

**Strong**  
**[Ephesians 6:10-20](#)**  
**Rev. Curtis Bablitz**  
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The Olympics are a strange thing. Every two years, athletes gather from all over the world to play very strange, very specific games together, and all over the world people watch and get deeply, emotionally invested in the success or failure of these athletes who we only just heard about, playing games we don't really understand. These athletes spend their entire lives training in obscurity, preparing to get incredibly good at one very, very specific skill – luge or javelin or pole vault or biathlon – and then for one shining moment, everyone knows who you are and exactly how good you are at your one thing. Until this summer, I don't think I'd ever thought about the hammer throw – if you had asked me six months ago, I would've assumed it was like horseshoes or lawn bowling or something; you get a bucket of hammers from the hardware store and toss them at a target – how hard can it be? But now that our country is officially the greatest hammer-throwing nation on the planet, with men and women's gold medals, now I know better. The Olympic motto is Faster, Higher, Stronger, and all these competitions are meant to strip away every kind of advantage and bias and discover who is truly the fastest and the highest and the strongest. You might use some equipment to carry out your specific task – pole vaulters need a pole, hockey

players need skates and sticks, hammer throwers need a hammer – but the equipment isn't the important part. If you give me one of those hammers, I wouldn't be able to lift it, let alone throw it 80 metres. If you gave me a pole and told me to use it to jump really high, I'd trip over it just trying to get down the track. In all these competitions, the equipment the athletes use are just tools to help reveal who is really the fastest, highest, strongest of all.

And I think sometimes when we read this famous passage from Paul's letter to the Ephesians, we sometimes think that the same principle applies, the same thing is happening here. Paul tells the church to put on the whole armour of God – each and every follower of Jesus Christ needs to arm themselves, equip themselves with all of these spiritual garments so that we will be able to stand up against every kind of evil and cruelty, all the things that try to fill our world with darkness and death. When I was a kid in Sunday School, when we talked about the armour of God, the teachers gave us these cartoon drawings of a Roman Soldier outfitted in all the armour that a typical Roman Soldier would wear, and we were supposed to label all the armour with the different elements that Paul talked about – write Faith on his shield, write Peace on his sandals, write Truth on his Belt, and so on, and so on. And in all these drawings, the soldier already looked pretty strong – it was always this good-looking, athletic, muscular superhero, like Thor from the Avengers, and I always got the impression that this guy would do just fine in battle

whether or not I wrote “Righteousness” across his chest. And we got the message that the way to put on this armour was to work very hard at being a Good Christian – read your Bible from cover to cover, pray when you wake up in the morning and when you go to bed at night, go to church every Sunday, spend all your time training and working to become Faster, Higher, Stronger, so that when the trouble comes, when evil and darkness descend on the world, you will be ready, you’ll be this unstoppable warrior for Christ, ready to singlehandedly defeat every enemy, every obstacle that stands in your way. Putting on the armour of God was all about getting Stronger, making yourself stronger than the darkness, stronger than the trouble, stronger than any enemy that could stand in your way.

And all of that was good advice. Praying every day, reading your Bible, going to church, trying your best, all of that is wonderful stuff worth doing. But if putting on the armour of God is all about making myself faster, higher, stronger, training to get better and better at following God, you start to worry: if I’m not strong enough, if I’m not good enough, will I be able to stand against the trouble all around me? If I fail, if I falter, will the darkness overwhelm me, will the trouble defeat me, will my armour crack and crumble because I’m just not good enough to keep it together, to keep it strong? If the armour of God is all about my own strength, then I’m in trouble, because no matter how strong I get, no matter how much I train and practice and prepare, no matter how hard I work, I will never

be strong enough. I will never be able to defeat all the darkness in the world, in my life, in my family, in my own heart. We will never be able to build a perfect world, a perfect future, a perfect home, under our own strength. The truth is, we're not like those Olympic athletes, training to make ourselves strong. The armour of God isn't like the hammer and javelin, helpful equipment given to extraordinary individuals to help them do extraordinary things. We don't need to be strong to put on the armour of God. When we put on the armour of God, the strength doesn't come from us, it comes from God. Right there at the very beginning, Paul tells the church to Be strong in the Lord, in the strength of his power. The armour of God isn't about our strength, it's all about God's strength, God's strength that is given to us, to protect and defend us and help us to stand. And the same thing is true of all of those pieces of God's armour that we are told to put on. The Belt of Truth around our waist isn't about our ability to always tell the truth, it's about God's truth, the truth and trustworthiness of God's word to us, the confidence we have that God's promises can always be trusted because God's word is always true. The Breastplate of Righteousness we wear isn't about our righteousness, our ability to always do the right thing – it's God's righteousness, God's everlasting commitment to justice that will never fail, can never fail. The sandals of peace aren't about us feeling peaceful all the time, it's about the peace that exists between heaven and earth, between God and humanity, because of the good news

of what Jesus Christ accomplished for us on the cross, that's the foundation of our lives, that's the ground we walk upon. And the shield of faith, that's not about us being perfectly confident in what we believe about God – it's about the perfect faith of Jesus Christ, trusting God with his whole heart and willingly laying down his life so that we can live. The helmet of salvation is our salvation because of what Jesus has done for us – the sword of the spirit is God's word that became flesh and dwelt among us, God's word that is still being spoken through the power of his Holy Spirit among us here. All the pieces of the armour of God that Paul describes to us, they're all about God's strength, not our strength, they're all about what God has done for us, not about what we can do for God. Jesus Christ is the one who is always true and righteous and faithful, Christ is the Word of God, Christ is our Salvation, Christ is the Prince of Peace. Jesus Christ is the one who makes the armour strong, because Jesus Christ is the only one strong enough to stand against the darkness and prevail, to stand firm against every enemy, even death, and win the victory, every single time.

And the good news is that when we wear the armour of God – in our weakness and frailty, foolish and fragile as we may be, when we put on the armour of God, when we put on Jesus Christ, then in his strength, our strength will grow. Through his strength, we start to get a little stronger, moment by moment, day by day. Wearing the belt of God's truth will make us more truthful. Wearing the

breastplate of righteousness will make us more righteous. Wearing the sandals of peace will make us more peaceful. Holding the shield of faith will make us more faithful. When we put on the armour of God, it is God's strength that protects us, God's power that will keep us safe, but while that is happening, we grow a little more like Jesus, our strength grows and grows little by little so that the armour of God fits better and better the longer we wear it. And if we fail, when we fail – in the moments that we choose lies over truth and conflict over peace, when our faith fails and our righteousness crumbles, the armour of God still stands firm, keeping us strong, keeping us safe, protecting us from every power that would threaten to overwhelm us, because our safety does not depend on our strength. Our salvation does not depend on our strength. Always and forever, our strength is Jesus Christ. Always and forever, our strength is Jesus Christ, and Jesus Christ will never fail. Jesus Christ will always be strong. We don't have to fear the darkness, because Jesus Christ is faster, higher, stronger than every pain, every trouble, even stronger than death, and Christ's strength is our strength. Today, may we put on Jesus Christ, may we wear his armour and stand firm against everything that might threaten or discourage us, may we trust that his strength is more than enough to lift us up and hold us up and make us stand firm. Today, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his power; stand firm upon the rock of your salvation, on Jesus Christ, now and forevermore. Amen!