

How to Stand in Dark Days, part 1

Ephesians 6:13-17

In late October, 1415, King Henry V was retreating north from the French army toward the safety of the city of Calais. England's 6000 troops were tired, hungry and diseased after a three month campaign on French soil. The French moved to block the English retreat. And the English army was outnumbered by a French force 3 to 4 times its size. In a narrow plowed and muddy field the troops gathered in battle array, between two large stands of woods. In the western woods lay the village of Agincourt (today called "Azincourt"); in the eastern woods was the village of Tramecourt. Picture the field of battle and its hourglass shape running from the northwest to the southeast.ⁱ The French were well fortified; Henry's troops were nearly exhausted. The result of the coming battle seemed obvious. All the French really had to do was block their enemy. But they made a series of mistakes that led to one of the most costly defeats in the history of France.ⁱⁱ The French had chosen to place their horsemen at the front of the battle and their archers at the rear with their armored foot soldiers in between. Then they actually launched into battle from the wrong position. And when they charged ahead, it was into that narrow, muddy field. They were met by the English who had taken up the right position at the most narrow point between the forest woods. And the English stood their ground with dogged determination. Their arrows decimated the French who had sunk into the mud up to their knees as their own countrymen tried to clamber over them to get into the fight. Though they were nearly exhausted, the English forces knew where to take their stand and how to use their weapons to defeat their foes. And that day they won a great victory.

The importance of taking a courageous stand was not lost on the Apostle Paul. In the last message we studied the two commands to believers in this passage:

1. Be strengthened in the Lord and
2. Put on all the complete armor of God.

God gave us those first two commands, "... that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil ..." We could translate the word, "wiles" as "schemes" or "methods" of the devil. Spiritual warfare is fighting with wicked spirits. Four times (vs. 11, 13, and 14) the apostle told us the reason for the two commands in this passage: to be able to stand fast and withstand the onslaughts of evil. Believers should not be blind to this battle. Even now, the hail of the fiery darts of the wicked is descending upon you. Are you ready to stand firmly, and withstand in the evil day?

Therefore

Our text begins with the word "wherefore" or "therefore" in verse 13. That takes our attention back to verse 12. Let's start there and proceed through verse 17:

"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. Wherefore take unto you the whole armor 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:"

Verse 12 indicates "that these powers of evil are personal, demonic intelligences"ⁱⁱⁱ at work in the present evil days (see Ephesians 5:16).

It's one thing to know the outcome of the Battle of Agincourt in 1415. Now we know that the French floundered in the muddy, plowed field and were defeated. But do we have any kind of assurance in the spiritual warfare in this present darkness? Do we have Biblical promises and principles that assure us that we can be bold and fight the good fight of faith in this spiritual warfare?

Yes, we do. 1 Corinthians chapter 15 explains the significance of Christ's resurrection from the dead: **"Thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ!"** (1 Corinthians 15:57) Or 2 Corinthians 2:14, **"Now thanks be unto God who always causes us to triumph in Christ ..."**). Or consider Romans 8: **"No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."** (Romans 8:37-39). Should we cower before the devil? James 4:7 answers that: **"Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you."** Yes, we have Biblical assurance based on God's promises of victory. So take up your position of strength, and don't get bogged down in the wrong battles. The generals of this world have strength because they are supported by their armies. But Christian soldiers get their strength from the Lord Jesus Christ – the Captain of our salvation, whom we follow.

Before we proceed from verse 12, remember the illustration of the muddy field at Agincourt. If we take up the wrong position, thinking that our battles are with human beings – be they protesters or politicians – we will fail. That is not the fight that we are armed for. If we think only in terms of political battles, then our Christian armor will seem like dead weight restraining us from what we really want to say or do. We will be like the French soldiers sinking in the mud up to their knees while wearing heavy armor. You can't "out sin" sinners. Don't get drawn onto their turf. We must follow our Lord's commands as to how and where to take our stand and use our God-given armor to full effect.

Take Up Your Armor and Take Your Stand

Wherefore take unto you the whole armor of God that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. v. 13

The powers of darkness are gathering against you even now. Don't be like Samson who had disobeyed the Lord and did not know that his strength was gone (Judges 16:20). And consider the tragedy in Psalm 78:9, **"The children of Ephraim, being armed, and carrying bows, turned back in the day of battle."** Apparently the Ephraimites were real hotheads when it came to doing battle. They gathered to confront Gideon when he didn't place them in the battle (Judges 8:1). Their impulsive arrogance escalated into open hostility in Judges 12:1-6. So Psalm 78:9 strikes us as even

more tragic: these mighty warriors, with all their weapons in hand, turned back in the day of battle. Their hearts failed them when they faced the enemy. May God give every one of us the heart of a David when he saw the giant Philistine. David said to King Saul, **“Let no man’s heart fail because of him; thy servant will go and fight with this Philistine”** (1 Samuel 17:32). Take up your position and put on the complete armor of God to be able to withstand the enemy in the evil day.

How to Use Your God-given Armor

HAVING FASTENED ON THE BELT OF TRUTH, v.14

“Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth”

This part of verse 14 is a quote from Isaiah 11:5. In that Old Testament reference about the Messiah, the Rod of Jesse (Isaiah 11:1), we find these words in verse 5: **“And righteousness shall be the girdle of His loins, and faithfulness the girdle of His reins.”** When you think of “truth” think of that which faithfully agrees with reality. As you know, there are huge questions today about what is true and what is false. We are certain that there are those who twist facts into fibs so that lies are now called “learning.” For instance, an article published two days ago featured this headline: **“A Big Study about Honesty Turns Out to Be Based on Fake Data.”**^{iv} If a study on honesty is based on fabricated information, where does that leave us?! Whether it’s social media, whispered rumors or the nightly news, keep Proverbs 14:15 in mind: only naïve people believe every word.

In this passage, truth is pictured as a leather belt or a leather apron around one’s waist. How should a Christian soldier go about putting on this belt of truth? Throughout this letter to the Ephesians, Paul emphasized the theme “truth.” How do you put on this “truth belt”? According to Ephesians 1:13, **“In whom [Christ] you also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise.”** Have you really heard the Word of truth, the Gospel of your salvation, and turned to trust Christ? Do you now enjoy the abiding Spirit of God who has permanently sealed you for that Day when Christ will return? By placing your faith in the finished work of Christ – His sacrificial death for your sins and His bodily resurrection from the death – you snap the belt into place.

We have sung these truths from Ephesians 1:3-14: *“We’ve heard the Gospel Word of Truth / Believing by His Grace: / In His own precious promises for our accursed race. / The Promised Spirit seals us now / For greater blessings still / God gives us an inheritance: The Living Father’s will.”*^v

Ephesians 4:14-15 shows us how to keep the truth belt in place: **“Speaking the [doctrinal] truth in love, may grow up into Him, which is the Head [of the body], even Christ.”** Which doctrinal truth from Scripture have you shared with someone recently? This is important, because “the truth is in Jesus” (Ephesians 4:21). Christian soldiers employ the truth belt by putting away lying and speaking the truth to every man (Ephesians 4:25). Tightening our belt of truth in place is built on the organic teaching that **“the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness and righteousness and truth”** (Ephesians 5:9). So the way to take a stand and withstand the evil in our day begins with this foundation: arm yourselves with the belt of truth. Read your Bible. Study your Bible. Share what you are learning with others. Surround yourself with truth at every opportunity.

HAVING PUT ON THE BREASTPLATE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS, v.14

“... and having on the breastplate of righteousness”

Roman soldiers wore the breastplate over their chests to protect them from the thrusts of swords, spears, daggers and darts.

In Ephesians 4:24, Paul called upon believers to individually apply what God had brought into existence corporately: “the new man” (the church, Ephesians 2:15). Each of us should “**put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness**” (Ephesians 4:24). This righteousness springs directly from the truth that is in Jesus (Ephesians 4:21). Each true Christian is a new creation of God, created in righteousness and holiness springing from that truth. We were created to be like Him. And practically, daily doing right is the fruit of the Spirit (Ephesians 5:9). So as you can see, these important teachings in this letter are woven into the illustration of the soldier’s armor.

It’s important to remember that your adversary, the devil, is scheming for a way to pounce on you and your family. We live and dwell in the presence of spiritual predators. At this time of year, it is a joy to watch the hummingbirds flutter around our garden. But those beautiful creatures provide us with a helpful warning about predators. As the summer progresses, you will see hummingbirds run away from the bees at your bird feeder. The hummingbird’s racing heart would spread the venom from a bee sting throughout its body in moments. This would sicken or kill it. But the hummingbird’s even more dangerous enemy is the praying mantis.^{vi} When the hummingbird comes within reach, the mantis will thrust its sharp-wedged claw into the breast of the hummingbird, and hang on. Then, while the hummingbird struggles, the praying mantis will eat its prey alive.^{vii} It’s important to remember that we live and dwell in the presence of spiritual predators. So be strong in the Lord, take your stand in the right position and put on the complete armor of God. God has given us everything we need to stand in dark days.

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ⁱ See Maps, University of South Florida, accessed at <https://etc.usf.edu/maps/pages/400/431/431.htm>

ⁱⁱ See Agincourt 25 Oct 1415 accessed at <https://www.longbow-archers.com/history/agincourt.html> and “The top 10 military blunders in history” History Extra, accessed at <https://www.historyextra.com/period/medieval/worst-military-blunders-battles-mistakes-history/>

ⁱⁱⁱ Peter O’Brien, The Letter to the Ephesians, Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1999, p.468

^{iv} Stephanie M. Lee, “A Big Study about Honesty Turns Out to be Based on Fake Data” Buzz Feed News, August 20, 2021, accessed at [Dan Ariely Retracts Honesty Study Based On Fake Data \(buzzfeednews.com\)](https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/dan-ariely/retracts-honesty-study-based-on-fake-data)

^v A Hymn of Adoption, accessed <https://www.cbcbfindlay.org/a-hymn-of-adoption/>

^{vi} See Preying [sic] Mantis Attacks Hummingbird accessed at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uWqTZErviJI>

^{vii} See Nicole Mortillaro, “Hummingbirds beware: Study documents praying mantises killing, eating birds” CBC News, July 17, 2017, accessed at <https://www.cbc.ca/news/science/hummingbirds-beware-praying-mantis-killers-1.4203443>