

Stand Firm in His Strength

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[0 : 00] a call for every Christian to join a war. And so in verse 10, Paul raises a battle cry. Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power.

Rise up, he says. Get ready for battle. It's the same commandment that God gave Joshua when Israel was about to enter the promised land. Then God said, be strong and courageous.

As I was with Moses, Joshua, so I am with you. Well, we're called to a battle, but this is not an ordinary battle.

We're not called to conquer land and we're not called to use guns and arrows. Instead, we have a unique enemy which calls for a different kind of mission and the use of different kinds of weapons. And so as we look at our passage tonight, Paul tells us who this enemy is. So that's verse 11 and 12. Then in verses 13 and 14, we understand our mission. Verses 15 to 17, we see how we are to be fitted for action.

[1 : 07] And then finally, Paul shows us our secret weapon. So that's the outline in front of you. Now it's clear from verses 11 and 12 that our enemy is the devil.

He says, put on the full armor of God because it's the devil's schemes that you are standing against. But know that this is no ordinary enemy.

For our struggle, he goes on to say, is not against flesh and blood. That is not against physical power, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.

Satan has with him a dark cloud of evil forces and he's mobilizing them against God's people. Now what are these so-called dark forces?

Well, I think there are any power, any authority, anything that is not submitted to God, whether knowingly or unknowingly, each is being used by the devil against us.

[2 : 09] But unlike flesh and blood, these are unseen forces. So it's not like a normal army where we can see with our naked eye. It's not even like, you know, in the Harry Potter movies where you get all these evil forces hovering around, you know, Hogwarts and then zooming in to attack us.

So we can't point a gun at the enemy and hope to get rid of him by shooting him. Instead, Paul uses this word in verse 12 and it's a struggle. It's like the Greco-Roman wrestling that we get in the Olympics where it's in close combat and the devil's there in a lifelong struggle with us where he never lets go.

So every day in our lives, as we go about our work and our school, at home, with family and friends, the devil is up there with his schemes. But rarely does he come at us with a full frontal assault.

He works best when he's not noticed through tricks and lies. And so two weeks ago in chapter 4, we saw one of his methods where Paul warned us not to give a foothold to the devil when we allow our anger to get the better of us, to let us sin.

But the devil will use anything as well. So a fleeting temptation as you're walking past an adult bookstore or a hasty financial decision made out of greed or an unforgiving spirit, perhaps, when someone offends you.

[3 : 45] None of these look like the devil's schemes, do they, at first? But as someone once said, evil rarely looks evil until it accomplishes its goal.

And so that's the devil's ploy, quietly chipping away at you, bit by bit, slowly turning you away from Jesus until you wake up one day and you find you're no longer a Christian, no longer praying, no longer trusting Jesus, no longer reading the Bible.

So brothers and sisters, know your enemy, it's the devil, and know the schemes that he uses to work. But second, understand your mission.

And again, it's not hard to see what it is. So four times, Paul says, our mission, our goal is to stand. So already in verse 11, we're called to stand against the devil's schemes.

But then again, it's three more times he says that in verse 13 and 14. So therefore, put on the full armor of God so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground.

[4 : 51] And after you've done everything, to stand. Stand firm then. Now, in chapters 4 and 5, it was all about walking. Walking a life of God's calling.

But here in chapter 6, it's all about standing. Paul calls us to walk and stand at the same time. Now, the Americans may say you can't walk and chew gum at the same time.

And in some cultures, they tell you that you shouldn't walk and eat at the same time. But Paul calls all Christians to walk and stand at the same time. Now, we know that it's possible because he's talking figuratively.

And Paul's actually talking about two different things. Walking is a way of life. But here, standing refers to our position in Christ. So yes, the devil may seem overpowering, but we don't need to defeat him.

We don't need to actually get rid of evil from this world. Instead, all we are told to do is to stand firm. Stand where we are because the victory is already won.

[5 : 58] Satan is already defeated. God has already won the victory for us. And that was done by Jesus when he died on the cross. So our victory is secure. It's already been won.

What Jesus did has enabled our sins to be forgiven. We have been saved already by faith and raised up in Christ and seated with him in the heavenly realms.

Our glory is already in heaven. And so the devil cannot take any of that away from us. Nothing he does takes that away because of what Jesus has done. But what he can try and do is to try and deceive us with his lies.

And so our mission really is quite straightforward. It's actually to be immovable, to just stand firm whatever the devil may throw at us. Whenever our faith is tested and the day of evil here suggests a time of intense testing, if and when that day comes, we are to stand firm.

we are to hold our ground under trial and remain standing through it. So it may be a time of persecution or maybe a period of prolonged sickness or financial difficulty or conflict in relationships.

[7 : 20] God may allow some of these things in our lives at times, but the devil will try and use it to get us to doubt God's goodness and to stop us believing that God cares for us.

But actually, the devil is even more devious than that because he will also use so-called good things as well. So if doing well at an exam feeds your pride, well, he'll use that as one of his schemes.

Or if a new boyfriend or girlfriend will distract you from him, he'll use that. The ads we see on TV, the things people say at lunchtime, even the status updates on Facebook, anything and everything he'll use to corrupt your mind if possible, even so-called good things to fill you with envy and dissatisfaction with God.

So we need to be on our guard. None of these things would look bad on the surface, and maybe they aren't, but the devil will twist them for his benefit and cause us to stumble if possible.

Friends, if you have stumbled previously, that's okay. It's never too late. You can always get back on your feet and then stand.

[8 : 39] Repent, turn back to God, and then stand firm in him again. Stand firm in his promises. Stand firm in what God has already done for us. Stand firm and stop trusting in ourselves, in our own achievements, our own experiences.

stand firm in what God has done instead. So stand firm. That's the second point. That's our mission. Now third, Paul tells us not just to stand firm, but he also gives us all we need to withstand the devil's schemes.

And that is found by putting on the armor of God. Put it on and, as I say, be fitted for action. Again, twice already, Paul has already given this command. And so in verse 11, he says, put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand.

Verse 13, therefore put on the full armor of God so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground. But now, in verses 14 to 17, what Paul does is he details all the pieces of this armor.

He says, stand firm then with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace.

[9 : 53] In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the spirit, which is the word of God.

Now, if you're having a bit of trouble visualizing all this, I've got a handy coloring sheet. There you go. Give credit to one of my daughters for that. I think she must have got it from Ruth Newmarch. But I guess even with this picture, you might be wondering what to make of all these verses. We know it's figurative. We know that we don't literally put on an armor. But what does each part signify?

Well, the context of these verses actually comes from Isaiah. So, in our first Bible reading tonight, we saw a reference to the feet fitted for the gospel of peace in verse 15.

So, Isaiah 52 and 7 says, that a herald will bring good news of peace and salvation. So, the verse we have up there, how beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news.

[10 : 53] That is the gospel, who proclaim peace, who bring glad tidings, who proclaim salvation, who say to Zion, your God reigns. So, that's one part which comes from Isaiah 52.

But then in verses 16 and 17 of Isaiah 59, we get other references to the parts of the armor. So, in verse 16, he saw that there was no one. He was appalled that there was no one to intervene.

So, his own arm, that's God's arm, achieved salvation for him and his own righteousness sustained him. He put on righteousness as his breastplate and the helmet of salvation on his head.

He put on the garments of vengeance and wrapped himself in zeal as in a cloak. So, the breastplate of righteousness, the helmet of salvation. salvation. But notice, however, whose armor this is.

Who's the one putting on the armor? It's God. Here in Isaiah, God himself is the one putting on the armor. And so, here in Ephesians, what Paul is saying is that the armor which God himself uses is the very one which he provides to us.

[12 : 04] It's his righteousness, his truth, his salvation. Those are the things that God gives to us as our armor. And so, every time we are attacked or accused, every time we're subjected to discouragement, it's to God's character that we appeal to and it's to what he's done already for us that we seek to defend ourselves from the devil.

We appeal to the gospel, the good news of Jesus, God's word of truth, that salvation that has come through Jesus. So, remember in chapter 3, Jesus himself is our peace and here, he's part of that gospel of peace which we proclaim.

We who were once far away have been brought near to God and saved by grace through faith in Jesus. And so, when the fiery arrows come, how do we extinguish it?

By putting our trust in that truth, that it's our shield of faith. and when the devil accuses us, how do we defend ourselves?

Well, with the sword of the spirit, that is the word of God. Now, many people think that this is actually a reference to the Bible but actually, Paul means that this is the message of the gospel.

[13 : 21] The word of God is the message of the gospel which is spoken and proclaimed. Now, I don't think we need to get too caught up in all the naming of each part of the armor.

Like, you know, ask why is it the breastplate of a righteousness and not the belt of righteousness. There is, as you can see, some loose connection but the connection is actually not hard and fast. So, here's another reference from Isaiah 11 and verse 5. Here, we find that righteousness is now like a belt and faithfulness a sash around the waist.

So, it's actually not a direct connection between each part and each quality. The important thing to realize though is that this is not a pick and choose armor, right?

We are called to put on the full armor of God. So, it's not like on one occasion we'll take up the shield and then on another we'll have the helmet. No. We are to put on all the armor all the time.

[14 : 19] Put on righteousness, truth, faith, peace, salvation, all at once, all the time. They're all interconnected anyway because you can't have salvation without faith.

You can't have the gospel of peace which rests on God's righteousness and truth. All these things come together and go together. So, I think we're to look at the full armor as a whole and what Paul is emphasizing is actually if you think of all these ideas, the importance of the word.

That is, the gospel truth is our main defense against the devil and putting on the armor involves knowing the truth, knowing what God has done and who he is and then constantly reminding ourselves and each other through encouragement, through teaching so that when the devil tries to deceive us, we remind ourselves of that truth, we recall the truth and we hold up God's promises to what he has already done in Christ so that we can defend ourselves against the devil's accusations and discouragement.

Put on the full armor of God then and be ready for action. Now, many of you I know have Xboxes and Playstations and so you know that with some of these computer games, many of them I think, there's usually a secret weapon, right?

Something you can find which will then help you to kill all the enemies at once or whatever and win the game. A special gun or something like that. Well, here in this passage, we find that Christians also have a secret weapon and Paul tells us what it is in the next three verses, 18 to 20.

[16:02] And so, anyone can tell me what that might be? Quick guess? Pretty obvious? Yes. Now, come with me how many times Paul uses that word?

And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord's people. Pray also for me that whenever I speak, words may be given to me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel for which I am an ambassador in chains.

Pray that I may declare it fearlessly as I should. Prayer is the Christian's secret weapon. Now, to outsiders, it seems like the most passive of activities and ineffective, which is why a lot of people say, you know, I'll pray when all else fails.

But for the Christian, it is the most powerful weapon that we have. It's not our last resort, it is our first port of call. Why? Because prayer is the one thing that shows most clearly who we are dependent on.

So, you've heard me say this before, if you are not praying, then who or what are we relying on? Prayer, or the lack of it, reveals quite clearly where our trust is.

[17:21] So, it's not that we pray and then don't do anything else, but what I'm saying is that neither do we do everything else but not pray. So, we can't say we trust God and not pray.

If we want to be strong in His mighty power, then we will pray. If we know that our battle is not against flesh and blood, then we will pray.

we stand firm how? Through prayer. Prayer is the one thing that we must do when we put on the armor of God. So, Paul says, pray in the Spirit and that means not because there are some prayer which is in the Spirit and some which is not.

No, all prayer is in the Spirit because our only access to God is through Christ by the Spirit. So, all prayer is in the Spirit. But then he says, pray on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. Be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord's people. In other words, pray about anything and everything at any time and anywhere. And so, whenever a friend comes to mind, pray for them.

[18:28] When you're sad or when you're glad, pray. Pray when you're still, pray when you're on the move. Set aside time for individual prayer, but then also make time for praying with others.

And just on that note, the church is having a church-wide prayer next Tuesday, not this one, 22nd of October. Make it a priority to come for that. And if you're wrestling with something tonight, well, come down to the front at the end of the service and pray with someone.

Pray because that is God's weapon for us to stand firm. Now, if in verse 18 Paul tells us how often to pray, then from verse 19 onwards, Paul gives us some priorities in prayer.

He names two, in fact. First, Paul says to pray for all the Lord's people, all the holy ones. He doesn't say what, but I think in light of the earlier verses, it's clear that we should be focusing on praying that God's people will stand.

And in this regard, I want to encourage us to pray particularly for those who are persecuted in the other parts of the world. So pray for ourselves and pray for God's people.

[19:39] But secondly, Paul asks for prayer in preaching the gospel. He asks here specifically for himself that he may be fearless and that he may have words to say. But I think if we extrapolate more generally, Paul is asking for prayer for gospel ministry generally, and especially in the work of evangelism and mission.

In one sense, with evangelism and mission, that's where the battlefield lies. That's where people are being pulled out of darkness into light.

And so it's understandable that the battle is fiercest at that point with the devil. So let's pray for all things, but especially for mission and evangelism.

Now, I reflected on this, and Paul's request is actually quite amazing, isn't it? Because if I were Paul, I would have asked people to pray for my safety, maybe to be released from jail.

But that's not what he's focusing on at all. His chains don't bother him. In fact, he's going to send Titicus to them and tell him that he's all fine. He's happy to be God's ambassador in chains, a prisoner for the Lord, he says in chapter 4.

[20 : 52] You see, Paul knows that his struggle is not with flesh and blood. So his flesh and blood, his physical situation, is not the critical thing to him. Rather, it's the battle in the spiritual realm which matters most to him.

And so that's why whenever I pray for others, and I pray for a lot of physical things as well for them, I try and remember to make it a point to pray for them spiritually as well.

So I pray for people to find jobs, to get well, to pass exams. But on top of these things, I pray too for their faith. I pray too for their godliness. I pray that in the midst of all those flesh and blood situations, as you will, that they will stay strong spiritually, that they will stand firm, they will trust the Lord, that the devil wouldn't use those situations to deceive them.

Well, we get to the end of our passage tonight and the end of the letter. But I want to conclude tonight, I think, by actually praying. Given what Paul has said, I think it's appropriate.

And what I want to do is use some of the same prayers that Paul used in his letter as the basis of our prayer. So let's finish by praying. Our God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, we praise you for you have blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ Jesus.

[22 : 24] And we praise you for in all wisdom and understanding you have made known to us the mystery of your will, that is to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ.

Glorious Father, may you give your holy people here tonight and everywhere in the world the spirit of wisdom and revelation so that we may know you better, so that the eyes of our hearts may be enlightened in order that we may know the hope to which you have called us, the riches of your glorious inheritance in your holy people, and your incomparably great power for us who believe. that power which raised Christ from the dead and seated him at your right hand in heaven, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every name in this age and the age to come. Strengthen us, Lord, with power through your spirit so that we may stand against the devil. But more than that, strengthen us so that Christ may dwell in our hearts through faith so that we may be rooted in love and we may grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ and be filled with the fullness of God.

And now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations forever and ever.

[24 : 03] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.