulers of the darkness of this age” are world rulers of darkness. (By “world” I mean the realm that does submit to the authority of God. It speaks of those who are enslaved to the devil.) “Spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places” are spiritual forces of wickedness. The language speaks of extreme depravity in the spiritual realm – again, not merely against flesh and blood.

This verse, then, refers to the comprehensiveness of the enemy. It likely points to a hierarchy of evil in this world. Certain Old Testament texts (e.g. Daniel 10:10–13) clearly illustrate this truth. Second Corinthians 4:3–4 refers to Satan as the “god of this world” – that is, the devil who rules the age or realm of those whose minds are blinded to the gospel.

The point is simply this: We are at war. Kingdoms are in conflict. We face evil on every front. We must be alert. The evil one and his hosts desire to rob God of his rightful worship. They will stop at nothing in their devious efforts. As John Stott says, “Bear in mind that they have no moral principles, no code of honor, no higher feelings. They recognize no Geneva Convention to restrict or partially civilize the weapons of their warfare. They are utterly unscrupulous, and ruthless in the pursuit of their malicious designs.”

Therefore, we must “wrestle” together. The term literally means to vibrate, and it means to pin to the ground with the victor’s foot on the neck of the opponent. Jesus has won the victory (Romans 16:20). We share in this together and so we share in the spoils together, and this implies that we share in the struggles together.

We are in the midst of a true “worship war,” and it has nothing to do with whether or not we use drums or whether or not we sing exclusively psalms. It is a war for our loyalty (see Job 1–2). And we are in this war *together*.

We are in this together; therefore, if one falls, we all suffer. It matters how you live your life. Your corporate gathering matters to all of us (5:18–21). Your marriage matters to all of us (5:22–33). Your home life with your parents and with your children matters to all of us (6:1–4). Your life in the marketplace matters to all of us (6:5–9). Together, we must be aware of the devil’s schemes. Together, we must be alert to the devil’s system.

Paul well understood this truth. He realised that he did not have to war alone, that there were others fighting with him in this battle. Consider, for example, these words from 1 Thessalonians 3, where Paul used Timothy as a fellow soldier.

Therefore, when we could no longer endure it, we thought it good to be left in Athens alone, and sent Timothy, our brother and minister of God, and our fellow labourer in the gospel of Christ, to establish you and encourage you concerning your faith, that no one should be shaken by these afflictions; for you yourselves know that we are appointed to this. For, in fact, we told you before when we were with you that we would suffer tribulation, just as it

happened, and you know. For this reason, when I could no longer endure it, I sent to know your faith, lest by some means the tempter had tempted you, and our labour might be in vain.

But now that Timothy has come to us from you, and brought us good news of your faith and love, and that you always have good remembrance of us, greatly desiring to see us, as we also to see you—therefore, brethren, in all our affliction and distress we were comforted concerning you by your faith. For now we live, if you stand fast in the Lord.

(1 Thessalonians 3:1–8)

We are Weak Soldiers Empowered Together

In v. 10, Paul highlights our own weakness and encourages us to be empowered by the Lord: “Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of his might.”

This promise of strength is implicit, if not explicit, throughout this passage. The enemy is far more perverse and pervasive than merely those of flesh and blood. We need help. We need God’s help. And we need to remind each of other of our need for God’s help.

Each of us must take responsibility to lovingly remind one another of our weakness apart from Christ. As one commentator puts it, “Confession of our helplessness prepares us—even compels us—to don the weapons of spiritual warfare. Confession of our helplessness apart from God must precede putting on our armour lest our preparation be perceived as righteous works we do that qualify us to resist Satan.”

Together we must appreciate that we are together with Christ (Ephesians 2:11ff; Colossians 3; etc.). Our union with Christ puts us in communion with one another. We are to volitionally join with one another against the schemes of the evil one. We need to exhort and equip one another concerning this strength. This is teamwork.

In what ways are we corporately empowered? By prayer. By helpful rebuke of pride. By the reminder of the propensity for evil. By pointing to Christ and his gospel. By gathering together. Everything above requires this.

We are Wounded Soldiers Encouraging Together

We must also face the reality that soldiers do get wounded. Therefore, we need to encourage one another. This truth is implied in the military metaphor and is taught throughout the New Testament. Consider, for example, 1 Thessalonians 5:12–15.

And we urge you, brethren, to recognise those who labour among you, and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, and to esteem them very highly in love for their work’s sake. Be at peace among yourselves. Now we exhort you, brethren, warn those who are unruly,

comfort the fainthearted, uphold the weak, be patient with all. See that no one renders evil for evil to anyone, but always pursue what is good both for yourselves and for all.

(1 Thessalonians 5:12–15)

In most every church, there are the *exceptionally weak* (those who desire to serve the Lord and yet surrender easily); the *evidently wicked* (those who refuse to submit to Christ and their mutiny is clear for most of the church to see); and the *experientially wounded* (those who have fallen and who sense that they have been dishonourably discharged).

It is to such that we are called to encourage. No one who is truly in the Lord's army is to be left behind. This means that we are to be *compassionate* soldiers. The story is told that General Patton once confronted a soldier who, for fear, had inflicted a wound on himself in order to escape the battle. Patton rebuked the man and physically slapped him. That is not the right way to deal with the weak. Paul's rebuking and yet encouraging letters to the Corinthians are a far better way to deal with the situation.

The wounded are to be helped to recover so that they can help to recover. When I do marriage counselling, my goal is always to create marriage counsellors. By God's grace, this has happened in the past. I have been privileged in the past to set up people whom I have counselled with others who are going through the same issues. This is the goal: Those who live with "unfixable" brokenness are to be equipped to encourage others with "unfixable" brokenness.

We are all wounded. And the wounded often make the best worshippers. Psalms 32 and 51, two of the greatest psalms for those experiencing affliction, arose from the pen of a man deeply wounded by his own sin. Job's affliction drove him to worship in a way that has encouraged God's people for centuries. Wounded and weak Paul was enabled to encourage others who were wounded and weak (2 Corinthians 11:22–12:10; 2 Timothy 4:9–16). So can you and I.

Wounded soldiers are also weeping soldiers. Jesus, who was wounded in the house of his friends (Zechariah 13:6) and was wounded for our transgressions (Isaiah 53:5) also wept (John 11:35). And this makes his invitation to come to him all that more inviting and assuring.

We are Well-Armoured Soldiers Equipping Together

Verse 11 draws attention to the armour we are privileged to bear: "Put in the whole armour of God." We will examine this armour piece by piece in future studies, but for now we must note that this armour is both *how* we are strengthened in the Lord as well as *why* we must be strengthened by him.

How are we strengthened by the Lord? By putting on Christ. We saw in a previous study that the armour here is really a reflection of God and Christ's character. But to wear this armour requires God's power: We must first experience the power of God in the gospel to be able to put on Christ. This is the problem with many people in churches: no putting on because no power preceding. The result is that they put on an act. Moralism is no substitute for the power of God.

We need to help one another to put on this armour. We do this by pointing out when, like the emperor, others are naked. In other words, we need to help people ask whether they have really put on Christ before they can put on the armour. We do so by discipling one another towards Christlikeness. This is a most necessary and most practical way of helping one another to put it together. We do this by speaking into one another's lives – by counselling one another (Romans 15:14). This includes both encouraging and correcting but it also includes instructing one another how to stay on the right path and then what to do when we get off the path (see 2 Timothy 3:16–17). We do this by gathering together and listening and learning together. The teaching and the preaching of God's Word is essential if we will be strengthened for the struggle. We must therefore take opportunity to gather when the church gathers to be instructed.

This may be an overstatement, but there is something to it: The church is only as strong as its weakest link. So, if there is a chink in your armour, seek – together – to fix it! A part of this is acknowledging that we are broken and that we live in a broken world. We cannot fix everything, but we can *redeem* everything that God in his providence has allowed to be broken in our lives. That is, we can submit to God as he uses it for our good and for his glory. We need to realize that even though everything may not get fixed, everything can be responded to in faith. And this is good for us, to the glory of God.

The elders carry a large responsibility for this. I trust that we will do better in the future. But what do we do when church members refuse to hear us in our attempts to help a covenanted soldier suit up? We need the help of the congregation, in an even greater way. We need the full membership to be fully armed. No one should be left behind. But if you choose to remain behind, then ultimately that is your choice and it is one that you will have to live by – and to die by.

Each of us must be fully equipped with the fullness of the gospel. If we are not, then we will not stand. Good and healthy churches can go bad. This church in Ephesus did. What are you doing to provide for and to protect the next generation of Christians? Far too many Christian parents commit themselves lightly to raise their children in the discipline and instruction of the Lord but then fail to follow through. They stand before the church and make promises to do so, but then they fail to be deliberate in keeping their vows. At heart is a feat issue. If we do not fear God, we will fail to keep our vows (see Ecclesiastes 5:1–7).

So it is here in Ephesians 6. We are not to fear the evil one – we are to fear dishonouring our God by giving in to the evil one.

We are Winning Soldiers Established Together

This is the emphasis of the passage (vv. 11, 13, 14–15). As Stott comments, “the apostle’s concern is for Christian stability. Wobbly Christians who have no firm foothold in Christ are an easy prey for the devil.” Calvin comments: “We must prepare our minds for the battle. A promise of victory is, indeed, involved in the exhortation *that you might be able*.”

The devil seeks to knock us off our spiritual feet. He and his seek to drive us to retreat; he and his seek to make us flee. But God strengthens us so that we *can* stand, and that we *will* stand. This is a promise of victory – of victory *together*.

It is significant that each use of *istami* (translated here as “stand”) in the epistles is revealed as a given for the Christian. That is, the Christian stands because God makes it so. Therefore, it seems that Paul’s point is that there is no question as to whether the Christian soldier will make it to the ultimate victor’s parade. Each one will! But together we are to remind one another of this reality. *We are therefore to exhort one another and to edify one another in the gospel.*

By being reminded of who we are in Christ, we are encouraged to live like it. Because we will persevere, act like it! Ferguson helpfully comments, “The final proof that we have been raised up to sit with Christ in the heavenly places and now walk in a way that is worthy of him is: we keep our feet and are able to remain standing in the battle against the Evil One.”

Chapell captures this gospel confidence when he writes, “We take our ‘stand against the devil’s schemes’ (Eph. 6:11) and ‘stand [our] ground’ (Eph. 6:13) not primarily by more vigorous performance of good deeds or by greater exercise of our willpower and resolve, but through confidence in and dependence on God’s provision.” And of course, “God’s provision” is the gospel of Christ. We need to remind each other that we stand in and by the grace of God. this is how we will be strengthened to stand. Let us have more and more gospel conversations.

Conclusion

Often in the realm of sports, athletes are exhorted in training and in races with the phrase, “You’ve got this.” That may be helpful in the sports arena, but it is not very helpful for the Christian whose struggles are not merely against flesh and blood. In such a case, the only encouragement is “God’s got this.”

In many situations, such an exhortation sounds like empty and mocking Christianese. After all, if our brother/sister really “got this,” why do they feel so weak and wounded? And why

are they so often hopeless? No, as the body of Christ, we must realise that the pain of another is ours to share.

Several years ago, I was running a race called the Monster Road Race. It was appropriately named! As I rounded a corner around the 25km mark, I groaned as I saw yet another hill in front of me. By the 30km mark, I was certain that I would not finish. But just then I saw someone running toward me. It was a fellow church member, who had finished the race, and was now running in the opposite direction! “I don’t think I can finish this,” I told him. “Of course you can,” he said. He proceeded to run the remainder of the marathon with me. I finished the race, because a teammate ran with me.

We must embrace the truth that we are in this together, and then come along and say to each of other, “God’s got this – and therefore. together, we’ve got this.” This, my friend is one of the many glories of the power of the gospel. Because “it is finished” (John 19:30), we have only just begun to really live, together.

AMEN