

Stand Firm

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[0 : 00] The scripture reading today comes from Ephesians chapter 6, starting in verse 10 we read, 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. 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.

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, 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, so that you also may know how I am and what I am doing.

[1 : 33] Tychicus, the beloved brother and faithful minister in the Lord, will tell you everything. I have sent him to you for this very purpose, that you may know how we are, and that he may encourage your hearts.

Peace be to the brothers, and love with faith, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Grace be with all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with love incorruptible. This is the word of God.

Thanks, Chloe. Yeah, let's keep that passage open. We're going to look at it closely. I guess it's in some ways a familiar passage. Many of us have heard of the armor of God, and yet I'm sure there's many confusing things, and it's a topic where people have different views.

It's a bit of a controversial passage. So why don't we pray, actually, that God would help us understand, right? Father, thank you that your word brings clarity.

It's a lamp to our feet and a light to our path. Pray that you would speak to us powerfully, clearly. You would equip us for the spiritual war we're in, and you would give us great hope and joy in the gospel.

[2 : 39] So please be, yeah, would the words of my mouth and the meditation of all our hearts be pleasing in your sight, our Lord, our God, and our Redeemer. Amen. Great.

So, yeah, the end of Ephesians, end of November, three months of preaching from start to finish. And I don't know about you, I mean, I really loved it. I love Ephesians, such a great book, our Sundays, they felt so powerful.

It's been great. And then you come home, right? And then the next day you go to work. And a lot of that, it seems to just dissipate, right? The encouragement is gone and things are tough.

You know, morning, you're rejoicing in the Lord. In the evening, you know, EJ and I have some argument about chores. What's happened to that joy? The next day you're in school and it's boring and the teacher's unfair.

Or you go to work and it's so demanding. And actually, it's hard to be a Christian, right? You want to speak up, but you don't want to cause trouble. And what should you do?

[3 : 40] You know, it's great to be here. And yet life in the world is so tough, right? I don't know if you feel that way. I can feel that way. And actually, Paul knows that it is that way. Paul knew that very well himself.

And so as we finish this great book, yeah, great. You know, God has this amazing plan for all creation. He has this great plan for the church. It's wonderful what he's doing. But actually, in the world, it's tough.

And there's a reason for that. And so as we finish this series, that's what I want to speak from this passage, right? It's going to be tough, actually, but it's wonderful and we have everything.

So let's live this out. I mean, it's very clearly a different part of the letter. If you've been here the past few weeks, of course, Paul has told us a lot about how to live.

But I guess you've heard the key word, right? The key word was always walk. Walk in a manner worthy of your calling. Walk in love. Walk as children of light. Don't walk as the Gentiles do.

[4 : 37] Walking. But then you come to this passage and there's no more walking, right? Stand. What's the big verse here? The verb? Stand, right? Verse 13.

Take up the armor of God that you may be able to withstand in the evil day. And having done all to stand firm. It's about standing. And not the kind of the way I stand outside the shop on my phone, no.

Right? Withstanding. Standing firm. As it starts. Be strong in the Lord. Be strengthened in the Lord. We need God's help to stand.

And because it's tough. You know, it's a great triumphant letter. But actually, the Christian life is not a cruise. It's not even a race. In some ways, it's a race. Actually, Paul says, it's a war.

And are we ready for war? Are we ready for, well, the battle that's here? We started the book spiritually. We went down to earth.

[5 : 35] And now let's look again at these spiritual realities. And we want to understand, well, our enemies, our armor, and our weapons. So let's look at this passage more closely.

Of course, this is basically the only main passage on spiritual warfare. It's what we're talking about. Spiritual warfare in the whole Bible. So maybe I have to sometimes explain a bit more.

Like, what does the whole Bible say about this? But I hope that's going to be helpful for us, right? If this is true, we need to know what's going on. How can we live here in the world?

How can we live when we're under attack, right? So let's go in. And let's first talk about our enemy. That's what Paul starts with. We have an enemy, right?

Who is our enemy? I don't know. There's a lot of evil in the world. And there's political regimes. And there's false teaching. But actually, what does Paul focus on?

[6 : 30] 6 verse 11. 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.

I mean, that's very strong language, right? It's spiritual forces of evil, cosmic powers over this present darkness. It sounds scary, right? You may wonder that phrase, in the heavenly places.

We think of heaven. How can there be evil forces in heaven? What Paul means is the spiritual realm. Not heaven where God is, but the spiritual realm. But there are real evil forces, real enemies.

And it's very much spiritual, right? So some people, they don't like this language of warfare, language of armor and weapons. And Christians, they're this kind of militant religion.

Paul's very clear it's not against flesh and blood. It's not against other people. Right? It's against evil spiritual forces. And they don't think Christianity, it's about, you know, the peace of the gospel.

[7 : 45] But spiritually, that's different. And we don't know much about them. I mean, right? We know about Satan. You know, the fallen angel who tempted Adam and Eve out in the desert.

That was in the Garden of Eden back then. And later, Israel in the desert and so on. Jesus in the desert. But there's many more, right? Evil spiritual forces.

You read the gospels. There's lots of demons. Talks about rulers and authorities. Must be some kind of hierarchy. Although, to be honest, we don't know that much about it.

The Bible doesn't tell us very much. Why does he put it here in Ephesians then? Because many New Testament letters don't actually talk much about this. But here there's a lot.

But, right, chapter 1, 2, 3, 4, did Satan only have an office in Ephesus? Well, actually, if you read the book of Acts, right, it's very helpful.

[8 : 42] You can see what all the churches are like that Paul is writing to. Actually, in Ephesus, people were really into the occult. There was a lot of false religion.

And at some point, you know, there's exorcisms and a lot of people burning magic books. It's just, you know, a whole bed of the occult. No wonder these people, they knew a lot about demons.

They were very aware of evil spiritual forces. And so Paul wants to write to that. Maybe other places are less aware. It would be the same in this church, right? Some of us, we're not very aware that actually there are these evil spiritual forces.

While others, maybe you live with your family. And they're very strong Buddhists. And you can just feel the evil presence when you walk past some shrine and those kind of things, right? Some of us are just much more aware than others because of the kind of the background we have.

But also, in a way, it fits really well with the letter. Because what Ephesians was about, it was God's great plan for the church. That's, well, and what is Satan's great plan?

[9 : 47] Well, destroying God's plan, in a way. Right? Adam and Eve in the garden. You know, God had this great plan. Here's the garden of Eden and his people. And Satan, yeah, he came and tempted them.

And, you know, got them to turn away from God so that they'd have to die and go away from him. Right? Ruining God's plan is what he's always been doing. And same with, then, yeah, now that God has put everything right through Christ.

Shown here in the church. Again, Satan wants to destroy that. And the church is this great billboard of God's plan, right? The church is this beautiful picture of what God is doing.

Advertising God's glory to the world. And Satan hates that, of course. Right? He doesn't want anyone to come here. So, let me try and destroy the church. Let me see if I can sow conflict.

Let me, I can destroy what's going on here. Turn people away from Jesus. Destroy this loving community. So that no one can see God's plan, right? That's what he wants.

[10 : 51] And no wonder we need that passage, yeah, on old spiritual warfare. Although, then, how does Satan work? Because, you know, evil spiritual forces. I don't know what you expect. Do you expect things like the exorcist?

You probably haven't seen that movie. But, you know, what do you expect from demons and spiritual forces? Possession? It's interesting what it says, right?

What do we need to take our stand against in verse 11? It's the schemes of the devil. He doesn't talk about the devil as someone with a lot of power. But he's trying to deceive.

He's trying to scheme. I mean, that word scheming, we saw in chapter 4. This verse here. 4, verse 14. That we may no longer, why do we need to grow up in the faith?

Well, that we may no longer be children. Tossed to and fro by the waves. And carried about by every wind of doctrine. By human cunning. By craftiness and deceitful schemes. Right?

[11 : 50] False teaching that blows us this way and that way. That's the kind of thing that he is behind. Or conflict in the church. 4, verse 26.

Be angry and do not sin. There's some conflict. Be angry, but don't sin. Do not let the sun go down on your anger and give no opportunity to the devil. Right?

This conflict, Satan's behind it. He wants to get a way in. And when we don't deal with our conflict and we remain bitter and resentful, the devil's got a way in.

Right? So actually, this sounds very normal. In Revelation and 1 Peter, persecution. Normal persecution. Satan's behind it.

Temptation. Right? Satan is the tempter. He's behind it. Accusations. Right? Satan means the accuser. You're struggling with sin and you just feel that, how can I ever come to God?

[12 : 52] Right? With my sin. I don't deserve to be with God. That's Satan accusing you. Right? But what's interesting is that that's all very indirect. Satan doesn't attack directly.

He attacks indirectly. He uses normal things. He's behind them. I think that that's very important to see. Like, how do we expect, you know, Satan to work?

So, often Christians, you know, we have three enemies. The world, the flesh, the devil. And we think of it as basically this picture here. Right? Which is free. Sometimes we get attacked by the flesh.

Sometimes by the world. Sometimes by the devil. But that's not really how it works. Rather, you know, they're all there together, using each other, like we see here.

Satan. So, Satan, he wants us to turn away from Jesus. So, what does he do? He influences the world to say that, you know, what you really need is, you know, lots of stuff and money.

[13 : 49] And then my flesh sees that and thinks, yeah, I want this and wants to turn me away from Jesus. Right? Satan using the world and the flesh. It's actually not just, it's sort of all three are involved.

And to be honest, it sounds now like Satan's in charge. Ultimately, God is in charge. Right? God is even over this. And maybe God wants to purify our faith.

And so, he allows Satan to stir up persecution. Right? And the world makes it harder to be a Christian. And my flesh wants a comfortable life. And so, my flesh wants me to keep quiet.

And so on. And I have to fight that. And it will strengthen my faith. Right? It's much more complicated. It's not, does that make sense? Yes, Satan, he uses these things.

And I think that explains why spiritual warfare is here, but not in these other letters. Because you don't need to always talk about all three of them. Most letters, he just talks about the world and the flesh.

[14 : 53] He just talks about our sinful nature and the world tempting us. And that's a perfectly fine explanation. And, you know, but in Ephesians, of course, these people are really aware of demons.

Right? For them, that's a really big thing. And so, Paul talks about Satan. But it's really, you're going to get tempted. Right? It's Satan working through the world, or you just look at the world.

It's there. Okay? So, they kind of work together. And I think that really helps us to avoid two mistakes. So, one mistake is that we get really worried about the demonic and everything.

Right? If we only think of, like, the Ephesians. Actually, it's pretty normal. Temptation. False teaching. Persecution.

I mean, it's hard, but it's understandable. Right? And the Bible talks a lot about it. It's not weird. On the other hand, the other mistake is that we just think about the world and the flesh, and we forget, actually, there's an enemy behind it.

[15 : 55] And we're just not aware of the war. Right? Things are going really well in church, and then there's some conflict that causes division. And we're kind of surprised.

Huh? I thought church was going well. Why do we now get conflict? Well, of course. Satan wants to destroy it. Right? Or someone just becomes a Christian. And you think, oh, that's great. They're now a Christian.

And they're going to be happy forever. Instead, you know, lots of things going wrong in life that make it hard to come to church and all those kind of things. And we're kind of surprised.

Oh, why did this happen? Spiritual attack. Right? Satan is active. He wants to destroy the church. He wants to destroy our faith. And he's going to work through those things.

So we can expect things to go wrong. Don't expect the government to come up with really good legislation that's really good for churches. Don't expect that.

[16 : 50] Because we don't have a spiritual enemy. Right? Right? Does that make sense? Okay. Now, we need to make sure we know that.

And if that doesn't make sense, I hope it will make sense when we look at, actually, so what do we do? All right? We have this spiritual enemy. This is how it works. How do we stand?

Well, we need to look at our armor. What is the armor of God? Right? This is what we need, the armor. And I'm sure if you've been in Sunday school, you would have cut out the helmet and the breastplate and made that kind of thing.

I think the striking thing, first of all, is that it's defensive. Right? What is armor for? It's for protection. It's defending yourself.

It's defending yourself. Even the sword. Right? It talks about the sword of the spirit, but it's not a kind of huge sword to go and attack. It's a small sword that you use for close combat. It's defensive.

[17 : 49] In fact, that's what we talked about, right? Standing. Not about going and attacking. It's standing. Standing firm. But actually, it makes so much sense because what is this armor?

Well, look at those words. What does it talk about? It talks about truth and righteousness and the gospel of peace and faith and salvation.

Right? What is that word? It's gospel words. It's the gospel. Right? Actually, yeah, why do we stand firm? I mean, what is the gospel? We know the gospel, right?

It's the good news of what Jesus has already done. It's not about what we need to do. I mean, we don't need to attack. Why not? Jesus did that. Jesus has won the victory.

He's disarmed Satan completely when he died on the cross and all our sins could be forgiven. He's exalted above every spiritual power. He's already done everything.

[18 : 47] And we just need to hold on to that. Right? We just need to stand firm in the gospel. Does that make sense? Right? We don't need to do anything because Jesus has already done it.

Now, again, we're a diverse church. And if I talk about spiritual warfare, and actually, it's just standing firm in the gospel. I'm sure there's people here who think, yeah, but there's so much, you know, you read other books, and they talk about territorial spirits and deliverance ministries and all kinds of spiritual things we need to do.

Isn't that spiritual warfare? Isn't that spiritual warfare? Isn't that spiritual warfare? Isn't that spiritual warfare? Is it really just the gospel? And there is some really elaborate teaching sometimes. I mean, well, what should we think of that?

And I would say, look, God has given us the Bible, right? And then this should be easy to understand. The thing about territorial spirits and all that, if you have no idea what I mean, don't worry.

But it's kind of, look, here's this whole big system based on one random verse in the book of Daniel and another random verse in Deuteronomy.

[19 : 58] And then this whole theory about what is going on in the spiritual world and what we need to do and how we need to fight against it. But it's not a plain teaching.

If we want to know what Christians should do with spiritual warfare, shouldn't we just read what does the Apostle Paul write to churches? What does he tell Christians to do? And actually, most churches, he doesn't write about territorial spirits.

Right? So clearly, it doesn't seem that important. And here's the one church that's obsessed with demons. And here is one major passage. Right? So this really should be our control.

This is what spiritual warfare really is. And it's all about the gospel. Yeah. And so it seems to me, you know, I'm sure there are territorial spirits. There are rulers and authorities.

God didn't think we needed to know much about it. Right? We don't need to worry that we do yoga and suddenly a demon enters us or whatever.

[20 : 57] There's all kinds of strange teaching. Don't worry. Especially if you're a Christian. Christians can't be demon-possessed. I'm pretty sure of that. Right? The Bible says he who is in us is greater than he who is in the world.

No demon can remove the Holy Spirit from your heart. You know, we should trust in God. And actually, sometimes this thing can be a distraction.

If I'm struggling with pride, do I need to look for the demon of pride somewhere inside me and try to get rid of him? Or should I look in my heart at my idols? I think the Bible would say, look at your idols.

That's the problem. Blessed demon. Ah. You know, we want to see Hong Kong. Many people become Christians. Should we wonder what demons are here and what power level?

The Bible would say, look, God is almighty. Jesus is over everything. Trust in him and pray. It's actually much more simple. I think so. Even, again, if this is something that's dear to your heart and you want to talk about it, we'll have a, you know, come and talk to me after the service.

[22 : 01] But I think it's just helpful for us to be clear. Because if it's just the gospel, right, we've got it. We have the gospel. We have Jesus. That's the wonderful thing, right?

Even this passage, there's not much detail. But it's just the gospel. And indeed, the gospel is everything. You know, the belt of truth. Isn't the gospel the answer, right?

Here is a church and, you know, people listen to all kinds of teaching. And they clash. And they lose sight of the gospel. And the church just isn't the community it needs to be.

In fact, the answer is if we just all love the gospel. If we're just all growing in the gospel. And we know what's important. And we know what's not important. We can be the church we want to be. Or church conflict.

If we have the readiness of the gospel of peace. Right? You know, you say something wrong. And you hurt another person. And they get angry with you.

[22 : 58] And you feel bitter and resentful. It can tear a church apart sometimes. Instead, what if we remember the gospel of peace? What if we remember how, you know, we're all sinners.

But Jesus forgave us. And he brought us peace. And he brought us together. And actually, we can bear with each other. We can forgive each other. And stop this disagreement. And learn to live with it.

And you know, it's okay. Or righteousness. Right living. Righteousness here. Not kind of the righteousness we get from Christ.

But our new self. You know, maybe you heard last week's sermon. About marriage. And man, your marriage is not in a great state. And you hear that.

And you think, I could never do that. Right? You know, it's Satan whispering to you. Right? Just give up. There's no hope for your marriage. But then you remember what Jesus has done.

[23 : 55] How he's given you the new self. Right? He's given you a new heart. You've got the power. You can work on your marriage. Right? The gospel is the answer. The shield of faith.

You know, when Satan comes to you and tells you you're not good enough. And you have no business coming to God in your prayers. Or in your life. Or relying on him. Remember the shield.

Remember your faith. Remember how Jesus has done it. And you just need to trust him. Martin Luther has this great quote. I mean, he loved the gospel. And what did he say?

When the devil throws your sin 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. And where he is there, I shall be also. That's the gospel, right?

[24 : 52] Every accusation. Every time you feel you can't come to God. Every time you feel you're not worthy. You've sinned too much. That's Satan. And we just need to hold on to the gospel.

Right? That's our armor. That's what protects us. It's wonderful. It's so normal, right? Just a normal Christian life. But actually, that's spiritual warfare. The answer is the gospel. Not just to be saved initially, but to go on and to keep with Jesus.

Let's hold on to the gospel. Let's believe it. Let's live it. Let's speak it to each other. Right? Why does Ephesians want us to speak the truth in love? Well, if I believe a lie, you can probably see through that and speak to me.

Right? That's why we need each other to keep each other focused on the gospel. It doesn't mean we need to know the gospel, right? We need to be growing in it. Which means, you know, we need to be in the word.

Right? How can we stand firm if we only read the word once a week on Sundays? I hope you're doing devotions. If you're, you know, otherwise come to this course tomorrow. If you didn't sign up, that's okay.

[25 : 59] The Zoom link is on the website. Just join. We need the gospel, right? To stand firm. But that's our armor. Of course, there's more. That's how we stand firm.

There's a few more things, of course. There's some of our weapons. That's in verses 18 to 20. The first one, of course, is prayer. Right? 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. We've moved on from the armor, right?

It's not the cloak of prayer or the spear of prayer. But praying. Praying. And it's such a big thing, right? You've seen the words, well, the repeated words.

All times. All the saints. All supplication. All, you know, Paul really expects Christians to be in prayer. To be relying on God with kind of all their hearts, ongoing, heartfelt prayer.

[26 : 59] I mean, ultimately, this is the strength that we need from God, right? We can do this ourselves. Who do we pray for, especially for the saints?

For other believers? Because, you know, here we can encourage each other. But tomorrow you're in your workplace. And I'm not. And how can I speak to you and remind you of the gospel?

I can't. But I can pray for you. Right? We can pray for each other to stand firm. We can pray for each other to hold on. Pray that God would help. And actually, again, don't we want God's help?

You don't want my help. You want God's help. I mean, thinking of warfare. When I read this passage, I just think of calling in an airstrike. Right? This movie. And there's this few soldiers against this overwhelming force.

But they just, they have a line to headquarters. Hey, can you send some planes? Boom. Right? That's what we want. We want. Yeah.

[27 : 53] We need God's help. And here it is. So, if you know people in a church under attack, pray for them. Satan's trying to get them away from Jesus. Let's pray they won't.

People in your CG who are struggling, pray for them. Again, Satan would love us to not pray. To make us think we're too busy or we don't need it.

We do. CG's this week we're praying. Let's be praying for all the saints together. And not just for the saints, of course, also for world mission. All right?

Verses 19 and 20. And also pray for me, Paul says, that words may be given to me and opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel for which I am an ambassador in change.

That I may declare it boldly as I ought to speak. In some way, you know, the church is on the attack in one way. Right? Mission as the gospel goes out.

- [28 : 50] Yes, Jesus has won the victory in the spiritual realm. Actually, here on earth, people still need to hear. People are still in the power of Satan and they need to turn.
- And, you know, that will only happen as they hear about Jesus. So, Paul says, please pray for me that I would proclaim the gospel. And same for us, right? Many people need to hear the gospel.
- Our families, our friends, our colleagues. Speak to them. Invite them to the carol service. Right? So they can hear the gospel there. And not just there.
- Loving the city. Let's pray people would see the love of Jesus and want to know more. Let's pray for Amelia out in Taiwan. Right? Reaching out to the Hakka people. Let's pray for many other countries where, you know, people are still in the power of Satan.
- And, you know, some places there's really no church, no missionary. Satan has such a power there. You know, so much influence. Let's pray that the gospel would go there.
- [29 : 48] Let's think how we can maybe be involved. But, yeah, world mission. Praying for that. That's what we need to do in this war. You know what? If you want to start praying more for the world, there's this great book, Operation World, which is basically just goes through every country in the world.
- How's the spiritual state? How's the church there? Giving you prayer points. It's a really fantastic book that will help you pray. I've got an online version every day. It gives me some prayer points.
- It's great. But let's be praying. But, yeah. But I hope we feel, yeah, we can do this, right? Yes, cosmic powers over this present darkness. Yes, evil spiritual forces.
- But we've got everything, right? We've got the gospel. We can pray. God's given us everything. So let's do this, right? Let's stand firm. Let's be the church.
- As Paul finishes his letter, yeah. You know, I've got other letters to write. He says, please just hold on to the gospel. Ephesians, watermark church. Let's hold on to the gospel.
- [30 : 52] And he reaches those last verses, verses 23, 24. And remember what you have in Christ.
- Remember his peace. Remember his grace. Remember his love. You've got the gospel. He's done everything. You just need to hold on. Let's do that. Love incorruptible.
- It's ultimately his work in you, not our own. So church, yeah, let's go. And let's let it be our confidence as we go into home this week, next week, next month, next year, in the strength that God supplies.
- Let's pray together. Our Father, we are so grateful that we are not alone.
- We know there is a battle. We know there's a war. And yet you've given us everything. You've given us your son, your precious son, to die for our sins, to wash us clean, to forgive us, to bring us back to you.
- [32 : 02] And you will not let us go. You'll be with us. You will strengthen us. Help us to hold on to the good news, to live in this city amidst a war with all its temptations and difficulties and accusations and conflict, to live with the gospel, to live it out, to believe it.
- Yeah, and to be your church, Lord, that people would see your grace, that people would come to know you, and that we would show the world how wonderful Jesus is, how wonderful it is to be one of your children.
- Lord, do that work in us. Strengthen us for your glory. Amen. Amen. Amen.