

Standing Firm: *Knowing the Resources Given* – Part 2
Ephesians 6:13-15

“Therefore, take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day”

Introduction: A church in Jacksonville, Florida stirred up controversy this last week, which made it all the way up to the national news cycle. Churches can easily become embroiled in unwanted (or wrongly sought after) controversies by being overly political, acting like the world, or by doing strange things (letting venomous snakes bite you and weird stuff like that, like “Pastor” Jamie Coots of Kentucky). But this church brought the ire of many because they simply made known what they believed the Bible actually said, what they have historically practiced, and what the members of the church agree to. They put out a statement on sexuality, which many churches have done over the last several years, to clarify their Biblical stance on marriage, gender, and sexuality since there is anything BUT clarity in the world around us. Here is what the statement contained, and see if you can see the reason for the angst:

“As a member of First Baptist Church, I believe that God creates people in his image as either male or female, and that this creation is a fixed matter of human biology, not an individual choice. I believe marriage is instituted by God, not government, is between one man and one woman, and is the only context for sexual desire and expression”

Genesis 1:27; 2:24 Matthew 19:5; Romans 1:26-27; 1 Corinthians 6:9-11¹

Notice this was a statement that **members** of the church voluntarily signed off on, that this did not extend to *visitors* of the church or even the world around. It was written *positively* without condemning any one sin, but addressing ALL sexual sin collectively. It was written *clearly*, a concise statement that did not wax eloquent or venture into cultural issues, but laid out a simple truth. It was written *Biblically*, stating the historic doctrine of the church, explaining God’s plan for the good of humanity from the beginning, which would build up society to the glory of God.

Heath Lambert, the senior pastor of the church and writer of several books on counseling that we enjoy and endorse, boldly held an open meeting for the church AND those outside who wanted to ask questions/make statements (what often happens at open mic meetings). There was a young woman named Katie who got up to make a statement about her upbringing in the church, how she felt shunned, and how the church hated who she was, a practicing queer person. She came to make a statement, left without opportunity to respond, and encouraged the people there to leave the church. She quoted Lady Gaga as a source of truth (“*born this way*”), misquoted Scripture (“God says to love thy neighbor unconditionally”, apparently except if you are gay), and took up cultural idioms as fact (“God loves me just the way I am”). Her plea is an often repeated, loud lie that many have been duped into. Pastor Lambert gave a kind, truthful, and gracious response, not in *defensiveness* but in sadness. Here is a young woman who is **confused, leading to anger, blame-shifting, finger pointing, and left searching for hope**. If ever there was a time to understand how our enemy operates, and how we must respond, the time is now.

We took a look a few weeks ago the battle that is being fought against and all around us. It is an unseen battle with tangible consequences with a hidden enemy who is altogether too real. His weapons of warfare are the lie, deception, temptation, counterfeiting the truth, comparison, and causing doubt.

¹ <https://fbcjax.com/sexualitystatement/>

Though he cannot possess a believer who is indwelt with the Holy Spirit, he certainly can oppress. He has access to much knowledge about us (even the secret things), understands Scripture better than most, and though defeated, is willing to continue to try to blind, harm, and make believers as ineffective as he can. He cannot take away salvation, but he sure can make it feel like he can. So the weapons of OUR warfare have to not only stack up to this enemy, they must exceed (he brings a knife, we bring a gun!). That is the point of this most precious section given to believers: we can stand against ALL the schemes of a powerful enemy because our God is greater, has given us resources, and have the promise that when we walk with these weapons, we will NOT be defeated.

As we look at the **specific pieces of armor** that we are given, we must remember a few key principles:

Comprehending Our Victory

We are in a fight. But we remember a few things:

- 1) **The victory over evil, death, rulers, cosmic powers, and spiritual forces has ultimately been fought and WON by Jesus Christ** – He has put all things under his feet. Satan has NO AUTHORITY over us, and only can do what God allows him. So we do not fear him, but resist him, we don't fight him but stand against, giving him no opportunities in our life. That is why we can operate in **strength**, but NOT our own strength, but the strength of the might of Christ (v. 10). The battle has been fought and won, and though Satan is dangerous like a snake with his head cut off, he has no ultimate power over us. This has been the whole build-up in Ephesians: we have a **sovereign God** who not only chose us before the foundation of the world but gave us every spiritual blessing in Christ (Eph. 1:3-4). We have been sealed by the Holy Spirit who guarantees our salvation (1:13-14), which Satan cannot break. God raised up Christ and put all things under His feet (1:22), and seated us with Him (2:6). Satan has delegated authority on this earth, but it pales in comparison to the power, authority, and dominion of the Trinity.
- 2) **Our enemy is NOT people but the power behind** – Satan is our enemy but people are our mission. There is a reason why there is a liberal agenda and polarizing politics. It divides people. It blinds people. Our mission is NOT to produce a better government but to destroy strongholds with the truth (2 Cor. 10:3-5), to cut through the lie with the truth, to engage people with the ministry of reconciliation, begging and urging people to be reconciled to Christ (2 Cor. 5:20-21), gladly spending and being spent for people's souls (2 Cor. 12:15).
- 3) **We must gear up for battle each and everyday** – Our enemy is active and looking for opportunities. We have assurance and security in our salvation to repent of our sin, to turn from temptation, and to seek to please Christ in all things. So we must approach each day not as a vacation or trying to avoid conflict, but to realize we are smack dab in the middle of an ongoing one, which necessitates us to be filled with the Spirit, centered on God's Word, and dependant on grace.
- 4) **The call is to STAND FIRM, to not give ground rather than a forward moving fight** – This is supremely important to understand the text itself, which is NOT talking about "getting saved" but the resources of those who already are! Each of these weapons, five of which are defensive, are what EVERY SINGLE BELIEVER possesses to defend ourselves against the wiles of the devil.

Taking up our Resources:

The “Armor of the Lord” is a favorite Sunday school lesson because it is so vivid. If you’re teaching an elementary class on Sunday you’re hoping for this passage over a passage in Romans that’s hard to explain. We have access to the armor a Roman soldier would wear, have had plenty of movies made to illustrate it (Thank you, *Gladiator*), and can unequivocally know this is what Paul was thinking. In fact, Paul wrote in a way that was memorable, practical, and perpetuating, knowing that generations would understand warfare and the need for defensive measures. Paul knew we were in a fight, so he gave instructions living up the seriousness of the battle faced.

This morning we will look at the **first three** pieces of armor which would have been kept on by a soldier at all times, and look how each counters a specific attack from Satan, so that we will be able to **stand firm, withstanding the evil day and evil one**.

Belt of Truth & Countering Confusion (6:13-14a)

*“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**. **Stand** therefore, having **fastened on the belt of truth**...”*

If the fight is real, what are our resources? The first piece of armor mentioned “*is basic to all other pieces because truth and trustworthiness are basic to all the other qualities that believers need in order to withstand diabolical attacks.*”² Truth has the idea of **reality**, which is reliable as opposed to what is false. Truth is the antidote to the lie, and where we go for truth is the matter of life and death.

How do we take a stand against the schemes of the devil? We gird up or bind ourselves around the truth. The picture was a tunic or outer garment worn by soldiers that during wartime would be pulled in tightly, under the other armor, so as not to leave something to be grasped by an enemy. It was to be fastened up around the waste so that a soldier would not trip over it or lose his footing. It’s a beautiful picture of preparedness, anticipation, and alertness. The verb is given in the middle voice, which simply means it’s the believer’s responsibility to gird themselves. This is done by preparing our minds for action, being sober-minded, and setting our hope fully on the grace that will be brought to us at the revelation of Jesus Christ (1 Pet. 1:13). It requires us to lay aside every weight and sin that clings so closely to us (Heb. 12:1). It is a total commitment to study, understand, and know the objective truth of God’s Word so that we can expose, see, and comprehend what is false. We are **girded with God’s objective truth** which becomes part of us, a lens that we see through and a framework which through we interpret every circumstance. We know it, live it, and crave it, and cannot be separated from it.

Why is this first defensive measure so important? First, because according to Lifeway Research, about **40%** of Protestant churchgoers (which includes us) read the Bible only once per week or less. Yet Lifeway also found that Bible reading is one of the behavioral characteristics that are most predictive of spiritual maturity.³ *Do we see the problem?* The first weapon of defensive warfare is being prepared, having every loose end tucked in, ready for battle in and with the truth, and people who claim to be believers have all kinds of thoughts flapping in the wind, tripping over false thinking and being taken down by worldly wisdom. Not only are WE unprepared, we are not ready to protect our families from the onslaught against our kids.

² Harold Hoehner, “Commentary on Ephesians”, p. 840.

³ Natasha Crain, “Faithfully Different”, p. 100.

Second, our enemy is active in confusing our kids, bombarding them with a torrent of nearly truths that cause them to question at best and rebel at worst. Every child or young person in this church will go through a **crisis of faith**, asking the question of whether they believe what they have been taught because their parents believed or THEY truly believe. But more recently, the idea of **deconstruction** has become popular among the younger generation, a “pulling apart of one’s faith in order to re-examine long held beliefs”. This comes as they come to **intellectual** (does the Bible make sense), **emotional** (my friends believe something different – does that mean they are going to hell?), or **moral** (it seems that everyone is doing _____ and are happy. Is the Bible just restricting me? Or they will have a problem with an experience with Christians rather than a thoughtful problem with Christianity). In this examination is an immense amount of **confusion**, which requires an equal or greater amount of truthfulness.

How do we deal with this level of confusion? Unleash the truth in a consistent, loving, and pervasive way. The truth has nothing to fear, so we can counter the false, sort-of truths that are utter *skubalon*: “Love is all that matters”, “love is love”, “You are perfect the way you are”, “I’m not worth it”. Truthfulness does not always sound nice, but just like life saving surgery, the pain is only temporary. The enemy wants us to believe that **open-mindedness** is a high value, that having conviction is equal to being prideful, and that experience or feelings are greater than objective, divine truth. Remember, the Bible lays out truth that is actually **narrow, not broad, sure, not obscure**. There is ONE GOD, not many. There is ONE WAY to God, and that is through Jesus Christ alone (Acts 4:12). There is a BROAD path toward destruction that MANY are on, but only the NARROW path is found by a few (Matt. 7:13-14). So we are able to **be honest** with our children (or anyone), to point them to the truth to expose the lies, and to point them to a Savior who is the true and ultimate solution.

So, “*having fastened the belt of truth*” means we give ourselves over to discipline and full commitment. We “tuck in” the regular excuses that Christians give: “I don’t have time/too busy”, “can’t understand it”, or “I don’t have time (oh, did I say that one again?!)”. We commit to having our minds **RENEWED** in the truth so that we can have TRANSFORMED thinking that counteracts the cultural narratives. Remember, when our intake in what is false outranks our intake of the truth, we are prone to *think wrongly* about life, ourselves, truth, reality, and others. There is no time to wait. The battle is raging. So we commit ourselves to the **truthfulness of truth** in order to set our minds in order to be ready when our enemy wants to confuse us.

Breastplate of Righteousness & Turning from Temptation (6:14b)

“and having put on the breastplate of righteousness...”

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 everyday.

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.

Are things getting worse and harder around us? Yes. Are the attacks for our kids minds and hearts ramping up? Absolutely. Do we run in fear, cowering away from the attack? By no means. We gear up! We commit ourselves to knowing Christ, to worshipping our Father, to know Scripture, and to walk in holiness. We make sure there is nothing dangling out of our armor and protect our minds and hearts, and that of our family. And the promise we have is sure: when we resist the devil, he will flee from us (James 4:7).

Next week we will continue on with our feet and our shield.

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.”