

Stand Up

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[0 : 00] The following message is given by Walt Alexander, lead pastor of Trinity Grace Church in Athens, Tennessee.! For more information about Trinity Grace, please visit us at TrinityGraceAthens.com.

Ephesians 6 verse 10, this is the Word of God. Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might.

Put on the whole armor 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 the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.

Therefore, take up the whole armor of God that you may be able to withstand in the evil day and having done all to stand firm.

Verse 14, stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth and having put on the breastplate of righteousness. And as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace.

[1 : 24] 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 apostle writes that 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 I ought to speak. It's the Word of God.

In the preface to his classic work, the Screwtape Letter, C.S. Lewis says, there are two equal and opposite errors into which our race can fall about the devils.

[2 : 44] One is to disbelieve their existence. The other is to believe and feel an excessive and unhealthy interest in them.

I think that sums it up well. Some of us are raised to live the Christian life, giving very little thought to the devil. Maybe we wouldn't be so bold to believe that he doesn't exist.

But is there room in our theology for him? Does an understanding of this evil one affect our daily life or our understanding of Christianity?

And still others are on the other side of the fence. We're raised to live the Christian life looking for a devil behind every bush. And so we spend our days fighting the devil.

I must admit, I believe I give too little thought to the devil. Specifically, I've come to realize over the past couple of weeks that I give too little thought to the work of the devil in causing pain and suffering.

[3 : 54] I'm quick to cry to pray and cry for help. I'm quick to ponder the purposes of God. I'm quick to mind the truths of Scripture. But I've come to realize that I'm not quick to ponder the work of the devil when facing pain and suffering.

How about you? Pain and suffering are not merely things God purposes to make us more like Christ.

Pain and suffering are alerts that we're still at war. As Lewis likes to say, we're an enemy-occupied territory with an enemy who would love to destroy our faith.

Christopher Ashe, in his wonderful commentary on the book of Job, concludes in his final chapter, he says this, Every morning we ought to wake up and say to ourselves, there is a vicious, dark, spiritual battle being waged over me today.

Satan is very busy whenever there is a believer walking with God in loving fear. Here is one inescapable element of the normal Christian life, warfare.

[5 : 12] What about you? Do you wake up? With an awareness, you have an enemy engaged in a battle for your soul.

Satan is very busy where there's a believer walking in loving fear with God. Pain and suffering alert us to this war.

As the Apostle Paul concludes this incredible book on the book of Ephesians, which we don't have time to obviously study the whole thing, but he includes the body. This is the conclusion of the body of the letter.

The conclusion of, well, not just the body of the letter, but the conclusion to all of his commands on the way to live the Christian life that begin in chapter 4, verse 1, and they conclude right here, and at the very conclusion of this body of the letter, of all that he wants to say about the Christian life, he alerts us to a war.

He rivets our attention on an unseen enemy, the devil and the spiritual forces of evil, telling us famously, we do not wrestle against flesh and blood.

[6 : 30] Wonderfully, though, he rivets our attention also on the power of God available to us. You know, these verses are not filled with strategies, tactics, and techniques.

They focus on the power of God that enables us to withstand any assault. There is a war that began the moment you awoke this morning.

But there is power from God. You probably saw it in the way we read it. The obvious appeal in this passage is to stand. God's doing something that makes us able to stand.

The entire passage is organized around this appeal. But He calls us to stand four times. So where we're going, inner word is stand in Christ's saving strength. That's the main point.

Stand in Christ's saving strength. We're going to unpack this in three points. Our enemy is point one.

[7 : 32] Even though we may not realize it, once we begin following Christ, we are thrust into a conflict, a battle, a war, with the enemy of our souls.

You see this as we've gone through the gospel. Jesus Christ is filled with the Spirit. He's anointed at His baptism as a man full of the Spirit. Everywhere He goes, He encounters the spiritual forces of evil.

So too with every man or woman of God. The very first thing Paul calls us to is the gravity of the war taking place, the massiveness.

These words come at us fast and straight. They're less like a personal letter, which is what this book is, and more like the final commands of a general before taking the field of battle.

There's an aggressiveness to them. There's a war going on that we will not win if we're not alert, aware, and ready.

[8 : 38] This war is marked by numerous up-close attacks. The attacks are repeated. Look in verse 11. Put on the whole arm of God that you may stand against the schemes, plural, of the devil.

Verse 16. In all circumstances, take up the shield of faith with which you may extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one. The emphasis is not merely on the presence of attack, but on the repetition of them.

On the continuing assault of these attacks, and these attacks are up close. That word wrestle is a word for hand-to-hand combat.

We're not at war with computer-programmed missiles. We're immersed in hand-to-hand combat. We're facing an enemy who is up close and personal. We're facing an enemy who interferes with daily life.

He is not remote. These repeated close-up attacks are caused by unseen demonic forces.

[9 : 44] Look at verse 12. We don't wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.

Now there's a lot of discussion on that verse. What is going on? Is this an institutional demonic forces working through something like Hitler, Stalin, systemic, that's a big word right now that we all argue about, or is it personal?

What are we to make? Rulers, authorities, world powers. That's what cosmic means. Universe powers. Spiritual forces. I think the main purpose is not to describe the details of demonic attack, or to define the hierarchy of demonic beings.

The main purpose is to underline the great power of demonic forces. I don't think we're supposed to get caught up in this hierarchy in the heavens of these demonic forces, but just emphasizing this great power they possess.

They are rulers. They are authorities. They are cosmic powers. They are spiritual forces.

[11 : 21] They are great demonic forces. We know from the rest of the Bible that behind all these forces is Satan himself. Now Satan is just a title, not a name.

But in the Scriptures he's called many things. He is the accuser, the deceiver, the father of lies, the God of this world, the prince of the power of the air, the liar, the tempter.

He's a creature, a superhuman creature, who has fallen from light and rages against the Lord. His seed rages against the Lord.

Now Jesus wasn't so popular when he told the Pharisees in John 9 that you are like your father, Satan, the father of lies.

But how does he do his work? Several chapters earlier in Ephesians give us a bit of a clue about, so how do these great, cosmic, demonic powers work out in our lives?

[12 : 31] Look at Ephesians 2, he says, you were dead in your trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work, and the sons of disobedience, among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.

I think wonderfully in those verses, which they would have just, this most likely would have been read in one sitting publicly, Ephesians, or at least they would have read it in one sitting, and so they would have just read these verses, right?

And in so many ways, it captures the way the Bible presents evil as coming at us or coming from three places, the world, the flesh, and the devil.

All who have not trusted in Christ are dead in sin, what the Scripture says, right there. All who have not trusted in Christ are following the course of this world. So they're dead in sin, but they're lured and enticed by this world, following its course.

But they're also following the prince of the power of the air. So you see there's this wonderful trifecta of trouble. I think the point is it's hard to separate because they're all working together.

[13 : 50] Now when someone becomes a Christian, wonderfully they're set free from the will of Satan. Look in 2 Timothy 2. Exhorting Timothy says, The Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome, but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently endure an evil, correcting his opponents with gentleness.

God may perhaps grant them repentance, leading to a knowledge of the truth, that they may come to their senses and escape the snare of the devil after being captured by him to do his will.

Now we like to talk about free will, but that doesn't look so free. But that's the way these powers work together.

We're captured by Satan to do his will. So after becoming a Christian, wonderfully Satan can no longer accuse us and even in death Satan cannot snatch us from our Father's hand, but the Scriptures continue to say that he's still at work in the lives of Christians in pleasure and in pain.

Satan seeks to destroy our faith with pleasure. In a couple weeks we're going to study Mark 4. It talks about the seed that's thrown different places.

[15 : 07] Seed of the word of the gospel. And the thorns choke out the fruit. They choke out the seed from bearing fruit through the cares of this world, the deceitfulness of riches.

The irony of the choking and the thorns is that the things that choke don't feel like thorns. They don't look like thorns.

Pleasure doesn't seem dangerous. Excess income, extravagant vacations, nice things don't seem dangerous. They don't look like thorns, but all of them whisper, you don't need God.

You don't need to be committed to Him. Relax, eat, drink, and be merry. But if He cannot get us with pleasure, Satan seeks to destroy our faith with pain.

1 Peter 5 makes this very clear. Be sober-minded, be watchful. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion seeking someone to devour.

[16 : 13] Resist him firm in your faith knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion seeking someone to devour.

How does he devour? Through the same kinds of suffering. How does he seek to devour us? with suffering. If he cannot get you with pleasure, he will get you with pain.

Now, you start to talk about pain and suffering, and less we think what we're facing is not suffering, Elizabeth Elliot defines it helpfully for us.

She says, suffering is having what you don't want or wanting what you don't have. I love that. I think that captures all of it.

There are a few songs that capture more fully the pain of suffering than the song I Dreamed a Dream from the musical Les Misérables. Now, I grew up singing this on car trips because my dad was a tenor.

[17 : 33] That's just a part in the choir. We don't do choirs anymore, much to the heel of chagrin. But it's simply one of the most devastating songs I've ever heard.

You might have seen the movie version a handful of years ago. The character, much of the story centers around Jean Valjean and his compassionate friendship to a lady named Fantine.

Fantine, after losing her job, is forced to prostitution to survive and to provide for her child, her young child named Cosette.

And she sings this aria called, I Dream to Dream. The song begins bright, discussing days when dreams have come true.

She says, there was a time when men were kind, when the world was a song, when love would never die, when no song was unsung and no wine untasted.

[18 : 43] Captures the heart at feast. But things change, darkness and pain enter. She says, the tigers came at night.

They tear your hope apart. They turn your dream to shame. She tells of her lover and childhood who left her alone and took what was most dear to her and made it her greatest shame as a single mom in a world that was not as kind.

She concludes, I dream my life would be so different than this hell that I'm living. Life has killed the dream I dreamed.

Now you may think that you can't relate to Fantine, that you never had to work the streets.

You may think that you can't relate to the suffering of this person or that person, but the New Testament never encourages you to think that thought. New Testament rather knows that we all have dreams, we all have hopes and plans, we all have things that we think we were born for and life has a way of making us suffer by taking what we want and giving us what we don't want.

[20 : 28] Wherever that happens, whenever that happens, that is suffering. So whether your suffering is cancer or criticism, sickness or slander, death of a close friend or discouragement, financial loss or loneliness, what you are suffering is not the most important thing.

The most important thing is that Satan is at work behind your suffering seeking to devour your faith, seeking to get you to say, does God really want what is best for me?

Does God really care about me? Does God even know me? There's an enemy of our souls, God but there's a friend.

Point to our friend. Verses 14 through 17 in this present darkness we need a friend, we need a comrade, we need someone who would stand with us against the schemes of the devil and so Paul turns to the armor of God, the armor of our Lord Jesus Christ.

We see this command to take up, to put on the whole armor of God and I just love this that again it says take up the whole or the full armor it's all we need to stand against the evil one.

[21 : 43] There's no secret recipe out there. This armor is it and this armor is the Lord's armor. It's quite obviously the armor he gives but in so many ways it's the armor he wears.

Beneath each of these pieces of armor are Old Testament references. One of them is Isaiah 59. The people are oppressed by wicked men committing acts of injustice.

There's no one to hear their cry, no one to stand up for them but the Lord comes and look what he's wearing. Isaiah 59. 17 He puts on righteousness as a breastplate and a helmet of salvation on his head.

He puts a garment of vengeance for clothing. He comes in judgment and wrapped himself in zeal as a cloak.

This armor is the armor the Lord wears. But in so many ways, Paul is tying this armor to Jesus Christ. The one who has heard our cries in a much more profound way and it's come down to stand up on our behalf is our Lord Jesus Christ.

- [22 : 49] And this armor is calling us to stand in the victory of Christ over Satan's sin and death. In so many ways, putting on this armor is the same thing he said in Ephesians 4, to put off the old man which belongs to your former man of life, to be renewed in the spirit of your mind and put on the new man created after the likeness of God and true righteousness and holiness.

And so standing in the power of Christ is the only way we'll endure and the only way we'll be strong in the strength of the Lord. But let's walk through this armor briefly.

The tall order of number of pieces there are. Look in verse 14, stand there for having fastened the belt of truth. A Roman soldier's belt would have been a leather apron under his armor, essential for gathering his tunic and holding his sword in place.

In the same way, we're readied to fight because of truth. The truth about Jesus has set us free from the snare of the devil. And so we're steadied against his lies, untruth and deceitful schemes through the gospel.

Then we put on the breastplate of righteousness. 14b, having put on the breastplate of righteousness. The Roman soldier, the breastplate covers and protects his head and chest.

- [24 : 15] It protects his vital organs. And so too we're covered and protected by the gift of righteousness through Jesus Christ. Not only has the Lord set us free, I want you to see this, the Lord has said, there's no more condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

Not only has the Lord set us free, he says our name is written in heaven, that our name is engraved upon the palm of his hand, that we have been fully and eternally accepted before God through Jesus Christ.

Now, why is that good news? Well, it's good news because it protects the vital organs. It says, no mortal wound can pierce you.

No power of hell, no scheme of man can ever pluck you from his hand. No one can cast you out. For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God.

The final verdict over your life has been rendered shared. Through the righteousness of Jesus Christ.

- [25 : 26] Not only has he forgiven all your sins, he's qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. Through the righteousness he's given to you and to me.

John Bunyan in his autobiography called *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*, he says, one day as I was passing into the field, this sentence fell into my mind, my soul.

Thy righteousness is in heaven. And with the eyes of my soul I saw Jesus at the Father's right hand. There is my righteousness.

So that wherever I was and whatever I was doing, whatever I was facing, God could not say to me, where is your righteousness? For it is always right before him.

I saw that it was not my good frame of heart that made my righteousness better, nor yet my bad frame that made my righteousness worse.

- [26 : 38] For my righteousness is Christ. Now my chains fell off, my temptations fled away, and I live sweetly at peace with God.

I think that gets it. The breastplate of righteousness draws us up wonderfully above any earthly circumstances, or circumstance, regardless of how wicked it is.

verse 15, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace. So much like our shoes, the Roman soldier's shoes make him ready for battle, ready to fight.

This too is an allusion to Isaiah 52, 7, and the good news that has come to us in Christ. How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, who publishes peace, who brings good news of happiness, who publishes salvation, who says to Zion, your God reigns.

So too, we put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace. There's no peace in this world, but Jesus is our peace. Ephesians 2, 14, for he himself is our peace, who is broken down in his flesh, the dividing wall of hostility by abolishing the law of commandments and ordinances and creating in us one new man in place of two, so making peace.

[28 : 02] We have access to God. We have peace in the world. We don't cave in to discouragement or despair or lose heart or lose hope. In the fog of war, in the agony of pain and suffering, we rest in the peace of God secured for our salvation.

Verse 16, in all circumstances take up the shield of faith with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one. The shield is set apart from the rest of the armor.

It's emphasized. It must be used at all times. I love that. The Roman soldier's shield was very large. It would have been soaked in water before a fight so that it would extinguish fiery darts.

And so too, faith is our shield. To extinguish his darts. Now, what does that mean? It means we're not protected through tactics, techniques, and strategies.

We're not protected by our attempts to take out the devil. We're protected by depending completely on Jesus Christ. What is the definition of faith? Faith is a reliance completely upon Jesus Christ that looks out, and so faith looks away from itself to Jesus.

[29 : 15] Faith presses forward without sight. Faith remembers the promises of God purchased through Jesus Christ. Faith makes us confident in any dart that might come our way.

I remember years ago watching a dear friend of mine die of cancer named Doug, and one of the things we like to do, much like we do here, is recite catechisms.

And this, we recited one of the Heidelberg Confession of Faith. about our lives being completely secure through God and God alone.

And Doug was telling me, sitting next to his daughter, he had cancer and he had used chemotherapy and all his hair had fallen out.

And we're reciting this catechism that said, not one hair would fall from my head apart from your will. his little daughter said, that's your hairs too, daddy.

[30 : 35] That's the power of faith. When all else is giving way, faith regards the promise of God, not present sight.

take the helmet of salvation. Take the helmet of salvation. Verse 17.

We would know a helmet is just a crucial piece of armor. Protects the head. That's a reference to Isaiah 59, 17.

And so we put on the helmet of salvation. I think the idea is that we put on an active awareness that our salvation is secure. That Christ has lived, died, and been raised.

Christ is now enthroned above every other power. And so we take every thought captive and make it obedient to Christ. So we take everything in our lives and we bend it to submission to Jesus Christ.

[31 : 39] I think that's what it means to take on the helmet of salvation is to render our minds submissive to Jesus. Verse 17.

Be the sword of the spirit, which is the word of God. This sword, the reference here, is to a short sword used for hand-to-hand combat. We already know that we're wrestling against this enemy, and so we have a short sword, not a spear, against him.

And this is the only offensive weapon in this armor, and so we take up the sword. The sword is the sword of the spirit, which is the word of God. Now that is a curious phrase. The sword of the spirit, which is the word of God.

So which one is it? I think there's several things going on here. One is that the spirit rides on the word of God. You don't be in touch with the spirit.

Don't go to a field. Get in the word of God. That's where the spirit of God, the presence of God rides. They work in tandem. God's freedom.

[32 : 41] Always. I think something else is going on here. When Paul uses the word of God, most often he's referencing the word of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

We see this. I don't think I put it up, but one example would be 1 Thessalonians 2.13. We thank God when you receive the word of God, which you heard from us, you accept it not as the word of men, but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers.

Now he's talking about when he preached the gospel to him, and so they received the word of God, which is the word of the gospel. And I love this. What he's saying is the offensive weapon, the only offensive weapon, is the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Now we think, man, that's a bummer. That's all we have. I think the point is, the offensive weapon God has given you against Satan is not a prayer tactic or a spiritual formula.

It is the truth that as Jesus is proclaimed, he transfers bound helpless sinners from Satan's grab into the hand of the almighty King of Jesus. The only one who plunders the strong man's house is the one who has bound the strong man, and his name is Jesus Christ.

[34 : 00] Martin Luther says, so when the devil throws your sins in your face and declares that you deserve death and hell, tell him this, I admit that I deserve death and hell.

What of it? For I know one who suffered and made satisfaction on my behalf. His name is Jesus Christ, Son of God.

Where he is, there I shall be also. The takeaway from all this armor is if you're not standing in Jesus Christ, if you're not in relationship with him such that your life is submitted completely to him, you will not, there is no hope of enduring.

These attacks are too great. And so, he is the strong tower that the righteous man runs to. and he's safe. So I invite you to come to Jesus Christ.

[35 : 35] And to hide in him, not having a righteousness of your own that comes from the law, but the righteousness that comes by faith in him to believe in him and be saved.

the scriptures say that all day long I've held out my hands. That's the posture of Jesus Christ.

This armor, there's no qualifications to take up this armor. There's no track record or background demanded. There is only the admitted so that you are sunk without it and then it's yours.

Thirdly, our station. Our station. If we're in a battle, we've got to know where we stand.

This final section kind of tells us where we stand, what we have to do, what our duty is, what our responsibility is, what our station is. We appropriate this armor by prayer.

[36 : 48] Prayer seems to be the means by which we stand. Look at verse 18. 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.

Prayer is how we get this armor to function. That's what's going on here. Prayer is not an additional piece of armor or an additional weapon. Specific prayers are not what we need to cast out the enemy.

Prayer is how this armor is deployed. Prayer is how we stand in Christ's saving strength. Clinton Arnold says, prayer is the essence of spiritual warfare and the most important means by which believers are strengthened by God.

I love the way this passage comes together. The passage does not focus on tactics, techniques, and strategies. It doesn't focus on power encounters and bondage. It doesn't focus on the lies of the enemy and formula.

It turns our attention to he who is greater than he who is in the world. It turns our attention to he who has triumphed over sin and death and is exalted above every rule and power and dominion.

[38 : 00] It doesn't help us stand against Satan on our own. It helps us stand against Satan in Christ alone. So we appropriate it through prayer.

We deploy the Lord on our behalf through prayer. That's what's going on. And we appropriate it by persistent prayer.

Praying at all times, with all prayer and supplication. Keep it alert with all perseverance. Our neediness will persist until Christ returns. And so too must our prayer. But sometimes I feel like prayer is a medicine we know we need but don't take.

Several years ago, well, maybe a year ago, I read Jordan Peterson's book, 12 Rules for Life. It says, statistically, if a hundred people are prescribed a drug, one-third fill the prescription.

Or one-third don't fill the prescription. Half of the remaining two-thirds will fill it but won't take the medicine correctly. They'll miss doses. They'll stop too early.

[39 : 10] And so on. But he says, statistically, if your dog gets sick, you will take him to the vet. If he gets a prescription, you will fill it and you'll make sure he doesn't miss any doses.

I guess you care about your dog more than you. You're more likely to make sure your dog takes his medicine than you are likely to take your own medicine.

And prayer can be like that. It's a medicine we need but don't often take. I think we need more information, more techniques, more techniques.

we need prayer. Ed Welch says, it's not always easy to talk openly to the Lord. We need help but it's difficult to actually ask for it.

Our inclination is to live self-sufficient life. When there's trouble, we first try to figure it out. Then we worry as if there is no one who cares or hears.

[40 : 15] Or maybe we give God the cold shoulder because he didn't give us what we'd hoped for. Or we hide from him because we cherish sins in our private world. There are dozens of reasons why we resist calling out to the Lord.

Real life though begins with help. I need Jesus. I think the point is not to get caught up in trying to make sure your prayers are long or eloquent or something silly like that.

the point is that your prayers come from a heart that says I need Jesus. Luther says make your prayers brief, frequent, and intense.

I like that. Brief, frequent, and intense. Spurgeon says you don't need to pray all day long, you know. just put a few bits of prayer between everything you do.

That's the point of persisting this. We're not cordless drills. We need to be charged throughout the day. We need help continually and so we cry out in prayer.

[41 : 26] prayer. And that's the way I want us to conclude. I want to conclude quietly. You know where the trouble is in your life.

You probably know where the enemy is pushing down his thumb. Luther said, I wake up some mornings where it feels like Satan is sitting on my face.

And so, let us pray about that. Let's bow together. If you would, take a moment. Father, we calm and quiet our soul before you.

We confess that we don't have resources to face the enemy of our soul. we confess our neediness before you.

We cry out for your health. Give ear, O Lord, to our prayer. Listen to our plea for grace. In the moment of our distress, we call upon you for you answer us.

[42 : 50] We pray, God, that you would deepen us and strengthen us as a people who face down the enemy by standing in the power of Jesus Christ.

We praise you and worship you. We ask for your help. In Jesus' name, amen. Amen. You've been listening to a message given by Walt Alexander, lead pastor of Trinity Grace Church in Athens, Tennessee.

For more information about Trinity Grace, please visit us at TrinityGraceAthens.com. Thank you.