

Protected in Christ

The Armor of God

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Bible Verse: Ephesians 6:14-15
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Well, it's our privilege this morning to return to the text found in Ephesians 6 about the armor of God and I invite you to turn there. We'll be looking specifically at verses 14 and 15 this morning but I want to reset the context and read from verse 10 as we begin. We've come to this text again, we've preached through this a few years ago. As I've said in the past, I feel a certain urgency to come back to these principles and to these texts in light of the world in which we live. There is so much tearing at the body of Christ. I'm speaking broadly generally, not specifically about Truth Community today. There's so much tearing at the body of Christ with the false social justice gospel, even the whole thing with the virus and the so-called pandemic and how that's tearing at churches and tearing at Christians who have different opinions about these matters, and people are at odds with one another that should be standing together shoulder-to-shoulder for the sake of the Gospel. Well, my friends, what we need to understand and observe is that that kind of tearing and rending has to be a work of the devil, undermining and disrupting things in the church because it's certainly not coming from the Holy Spirit whose fruit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control, and even as we're mindful of the fact that families and marriages are being torn and pressure and tension brought against them, we need to understand what the resources of God are that can help us find our peace, our stability, and to give us the courage and the ability to go through these things in a way that is pleasing to him and to know and to find his blessing as we do. That blessing and protection is available in the armor and in the resources that he has given to us and we read about them in Ephesians 6, beginning at verse 10. Look at it with me where the Apostle Paul says this,

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, 15 and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace;

You see here that Paul describes us as soldiers in the midst of a battle, soldiers who need to stand firm as the war rages about us, and it immediately gives us a sense of perspective about what the Christian life was always about and what it was intended to be. It was not the easy path promised to us by the purveyors of the seeker sensitive gospel and the purveyors of moralistic therapeutic deism, which we've talked about in the past, God loves you and wants your life to be easy for you, and he's here to fix all your problems. That's not the biblical picture of what the Christian life is like. There is a real devil that brings real opposition to the people of God and it is a struggle to go against him. As we've said in the past, this idea of struggle, it's like a wrestling match, it is close, personal, face-to-face combat that is taking place and if you expect it to be easy and find that it's difficult, it's hard to know where to turn for guidance and direction when you think that it's not supposed to be like that. When we understand that there will be tensions, that there will be difficulties, that there will be trials that we go through, then we have a perspective and say, "Okay, I'm only entering into a struggle, into a wrestling match that God told me in advance to expect. What then do I need in order to go through this battle in a way that is pleasing to our Lord?" And more importantly, how do we do that? Where and how do we find the path to victory in the midst of such a struggle? I don't know about you but if I'm going to have to have a struggle, if I'm going to be in a wrestling match with the devil, I'd like to win by a pin, I'd like to pin and win the victory in that rather than the reverse. When we're mindful of the fact that there is real hostility in the world against the people of God and not just on a horizontal human level but we are wrestling against invisible, evil, wicked forces that are designed for our destruction, that are intent on our destruction is what I mean by that, then the question becomes how do we find our way through that? What is it that gives us the spiritual resources that we need?

Well, look at verses 14 and 15 with me again. That's going to be the particular focus of our time together here this morning and I just want to set these words in your mind yet again. Paul says stand firm. We're not supposed to run, we're not supposed to be afraid in times like this. You and I are meant to be men and women of courage and of confidence in the midst of the battle. Sure, there's smoke filling our nostrils, so to speak, as we go about. Sure, there are spiritual bullets flying by our helmet as we go through, but there is not to be this sense of fear, dread or uncertainty. We are under the commanding General, our Lord Jesus Christ, and he has equipped us for battle and therefore we are to stand firm and be courageous in the midst of it and that must be that which shapes our perspective on it.

So he says, "Stand firm therefore." In these two verses he lists out three aspects of the armor that we want to focus on this morning. 1. "Having girded your loins with truth." 2. "Having put on the breastplate of righteousness." And, 3. "Having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace." What Paul is doing here is he's giving a very extended metaphor that is based on the battle equipment that was worn by Roman soldiers in his day. If you remember that he was in prison as he was writing this, he was probably chained to a Roman soldier as he was preparing this letter, he had a visual picture in front of him as he wrote it that he drew upon as he gave us this metaphor

illustrating these spiritual realities, and what you need to understand is this, just looking at the passage and thinking about it in the broadest, simplest, most basic perspective, Paul is using physical pieces of armor to illustrate the spiritual protection that is ours in Christ as we stand firm in the Christian life. You must understand this and you must believe this, beloved, if you are going to walk well in the Christian life. God has given you everything that you need for your spiritual protection in a battle like this. You do not have to be overwhelmed by the news that is about us. You do not need to live in fear about what the next election or the following four years will bring, and you shouldn't. You do not need to be at odds with other believers over secondary and tertiary matters that are tearing at us here today when you remember and draw upon the spiritual resources that God has given to us as believers.

Now there is a very important interpretive issue that I want to address upfront as we move into considering these things. Paul in this passage speaks about, look at it there in verses 14 and 15 with me, he speaks about truth, he speaks about righteousness, and he speaks about peace in these verses; he alludes to those three qualities, you might say. Now many, or at least several, very excellent Bible teachers will explain this passage from this perspective saying from the perspective that I'm about to describe, that Paul here in Ephesians 6 is referring to Christian character, that is, it's a reference, you might say, to sanctification and the idea is that if we are going to be successful in this spiritual battle in which we find ourselves, that we must be truthful people, we must live righteously, and we must faithfully preach the Gospel in order to fight the battle and win. Now the fact that good Bible teachers see the passage in that perspective means that we shouldn't easily dismiss that perspective on it, and it is true that Christians should be people of truth, people of righteousness, people of peace that are faithfully bearing witness to the Gospel of Christ, it's true that careless Christians will not resist Satan successfully, but I have to ask this question as I contemplate the things that we've considered about Satan, about demons, about these invisible forces of wickedness that are against us. Is it possible, is it really possible that Paul is saying that the practical righteousness that you and I bring to life is the armor that protects us from the fiery darts of the devil? Here's my question in light, when I consider that interpretive approach to this passage, isn't the very problem in our Christian life that you and I are inconsistent? Isn't the problem that we are not always faithful, that we get distracted and we give into temptation, and we sometimes set ourselves at odds with one another? Is it possible that our protection against Satan is premised on our very imperfect living out of the Christian life? It seems to me that that approach puts all of the pressure on us to carry these things out or we're going to die in battle.

There's a different way to consider these things that I think is more in line with what Paul intends and is certainly more supernatural in its ability to protect us, supernatural in its ability to strengthen our faith, to give us the ability to stand. If you tell me that resisting Satan depends on me and how I live, man, I am immediately crushed by the fact that I'm doomed to failure because I am so inconsistent in my Christian life. It seems to me that we need something besides that to defend us against a strong supernatural foe who knows our weaknesses and is more than happy to exploit them in order to win the battle against us. There's a different way to consider these things. Paul here has spoken about the armor

of God. Look at it with me in verse 11, "Put on the full armor of God," the armor that belongs to God, that is his, his armor. He says that there again in verse 13, "take up the full armor of God." He says to be strong in the Lord, verse 10. Look at it there, "be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might." You see, beloved, just looking at this again from a broad simple perspective here, Paul's emphasis is on the strength of the Lord and on the strength of his might in this passage, and when we remember that God is stronger than Satan, that God has resources that Satan does not, then it seems to me that we are designed to look at this passage in a vertical way toward the resources of God rather than our own inner resources and our own inconsistent sanctification. A supernatural battle, beloved – listen to me, follow this thought carefully, we're building a case here – a supernatural battle needs supernatural power to win. Victory comes through supernatural strength alone if our struggle is against a supernatural foe. Well, that's what Paul's been saying all along in this letter.

Look at Ephesians 1:18. You must follow this. I don't know how else to say it. You must follow this and I say that to emphasize the importance of this for your own well-being. Ephesians 1 in verse 18 Paul says, "I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you will know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe. These are in accordance with the working of the strength of His might which He brought about in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead and [He] seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion." Paul is talking about the power that raised Christ from the dead. That's not our power, that's the power of God Almighty, that's the power of the Holy Spirit himself.

Look at Ephesians 2:4. It's not just that God in his own power raised Christ from the dead, Ephesians 1, the whole premise of the book of Ephesians is that God by his own supernatural, monergistic, unaided, supernatural power raised you from spiritual death into life. Verse 1, "you were dead in your trespasses and sins, you used to walk according to the prince of the power of the air." Verse 3, "by nature you were a child of wrath, even as the rest. But God," but God, "being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions," God, "made us alive together with Christ," God, "raised us up with Him," verse 6, God, "seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ, so that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus." It's, "by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves," not of yourself, "it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them." Beloved, do you see it? Ephesians 1, the power of God in raising Christ. Ephesians 2, God using that same power to raise you from spiritual death and to give you spiritual life in his act of regeneration upon your souls. The whole foundation of Ephesians is about the power of God.

Look at Paul's prayer in Ephesians 3. He says, "For this reason," verse 14, "For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on

earth derives its name, that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man." He's praying that God would grant his power to you mediated by the person of the indwelling Holy Spirit deep in your heart, "so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; and that you, being rooted and grounded in love, would comprehend the breadth, the length, the height, the depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God. Now to Him," to Him, "who is able to do," it's about what God is able to do, "far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us," that power of God that raised Christ from the dead, "to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen." And so the whole spirit, the whole atmosphere of this entire book and going back to Ephesians 1:3, "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." You see, Ephesians is premised upon what God has done for us, what God has done in us, how God has saved us from Satan, and that is the whole environment in which we live and breathe and have our being as Christians, it's a whole foundation upon which we stand is what God has done.

Now in light of that, beloved, which I think is just undeniable from a quick survey of the letter, in light of that, in light of the fact that we fight a supernatural battle against Satan, is it possible that we are being cast on our own ability to keep the commands in order to win this battle? I don't think so. I don't think that's Paul's point here at all for all of those reasons that I have been saying. A supernatural battle needs supernatural power and God has displayed that power to you in saving you in the first place, and it is that same God, that same power, it is what he has and what he has done that we draw upon in order to find our strength for the battle.

If you're not convinced yet, which I hope that you are, but if you're not let me just point out a simple observation that will also help frame this for you in the remainder of our time here today. Thinking about the literal physical armor of an actual Roman soldier, you need to understand that that armor was something that was external to him. He grabbed a shield that would protect him. He grabbed a sword, a dagger that was outside of him and he appropriated it. The helmet was something that he took from outside himself and put it on. It's something that was external to him, not internal to his own being. And in like manner, taking the analogy and applying it spiritually, then, what this passage I believe is teaching quite plainly is that we draw upon armor, we draw upon resources that are external to us, that are independent of us, in a sense, and that is what we draw upon, that's what we apply to ourselves find the protection and strength that we need in order to stand firm in the battle.

And so with those things in mind, how then would we understand this passage and what it is teaching us? Well, we'll look at these three pieces of armor in turn here this morning. First of all, what is the armor that you draw upon? What is it that gives you strength for battle against – watch this – gives you strength for battle against a supernatural foe of deception, a foe who has the ability to supernaturally deceive you and we're seeing it work out in the world around us in real time? All the deception that is about us, it's not

you telling the truth that's going to be your defense against that, it has to be the truth of God.

Point 1. You remember God's revelation. You remember God's revelation. Beloved, I'm going to say something really simple here but it's the simple things that bring clarity in the smoke of battle. When everything around is smoke and confusion in the midst of the battlefield, you know, we need the trumpet call, we need a trumpeter to step forth and pierce through that with the clarity of the call of a trumpet about what it is that gives us the victory in the battle. And what is that trumpet? It's the word of God. It's the 66 books of the Bible. It is the truth of God that protects you in battle with Satan.

Look at chapter 6, verse 14 with me. Ephesians 6:14. Paul repeats the admonition, "Stand firm." He said it in verse 11, stand firm; verse 13, stand firm; now again in verse 14 back to back forms of the same verb, "Stand firm therefore, having girded your loins with truth." Now notice that the main verb here in this section is the imperative, stand firm. Paul builds around that command with a series of participles to show you what it is that equips you with spiritual stability so that you are able to stand firm. The command is to stand firm, not to be truthful. It's important to be truthful but that's not the command here, the command here is to stand firm and then the three participles that follow in these two verses show you what it is that gives you the ability to stand like a man in battle, to be courageous when others tremble and turn away and fall away. It's that which gives you the courage to stand alone for Christ even if other prominent men are going the way of the world in their ministries. You say, "They can do that. I can stand firm because my faith is not resting on what those guys do in Louisville or in Washington, DC. My faith isn't built on them, it's built on the revelation of God which is immovable."

So Paul says we can stand firm "having girded your loins with truth." Now as many commentators have pointed out in many historical sources, Roman soldiers were dressed in robes, loose robes, but he had a belt that would gather in his clothing as he was entering into battle that would hold it close to his body. Without that, an enemy could grab loose robes and gain an advantage, but if the robe is bound tight to him, he is not vulnerable in that same way. What Paul is saying is, I'll show you in a moment why we believe this is referring to God's truth, not our truthfulness, that what Paul is saying is that when you gather the truth of God and bring it close to you, there are far fewer vulnerabilities in your life by which Satan can attack you. Martin Luther said in the hymn that we sometimes sing, "A Mighty Fortress is our God," that God wills his truth to triumph through us. Beloved, it is the revelation of God in the 66 books of the Bible, it is the revelation of God in truth. Who is truth? Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth and the life. It is in the written word of God, it is in the Incarnate Word of God, in our Lord Jesus Christ, it is external to us that we find the truth that protects us in the battle. That means that you and I, we do not carry the loose robes of pragmatism or worldly values that allow Satan to grab hold of us and to inflict damage upon us. That means, beloved, that when, as is happening in real time even this morning as we speak, when the world opposes Christ and his people, you may have seen it, yesterday it came out there is a church in California, not Grace Community Church, there is a church in Thousand Oaks, California that is under a court order not to meet today and their pastor in a most

courageous video said, "We're going to meet anyway." Eleven minute video, he explained it all. I'm just giving you a very thumbnail here, but this is how real and immediate it is. The judicial system has aligned against the people of God in that place, commanding them not to meet over Covid things. Well, what do you do at a time like that? If it's about getting worldly applause, securing worldly benefits, securing your own personal temporal protection, you're going to fold, you're going to cave to that. This pastor didn't. God bless him and his congregation. He said, "We're going to meet." You have that kind of courage when your ministry is built on the word of God that allows you to stand firm even in the midst of a battle like that.

And so, and it grieves my heart to think that there are men in ministry that are not standing with guys like that, but when the world opposes Christ like that, when men that profess to be our brothers stand by idly while it does or take their own shots at us while they do, I'm not speaking personally here, or when false teachers promote appealing doctrines, beloved, the thing that brings clarity, the thing that brings courage, the thing that enables you to do the right thing in times like that when your livelihood or maybe even your freedom or your life itself is on the line, what gives you the courage to stand firm is the word of God written and Incarnate. It's when you're remembering what Christ did for you to redeem you from your sin, when he bore the wrath of God against you at the cross and suffered on your behalf, and took the penalty that you deserve so that you could be free and a recipient of the gift of his righteousness, that is where you find your courage to stand. "I'm not going to betray my commanding General after He's done an act like that. Are you kidding me? I'm going to draw upon that." And the word of God is that which gives us clarity and discernment about the things that are around us. God honors his truth and that rallies us to stand firm in the midst of the battle. Truth is God's word, truth written and Incarnate.

So from that position of understanding, then, beloved, we ask the question that for some of you I think may be rather convicting and even frightening for you, "Do you read your Bible? Do you at least read your Bible on a regular basis?" If not, how are you taking up the full armor of God? When there is a supernatural enemy designed and intent upon killing you, destroying your life, perhaps even taking you down to hell with him, if the word of God has no role in your personal private life, on what basis do you think you're defended against it? I realize that sometimes we go through periods of time where the demands of life make it harder to do that than others, but look at your life over the course of time, over the course of the past many months not just recent history, the past months, the past years, is the word of God personally important to you enough that you read it, you intake it, you digest it in your mind, you hold it close as something most precious to you? Because it is the revelation of God that protects you in times like this.

Look, I'm a pastor and, in a sense, I'm being a bit facetious here, a little bit melodramatic here, there's a sense in which part of my salary goes to worrying about you. You know, Paul said, "I'm burdened daily by the concern for all of the churches," and I worry about a lot of you that lest you have the external form of Christianity and identification, maybe you've been baptized, maybe you've been baptized in that baptistery, but the reality of your life is that you really don't have any desire for the word of God. You come Sunday

by Sunday maybe but the truth is that the armor of the word is laid aside on a shelf someplace and it just doesn't matter to you that that's how it is. Beloved, you see from this passage in Ephesians 6 how the refusal to appropriate the inability, the lack of desire to appropriate that armor for yourself is a very bad spiritual sign in your life. I'm not laying a guilt trip on you because you need to read your Bible more, we're talking about what the spiritual reality is, what the affections of your heart are, what it is that you love, and there's no such thing as a true Christian who doesn't love the word of God written and Incarnate, and so I'm appealing to you to consider what it is that is most important to you in your life as a measure as to whether you are protected against this wicked enemy or not.

Point 2. Said that you remember God's revelation, you put on, it says in verse 14, girded your loins with truth. Secondly, you remember Christ's righteousness. Christ's righteousness. This is so sweet. Paul points next to the breastplate of righteousness. Look at verse 14. You have that central command to stand firm and then the participles that indicate how it is, what it is that strengthens you to stand firm. You've girded your loins with truth, you've internalized the word of God, and you have affections for Christ, and you feed those things so that they grow strong in you, then verse 14, "and having put on the breastplate of righteousness." Well, the breastplate was a piece of armor that protected a soldier's vital organs in battle and the question for our time here this morning is what is this righteousness of which the Apostle Paul speaks.

Well, for that we want to go back. You see in many of your Bibles that's in all caps indicating that he is quoting from the Old Testament as he speaks here, and he is referring to a couple of passages from the book of Isaiah. First of all in Isaiah 11. Isaiah 11:5 in a messianic text, in other words, he's speaking prophetically about Christ. In verse 5 it says, "righteousness will be the belt about His loins, And faithfulness the belt about His waist." He is saying that Christ will be clothed in righteousness. He will be a manifestation of righteousness itself. And in Isaiah 59:17, you can turn there, Isaiah 59:17 it says that, "He put on righteousness like a breastplate, And a helmet of salvation on His head; And He put on garments of vengeance for clothing." What you see in these texts is this, you see a reference to the perfect impeccable righteousness of our Lord Jesus Christ. Christ is utterly pure, utterly righteous. He lived a life of perfect obedience to the Father, a perfect obedience to the law of God during his earthly, the time of his earthly Incarnation. So he is righteousness and he lived righteously and the point for us as believers to understand is this, oh, and it is sweet, it is so very sweet, when God saved you, he took away your sins, he removed the guilt of your sins from upon you having put them on Christ and punished them there at the cross, and in the place of your sin he imputed to you the righteousness of Christ. God gave you full credit for everything that Christ had done, all of the righteousness and obedience of Christ, God attributed that, he imputed it to your account so that he does not hold your sins against you anymore and instead views you from a perspective of the same favor that he has toward his Son the Lord Jesus Christ of whom he said, "This is My beloved Son, in Him I am well-pleased."

Beloved, understand that your standing with God, your access to God, your hope for heaven is not based upon anything that you have done. It is based upon what Christ has

done and the whole reason that salvation is a gift is that God has gifted you with the position of having lived the perfect life of Christ himself when you haven't. How does that strengthen you for battle against Satan? Well, when you understand – oh, this is so important – when you understand that the basis of your access to God is the perfect unchanging righteousness of Christ, you can have a deep-rooted peace and stability in your heart that no matter what your inconsistent sanctification may be, that God views you through the lens of the righteousness of Christ and accepts you for the sake of his Son, and it's because he accepts you on the basis of Christ that you know that he will never leave you nor will he ever forsake you. So rather than stumbling along the way in doubt and guilt because you have sinned yet once again as a Christian, or on the other end, on the other end of the spectrum, going through life with a false sense of pride because of your perception of your legalistic righteousness based on what you have done and the rules that you have kept or not broken, rather than thinking that that is why God loves you, your righteousness, you understand instead that God loves you for the sake of the righteousness of Christ, that he loves you for the sake of his Son, that Christ loved you and gave himself up for you, everything about your standing with God is rooted in the perfection of Christ and therefore it is secure. It can't be lost.

So what is it that strengthens you to stand firm when you're plagued with fresh doubts? What is it that helps you to stand firm when you stumble along the way? It's by looking up to Christ, at your brother in heaven who represents you there, as it were, standing like Stephen at the end of chapter 7 of the book of Acts and say, "I look up and I see Christ standing at the right hand of God." Well, precisely. Our armor is that we look up into heaven, figuratively speaking, we look up into heaven and we see our glorious Savior, our representative standing there and we know that he has us covered, we know that he is protecting us, we know that we're safe in the battle. You can no more be lost in the battle against Satan than Satan could go into heaven and pull Christ down from his throne. Your life, Colossians 3 says, is hid with Christ in God. So focus on the things above, not on the things of earth.

And so, friends, that righteousness of Christ is the answer to the accusations of Satan or the plague of a guilty conscience. You say, "My sins are forgiven. My sins are covered in Christ, and not only that, it's not just that I'm not guilty in the sight of God, it's that He accepts me as perfectly righteous for the sake of Christ." When you combine the truth of his revelation with the reality of your position in Christ and knowing that you are guarded by a righteousness that is external to you just as the breastplate was external to the soldier that protected his vital organs, you realize that, "I'm safe. I'm secure. And that means when the battle comes, I'm equipped to stand firm in it without fear, without doubt." Man, you know, look, don't you want your breastplate that protects you to be the righteousness of Christ, not your own imperfect righteousness, your imperfect sanctification? This is the armor of God, the armor of God is Christ himself, it's the word of God itself. That's what gives us supernatural confidence to stand firm.

Thirdly, you remember your reconciliation. So what we have said is you remember the revelation of God, you remember the righteousness of Christ, and now you remember your reconciliation with God. Paul moves to a third piece of armor in which he alludes to

Isaiah 52:7. He says, "having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace." Roman soldiers had footwear that was studded with sharp nails. It gave them traction and enabled them to move quickly in battle to help them stand firm, to pivot as the enemies came about them. Well, beloved, if, going to modern-day footwear, you know what it's like, don't you, to try to walk with a pebble in your shoe, just the tiniest little bit of irritation of a foreign object under your foot between you and the sole of your shoe? You know how debilitating and restricting that can be. Oh, man, you have to stop until you get that thing out from it, out from your shoe so that your feet are planted firmly and you're able to walk and move forward in a way that is consistent with the comfort and protection of your feet. Well, what is it that gives us – oh, this is so precious – what is it that gives you comfort? What is it that gives you the ability to walk step-by-step through life with a sense of settled comfort? What could it be except for the fact that you've been reconciled to a holy God; that though you were once far off from him, God has, as it were, reached out his arms and gathered you near in Christ. Though you were separated from him in sin, God has brought you close in Christ.

Paul is telling us to rest in our reconciliation, the Gospel which brought Christ to you, brought peace to you when the Spirit worked faith into your heart and you believed and were born again, reverse those two in your theological thinking, you're born again and you believe as a consequence of that. But look at chapter 2, verse 17 of Ephesians. Chapter 2, verse 14, verse 13, let's go all the way back to Ephesians 1:1. No, I'm kidding. Look at this, beloved, chapter 2, verse 13, "now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For He Himself is our peace, who made both groups into one," talking about Jews and Gentiles there, "made both groups into one and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall, by abolishing in His flesh the enmity, which is the Law of commandments contained in ordinances, so that in Himself He might make the two into one new man, thus establishing peace," objective reconciliation with God. Verse 16, "and might reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross, by it having put to death the enmity." The cross is the basis of your reconciliation with God. It is the basis of objective peace.

Beloved, at the cross Jesus Christ satisfied the demands of God's justice on behalf of his people. Justice cried out for vengeance against your sins, called out a curse upon you for your rebellion against God, and Christ went to the cross, satisfied every demand of divine justice with his shed blood and through that act of satisfaction of justice, he became the one who can justify you and have you declared righteous in the sight of a holy God, and by faith in Christ, all of the benefits of his righteous life and his atoning death become yours. God withheld nothing from you. There is no aspect of the work and obedience of Christ that has not been fully applied to your account because he was acting as your representative as he lived. There is no aspect, beloved – stay with me here – there is no aspect of his forgiveness, no aspect of his cleansing shed blood that is not fully applied to you. It's all yours in Christ. Obedience for the sake of righteousness, forgiveness through the shed blood, it all belongs to you and that means that you are at peace with God if you are in Christ. God is on your side. Romans 8 makes that as clear as it could possibly be. And as amazing as those truths are, beloved, understand what they say about the disposition of God toward you. What this says about the nature of God toward his people

is that he loves us, he cares for us, he sought us when we were far away, he was the shepherd and he went out and he sought us when we were lost and he brought us into the fold. That's what he did for his glory, by his love for unworthy people like you and me.

Well, because that's true, that means chapter 2, verse 18, that through Christ "we have access in one Spirit to the Father. We are no longer strangers and aliens," verse 19, "we belong to the household of God." You see, my Christian friends, in incalculable love, in eternal love in keeping with an eternal covenant of redemption, Jesus Christ through his life, death and resurrection has purchased peace with God on your behalf so that you could have access to God. And listen to the implications of that from the book of Romans 5:1, 8:1. "Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore now there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." Christ has satisfied everything that God requires. You're in Christ. Everything about him belongs to you, not his deity, everything that is necessary for righteousness' sake for you to have access to God is found in Christ. You have peace. God has brought you to a position of peace through the Gospel which was one day in the past proclaimed to you and by which you now believe.

So beloved, let's step back and just survey the vast field of goodness that we have seen. God has given us a perfect revelation in the Scriptures and in Christ of himself, and it's everything that we need for life and godliness. You say, "Oh, but I'm a sinful man. You don't know how I've stumbled even in this past week." Oh, my friend, let me remind you of the righteousness of Christ, of his perfect obedience, and God applies that to your account. God accepts you on the basis of Christ, not on the basis of what you've done. As you receive him by faith, that's all yours. There's no barrier between you and God now and that righteousness means that you're at peace with a holy God.

Now when you put all that armor on, you realize that you're strong for the battle. You have the truth against the devil's lies. You have righteousness to answer his accusations, righteousness belonging to Christ. And while there may be this divisive sense that Satan tries to inflict on the church, there is this recognition that we have that we're at peace with God and therefore we can also be at peace with one another. That is the armor of God in these pieces that Paul has applied it to us here today.

My friend, I ask you for the sake of Christ and in the love of Christ, do you belong to him? Do you see that the God, I speak now to those of you that are sinners, either you've never professed Christ or you have but it's proving to be a false confession, there's just been no change in your life to verify the fact that you've truly been born again. Well, do you see laid out before you afresh the love and mercy of God displayed in Christ before you? How he calls you to himself, how he calls you to believe in him, to receive him, to forsake your worldly life and to embrace Christ and his kingdom as the greatest affection of your heart? Christ offers all of this to you in the Gospel and he offers it without condition. He simply says, "Repent and come to Me and the riches of this kingdom will belong to you." I invite you to him, my friends, my loved ones. I invite you to Christ. And for those of us that are in him, don't you see that whatever is happening outside the walls of this church, we can stand firm in the battle because of the revelation

of God, the righteousness of Christ, and the reconciliation that we have in him? Let's stand firm in the battle, shall we?

Let's pray.

Dear God, in light of all of these things, help us to appropriate that armor that You have given us. By the power of Your Holy Spirit, give us confidence and love for Your revelation in Scripture and in Christ. Father, help us always to rest in His righteousness as the basis upon which we have peace with You. And help us to remember that reconciliation, though we were once far off, You have brought us near in Christ and as a result of that we have an objective peace. You are no longer our enemy, we no longer see You as the Judge who would one day condemn us. You're our heavenly Father. You love us, you protect us, You're good to us. And as we draw upon those great eternal spiritual realities, our Lord, help us, then, to stand firm. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

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