

May 12/13, 2001

The Truth About Our Life in Christ

A Study in the Book of Ephesians

Stand Firm

Ephesians 6:10-24

Pastor Bryan Clark

I remember, as a kid in the early 70s, one time when I was at a Nebraska football game sitting on those aluminum bleachers right near the field. When you're sitting in the front row of bleachers, there's the fence, and you are very close to the corner of the end zone. I remember standing up against that fence watching as Nebraska was playing either Kansas or Kansas State (I can't remember which one it was). Jeff Kinney was the I-back for Nebraska, and he came around the end and was coming right at us. He lowered his head and he hit the defensive back right at the goal line. I'm not kidding you, that thing absolutely exploded, and that defensive back just crumpled to the ground. Jeff Kinney went in the end zone and trotted back across the field.

I remember, as a kid, that scene was very intimidating. I was looking at this guy, and he was unconscious on the ground. They pulled his helmet off and he was out cold. As a boy you think, *I want to grow up and play football for Nebraska.* But at that moment I was thinking, *You know, golf's not a bad sport!*

Can you imagine what that would have been like if that defensive player had left his helmet in the locker room? Obviously, a blow like that would have killed him. You have equipment and you need to wear that equipment.

When I owned a motorcycle my father bought me a helmet and requested that I wear it. But oftentimes that helmet just rode on the back of my motorcycle. I remember, over and over again, I would pull into the driveway and my mom would say, "Bryan, that helmet isn't going to do any good just hanging on the back of your motorcycle." She didn't know that it was protecting the tail light...that's very important, you know. But it was a point well made: The helmet does need to be worn if it's going to do any good.

Paul is going to remind us that God has given us armor, and that armor is provided so that we can stand firm in the battle. But we do have to put the armor on. We do have to choose to wear it if it's really going to accomplish the purpose. We conclude our study of the book of Ephesians this morning by looking at the armor in chapter 6.

There's quite a bit of discussion as to how this last section fits with the rest of the book. Some people say it's just the third of three sections. One commentator has suggested that the first part of Ephesians describes our wealth in Christ; the middle part is our walk; and the last part is warfare. This may be correct, but I don't think that this last section really is a third section, but rather a review of the previous two sections. When you read through the armor, you realize that there's nothing new here. There's nothing that we haven't already been taught in this study of Ephesians. So Paul is really just pulling it all together with a final review, and using this Roman armor as a metaphor to do that.

Imagine Paul in his Roman imprisonment. It says at the end of this letter that he's in chains—probably chained to a Roman guard. As he's thinking about how to close this letter, even though the guard he's chained to probably isn't in full armor, Paul perhaps can see some Roman soldiers. Maybe they're putting on their armor getting ready to head out to battle

somewhere. As he sees that, he begins to think, *That's what we've been talking about. That's what these doctrines are; that's what these truths are. It's how we put on our spiritual armor as believers.* He uses the armor as a metaphor to summarize what we've learned together. So that's how we're going to approach it. We're going to summarize where we've been, by talking about the pieces of the armor.

In verse 10 Paul says, “Finally *{in conclusion or in summary}*, be strong in the Lord, and in the strength of His might.” Those words aren't new to us. We saw them in chapter 1 when Paul said, “I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints.” And here are those words, “And what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe. These are in accordance with the working of the strength of His might.” Those are the same Greek words that we see in chapter 6, verse 10.

At the beginning of the letter Paul prayed that their minds would be enlightened, so that they would understand and experience the power of God. Then he taught them about the power of God and about their life in Christ. And now, at the end of the book, he's saying, “Okay, now take it and put it on and wear it.”

Paul is bringing it all together here at the end of the book when he says in verses 11-12, “Put on the full armor of God, that you may be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places.”

There are several things to notice in these verses. This sounds like a general giving orders to his troops, because there's a real military metaphor—he's talking about putting on the armor. There are three commands here: in verse 10, “Be strong”; verse 11, “Put on”; and verse 11, “Stand firm,” which is a military phrase that means “to hold your ground.”

Notice that in those two verses the word “against” is used six times. That is Paul's way of saying that we don't live out our Christian life on neutral territory. We live out our Christian life on a battleground. We have an enemy that we fight against, which means we always live out our Christian faith uphill. It's never going to be easy, because we have an enemy who wants to see us destroyed. It's always going to be a battle.

In verse 12, when Paul says “our struggle,” he uses a word that could be translated “our wrestling match.” He's talking about the fact that this is hand-to-hand combat. You are going nose-to-nose with the enemy. It's not a concept of the enemy being like a mugger in an alley, and if you happen to take the wrong alley, he's going to mug you. Instead it's the concept of the enemy being right here—he's in your face. You do have to wrestle him to walk the Christian life, so we have to learn how to do that. We have to learn how to respond to the enemy.

Paul reminds us in verse 12 that this war is fought on a spiritual plane, in a spiritual dimension. However much conflict you have with other people, you need to realize that the ultimate conflict isn't with people. The ultimate conflict is with an enemy that dwells in a spiritual dimension.

When he talks about “heavenly places,” he’s not talking about geography. Paul is not saying it’s “out there” somewhere, but rather that it is a spiritual dimension. We’ve talked about the spiritual dimension quite a bit in this study. If I could tune into this spiritual dimension that’s right here with us, I would see these truths about my life in Christ. I would see that I am seated with Christ in the heavenlies, and all the things we’ve talked about that are true of my life in Christ. But I would also see that there’s an enemy who is just as real as any material thing on this earth.

This enemy has one mission in life—to destroy you and to destroy me. Verse 12 reminds us that he has this large army. Some people spend a lot of time trying to figure out the different categories of demonic spirits outlined in verse 12. I don’t really think that’s the point. I think Paul’s point is just saying the enemy has a very complex army, and this army is out to get us. While it’s an enemy that we need not be afraid of, it is an enemy that needs to be taken seriously. Therefore, we put on the armor in order to fight the battle. Verses 10, 11 and 12, then, are an introduction into this concept of warfare and this battle against the spiritual enemy.

He talks about the devil in verse 11, and he says that we might “stand firm against the schemes of the devil.” It could be translated “against the strategies of the devil.” It is important to realize that when we’re talking about the devil, we’re talking about someone more evil than any person who has ever lived. We are sometimes misled by pictures of a little red guy with a pointy tail and pitchfork and horns on his head—as if he’s just kind of a harmless prankster.

But if you can imagine the most evil person who has ever lived—whether you think it’s Timothy McVeigh or Adolph Hitler or Joseph Stalin, or whoever it is—they don’t even come close to the evil that lies within the heart of the enemy. The devil has no morality. He has no ethics. He has no principles. He has nothing that would guide and control his behavior. There’s absolutely no potential for kindness or goodness or compassion in the enemy.

For example, when you look out on the horizon in the middle of a storm and see a tornado coming toward you, ripping up everything in its path, you don’t appeal to some moral sense within that tornado. You don’t think that because you have a child in your home, hopefully the tornado will be overcome with compassion and not hit your house. A tornado has no concept of that. It’s just a force, and it doesn’t know the difference between a house and a rock and a child.

In a way, Satan is like that, in that there is no moral sense that would control his behavior at all. He has no potential for compassion or kindness. If he can destroy you, he will. If you’re suffering, he’ll make you suffer more. Outside of the power of God, there is no limitation to the potential of evil that he can bring forth. So he is a very serious enemy.

When Paul talks about the schemes of the devil, the name “devil” means slanderer or accuser. It’s talking about the fact that we do know how he operates. We do know how he’s going to fight the battle. In 2 Corinthians 2:11 Paul says that “we are not ignorant of his schemes.”

Jesus told us about the enemy. He said that he’s a liar, and everything that comes out of his mouth is a lie. The enemy’s a liar—a deceiver—and that’s how he operates. So, again,

he's not going to take you and throw you down on the carpet and work you over. Rather, he's going to come as an "angel of light." He's going to come as a "wolf in sheep's clothing." And he's going to try to convince you of something that isn't true. He's going to challenge what you believe to be true about God and God's goodness. And in little, subtle ways, he's going to try to convince you of things that will ultimately destroy your life.

We see this in Genesis chapter 3, when the serpent came along to Adam and Eve in a perfect environment. The serpent didn't come along and put them in a headlock and take them down to the floor of the Garden and work them over. Instead, he just came up alongside them and began to ask them some questions: "Are you really sure God is as good as you think He is? Are you really sure God has your best interest in mind? Have you ever thought of what it would be like to be God yourself?" He began to just work on their minds. And they began to think, *You know, maybe that's true. Maybe we need to rethink some of this.* Little by little, he moved them to a point of decision where they disobeyed God and suffered the consequences.

So if that's true, then we know how the armor is going to operate. If the enemy's schemes are through lies and deception, then the armor is going to deal with how we think. It's going to deal with what we believe, and it's going to deal with our minds. As we get into discussing the pieces of armor, that will become quite obvious.

Verse 13: "Therefore, take up the full armor of God, that you may be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm. Stand firm therefore, having girded your loins with truth..." The first piece of armor discussed is the first piece of armor Paul would have seen a Roman soldier put on, and that is the "belt of truth." That's what it means when it says "gird up your loins." It means to put on your belt. It would have to do with pulling together your undergarments, your underwear, whatever you wear under the armor—pulling it together with a belt so that it's secure. Then the sword and other pieces of armor would attach to that.

When you think about the "belt of truth" you think about what was necessary to give that soldier confidence in the battle. Imagine what it would be like to be fighting in hand-to-hand combat, fearful that your pants are about to fall down around your ankles. You would have no confidence and it would be hard to fight. That's the point he's making, because that's what that belt does—it brings everything together with a sense of security.

Now I've had that feeling myself while I'm preaching. (This is a little-known secret that you must keep to yourself.) But on Sunday mornings when I'm wearing my suit, I also have on my suspenders. Now, men, I want to tell you about an illusion that I find quite helpful. If you buy pants that are about two sizes too large and then wear suspenders, it gives you the illusion that you're skinny. So every Sunday morning, I think to myself, *I am really losing weight; I am getting so thin.* Then the next day, I put on my other pants and I think, *Boy, what happened?* When you wear suspenders it's actually quite comfortable. But every now and then, in the midst of a sermon, a suspender pops. It comes off, and I find myself looking at the clock and thinking, *How much time do I have left in this sermon? Do I stop, open up my coat and reattach it, or do I just hope the other one doesn't pop before this is over?* Now it's helpful to know that if the other suspender were to pop, the pants do come down, because they are quite loose. Whenever that happens (which for your confidence's sake isn't often), it's really hard to concentrate on preaching, because I'm always thinking, *My pants are falling off.*

That's the same concept when you think about the belt of truth. Paul is saying that if we really understand the truth, then that gives us the confidence we need not to worry about these things. We will have the confidence to put on the rest of the armor and go out into the battle. If you do not understand the truth, you will not have confidence, and the rest of the armor really won't do a whole lot of good.

Remember when we started this study, we said that we, as a congregation, were going to try to raise the bar on our commitment to truth and to immerse ourselves in the book of Ephesians. We committed ourselves to really dig into this book and try to learn some of the most essential doctrines that have to do with our life in Christ, what that means, and how that affects the way we live our lives. I would suggest before you go on to other studies, that you go back through the book of Ephesians and make sure you understand everything we've talked about. If you missed any messages you can get the transcripts to read, in order to make sure you understand this doctrine that is very basic and very essential. Do you understand how it applies to your life? Do you understand how it affects the way you live? Then believe it and really understand this whole concept of truth, as Paul has talked about it. So that's the first piece of armor—the “belt of truth”—and our commitment to that.

Secondly, he says “and having put on the breastplate of righteousness.” When he talks about the breastplate, of course, he's talking about the breastplate the soldier would put on that covers his vital organs in both the front and the back. Because the vital organs were covered, it gave him confidence to step out into the battle and concentrate on fighting. If he would step out into the battle without his vital organs covered by the breastplate, it would really affect his confidence and his ability to fight the battle.

Paul says that the breastplate that we wear as children of God is righteousness. But the big question that has to be addressed is: Is it *my* righteousness, or is it *His* righteousness? If I believe that the breastplate is made of *my* righteousness—which means my behavior this past week—then I will ultimately end up wearing a breastplate made of tissue paper. The enemy will penetrate it, and I will suffer the consequences of that. But the breastplate is not based on how well I did this week. It's not based on my behavior or my righteousness. It is determined by the righteousness of Jesus Christ that is applied to me. It's based on something I didn't deserve, but was given—and that is the salvation which is the righteousness of Jesus Christ.

So I stand before God the Father righteous, declared legally righteous in His presence, even though I've had a lousy week spiritually. Because the enemy is the accuser and a slanderer, he comes along and begins to question that: “Who do you think you are, to stand in the presence of God? Really, you are a failure as a Christian.” He starts to point out this area and that area to me. The enemy can get us pretty discouraged and we start to lose sight of the truth. Pretty soon he has penetrated some vital organs and we begin to live consistent with how we feel about ourselves. So Paul says you have to put on the “breastplate of righteousness” to prevent that.

Looking back in chapter 1, let's review a couple of essentials that we have learned. Beginning in verse 3, Paul says:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, just as He chose us in Him

before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before Him. In love He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace, which He lavished upon us.

Then in chapter 2, verse 4:

But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places, in Christ Jesus, in order that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, that no one should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

And in Ephesians 4:24 it says, “And put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth.”

Paul reminds us that this breastplate has been created for us by the righteousness of Jesus Christ. This is something that we have been given, and we have received it because of His grace. He has lavished His grace upon us. We say, “Why would He do that?” Paul says, “To the praise of the glory of His grace.” That’s why we are His “workmanship.” It could be translated, “We are His masterpiece.” We are a trophy of His grace, so when He displays us in the heavenlies, it’s not us who really are on display. It’s His grace that is on display. I don’t stand on display because of my behavior, or because I had a great week or because I am spiritual. What is on display is the fact that I was a sinner, with no hope of salvation apart from Jesus Christ pouring out His grace upon me; and I now become a trophy of *His* grace. Therefore I stand in *His* righteousness.

It’s very important to understand that, if you’re ever going to wear the breastplate of righteousness, it’s not based on your behavior. It’s based on your position in Christ. It’s based on the righteousness of Jesus Christ that is applied to you. The enemy cannot penetrate that. The only thing the enemy can do is convince you that’s not true. And if he can convince you that’s not true, then he will penetrate vital spiritual organs and you’ll suffer the consequences.

The next piece of armor he talks about is in verse 15: “And having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace.” He’s talking here about the Roman soldier wearing a kind of combination boot/sandal, which was tied up over the ankles, but the top was open like a sandal. Then underneath there were cleats, like a football player would wear in order to give him traction. In hand-to-hand combat, all it takes is one slip and somebody’s going to run you through with a knife. So sure footing was critical. Paul says this is the preparation—the readiness—for the battle. I put on the shoes and they give me confidence to walk out into the battle.

What is that spiritually? He says it is the “gospel of peace.” It is the Gospel that brings people together to experience the peace of God that he talked about in chapters 2 and 3.

Ephesians 2:14 says, “For He Himself is our peace, who made both groups into one, and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall.” Then in 2:17: “AND HE CAME AND PREACHED PEACE TO YOU WHO WERE FAR AWAY, AND PEACE TO THOSE WHO WERE NEAR.”

You remember when we studied this passage, we talked about this marvelous message where Jesus Christ now makes it possible for all people to come together and experience this oneness in Christ. It doesn't matter if you're Jew or Gentile. It doesn't matter if you're black, if you're white; if you're Asian, if you're Indian. It really doesn't matter. It doesn't matter if you're old or young; if you're rich or poor. It doesn't matter if you're male or female. In the Gospel we all come together the same way and we become one in Christ.

Paul said this is a message of such hope. This is a message that gives people everything they're looking for in life in terms of hope and meaning and purpose. He says he's so excited to have the privilege to go out and share it with people living lives of despair. That's what he says in chapter 3, verse 8: “To me, the very least of all saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ.”

The Gentiles believed that they had no access to God, and that they would never have access to God. But Paul has been given the privilege to go out and tell the Gentiles that they now can come and experience this relationship with Christ. Their lives can be filled with hope, and they can experience the unfathomable riches of Christ. Paul says that message is so exciting and so positive. It is so filled with hope that that's what we put on our feet, and that's what takes us out into the battle.

What is it that prevents us from running back into our tent and just hiding? It's because we've put the “gospel of peace” on our feet because the world needs to hear this message. This message is so positive and hope-filled, and it's everything people are looking for, so we put that message on our feet and we go with confidence into the battle.

But the enemy comes along and says, “You know, you're kind of narrow-minded... Why is it that you think that's the only way to God?... You really shouldn't share that with other people, because you're just going to cause problems... If that's what you believe, keep it to yourself and let's just all get along here.” The enemy tries to prevent us from fulfilling our mission. We realize we're going to stand firm because we have the “gospel of peace” on our shoes, and that's what we're going to stand on as we walk into the battle—this marvelous message of salvation that Jesus Christ has given us.

The next piece of armor Paul talks about is in verse 16: “In addition to all, taking up the shield of faith with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming missiles of the evil one.” Sometimes you see these pictures of a Roman soldier with a little shield on his arm that looks like a trashcan lid. That's what we often think of as a shield. But this Greek word actually meant a shield that was a full body shield. It was a great big, very heavy shield. When the enemy would take arrows, dip them in pitch, light them on fire and shoot them, this shield was big enough to cover their whole body and protect them. They just kept marching right into battle and right toward the enemy.

Paul says this shield that we have, that we carry with us, is our faith. Our faith, simply put, is our willingness to believe that God tells the truth, and Paul says that is the key. In chapter 1, verse 13, he said, “In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the

gospel of your salvation—having also *believed*, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise.”

Verse 15: “For this reason I too, having heard of the *faith* in the Lord Jesus which exists among you.” Verse 19: “What is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who *believe*.” Ephesians 2:8, 9 says that our salvation is by *faith*. And in 3:17 it says that Christ dwells with us on the basis of our *faith*.

All of those statements are talking about our willingness to believe that God tells the truth. The enemy is going to come along and he’s going to question that. We have to make a decision: Do we believe God tells the truth or don’t we?

Everything that we’ve talked about in the book of Ephesians you must take by faith. I cannot prove any of these things to you. I cannot prove that you were chosen by God before the foundation of the world. I cannot prove to you that you’re seated with Christ in the heavenlies. I can’t prove to you that you stand in the righteousness of Jesus Christ. You have to *choose* to believe that by faith.

What it boils down to is asking myself: “Do I believe that God tells the truth?” If I believe that, then I stand on that. There is a tendency to think with our emotions and our feelings. We have a tendency to get too much of our opinion in there, and we have to be careful of that. I don’t think with my feelings. I don’t think with my emotions. I have to choose with my mind to believe God tells the truth. If He has said this is true of me in Christ, then I choose to believe that, no matter how many times the enemy tries to challenge that. If I do not believe that God tells the truth, then I have no shield, and the enemy’s arrows will certainly penetrate.

Beyond the shield of faith, he talks about two more pieces of armor. Verse 17: “And take the helmet of salvation.” We understand the helmet, which goes on the head. No matter how well a soldier is armored up, if somebody gets to his head, he’s done for. I think that’s why Paul attaches the concept of salvation to the head. Because, ultimately, if we doubt our salvation, the rest of the armor falls off. If I doubt my salvation, I have no breastplate... I have no shield... I have no shoes... I have no belt. Everything just comes unraveled.

When Paul talks about our salvation, he’s talking about the assurance that is based on what we have received by faith. I know that I am a child of God. I know I have been redeemed. I know I have been saved. In chapter 1, verse 13, he said, “In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation—having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of God’s own possession, to the praise of His glory.” In other words, at the moment of salvation, you were given the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit is a down payment. It is a pledge that God will complete this salvation, and that is a guarantee.

He has also talked about the fact that the purpose for our salvation is “to the praise of the glory of His grace.” He puts us on display in the heavenlies as a trophy of *His* grace. Now if we have that salvation and lose it, what’s displayed is the inadequacy of God’s grace to hold us. That could never be possible, so I don’t know what else Paul could tell us to convince us that our salvation is absolutely secure. It’s not based on me. It’s not based on my

works. It's not based on my behavior. It's based on something that never changes, and that's the righteousness of Jesus Christ.

When I put that on my head and I realize that is true, that's how I'm going to think. And I'm not going to let the enemy get to my head. I'm not going to let him convince me of anything other than that—because if he does, all of the armor falls off and I am really in trouble. So Paul says, “On your head, you have to put the helmet of salvation. You have to believe God told the truth when He said you're signed, sealed and delivered for the day of redemption.”

The last piece of armor, according to Paul, is the sword: “And *{take}* the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.” When he's talking about the sword of the Spirit, he's not talking about a big long sword. The word used is a Greek word that means a little short sword that was used, again, in hand-to-hand combat. Paul says that is the Word of God. The Spirit of God takes the Word of God, and that's our weapon of warfare. The enemy attacks by deceit and lies, and we fight back with the truth.

Now one question that arises is: How is the Word of God different from the truth, different from the gospel? And the point would be that I don't think they're different at all. I don't think Paul is trying to say these are all different things. He's simply taking the basic concept and applying it to different pieces of armor. The truth of God, the Word of God, the Gospel of Christ, the truth about our righteousness in Christ—it's all the same thing. Put it all together and it's just repetition. It is saying that what really is going to allow you to stand firm in the battle is that you *choose* to know the truth, *believe* the truth and then *stand* in the truth. There are no shortcuts to this.

It's very important to understand that putting on the armor is not a magic formula. You don't just memorize these verses and recite them in the morning and consider yourself armed. You can't just have it on a piece of paper and recite it, or even pray it, over your children and assume that they're armed. It's not a magic formula and there is nothing magical about saying those words. The truth has to be understood. You have to understand the doctrines, and you have to understand how they apply to your life. Then you have to make a choice in your mind to stand on those truths.

Paul then goes on, beginning in verse 18, to say: “With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints, and pray on my behalf, that utterance may be given to me in the opening of my mouth, to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains; that in proclaiming it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak.” It's interesting that prayer is not identified as a piece of the armor. Rather, it's identified as the atmosphere in which the armor is put on. He says, “Pray all the times. Pray all prayers. Pray always in the Spirit. Pray for everyone.”

When you go back to the original commands, when Paul was talking about “Put on” and “Stay firm,” it's interesting to notice that those are plural commands. It shows that this is something we're in together. Together we put on the armor—together we stand firm. Now he's saying, “Intercede for one another. Pray all the time. Pray all prayers. Pray for all people.”

He is saying that the way you put on the armor is in this total dependence on Jesus Christ. It means I am constantly aware of my relationship with Him. It's not prayer as a five-minute devotional in the morning, but he's saying pray all the time. I am to put myself in this constant awareness and dependence upon Him—where I understand my relationship with Him, and that is the dynamic in which I put on the pieces of the armor.

Paul models that by saying, “Pray for me. Pray for my armor.” He doesn't say, “Pray that I'll be released from prison.” He says, “Pray that I'll have the boldness and courage to preach the Gospel to whoever is in here with me.” Paul is chained to these different people, and he says, “I might as well preach the Gospel to them.” Paul himself says, “Pray for my armor as we pray for one another.”

I understand that there are people in the Body who are not yet mature enough in their faith to understand how to put on their own armor. So I can intercede for them. That's basically what Paul is saying. I can intercede and pray for their armor while they are in the process of learning these truths and putting on the armor themselves.

I can pray that for my children, but I have to understand that it is not a magic formula. I'm interceding for my children, but at the same time I'm teaching them this truth. I'm teaching them about their breastplate, about their feet, about their shield and about their sword. So in the meantime I can intercede, but I also have a responsibility to teach. I'm not treating that like it's a magic formula out there, and that's how Paul talks about this whole idea of prayer.

Then, at the end of the book, Paul reminds us this isn't a theological article for a journal somewhere. He's writing this to people he deeply cares about. They are people he has led to Christ, and they are people he loves very dearly. In his mind, he's given these people what he believes they need—what the Spirit of God knows they need—in order to stand firm and to live out this new life in Christ. So the end of the letter is a warm, personal reminder that Paul is writing this to people he deeply cares about. He concludes in verses 21-24:

But that you also may know about my circumstances, how I am doing, Tychicus, the beloved brother and faithful minister in the Lord, will make everything known to you. And I have sent him to you for this very purpose, so that you may know about us, and that he may comfort your hearts. Peace be to the brethren, and love with faith, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Grace be with all those who love our Lord Jesus Christ with a love incorruptible.

Paul sends this letter to the believers in Ephesus, but the Spirit of God sends it to all of us. Because God deeply cares about us, He wants us to know what we need to know in order to live out this life in Christ.

The armor is made available to every believer. We each make a choice to believe that God tells the truth. Then we learn that truth. Then we stand firm in that truth...that we may be able to resist the attack of the enemy...that we might live out this new life in Christ.

Study Questions
Stand Firm
Ephesians 6:10-24

Opening Discussion

1. Describe what you would consider to be your main “struggles” on a week-by-week basis. How do these struggles affect your Christian walk?
2. What has been your experience with “spiritual warfare”? What do you know about Satan and his army and how he operates?
3. How do you believe the average person in our culture views the devil? What evidence do you see in our culture of the devil at work?

Bible Study

1. Read Ephesians 6:10-24. According to Paul, who is our struggle against, as Christians?
2. What do we know biblically about the “schemes” of the devil?

Read 2 Cor. 2:10,11; 4:3-4; and John 8:44. How do these New Testament passages line up with Genesis 3:1-6?

3. Read Acts 19:13-17, 18-20. What more do we learn about the occult activity in Ephesus?
4. Think of the pieces of the armor as a guide to review what we’ve learned in Ephesians. Take Paul’s description and talk about what we’ve learned in Ephesians that addresses each piece of armor. Then go back and try to identify truth we’ve learned in Ephesians that relates to each piece of armor.
 - Belt of Truth
 - Breastplate of Righteousness
 - Boots of the Gospel of Peace
 - Shield of Faith
 - Helmet of Salvation
 - ◆ Sword of the Spirit

5. Now that you have discussed each piece of armor from Ephesians, what other passages shed light on each piece of armor?
6. Paul puts great emphasis on prayer in verses 18-20. Why? How does prayer fit with the pieces of armor he has listed? Why doesn't he include prayer as a piece of armor?

Application

1. Based on this study, what do you believe is necessary to stand firm against the enemy? List three practical things you must do to stand firm.
2. Write down the three most significant truths that have impacted your life from our study in Ephesians.
3. Share with the group your list and how these truths have impacted you.
4. Spend time praying for one another, that we would all stand firm in this critical battle.

*** Please note: This lesson concludes our study in the book of Ephesians and the end of our study lessons for this season. Group study lessons will again be available in September when we begin a study on the book of I John.**