

Standing Firm: *Knowing the Resources Given* – Part 3
Ephesians 6:14b-15

“For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”

2 Corinthians 5:21

Introduction: In his classic work *The Screwtape Letters*¹, C.S Lewis creatively describes the schemes of the devil and his minions by writing from the perspective of a demon, *Screwtape*, to his nephew *Wormwood* as a type of mentor in leading believers and perspective believers away from the truth (or in this case, *The Enemy*). Though written in a bit of British brogue and in a specific time of history (citing the Great War – since it was published in 1961), it nonetheless captures timeless truths of **how** Satan attempts to deceive, trick, redirect, or flat out lie to people.

In his advice about how to distract a believer from what is most important or in pursuing holiness, Screwtape counseled to use any means possible to separate a believer from pursuing God: *“You will say that these are very small sin; and doubtless, like all young tempters, you are anxious to be able to report **spectacular wickedness**. But do remember, the only thing that matters is the extent to which you separate the man from the Enemy. It does not matter how small the sins are, provided **that their cumulative effect is to edge the man away from the light and out into the Nothing**. Murder is not better than cards if cards can do the trick (or modern day “social media” or entertainment). **Indeed, the safest road to Hell is the gradual one – the gentle slope, soft underfoot, without sudden turnings, without milestones, without signposts.**”* (p. 55)

In keeping believers away from *repenting of sin*, he said, *“The more often he feels without acting, the less he will be able ever to act, and in the long run, the less he will be able to feel.”*

In terms of dealing with **time and temptation**, *“Gratitude looks to the Past and love to the Present; fear, avarice, lust and ambition look ahead. Do not think lust is an exception. When the present pleasure arrives, the sin (which alone interests us) is already over. The pleasure is just the part of the process which we regret and would exclude if we could do so without losing the sin; it is the part contributed by the Enemy (in other words, true pleasure derives from and is a gift from God alone) and therefore experienced in the Present. The sin, which is our contribution, looked forward.”* (p. 62)

Again, Lewis hits on the heart of the battle that every Christian is engaged in. We have an enemy who is scheming to blind the eyes of unbeliever and make the believer as ineffective as possible. This morning we will take a look at **two more pieces of armor** that ward off the attacks of **temptation and doubt**, each seeking to rob us of joy and believing the lie. We are compelled to put on righteousness and be ready with the gospel of peace, which are glorious and strong defensive weapons against the constant onslaught of our enemy.

Breastplate of Righteousness & Turning from Temptation (6:14b)
“and having put on the breastplate of righteousness...”

¹ This book is HIGHLY recommended for parents, high school, and college age students. It’s not long, has short chapters, and must be read a bit slowly, but hits on so many current, relevant issues.

If confusion does not work, our enemy will pull out another deadly weapon in his arsenal: **temptation**. This often works in tandem with confusion, as seen in the Garden of Eden with Adam and Eve, where he first confused Eve (*"Did God really say?"*) and then appealed to her eyes and desires. He was even so bold to try to make these same appeals to Jesus Himself during His time of sojourn (Matt. 4:1-11) This is exactly how he operates today. *"Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world --- the **desires of the flesh** and the **desires of the eyes** and **pride of life** --is NOT from the Father but is **from this world**. And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever."* (1 John 2:15-17)

What does this mean? It means that Satan will use all the materialistic and hedonistic tools at his disposal to distract, entice, and draw us away from God into ruin. Like the Siren's song in Greek mythology who lured unwitting sailors with their music and voices to shipwreck (as in Homer's account of the adventures of Odysseus), Satan will appeal to our desires to entrap us. If he can tempt us to believe that sin is better or that the walking in sin will make us happier, the trap that is set will snap down and ensnare us. This is why we struggle with issues like **addiction**, because God will give us over to our sin when we give into them over and over. Temptation is real and our enemy will use them with us uniquely, whether its lust, alcohol, power, or materialism, these each will speak to our minds, hearts, and affections in a way that leaves us hopeless and miserable.

So the weapon of warfare must rise above the challenge. So God has resourced us out with the **"breastplate of righteousness"**, a piece of strong metal or woven leather that would cover a soldier's vital organs, like his heart or bowels. A soldier could live with a wound to an arm or leg, but a piercing blow to the heart would mean sure death. Since Satan targets our minds AND hearts, we MUST protect both diligently.

What did Paul mean by righteousness here? Let's start with what he did NOT mean. He did NOT mean "self righteousness", a type of works based effort where we try in our own strength to be moral or to "get to God" on our own. Jesus debunked this when he said that if we tried that, our righteousness would have to exceed that of the Pharisees (the OG's of self-righteousness), which would be impossible (Matt. 5:20; Isa. 64:6) Satan will USE any self-righteousness against us, turning our effort into idolatry and our morals into stumbling blocks.

He was also NOT referring to imputed righteousness (2 Cor. 5:21; Rom. 4:6, 11), the righteousness given to us by Christ at the point of salvation. When we come to Christ by faith alone, trusting in Him for forgiveness, He not only takes our sin on Himself on the cross, satisfying the wrath of God, but GIVES us a foreign righteousness that we could never earn ourselves. In other words, **He takes our life on Himself and gives us His**, so that God sees Christ's life in us, so He could accept us back without compromising His glory. This is the marrow of the gospel itself, and cannot be "put on", **but absolutely becomes the foundation for obedience every day**.

In light of receiving Christ's life and righteousness, we can now pursue Him, walking in active obedience (1 John 5:1-2) and working out our salvation with fear and trembling (Phil. 2:12-13), since God is at work in us, both to will and to work for His good pleasure. This means that every day we are seeking to put off sin, renew our minds, and putting on active obedience, giving **not opportunity for the devil** (Eph. 4:24-27; Col. 3:9-14). Paul said he **presses on, straining forward**, so that: *"Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in*

*Christ, the **righteousness from God that depends on faith**— that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.”*

There is a damnable heresy that runs in Christian circles and churches that daily obedience and holiness do not matter, but only coming to Christ in initial salvation. This is taught both directly and indirectly, where the entire emphasis is on a “decision” to follow Christ but no other follow up or expectation. That is absolutely unbiblical and leaves people TOTALLY exposed to the attacks of Satan. We are DAILY in need of the same grace available for salvation to live in holiness (Gal. 3:1-3). Is this going to be a struggle? Absolutely! Why, because we still have these fleshly bodies and minds that are prone to the lies of our enemy. But, the key is that we STRUGGLE, as opposed to simply being given over.

What is at stake? Our ultimate goal is to bring **glory to God and want to display the glories of Christ in our lives, marriages, families, and this church**. Our enemy wants to see us give into our desires, putting every type of enticement in front of us. So **PAPER ARMOR will NOT Do!** What we need is not good advice, programs, activities, a bunch of ‘how-to’s’, or techniques. What we need is to deal with our hearts at the level of desire, seeking to be satisfied by a greater Savior who is the fountain of living water, quenching our thirst for pleasure, security, and joy. We need to be able to deal with our **sin, confessing it, acknowledging it, turning from it, and running to Christ for forgiveness**. This will be transformative in your marriage, life, and experience with Christ.

Feet Ready with the Gospel & Dispelling of Doubt (6:15)

“and, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace.”

Doubt is a powerful force. In athletes, it’s observed that one can have the ability to dominate in a certain sport, but lack of confidence or a high level of self-doubt will cause a person to shrink away from the key moment, or pass up the opportunity to lead, or worse yet, not try at all. When doubt creeps in, the fear of failure is high, confidence is low, and the sense of criticism is crushing. Self-doubt is produced by over-thinking (paralysis by analysis) and keeps one stuck in ruts, not able to try new things or discover extraordinary opportunities.

But in the realm of spiritual warfare, **doubt is a direct enemy of faith**. When Peter boldly left the boat to walk to Jesus on the water, he saw the wind, became **afraid, and began to sink**. Jesus’ response was simply, “O you of **little faith, why did you doubt?**” (Matt. 14:21) At the beginning of Passion Week, Jesus taught the disciples about the power of prayer that was expressed in total faith, powerful enough to move a mountain. But He said very clearly that they would have to ask in **faith and do not doubt** (Matt. 21:21). The disciples struggled with the reality that Jesus ACTUALLY rose from the dead, even though He told them multiple times that He would. When they saw Him in His resurrected body, they were startled and frightened, and He said, “*Why are you troubled, and why do **doubts arise in your heart?***” (Luke 24:38). James reiterated that if we are going through trials and need wisdom, we should ask for it and it will be given. But, it must be asked “**with no doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind**”. (James 1:6)

Satan understands these realities of our doubts and will feed them to try to get us to doubt God’s love, Christ’s work, or look to ourselves, which leaves us empty and hopeless. Everyone struggles with doubting God at some level. *Will God accept me, knowing all the sinful things that I’ve done (or even things done to me)? Will God truly forgive me? Do I need to clean myself up before I come to Him, or before I will be received or welcomed? Am I worth it? Am I worthy of being loved?*

These questions are particularly enhanced when we have an improper view of faith and the gospel. Jerry Bridges wrote about this reality in his book *“The Disciplines of Grace”*, another book that is highly recommended. He talked about the experience of the **“Good Day/Bad Day”** Christian or experience. The good day experience is when we get up on time, do our devotions, exercise, feel good about the job we did at work, treat people with patience, and when we get an opportunity to share the gospel at the end of the day, we are full of confidence because of our good standing. But the bad day starts with sleeping past your alarm, missing out on your workout and devotions, cussing at the car that cut you off on the way to work, the annoying co-worker testing your patience and feeling the ire of your frustration, topped off by an argument with your spouse when you get home, knowing that you were actually in the wrong. When you have an opportunity to share the gospel with your neighbor at the end of the night, are you filled with confidence or doubt? Do you run to the Lord in immediate prayer or feel like you have to have a stretch of “good” before you can enter His presence or be used by Him? These and other scenarios are why believers need a fully fleshed out view of the gospel for their lives **each and every day, a weapon that prepares us for the fears and doubt that will come.**

The picture that Paul gives of a soldier is one with proper footwear for battle. A Roman soldier who did not have the right shoes would find himself out of position, slipping and falling when the enemy brought the heat. If you’ve ever tried to run and cut on a slick or wet field without cleats in soccer or football, you know how frustrating it can be to do your job when you slide all over the place. A Roman soldier would have thick, leather soled shoes, strapped up high around their ankles, with **studs or hollow headed hobnails** nailed through the bottoms, allowing extra grip to a soldier dug in with shield in hand and an enemy trying to bulldoze him. This is a vivid picture of **“readiness of the gospel of peace.”** What does he mean by this phrase?

Some have taught that this is a gospel of “proclamation”, based on the prophecy of **Isaiah 52:7**, which says, *“How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news...”* The gospel is certainly news to be proclaimed, and we will see in a few short verses ahead that Paul prays for this very thing. But this is NOT a gospel readiness to proclaim, but a gospel readiness for a defensive measure, one that if FOR the defender, the one who is already saved. It is the resource that we have that can overcome doubt and fear, give us supreme confidence in the finished work of Christ, and allow us to move forward with joy.

The term “gospel” simply means “good news”. For a believer it never gets old or boring, but far too often gets relegated to the stuff of **evangelism** alone, but the truth is that THE GOSPEL is the foundation for all of our life in Christ. The gospel is the news that we respond to by faith in Christ Jesus where we are declared righteous through the forgiveness of our sin. This is called **justification**, where God’s wrath for our sin is satisfied in the work of Jesus on the cross, and it deals with the **penalty** of our sin (Romans 3:21-26). But the gospel continues to work in us day by day, moving us to holiness and making us more like Jesus. This is called **sanctification, and it deals with the power of sin in our lives.** This is where active obedience comes into play (1 John 2:3), and where we are on an upward path of knowing Christ (Phil. 3:12-16). The gospel continues to play out until we attain to **glorification**, where we are freed from the **presence** of sin someday, where we will have new bodies and will reign with Christ forever in perfection and purity (1 Cor. 15:42-56; 1 John 3:2-3). All of this has to do with **“PEACE”**, and though the gospel brings peace between factional people like Jews and Gentiles (Eph. 3:6), it is what ultimately makes peace between God and man, so that God can stay glorified and holy and still receive back sinful mankind to himself.

Now, how does all of this factor into our weaponry, and how does it protect us? Far too often those who claim to be believers in Jesus Christ do NOT KNOW the gospel well enough to put it into practice every day! The gospel can be recited in 60 seconds but takes a lifetime to understand. So let's look at two passages to make sure we understand "The Gospel" in our lives. The first is Romans 3:19-26 and the second is 1 John 2:1-2.

- **No one is declared righteous before God by observing the Law²** (Rom. 3:19-21) – The very best a person can offer is merely filthy rags before God. If our righteousness falls short at even one little part, that is enough to condemn (James 2:10).
- **There is a Righteousness from God that is apart from the Law** (Rom. 3:21) – *"But the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the Law"* – This righteousness had to come from Jesus alone, who fulfilled all the Law by His sinless life, becoming the perfect substitute and atoning Lamb (John 1:29)
- **The righteousness from God is received through faith in Jesus Christ** (3:22) – Faith is how we receive the work of Christ on our behalf. But faith cannot be conjured up in ourselves, but is a gift of grace (Eph. 2:8-9), thus it does not have merit in itself. Though faith works, it is NOT a work that earns.
- **This Righteousness is available to everyone on the same basis, since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God** (Rom. 3:22-23) – There is no bell-shaped curve here. Everyone stands GUILTY, declared un-righteous, and stands condemned because of our sin.
- **All who put their faith in Jesus Christ are justified freely by God's grace** (3:24) – "To be justified is to be absolved from any charge guilt and to be declared righteous." This is undeserved and unearned, but it is complete and total. Once justification is given, it is not taken away
- **This justification is through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus** (3:24) – The only way we could be declared righteous was to have a payment price paid, and that was the blood of Jesus Christ, which **satisfied** the wrath of God, paying the payment in full for ALL the sin of those who believe.
- **God presented Jesus as a sacrifice of Atonement through faith in His blood** (3:25) – *"whom God put forward as a propitiation by His blood to be received by faith"* This is monumentally important. How could God stay holy and keep glorious and receive sinners? By having an atonement sacrifice to replace us, to take our place. Jesus shed His blood and God treated Him on the cross the way He should have treated us. When we believe in Jesus, that He lived and died for us, rising again to conquer sin and death, we place our lives in His hands, asking for forgiveness and yielding our lives to Him as our Master.

Since ALL of the gospel is based on what God did in Christ, and because Jesus' work on the cross is finished, we can live in light of the gospel each day, preaching it to ourselves every day. I need the gospel on my best and worst day, since I am both prone to *self-righteousness*, thinking that I can do it on my own, and *doubt*, thinking that I need to do something to earn. As Jerry Bridges says, ***"Your worst days are never so bad that you are beyond the reach of grace. And your best days are never so good that you are beyond the NEED of God's grace."***

So finally, look at **1 John 2:1-2**: *"My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an **advocate** with the Father, **Jesus Christ the righteous**. 2 He is the **propitiation for our sins**, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world."*

² This outline is used from "The Disciplines of Grace" – a book you should read!

Here is how the gospel of peace prepares us for action every day. We have been declared righteous and given a foreign righteousness by faith in Jesus Christ. He calls us to holiness, a hatred of sin and pursuit of God in worship. BUT, when we DO sin, we can come immediately to God BECAUSE we have an **advocate** in Jesus Christ, who paid the price for our sin. When we doubt our standing or value, we look to Christ! When we are guilt laden over sin, we look to Christ! When we are accused by our enemy, we look to Christ! When we've had a "good day", we look to Christ, and when we've been dragging, joyless, and giving into temptation, we look to Christ! And He looks at us and reminds us that He died in our place, paying for our sin and guilt, lifting our head, lavishing us with His grace, and calling us to believe.