

Stand Firm with God's Strength

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[0 : 00] My question is this, hands up if you find the Christian life easy and struggle free. No one? I asked my Bible study group that same question last week, they all laughed as well and kept their hands firmly down.

The Christian life is good, it is worth it, but it's not always easy, is it? Because we live in an imperfect world where there are struggles with health or family, work or study.

But as Christians we also face another struggle or battle. The constant battle to live God's way and not the world's way. To react as Jesus would, not as the world would.

Or as Ephesians has already put it, to live out our new life in Christ and not our old life as Gentiles. But this battle is not only with our sinful nature, you know those desires that pop up and you want to do something that you know you're not supposed to do and you've got to fight that urge.

That sinful nature that God is transforming. Our battle is also with the devil who is always tempting. You see, Paul has been helping us see the spiritual reality of who we are in Christ.

[1 : 17] That all we have because of Christ. Now our privileged place because of Jesus in God's plan. And so we've heard that in Christ we have every spiritual blessing.

In Christ we who were once no-hopers are now family members. In Christ we have peace with one another and peace with God. In Christ we are part of his body, the church, which is God's masterpiece.

His pride and joy. And then Paul encouraged us to live out that privileged place in Christ. And that's what we've been looking at over the last few weeks.

And now in our final week on Ephesians, he encourages us to stand firm in it. In fact, the opening verses of our passage, the word stand comes up four times, doesn't it?

Just so we get the point. We're to stand firm in Christ. Because another spiritual reality is that the devil will do all he can to make us doubt our privileged place and stop us standing firm in Christ.

[2 : 25] Now the bad news is we cannot stand firm in Christ on our own. But the good news is we can with God's strength.

So point one and verse ten. I'll have the verses on the slides as well. I wasn't sure how to work it.

But anyway, verse ten. He begins by saying, Finally be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power.

Notice where the strength comes from? It comes from God. We're to literally be strengthened in the Lord as Christians and in his mighty strength.

Our self-help books will tell you to look within, don't they? And find inner strength to overcome obstacles in life. But we're not strong enough on our own for the Christian life.

I remember trying this one time. I said to myself, That's it. Today I'm going to be patient with the kids all day. You know how long it lasted? Less than ten minutes.

[3 : 30] We don't have the power we need. But God does. And it is mighty. We saw before in Ephesians, In chapter one, That this power that is already at work in us who believe to transform our sinful nature, That power is the same power that raised Christ from the dead.

It's powerful stuff, in other words. So God's power can certainly strengthen us to stand firm, can't it? How? Well, verse 11, Put on the full armor of God, So that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes.

God's power is described in terms of God's armor. To be strengthened by God's power is to wear God's armor.

The armor he himself wore in our first reading from Isaiah. I hope you noticed. And the armor that he's now given us to wear. But before we unpack how to wear it, Notice again why we need it.

We need it because of the devil's schemes, Or as verse 12 explains, For or because our struggle, Our battle is not against flesh and blood, 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.

[5 : 03] Now, as we've seen before, Heavenly realms refers to the spiritual reality. The reality we cannot see, But often have an inkling is real, Don't we? And again, Paul is helping us to see it's real.

And to see that there are evil spiritual forces led by the devil. Now, when it comes to the devil, C.S. Lewis, Who wrote that Narnia series, I'm sure you're familiar with that, He said this, He said, There are two equal and opposite errors Into which our human race can fall about the devil.

One is to disbelieve his existence, And the other is to believe and to feel an excessive and unhealthy interest in him. In other words, The first mistake we can make is to believe that the devil is not real.

Disbelieve in him. I think I've mentioned to you before this movie, It was in 1995 with Kevin Spacey, It's called The Usual Suspects, And it's about a shady underworld boss, That no one knows if they really exist or not.

And the movie ends with this line, It says, The greatest trick the devil ever pulled Is convincing the world he doesn't exist. Now, there's quite a bit of truth in that, isn't there?

[6 : 17] Many disbelieve the devil's existence. Even as Christians, We can forget his existence. But it's a mistake to disbelieve or forget, Says Lewis. Yet the other mistake, As Lewis says, Is to have an excessive or unhealthy interest in him, Or even to be scared of him.

Because the devil is defeated, Isn't he? Christ won the battle at the cross. And in fact, As we saw just a moment ago, Christ is then seated in the heavenly realms, Far above every rule and authority, Including, Verse 12, Those evil rules and authorities.

You see, The devil is defeated. He is a loser. And so we need not be fearful of him, But we do need to be aware of him.

Because although he's defeated, The final nail in his coffin won't come Until Jesus returns. And so until then, He'll try to stop us standing firm in Christ. And pull us away from Christ.

How? What are his schemes? Well, the devil's primary power is to tempt people Through lies or deception. In fact, Jesus calls him the father of lies.

[7 : 38] It's what we saw with Adam and Eve. You know, Did God really say? You know, Twisting the truth, Using deception lies. He also tempts non-Christians to persecute Or oppose Christians.

Whispering to them, It's okay to make new laws against Christians. Christianity is outdated anyway. You see, He uses lies to tempt Whomever he can To oppose Christ And to drag us away from Christ.

But God has given us his armour So we can stand firm in Christ. Verse 13. He returns to say, Therefore, In light of this battle, Put on the full armour of God.

So that when the day of evil comes, You may be able to stand your ground. And after you have done everything, To stand. See, We are to wear the armour God has given us.

So that having done everything, That is, Having put it on, We will stand. When the day of evil comes, When the day of temptation comes. And temptations can be stronger some days than others, Can't they?

[8 : 49] In fact, Even some temptations, We feel more acutely than other people might feel. You know what they are for you. But the devil will look for opportune times, Just as he did with Jesus.

But if we armour up, When that day of evil comes, We will stand. And so how do we armour up? At point 2, Verse 14.

He says, Stand firm then, With the belt of truth buckled around your waist, And with the breastplate of righteousness in place. So the first thing we do is to put on truth.

That is, To remember the truth. Truth in Ephesians especially refers to the gospel. And when we remember the truth of the gospel, We can stand firm against the lies of the devil.

For example, The devil may whisper to you, If God really loved you, He wouldn't let you go through this suffering, Would he? But then you put on the truth of the gospel, Which says, Actually, God loves you so much, He gave his only son to die for you, When we didn't deserve it.

[10 : 07] So that we can have an eternity without suffering. You see, We're to remember the truth of the gospel, So we can stand firm against the lies of the devil.

We're to armour up with truth, And with righteousness. Now putting on the breastplate of righteousness refers to two things here. Firstly, Firstly, It means remembering that God has made us right with him.

That he has given us righteousness in his sight. So if the devil tempts you to doubt, You know, Whispering lies like, God could never forgive that sin.

Or, God will never let you into heaven because of your past. We are to remember our righteousness. That Jesus has already paid for all our sins.

We are right with God now, So that there is now no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus. We can be certain and stand against the devil's accusations.

[11 : 12] I've had someone from our church say that to me before. I'm not sure if God will let me in because of my past. Put on that breastplate of righteousness and know you are right with God now. Heaven's secure. In fact, Someone once told me, The next time the devil reminds you of your past, Remind him of his future. Putting on the breastplate of righteousness means, Firstly, Remembering we are right with God now, So we can stand against the devil's accusations.

But secondly, It means then practicing or living out that righteousness. If God has made us righteous in his sight, We are to live like it. Earlier in Ephesians, In chapter 4 on the screen there, We're told to put on the new self That has been created to live like God in, Notice, True righteousness.

In other words, We're recreated as righteous in God's sight, And so now we're to act like it. That's why the verse in chapter 4 goes on to say, On the next slide, Therefore, Live like this. Live out the righteousness. For example, Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry. In other words, Don't hold a grudge. And do not give the devil a foothold.

[12 : 29] You see, Practicing this righteousness Means we won't give the devil a foothold. In other words, We'll stand firm. You see. One of the devil's schemes is to divide Christians.

He's been doing it for hundreds of years. And at the moment, There are different opinions around vaccination, And even different services. And so it's easy for Christians to become angry. Vijay and I have experienced it in the last couple of weeks. To hold grudges against one another, Without gently talking to one another. Trying to understand where each other's coming from. And we don't know the whole situation for one another, Do we? If we live out our righteousness, We won't let the sun go down.

We won't hold a grudge. And therefore, We won't give the devil a foothold to divide us. Instead, We'll stand firm. You see. So, Armour up with righteousness, Remembering we are right with God, And living out the righteousness we've been given.

[13 : 35] But also, Armour up with gospel readiness. Verse 15. And with your feet fitted with the readiness That comes from the gospel of peace.

Now, We can read too much into the bits of armour, But I think Paul has deliberately chosen some of them To match the Old Testament, Like our first reading in Isaiah. And elsewhere in Isaiah, We're told That, Well, That famous verse, How beautiful on the mountains Are the feet Of those who bring good news.

The gospel. And so, I take it here, The shoes on our feet Are doing the same thing. It's about a readiness To bring the good news. To share the gospel.

As our opportunity, Opportunities come along. Or as Peter puts it, From 1 Peter 3, To always be ready To give an answer For the hope we have.

Remember, The devil's schemes Are about opposing Christ And dragging people away from Christ. What better way To stop Christianity in its tracks By keeping Christians silent.

[14 : 45] No more gospel sharing. No more Christian conversion. Christianity dies out. Mission accomplished For the devil.

But armoring up with gospel readiness Means we'll stand firm Against that particular scheme. So, Armour up with truth, Righteousness, Readiness, And verse 16, In addition to all this, Take up the shield of faith With which you can extinguish All the flaming arrows Of the evil one.

As someone said In my Bible study group, The shield Paul has in mind Is not those small, Circular, Captain America style shields. It's those big, Roman shields Which covered the whole body.

What's more, The phrase, In addition to this, In verse 16, Is literally, In everything. In other words, The shield is the big one. The one that protects us From everything.

You see, Without faith, We won't believe the truth. We won't be right with God. We won't share the gospel. We won't even have salvation. Faith cuts across them all. And what's more, Faith, We're told in verse 16, Extinguishes all The flaming arrows.

[16:05] Every temptation The devil shoots our way. It protects our whole Spiritual body, You see. Because faith is about Trusting all of God's truth And none of the devil's lies.

During the pandemic, Someone from our church, One of my Bible study groups actually, Has his own business And things were getting very tight. He just made it through The lockdowns last year And he was, You know, About to crash this year.

I wasn't sure how he would pay his mortgage. But I remember him saying, As we were doing prayer points in Bible study, He said, Look, I know God will provide. In other words, He put on the shield of faith That trusted God's promise to provide.

And he didn't give in to the temptation To doubt God's goodness, God's promises of provision. And God did provide. But the point of the story is, That shield of faith Helped him to stand firm, You see. So armor up with faith And verse 17, Take the helmet of salvation And the sword of the Spirit, Which is the word of God.

[17:23] Armor up with salvation, That is, Remember our salvation Is both secure And worth waiting for. The devil can tempt us To doubt our salvation Or that it's, You know, Worth living for the world to come Rather than this world.

And so we're to put on the helmet, We're to remember Our salvation is secure And will be better And more brilliant Than anything else we can imagine.

We're to put it on And realize it's a brilliant light At the end of a dark tunnel That we might persevere. That it might be worth Giving up things In this world for Christ, Knowing we have the world to come.

That's why Paul is willing To give up his life for Christ In this world And even go to prison. That's where he's writing this from. From prison for many years. Because he knows his salvation In the next world Will be paradise.

And will more than make up For anything he's suffered In this world. So armor up with salvation In verse 17 With the sword of the Spirit Which we're told Is God's word, Aren't we? God's Spirit And God's word Go together.

[18:32] It's the primary way By which God's Spirit Works in us. Just like the devil's Primary way is lies, The Spirit's primary way Is truth In God's word. And it helps us stand firm.

I remember a time I couldn't really understand What God was doing. Have you had moments like that? I'm sure you have. Kind of go, I don't really get What you're doing here God. And you're very much, Well I was, Very much tempted To doubt God actually knew What he was doing.

Because it was hard for us to see. And I remember this time vividly Because in pop, This Bible verse, Proverbs chapter 3, 5 and 6. Do you know it? Trust in the Lord With all your heart And lean not On your own understanding.

And I went, Ah, I don't understand. But don't lean on it. Lean on God. Trust in him. And it helped me to stand firm. That's how it works, You see. So armor up with truth, Righteousness, Readiness, Faith, Salvation, And God's word.

For having put all that armor on, We will stand firm. I've actually worn armor before. Michelle and I, When we were first married, We went to see her grandparents In England.

[19:45] And we do what tourists do. We visited some castles. And one of the castles, They were having a medieval reenactment. And then after the performance, I went up to the armorers And said, Oh, look, Can I try some armor on?

I've never done that before. But they said yes. And so here I am on the next slide. They told me to pull that face. They told me to pull that face. And then on the next slide, Here is an action shot. That's me behind the mask. And they actually even got a real sword And kind of whacked it across my chest. I couldn't feel a thing. The armor really works.

But so too does God's armor really work. It enables us to stand firm As too does prayer. So more briefly, Point three, Verse 16.

And as I read these verses, See if you can count how many times Prayer Is referred to. And pray in the Spirit on all occasions With all kinds of prayers and requests.

[20:46] 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 ambassador in chains.

Pray that I may declare it Fearlessly as I should. How many times? Five times Plus requests Six times.

Yeah. Prayer is pretty important, Isn't it? It's not a piece of armor But it is another way We are to rely on God's strength.

By the way, Prayer in the Spirit Just means prayer by the Spirit. Back in chapter 2 We heard how we both, Jew and Gentile, Have access to the Father By one Spirit, It says.

So it's just talking about normal prayer. But we are to pray regularly. Verse 18 says, On all occasions With all kinds of prayers. And it says to keep on praying.

[21 : 49] Or literally to pray with all perseverance. Which I like Because it can be hard to keep praying sometimes, Can't it? It requires perseverance. And it requires alertness.

Being alert to what's happening around us So we know what to pray for. Especially when it comes to the devil's schemes. Jesus told his disciples something similar, Didn't he? In the garden. Watch, Keep alert, And pray.

Why? So that you will not fall into temptation. As I said before, We're prone to certain temptations more than others. I'm guessing you know what they are for you.

And so we're to be alert to those temptations. So we can especially pray and ask for God's help To stand firm. But also verse 19, To pray for one another.

All the Lord's people. And gospel proclamation. And not only that we would have the shoes of readiness on, But for those whose job it is to preach the gospel.

[22 : 54] Like Paul or church leaders or mission partners. As I said, The devil would love nothing more than for Christians to keep quiet. And the gospel to die out.

And so we're to pray that it keeps being proclaimed, As Paul says, Fearlessly. Something that's worth adding to your own prayers, Isn't it? Or to come along to Kingdom Growth Night, Where we'll pray for our mission partners.

In fact, It's by their prayers and God's armor that Paul himself can stand firm, Despite being in prison. Do you see the last bit of our passage? Verse 21. Dicitus, The dear brother and faithful servant of the Lord, Will tell you everything, So that you may know how I am and what I am doing. I am sending him to you for this very purpose, That you may know how we are, And that he may encourage you. Peace to the brothers and sisters, And love with faith from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Grace to all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with an undying love. You see, Paul sends Tychius to encourage them, Presumably by telling them he's okay, Even though he's in prison.

[24 : 04] You see, He may be in chains for preaching the gospel, But more importantly, He's in God's armor. And so he's okay. By God's armor and their prayers, He'll keep preaching the gospel.

And his love for Christ won't die, Even if he does. An undying love that encourages us to have too. There's lots more we could say, But I need to finish. During the New South Wales lockdown this year, Some guys from Western Sydney went shopping in Coles, In their version of PPE.

Here they are. I love the caption, Even though it's bad humor, Late night shopping. Yeah, Yeah, It's dad humor. That's why I liked it. Anyway, I'm not sure how protective it would have been against COVID, But God's armor and our prayers do protect us from the devil's schemes.

I don't know how undying your love for Christ is going at the moment. I don't know how you're faring in the battle between living Christ's way and not the world's.

[25 : 11] But by armoring up each day, And continuing to pray, We can stand firm. Why don't we pray now?

Let's pray. Our gracious Heavenly Father, We thank you for this great letter of Ephesians. We thank you that it reminds us about all we have in Christ.

Our privileged place because of Christ in your plan. And so Father, We pray that you would help us to stand firm in Christ as Christians.

Help us to stand firm with your strength. By armoring up each day. And continuing to pray. We ask in Jesus name.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.