

Ephesians 6:10-17¹

***Scripture divisions used in our series and various commentaries differ from each other.*

This is the reason for the occasional discrepancy between the verse range listed above and the notes given below.

F. Stand in Warfare ([6:10-20](#))1. Put on the armor ([6:10-13](#))

¹⁰A final word: Be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. ¹¹Put on all of God's armor so that you will be able to stand firm against all strategies of the devil. ¹²For we are not fighting against flesh-and-blood enemies, but against evil rulers and authorities of the unseen world, against mighty powers in this dark world, and against evil spirits in the heavenly places.

¹³Therefore, put on every piece of God's armor so you will be able to resist the enemy in the time of evil. Then after the battle you will still be standing firm.

Notes**[6:10](#)**

A final word: Be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power.—Rather than “with,” which denotes instrument (and is grammatically defensible), “in,” denoting sphere (or source) is probably a better choice, hence, “be strong in the Lord.”

[6:12](#)

against evil rulers and authorities of the unseen world.—NLT adds “of the unseen world” in order to clearly delineate that the rulers and authorities are spiritual, not human.

against mighty powers in this dark world.—This is a good rendering of the literal “world rulers of this darkness” or “cosmic potentates of this darkness.”

against evil spirits in the heavenly places.—The Greek text has “against spiritual beings of wickedness in the heavenly realms.” The use of “spiritual” is juxtaposed to spiritual benefits ([1:3](#)) and spiritual songs ([5:19](#)). It shows that the character of the enemy is not human but supernatural.

Commentary

Whereas thus far, every division of [4:1-6:9](#) was introduced by the Greek inferential conjunction *oun* [^{TG}<[G3767](#)>, ^{ZG}4036] (therefore) along with the imperative *peripateite* [^{TG}<[G4043](#)>, ^{ZG}4344] (“walk,” “live”; [4:1](#), [17](#); [5:1-2](#), [7-8](#), [15](#)), this final division is signaled by the articular adjective *tou loipou* [^{TG}<[G3064](#)>, ^{ZG}3370] (finally) to indicate that these are Paul's final thoughts before he ends the epistle. He encouraged believers to be strengthened in the Lord in order to stand against the spiritual wickedness in the heavenly places ([6:10-12](#)), which is engendered by the devil and his spiritual hosts, who desire to rob believers of their

1. Philip W. Comfort, ed., *Cornerstone Biblical Commentary – Volume 16: Ephesians-2 Thessalonians, Philemon*, (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2008), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, 125-130.

spiritual benefits. This section is divided into three parts: (1) putting on the armor ([6:10-13](#)); (2) standing with the armor ([6:14-16](#)); and (3) taking up the last pieces of armor ([6:17-20](#)).

In order to prepare for battle, believers were instructed to “be strong in the Lord” ([6:10](#)), followed immediately by the charge to put on the armor of God ([6:11a](#)) for the purpose of withstanding the strategies of the devil ([6:11b-12](#)). [Verse 13](#) reinforces the preceding verses by declaring that believers must take up God’s armor in order to stand in the time of evil.

In this final section of the letter, Paul exhorted believers to be strengthened in the Lord—that is, in the might of his strength. As in [1:19](#), he used various words for power. He began with the present passive imperative *endunamousthe* [^{TG}<[G1743](#)>/A, ^{ZG}1904] with the sense, like the noun (*dunamis* [^{TG}<[G1411](#)>, ^{ZG}1539]), of dynamic power or ability, which in this context means “to be imbued with power, to become able, to be strengthened.” Although in form it could be rendered as a middle voice, it is best understood in the passive voice, “to be made strong” or “to be strengthened,” as elsewhere in the New Testament ([Acts 9:22](#); [Rom 4:20](#); [2 Tim 2:1](#)). “In the Lord” indicates the sphere from which the believer’s strength comes, namely, in the Lord Jesus Christ. Immediately following, the conjunction *kai* [^{TG}<[G2532](#)>, ^{ZG}2779] (and) most likely is used as exegetical (“that is”), further explaining the particulars of the preceding words, “be strengthened in the Lord.” Believers are to be strengthened in the *kratos* [^{TG}<[G2904](#)>, ^{ZG}3197], the supernatural “might” of his *ischus* [^{TG}<[G2479](#)>, ^{ZG}2709], which denotes inherent “strength” or power. Consequently, believers are strengthened not only by the person of the Lord Jesus Christ but also by his resources.

Once the command had been given, “be strong in the Lord,” Paul explained how this is to be accomplished ([6:11a](#)): “put on all of God’s armor.” The word *endusasthe* [^{TG}<[G1746](#)>/A, ^{ZG}1907], meaning “put on clothes” (either in a literal or metaphorical sense), is used with an imperatival force three times in Ephesians ([4:24](#); [6:11](#), [14](#)), although each is a different form of the word. The middle voice indicates that believers themselves are responsible for putting on the *panoplia* [^{TG}<[G3833](#)>, ^{ZG}4110] (the suit of armor of the foot soldier), which in this case refers to “the full armor of God.” God’s provision of this armor indicates that this is not a physical battle but a spiritual one, requiring spiritual armor provided supernaturally.

The purpose for donning God’s armor is to enable believers to stand against the strategies of the devil ([6:11b-12](#)). The ability “to stand” results in firmly holding one’s position. Notably, then, this is not speaking of offensive but defensive warfare, to hold one’s ground, against the schemes or strategies of the devil. In [1 John 3:8](#) he is identified as one who has sinned from the beginning and, according to Jesus, has nothing to do with the truth because there is no truth in him; he is a liar and the father of lies ([John 8:44](#)). John identified the devil as Satan, who is the deceiver of the whole world ([Rev 12:9](#); [20:2](#)). Due to this, one must always be cognizant that the strategies or schemes of the devil are based on lies and are designed to deceive believers. Paul exhorted believers to put on the full armor of God in order to stand firmly against the deceptive strategies of the devil. Paul is not calling believers here to attack the devil or advance against him; they are only to “stand”—to hold the territory that Christ and his body, the church, have already conquered. Without the armor of God, it is certain that believers would be deceived and defeated by those “schemes” of the devil, which have been effective for thousands of years. God’s spiritual armor is required since it is not physical but spiritual warfare ([6:12](#)). In other words, the believers’ struggle is not against human beings composed of flesh and blood but is a spiritual battle against spiritual enemies, whom Paul lists as “evil rulers and authorities.” These powers already mentioned in [1:21](#) and [3:10](#) are most likely angelic leaders in league with the devil, who is portrayed as the one who is “the commander of the powers in the unseen world” ([2:2](#)), the evil one who controls this world ([1 John 5:19](#)), and “the god of this world” ([2 Cor 4:4](#)). Next, in [Ephesians 6:12](#), Paul mentions “mighty powers in this dark world,” who are cosmic potentates unknown before New Testament times. Paul describes these as having universal power. Their realm is in darkness, and they are in conflict with the God of light. The final descriptive statement, “evil spirits in the heavenly places,” may not depict a

new foe but may further describe the hostile rulers mentioned earlier as well as identify the realm of these foes. Clearly, the struggle is not human but supernatural. The words “evil spirits” are descriptive of the essential character of those spiritual beings. Their sphere of activity is in *tois epouraniois* [^{TG}2032B, ^{ZG}2230] “the heavenly places”—the fifth occurrence of this phrase, which occurs in this form in the New Testament only in [Ephesians 1:3, 20; 2:6; 3:10; 6:12](#). The idea that evil spiritual leaders are located in the heavenly places is not new. In the Old Testament, God and Satan converse with one another in heaven ([Job 1:6-12](#)). Also, good and evil angels struggle with each other in heaven and on earth ([Dan 10:13, 20](#)). Earlier in this epistle ([3:10](#)), the church is told to demonstrate the manifold wisdom of God toward both good and evil spiritual leaders in the heavenly places. Though the locale of the evil rulers is in the heavenly places, the conflict is both on earth and in the heavenly places. Although believers are blessed with all the spiritual benefits in the heavenly places ([1:3](#)) and are seated there together with Christ ([2:6](#)), they do live on earth in the present evil age ([5:16](#)), where the devil and his followers are active. The present battle, then, is played out in the heavenly realms and on earth between those who align themselves with the devil and his angelic leaders and those who align themselves with Christ and his angels. Although Christ has won the ultimate victory at the Cross, at the present time, it is his plan for the struggles to continue, and hence believers urgently need to put on the full armor of God. This struggle will continue until the defeat of the devil and his angels at the second coming of Christ ([1:10, 21](#); cf. [1 Cor 15:24-28](#)).

In conclusion, believers are urged to put on the armor of God so that they can stand against the onslaughts of the devil and his cohorts ([6:13](#)). The active imperative (“put on”) indicates it is the responsibility of believers themselves to put on the full armor in order to be able to resist or withstand in the evil day. “The time of evil” refers to the present evil days ([5:16](#)), which are compounded with heightened and unexpected satanic assaults against believers and for which they must be prepared. The final clause, which is literally “and having done everything, to stand,” is interpreted by some, including NLT, to convey the idea that when the victory has been accomplished, believers can then stand (John Chrysostom, *Ephesians* 6:13; *PG* 62.159-160; Schlier 1971:293; Yoder Neufeld 2002:298). Others consider it to mean that, having prepared by donning the full armor of God, believers will be able to stand or hold their ground against the attacks of the devil and his partisans (Lincoln 1990:446; Best 1998:597; O’Brien 1999:472). This latter view is preferred for the following reasons: (1) It is consistent with the defensive use of the verb “to stand” throughout the context ([6:11, 13, 14](#)); (2) subsequent verses ([6:14-17](#)) describe the various pieces of armor that believers are to put on in order to make their stand, and this would be pointless if it is subsequent to a victory stand but appropriate for a defensive stand; and (3) the imperative “stand” in [6:14](#) is unnecessary and inappropriate if it has reference to a victorious stand but entirely appropriate if it refers to a defensive stand. Accordingly, appropriately clad with the full armor of God, believers will be able to make a defensive stand against the devil and his strategies.

2. Stand with the armor ([6:14-16](#))

¹⁴Stand your ground, putting on the belt of truth and the body armor of God’s righteousness. ¹⁵For shoes, put on the peace that comes from the Good News so that you will be fully prepared. ¹⁶In addition to all of these, hold up the shield of faith to stop the fiery arrows of the devil.

Notes

[6:14](#)

putting on the belt of truth.—“Belt” is literally a “girdle.” See commentary below.

the body armor of God’s righteousness.—The Greek text has only “breastplate of righteousness” and may well refer to righteous acts of believers that are based on God’s righteousness.

Commentary

After making the general command “put on every piece of God’s armor” (6:10-13), Paul described the various pieces of the armor (6:14-16). The larger section (6:14-20) is the last of the eight long sentences in this epistle (cf. 1:3-14, 15-23; 2:1-7; 3:2-13, 14-19; 4:1-6, 11-16; 6:14-20) with 113 words. This section can be divided into two parts indicated by the two imperatives: (1) “Stand” by putting on the various pieces of defensive armor (6:14-16), and (2) “take” the final pieces of the armor together with prayer to be able to stand against the assaults of the spiritual forces of the devil (6:17-20).

Paul had exhorted believers to put on the armor of God in order to stand firmly against spiritual wickedness (6:10-13), and he further exhorted them to do just that, to “stand” (6:14a). This is the third time he used “stand” (6:11, 13, 14). Note again, believers are not exhorted to advance but to hold their ground and not retreat in the face of wicked spiritual leaders who belong to the devil. Our firm stand depends on the donning of the various pieces of armor. First, there was the girdle of truth (see note on 6:14), which was to be worn around the waist (6:14b). It was used to protect the thighs and to provide a place to tuck in articles of clothing in order to allow greater freedom of movement. It was a defensive piece of armor. The girding with “truth” may refer to the objective truth of Christianity or the gospel, but more probably refers to the believers’ integrity and faithfulness. This piece of armor is basic to all other pieces because truth and trustworthiness are basic to all the other qualities that believers need in order to withstand diabolical attacks. As the soldier’s girdle gives ease and freedom of movement, so truth gives freedom with self, others, and God.

Second, believers are to put on the breastplate of righteousness (6:14c). In Roman armor the breastplate was a metal plate worn over a leather jerkin or coat of mail to protect the chest and back, again a defensive piece of armor. The “righteousness” further describing the breastplate could refer to justifying righteousness but more likely is sanctifying or subjective righteousness (1 Cor 1:30), which, of course, still has its basis in justifying righteousness. In other words, by appropriating God’s righteousness, believers are to act righteously in their dealings with God and people. As a soldier’s breastplate protected his chest from enemy attacks, so sanctifying, righteous living (Rom 6:13; 14:17) guards believers’ hearts against the assaults of the devil (cf. Isa 59:17; Jas 4:7).

Third, their feet are to be shod, literally, “with the preparation of the gospel of peace” (6:15). The heavy sandals worn by Roman soldiers had soles made of several layers of leather studded with hollow-headed hobnails, thus affording them stability. The preparation or readiness, which such footgear represents, affords believers a spiritual stability—or, if you will, surefootedness. The “gospel of peace” (nlt, “peace that comes from the Good News”) refers to the reconciliation of believing Jews and Gentiles united into one body, the church. In this regard, some suggest that in the midst of vicious attacks from evil powers, believers have shod their feet in their readiness to preach the gospel of peace (Caird 1976:93; Schnackenburg 1991:278; O’Brien 1999:476-477). This view is unlikely for the following reasons. First, it does not say that they have shod their feet with the *proclamation* of the gospel of peace but that they have shod their feet with the *readiness* of the gospel of peace. Second, the context is about wearing defensive, not offensive, armor. Third, the main verb in the present context (6:14) is “to stand” and not “to advance.” Hence, Paul depicts this as another defensive piece of armor. In light of this, believers who are to be ready or prepared to stand against the onslaughts of the evil forces must be firmly grounded in the gospel of peace (Hendriksen 1967:277; Lincoln 1990:449; Best 1998:599-600). Their certainty or “surefootedness” results in tranquility of the mind and security of the heart and enables them to stand against the devil and his angelic hosts.

Fourth, they are to take up the shield of faith in which the fiery arrows of the evil one are stopped or extinguished ([6:16](#)). The Roman shield was two-and-a-half by four feet, made of two wood planks glued together with the outer surface covered first with canvas and then with calf skin. There was a metal strip on the top and bottom edges, which protected the wood when it hit the ground and a center iron boss, which caused most stones and heavy arrows to glance off. This shield not only covered the body but also the other parts of the armor described earlier; hence, Paul used the phrase “in addition to all of these.” He further described this shield as a shield “of faith.” Again, it is a defensive piece and represents the believers’ subjective faith, a resolute faith that helps them stand firmly and resist the devil (cf. [1 Pet 5:8-9](#)) and his schemes. The arrows are described as “fiery” like those of Roman soldiers who wrapped them with tow and ignited them, making them fiery or flaming. Their shields were soaked in water and hence the water-soaked skins and hides covering the shields prevented the wood from catching fire and extinguished the arrows. Accordingly, believers are shielded from spiritual harm aimed at them by the evil one. It would be a serious mistake to lay aside the shield of faith and attempt to stand in one’s own strength.

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Ephesians 6:10-17²

6:10. [Verses 10-20](#) deal with the counterpart of the Christian's internal warfare described earlier ([4:17-32](#)). "Finally" literally means "for the rest" (*to loipon*). From a description of the ideal home the focus suddenly shifted to the battlefield. Paul's writings frequently speak of the Christian life in military terms. The language here, however, describes something that is more than just a figure of speech. This battle is real, difficult, and dangerous. Although salvation may be free to the person who receives it, it is not culminated ultimately without great effort. No true soldier of Jesus Christ can expect to be immune from the assaults of the enemy, and no Christian can afford to be neutral in the conflict.

In the light of the seriousness of this warfare, the Christian cannot be self-reliant. "Be strong" comes from a present passive verb, indicating a command to be strong "in the Lord" or "in the sphere of the Lord" or "to participate in the strength that is inherent in Him." It is present, indicating the necessity of continuous dependence upon Him. It is also passive, showing that strength must come from outside the believer, for without God's help he would never make it.

6:11. Therefore, the inspired writer advised putting on the whole armor (*panoplia*) God has provided for Christians so they may stand victoriously in this battle. The emphasis on "to stand" can be found again in [verses 13](#) and [14](#). It contains the idea of being successful in this spiritual battle.

Because "put on" comes from a middle voice verb, it contains the idea of "putting on for one's self." Christians must do this in order to counter the "wiles" or "schemes" or "strategies" of the devil. The original word here (*methodeias*) is transliterated into English as *method* and would be an appropriate rendering of the idea expressed. The word for "devil" (*diabolos*) in this context literally means "slanderer."

The order in this passage about spiritual warfare cannot be overemphasized. While it is not wise to overemphasize the devil, neither is it wise to go to the other extreme and ignore him.

6:12. The conflict is serious because the battle is not against natural forces, but spiritual. Paul referred to "principalities" (*archas*), "powers" (*exousias*), "rulers" (*kosmokratōras*), and "spiritual wickedness." The language shows that these beings are spiritual and not like people whose bodies consist of blood and flesh, etc. "High places" or "heavenly realms" merely denotes the unseen realm in general and not the atmosphere.

Christians are not just shadowboxing in this spiritual warfare. The enemies are real, but thank God they can be overcome by His grace. When describing the reality of these enemies, some commentators add that sometimes in those days the loser in a Greek wrestling contest had his eyes gouged out with resulting blindness for the remainder of his life. That should give a little idea of the reality of these enemies.

6:13. The word "wherefore" literally means "on account of this" (*dia touto*) and relates back to the earlier description of the conflict and the enemies. "Take unto you" refers to the decisive act of taking all the armor God has supplied so that a person can stand his ground when the evil days come, a probable reference to the time when the conflict becomes most severe. As a result, "having done all" or "after you have won the battle," the Christian can stand victoriously.

2. Thoralf Gilbrant, ed., *The Complete Biblical Library – Galatians-Philemon*, (Springfield, IL: World Library Press, Inc., 1995), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, 169-173.

6:14. Before the armor could be put on, the soldier had to bind the loose, flowing garments worn by people of that day, so he could enjoy freedom of movement. To tighten the belt meant a soldier was ready for duty, and to loosen it meant he was going off duty. In the Scriptures "loins" (*osphun*) were used often to signify strength. Girded loins meant the opposite of self-indulgence, ease, or carelessness. Paul compared the wide leather belt of the soldier to the belt of truth worn by the Christian who stands literally "in the realm of truth." The person who operates in the realm of the truth of God's Word will not be defeated in battle.

"The breastplate" usually was composed of metallic scales, but sometimes it was made of leather or bronze. It covered the torso, and so protected the vital organs of the body—the heart, the lungs, etc. The breastplate often saved the Roman soldier from being mortally wounded. Similarly, the person who is just or righteous, because he has accepted the righteousness of Christ, will not be mortally wounded in the spiritual warfare in which he is engaged. Putting on the breastplate of righteousness means an individual has come to grips with the basic tenets of the gospel.

6:15. Thirdly, the soldier needed sure footing to enable him to march and to move quickly when necessary. The Roman sandal or military shoe was bound by a thong over the instep and around the ankle, and the sole was studded with nails to permit surefootedness. "The preparation of the gospel of peace" is a fitting way of stating that a Christian must be prepared with the gospel which has peace as its message.

6:16. "Above all" literally means "besides all." Believers should never be without the shield of faith. The large body-shield usually measured about 4 feet high by 2½ feet wide. It normally was constructed of alternating layers of bronze and oxhide. Many of Rome's enemies used arrows dipped in pitch which would be set aflame and propelled toward the Roman soldiers. The shield would break the arrow's force and cause them to fall harmlessly to the ground. Just as the soldier could not afford to be without this protective shield at any time, the follower of Christ cannot for one moment afford to be without faith.

6:17. The fifth item, the helmet, was made of bronze with leather attachments, or of leather strengthened with metallic plates. It protected the head of the individual. [First Thessalonians 5:8](#) makes another reference to this piece of equipment, calling it "the hope of salvation." It seems to refer to the fact that a person's will, a very important part of his intellectual process, is involved in the hope of full salvation. Christians must continue to will to serve God if they expect the ultimate consummation of all His promises. The head may also symbolize the mind which needs protection. Finally, Paul spoke of the offensive weapon, the "sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God."