

Strong in the Lord: Why, How, For What Purpose?

Eph 6:10-20 (text: vv.10-13)

31 March 2019, Reformed Church of Wainuiomata 10:30 am
(Sermon put together by Pieter van Huyssteen with due acknowledgement)

Intro

Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ,

About 600 years before Christ, there was a Chinese military strategist, by the name of Sun Tzu.

Well, this man wrote a book entitled, "The Art of War."¹

So good was this book that, over the years, many a military commander from east to west has used it with great success!²

Well, in one of this book's chapters, Sun Tzu makes this very important point: "*Know your enemy and know yourself, then you'll be able to fight a thousand battles without disaster.*"³

¹ "The Art of War is an ancient Chinese military treatise dating from the Late Spring and Autumn Period (roughly 5th century BC). The work, which is attributed to the ancient Chinese military strategist Sun Tzu ("Master Sun", also spelled Sunzi), is composed of 13 chapters. Each one is devoted to an aspect of warfare and how it applies to military strategy and tactics. For almost 1,500 years it was the lead text in an anthology that would be formalised as the Seven Military Classics by Emperor Shenzong of Song in 1080. The Art of War remains the most influential strategy text in East Asian warfare[1] and has influenced both Eastern and Western military thinking, business tactics, legal strategy and beyond.

This book contained a detailed explanation and analysis of the Chinese military, from weapons and strategy to rank and discipline. Sun Tzu also stressed the importance of intelligence operatives and espionage to the war effort. Because Sun Tzu has long been considered to be one of history's finest military tacticians and analysts, his teachings and strategies formed the basis of advanced military training for centuries to come" (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Art_of_War).

² "The book was translated into French and published in 1772 (re-published in 1782) by the French Jesuit Jean Joseph Marie Amiot. A partial translation into English was attempted by British officer Everard Ferguson Calthrop in 1905 under the title The Book of War. The first annotated English translation was completed and published by Lionel Giles in 1910. Military and political leaders such as the Chinese communist revolutionary Mao Zedong, Japanese daimyō Takeda Shingen, and American military general Norman Schwarzkopf Jr. have drawn inspiration from the book" (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Art_of_War).

³ "The translator Samuel B. Griffith offers a chapter on "Sun Tzu and Mao Tse-Tung" where The Art of War is cited as influencing Mao's On Guerrilla Warfare, On the Protracted War and Strategic Problems of China's Revolutionary War, and includes Mao's quote: "We must not belittle the saying in the book of Sun Wu Tzu, the great military expert of ancient China, 'Know your enemy and know yourself and you can fight a thousand battles without disaster....'"

"Verses from the book occur in modern daily [Chinese idioms](#) and phrases, such as the last verse of Chapter 3:

故曰：知彼知己，百戰不殆；不知彼而知己，一勝一負；不知彼，不知己，每戰必殆。

Hence the saying: If you know the enemy and know yourself, you need not fear the result of a hundred battles.

If you know yourself but not the enemy, for every victory gained you will also suffer a defeat. If you know neither the enemy nor yourself, you will succumb in every battle.

This has been more tersely interpreted and condensed into the Chinese modern proverb:

知己知彼，百戰不殆。(Zhī jǐ zhī bǐ, bǎi zhàn bù dài.)

If you know both yourself and your enemy, you can win numerous (literally, "a hundred") battles without jeopardy." Cf. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Art_of_War

Sadly, many a military commander has failed in this regard – also Napoleon Bonaparte of whom it is said that he underestimated the cunningness of the Russian Tsar Alexander I, and that he also did not reckon with the harshness of the Russian winters!⁴ Clearly, Napoleon did not know his enemy well enough – neither did he know his own limitations!

“Know your enemy and know & acknowledge your own weaknesses!”

Well, this is also the advice which the Apostle Paul gives to you & me and every Christian, i.e. know your enemy; yes, first of all, know that your enemy is not so much any human being who gives you trouble; yes, know that your struggle is not against human beings in the first place, but against the evil one! Thus, make sure that you know the devil and his tactics – i.e. the way he operates!

Secondly, know yourself! Know your weaknesses! Know that, in your own strength/armour, you cannot fight this enemy!

Therefore, you must be what v. 10 says: “...**strong in the Lord!**”

So, here’s the main message of our text: **Christian, because your struggle is ultimately against the evil one himself, be strong in the Lord by putting on the full armour God is giving you!**

Well, we’ll explain this message by way of the following three main points...

- **Why** (Why we should be strong in the Lord)?
- **How** (How we will be strong in the Lord)?
- **For What Purpose** (For what purpose should we be strong in the Lord)?

Why (Why we should be strong in the Lord)?

Do you know where the Apostle Paul was while he was writing the words of our text?

He was in prison in Rome!⁵

Why?

Well, because the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem felt threatened by Paul’s passionate Gospel preaching!! So, they complained to the Roman police in Jerusalem who then threw him in jail. Eventually, Paul ended up in a prison in Rome!⁶

So, here’s a question: There where Paul sits in that Roman prison – who, as far as meets the eye, is his enemy?

Well, it’s the Jewish religious leaders and the Roman police – it’s *human beings!*

Perhaps you say, “So what?” “We know Paul’s enemies were human beings!”

Well, but look what Paul (Paul who experiences on his skin the hatred of these human beings; yes, Paul who should have been the one to hate these human beings) – look what he now writes to his fellow Christians in Ephesus (in v. 12), ***our struggle is not against flesh & blood*** – it’s not against human beings in the first place! It’s in the first place not against the Jewish leaders! Nor is it against the Roman Emperor!

⁴ “However, there were times when even the great Bonaparte was defeated. He sometimes had a tendency to underestimate his enemy. He was overconfident and this attitude led that he was occasionally defeated. For example, Napoleon’s invasion of Russia was a fiasco because he underestimated the cunning strategy of Tsar Alexander I. Napoleon also did not consider the cold Russian winters. Bonaparte’s failure in Russia was the beginning of his downfall and the rise of Russia’s status as a leading power in post-Napoleonic Europe.” Cf. <http://www.ancientpages.com/2017/07/03/napoleon-bonaparte-defeated-waterloo/>

⁵ Cf. e.g. ELWELL, W.A. & YARBROUGH, R.W. 1998. Encountering the New Testament: a historical and theological survey. Grand Rapids, MI : Baker Books p.310.

⁶ Cf. Acts 21:27-28:31

My brother & sister, our fights here on earth – whether it’s the struggle you have in your marriage, or with your children, or with the boss at work, or with parliament or with a heavy-handed ruler like Donald Trump or Kim Jong Un – these struggles are ultimately more than a struggle against flesh & blood (yes, more than a fight against mere human beings)! It’s actually a fight against evil – more precisely, against the *author* of sin and evil; yes, against the *devil* who, at times, works through human beings – sadly, all too often even in our own hearts!

In v.12, Paul gives four names to the devil and his team!⁷ He calls them, 1) “rulers,” 2) “authorities,” 3) “powers of this dark world,” and 4) “spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.”

You say, “Heavenly realms!?” “Really!?” “Is Paul then saying that the devils live in heaven where God is seated on His throne?”

No, my brother & sister, when Paul says (that) the devils live *in the heavenly realms*, he talks as a first-century Jew. You see, the Jews of Paul’s time understood that the devils roamed the air above earth, but not as high as the highest heavens where God is seated on His throne.

You & I will do well to simply understand that the devil and his gang live and work in the *unseen world*; yes, in a space which is *invisible* to the human eye.

Now, someone will mock, “Come on, there are no devils!” “Look, we live in the western world in the 21st Century!” “You have archaic ideas just like those of ancient & primitive peoples!” “We don’t believe in that sort of nonsense anymore!”

Well, my brother & sister, do you know that, although enlightened, self-reliant, modern westerners might think evil *spirits* don’t exist, yet, very few modern westerners will say that evil *itself* does not exist!?

Yes, even though many self-reliant, self-confident westerners might say (that) there is no devil, yet, how often do we hear these same people say (and say when they have done something bad), “Sorry, that was not me!” “I don’t know what got into me, but that... that what I have done, that was not me!”

So, what do we see?

Well, don’t we see that even those who deny the real existence of the evil one, still acknowledge that, at times, there are things which evil forces are working in their lives – things which they themselves did not want and cannot explain!?

So, whether we like it or not, the Bible makes it clear that there are evil forces at whose head stands satan, (the devil) who is a fallen angel!

The Bible also says that our *enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour!*⁸

If the devil attacked our Lord, why would he pass us by?

So, should we fear the devil and his helpers?

No!

Granted, on the one hand, the devil is a force to be reckoned with – an enemy that is hell-bent on the destruction of the Church;⁹ yes, satan and the Church are on a collision

⁷ “Of the four expressions used for spiritual forces in verse 12 only “rulers” and “authorities” appear in the earlier list of five terms for spiritual forces in 1:21. We are not to conclude that seven categories of demonic spirits exist; rather, both passages pile up terms for emphasis and rhetorical impact. The two new terms do add detail linking these forces to darkness and evil. “Powers of this dark world,” if translated more literally, would be “world rulers of this darkness” and is reminiscent of 2:2 and 5:8–11” (Cf. Snodgrass, K. (1996).

[Ephesians](#) (pp. 334–362). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan).

⁸ Cf. 1 Pt 5:8 **Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour** (NIV84).

⁹ Words well-said by Hendriksen (ibid:270)

course!¹⁰ But, on the other hand, it's also true that nowhere does the Bible tell us to *fear* the devil.¹¹

The Bible tells us only to fear God!

Of course, this kind of fear means to live in absolute awe, and to reverence God! Yet, we cannot deny that, in this word “fear,” there sits also a smidgen of being scared/afraid!

Nowhere does the Bible instruct us to fear satan (the devil).

So, what should the Christian's attitude towards the devil be?

Well, certainly not that of some animists who see the devil behind every event or object; not like those who practice exorcism (the driving-out of demons); and not like those who believe that even Christians can be demon-possessed.

My brother & sister, the Christian – the born-again believer – cannot be indwelt by the Holy Spirit and satan!

Indeed, *the New Testament betrays no thought that a Christian can be demon possessed, and it makes no theological sense to say a person can have the Spirit of God and another spirit.*¹²

Thus, let's not err by giving the devil too much attention (and fearing him), by being enamoured with him or even worshiping him. But, on the other hand, may we never totally deny the devil's existence.

You see, the Bible message is rather that you & I should know (that) the devil and his demons are a reality. Yet, the Christian should never fear him!

Why?

Well, because our Lord Jesus has dealt him an enormously big blow on that day when satan's power was too weak to keep our Lord in the grave – yes, on that Sunday morning when Jesus rose from the dead!

Well, now that we have been reminded of the reality of the devil, how will we react!?

Well, certainly not in overconfidence – yes, not in the way many a general has lost the battle – but acknowledging our *own* limitations – i.e. that, alone, we cannot win the evil one; that we have to (as v.10 says), “... be strong in the Lord!” Yes, “find our (source of) power¹³ in the Lord...”¹⁴

So, that brings us to point 2...

How?

How will you & I find our source of power in the Lord?

Well, do you remember what happened when our Lord raised Lazarus from the dead?

Obviously, a dead man cannot make himself alive! So, it was on *Christ* to restore life to Lazarus' dead body!

But look! What happened straight *after* Lazarus was raised!?

He had to use *his own hands* to take off his grave clothes and to dress himself in the clothes of the living!

Yes, now that Lazarus was alive, *he* had to clothe *himself*!

¹⁰ Words well-said by Hendriksen (ibid:274)

¹¹ Valid point made by Snodgrass (ibid)

¹² Cf. Snodgrass (ibid)

¹³ Hendriksen's way of translating ἐνδυναμοῦσθε (literally, “be empowered!”), Present Passive Imperative 2nd Person Plural of ἐνδυναμῶ (endynamoō), *strengthen; become strong* ((2011). [The Lexham Analytical Lexicon to the Greek New Testament](#). Logos Bible Software).

¹⁴ Good paraphrase by Hendriksen, W. 2004. Exposition of Ephesians (In: Hendriksen, W. ed. New testament Commentary. Grand Rapids, MI : Baker Book House. p.270).

Well, similarly, you & I did not work faith in our own dead hearts! It was *God* alone who made us alive – we who once were spiritually dead!

But now that God has raised us from this spiritual death, we (just like Lazarus) have a task, i.e. to put on the appropriate clothes.

And what are these clothes?

Well they are the *full armour* of God!

What does “*armour of God*” mean?

Well, that *God Himself* has made this full armour, including its sword! And it is God alone who provides it! But now we, ourselves, must put them on, for look, is it not a *command* we receive in v.11 and 13!? It says, “***Put on for yourselves***¹⁵ (yes, ***take up***)¹⁶ the full armour of God...!”

In other words, do not let the enemy find you defenceless! Take up every part of this armour which God has provided!

Someone might ask, “But *what* is the armour of God, and *how* do I put it on?”

Well, the armour of God is not the real sword – it’s not guns, army tanks, missiles, fighter jets and nuclear heads! Rather, God’s armour consists of *spiritual qualities* – as this afternoon’s sermon will explain!

And how does one put these qualities on – how does one dress yourself with them?

Well, by not just once (or even periodically), but by *constantly* living your life close to Jesus through regular personal devotions!

You see, if you & I don’t live close to Jesus, we’ll be like branches that have been chopped off from a tree!¹⁷ Yes, without an ongoing close relationship with Jesus, you & I will wilt – will be defenceless!

But, on the other hand, if I have close fellowship with my Lord, then I can overcome all my spiritual battles, because ***I can do all things through Him who strengthens me.***¹⁸

Putting on the full armour which God has provided – that’s *how* I will be strong in the Lord!

Here’s the last point...

For What Purpose

For what purpose should we be strong in the Lord?

¹⁵ Verse 11 reads *endysasthe* (ἐνδύσασθε), which is an Aorist Deponent Imperative 2nd Person Plural of **ἐνδύω**: to put on clothes, without implying any particular article of clothing—‘to clothe, to dress, to put on’ (Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996). [Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: based on semantic domains](#) (electronic ed. of the 2nd edition., Vol. 1, p. 524). New York: United Bible Societies). Remember that part of the task of Deponent verbs is to describe an action that someone does for him/herself or for his/her own benefit/gain – therefore, “clothe yourselves...”

¹⁶ Verse 13 reads *analabete* (ἀναλάβετε), which is a Second Aorist Active Imperative 2nd Person Plural of **ἀναλαμβάνω**: to lift up and carry (away)—‘to carry (away), to carry off, to remove, to take (away)’ (Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996). [Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: based on semantic domains](#) (electronic ed. of the 2nd edition., Vol. 1, p. 206). New York: United Bible Societies).

¹⁷ Cf. Jn 15:1-5 ***“I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. ² Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit. ³ Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you. ⁴ Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. ⁵ I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.***

¹⁸ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#). (2016). (Php 4:13). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

Verse 13 gives the answer – it says, “...*so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground...*”¹⁹

You ask, “But when is the day of evil?”

Well, it is the day of severe trial – those critical moments in your life when the devil and his underlings will assault you most vehemently!

When will such days come?

Well, you & I don’t know! And because we don’t know, our motto should be: be ready *always!!*

That means that you & I should not be like Napoleon who 1) underestimated the Russian Tsar, while 2) on the other hand, was overconfident in his own abilities!

This means you & I should know our enemy’s tactics – or as v. 11 calls them *the devil’s schemes;*²⁰ his crafty methods!²¹

You ask, “But what are some of satan’s crafty methods?”

Well, the Bible gives us at least six of the devil’s schemes...

Here’s the first one: that he mixes the lie with just enough truth so that you & I will fall for his lies. Look, is that not what he did in Paradise with Adam & Eve (Gn 3:4-5)!?²²

Mixing a bit of truth with a lie!

When I was two years old, a group called “The Four Lads” composed a very catchy tune with lyrics that started off very innocently! So, which young man with a little bit of music in his bones could resist learning the cleverly-written lyrics – however, lyrics that the heartfelt Christian soon discovers he cannot really sing. Here are snippets from stanza 3 and 4 of that song...

*Standing on a corner watching all the girls go by
Standing on a corner giving all the girls the eye
Brother if you've got a rich imagination
Give it a whirl, give it a try...*

*Brother you can't go to jail for what you're thinking
Or for that woo look in your eye...*²³

Well, is not the evil one so clever!?! Of course, it’s true: you can indeed not go to jail for what you’re thinking, but look what this song doesn’t remind you of! It doesn’t remind you that *God knows what you’re thinking!* And it doesn’t remind you of Mt 5:28, “***I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart.***”

See how the evil one mixes the truth with the lie!?

¹⁹ NIV84

²⁰ NIV84

²¹ *Methodeias* (μεθοδεΐας) Feminine Plural Accusative of *methodeia* (μεθοδεΐα, ας f): crafty scheming with the intent to deceive—‘deceit, scheming’ (Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996). [Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: based on semantic domains](#) (electronic ed. of the 2nd edition., Vol. 1, p. 759). New York: United Bible Societies).

²² Gen 3:4-5 “...***You will not surely die. ⁵ For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.***”

²³ <https://www.songfacts.com/lyrics/the-four-lads/standing-on-the-corner>

He may also whisper in your ear: “Just look at the large number of non-Christians out there!” “There are Judaists, Muslims, Hindus, agnostics, atheists etc. out there!” “And some of them are such kind people – some even have such good moral standards!” “Surely, they cannot all go to hell one day!” “Surely your Jesus cannot be the only way to God!”

My brother & sister, is not this again a case where the devil is mixing seeming truth with lie? Where has Christ ever said that numbers are important to His kingdom!? In fact, did He not say, “Few are those who will enter!”²⁴ And where did He ever say that kindness or high moral standards are ways to enter His kingdom?

Here’s a second scheme the devil has: that he abuses (mis-applies) the words of Scripture, as in Mt 4:6 “***If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down, for it is written, “He will command his angels concerning you...”***”

Similarly, the evil one whispers into your/my thought-life: “O, that sin you’re about to commit – go on, do it, for the grace of God through Jesus Christ will cover you!”

Well, remember what God’s Word says: “Shall we go on sinning (Shall we make the most of God’s grace)!?” “May it never be!” “How can he/she who has tasted God’s grace go on and abuse it!?”

Here’s a third scheme: that he masquerades as an angel of the light – as apostles of Christ (2 Cor 11:13-14). Just remember the movie which starts off holy & good! Then just when the storyline has captured your imagination so that you feel, “Wow, I want to watch this to the end,” then, “boom!” suddenly there appear obscene scenes or blasphemy! Eventually/Gradually, if the Christian does not wake up to these lures, he/she becomes desensitised! Next time, you watch rougher stuff!

A fourth scheme of the devil is: that he makes people (even some theologians and pastors!!) believe he does not exist (the very reason why Paul had to write our text)!²⁵

Here’s a fifth scheme: that he enters even unexpected places.²⁶ 2 Thess 2:4). Yes, much to his joy, he even enters the manse or the church where he has made many a pastor fall from grace, and where he, at times, causes church members to be so opinionated on small matters that they end up in division!

Here’s a sixth scheme: that the devil promises people that good can be attained through wrongdoing (that the end justifies the means). Remember how the devil once said as

²⁴ Cf. Mt 7:13-14, ***Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. ¹⁴ For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few.*** (Emphasis mine)

²⁵ Also why Peter wrote the words of 1 Pt 5:8-9 ***Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. ⁹ Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world.***

²⁶ Cf. Mt 24:15-16 (especially v.15), “***So when you see the abomination of desolation spoken of by the prophet Daniel, standing in the holy place (let the reader understand), ¹⁶ then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains.***” Also cf. 2 Thess 2:3-4 (especially v.4), “***Let no one deceive you in any way. For that day will not come, unless the rebellion comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction, ⁴ who opposes and exalts himself against every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God.***”

much as, “Jesus, You want glory!?” “Well, the easier way is to bypass that painful cross!” “Yes, just worship me, and I will give You that much-desired glory!” “Yes, Jesus, it doesn’t matter by which way You get that glory!” “Any old way is good!”²⁷
My brother & sister, don’t we see this also in our very day & age when some people say, “The best way to deal with Islam is to take up the sword against them!” Well, hang on, that’s not the message of Christ! Christ’s message is the Word not the sword – the Gospel, not violence! The end does not justify the means!

Well that was a brief summary of the way the devil works!

Our text reminds the Christian (you & me) that, even behind your struggles with people (or with yourself), it is the devil who is at work – your struggle is against a spiritual enemy!

So, that being the case, what shall you & I do?

Our text says, “Put on the full armour which God has provided for His loved ones!”

What is that full armour?

Well, we’ll see this afternoon when we will study v.14-18!

AMEN (2,872 words excluding footnotes)

²⁷ Cf. Lk 4:6-7, “*To you I will give all this authority and their glory, for it has been delivered to me, and I give it to whom I will. ⁷ If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours.*”