

Stand Firm

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Bible Verse: Ephesians 6:13
Preached on: Tuesday, July 28, 2020

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Our text this evening comes from Ephesians 6 again and I invite you to turn there. We're going to focus on verse 13 but for the sake of context I'm going to read verses 10 through 14, that five verse passage. We're preaching on Ephesians 6 on both Sunday and Tuesday evenings so if you're only able to make one or the other, if you're only choosing to make one or the other, it's important for you to be able to pick up the intervening messages because it's all important because all of God's word is important, especially a critical text like this. Ephesians 6:10 says,

10 Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might. 11 Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil. 12 For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places. 13 Therefore, take up the full armor of God, so that you will be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm. 14 Stand firm therefore, having girded your loins with truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness,

In 1878, Bishop J. C. Ryle said this in his book titled "Old Paths," it's a book that we've recommended to you over the years, he said this and I quote and I agree, I am identifying with him. He is speaking for me in what I have to say this evening just far more eloquently than I could do it. J. C. Ryle said this, "I am one of those old-fashioned ministers who believe the whole Bible and everything it contains. I can find no scriptural foundation for that smooth spoken theology which pleases so many in these days and according to which everybody will get to heaven at last." He goes on to say, "I believe there is a real devil. I believe that there is a real hell. I believe that it is not love to keep that back from men that they may be lost. It is the highest love to bring the whole truth before men. It is real love to warn them when they are in danger. It is love to impress upon them that they may lose their own souls forever in hell." And so we are coming to this text from the perspective that when it speaks about the devil, we accept the Bible on its own terms that there is a real, personal, evil, sinister being variously called the tempter, Satan, the devil, in the word of God, and that the devil is actively opposed to the people of God and he works to undermine us in our efforts to bring glory to God, he seeks to make shipwreck of our faith, to destroy lives and to lead as many men as

possible from his perspective into the ultimate destruction that the devil and his angels will face that we see described in revelation 20:11 to 15.

The consequences of this are vast and one of the things that we need to remember is that every living man, woman, boy and girl, we all have an eternal soul, that somehow there is a soul within us, there is an immaterial aspect to our existence, and that soul is going to live forever and whatever happens to us in this life is inconsequential compared to what happens to our souls. Jesus said, "What does it profit a man to gain the whole world and to lose his soul?" What is the advantage to living in a palace on earth, to having kingdoms under your hand if at the end of the day you're dwelling in a dark corner of hell suffering for your sins and your rejection of the Gospel of Jesus Christ? We must view these things from the proper perspective. We must see things from an eternal perspective which is to say we must see things from a biblical perspective and only from that perspective will we ever make a proper assessment of what is important in life. And so we need the word of God, and you and I and those of you watching and hearing over different forms of media, you need to come to serious grips with the fact that you have a soul that is going to live forever and the question is what are you doing with that soul?

Well, I'm grateful for those of you in the room tonight. You want the word of God to feed your soul but how often and how quickly we turn away from the word of God for the things of this world, for the passing pleasures of sin. We live as practical atheists as if these things weren't really true and really didn't matter. You know, I'm convinced that if we really took seriously what Scripture said here in Ephesians 6, you and I would be far more urgent in praying what Jesus taught us to pray from the beginning, "Deliver us from evil. Deliver us from the evil one. Lead us not into temptation. God, I have a soul that is vulnerable here. God, I have enemies that I cannot see and that are stronger than me. I need Your help." And our passage here that we're looking at in Ephesians 6 shows us the instruction that God has given us in terms of how to appropriate the gifts that he has given to us in our salvation so that we would be able to resist these demonic forces that are aligned against us. And just to review them, we're actually going to be studying these in future weeks but I'm giving you a little bit of advance repetition of what it is because this is just so important for us to understand. The armor of God refers to the revelation of Christ in the written word and in the Incarnate Word, the revelation of Christ. It refers to the resurrection of Christ by which we find our power to live and our power to overcome sin. It covers other matters that we are going to look at, our reconciliation with God in Christ and the righteousness of Christ which covers us in perfection so that we are not trusting in our own works as a means of finding reconciliation with God, rather we are trusting in the righteousness of Christ alone as that which merits eternal life for us. That is the armor of God. That is these spiritual equipment that is given to us to help us stand firm in days like this.

So to be a Christian, then, to be a Christian is to be one who is committed to biblical truth. Jesus said in John 4:24 that we must worship God in spirit and in truth. He prayed to the Father, he asked God, he said, "Sanctify them in the truth. Your word is truth." So that the word of God and Christian sanctification are joined together in an inseparable bond as that which helps us to grow in righteousness.

Now I'm not going to say anything new in what I'm about to say here but it's something that we need to emphasize and remember again and again. This priority of truth in our life contradicts the spirit of our age, and not only does it contradict the spirit of our age, it sets us in opposition to it. The age, the environment, the world in which we live is animated by Satan. The end of 1 John which we looked at a month or so ago says the whole world lies in the power of the evil one, and so for us to be committed to truth against the father of lies, for us to have that commitment to truth in an environment that he controls is going to bring the fury and the wrath of demonic forces against us in an individual way and in a corporate way as a local church and in the broader body of Christ. This is real conflict between real forces and there is a sense in which we are the human field in which this cosmic battle for truth plays out.

Now the world either denies God in an atheistic way, or in another way says that all religious paths lead to the true God and so we don't need to get too worked up over our doctrine or over different religions, as long as somebody worships something, then he's going to be okay in the end, as if the first table of the 10 Commandments had never been written in which God said, "You shall have no other gods before Me." The church, the so-called broadly speaking Christian church either diminishes truth for the sake of external unity, I saw an example of that reading a website of a large local church just yesterday or the day before looking at their statement of faith and you could print it on an index card basically, saying things that in one sense we would agree with but being so broad and general about it that they're not standing for anything, and when you don't stand for anything and when your summary of your beliefs is very very brief like that in the hopes that you're going to be able to attract more people under your big tent, the truth of the matter is, as you'll see tonight, is that you are not going to be able to obey the command of this text which says to stand firm. If you are only standing on a few rickety platforms, that's going to collapse under the weight of the heat of the battle. And so the church diminishes truth for broad external unity, for numerical popularity, or for intellectual prestige.

Look, you and I should be very careful not to just automatically believe what any so-called Christian scholar says. You know, you can get a PhD or a ThD after your name with, you know, without a whole lot of trouble actually, that's only indicating that you fulfilled the academic requirements of the institution that you attended. It is not at all any guarantee or proof that a man is actually committed to the inerrant word of God and the doctrines for which it stands. You know, that's all I'm going to say about that but it is quite easy for truth to be sacrificed on the altar of intellectual prestige and for acceptance in a broader scholarly community and, you know, we just as ordinary Joe Christians like you and me, we need to be careful and to be aware and to not let ourselves be buffaloes by these people who like to speak with names that are very careful to add their academic credentials after their signature.

Beloved, don't be intimidated by that, in fact, I want you to look at Psalm 119 in that regard. Psalm 119 which we will get to soon enough as we're reading through this Psalm on Tuesday evenings as the different men open for us, but you need to understand this

and to be in a position of strength so that you can stand firm even if issues are being discussed that use terms that you're not familiar with. Speaking about the power of the word of God to equip ordinary believers like you and me, the psalmist says this beginning in verse 97 of Psalm 119, he says, "O how I love Your law! It is my meditation all the day. Your commandments make me wiser than my enemies, For they are ever mine." Now watch this next verse, "I have more insight than all my teachers, For Your testimonies are my meditation. I understand more than the aged, Because I have observed Your precepts." The psalmist is saying that, "Through the daily, loving, devoted meditation that I give to the word of God on a consistent basis over the years of my life, You use Your word, Your Spirit equips me and gives me a sense of understanding and discernment that gives me insight that goes beyond those teachers who don't actually do that."

So what I want you to see here in this room is that that kind of insight and that kind of discernment and understanding and strength is available to you if you would simply devote yourself to the word of God in a consistent manner. And as we do that, as we do that together as a body of believers, we're mindful of some things, we're mindful that not only does this passage in Ephesians 6 tell us to expect a battle, a struggle as we saw on Sunday, an intense personal, up-close wrestling match with forces that are opposed to us that manifest themselves in difficult circumstances, difficult people, difficult understandings, but elsewhere the Bible tells us also to expect it to be a battle. In Jude 3, the third verse of Jude, God calls us to contend for the faith once for all delivered to the saints. It's a struggle. There is a contest to take place. There is a battle. We contend for these things. What you and I must understand, that there is a perspective on the Christian life in which we realize that it's not as easy as it might sound. God saved us from the devil's rule and dominion, he opened our eyes, he changed our hearts, he gave us new life and brought us out from the devil's kingdom, put us in his own kingdom but, beloved, the effect of that was to set us in opposition of the very environment in which we live. And so we expect it at times to be a struggle, to be a battle, that there are times where we have to contend for the truth, and that means that contrary to what I heard someone say decades ago, we're not going to be friends with everybody simply by being nice and smiling at them and saying kind things to them. Sooner or later issues of truth are going to come up and those who do not love the truth and are enemies of God are going to make themselves into our enemies as well. That can't be avoided. It's the nature of the battle and it's not because we want to be contentious, it's not because we want the battle, it's simply a matter of the reality that there is a living devil who is opposed to everything that we love and hold dear, stated differently, who is opposed to our supreme King, the Lord Jesus Christ. There is going to be a struggle over this. The sooner that you and I understand that, then it's actually going to help us walk in greater peace because we realize that, you know, when we share Christ with someone or we have to take up issue over the truth and that brings conflict and disagreements and all of that, we say, "Okay, this is what I expected. This is what I expected. I expected there to be resistance here. I expected at times there's going to be people that don't like what I have to say. I'm okay with that. This is just the nature of Christianity, we have a struggle to engage."

Now what does God, then, call you to do? What does he call you to do? I'm speaking in the second person singular here now. What does he call you to do that you would respond properly to those great surpassing realities? Well, look at Ephesians 6:13. We saw last time on Sunday our struggle against the spiritual forces and now we get the instruction on what we are to do with that. Verse 13,

13 Therefore, take up the full armor of God, so that you will be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm.

It's remarkable. You can see it here easily in the English text, it jumps out at you in the Greek text, because he immediately repeats himself for emphasis. Verse 13, "When you've done everything, stand firm." Then he says, "Stand firm therefore." He describes what we are to do and then he commands us to do it, to stand firm, stand firm, having already said that in verse 11, that you would be able to stand firm. Do you get the idea what we're supposed to do? We're supposed to stand firm. I hope that's not too complicated an interpretation for you. I don't intend it to be. I'm making a joke about it just to help you see the repetition, what is woven through this is that we are to stand firm.

Now as I pointed out a time or two ago, time slips away from me, he talks about "our struggle," whose struggle is this, and we remembered and we said that he is describing belongs to those that fall within the realm of salvation that was described in the opening three chapters of the epistle: that we are chosen by God, adopted into his family, redeemed by the blood of Christ, sealed by the Holy Spirit of promise, all of this to the glory of God and to the glory of his grace. And that we are the ones who in chapter 2, look at it with me, we are the ones in chapter 2 who though we were dead in our transgressions, chapter 2, verse 5, we have been on the receiving end of a miraculous act of God in the act of regeneration, that moment of regeneration when the Spirit of God touched us, changed us, took away our old heart and gave us in its place a new heart that was alive to God. Verse 5, "even when we were dead in our transgressions, [He] made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved)." So we've been born again in the language of other Scripture, and we understand that this is something that came about not through our own righteousness, this was a gift of God given to us in undeserved mercy. Verse 8, "by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast." Now that's whose struggle this is. "Our struggle" refers to the people of God who are true Christians like that, once dead in sin, "I once was lost but now I'm found. I was blind but now I see." I won't sing it for you. But we were dead. We've been made alive and we understand those things.

Now when Paul says that we are to stand firm in light of the battle, the struggle that we face, he has this in mind, he's saying that we are to show resolve, we are to hold our ground against that which would try to make us retreat and the ground that we are holding is the ground of the truth that leads to salvation.

Look at chapter 4, verse 14. We've been pointing this out a lot in recent days. Chapter 4, actually let's go back to verse 11 and to just realize the importance of teaching and

doctrine in the Christian life and this is the realm in which we are to stand firm. He's already shown us in chapter 4 the realm in which he wants us to stand firm so he says in verse 11 God "gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; until we all attain to the unity of the faith," that system of truth that has been given to us in biblical revelation, "of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ." Now look at verse 14, "As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about," here it is, "by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming; but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ."

So beloved, what we see here is that in the first three chapters Paul gave us a stunning panorama of the greatness of our salvation and the greatness of the work of God on our behalf, a Triune salvation, God the Father choosing us before the beginning of time; Christ saving us, redeeming us at the cross by his shed blood 2,000 years ago; and the Spirit of God coming and applying that redemption to our souls in sovereign power and sovereign majesty, delivering us from the bondage of Satan and into the kingdom of his beloved Son. Those are the truths and the doctrines of what real Christianity is. So we are to stand firm in the sense that we learn and understand those doctrines, we come to convictions about those doctrines that we are not willing to compromise and that we will not yield on. We arrive at the truth and we say, "This is what we believe. This is what I believe and I stand on this ground and I am not going to retreat from it no matter how it is assaulted in the days to come." He's speaking about standing firm in the realm of Christian truth. We resolve to hold our ground on that.

Now let me pause for a moment here and just help encourage you, try to encourage you on what that means, to have a sense of the importance of that. If you are going to stand firm, then you're going to have to come to grips with what it says in Ephesians 4:14, that you're not to be tossed back and forth by every wind of doctrine; that you study these things, you study them with an intention of coming to convictions about what is true and you say, "This is true and I am not open to discussion about that which would contradict it." One of the qualifications for spiritual leadership is that elders are to hold fast the faithful word, this is Titus 1:9 for those of you keeping score at home, holding fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching so that he will be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict. We are to study and to come to settled convictions about what is true. You are not to be a Christian that just holds an open mind and everything is always open for discussion for years on end. That's not a mark of maturity. You are to learn what the truth is, believe it, accept it, and defend it, and to hold to it, and to proclaim it.

Now we do that at different levels of maturity, different levels of ability, different levels of opportunity but my point here tonight is this, is that we are to study the truth in a way that we understand it, and having understood it, we hold it as our own conviction, and having it as a conviction we stand firm and we don't acquiesce in efforts of others to contradict, undermine or deny it. And you say, you might say, especially if you're newer

to Christianity or you're young in the faith, you might say, "Well, that sounds kind of hard. That sounds like that could involve difficult discussions and that that could kind of be like, I don't know, a struggle sometimes." Yeah, exactly. That's the whole point of the passage. It's a struggle to live this way and to be committed to these unpopular truths. It's a struggle within the realm of the professing church to hold to the five Solas: Scripture alone, Christ alone, grace alone, faith alone, to the glory of God alone. There's a whole realm, there's probably a majority of professing Christians who either don't know what that means or when it's explained to them say, "That's not what I believe." So we, you know, we hold these things, we engage in the struggle when we're in kind of a minority position and, you know, that's okay. Jesus said it's a narrow path, narrow gate, small gate that leads to life. You know, this is what it is and think about it this way: there's a sense in which, there's a glorious sense in which we didn't get any say in the matter. God saved us by his own sovereign purposes and he saved us that he would use us and belong to him, and he saved us so that we would be in his kingdom, in his army, struggling against the foes on his behalf. We were sovereignly called into battle, sovereignly called into duty by one who graciously saved us and Christ as Lord made us his own, said, "I will now be your Sovereign and here is what I command you to do. I send you out to stand firm and to believe these truths and to stand firm for these truths which I have revealed and which is the truth by which you have been saved."

So my friends, what that means for you and me, ordinary Christians like you and me, it means that we study the Bible – watch this – we study, we read, we memorize the Scriptures not simply to go through a religious motion day by day and check the box, "I did my religious duty today," we engage all of that, we sit under the teaching of the word of God to actually grow in understanding and conviction about what the truth is so that we would be able to stand firm in it. This is the grace of God, stand firm in it.

So what does that mean for you and me here tonight? What does it mean to show resolve, to stand firm in light of all of these things? It means this, it means that in the deepest realm of your heart, in the farthest reaches of what most motivates you in life, you say to yourself, you ask the Holy Spirit to help you do this, and you say and you resolve in your mind, you say, "No matter what happens, I will not move away from the Gospel of Jesus Christ. That is not negotiable. This is the ground upon which I will die, the Gospel of Jesus Christ. All men are sinners. Christ died and rose again for sinful men." And in the language of an old hymn that was adopted by Murdoch of Buckhorn, Kentucky, "Christ receiveth sinful men." That's what we believe. That's what we stand for and as a result of that Gospel, we proclaim to men that you must repent and receive Christ by faith alone or you will perish in your sins, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven, your destiny will be most miserable unless you respond to Christ and why would you do that when a loving gracious Savior offers the full complete forgiveness of your sins to you and calls you to come to him and he will give you rest. We represent a sovereign Lord. We represent a loving and gracious Lord as we proclaim this Gospel and call men to faith in Christ and that's the ground upon which we stand firm. There's a sense in which, beloved, no other ground matters. That's the sacred hill that we defend.

Now you and I, we have these things. When we talk about these things, this is really an amazing passage, isn't it? We have these things and we hold these things in earthen vessels, the Apostle Paul says. These are truths that you and I did not make up. These are truths that are more valuable than your life or mine. These are eternal truths. They were true before you were born. They will be true after you're dead. This is the truth that matters and it's so weighty and it's so lofty and it's so majestic. And how can we know that we can stand firm on that and what's the basis upon which we do it? Well, it's all certified to us with the imprimatur of God himself in his inspired inerrant word, the 66 books and no more of the Bible. These things are certified to us in God's revelation and therefore we know that our convictions are premised on truth, and we know that we defend these things not in vain. We know that these things are worthy of our lives, in fact, we know this, we know that to stand firm on this truth is ultimately the only life that is worth living. Everything else, heaven and earth will pass away, you and I are going to die, they're going to put a few feet of dirt on us one day or do something else with our remains and we'll be forgotten generation or two down the line, and all of our earthly affections and activities will, you know, drift away into the mist of history and be forgotten by future generations. That's the book of Ecclesiastes for us.

So to live for ourselves is to ultimately live for nothing. To live for this truth, to have this as the motivating reason for our existence gives us an eternal purpose in life that transcends every other thing that we could give our affections to and that's what we're to stand firm for. It helps a soldier to fight the battle if he knows that he's fighting for a noble cause. Well, we're fighting for the noble cause of Jesus Christ. That's worth living for. That's worth fighting for. That's worth dying for. That's worth losing reputations for. That's worth standing alone for. That's worth losing family relationships for, as many of you have found out is necessary.

So how do we stand firm? Well, let me give you three quick points. Ha. Ha, that's a joke to call it quick. First of all, you recognize the danger. You recognize the danger. Let's go back to Ephesians 6:13. Paul describes us as soldiers in the midst of a battle. Verse 12 has described the hostile spiritual nature of that battle and he says there in verse 13, "Therefore, because it is a supernatural battle and you are fighting supernatural foes, therefore as a consequence of that, here's what you are to do, you are to take up the armor of God." And what that tells us is this and the beauty of this passage is not designed to bring us to fear and to bring us into a trembling sense of craven dread against a supernatural enemy, it's designed to give us the courage to stand up and do what we're supposed to do. The battle is serious and the battle wages strong and the foe is mighty but that's why you take up the full armor of God. What Paul is saying here, recognize the danger. That word "therefore" says recognize the danger that's at stake here. You and I battle a supernatural foe but God has equipped us in Christ for the battle, and as a result of that, you and I must take up this armor that God has given us, put it on and appropriate it so that you will not be a casualty in the battle. God has given us everything that we need in his revelation, in the righteousness of Christ, in our reconciliation to God through Christ, and in the resurrection power of Christ. He's given us everything that we need in those things. That is the armor of God whose source is in God, as we will see in coming weeks, but you have to take that up and, beloved, you take it up in part by being

convinced of the authority of Scripture, the supernatural authority of Scripture, the impeccable righteousness of Jesus Christ. You must believe in the resurrection of Christ. You're not a Christian if you don't believe in the resurrection of Christ, and you have this settled sense of peace and confidence in trusting in the reconciliation with God that Christ purchased for you at the cross. We have an authoritative word, we have a perfect righteousness credited to our account which covers us and gives us access to God, we are reconciled to a holy God and we live by the same supernatural power that raised Christ from the dead. That's more than enough to overcome even a supernatural foe like Satan.

So you recognize the battle. Secondly, you recognize the danger. You recognize the danger, Satan is a formidable foe. Secondly, you prepare for battle. You prepare for battle and we've been talking about this all along. I kind of exegeted the text for you before we even got to it. That's okay. You can do it backwards sometimes. You prepare for battle. What is your responsibility, my Christian friend? I could address you individually by name here, what is your responsibility in the battle for truth? Look at Ephesians 6:13. He says, "Therefore, take up the full armor of God." The original language tells us, creates a sense of urgency in the command. Because the battle is dangerous, because the foe is supernatural, it's urgent for you to do this, to take up this armor of God and appropriate it in your battle.

Now we've shown what that means. This is a battle in standing firm for the truth by which we are saved, and in one sense all the days of our lives are evil days. He says there in verse 13, he says, "so that you will be able to resist in the evil day," to resist that which would contradict the truth by which you are saved. Now as I said, in one sense, all the days of our lives are evil. Look over at chapter 5, verse 16. He says in verse 15, you could say, "Therefore be careful how you walk, not as unwise men but as wise, making the most of your time, because the days are evil." There's a general sense in which we are living in an evil environment that requires us to have the armor of God on us at all times because you never know when the attack is going to come. And yet you and I know by personal experience that there are, haven't there been days in your life, seasons in your life where the attacks, the difficulties of being a Christian were especially heightened? There were times when the conflict was close and severe and the outcome was uncertain? Those days where you are especially under assault? Those seasons where you are especially tempted to compromise and to sin? You young people sitting back to my right, you have a season of particular temptations that apply to you. It's not always going to be like that but as you grow and mature in life, those of you especially that are in Christ, there will be those temptations fade away a bit but new temptations and other responsibilities come. The seasons come and go in what tempts us at particular times in our life.

So you face it personally and we've been around as a church long enough to understand that sometimes we face it together as a church. That's okay. Here's the thing I would just say in light of that, just talking about facing it as a church, this is a time, I believe as far as I know and I was saying this to somebody I was corresponding with in another region of the country just today, that as far as I know, the pastor is always the last one to know about anything contrary to what I'm about to say, that's true, but as far as I know this is a

season of peace and unity in Truth Community Church, and I am so grateful to God for that because it's not always like that. Church life anywhere is not always like that. I'm grateful for a season where we're able to gather together in peace and unity and to be able to study God's word together. It's at times like this where those of you that are gathered in the room and you are especially committed to the ministry of Truth Community Church, many of you new members from just, you know, you're just 48 hours into your official membership of Truth Community Church, that's great. It's just important for us to realize and to appropriate in our minds at times like this that we equip ourselves and we realize that there will be times where the battle comes and that's not an indication that it's time for us to flight, it's not a time for flight when a battle comes, in a sanctified, holy, godly way it's the time to fight, to fight and to preserve that which the Lord has given us and not let winds of doctrine or false teachers or divisive people come in and break it all up. What we have is precious. It is a gift from God but it's not only a gift from God, it is a stewardship from God that we are to defend and to stand firm in the defense of, and if we understand that now in times of peace, then we have a better idea of what to do when it's challenged at some indefinite point in the future, and you and I can come alongside each other and more important than me in this is you speaking to each other and saying, "No, remember we talked about this. We heard about this. We knew that there would be times, we didn't know what the form of it would be but we knew that difficult times would come. It's a difficult time, we just stay together, we stay unified and we stand firm in the battle." It's really important for you to individually understand that, embrace it, and to commit yourself to that in a time of peace. You know, it's in times of peace when soldiers are trained for the battle to come.

So God has given us armor to protect ourselves, that righteousness, that revelation, that resurrection power, the reconciliation, and we live that out, we put that armor on and then we live it out in the simplicity of holy living as we prayerfully depend upon our Lord Jesus Christ. Now later in the passage Paul explains the armor and goes through it piece by piece. We'll look at that in future weeks but right now he's just telling us what to do with it. He says, "Take it up, put it on, develop convictions about these and don't ever let those convictions go. Go to your grave with these convictions and wake up in heaven with the applause of angels as you enter in," in the words of our blessed Lord saying, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant, enter into the joy of your Master." You know what? There's a sense in which, I don't always think this way but in the whole background of my life, that's the one moment I'm living for. Everything else is incidental to that. I want to enter the presence of Christ and hear words of affirmation from him, and everything else is incidental by comparison. If you and I could just hear those words, you know what, I could go sit in a corner of heaven and just be content with that. "Christ was pleased with me. The One who gave His life for me, the One who called me to Himself and sent me into the life that He gave to me, all of the ups and downs and pockmarked with failure and unfaithfulness, He still graciously welcomed me and said, 'Well done.'" I ask you whether that's the supreme ultimate motivation in your life because that is what motivates you to put the armor on, to stand in battle, to recognize the danger and come to point 3 which we will call stand your ground. Stand your ground. You recognize the danger, you prepare for battle, and then you stand your ground.

So here's the thing, beloved, it's not necessarily going to be an outwardly dramatic appearance by living a life this way. Sometimes for, you know, I think of young moms living it out in the life of their home and serving their family and loving them, it takes place in obscurity and that's all right. It's not always a big public deal, for most of us it's not. Our duty is to resist the powers of darkness with stability of life.

Look at Ephesians 6:10 he says, "be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might. Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil." Verse 13, "take up the full armor of God." Do you see that bracketing technique that we so often see in Scripture? Verse 11, the full armor of God. Verse 13, the full armor of God. Verse 14, "Stand firm therefore, having girded your loins with truth." The idea of the collective grammar here in the passage is this, it has the idea of put it on and keep it on. It's not just a one time thing. You appropriate it and then you live this way, and what you and I do is we keep the ground that Christ has won. We defend the turf that our Lord gathered and won for himself.

Ephesians, Paul wrote the letter of Ephesians at the same basic time that he wrote Colossians and there are a lot of similarities in the two letters. Let me turn you over to Colossians 2 here and you can see these things clearly. In Colossians 2:5 Paul said, "even though I am absent in body, nevertheless I am with you in spirit, rejoicing to see your good discipline and the stability of your faith in Christ. Therefore as you have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, having been firmly rooted and now being built up in Him and established in your faith, just as you were instructed, and overflowing with gratitude." A stable life firmly rooted. Not necessarily flashy in the eyes of men but strong, firm, stable. A Christian's life is not intended to be a series of panicked decisions, trying to escape one uncomfortable situation and then the next, and then the next. Battles come. We're supposed to stand our ground, not retreat and, you know, go AWOL in the battle.

Look at verse 13 of Colossians 2, he says, "When you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions, having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us, which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross. When He had disarmed the rulers and authorities, He made a public display of them, having triumphed over them through Him." And so the cross is the source of our victory.

Now watch this, here's a transition. We're going into some brief areas of application now. In light of the cross of Christ where do we stand firm against evil forces? Or to ask the question differently, how do these evil forces attack us and undermine us? That's kind of important to know. Where will the enemy engage the battle against us? Where can we recognize that so we can be especially on guard? Well, look, please follow me here. This is so very important and so clear in God's word. If we find our salvation in Christ given to us, revealed to us in God's word, the enemy will attack the revelation that is the foundation of that truth. If our salvation is rooted in the righteousness of Christ, and it is, then he will attack us with false ideas of what righteousness is. False revelation, false

righteousness, and so what does that mean? Well, I'm just going to give you three brief areas for you to just kind of recognize where these attacks of false righteousness and false revelation come in.

1. Based on the parallel Scriptures in Colossians, how do we stand firm? 1. We reject legalism. We reject legalism because that is a false view of righteousness. And I know some of you have come out of very legalistic backgrounds, "Keep this rule, do this, don't do that." We need to understand that that is not where true righteousness is found. It is in Christ, not in our own efforts and what happens is, I've had to fight these battles in the past, sometimes it will come up with false teachers trying to impose Old Testament ceremonies on the church, saying, "You need to go back and revive what the Old Testament did." This was a constant battle in the New Testament as the Judaizers wanted to impose circumcision as a condition of salvation upon the Gentiles. Today we have those that want to go back and resurrect all of the Old Testament ceremonies and feasts and say the Christian church must do those things if we are to be righteous. No. No. The word of God rejects that. Chapter 2, Colossians, verses 16 and 17, "Therefore no one is to act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day-- things which are a mere shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ." Those Old Testament ceremonies and the sacrifices and all of that, they were simply pictures that were pointing to a future reality in the Lord Jesus Christ. Now that Christ has come, accomplished his work of redemption on the cross, we do away with that ceremonial aspect of the Old Testament law because they were merely pointing to a future fulfillment. Now that the fulfillment is here, now that the fulfillment has been accomplished, we put those other things aside and we don't let anyone try to impose Old Testament or external matters of righteousness upon us. We reject all of that. Look at it again in verse 16 with me, "no one is to act as your judge in regard to food or drink." We reject such things because, here's what you need to understand, we reject those things because we understand that our righteousness is found in Christ alone and that we do not contribute righteousness that gives us any merit with God, and so we're resting in the righteousness of Christ and that gives us liberty from restrictions on food and ceremonies that are imposed by others.

So we stand firm. We take on the armor of God. We take on the righteousness of Christ. We reject those who would seek to bind our conscience with ungodly legislation that is not rooted in truth, and so you can't submit yourself to that kind of stuff. Secondly, we reject new revelation. We reject new revelation. The spiritual battle is engaged when teachers, false teachers claim that they have new revelation from God and therefore you should listen to this new revelation from God. Look at Colossians 2:18 and 19 where Paul says this in verse 18, he says, "Let no one keep defrauding you of your prize by delighting in self-abasement and the worship of the angels," here it is, "taking his stand on visions he has seen, inflated without cause by his fleshly mind." What is charismatic theology and their openness to new revelation except a violation of this? "I had a vision. God spoke to me." No, he did not. We covered all of that in my series "The Holy Spirit Today." I'm not going to rehearse all of that here. But beloved, you must understand that the armor of God is found in the revelation, found in the word of God, the written 66 books of the Bible, and to be diverted away from that into supposed new claims of

revelation is to enter into a demonic realm of deception that can only end badly for you. God has given us a final word. New revelation has ceased. It is over. And when you know that and you take on the armor of the revelation of God, 66 books of the Bible, you are defended against those deceptions which would lead you astray. These things have consequences. There are churches that are happy to have people that side-by-side that believe in sensationalism and those that are continuationist. That is a, I'm sorry, I'm so sorry to say this, I'm not that sorry but that's foolish. How can you mix that oil and water together? You've got to take a stand one place or the other. Here at Truth Community Church we've made our stand. I stand alone on the word of God, the B-i-b-l-e.

Thirdly, what we've said is we reject legalism, we reject new revelation, what I want you to see is we're talking about the revelation of God and the righteousness of God and this is the armor that protects us from satanic deception that would lead us astray. Thirdly, we reject asceticism. That's a \$0.25 word, asceticism. Asceticism says that we gain righteousness through self-denial, and so we deny ourselves certain pleasures of life and that somehow increases our righteousness. Well, false teachers speak for demons when they talk that way, and I'll show you what this means here. Colossians 2:20. It's an argument about the righteousness of Christ that you can see plainly. He says, "If you have died with Christ to the elementary principles of the world, why, as if you were living in the world, do you submit yourself to decrees, such as, 'Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch!'" Verse 22, "(which all refer to things destined to perish with use)--in accordance with the commandments and teachings of men?" Verse 23, "These are matters which have, to be sure, the appearance of wisdom in self-made religion and self-abasement and severe treatment of the body, but are of no value against fleshly indulgence." It looks pious. It looks outwardly godly. But because it is a false righteousness, because it is distracting you away from Christ and into your own personal efforts, it is actually demonic and leads to spiritual pride. "I do this and you don't. I'm better than you." No, we reject all of that. Our righteousness is found in Christ alone. In Christ alone my hope is found.

Look over at 1 Timothy 4. I'm almost done here. I really am. I need to talk to the guy that took up 30 minutes of my time with his introduction. 1 Timothy 4:1 through 3. It's a rather bold claim to say that these things are demonic until you realize it's not so bold when it's simply what the Bible says. Chapter 4, verse 1, "the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons, by means of the hypocrisy of liars seared in their own conscience as with a branding iron," look at this, "men who forbid marriage and advocate abstaining from foods which God has created to be gratefully shared in by those who believe and know the truth." This is demonic stuff that takes us away from gratitude toward God and a reliance on the righteousness of Christ, to an area of false self-denial that creates pride in us and distracts us away from the righteousness of Christ to trust in our own false righteousness. You see, beloved, these things are not innocent. The demonic realm calls you to focus on what you do and what men say. It opposes the Gospel of Jesus Christ with self-reliance. I don't need external regulations and there aren't rules for me to follow that earn righteousness before God. All of my righteousness is found in Christ alone.

That's the armor of God, one aspect of it. And when that's clear, you're set at liberty from those things that would bind your conscience with false teaching.

So as we're going to see more in the weeks to come, what we do as Christians, it's simple, we trust the revelation of God, we trust the righteousness of Christ, and there we stand. As Luther said in 1517, "Here I stand. I can do no other. God help me. Amen." And you and I must stand even if everyone else defects. Now I'm not saying everyone else will. There's a lot of faithful Christians around the world. There's thousands that haven't bent the knee to Baal. I'm not saying we're the only ones. I'm merely making a rhetorical point that it doesn't matter what other men do, this is what we do. In light of the fact that it's a demonic battle, we take on the armor of God and then we stand firm.

Let's pray together.

Father, blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ. Father, we trust Your word and we trust Jesus Christ and we ask You to help us stand firm in light of those things, and that You would have mercy, Father, that Your Spirit would have mercy and touch deeply in the hearts of those who have yet to believe. Remove their stony heart and replace it with a heart of flesh. Take away their unbelief and deliver them from the domination of the devil and cause them to be born again, impart new life to them that would manifest itself with a lively trust in our Lord Jesus Christ. We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.

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