

Open the Eyes of My Heart (Part 25)

Ephesians 6:10:24

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Looking through the book of Ephesians, we see that it has a simple structure. The first 3 chapters are about all of the blessings God has given us through Jesus, not just individual blessings but also the unity that comes from the gospel, which brings Jews and Gentiles together as one. Then in chapters 3-6 Paul explains how having our eyes opened to all that Jesus has given us should change our lives. It should manifest itself in our service in church, in self-control, in harmony within the church body, in walking in the light rather than doing deeds of darkness which are hidden in shame, and in living wisely by having the proper attitude in our relationships with our spouses, parents, children, employers and employees. Our lives must reflect our understanding of God's grace. But it's hard to live like this. We may be motivated for a while, but just like when trying to lose weight, the motivation soon fades and we become discouraged as we fail.

This is why Paul goes on in 6:10-24 to tell us where the ability to be changed actually comes from. None of us can be truly transformed by our own effort, not even the most disciplined among us. Paul tells us we cannot rely on our own spiritual maturity, but rather we must rely on the power of God to change us. In v. 10 Paul tells us to be **strong** in the Lord, and in the **strength** of His **might**. This is similar wording to 1:19, when he describes the power that God gave to us, the same power that raised Jesus from the dead. In 6:11, 13, and 16 Paul says that God makes us **able to** stand against the devil's schemes, **able to** stand our ground, and **able to** extinguish the flaming arrows of the evil one. Though the verb he uses just means "can," it shares the same root (*dunamis*) as the word "strong" in v. 10. So six times Paul mentions the concept of strength, and each time our strength comes from God, not ourselves. We also see this concept in Matthew 5:29-30, when Jesus hyperbolically says that if our eye or hand causes us to sin we must cut it out. But if we cut off every part of us that caused us to sin, there may be nothing left. This underlines how impossible it is for us to transform our lives. Even if we removed our eyes, hands, and tongue, we would still sin because sin originates from the heart, which we cannot change through any physical means. But through Jesus our hearts can be transformed. We must rely on God to change us.

Paul tells us that we also must rely on God because our adversary is not physical, but spiritual. No matter how strong we are physically or mentally, it does nothing against spiritual forces, the rulers, authorities, cosmic powers, and spiritual forces in heavenly places (v. 12). These phrases are similar to those used in 2:1-2 to describe how we were formerly children of Satan, the prince of the power of the air. Unless we stop relying on our own strength and start praying for power from God, we won't stand a chance against these forces. But the God that redeemed us from Satan and brought us into His family will help us fight against these demonic forces. We need not fear these forces because God is infinitely more powerful.

Paul goes on to explain what it looks like to rely on God's strength by using the illustration of armor (vv. 13-17). We know that this armor is clearly spiritual and not physical, but what are these pieces of armor specifically? Often too much emphasis is placed on distinguishing the different parts of the armor, but they are actually referring to the same thing. We must see the forest through the trees. In fact, the pieces of armor are all references to Messianic prophecies in the Old Testament (note that Paul uses the wording from the Septuagint, the Greek version of the Old Testament, so some of the references may not seem obvious at first). The belt of truth comes from Isaiah 11:1-5, the breastplate of righteousness and helmet of salvation comes from Isaiah 59:17, the shoes of the One that brings good news comes from Isaiah 52:7, and the shield that extinguishes flaming arrows comes from Psalm 46:8-11. The sword of the word of God is a not uncommon way of describing God's word, which is associated with Jesus in Revelation 1:16. All of this armor references the Messiah. Putting on the full armor of God isn't about putting on all the different pieces, but fully putting on Jesus. Being strong in the Lord means being in Christ, putting Jesus on, covering ourselves with Him, being hidden in Him, and abiding in Him. Rely on Jesus, not on yourself. Pray in the Spirit and request this strength (v. 18). Stare into the face of Jesus and be transformed (2 Corinthians 3:18). Let us all fight with God's strength and put our faith completely in Jesus for our struggles with sin in this life, with the hope of final and complete transformation when we finally can see Him face to face.