

## (4) Standing firm in Christ

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[ 0 : 0 0 ]     The reading today is from Ephesians 6, verse 10 to 20, which is page 1178. Ephesians 6, starting verse 10. Finally, be strong in the Lord, and in the strength of his might, put on the whole armour of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil.

For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against authority, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.

Therefore, take up the whole armour of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all to stand firm, stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and as your shoes for your feet, having put on the righteousness given by the gospel of peace.

In all circumstances, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one. And take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication, to that end, keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints.

And also for me, the words may be given to me, in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains, that I may declare it boldly as all to speak.

[ 1 : 3 0 ]     Thanks, Bex, for reading those verses to us. Please do keep your Bibles open there on page 1178.

And if you turn to the back of the service sheet, you'll see an outline of today's sermon, as well as some space to make notes or jot down questions for the question time that we have at the end.

Now let me pray for us again. Father God, we do thank you that your word is a lamp to our feet and a light to our path.

And so we ask that you would shine the truth of your word into our hearts now. Please help us to see the spiritual truths contained here, that we may know you better, know ourselves better in Christ, and know better what it means to follow the Lord Jesus Christ.

We ask it for his name's sake. Amen. Now today is the last in our series, looking at the implications of our union with Christ.

[ 2 : 4 2 ]     We've seen over the past three weeks that all Christians are united to Jesus by faith. So we've had this picture of a head united to a body, a vine united to branches, a husband united to his wife, one flesh.

And in the same way, we too are united to Jesus, spiritually speaking, at one with him by faith. And we've seen that because of our union with Christ, it changes everything for us in the here and now.

So in the first talk, we saw that there is no condemnation now for those in Christ, free forever from the penalty of sin. No more guilt.

In the second sermon, we saw that we're free, we're dead to sin in Christ, we're free from the power of sin forever. No more slavery. And last week, we saw that we have a new identity in Christ.

Dead to finding our identities or sense of self-worth in things of this world, we're alive to God now. We're children of God. We're loved by him, accepted by him. We have this brand new lifestyle flowing out of a brand new identity.

[ 3 : 56 ] Three Sundays, three sermons on this radical, once for all, change that God brought about in our lives. the moment we trusted in Jesus Christ. And yet, even though God has done all this for us in Christ, even though it is absolutely true that we're no longer condemned, that we're dead to sin, that we have this new identity, is it not also true that so often it doesn't actually feel like this in our experience?

So we hear the Bible say, no condemnation in Christ. Yet at the same time, often we can be full of feelings of guilt.

We hear the Bible say to us, believers, you're dead to sin. And yet, so often we can feel enslaved to sin in certain areas of our lives. We hear, you have a new identity in Christ from God's word.

And yet at times, we feel no different to before. We think, we speak, we act, as if nothing has changed. And you could have been left wondering as we've had this sermon series together, well, is there something wrong with me?

Why does the Christian life feel like such a struggle? Why does it feel like I'm constantly tempted to sin? Why is being a Christian so hard? Why does it feel like I'm constantly tempted to sin?

[ 5 : 22 ] Well, our passage this morning gives us one reason why. It may come as something of a shock to you if this is the first time you've come across this passage, perhaps a little far-fetched when you first hear it.

But Ephesians 6 says that one of the reasons why the Christian life feels like such a struggle is that we are under constant spiritual attack from the devil.

So that's our first point, if you're following on the handout. Christian believers are under constant spiritual attack from the devil. So have a look at verse 11.

Put on the whole armour of God that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. Continues verse 12. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood.

We wrestle against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.

[ 6 : 26 ] You see, we're reading here of the devil. He's scheming against Christians. He's wrestling against us. What believers have to put on the armour of God because the devil is at war with us.

Just look at his relentless attacks in verse 16. In all circumstances, so not just some, in all circumstances, take up the shield of faith.

Why? Because with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one. I remember my grandparents telling me about what it was like to live during the time of the blackout in World War II when wave upon wave of German fighters would drop their onslaught of bombs over the cities and across Britain.

And you can imagine what that would be like. Spiritually speaking, Paul is saying, this is what it's like for us if you're a Christian. As day and night, the devil is pelting believers with his own onslaught of spiritual bombs designed to make us doubt God.

Doubt our salvation. Turn from God. Live for self. Give in to sin. So we spoke, didn't we, in the first talk about the devil loving to sow some of his seeds of doubts in our minds concerning our salvation.

[ 7 : 49 ] Do you really suppose God's going to forgive you this time? I mean, how many times has it been? Now, but here in Ephesians 6, we're told, well, it's not just in the area of guilt and condemnation.

The devil's at war with us in all circumstances, verse 16. So, for example, you get up in the morning. First thing the devil will try to do is to fill your mind with all the stresses, worries, concerns, anxieties of the day.

Anything to get your mind off God and starting your day with him. You find yourself praying and the devil will try and make you feel like you're just talking to yourself.

That God doesn't want to hear from you. That God doesn't answer prayers. He'll try and make your mind wander off to other things. Do you find yourself doing that? Repaying conversations, things you need to do, how big the bubbles are in the bath.

Even the most mundane things, they suddenly become really important when you're trying to pray. The devil will try and intellectualise your Bible reading, puffing you up with knowledge rather than using God's word to love him and to love others.

[ 9 : 00 ] He'll try and make you see just words on a page. It's just another book. Not the words of the living God of the universe talking to you. He wants to try and make it as mundane, as boring, as irrelevant as possible.

And you know, at work or walking the kids to school. Again, the devil's at it. He's trying to make you forget your identity in Christ. You're a popular mother. You're a successful manager.

You're cool at school. So keep the Jesus stuff for Sunday. People don't want to hear about him now. Keep quiet. The devil will tempt you not to go to church, keep you from home groups.

You need a break. You're tired. They won't mind. They're Christians after all. What's one or two missed studies or missed Sundays? You see, the devil, he's at it all the time. He's constantly attacking your faith in God right now.

He's trying to do it now. Trying to cloud your thinking. Trying to distract you from listening to the sermon. Making you doubt it. Tempting you not to live out these truths. He's trying anything and everything he can to make you and I as ineffective, as unfruitful, as unproductive, as possible, as Christians.

[ 10 : 15 ] And to give just one more example, because it's probably on your mind right now, how many of you are petrified of the thought of doing a dialogue supper? How many of you have attempted to think, you know, well, it's just a bit too soon for something like this.

We've not known them that long. Let's wait another year before we try dialogue events. Or on the other hand, how many of you have been thinking, well, we've known them for years. Do we really want to jeopardize the friendship?

Can you see, it doesn't matter whether you've known someone for a short time or a long time. The devil, he'll use any excuse to try and stop you acting out in faith, in this case, sharing the gospel message.

It will never be easy to host a dialogue event. It will always feel like a struggle. It will always feel like a battle. Because, Paul tells us through Ephesians 6, we are under constant spiritual attack.

The attacks never stop. No ceasefire. The devil is at war with us every second of our lives. So why does the Christian life feel like such a struggle?

[ 11 : 23 ] Why does it feel like I'm constantly tempted to sin? Why is it so hard? One reason the Bible gives is because Christians are under constant spiritual attack from the devil.

Let me just say, if you're someone looking into the Christian faith, please don't think for one moment that it'll be all plain sailing. If and when you turn to Christ, it won't. It isn't. Being a Christian is like being at war.

The normal Christian life is to be under constant spiritual attack from the devil. But secondly, I want us to see that we have nothing to be worried about.

It could be that all this talk of the devil and his onslaught of spiritual bombs have left you feeling a tad scared or a bit nervous. But we have nothing to fear from the devil.

We have nothing to fear because secondly, of what we've been seeing throughout our sermon series, that in Christ we have what we need to protect ourselves from the devil's attacks, to defend ourselves.

[ 12 : 30 ] So running through the talks again, if for example it's guilt, condemnation, doubting your salvation, if that's where the devil's attacking you right now, or we can fight back with the truth of the first sermon.

No condemnation in Christ. Because of our union with Jesus, we saw our sin has been reckoned to Jesus Christ. His righteousness has been reckoned to us.

We're free from the penalty of sin. We need never doubt our salvation again. If it's slavery to sin that the devil's attacking you with right now, making you feel like we can never break free from certain sins, we can fight back with the truth of the second talk.

Dead to sin in Christ. Because of our union with Jesus, we've died to the enslaving power of sin. Now grace rules over us. Free to change.

If it's your identity that the devil's attacking you with right now, seeking your sense of self-worth in what we were saying before, being a popular mom, successful manager, a cool kid at school, then we can fight back with the truth that we're new people in Christ.

[ 13 : 46 ] Because of our union with Jesus, we're sons of God. We're accepted by him. We don't need to care what others think of us because we know what God thinks of us. And if you missed any of those sermons, do please download them from the website.

Do listen to them. Because each week through the series, we've seen that in Christ, we have what we need to protect ourselves from the devil's attacks. And we see exactly the same thing going on in Ephesians chapter 6, just more so.

So look at verse 10 with me. Verse 10 speaks of being strong in the Lord. Not strong in our own strength. But strong in the strength of God's might and all that God has done for us.

Verse 11 speaks of putting on the whole armour of God. God's given us everything we need. Get it again in verse 13. Take up the whole armour of God. And if we do, then verse 16 guarantees we will extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one.

In other words, because we're connected to Jesus, because we're united to him, because all the things he's won for us, the blessings flow to us, well, the devil is powerless against us. Isn't that great?

[ 15 : 05 ] Isn't that wonderfully reassuring? We don't have time to go into it now, but one of the main themes of this letter to the Ephesians is how Christian believers have every spiritual blessing in Christ.

I put the reference on the handout. Not one, not two, not some blessings, every spiritual blessing. In other words, if you're a Christian, you lack nothing, spiritually speaking.

You really do have everything you need to defend yourself against the devil's attacks. And it's why, by the time we get to this last chapter in the letter, chapter 6, the repeated command to believers is simply to stand, to stand firm in the armour of God.

So again, verse 11, put on the whole armour of God that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. Verse 13, therefore take up the whole armour of God that you may be able to withstand in the evil day.

And having done all, to stand firm. Verse 14, stand therefore in other words, in the face of this constant onslaught from the devil, what are we to do?

[ 16 : 22 ] Fight back in our own strength? No. Resolve to try harder in the battle? No. Surrender? No. What are we to do?

To stand. That's it. To stand firm in the truth of what God has done for us in Christ. To stand firm in the truth of our union with Christ.

To stand firm in this wonderful truth that God has given us everything we need to protect us from the devil's attacks. Now that might sound a bit abstract, so let me give you a few examples of what this looks like in practice.

Three scenarios. You're going through a rough patch. Perhaps you're struggling with sin in a certain area of your life. You begin to doubt that God still loves you.

You think, well, God's going to give up on me. It's just too many times I've fallen into this sin. You begin to wonder, can you really be a Christian? Doubt's increasing.

[ 17 : 21 ] What do you do? Well, from Ephesians 6, Paul says, first, remember that you're not wrestling against flesh and blood, you're wrestling against the devil. This is a spiritual battle you win.

You need to fight spiritually. Secondly, remember that you have every spiritual blessing in Christ. So from Ephesians, you would know that in Christ you are loved by God.

You have been adopted into his family. In Christ, you are redeemed, forgiven, because Jesus has died for you. This is the truth, the truth of God's word.

Then, you need to stand firm in it. You need to say to yourself, look, God's word tells me, God loves me. You look to the cross, you see Jesus dying for you, you say, yes, I am forgiven.

You say to yourself, there's no need to doubt. This is how the fight is, this is what it is. You fight those doubts by faith, you fight spiritually. You take up the shield of faith and extinguish these flaming darts of doubts.

[ 18 : 31 ] Another scenario could be you're feeling nervous about telling someone the truth about Jesus. So, last week, we were in a conversation and someone said, are you telling me that Jesus is the only way to God?

They said, surely you can't be saying that. If you're saying that, well, I don't know what that will mean for our friendship. Now, if you're anything like me, fear overwhelms you in that moment.

You don't like confrontation, you begin maybe to doubt. You think, what if I'm wrong? What if they're right? It can't be so much easier to let it go. What do you do? We need to remember in that moment that you are not wrestling against this person, you're wrestling against the devil.

This is a spiritual battle you're in. You need to fight spiritually. You need to remember you have every spiritual blessing in Christ. From Ephesians again, to keep it to Ephesians, you know from chapter 2, we're all by nature enslaved to the devil, spiritually dead, children of wrath.

You know the only way to be saved, to become alive spiritually is through Christ, through his death. This is the truth of God's word. And in that moment, you need to ask God to help you to stand firm in that truth.

[ 19 : 46 ] Believing this person needs to hear about Jesus. They need to hear the gospel and so be saved. You need to ask God to make you believe truly that their potential friendship with God is infinitely more important than your friendship with them.

And so you fight those fears, not in your own strength but by faith, faith in God's word. You fight that temptation to keep quiet. You take up the shield of faith. You extinguish the flaming darts of the evil one.

You step out in faith and you tell your friend the truth, that Jesus is the only way to God. A third scenario which many parents probably find themselves in is getting really annoyed and sort of overly angry when kids don't behave.

Why can't they be like other kids? I think I heard that a lot growing up. What will other parents think? What does it say about my parenting skills? What if I don't grow up to be Christians?

When you find yourself reacting like this, what do you do? First, remember you're not wrestling against your kids, you're wrestling against the devil. This is a spiritual battle you are in.

[ 20 : 59 ] And marvelously, you already have every spiritual blessing in Christ. You know you're saved by grace. You didn't make yourself a Christian. God did. You won't make your children Christian.

Only God will. It's by grace you were saved. You know that. Now you need to stand firm in the truth of it. Just believe it and act on it that you're saved by grace and therefore realizing you can't save your kids or change their behavior.

Only God can. Now of course, don't hear me wrong. By all accounts, love your kids, teach them all about Jesus, model the Christian life with them, discipline them as God commands you to do.

But leave the rest to him. Fight those feelings of over anger. Fight those feelings of comparison. You don't need to compare. It's all by grace. Take up the shield of faith.

Stand firm. Extinguish the devil's attacks. Can we see in all circumstances, not just these three, in all, it's remembering we're in a spiritual battle.

[ 22 : 02 ] It's remembering that in Christ we have every spiritual blessing and that it's standing firm in the truth of it. Christian believers are under constant attack from the devil.

Christian believers have everything they need to defend themselves from the devil's attacks. Finally and briefly, Christian believers need to see with their hearts.

Because I hope we can see from these verses just how important it is for us to be spiritually minded, to be spiritually aware, to be battle ready, spiritually speaking.

For some of us here, you may have never realized that you're under constant attack from the devil or if you did, you may never have realized that God's provided the armor, everything you need. to defend yourself.

That's why one of the big applications of Ephesians and of our sermon series actually is that we would see and believe the spiritual truths about us. We would see and believe the spiritual realities of our union with Christ.

[ 23 : 08 ] The need to see with our hearts as the Bible puts it. because this is where the battle's being fought. In our hearts, the spiritual battle, it's a battle of faith.

So when some people speak of spiritual warfare, they speak of demon possession, of breaking down strongholds, of Jesus and the devil in a titanic duel to the death. But that's not what it's about. The theme of our service today is that Jesus has conquered the devil on the cross.

The victory's his. Now the issue is whether we'll believe in this victory or not. Spiritual warfare, it's a warfare of the heart, it's a warfare of faith. A battle to see the spiritual realities for what they truly are.

Said that in the battle of Waterloo there was this one encounter where the captain of the British army ordered half of his troops to lie down in the field so they were concealed out of sight.

And when the French army came over the hill into battle, they looked down and just saw what they thought was this depleted army, half of what they were expecting. So the French general ordered all his troops straight in to fight and of course at that point the British army got up and they annihilated the French.

[ 24 : 24 ] The British army, although unseen, were no less real. It's just the French general couldn't see them. And God does not want us to make the same mistake when it comes to the devil. Maybe we can't see him with our physical eyes but it means it's no less real.

We'd spiritualize to see the truth and see the truth of the implications that we have by our union with Christ. We need to pray to God to give us this spiritual sight.

We need to pray the prayer Paul does in chapter 1 that the eyes of our hearts would be enlightened. That we would be given spiritual sight, clearer spiritual sight, stronger eyes of faith to see and believe the truths we've been seeing throughout the series of who we are in Christ.

No one is so stupid to go into battle without an armor or sword. And nor should we as Christians. So get on your knees, get praying. Verse 18 speaks there, praying at all times in the spirit with all prayer and supplication.

Every day we need to ask God to help us see the spiritual battle we're in. Every day, every morning when we get up we need to ask God to help us see the spiritual blessings we have in Christ, who we are now in Christ.

[ 25 : 43 ] we need to ask God to help us get battle ready for the day. So if you're thinking of your quiet times as a bit of a bore or a bit of a burden or a chore, well look, think of it as mission training.

Think of it as putting on your armor. Think about it getting ready for battle. And having prayed, go boldly into the world, standing firm in the full assurance of faith that there's no condemnation in Christ, you're dead to sin in Christ, you have a new identity in Christ, the devil is powerless against us.

This is what it means to be in union with the Lord Jesus. Let's pray together. Father God, we thank you so much for all the blessings that we have in Christ, what we've seen over the past three weeks but then today to see we have every spiritual blessing in the Lord Jesus.

And so we thank you that even though we are under constant spiritual attack from the devil, we have nothing to fear or be worried about for we have your armor and wearing your armor we know that the devil is powerless against us.

So we ask that you'd help us to stand firm in this truth, the truth of your word. Please give us spiritual sight to understand and know and believe even more who we are now in Christ, what you have done for us that moment you placed us and united us with him.

[ 27 : 06 ] We ask it for his name's sake. Amen. Amen.