

Becoming Who We Are – The Book of Ephesians

Our Strength is from the Lord

Ephesians 6:10-12

Mark Vroegop

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. For 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 (Eph. 6:10–12, ESV).

- “Who am I?”
- “What’s important?”
- “Where do I belong?”
- “What’s happening in the world?”
- “How do I live?”

These are questions connected to identity. Your answers to these questions are really important, and they shape the trajectory of your daily life. What you believe about yourself affects how you live. Just think with me about that first question: “Who am I?” Consider the implications if you’d answer that question like this:

- “I’m successful”
- “I’m popular”
- “I’m in control”
- “I’m perfect”
- “I’m a victim”

How you think about identity is powerful. And that’s why the message of Ephesians is critical to understand and apply. Paul desires for Christians to become who we really are. The aim of this book is for followers of Jesus to embrace their spiritual identity “in Christ” so that they’ll know how to live “in the world.” Christians are commanded to “walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called” (Eph. 4:1). Identity fuels action, behaviors, attitudes, and choices.

Ephesians 1-3 focused on the substance of Christian identity, addressing the doctrinal basis of what it means to be “in Christ.” Chapters 4-6 address the practical implications of that identity. Over the last few weeks, we’ve looked at how Christian identity applies to wives, husbands, children, fathers, bondservants, and masters. We’ve particularly considered the application of Christian identity to the

issue of authority—whether one has a lot or a little. You could think of this as the application to various roles that we might find ourselves in.

Paul makes a final application of identity beginning in 6:10. But instead of applying identity to our roles, he applies it to the realm in which we live. It's as though Paul pulls the pastoral lens way back to help Christians understand the landscape of the world in which they live. He connects the individual application of Christian identity to the broader issue of what kind of world we are living in.

Ephesians has walked us through who we are, what we should do, and (now) what's next? This is the "bell lap" for the final leg of Paul's pastoral letter. As he starts to bring his letter to a close, Paul shows us that **Christian identity provides strength for an unseen battle.**

There are two commands: 1) Be Strong and 2) Put on the Armor of God.

This book starts its conclusion with cautionary and hopeful instruction about knowing the nature of the battle and the resources available to a follower of Jesus. It seeks to answer the question: "Now what?"

1) Be Strong

Verse 10 contains a single command with two contextual statements. The command is "be strong." And the contextual statements are "in the Lord" and "in the strength of his might." The command tells Christians what to do. The context helps us understand where that happens or what that looks like. This is not an encouragement for Christians to "get it together" or "find your inner strength." It's actually quite the opposite.

Before we look at the command and context, we should be careful not to miss the first word in verse 10: "**finally.**" It's important.

You might think it merely means that Paul is drawing his letter to a conclusion. While it's true that we're getting close to the end of Ephesians, the placement of this word is more than merely a transitional word. It could also mean something like "as far as the rest is concerned" or "beyond that."¹ Paul could be using the word to not simply draw the book to a conclusion but to expand his application in the broadest sense possible. In this way, it could be that Paul is pointing a way forward to apply Christian identity into the future and in other arenas that he doesn't specifically address.

Another way to say this might be: "Here's what I'm calling you to do..." or "As you think about what's next, remember this..." In other words, "finally" doesn't just mean that this is last. It means that there's something critical being said.

¹ Constantine R. Campbell, [The Letter to the Ephesians](#), ed. D. A. Carson, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2023), 278.

Even if wives are submissive, husbands are Christlike, children are obedient, fathers are nourishing, bondservants are respectful, and masters are wise, utopia is not around the corner. Obedience is called for as we continue to live in a world filled with conflict and chaos.

The single command in verse 10 is “be strong.” The tense of the verb is a bit ambiguous in that it could mean to embrace strength or to receive strength. That’s why the ESV translates this as “be strong” while the CSB translates it as “be strengthened.” I like the ESV translation better because it fits the parallelism of “put on the armor,” and it creates a powerful connection to the phrase “in the Lord.” The command “be strong” requires “in the Lord” for it to be understood and applied.

The Greek word for “be strong” means to be enabled, to be empowered, to confirm upon you, or to strengthen you. Here’s how it’s used in other places:

- Abraham is described as “growing strong in his faith” as he continued to believe the promises of God (Rom. 4:20)
- Timothy was charged to “be strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus” (2 Tim. 2:1)
- Paul honored the Lord Jesus, saying, “I thank him who has given me strength...” (1 Tim. 1:12)

In every case, I hope you noticed that strength was tethered to something else. In the Bible, strength is not an isolated action. In other words, it’s not something that you find inside of yourself. Being strong comes from looking elsewhere –to God, to faith, to grace, etc. The strength is going to come from a spiritual resource available to you. It doesn’t come from within you.

If you’ve been following this sermon series through Ephesians, this outside-not-inside-of-yourself perspective shouldn’t be surprising or new. Central to the notion of Christian identity is the idea of its connection to being “in Christ, with Christ, or through Christ.” One of the most important elements of Christian identity is the absence of yourself. This is not only basic to understanding who you really are as a Christian, but also, it’s critical to knowing how you are going to make it in the future.

Strength is most certainly what every Christian needs. We need hope, empowerment, enablement, encouragement, strength, wisdom, and assurance. Don’t those sound amazing? Who doesn’t need this? We need faith, perseverance, patience, and victory. But you don’t find this through selfie Christianity. The command “be strong” needs to be heeded, but the next two phrases help us make this work.

“In the Lord” – The first contextual statement is a primary theme throughout the book of Ephesians. “In Christ” is how this book began. Allow me to read the beginning of the book with a particular emphasis:

*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us **in Christ** with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us **in him** before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. **In love** he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons **through Jesus Christ**, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us **in the Beloved**. **In him** we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight making known to us the mystery of his will, according*

*to his purpose, which he set forth **in Christ** as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things **in him**, things in heaven and things on earth. **In him** we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will, so that we who were the first to hope **in Christ** might be to the praise of his glory. **In him** you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed **in him**, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory (Eph.1:3-14).*

Being “in him” is a spiritual and theological reality. It describes a miraculous spiritual condition where my life enters into a different spiritual realm and existence. It’s an other-worldly reality that I have to believe exists and one that I have to remember is true. This is why we gather on the Lord’s Day. It’s why we sing. It’s why we study God’s Word. It’s why we need to read the Bible and pray. You aren’t doing all these things simply to learn. You are doing them to become who you are.

That approach might change how you read the Bible. You are reading to rehearse and reinforce who you really are. Strength is found “in the Lord.”

“In the strength of his might” – The first contextual statement is more positional. This one seems to be more practical. Paul commands Christians to know who they are, but also to find their strength in the Lord. Notice that Paul could have merely said, “Be strong in the strength of the Lord.” He puts three words together all related to empowerment: “Be **strong** in the **strength** of his **might**.” Do you see it?

There’s an assurance in mind here. It’s clear that there’s a lot of empowerment available. But again, you have to see where it’s coming from. Oh, how critical this is! Strength doesn’t come from who you are but who Jesus is. Your hope is not in your power but in Jesus’s power. Your confidence is not in your strength, but his.

How does this work? Let me suggest a few practical steps:

- 1) Humility - You have to be desperate and not have confidence in yourself
- 2) Belief - You must know what’s true about the Lord and trust in it
- 3) Seek – You need to ask the Lord for what you need
- 4) Faith – You must act on what’s true

Where do you need to apply that kind of approach today? Where do you need strength from the Lord? Paul assumes that the next steps in living out our identity are going to be challenging. Where do you need the strength of his might? The first command is “be strong.”

2) Put on the Armor

The second command is similar to the first, but with a unique angle. Paul shifts the focus from the need for strength and courage to a battle metaphor. Putting on armor, after all, implies that there’s a battle to be fought.

Next week we are going to learn more about the specific pieces of that armor. Pastor Mitch DePoy is working on a great sermon to help us know what it means to stand firm and to unpack part of the spiritual armor. So, this point will carry us forward for the next two weeks as we look at the specifics.

For today, I simply want to introduce the idea of putting on armor because of the nature of the battle. Paul's instruction to put on the armor of God serves as a poignant reminder of what is really going on in the world. There's a battle that's happening in the world, and Christians need to understand this reality. The application of Christian identity in the world is not an improvement plan. Living this out is going to be a struggle, a fight, and a challenge.

I don't know about you, but I find that to be refreshingly helpful. It resets my expectations as to what the practical application of Christian identity looks like. It helps me to know that if I apply this correctly, it's not going to be easy, level, or smooth. Sometimes it seems that Christians have the wrong vision for what it looks like to be a follower of Jesus. We shouldn't be surprised when it feels like a battle. Know why? Because it is a battle!

But what kind of battle is it? We get a hint with a few things that Paul says. In the latter part of verse 11, we read this phrase: "that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil." The battle involves learning how to "stand." The word reflects a steady, faithful, and persevering posture. And it includes the idea of courage. In the face of opposition in the heat of the battle, a Christian learns to hold his ground, keep believing, and not give in. But withstand what?

Verse 11 specifically lists "schemes of the devil." This refers to the methods and temptations created by the devil. Consider the temptation of Jesus as a prime example. It was an offering for an alternative plan, a way to make things easier, or victory through unholy means. Victorious Christian living certainly involves doing the right thing, but it also often involves not embracing the devil's shortcuts and schemes. This is particularly challenging when it seems as though everyone else is embracing his lies. It's also hard when you are discouraged or weary. Yet these are the times when you need to be strong "in the Lord and in the strength of his might."

The final explanation of this battle is a description of who we are fighting against. Paul makes it clear that the battle is not merely with "flesh and blood" with human beings. There's another realm in which this battle is fought. He describes it in four ways. Notice the use of the word "the." This is not a generic statement. Paul has something specific in mind.

- The rulers
- The authorities
- The cosmic powers
- The spiritual forces of evil

We're not exactly sure what each of these describe or even mean. Paul doesn't give us more detail. It seems he merely wants us to understand that there's an unseen world that is connected to this battle. This realm is not minor or small. This is a real and intense battle with the forces of wickedness.

In response to this reality, Paul says “put on the whole armor of God.”

Applications

This is a significant text in Ephesians. There are significant implications and applications in light of what we read and learn here. Let me give you three to consider:

1. Embrace Christian identity because the way forward is not easy

Ephesians shows us that becoming who we are isn't a way for self-improvement. It's how we navigate our way forward in a complicated world. Knowing your identity doesn't make life easier. It makes the options clearer.

2. Embrace Christian identity as a way to tap into spiritual strength

Understanding who we are in Christ and what it means to be “in him” point us toward where we can receive spiritual strength. Becoming who you are means you don't rely on who you are.

3. Embrace Christian identity to keep persevering

We make it long term by consistently reconnecting to who we are in Jesus. We persevere by living day by day in truths like this:

In Christ alone my hope is found,
He is my light, my strength, my song;
This Cornerstone, this solid Ground,
Firm through the fiercest drought and storm.
What heights of love, what depths of peace,
When fears are stilled, when strivings cease!
My Comforter, my All in All,
Here in the love of Christ I stand.²

Christian identity provides strength for an unseen battle.

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² In Christ Alone (My Hope Is Found) - Song by Adrienne Camp and Geoff Moore and The Distance, 2002