

## **A Proper Perspective on the “Real” World: Pastoral/Theological Exegesis of Ephesians 6:10-20**

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### **Abstract**

*Early in the book of Ephesians, the Holy Spirit writing through Paul leads the believer in praise of God for the “mystery” of God’s work on our behalf (1:3-10) and proceeds to intercede for the Ephesians that “the eyes of your heart may be enlightened...” (1:18). Indeed, much of the book unfolds so as to provide insight for the believer about one’s life in Christ, role among the believers, and the call to live among family and community. Throughout the book, the tensions of living a radical life in Christ remain a subtheme. This underlying motif is brought to the centre of focus in the climactic revelation of mystery for the believer reached in the final chapter where the Holy Spirit provides a proper perspective of the reality of the world in which the believer lives. Understanding this proper perspective is crucial for the follower of Christ. In this article, the author will examine the structural and thematic context of 6:10-20 in the letter of Ephesians and unpack the significance for the present disciple of Christ. As the exegesis unfolds, one is confronted by the nature of the “real” world beyond the flesh and blood, is presented with the call to holy living in light of this reality, and is challenged to act boldly in response to the true enemy of our faith.*

### **1. Introduction**

“...the sense that in this universe we are treated as strangers, the longing to be acknowledged, to meet with some repose, to bridge some chasm that yawns between us and reality is part of our inconsolable secret.” C.S. Lewis (2001: 40)

“ I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and his incomparably great power for us who believe.” Eph 1:18-19a ”

Bloopers. I like bloopers. I can remember the first time I ever saw outtakes during the credits of a movie, an old Burt Reynolds comedy, *Cannonball Run*. It was eye opening as a young teen to catch a glimpse of what really went on during filming. To be honest, these mistakes and mess-ups unveiled at the end of the movie are one aspect of every Jackie Chan feature to which I look forward. Similarly, I watched *The Lord of the Rings* (extended versions so I could see those extra bits of the story) with every possible commentary on just to gain a little more insight as to what was really going on behind the movie. Spending a few months in the States this year, I was struck by the explosion of “reality” television since we were

last there a few years ago. The genre has moved passed the reality ‘games’ like Survivor or Amazing Race or the “real” lives of celebrities. Now one can find out what ‘really’ happens behind every imaginable job from building aquariums to bounty hunters; catch a ‘real’ glimpse the different ‘cultures’ across the US from those living in swamps to southern family millionaires; follow along as ‘real’ people (NOT actors—one is assured) work in extreme conditions from looking for gold in Alaska to deep sea fishing for tuna. Furthermore, the genre doesn’t seem to be losing steam as new slices of real life are laid bare for the hungry populace. Through it all, I found myself stunned... do people really want to know this stuff?! Apparently, the answer is a resounding, “Yes!” I find myself compelled to ask “Why?”

It seems to be part of a cultural longing for reality. People are yearning to know that some reality beyond their own existence can be found—either to aspire one to greater acts or to help one realize that their own life isn’t so hard after all. This longing is also found again and again in the trends of larger entertainment with notable tension. Superhero movies are the phenomena at the moment (which makes me happy as a movie goer as I am a self-confessed super-hero-holic). The fantasy genre continues to grow. One has a strong desire for the good guys to win against improbable or nigh impossible odds yet such optimism runs contrary to the experiences of reality resulting in a new wave of more ‘realistic’ or ‘dark’ superheroes. Never-the-less, many want to know there is something more... some greater possibility. Why?

I believe that part of being human is being hardwired to yearn for hope. To know that something more is possible. Books that suggest Narnia is just behind a wardrobe or Wonderland is down the rabbit hole pluck at the back of our minds and imaginations. We yearn to have some explanations for our sense of alienation or address our desires for fairness. Is there an explanation or hope when things don’t seem right? TV shows like Supernatural or movies like the Matrix tease us with the suggestion that all around us unseen worlds and entities are moving—all is not what it seems. And more than ever, people seem to be yearning for just such a truth—that there is more to life than meets the eye. Again, this yearning is a part of being human. Part of being created in the image of God is to know that something is beyond our experience—and this tension is met with a variety of responses from a drive to find natural explanation to the journey of seeking out the supernatural.

Throughout the biblical narrative the reader is confronted by this truth that more is happening than is visibly evident. The history of Israel that plays out across the books of the Old Testament was never just about the narrative of a people descended from Abraham; rather, the narrative is really about the work of God within the scope of history. The creator of the universe responded to the trauma of sin with a plan and decisive action toward redemption—climaxing with the rescue of a sinful humanity through the person and work of Jesus which came to fullness in the death, burial and

resurrection! There was a ‘real’ story behind the whole of human history. And this real story didn’t end at Easter. As Acts unfold and the Epistles provide true insight to the growth of the kingdom of God, the Christian is given glimpses of God’s continued work through the moving of His Spirit.

Tension, however, begins to surface for the believer when this confession of faith that affirms God is actively involved in the life of both the individual Christian and the corporate body of believers is challenged by the hardships of life that include purposeful opposition to the Kingdom of God. What is the ‘real’ story? Several New Testament writers offer insight and explanation, especially as the church began to experience significant persecution in response to the preaching of the gospel and the growth of the kingdom. From the book of Hebrews’ declaration that suffering is expected of the believer much as a child should expect discipline from a father to the observation of Peter that we are strangers in this world and will never feel completely welcomed here, the believer is offered multiple facets of the truth of God moving beyond the scope of our perspective. It is this last aspect that Paul, in particular, challenges for the believer: the matter of perspective. Paul suggests that too often we don’t perceive what, indeed, is the ‘real world’ as we are too distracted by what seems apparent. In a key passage in final chapter of the book of Ephesians (6:10-20), Paul provides a curious call to the Christian regarding their response to the realities of this world: put on the whole armour of God! Such an interesting climax for a book that includes so many insights for the follower of Christ! Nevertheless, the passage does provide THE climactic movement of Paul as he challenges the disciple to see the REAL world. In light of the current atmosphere of reality mentality, this passage is particularly appropriate for the church today—as it seeks to make sense of our calling to impact a world that is crying out for some clarity to life. In order to best understand the significance of this passage, one must first place it within the larger context of Ephesians. In light of this context, one must exegete the text so as to grasp the fullness of its meaning. Finally, one must unpack the significance of this passage for the current follower of Jesus in light of this modern world.

## **2. The Context of Ephesians 6:10-20 within the Epistle**

The time of writing of the letter to the Ephesians falls into the period of suffering letters (from the late 50s to middle 60s). The content is not focused upon suffering; rather, it was written during the period of the initial persecution of the church which resulted in the second great theological crisis of the early church. The first crisis centred on the question of Gentiles in the church; more specifically, do Gentiles need to become members of the first covenant as evidenced by circumcision before they can become a part of the second covenant? This crisis was addressed in many of the early epistles, such as Galatians. The second crisis centred on the question of suffering. For most people, some element of divine retribution was the explanation

of any form of suffering. In other words, one suffers because one has angered God. Slightly before and during the time of Nero, the Christians experienced suffering because of their obedience to God. The church, then, needed to answer the question how one could be following God and still experience such harsh suffering. How could one be sure that the suffering wasn't God's response to disobedience? In response to this quandary, several Epistles were written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit such as Hebrews, 1 Peter, 2 Timothy and including Ephesians, which was written during one of Paul's imprisonments.<sup>2</sup> In addition to an understanding of its temporal context, as one studies this passage (6:10-20), one needs, also, to understand its significance due to its place within Ephesians from both a structural and a thematic perspective.

## **2.1 The Structural Relationship of Ephesians 6: 10-20 within the Epistle.**

As with most of the Pauline Epistles, the letter to the Ephesians begins with opening greetings and an additional thanksgiving. In this letter, the thanksgiving is extended to include a section of praise (1:3-14) as well as a more formal thanksgiving prayer section (1:15-23). The significance of these sections will be considered further in the discussion of thematic relationships (see below).

The remainder of the letter has a more clear structure than many of the Pauline letters. Two primary sections exist (2:1-3:21 and 4:1-6:20) with the transition emphasized through the use of a doxology in the closing verses of chapter 3. These two sections can be designated broadly as teaching or doctrinal exploration in the first half and exhortation or paraenesis in the latter. The placement of the passage at hand (6:10-20) deserves special attention from the reader as it declares the passage to be the climactic exhortation from Paul to the church:<sup>3</sup>

In rhetorical terms, the exhortation of 6:10-20 is to be thought of as the main part of the *peroratio* [see endnote for definition and note of the significance of *peroratio*],<sup>4</sup> providing a striking final appeal to the readers, which sums up the need to guard all that belongs to their calling in the battle against hostile opposing forces and attempts to arouse them to appropriate actions by the threefold use of the verb 'to stand'. (Lincoln 1990: xliv).

While Hoehner (2002:817) disagrees with Lincoln's designation of the passage as the *peroratio* preferring to keep the passage within the larger body of exhortations concerning the conduct of the church; nevertheless, he does recognize that even within the context of the series of six exhortations found in 4:1-6:20, this passage is set apart grammatically by a break in the choice of word used to introduce it. More specifically, Hoehner notes that in applying the doctrinal teaching of chapters 1-3, Paul uses an imperative form of the verb "walk" (*peripateo*) in conjunction with

“therefore” (sun) five times. “Believers are to: (1) walk in unity (4:1); (2) walk in holiness, not as the Gentiles (4:17); (3) walk in love (5:1-2); walk in light, abstaining from involvement with evildoers and their works (5:7-8); and (5) walk in wisdom controlled by the Holy Spirit (5:15)” (Ibid.). The final exhortation in 6:10-20, however, does not follow the established pattern, no longer using the imperative form of “walk” (Ibid.); rather, after declaring “finally” he utilizes three different verbs: first, the call to “be strong;” and, second, the command to “put on,” and, finally, “stand”. The final usage of “stand” does utilize the imperative with “therefore”. One should not take lightly the breaking of a pattern. The shift from an established form of exhortation (here over five examples) results in the highlight or emphasis of the exhortation in which the form has been altered. As such, it becomes climactic. Whether one accepts this passage as Paul’s conclusion to the list of exhortations or as Paul’s final declaration for the letter as a whole, one must recognize that, structurally, special emphasis is given to this passage. The relationship of this passage, structurally, to the whole of Ephesians is one of special climax.

## **2.2 The Thematic Relationship of Ephesians 6: 10-20 within the Epistle**

As with most of his letters, Paul expands upon the letter form of the day. While the most obvious expansion is found in the length of the body of the letter, one can also note significant development in the early portion of the letter. In particular, Paul utilizes an extended greeting and thanksgiving to foreshadow key ideas to be addressed in the course of his writing. Ephesians, similarly, includes such expansion. The extended thanksgiving and prayer in Ephesians 1:3-23 is made up of two lengthy sentences (vv. 3-14 and vv. 15-23). The usage of such statements is often a literary technique to help provide the sense of strong evidence or witness. In the initial sentence, one is provided with a sense of the magnitude of the work of God and utilizes the form of extended blessing or *berakah* (see a similar usage in 1 Peter 1:3-5) that should mirror the recipient’s attitude toward God while the latter provides Paul’s extended prayer and thanks for the recipients. Furthermore, in these sentences, one finds not only a key concept introduced, but also significant use of ‘hook’ words that anticipates the epistolary climax of 6:10-20.

In the first sentence, as Paul lists various aspects of the saving work of God through Christ, he declares that God has “made known the mystery of his will...” (1:9a). In this seemingly simple statement, Paul touches a key area of concern for his contemporary audience—especially, in light of the growing persecution of the church. While a Jewish background to the word often denoted simply a previously hidden secret, for the largely Gentile audience, the usage calls to mind the promises of the Greek mystery religions which promised some knowledge “beyond ordinary human comprehension” (Lincoln 1990: 30). Mysteries often expressed insight into the nature of suffering and the promise of salvation

either through wisdom to endure the now or promise to escape the unknown yet to come. “The salvation the mysteries brought was a deliverance from fate and the terrors of the afterlife, not a redemption from sins. The initiate was brought into the special favour of the deity and promised his or her protection in this life and often a blessed immortality in the afterlife ” (Ferguson 2003: 298). Common to most mysteries was the “possession of a secret or of secrets, which were made known only to initiates, giving them great spiritual privileges unavailable to others without this knowledge” (Lincoln 1990: 31). In Paul’s use of such mystery language within the context of the *berakah*, one understands that the Christian is also a part of a “highly privileged group” (Ibid.). Further, Paul will use this term in three other passages in the book (3:3, 4, 9; 5:32; 6:19). This concept becomes one of the unifying themes of the book, climaxing in 6:10-20-where the ‘mystery’ is to be proclaimed boldly!

In the second sentence, as Paul lists aspects of specific prayers for the recipients, he includes a desire for the “eyes of their hearts” to be opened (1:18). The result of such enlightenment is a fullness of hope. This hope is expressed in terms not only of our inheritance (v. 18), but in grasping the incomparable power of God (v. 19) seen not only in the resurrection and exaltation of Christ (v. 20) but also in that the implications of this exaltation is authority far exceeding every authority, power and dominion, and every title—both in this age and the age to come (v. 21)! Indeed, all opposition is placed under his feet and he is over the church (v. 22). Nevertheless, some mystery remains. Who are these authorities and powers? Why does persecution persist? Rather than answer these questions immediately, Paul moves to the gain for the believer from the work of Christ. The reader is kept in suspense with reference to these mysteries until the final exhortation of 6:10-20! Paul does, indeed, foreshadow much of the content of Ephesians in the opening thanksgiving and prayer. One will find discussion of one’s life in Christ, of the body’s unity in Christ, and even more of Paul’s mission in response to the calling of God in his life. The tantalizing promises to know more fully the ‘real’ situation of God’s mysterious work in the world and the role of the believer in response to the condition of the Christian in the context of a hostile world are finally made known in the climactic exhortation found in 6:10-20. If one seeks to understand such mystery, one must turn attention to the passage, itself.

### **3. An Examination of Ephesians 6:10-20**

In Ephesians, Paul moved through doctrinal exposition of the significance of God’s work in Christ for the believer, through a series of exhortations in light of this significant work, and reaches the climactic multifaceted exhortation of 6:10-20. As mentioned above, this final passage serves at the closing focus of Paul on those issues introduced earlier. To strive to understand the meaning and teaching of this passage is paramount in grasping the fullness of the letter. In order to best achieve this task, this author will examine the passage in terms of content and

meaning rather than progressing linearly verse-by-verse. As one moves through the passage, three key ‘realities’ or truths are exposed: the nature of the real world, the truth of one’s calling in light of this real world, and the genuine manifestation of this calling in the real world.

### **3.1 The Real Nature of the World**

While the passage begins as one would expect with an exhortation given in terms of a command (which will be examined in 3.2 below), Paul quickly moves to a revelation concerning the true source of frustration for the believer. As mentioned above, mystery religions often gained strength due to the promise of providing some information regarding the problem of the existence of evil and suffering or offering some certainties on the overcoming of such evil—in an eschatological if not temporal reality. Finally, the promised mystery is revealed and the enemy is not the assumed civil authorities. For many of the early Christians, especially those seeing Paul in prison at the actions of a Roman representative, the Romans were the assumed answer to the question: Who is the enemy of God? Similarly, the Jewish people yearned for the removal of the civic yoke of the Romans so that they could be free people of God. Nevertheless, Paul, through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, provides understanding concerning the true enemy and scope of our opposition in the ‘real’ world.

First, Paul identifies the true enemy of the believer: the devil. In the second exhortation found in verse 11, the rationale for our behaviour is understood in the context of the scheming of the devil. Paul rightly understood that the Roman civil authorities were not the ultimate strategists in the growing ‘war’ against the church. The problem at hand, however, is that most believers did not grasp this truth for seemingly valid reasons. One encounters a case of ‘not seeing the forest for the trees’ in that the Roman government is hard to look past. The combination of the perception of governmental efficiency and the sense of omnipresence of the Roman representatives provided the illusion that truly Rome was the oppressor. While the Greco-Roman culture was no stranger to the concept of unseen gods or spirits moving within society, the tendency was to limit the activity so as to make it more personal. For example, as the Greek culture was assimilated into the Roman culture, the term ‘demon’ (*daimon*) evolved so that “in general, it referred to a power that accompanies a person and dispenses destiny” (Ferguson 2003:236). Such development resulted in a greater level of superstition, but at the personal rather than civic level. On the other hand, the growth in Greek philosophy among the Roman territories resulted in a dismissal of the direct role of the spiritual or unseen in the lives of average citizens calling, instead, for the adoption of new philosophic approaches to life and worldview (Ferguson 2003: 320-321). Paul is pushing the church to understand a greater threat exists in the intentional scheming of Satan against the people of God. The devil is

neither a source of superstitious fear only concerned with tripping up the individual, nor is the devil a philosophic frame of mind to be overcome with a proper discipline; rather, the devil is the true enemy and general in the waagainst the church.

Second, Paul explains the scope of the scheming of the devil as he bluntly places the enemy of the Christian in contrast to ‘flesh and blood’ which refers to the weak, temporal nature of humanity. This contrast, then, is sobering for the believer in that “the real enemy is not so easily resisted or disposed of as such human opposition” (Lincoln 1990: 444). In broad strokes, Paul categorizes the scope of the enemy in two phrases which together are summed up in the expression, “spiritual forces in the heavenly realms” (v. 12). First, Paul notes rulers and authorities. These terms echo the similar usage in 1:21 to describe those over whom “Christ rules not only in this age but also the age to come” (Lincoln, 1990: 444). Not to be mistaken as earthly leaders—for they are spiritual in nature, they do, however, provide an analogy to the type of opposition: organized and intentional. Second, Paul identifies “world rulers of the darkness” (v. 12). This terminology is more closely aligned to the Greco-Roman understanding of forces involved in the determination of human fate although the phrase “world rulers” does broaden the understanding to encompass world affairs. Within the context of Ephesians, the reader must remember that “darkness has a ready been associated with the past from which believers have been delivered...‘This darkness’ therefore has referenceto this present age, this world...” (Lincoln 1990: 444).

In revealing the nature of the real world, Paul, then, provides two lenses. One identifies the movement of an evil one behind the readily perceived circumstantial opposition to the Church. Such movements are schemes with breadth and depth of purpose and scope. The second lens provides the clarity of focus that in spite of any movement of the enemy within the current experience, all the enemies have been placed under the feet of Christ. The believer must see beyond the now to the true nature of the real world, but must also grasp this reality in the fullness of the truth of the efficacy of the work of Christ. “Yes”, a more frightening enemy exists than Rome, but “Amen” the sovereign God knows and has not lost control now or ever; rather, victory has been achieved through the saving work of Christ.

### **3.2 The Real Nature of Christian Calling**

In this passage, as with the other paraenetic sections in Ephesians, the force of exhortation is expressed through the use of imperative verbs. The use of imperative (command) instead of a subjunctive provides slightly more force in the call to respond. One finds in this passage, however, the use of three imperatives (four imperatives are found but two are synonyms used in parallel) working together to provide a more full expression in this final exhortative passage of the letter.



In verse 10, one finds the first imperative and the summary exhortation for the passage—and one could argue for the whole of the book: “...*be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power.*” Paul returns to the essential truth for the believer: victory is dependent upon the Lord! This reality is even more emphatic in that the imperative is actually in the passive voice: “be enabled” or “be made strong,” “corresponding to the passive in the prayer of 3:16... ‘to be strengthened with might’” (Lincoln 1990:441). Furthermore, the agent of that empowering is explicitly stated as the Lord.<sup>13</sup> Thus, while usually translated as the idiom “be strong in the Lord,” the literal rendering captures the meaning—“be empowered by the Lord”. It reflects the truth that the primary calling of the believer is to yield to God so that one may be made strong. God as the sole source of strength is made emphatic through the use of the parallel phrase “and by the might of his strength”. Herein, Paul begins this final movement with an emphatic command for the believer to recognise this fundamental truth. The only means by which the believer will be able to “walk” as commanded throughout chapters 4-6 is by allowing God to provide the necessary strength.

In verse 11, the exhortation again takes the form of an imperative; however, this command is expressed in the middle form—what one is to do to/for oneself. The command to “put on” is the active consequence of “being empowered by the Lord”. In light of the Lord’s work on behalf of the believer, one is commanded to get involved. The purpose of this action is so that the disciple of Christ may be able “to stand” against the strategies of the devil. In the flow of thought, then, as one yields to the Lord and is strengthened by the might of the Lord, one is called to put on or take up every armament of God so that one will be enabled to stand firm in the face of the concerted attacks of the true enemy. Paul connects verses 11 and 13 through the repetition of the key phrases “full armour” and “to be able to stand.” Interestingly, sandwiched in between these two verses is the revelation of the scope of the enemy in verse 12 (discussed above). Indeed, verse 13 begins with the phrase “because of this” referring to the revelation found in verse 12. A second imperative is given, “take up,” which is essentially a synonym with the “put on” of verse 11. A key expansion found in verse 13, however, is the idea “when the day of evil comes.” This phrase creates the tension of the already and the not yet that is often found in Pauline letters. In this case, the plotting of the devil is already evident resulting in the necessity of the believer to put on the armour of God having been empowered by the Lord. Nevertheless, the language of verse 13 indicates that while the schemes of the devil are already evident, there is movement toward a more definitive action against the church<sup>14</sup> so that the believer must maintain themselves without neglect—it is the permanent act of following of Jesus. This truth is reflected in the final phrase “having done everything to stand” with the meaning: “Having accomplished all that is necessary in preparation for the battle and being fully armed, believers are to stand firm” (Lincoln 1990:446).

The final key aspect of the calling for the disciple is found in verse 14 with the imperative "stand". This instance is the climax of a three-fold use of this word. Previously, the word was used in relation to the purpose of one's preparation. Now this purpose moves more directly into the place of the responsibility of the believer. The ultimate action of one having yielded to the empowering work of the Lord and the preparatory work of taking up the armaments of God is to stand. This concept is not to imply that the believer is static by any means; rather, in this context "suggesting the stance of the soldier in combat, standing firm, resisting, and prevailing against the enemy" (Lincoln, 1990:447). This calling "to stand" cannot be understated. To stand is to position oneself completely in the conviction of the truth of God's revelation of the certain efficacy of his grace. To stand is to position oneself absolutely under the authority of God. To stand is to position oneself resolutely in the face of all opposition.<sup>15</sup>

The true calling of the follower of Christ, then, is found in these two-tiered commands: First and foremost--be empowered by the Lord; then, having been empowered--put on all the armaments of God, and stand! Completion of all the previous exhortations (walking in unity, love, holiness, light, and wisdom) is only possible as one fulfills these three elements. One must, however, understand the application of this calling in the passage—what is the expected response?

### **3.3 The Real Nature of the Genuine Life**

The true calling of the believer in light of the nature of the real world, then, is to radically yield to God with the expressed purpose of standing. Sounds great! But what does such a calling look like in the real world? Paul does not leave the reader in a position of unexplained principles; rather, he provides several concrete expectations for the disciple of Christ to enact in the on-going call to be strengthened and stand.

Firstly, the believer is to express this calling in terms of intentional transformation of character. The use of the various pieces of armament becomes a metaphoric imagery of the call to "be holy as God is holy." The need for godly character in the life of the believer is of the same importance as armour for a soldier. This war being waged by the enemy is real. As a result, disciples of Christ must take seriously their role in the continued work of God in their life:

The notion of putting on the armor of God is the functional equivalent of putting on the new humanity (cf. 4:24). From 4:25 onward, the writer had elaborated on putting off the old humanity, and now the detailing of the armor to be worn can be seen as the writer's development of the idea of putting on the new (Lincoln 1990:442)

While this article will not spare space to analyse each piece of this armour, it is notable to recognise that the primary purpose for the armament is defence against the scheming attacks of the devil (although such defence can be active in "quenching"

the “flaming arrows”). Too often, one hears of ministry de-railed due to ethical misconduct. The challenge of intentionally, aggressively, seeking holiness in one’s life is the *expected* response of the Christian to the incredible work of grace through Christ. Satan utilises the failure of the believer to neutralise one’s effective role in this on-going war. The only ‘offensive’ weapon mentioned in this metaphor is the word of God. Again, illustrating that not only is the believer empowered by the Lord, but the only weapon of note is one’s ability to handle the word that God has given. Holiness, thus, includes this proper incorporation of Scripture into the life and witness of the Christian.

Secondly, the life of the believer is to be characterised by prayer. While the sword of the Spirit is the offensive weapon, praying in all occasions in the Spirit is the only offensive action taken. Too often, the modern Christian has minimised the role of prayer in a healthy spiritual life. Prayer is the key activity in the call to stand in the face of the true enemy. Within the passage, Paul provides a three-fold emphasis on prayer: “pray in the Spirit”; “with all kinds of prayers and requests”; “keep on praying for all the saints”. This sentence provides appropriate focus for the Christian. The true means of prayer involves the Spirit of God. Prayer, then, is yet another extension of one’s primary calling—“be empowered by the Lord” from verse 10. The true nature of prayer involves variety and insight. The believer is to be consciously engaging the schemes of the enemy with active prayer. The true scope of this offence minded prayer is the alert, mindful prayer for the saints. One must be mindful of the state of other believers. As others flag in energy and determination, the faithful disciple moves to support in prayer as the expected starting point. In our first year in Cape Town (2000-1), several bombings occurred around the city. They were unpredictable and rather disconcerting. After over 10 different occurrences, area churches called for and gathered for a day of prayer. What makes this event stand out in my mind is that in the week or two following this event, several arrests were made and the bombings ceased. It was a reminder that when circumstances seem to suggest one is powerless, in this warfare, the Christian is never powerless because of the weapon of prayer in the Spirit.

Finally, Paul uses his own life as an illustration of the third expected response of the Christian in light of the calling to be empowered and to stand: fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel. Paul links this final statement to the previous expectation through the use of prayer. To what end is one to pray? Toward what goal is the offensive movement of the church? The proclamation of the gospel is the devastating advance against the enemy. The ultimate goal and desire of all ‘mysteries’ is found in the hope of salvation and certainty of that hope that is the good news of Jesus. The Christian must never forget that the purpose of our calling is to be moving with the desire and direction of God. This activity is qualified by a couple of different terms by Paul. Twice he describes the necessary attitude in the proclamation of the gospel as “fearless”

(verses 19 and 20), also translated “boldly”. Paul, himself in chains because of the preaching of this same gospel, desires even more opportunities to boldly proclaim it! Most of the epistles written during this period of crisis in the early church echo this sentiment that because of the work of Christ in his death and resurrection, the Christian is free from the bondage of fear. Indeed, what remains to fear if death, itself, has been conquered? The believer must become fearless in the pursuit of the proclamation of this gospel. One has been empowered, prepared, and is able to withstand any assault of the enemy; therefore, boldly move forward! Paul uses a second descriptive to explain this role—that of ambassador. One must never forget that the origin of the gospel is not the disciple, but the Lord. The Christian moves at the behest of God, not at the whim of self. The irony of “an ambassador in chains” should not be lost on the reader. While one would never expect to hear of an ambassador imprisoned—for they worked under a presumed immunity while they negotiated for their sovereign, for the believer such a condition is not to be a surprise. Remember, the believer has an enemy that is scheming and moving. While an ambassador might have immunity under normal circumstances, during war or conflict such treatment was not guaranteed. Nevertheless, the chains cannot contain the mystery of the gospel as one proclaims it fearlessly. The life of the believer must be characterised by boldness in the service of the Lord!

#### **4. The Significance for the Modern Real World**

Having examined this key passage from Ephesians, one is faced with the important question, “So what?”. What difference is noted for the disciple of Jesus living in the modern “real world”. While followers in many parts of the world do still experience spiritual war in the form of persecution, the majority of Christian communities experience a great amount of freedom. As such, surely they are free from the ravages of the scheming of the devil! On the contrary, most Christians have simply relegated the truth of the real world to the realm of the imaginary. Instead, one is consumed with the movements of daily life to the neglect of the true calling to be empowered and stand; thus abdicating one’s role in this on-going war. C.S. Lewis in his book, *The Screwtape Letters*, provides fictional correspondence between a senior demon and his nephew. In the first letter, Uncle Screwtape is advising his nephew on the art of deceiving his human charge: “Your business is to fix his attention on the stream [of immediate sense experience]. Teach him to call it ‘real life’ and don’t let him ask what he means by ‘real’” (Lewis 2001:2). And so it is among the modern audience, the ‘real’ has been relegated to that which is tangible. In light of this passage, several intentional actions must be taken by the Christian.

First, one must begin to take seriously the reality of the conflict in which the believer is a part. This truth is not meant to create a paranoia or fear in the believer; rather, a sobriety regarding faith. One must begin to see the activity of the enemy in our world. Take note of the erosion within society. Begin to see the social ills as not

simply expected consequences of a sinful world, but the schemes of the enemy. Do not allow the paralysis of acceptance creep into the life of the church. To begin to see unrighteousness as the norm moves the believer toward apathy and self-appointed removal from action.

Second, having recognised the reality of the evil one's scheming, begin to live as a soldier in this conflict. One is not helpless; rather, one can be empowered of God. While the Holy Spirit indwells the believer at the moment of conversion—and the incredible work of regeneration begins so that the believer is, indeed, a new creation, to allow the Holy Spirit to empower, to direct, to be full in one's life is an intentional surrender. This action is at the heart of the genuine Christian life. One must begin daily to yield to our Lord. As the day begins, intentionally surrender one's life: make one's day and act of worship and yielding. I have learned this action from my wife who regularly prays before leaving the home for God's direction to see where ministry is needed, where a word of hope should be given, where the love of God needs to be lived. Over the years, I have seen lives touched, ministries begun, and the schemes of the devil withstood because of such intentional surrender. Remember that yielding to God so as to be empowered is evident in the two-fold actions of "putting on" armour and standing firm. In the same manner, as one begins to live with more awareness of the truth of the warring schemes of the devil, one must intentionally move to live a life characterised by holiness and faithfulness. Practically, one should begin to evaluate one's life in terms of the character produced. How are righteousness, truthfulness, preparation for witness, awareness of salvation, faithfulness expressed in one's life and in which ways are they being eroded? Radical re-defining of morality and truth exists in society today, especially in the Western context. A case in point is the speed with which societal pressure toward conformity on the issue of gay marriage has moved within the US and Europe. Morality within the entertainment industry has been defined in very personal terms. Consider the presentation of sexual activity and content on mainstream television production in the US. In the 70s, the characters on one popular show revealed that "a good girl" doesn't kiss before a third date... by the 90s, the characters on one of the most popular comedies of all time debate the dilemma of a third date because it was the "sex date". In a decade and a half, the norm had been radically re-aligned and most people never noticed. The schemes of the devil have taken new tacts yet prove even more effective than outright hostility—breeding apathy. The believer must begin to re-consider all aspects of living so as to align them with the initial call to yield to God.

Further, one must begin to live prayerfully. As one seeks to yield and be empowered of God, the challenge to heed the admonition to "pray without ceasing" (1 Th 5:17) becomes all the more important. As one is going, be prayerful. Ever prayer-walk through the mall? Such an exercise can be challenging to our own perceptions of need as well as open our eyes to the hurts of those around us. I recall an anniversary

date with my wife years ago. We had arrived early for the movie and so went to a book store in the mall. I proceeded to make my way to the fantasy section—navigating an aisle blocked by a reader sitting on the floor. Moments later, my wife approached me and suggested I talk to a young man in the religion section—the very one who was blocking the aisle. He was reading a book entitled, *Is There a God?* I asked him if he had some questions I might be able to answer and he enthusiastically said, “Yes.” For the next 30 minutes, I answered spiritually minded questions (and took cell numbers that led to several follow up conversations). The point of the story is not that one should be amazed that God is moving in the hearts of those around us; rather, how easy it is to miss it. In truth, I never really “saw” the man and the conversation would not have happened had my wife not been aware. A part of such prayerful living must be a fearlessness in sharing the mystery of the gospel. Over the years since my bookstore lesson, I have had incredible opportunities of discussion and dialogue on planes, on the street, at the gate of my home, in my home... the reality is that no place is ‘off limits’ from the opportunity to serve as ambassador of our Lord and make known the truth of the gospel.

This statement leads to a final aspect that must come to life in the believer: understand and accept one’s role. Paul proclaims himself to be an ambassador. So, too, is the modern Christian. One does not represent oneself; rather, one’s life is a declaration of the truth of the gospel, or at least of our understanding of this gospel. As such, one’s life should be characterised by the hope proclaimed in this gospel, by the life declared in this gospel, by the grace demonstrated in this gospel. The reality is that those who have not experienced the salvation won by Christ through his death on our behalf are “dead people walking” (Eph 2:1-10). They move as if alive, but are only marching toward a death sentence... it is the real zombie apocalypse in a manner of speaking. Too often, however, the believer begins to envy and desire the life offered by society, falling for yet another scheme of the devil in his declaration that the Christian has no worth or value. Paul has emphasized, however, that one has eternal value and genuine power precisely because it is found in “the might of the Lord’s strength.”

Returning to the ponderings of the introduction, I believe that one of the reasons that so many connect with the great epic stories of that small band of adventurers or heroes who overcome the incredible odds is because it resonates with God’s view of his children and the desire of most to have some importance. In one of my favourite passages from Romans, Paul views the Christian in light of all the difficulties of this world and declares that one is “more than a conqueror” (Rm 8:37). This term is not some wimpy statement, but is a ‘super hero’ word of the day—one that cannot be overcome. This sentiment is what is expressed in this passage: the believer will be able to stand all the schemes and attacks of the devil. Eldridge in his book, *Waking the Dead*, he expresses this reality well under

the idea of the “weight of your glory,” namely the truth is that each believer has value and importance in the conflict resulting from the activity of the devil (2003:32-33). Rather than viewing oneself in terms of irrelevancy, one should understand oneself as heirs with Christ, members of the body of Christ, one empowered by God and equipped with all armament and standing at the point of attack! The Christian *must* stop accepting irrelevance in the face of silent screams from a hurting world in need of the mystery of the gospel. The greatest scheme of the devil is to neutralize the follower of Jesus through the lie that one cannot be useful to God due to past sin or present ignorance. To that Paul challenges the alternate of fearless proclamation. Returning to the realisation of the nature of the real world, in light of this declaration that the Christian has an important role in this conflict, the believer should be characterised as one who acts out the gospel as well. Those elements of evil that exists in society—from poverty to crime, should be confronted boldly by the faithful disciple. The Christian must not simply continue to ignore their role as ambassadors in this world—empowered and armed. Where the Christian moves and acts, life should be evidenced and darkness confronted!

## **5. Conclusion**

“Finally, my brothers, be empowered by the Lord, and by the might of his strength.”  
(Eph 6:10, author’s translation)

This brief command launches the reader into great reflection as it expresses the heart of the Christian life—the very core of one’s calling. Above all else, one is called to yield to God. This activity brings the faithful into direct conflict with the schemes of the true enemy—the devil. Through examining Ephesians 6:10-20, the reader is reminded that while a real enemy exists and one should take note of the organized opposition that will arise again and again, the one who yields to the Lord will be empowered. Those so strengthened are able to put on the character of Christ and actively stand all attacks. Such action must become evident in a life characterized by living hope and life. One final illustration on the nature of this standing from a more contemporary movie is the image from the movie *Avengers* of Bruce Banner calmly moving toward the impossibly huge alien spacecraft invading New York. The teammates voice concern as he hasn’t transformed into the Hulk. He expresses that the power is there, transforms and confronting the behemoth resulting in its destruction as it crumbles around him from the force of his blow and he remains unmoved. Similarly, the Christian must realize the creator of the universe indwells us and seeks to empower us so that no force can move us. Even death only yields victory. Why then do we hesitate? Let us, as Paul, ask for prayer that:

*“... words might be given to me as I open my mouth with boldness to make known the mystery of the gospel” (6:19, author’s translation).*

## 6. End Notes

1. John Eldridge connects this desire with the movies that capitalize on this reality and the reality of God’s movement in this world (2003: 19-34).
2. Some discussion exists as to the place and time of Paul’s imprisonment at the time of the writing of Ephesians. An excellent concise summary and evaluation of the various options is offered by Carson, *et al.* They argue for the strong possibility of Ephesus as the place of imprisonment, but also consider arguments for Rome, Caesaria, and Corinth. (205: 305-316; 319-322; 334-335).
3. Lincoln (1990:xlii-xliv) includes a couple of different examinations of the structure of Ephesians. One based upon the Epistle form and a second based upon rhetorical forms. Both, however, identify the same primary breaks in the letter. One significant difference, however, is seen in the rhetorical form analysis in which case 6:10-20 alone serves as the *peroratio*, or concluding movement. This designation correctly recognizes the significance of this passage in providing a summary response to all the elements covered in the letter.
4. *Peroratio* is a technical term used in classic rhetoric. As Hoehner explains: “... (peroratio is normally a conclusion in recapitulating the facts and an emotional call to action based on these facts), an element of *epilogos* outlined by *Aristotle* and *Quintillian*. The *peroratio* was used by ancient rhetoricians and in speeches of generals before battle.” (2002: 817)
5. In particular, Hoehner argues that if this passage was, indeed, intentionally structured as a *peroratio* in the sense of Greco-Roman rhetoric, “this conclusion would serve not only the parenthetical section of the book (4:1-6:9) but also as a stirring conclusion to the whole book. As such, the various pieces of armor would have links with the entire letter with Paul arousing them to action by the threefold use of the verb “to stand” (6:11, 13, 14). While Lincoln’s proposal has some merit, the author of Ephesians gives no obvious hints of links with the whole book nor is there any sort of recapitulation or an emotional call to action based on those facts, normally included in a *peroration*. ” (2002: 817). While he has some merit in his rejection of a strict rhetorical form, he is not necessarily correct in his assessment of the content’s relationship to the larger letter as will be discussed below.
6. The New Testament writers as a whole did not feel bound by the forms of the day. While most Greco-Roman letters were very short with brief statements identifying the sender and addressee, Paul often includes descriptions of himself and the recipients. Such expansions are strategic and foreshadow basic themes addressed in the letter. The most significant area of expansion, however, is in the



use of extended thanksgiving and prayers. While the Greco-Roman letters may have a sentence at best, Paul regularly uses these sections to provide a baseline for both the doctrinal and exhortative explorations found in the letter. Such is the case in Ephesians.

7. The use of lengthy or period sentences is found throughout the NT. They are characteristic of a more formal rhetoric style and are very evident in Epistles that display such style such as Hebrews, 1 Peter, and even Romans. It is interesting to note, however, that one finds an unexpectedly high usage in the relatively short letter to the Ephesians. Hoehner (2002: 153) notes eight lengthy sentences: 1:3-14, 15-23; 2:1-7; 3:2-13, 14-19; 4:1-6; 11:16; 6:14-20. Three of the sentences are statements of prayer and praise which is the more common usage for extended or period sentences.
8. Lincoln provides some background to the OT and Jewish usage of the *berakah* formula. Its earliest OT usages were individual response “to an act of God’s deliverance or provision (e.g., Gen 14:20; 24:27), that later it... was used in Israel’s corporate worship (e.g., Solomon’s prayer at the dedication of the temple begins and ends with the berakah formula in 1 Kgs 8:15, 56), and that a further stage of development is evidenced by the use of the *berakah* to conclude the books of the Psalter (Pss 41:13; 72:18, 19; 89:52; 106:48). Such eulogies remained dominant in Jewish worship and can be found in Qumran literature... in Zechariah’s prayer of Luke 1:68-75, and in rabbinic Judaism where they were the most characteristic formulae for prayer...” (1990: 10)
9. Lincoln (1990:30) provides a nice summary of the use of mystery language in both the Old and New Testaments.
10. Ferguson (2003) provides one of the better overviews of mystery cults within the NT era. He examines not only ‘local’ instances within given communities (2003: 253-4), but also the various key imports from Eastern communities including Greek (254-265), Egyptian (266-276), Phoenician (277), Syrian (278-280), Phrygian (281-6), and Persian (287-296). It is crucial to understand that such religious investigations were commonplace and explain why many thought Christianity was such a religion. Ferguson examines this relationship quite well (2003: 297-300) (see also Ferguson, 2005: 247 for an interesting look at the relationship between mysteries and the development of sacramentalism in the later early church).
11. See Ferguson (2003) for an excellent overview of Greco-Roman spirituality—from general characteristics (pp. 173-176), organized civic expression (pp. 182-198), and personal development (pp. 213-250). Of particular note is the

transformation of the term 'demon' (daimon). "In general, it referred to a power that accompanies a person and dispenses destiny" (2003:236).

12. Lincoln (1990: 444) notes that "Personal powers of evil are also associated with such a sphere of darkness in the Qumran literature, where the community will be in an end-time battle against the angel of darkness and his hosts... and where it is said that 'all the children of falsehood are ruled by the Angel of Darkness and walk in the ways of darkness'."
13. While he does not choose to translate the phrase explicitly as an agent with the use of "by," Lincoln correctly notes that "Although the imperative could be construed as a middle..., it is more likely that it should be taken as a passive with the sense of 'be strengthened, be empowered.' Reinforcing the notion that the strength is to be drawn from an external source... Here the external source is 'the Lord'..." (1990:441).
14. Lincoln (1990:445-6) provides four main competing interpretations of the usage of "the evil day": "(i) Some hold that the reference is to a particular time of special tribulation immediately preceding the end of the world...(ii) Others believe any time of crisis or special temptation is in view...(iii) Still others see the terminology as a reference to the whole of the present age...(iv) A fourth position attempts to do justice to the strengths of the first and third interpretations and is to be preferred. It recognizes that the terminology would carry clear connotations of a final time of evil at the end of history... Yet at the same time as the terminology of Ephesians carrying these overtones, the call to put on the armour of God and the orientation of the battle are present. The two perspectives or present and future overlap. The readers are to realize that they are already in the evil days... but that these will culminate in a climactic evil day, when resistance will be especially necessary... Just as redemption is already experienced but there will be a final day of redemption... so evil is already present but there will also be a final day of evil".
15. Lincoln identifies the importance of the concept of standing in other Pauline writings (1990: 447).

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