

“Be Strong in the Lord”
By Chris Ulrich
Sunday, October 12th, 2014

You may be seated. It's good to see everybody this morning. Actually, at this time, I'd like to ask Rob to come up, please, and lead us in prayer for this morning's message.

ROB: Lord Jesus, I give You thanks for this day, Lord God, for Your Spirit and for You Word, Lord God. A pray that you would anoint my brother, Chris, and give him the wisdom and the knowledge to preach, Lord, what You would have him to preach, Lord. God, Lord, I pray that Your Spirit would guide him; let him meet the needs, let him see the needs. Let him say exactly what You would have him to say, and I pray that he would be yielded to You. Lord, I thank You, and give honor and glory and praise. In Jesus' name. Amen.

My name is Chris Ulrich, and I appreciate what you shared earlier, Parrish, introducing yourself, introducing Andy, introducing who we are as a fellowship, who we're associated with, and we are a fellowship, as you mentioned, Malcolm, and that's what we're all about.

The last couple of months, we've had a time of sanctification. It's really been one of those kind of things where we're going to get out of it what we put into it. It's not something that, if we put no effort into it at all, then we're not going to reap that benefit. But, if we do make an effort, if we do take it seriously, that's what it's all about.

2 Chronicles 7:16 *For now have I chosen and sanctified this house, that my name may be there for ever: and mine eyes and mine heart shall be there perpetually.*

It's something that, we look at it like—we'll get into this a little more later—but it's a long-term plan. It's not something where it's like a quick religious experience, or something where we look at it like, "Well, I just want to dabble in the Lord." That's not going to cut it; that's not going to save our souls, and that's not going to give us a long-lasting walk with God.

Our theme for this month, has been a continuation of the book of Ephesians which we started in September. Parrish preached from Ephesians 4 last week and really highlighted verse 11 about the different offices in God. You mentioned how that these aren't the only positions and that a walk with God really isn't about a position at all, it's about each of us making a contribution for the glory of God. You also talked about how that each part and function of our bodies, and this is true with just about any living organism, affects the other parts of the body as well. You gave some good analogies, such as a tree, if there's some part that's affected, or even in our own bodies, as far as if we—Bob, I know that you've shared many times; Bob had an accident many years ago, he lost part of a finger. It was something where—I know that you shared that it affected you, and there were times when it was like you thought it was still there, and it wasn't. It affected you until you got accustomed to that, until you get used to that. And then you mentioned something about some guy from a sports team called the Baltimore Ravens and, I've got to say, that's where you lost me and I think you lost everyone else! I'm just kidding little bit, but Parrish is from Baltimore; he's a big Orioles fan. He's got an orange shirt. We are hoping that they mount some kind of a comeback here. Be that as it may, it was a great message and I appreciate the monthly themes we've had this year. How many have really gotten a lot out of the things that we've had this year? I know sound doctrine, a month of encouragement, The first month of

the year we had, "It starts with love." These are the kind of things that we're just praying to be led of God, to basically gain, and grow, and continue in our walk with God.

Now I'm aware that we are going in numeric order as far as the book of Ephesians, with these chapters but we're going to change things up a little today and look at chapter 6 today instead of chapter 5. There isn't any real controversy here but myself and Jesse had to switch places and since we'd both already started preparing our messages, so that's our reason for that

Ephesians 6:1-10 *Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right. Honour thy father and mother; which is the first commandment with promise; That it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long on the earth. And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. Servants, be obedient to them that are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in singleness of your heart, as unto Christ; Not with eyeservice, as menpleasers; but as the servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart; With good will doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men: Knowing that whatsoever good thing any man doeth, the same shall he receive of the Lord, whether he be bond or free. And, ye masters, do the same things unto them, forbearing threatening: knowing that your Master also is in heaven; neither is there respect of persons with him. Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might.*

I know there are quite a few highlights in this opening passage, but I'd like to focus your attention on verse 10. "Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might." There's a message right there if we'll allow it, that happens to be the title of the message, and it's also the first point is that we need to be strong in the Lord.

Having said that, I'm sure that, because we have quite a diverse group here, that there are those who are asking themselves, how can I be strong in the Lord? It takes reading the Bible. It takes evangelizing. It takes overcoming temptations. And I know there are some who are already pretty sure about what it takes to be strong in the Lord. And I would venture to say that there are those that say, "I can't be strong in the Lord." We've heard the expression—we've probably seen the commercial, "I've fallen, and I can't get up." It's one of those things where it's like, you know, the Bible says, "We've all sinned and come short of the glory of God." (Romans 3:23) but it also says, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." (1 John 1:9) I suppose, not here, but I suppose there are people that say, "I don't want to be strong in the Lord." I would say, for that, we're not going to make it on anybody else's coattails. We've all heard that expression before, I believe, and if you haven't, well, you're hearing it. It's one of those things where we need to strive to be strong in God.

It does take prayer. It does take living a godly life. It does take fellowship. It does take fellowship. It takes seeking to do the will of God, acting upon the still small voice of God, and having a plan that is long term.. I'm not saying that there are a million things to remember but God will guide us if we allow it. There's a balance to having a successful life in God, and that will keep us steadfast, if we are willing.

Speaking of steadfastness, and I have to say that, there was, a couple of months ago, and a thought that crossed my mind that I would have to interpret as a challenge, but, it was one of those things where, I think, sometimes God gives us challenges—I'm not talking about, God doesn't tempt us with evil, the Bible talks about that, but He does try our faith, and He does prove us. We look at it in the Old Testament, and we see it in the New Testament. I can't remember if there was any catalyst to this particular thought, but it was something that I pondered for a while. It was asking about what it would take for me to leave the faith. Now, I know that you probably are wondering did I actually—I would say yes; the question I asked myself was, "What would it take to get me to leave the faith?" I mean, what worst case scenario would cause me to just up and quit? What if I found out that I had cancer, got

hauled off to prison, was a victim of identity theft, you name it? Oh, I get that we all feel that, "oh, I'll never deny the Lord; I'll never deny the Lord" and that's a good thing, but sometimes battles come in such unexpected ways that sometimes we get caught off guard. I'm not making excuses for myself, but I'm being realistic.

Now, having said that, it's not like I'm planning my departure, or that I'm not satisfied with my life in God, or that all of a sudden I think the gospel is a big lie or a conspiracy. It's not that at all. I would actually subscribe to the opposite end of the spectrum, and say that I'm looking for reasons to stay in the faith, I'm very satisfied and thankful for what God has done in my life, and that I believe without a shadow of a doubt that being born again and baptized in Jesus' name is absolutely the truth. It's a matter of looking at it like, okay, but a big part of being strong in the Lord is knowing what our weaknesses are, and when we know them, we can address them. I'm not saying that is always going to be what would it take for me to leave. What if I had this misfortune? What if I have this accident? I've been reading this book recently, about the Jews displacement after World War II. About their going back to Israel. The book is actually called, "Exodus." It's a little bit older, it was probably written in the 1950s. It kind of goes back and forth from about 1948 back into the late 30s and 40s, what the conditions were in the concentration camps. I'm reading this and, it brings back a lot of the history that we've learned about people like Josef Mengele, the doctor, or Hermann Goering, or Adolf Hitler, for some of the other lunatics that make you think, "How can Humanity to humanity?" You think about slavery in this country; when the Emancipation Proclamation was signed in 1863, you know that--I'm going to share something that's history, there was a promise, and it was something where, it's a little hard to bring up, but we've probably heard of the 40 acres and a mule. That was something that was actually spoken, and that each freed slave would receive 40 acres and a mule. I looked up some of the history and I found out that some government official said, "No, we can't allow that." There was actually going to be an area down in Georgia where it was like, there was going to be a society formed. So you look at it like, the oppression that has occurred. So, having said all that, we look at the problems in society today, but thank God, He has brought all of us together. You know what? God's people are of every background: rich or poor, black or white, Latino, Asian, whatever nationality or whatever age group, the day we seek God with a whole heart, is the day we're going to find Him. Whosoever will, let him come, and take of the water of life freely. I look at that like, in a ministry like this--I'm getting a little bit away from my notes, I want to share these things, because we can't always know what everybody else's walk in life has been like, and to be quickly judgmental, or to stereotype people, or whatever the case might be, we have to be careful about that.

So, I have to ask, what would it take to leave? I know that we all could come up with reasons/excuses if we wanted. But having said that, I also need to ask, or a need to also ask, what would it take to stay? Because, that's really the more important question. I think the gold standard for perseverance, biblically speaking, is Job. I mean, if you read the book of Job, you understand some of the afflictions, and some of the tragedies that he withstood, it's about the most suffering and tragedy that I think one person could withstand and still survive. I would also be remiss if I failed to mention Jesus Christ, and the sufferings that He withstood, and the beatings He took, and He was blameless; He was faultless. We're talking about somebody that absolutely did not deserve it. On the other end of scale we find Esau who sold his birthright for one morsel of meat. My point is, that you would think the person who endured so much more suffering with just say, "Forget this. Absolutely, I am just forgetting this. There is no way this is worth it." And you would think that the person who had what was just a minor temptation, or just a minor battle, would say, "I can put up with this. I can survive this."

Ephesians 6:11-12 Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.

If we're not careful and we aren't spiritually alert we can allow our surroundings to dictate how we think we stand with God. In other words, if we're in a positive place, all the bills are paid, we have job satisfaction, live in a nice place, and we're getting along with everyone then we must be right with God. I'm not saying those aren't goals to strive for, because they are. It's not a matter of, we're looking to be masochistic, and try to make things more difficult than they actually need to be. Because even Christ himself said, "Take My yoke upon you and learn of Me, for My yoke is easy and My burden is light." The Bible also talks about, "Herein we understand the word of God, that we keep His commandments, and His commandments are not grievous." We're going to have a roller coaster ride, at times, of emotions, of situations, of circumstances... I'm not saying that those aren't goals to strive for, but, what about when we're in debt, out of work, or we just can't seem to catch a break? Do we base our spirituality on that? We shouldn't. I'm not saying that there aren't times when we bring folly or misfortune upon ourselves, because there is. There are times where, the Bible talks about, we're going to reap what we sow. If we sow seeds of doubt, or we sow seeds of distrust, or we sow seeds of unfairness, or just flat out sin, we're going to reap that, but, like I said earlier, in Romans 3:23, it says, quote "All have sinned and come short of the glory of God." But, again, God does give us forgiveness; if we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive our sins.

No matter how good or bad it might get, and I would highlight the good more as it relates to this point since we're more likely to take our ease (sort of fall asleep at the wheel) when things are going well, rather than when we're in turmoil. We look at the book of Revelation, where it talks about the Laodiceans, where it talks about they were lukewarm, neither hot nor cold. God said, "I would rather that you were hot or cold, but because you are lukewarm, I will spew you out of my mouth." Those are things that keep us strong, that keep us on the straight and narrow, that keep us focused. I want to share something: Jason, I know that you said something about a dream that your wife had, and you took the liberty of sharing that, and we appreciate that. This is one, years ago, and it was like, it wasn't anything profound, I think it was more important--and I was telling Mark Lanier this, he said, "You know, remember back when they first started cruise control?" He said, "Do you remember hearing like urban legends about people just getting in the back of their van and just do whatever, sit around?" Well, obviously cruise control only has to do with the speed of the vehicle, it has nothing to do with control. None of those ended well. There was a dream I had, I'm driving down the highway, doing the speed limit, of course, and I said, "Well, I'm going to go take a nap." This was in a dream. So, I somehow climb out of the driver's seat and into the back, and, of course, the vehicle goes out of control and Woooooh! It crashes into a tree, and it was like, I can't say that I had an interpretation other than, one of two things: either God was saying you have fallen asleep at the wheel, or make sure you don't fall asleep at the wheel. It was a wake-up call, and it was one of those things where it's kind of like, I've got to make sure that I'm spiritually alert. I can't just sit here and take this walk of God lackadaisically, or not seriously, and I think that I'm going to prosper, and think that I'm actually going to make it to heaven. Ultimately that's what this goal is all about. I mean, there is nothing more, there's nothing less, that is our ultimate goal. We still can never stop fighting against principalities, powers, and the rulers of darkness of this world. I'm sure there's plenty of things, I mean, we know what's happening now with this ISIS group. Doesn't it seem like, I mean, 12 years ago it was Al Qaeda. There's always some principality, there's always rulers of darkness in this world, and there's always some kind of conflict that manifests itself, but it's not a matter of--okay, as a country we do have to have protection, and we do have to have borders, and we do have to have an arsenal, we do have to have defenses. But, we're talking about spirituality here.

So what/who are the principalities, the powers, the rulers of darkness of this world? Is it the government, the establishment, or the wealthy, the media, the people in Hollywood, or the police? How about those that are constantly screaming about shortages of oil, water, "we're running out of copper," "we're running out of steel," "we're running out of land," "we are running out of air," you

know we're constantly hearing these talking heads--I guess I'd call them that, more than anything--alarmists. That's a very good term for it. There's another book that I was reading not long ago, where they were talking about shortages of water back in the 1850s. They were talking about shortages of land, like, back in the 1920s. You can go further back than that. I believe that God can protect us, and I believe that God has infinite resources. They talk about oil like it's a finite resource; maybe it is, and maybe it's not. That's not really the point here, because, really, it comes down to we've got to be careful in our rush to judgment when it comes to identifying who the enemy is. Those things that I just mentioned, as far as government, as far as the establishment, as far as the rich, I mean, it's like, after a while, we get this picture painted, and we can't put a face on evil, because we're going to get into something in Isaiah 14... The enemy we're talking about doesn't have a face because the one behind the mask is Satan --It might even sound cliché, "Oh, Satan." Well, it is. I'm here to say, we've identified that enemy, and that's where this is all coming from. I mean, Satan obviously works through people, and there are people that might be in these places where we see it manifested in a way quite a bit more than we would have figured. And The Bible talks about in 2 Corinthians 2, that we're not ignorant of Satan's devices and it also talks about in Hebrews about having our senses exercised to discern good and evil, so that we're not putting that face on the enemy. I'm going to read Isaiah 14, versus 12 through 17. I think this is an interesting passage, because it clearly identifies who our enemy is, and it does translate to modern-day.

Isaiah 14:12-17 *How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! how art thou cut down to the ground, which didst weaken the nations! For thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north: I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most High. Yet thou shalt be brought down to hell, to the sides of the pit. They that see thee shall narrowly look upon thee, and consider thee, saying, Is this the man that made the earth to tremble, that did shake kingdoms; That made the world as a wilderness, and destroyed the cities thereof; that opened not the house of his prisoners?*

So, God is showing us that we are wrestling not against flesh and blood, but against these principalities, against these rulers of darkness. It's not always a matter of just saying, "Well, I don't like the government." "I don't like this profession of people." "I don't like this country." Or whatever it might be. But then we have to understand that we have to shake that off, and I'm not saying that there's not times where it's absolutely cut and dried that there's some enemy. I had mentioned before about what had happened in Germany. You know, I have a German last name—well, actually, it's Czechoslovakian -- my dad told me something recently, my dad is 76, we just talking about this little bit, and he said, "You know, when I was in school," he was born in 1938, so he was a kid during the time of World War II, and he said, "Yeah, the kids used to say, 'Hey, you're a Nazi,'" and I was like, "What?" I had never heard that. I had never heard him say that. He's 76 years old, and sometimes, things just come out. Sometimes people—it's not like he was holding—he said, "I didn't feel that they were doing it in a real offensive way," but sometimes something happens enough times that it sticks. So, it was one of those things where it's like, I'm sure there were a lot of people in Germany didn't know anything about it, because they did keep it very secretive. Or, they looked at it like, "If I speak out against it, then the Gestapo is going to come." Do I think the world has gotten better since then? Now we're talking 70 years later; in some ways I think it has, and in some ways I don't think it has. I think that there is spiritual wickedness in high places that manifests itself—I mean, you do look at what happened on 9/11. I know that's going back 12 years, well, 13 years now, but, I mean, who would've thought that something like that could even—how could you imagine that somebody would hijack airliners like that? But, do I look at all Islamic people like they're all in that boat, or like they're all in agreement with that? I don't, and we

can't. They're not all responsible for that. We can't put the responsibility on one person based on what their predecessors did... The Bible even talks about that God made a new covenant where He said the children shall not bear the iniquities of their father, neither shall the fathers bear the iniquity of the children. People are individuals; they make their individual choices.

We could talk about how corrupt society has gotten and the morals declining further and further. We could talk about how we've lost generations and how the spiritual landscape looks bleak. Or we could talk about how difficult it's gotten to live a Christian life and wonder if it's really worth it. But I'd rather talk about the victory in God and how to keep that victory; how to be strong in God. My second point today is about protecting ourselves in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation.

Everybody knows that the only way to protect yourself is to arm your self. Don't mishear me, because I'm not talking about guns, or tanks, or nuclear weaponry, or any outward display of power, I'm talking about spiritual armament. We all understand that we live in a physical world so it's not always so cut and dry to separate that, but there is a verse in Hebrews 11 that the world is framed by the word of God so that the things which are seen were not made by things that appear. It's difficult for us to wrap our minds around that, but once we do, we get that victory, because then we understand, "You know what? Everything that I see, is made up of things I can't see which is God," I know there are plenty of people who looked at, and they don't have faith, they don't know God, "Oh, that's hogwash." They try to ridicule it... Hey, believe whatever you want. There was something I read recently, and I know Parrish had mentioned it a few years back, about Stephen Hawking. For those of you that don't know him, Stephen Hawking is supposed to be some genius. I don't really know a lot about him, but apparently, his opinions are highly esteemed in the scientific world. Recently, he made his declaration, "I'm an atheist. I don't believe in God." So what? Honestly, I look at that, and I don't care whether the guy believes or he doesn't believe. His opinion isn't going to affect my walk with God, or sway me whatsoever. It's a matter of looking at it like, this guy has brought forth any fruit before God. I mean, it's like double minded, if anything, along the way, because, way back, he said, "I believe in God," then, "I don't believe in God," then, "I sort of believe in God," and now, he's like, "I absolutely don't." As he approaches Judgment Day, he's actually going the wrong direction, if you stop and think about it. We have to be like that, and I don't mean go out and start fights with all the atheists out there, because one thing is for sure—and I used to be an atheist myself—if they were really atheist, then it wouldn't matter to them what kind of life we are living. If they were sure of themselves, to say, "I don't believe in God," then their opinion would be, "I don't care how you live. You can do what you want." Why does it actually angry them if I say, "Thank God," or "Thank you, Jesus."? I mean, it's not like I'm, you know, their boss or something.

Ephesians 6:13-18 *Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness; And your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace; Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God: Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints;*

We need to stand on the Word of God and make sure that we study it and know it. That's our lifeline. We need to walk the walk of Christianity which is the gospel of peace. And above all, we need to walk by faith and not by sight. I'm not going to get into how that we need to make sure all parts of our body need to be covered when we prepare for battle, because I think we already understand that. But we have to ask ourselves how we're doing in the areas that keep us spiritually protected because that's what's going to keep us long term. The goal here isn't to be a shooting star, or to make a big

splash, or to hit it big quick and then fizzle out, or get rich quick... There's no shortcuts in God. I guess it's one thing I would like to put emphasis on: we can't fake it, we can't take shortcuts, you can't cut prayer time short, or fellowship time, or the seriousness in God. God will bless us for it. I mean, this isn't is that we aren't receiving something, because we are. The Bible talks about, He daily loadeth us with benefits. That's something where—I mean, there are innumerable things to be thankful for, but, it has to come down to, MI looking for a way out, or am I looking for a way in? Am I looking for a way to continue in Christ, or am I looking for way to, "Forget it, I've had about enough of this." You know what? I'm going to share something that, when those temptations do come along, there can be there for a while, but they're not going to be there forever. When that window of opportunity shuts, it's gone. I'm not saying that other things aren't going to come up along the way, but , we have to put that behind us, and burn that bridge. I'm talking about, burn that bridge of the temptation that affected us, and make sure that we're not regretting that decision that overcame it; that we decided, "You know what? I want to stick with this; I don't want to go back to that. I don't want to live that life. I don't want to live in that world."

So how do we protect ourselves in a world that gets more corrupt every day? Well, how are we doing in the having fervent charity department? How about the study to show ourselves approved unto God department? What about visiting the sick, the stranger, or the prisoner? Or the weeping with those who weep and yes, rejoicing with those who rejoice? It's not all about affliction; it's not all about suffering. It's not all about—I guess you could say--enduring. We have to endure to the end. Jesus said Himself, when the disciples asked about the end times—that's a hot topic, that's something you hear about all the time. It's like, "The end of the world; the end of the world!" What puzzles me is, as much as you hear about the end of the world in the media, and in movies, I mean, how many different ways can you destroy the earth? I mean, whether it's a volcano, or a tidal wave, or a nuclear holocaust, or some kind of rabid locusts, or whatever, I mean, it's like, it seemed like that was the hot movie for about 10 or 12 years, and it's like, it would seem like, well, get ready. And I'm not saying--because, no man knows the day nor the hour when the Son of Man shall return. But, why is that such a popular theme? Because it's the ultimate. I think it's like, "This is the ultimate, and there's nothing we can think about or talk about or film after this." But, when it really does happen, because ultimately, it is going to happen, and it's not going to happen in some Hollywood fashion, or some way that a lot of times, unless you're talking about biblical... The Bible talks about, in Peter, that the heavens shall melt with fervent heat. I've heard people say, "That's a nuclear holocaust." I don't know. I know that if God rained down fire on Sodom and Gomorrah back then, it can happen however He wants it to happen. Again, it's not a matter of trying to sit there and—how about just enjoy the ride? How about enjoy the ride of Christianity, because that's a lot about it, too. Christ talks about the joy of salvation. You guys that were on the outing yesterday, that sounded like a fun time. I was out bike riding. But, I mean, something like that, where it's like, I mean, you don't want to scare them half to death.

I'm going to share something: I don't know if Jennifer—we were doing studies at the Orelup's, several years ago; Kirk asked those in attendance, "What topics would you like to hear?" Jennifer had mentioned, "I'd like to hear about the end of the world." So, it was like, okay, and it was really, to me, it was a topic where it was like, let's look at it biblically. Then, it was like—she's what, 13? 14? 13. Okay; Kirk's giving me signals. Am I going to say, "Jennifer, all you have to look forward to is blood, sweat, toil, and tears."? I know I'd be like, "Gee, I don't know if I really want a part of this." What I liked was, as we put it together, there's going to be a lot of times where you wake up, and it's going to be sunny, like it is today. It's going to be a beautiful day; you're going to have a fun time. You are going to go on outings. It's not a matter of we just sit there and live in constant fear, because perfect love casts out all fear. That's what it's about, as far as living in Christianity. So, I appreciated that topic, and looking at it like, let's teach it in such a way that the youth will get something out of it, and they will have something to look forward to, not just a life of torment and suffering. That's not what it's all about, not by a long shot.

Those questions and I ask, I'm not asking that while letting myself off the hook. I'm certainly not asking these things without considering that I've got work to do myself. There's always room for

improvement in the Lord, but the great thing is that God's wisdom is pure, peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated. The Bible describes the voice of the Lord as a still small voice and it's up to us to hear Him. Be strong in the Lord and put on the whole armor of God. That's what's going to keep us and protect us from here on out.

Thank you for your time.

