

Stand Your Ground

Ephesians 6:14-15

Would you turn with me this morning to **Ephesians 6:14-15**. I want to continue to look at the armor of God. We have been looking at the idea that each and everyday that we live we find ourselves in a struggle – a struggle with our sinful nature and a struggle against ideas and powers that are unseen. We fight a battle within our minds.

We look around us and we see that people are going through the same thing, many times buying into the ideas of the world, which we can see many times leads to a path of destruction. We need to find ourselves rooted in the truth – and until one realizes who Jesus Christ is, they will never fully understand the truth. Jesus is the beginning point of understanding reality.

Jesus is the truth, he shows us what the truth is, he explains to us the plan of God the Father, he lays out what our priorities should be, he tells us how we are to live our lives, he explains why we are living here on this earth, he tells us about the future, and he sends us help in the power of the Holy Spirit so that we can have help in maintaining a real and true perspective.

We fight the battle – but are we ready for the battle? What Paul gives us in this short passage of scripture are truths that will allow us to stand firm in our faith, to stand firm in our relationship with God so that when new ideas, new attacks come we are ready and will not be swayed. Scripture tells us in **Ephesians 4:14**:

14 Then we will no longer be immature like children. We won't be tossed and blown about by every wind of new teaching. We will not be influenced when people try to trick us with lies so clever they sound like the truth.

*6 But when you ask him, be sure that your faith is in God alone. Do not waver, for a person with divided loyalty is as unsettled as a wave of the sea that is blown and tossed by the wind. **James 1:6***

If we aren't on guard, is it possible for us to be swayed or even question our faith? Sure it is. That is why we need truths that will root us in our relationship with God. Last week we looked at the idea of truth - how the very first things we need to understand is that the truth that comes from Jesus Christ is the beginning point in everything that we believe and base our life on.

This morning, I want to look at another aspect of the armor of God in which, once again we find that we already possess in Jesus Christ – that is the breastplate of righteousness. Read with me our text this morning in **Ephesians 6:13-14**:

13 Therefore, put on every piece of God's armor so you will be able to resist the enemy in the time of evil. Then after the battle you will still be standing firm.

14 Stand your ground, putting on the belt of truth and the body armor of God's righteousness.

Paul is trying to establish for us confidence not in ourselves, but confidence in the Jesus Christ. As believers in Jesus this one topic is essential for us to understand if we ever want to find hope and purpose.

1. The body armor of righteousness.

What is the purpose of body armor? It is to guard our vital organs so that we aren't destroyed. It is like a bullet-proof vest that protects the heart. **Spiritually, the body armor of God is like a spiritual heart protector.** The very core of the Christian faith is found in this idea of being righteous.

What does it mean to be righteous? It means to be right, or to be acceptable. The problem is that none of us are capable of being fully acceptable or right before God on our own effort. **The whole point of the book of Romans is about righteousness.** It might as well be named the 'body armor of righteousness.' **Romans 1:17** Paul writes:

17 This Good News tells us how God makes us right in his sight. This is accomplished from start to finish by faith. As the Scriptures say, "It is through faith that a righteous person has life."

Romans 3:23-25:

23 For everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God's glorious standard. 24 Yet God, with undeserved kindness, declares that we are righteous. He did this through Christ Jesus when he freed us from the penalty for our sins. 25 For God presented Jesus as the sacrifice for sin. People are made right with God when they believe that Jesus sacrificed his life, shedding his blood.

Knowing the Jesus has made us righteous, how should the body armor of righteousness effect us?

a. We are to reject self-righteousness.

We read in **Isaiah 64:6:**

6 We are all infected and impure with sin. When we display our righteous deeds, they are nothing but filthy rags.

Even our best foot forward, our most pure in motives are lined with some form of self-righteousness – trying to earn God's approval or the approval of men. Every human effort attempts to be good enough for God, but it is impossible. But notice what Paul tells us in **Romans 4:6-8:**

*6 David also spoke of this when he described the happiness of those who are declared righteous without working for it: 7 “Oh, what joy for those whose disobedience is forgiven, whose sins are put out of sight. 8 Yes, what joy for those whose record the Lord has cleared of sin.”**

“Declared righteous without working for it.” Righteousness is only found in trusting and believing in Jesus Christ – his death, burial and resurrection, his payment for our sin, and his continued altering power that is working in us. It isn’t based on what I can do for God, but what he chooses to do for me.

Now you can see how ridiculous it is for people to make statements like – “I need to get some things in order before I can go to church.” “I need to stop this or that before I can feel like my walk is real and viable.” “The walls may cave in around me when I walk through the doors of the church.” These are all forms of self-righteousness (trying to make yourself right with God by doing instead of letting Jesus be your righteousness.)

We do not stand on our own merit. **We will not be able to stand based on who we are and what we can do. The enemy will tear you apart and will get you to buy into lies and deception that leave you paralyzed always trying to do good, always trying to be good, always living in a state of fear and uncertainty.** You will always be too busy to rest in God’s righteousness that is more than enough to make you right and acceptable to God. **Romans 4:22-24:**

22 And because of Abraham’s faith, God counted him as righteous. 23 And when God counted him as righteous, it wasn’t just for Abraham’s benefit. It was recorded 24 for our benefit, too, assuring us that God will also count us as righteous if we believe in him, the one who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead.

When we stand, we stand with the righteousness of God and not on our own merit. If it was only about me and my ability I know I would fall and fail. The enemy would convince me that I wasn’t good enough and that all hope was lost. **But when I look at the righteousness that God has given me that gives me hope and empowers me to stand strong against anything that would try to defeat or destroy me. Romans 8:1, 33-37** tells us:

1 So now there is no condemnation for those who belong to Christ Jesus.

33 Who dares accuse us whom God has chosen for his own? No one—for God himself has given us right standing with himself. 34 Who then will condemn us? No one—for Christ Jesus died for us and was raised to life for us, and he is sitting in the place of honor at God’s right hand, pleading for us. 35 Can anything ever separate us from Christ’s love? Does it mean he no longer loves us if we have trouble or calamity, or are persecuted, or hungry, or destitute, or in danger, or threatened with death? 36 (As the Scriptures say, “For your sake we are killed every day; we are being slaughtered like sheep.”) 37 No, despite all these things, overwhelming victory is ours through Christ, who loved us.*

You will go out of your mind if you try to earn God's favor and try and be good enough for him. Instead believe in him and his righteousness. Jesus said in **Matthew 6:33**:

33 But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. (NIV)

Now I don't want us to think that God puts his hands on the things we know are wrong in our lives and says, 'Oh, well, these things do not matter. Don't worry about these.' But it does mean that he sees them, and he says, "Oh, yes, but he hasn't learned yet all that I intend to teach him." And he deals with us as a father, in love and patient discipline – as a father, not as a judge. That leads us to our next point (the process of righteousness).

The second way that the body armor of righteousness should effect us is:

b. We are to become slaves to righteousness

Paul writes in **Romans 6:17-19**:

17 Thank God! Once you were slaves of sin, but now you wholeheartedly obey this teaching we have given you. 18 Now you are free from your slavery to sin, and you have become slaves to righteous living. 19 Because of the weakness of your human nature, I am using the illustration of slavery to help you understand all this. Previously, you let yourselves be slaves to impurity and lawlessness, which led ever deeper into sin. Now you must give yourselves to be slaves to righteous living so that you will become holy.

Our lives today should be marked as people who strive to do the right thing (I say strive simply because we fail to do this all the time). **Righteousness is not an outward expression, but an inner change of motivation.** Many people can look righteous but not many people are righteous.

We need to get away from the idea that our lives are for us to do whatever we want. Living life on this earth is not about us, it is about finding God and his plan and purpose and peace. We need to live our lives as a sacrifice – an act of worship and honor to God. Our goal is to become more like Jesus Christ.

Jesus Christ, the one who modeled to us a righteous life is to be our goal. His motives were pure, his heart was right, and that in turn determined what he did and how he lived. We need to become Christ-like. **Prayer, fasting, and sacrifice characterized the life of Jesus. Such spiritual disciplines need to become part of our lives as well. These things develop stamina and strength.** (They aren't for approval from God) Spending time with God, studying, serving, making sacrifices, submitting, all of these things promote righteousness.

Tom Landry, former coach of the Dallas Cowboys, is often quoted as saying, “The job of a football coach is to make men do what they don’t want to do in order to achieve what they’ve always wanted to be.”

A bible scholar once said, “Christians are called to make themselves do something they would not naturally do – pursue the Spiritual Disciplines – in order to become what they’ve always wanted to be, that is, like Jesus Christ.”

The problem however is that many Christians have never made the transition from declaration of their faith, to discipleship. They have not become slaves to righteousness but they continue to live a double life – one in the church and one outside. **We need to be people who will stand firm in the righteousness of Jesus Christ and who will develop the righteousness of Christ within us.**

Finally this morning, the third way that the body armor of righteousness should effect us is that

c. We are to reject superstitious righteousness.

What is superstitious righteousness you may ask? How many of us have heard the term, “The Devil made me do it?” **Superstitious righteousness is the notion that my right standing with God, my righteousness, can be achieved by deliverance instead of discipleship.**

Instead of dealing with our own humanity we try to pawn all the responsibility on demons saying that we simply need to be delivered from whatever “spirit” it may be. Indwelling of demons is said to be the problem, and getting rid of them is said to be the secret to restoring righteousness.

Church, we are a fallen people. Getting over obstacles and temptations is not an easy thing. At times I have seen some who have found complete freedom from their trials simply over a time of ministry or prayer, but that is not the norm. Thank God that he is able to work in their lives like that. But that doesn’t disqualify them from the process of discipleship.

Yes, God makes changes but they are not always overnight. We not only need to rest in the righteousness that we have been given through Jesus Christ, not only are we to strive to allow righteousness be our goal for living a life of worship for God, but we are also try to avoid the idea that there is no responsibility on my part.

When I put on the breast plate or the body armor of righteousness, I embrace the cleansing power of Jesus to make me right with God based on my belief and trust in him. When I put on the body armor of God, I make sure that I am well exercised in the spiritual disciplines of prayer, devotions, sacrifice, and service so that I have stamina and strength.

When I put on the body armor of God, I don't pass off the blame of my sin onto demons who possess me or manipulate me, but that in my humanness I was tricked and tripped up by lies, which I chose for myself, and which I now can come to God and ask that he give me another chance and forgive me for my wrong choice and rebellion against him.

Put on the body armor of God so that you will stand firm in these days. Let's pray!