

Courage And Devotion

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Preacher: Ray Sweet

[0 : 00] Well, hey, good morning. My name is Ray Sweet from First Christian Church in Greensburg, Indiana. As always, we just want to thank you for tuning in today. And we also want to tell you where you can get some more information about the church or maybe hear some more messages.

You can go to FCCGreensburg.com or you can check out the FCC Greensburg Facebook page. But hey, our heart is always this. We want to get into the Word of God.

But most of all, we want that Word to get into these hearts and transform us more and more into the image of Christ. Now, if I asked you today, what is it that you're willing to take a stand for?

I wonder what you would say. Maybe I could ask it this way. What are you so passionate about that you're willing to risk it all to stand firm? Some of you might say that you have a heart for widows and orphans.

You're willing to sacrifice time, money, and energy to care for those who don't have the care they deserve. Others of you may say that God has so burdened your heart that you will stand against abortion while loving those who are deeply affected by it to save those unborn lives that are precious to God.

[1 : 14] And I would say to you, stand firm. Some of you might say that your heart beats to end child trafficking and sexual abuse to the most vulnerable among us.

Others may say that you have a passion for children and raising them up in God's Word so that they may know and walk with their Savior. Stand firm. Maybe you have a heart for those who struggle with addiction and showing them that there's hope and healing in Christ, that they can defeat that addiction, be reunited with their families.

Or maybe homelessness that even affects a rural town like Greensburg is on your heart. Stand firm. I had a conversation last week with a dear member of this church who's in their 90s.

I'll keep her anonymous as to not embarrass her, but she's had some frustrating health issues lately that have just kind of kept her from being as active as she would like.

But I'll tell you, she does fantastic. She's probably healthier than I am. And I appreciate her passion for life. But as I was checking in on her, she said, Hey, I'm not giving up.

[2 : 22] I'm going to fight. And I have too much life to live. And I love that fire in her belly to take a stand and live every day for the glory of God.

And as we start this new series on spiritual warfare today, I want you to have this picture in your mind of you standing firm, digging your heels in for the glory of God.

Not pride, but godly courage and devotion. Because the reality is that each of us who are disciples of Jesus, man, we're in a war. A spiritual war that you can't always see with your physical eyes.

And yet God's word assures us that this war against the world's ways, against the flesh, against Satan, this war is real. And you are called to stand victorious as a child of God.

So if you would, grab your Bibles for me. Turn to the book of Ephesians. Probably about 90% of the way through your Bible. If you're kind of new to God's word and you need to go to the front of your Bible, to the table of contents, please do.

[3 : 27] That can help you. But turn to Ephesians chapter 6. That's in the New Testament. And over the next nine weeks, we're going to dig deep into these 11 verses and simply look at what spiritual warfare is all about.

Who is the enemy we face? What do his strategies look like? How do I prepare myself for battle? And what does it look like to actually put on the armor of God?

Because listen, I can guarantee you, if you are a sincere follower of Christ, you're a threat to the kingdom of darkness. Satan is coming after you all day, every day to kill, steal, and destroy your faith in Christ.

Your witness to this world and even your joy as a believer. See, the Christian life is not a playground. It's a battleground. But here's the great news that I hope you can see over the next couple of months.

1 John 4.4. You, dear children, are from God and you have overcome them. Listen to this. Because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in this world.

[4 : 34] So church, let's stand firm in Christ. Let's take hold of the godly inheritance we have as children of the King. And the reason we're calling this series Stand is because of the beautiful imagery that we see throughout the book of Ephesians.

If you were with us here about three and a half years ago, we walked through this entire book where the Holy Spirit inspires Paul to spend the first three chapters talking about the privilege that we have of being seated in the heavenly realms with our Savior, sharing in His glorious riches.

That we are rich beyond our understanding in the things that really matter. And then in chapters 4 and 5, we see the posture change from being seated in the glorious riches of Christ to now walking with Christ in a manner that is worthy of our calling.

That means we no longer walk like the world. Instead, we walk in love as children of light, living godly and wisely. And in the words of one of my favorite Bible scholars, the late Warren Wiersbe, he says, anyone who is seated with Christ on His throne and is walking with Him, revealing Him to an evil world, is going to be attacked by the enemy.

So, what do we do? What do we do in the face of this spiritual warfare? We stand our ground as heirs to the King in His power, in His authority that's available to us, His children.

[6 : 14] So, enough intro into this series. Let's go ahead and look at the first verse we're going to talk about today, Ephesians 6.10, as we kind of start this discussion on spiritual warfare.

So, verse 10, Ephesians 6. Finally, be strong in the Lord and in His mighty power. As we talk about spiritual warfare, we have a couple important choices to make.

First, we need to choose courage over fear. In the 16th century, there was a Protestant reformer, a great preacher in England by the name of Hugh Latimer.

And because he was such a gifted communicator, Latimer had plenty of opportunities to speak. Well, one day, he was summoned to preach at a service before King Henry VIII. As he prayed about the message that he should bring, God laid something on his heart that he knew that the King didn't want to hear.

But, he knew he had to have courage and follow the Holy Spirit's leading. With his usual creativity, he stood up to speak, and he began by saying, Latimer, Latimer, do you remember that you are speaking before the high and mighty King Henry VIII, who has the power to send you to prison or cut off your head if it pleases him?

[7 : 33] Will you not take care to say nothing to offend royal ears? He then had this long pause before he continued again. Latimer, Latimer, do you not remember that you are speaking before the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, before him at whose throne Henry VIII will stand, before him to whom one day you will give an account yourself?

Latimer, Latimer, be faithful to your master and declare God's word. Hugh Latimer faced the choice to fear man and preach what pleased the King, or would he choose to preach what Christ led him to say?

And there's no question, just from the introduction I just read you, that he chose courage over fear as he boldly proclaimed the truth. And while he wasn't killed in this instance, he would deal with a lot of trouble for standing strong on the word of God, and later he would be burned at the stake by Henry VIII's daughter, Queen Mary.

And how glorious, can you imagine how glorious his entrance into eternity had to be as he courageously gave his life to proclaim truth? And that's just one amazing example of choosing courage and spiritual warfare.

Latimer was being tempted to please people over God, to water down the calling on his life to speak truth that would set men free, to choose comfort and safety instead of stepping out in faith.

[9 : 04] And it would have been so easy to give in and to sugarcoat some things. And here's one reason he could obediently proclaim God's word. He knew that we don't fight for victory as Christians.

Listen to me here. We fight from victory. You as a child of God, you don't fight for victory. You fight from a place of victory. And that makes all the difference.

Listen, Jesus has already paid the price on the cross. He rose from the grave to conquer death and offer this amazing inheritance to us that is found in him alone.

By faith, we claim that victory when we surrender all to him. Let me explain it this way. Have you ever recorded a game to watch later, but you already heard that your team won?

For instance, maybe you couldn't watch the Colts game, so you recorded it for later, but somehow someone spoke up around you and said, hey, the Colts just beat the Bengals 34-31 in overtime. Now, the game may not have started off good.

[10 : 08] Joe Burrow may have put his team up early with two touchdown passes, but you know the end of the story, and you calmly watch every play knowing we're going to be okay.

Hey, Jonathan Taylor's going to break off a 50-yard run. Layatu Latu's got to get a strip sack and return it for a touchdown. Maybe AR's going to hit A.D. Mitchell deep to tie the game late in the fourth.

You're watching the game from a place of victory. I know how this story ends. We've got this. The good news for us as believers, though, is this.

In Christ, we have everything we need to stand firm and hold our ground against Satan and his attacks. And this is why we can choose courage over fear, because John 10-10 is absolutely true when Jesus says the thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy.

That is Satan's mission statement, to steal, kill, and destroy anything that is precious to God, anything that belongs to God. And he will come with shiny things that look good, that promise all kinds of things that are intended to harm us, to steal us, to kill us, to destroy us.

[11 : 22] But look what Jesus says. The thief comes only to steal, kill, and destroy. But I have come that you may have life and have it to the full. And because we can take courage in Christ and our inheritance as his children, we can boldly proclaim 2 Timothy 1-7 that says, For God has not given us a spirit of fear and timidity, but instead of power, love, and self-discipline.

It's so easy to worry yourself sick about so many things in this life. Too easy to walk in fear. In fact, in fact, the Church of Jesus Christ, especially here in America, we can get real comfortable going through the motions, doing the things we can do in our own strength, our own resources, and yet we're not called to walk by sight, but instead to walk by faith.

So let me ask you this. What keeps you up at night? What's been weighing on you heavily? What will you just not let go of? Is it that prodigal child?

Is it just an overwhelming responsibility of parenting well? Is it health concerns for yourself or someone you love? Is it the fear of retirement?

Or an empty nest? Is it a broken relationship you haven't attempted to mend? Is it unforgiveness that you harbor towards your spouse, your parent, your co-worker, whoever?

[12 : 53] Is it sin that you've been wallowing in that you know you need to surrender over to the Lord? Is it the fear of surrendering to Jesus altogether, knowing that everything will change?

I would even ask us as a church family, are we afraid to follow wherever the Lord leads us as a church, even if it's not what we've always done?

Satan will use fear in our lives. But you and I, as children of God, are called to look our fear in the eyes, lay it down at the cross in faith, and then stand our ground courageously, living out the plans the Lord has for us.

And I can't help but wonder if Paul had a certain Bible story in his mind as he spoke these words from Ephesians 6.10. Finally, be strong in the Lord and in His mighty power.

Could you imagine the fear Joshua could have had following a legend like Moses? Yeah, he's been the right-hand man for many years, but still, Moses was there to make those hard calls and handle the heat.

[14 : 02] But now Moses is dead, and you, Joshua, are called to lead God's people into the promised land full of people that are accustomed to fighting for their land. People who don't follow the God of Israel, who can care less that you claim that your God is giving you this land.

Not a chance we're going to move aside without a fight. And what are the words that God speaks to Joshua as he's not fighting for victory, but Joshua's fighting from a place of victory as God's already promised this land flowing with milk and honey?

So let me show you here. If you got your Bibles and you can get there real quick, turn to Joshua chapter 1. Joshua chapter 1. And I want to show you here, starting in verse 7, this really cool passage.

It says, Be strong and very courageous. This is God speaking. Be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you. Do not turn from it to the right or to the left, that you may be successful wherever you go.

Keep this book of the law always on your lips. Meditate on it day and night so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful.

[15 : 13] So right off the bat, he's talking about, hey, you have the word of God. And we have, in 2024, we have the complete word of God, inspired, breathed by God, perfect, true, every word, we have it right in our hands.

And we are called to follow that word completely. And then verse 9. Have I not commanded you? Listen to this. Be strong and courageous.

Do not be afraid. Do not be discouraged. For the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go. Now watch this act of faith and courage. So Joshua ordered the officers of the people, go through the camp and tell the people, get your provisions ready.

Three days from now, you will cross the Jordan here to go in and take possession of the land the Lord your God is giving you for your own. And then, and then, now let's, and I just got to say this real quick before we move on.

Church, every day, we have to make the decision, just like Joshua did, to choose courage over fear. And now let's wrestle with another choice we have to make every day.

[16 : 29] Choose devotion over mediocrity. Choose devotion over mediocrity. What's the name we use when we ask someone for their signature?

We'll say, hey, sign your John Hancock on the line, right? Sign your John Hancock. Not Herbie, but John. And do you know why that's a thing? It's because when you look at the 56 signatures on the Declaration of Independence, one stands out above the rest.

John Hancock. He was the first to sign, and he purposely signed it larger and legible so that the King of England could read his name without glasses.

He courageously wanted his allegiance to be obvious. And the message was received loud and clear because when King George III offered amnesty to all who would cease fighting, John Hancock was one of the few names left off the offer.

If he would have lost, if we as a country would have lost the war, John Hancock would have lost his life. But it was bravery like his that forged this great country.

[17 : 37] Now turn back with me to Ephesians 6, verse 11. As we're going to see, much like John Hancock's all-in approach to our country, we too are called to be all-in with our commitment to Christ.

And a lot of our founding fathers, that was the case in their lives as well. See, we're called to sign that line big and bold with our heart, with our actions, and the fruit of our lives backing it up.

Paul says, put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. So we're going to talk a lot more about the devil's schemes next week.

So I'm not going to dwell on that here today, but I want to focus on this phrase, put on the full armor of God. You know, my mind immediately goes to more modern day warfare, say with a SEAL team.

A lot of us have watched the movies that came out depicting the raid on Osama bin Laden. And it's amazing how every detail has thought through. And you think about the gear these SEALs wear.

[18 : 40] Depending on your job, you have specific things you might need. But of course, you've got your gun and probably a backup or two. You've got ammunition, night vision goggles, explosive for opening doors, even defense measures to protect them as best as possible.

And you know what? The list goes on. I probably don't even realize all the things they carry. And I'm sure they check, double check, and triple check everything, all their gear, before they leave on a mission.

Because it will not go according to plan unless their full gear is on and ready for whatever may come. Now, go back to these biblical times with the picture we're given here of a Roman soldier, days where you fought with a sword on a battlefield.

That's what I want you to take you back to, okay? So according to this passage, you needed the belt around your waist to hold everything together, the breastplate protecting several major organs, your feet fitted with shoes that gave you plenty of traction and stability, which you would need in battle, your shield to protect you from the enemy attacks, the helmet to protect your head, and of course, the sword to take out the enemy.

Now, imagine a careless soldier. Going out with half the gear on. No shield, maybe no helmet. Probably not going to go well, is it? Of course not.

[20 : 03] And we immediately think, well, that's kind of dumb. Nobody would do that. And yet, spiritually, you and I can do this a lot. And what happens when we go out in the battlefield without some of the armor on or all the armor off?

We get slayed by the enemy. That looks like struggling with the same habitual sin for 10, 15, 25 years. Walking with no joy, no peace, no contentment.

Having a Sunday faith that's more about traditions and titles and comfort than actually pursuing the heart of God. Anger that's out of control. Lack of love and respect for others. Lust that controls me.

No integrity in business dealings. Lies that spew out that get you out of a bind. Laziness. Lack of purpose and drive. Bitterness. Envy. Jealousy.

Hatred. Gossip. Slander. I mean, we could keep going, but I'm getting a little uncomfortable myself. See, all these struggles that I have a feeling that you and I both can relate to, they come back to either one of two things.

[21 : 04] An ignorance of the spiritual warfare that's going on in your heart and mind and you just need to be educated by God's word on what this looks like or for most of us, those who know better, just the reality that we've become spiritually lazy in hungering and thirsting after the heart of God, in getting in the word and letting the word transform these hearts, getting on your knees in prayer and growing in your relationship and trust in the God of the universe, in godly integrity, following the Holy Spirit's leading, in purity, in putting that support system of love and accountability in my life.

When we're told to put on the full armor of God, and we'll see what each piece means as we walk through this series, but the first thing we're being told is to come all in with Jesus.

This can't be mom and dad's faith. This can't be just about the lights and emotions and amens that we often see in American Christianity. It can't be an attempt to pad my obituary with church titles and responsibilities I had.

This is me. This is you putting your signature down, saying, And Jesus, I'm all in in my devotion to Christ and his precious bride, the church, will flow from that desire to love God with all my heart, soul, mind, and strength.

And to quote Warren Wiersbe again as he's talking about the Israelites and this constant unhealthy pattern they had where they would pursue God when things weren't going well and God would rescue them and then they would kind of walk away in the good times to worship idols.

[22 : 42] This very wishy-washy type of faith. And here's what Wiersbe says. He says, We can't take a stand against the enemy when we're bowing down to worship idols.

In other words, when you choose to put on the full armor of God, you're signing the dotted line that you are all in for the kingdom of God. Not perfect, but all in committed.

The Apostle Paul put it like this in Galatians 2.20. He says, I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live.

Do me a favor. Say that with me. Right from wherever you are. I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me.

The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me. See, when we take our stand against the enemy, we not only do so with courage, but it also takes a heart of devotion that says, Jesus, I'm all in.

[23 : 45] And I have to tell you, as I was preparing this message, I ran across an anonymous statement that says what I've been trying to say for probably the last five or ten minutes better than I could probably ever say it.

And it goes like this. I'm a part of the fellowship of the unashamed. I have stepped over the line. The decision has been made. I'm a disciple of Jesus Christ.

I won't look back, let up, slow down, back up, or be still. My past is redeemed. My future is secure. I'm finished and done with low living, small planning, colorless dreams, tamed visions, mundane talking, cheap living, and dwarfed goals.

I no longer need preeminence, prosperity, position, promotions, or popularity. I don't have to be right, first, recognized, praised, regarded, or rewarded.

I now live by faith, lean on his presence, walk by patience, live by prayer, and labor by his power. My face is set, my gate is fast, my goal is heaven, my road is narrow, my way rough, my companions few, my guide reliable, and my mission clear.

[25 : 01] I cannot be bought, deluded, or delayed. I will not flinch in the face of sacrifice, hesitate in the presence of adversity, negotiate at the table of the enemy, or meander in the maze of mediocrity.

I won't give up, shut up, or let up until I have stayed up, stored up, prayed up, paid up, and preached up for the cause of Christ. I am a disciple of Jesus.

I must go till he comes, give till I drop, preach till all know, and work till he stops me. And when he comes for his own, he will have no problem recognizing me.

Now, church, I don't know about you, but man, that gets me pumped up to be a part of the kingdom of God. And as we take this couple month journey together, as we walk through spiritual warfare, and what that means to stand firm, in courage, in devotion, to put on the full armor of God, I gotta tell you, I'm excited to grow alongside each of you.

Pray with me. Heavenly Father, thank you so much for just your truth. Thank you so much for just your call on our lives to not walk in mediocrity, to not walk in fear, but instead to walk in courage and devotion as a child of God.

[26 : 34] Father, I just pray that you will teach us over these next nine weeks that you will show us the ins and outs of spiritual warfare, that you will teach us the battle plans of our enemy, and that you will also show us how by faith to put on each piece of armor so that we can walk in your ways so we can fulfill your will in our lives and that we can trust you and be your hands and feet.

So Jesus, thank you. Thank you for these two verses that challenge us to be who you've called us to be in Christ.

Thank you for the inheritance you give us. Thank you for the security we have of our own salvation that we don't have to wonder what's going to happen to us, but because of our faith in Christ, we are secure and we walk in your power and your authority.

Jesus, we give you praise and ask that you have your way in these hearts. Your will be done. We pray all of this in the name above all names, the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior, and God's people said, Amen.

Amen. Hey, thank you so much for tuning in today. Once again, my name is Ray Sweet from First Christian Church in Greensburg, Indiana, but we just want to give you this simple invitation.

[28 : 04] I don't know where you are in your faith. I don't know if you're a follower of Jesus or maybe you're just searching and God is just working on your heart in a big way. If you have faith questions or if you would like to talk about what it means to truly surrender and repent and give your life to Jesus, we would love here at First Christian Church of Greensburg to come alongside you and just be helpful to you as others have done for us.

So here's a couple ways you can reach out to us. We would love to have that conversation with you. Once again, you can reach out to me. My name is Ray and you can do that 812-663-8488.

First Christian Church is 812-663-8488 or you can email me at ray at fccgreensburg.com.

Hey, thank you so much for tuning in to this new series we've started today and we just pray that you have a great week.