

STAND FIRM



KEITH MILLER

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EXPOSITIONAL REFLECTIONS ON SPIRITUAL WARFARE & THE ARMOR OF GOD

By

Keith J. Miller

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A Little History

At the conclusion of each of the three main sections in this book, I include a sample of an early stage in my sermon preparation: tracing biblical parallels for a passage or book to gain deeper insight into the author's intended message. I first encountered this approach in an elective course at Cairn University (formerly Philadelphia Biblical University) during the spring semester of 2000. The class—Deuteronomy and Its Biblical Parallels—was led by Dr. Gary Schnittjer, whose scholarship on intertextuality has profoundly influenced how I read and understand Scripture ever since.

Each student in the class was assigned one chapter of Deuteronomy and tasked with locating all of its parallels throughout the rest of Scripture. The underlying conviction of the course was that Deuteronomy serves as a hermeneutical key for understanding the Old Testament. Three of us were given additional responsibility—not only to complete our own assignments, but also to edit the work of each student in the class, along with producing parallels for two chapters instead of one. One of the chapters assigned to me was Deuteronomy 30.

The time I spent immersed in Deuteronomy and in editing the work of my peers became a Copernican-like discovery. It reshaped my theological understanding of who God is and how He accomplishes His redemptive purposes from creation to new creation. I have not been the same since that class in the spring of 2000.

It has now been over twenty-five years since Dr. Schnittjer's course, and my appreciation for Scripture as one unified story—highlighting God's passion for His glory and His sovereign decree to accomplish all His redemptive purposes—has only grown deeper. I remain convinced that tracing the biblical parallels of any book of Scripture, whether Deuteronomy or Ephesians, only strengthens one's grasp of the unity and profound connectivity of all sixty-six books that make up Holy Scripture.

Throughout this book—which originated as a series of sermons from Ephesians—I have included those messages specifically related to spiritual warfare and have compiled them under the title *Stand Firm*. This work examines the challenges every Christian faces in spiritual warfare and, to further illustrate my approach, I have intentionally provided examples of my biblical parallels method at the conclusion of key sections. For example, after my exposition of Ephesians 1:1–14, there is a corresponding set of biblical parallels. Similarly, following my discussion on Ephesians 6:10–24, which covers Paul's renowned teaching on the armor of God, another set of parallels is included. After my reflections on Ephesians 5:1–20, you will find a third sample that explores the parallels for Ephesians 5:1–21. These additions are not merely academic; they are intended to demonstrate the profound interconnectedness of Scripture, showing how the Bible continually interprets, expands, and enriches its own message.

Among the New Testament epistles, Ephesians stands out as one of the most thorough and direct explanations of what it means to be the Church of Jesus Christ. The structure of the letter reflects this: the first three chapters explain what it means to be a Christian, and the final three chapters explain what it means to be the Church. One cannot rightly understand what it means to be a Christian apart from understanding what it means to belong to Jesus as His Bride. Likewise, one cannot rightly understand the Church—the Bride of Christ—apart from understanding what it means to be united to Him by grace.

This resource aims to deepen your understanding of our identity in Christ, our unity as His Church, and the strength we have to stand firm as we eagerly anticipate the return of our Lord, Jesus Christ.

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Introduction

The City of Ephesus

The Letter of Paul to the Ephesians

Ephesus was a prominent commercial city whose life revolved around trade, travel, and the steady flow of people drawn to one of the marvels of the ancient world—the Temple of Artemis. Almost every aspect of Ephesian society—its economy, culture, and moral imagination—was shaped by devotion to this so-called goddess. Standing on its massive platform were 127 towering pillars, each said to have been donated by a different king. Within the temple complex lived priests and priestesses under the authority of a castrated high priest. The male priests oversaw sacrifices offered to Artemis, which at times included human sacrifices, while the priestesses—unmarried and set apart—served as channels of worship through ritualized sexual acts performed with male worshipers who sought favor from the goddess.

Because the worship of Artemis dominated the city, ritual prostitution and spiritual deception were woven into the fabric of everyday life. The priestesses and many who sought them out were frequently influenced or possessed by demonic spirits masquerading as divine guides. Scripture warns us that behind pagan worship stands a darker reality: “the things Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to demons and not to God” (1 Cor. 10:20). Offerings made to Artemis were not offered to a harmless myth or a lifeless stone, but to the spiritual forces of darkness behind the idol.

When Paul arrived in Ephesus and preached the gospel, everything began to change. The light of Christ exposed the emptiness of Artemis, and men and women who heard the good news believed and turned to the living God. The transformation was so widespread that those who profited from Artemis worship sounded the alarm: “this Paul has persuaded and turned away a considerable number of people, saying that gods made by hands are not gods at all” (Acts 19:26). Their concern reveals just how powerfully the gospel was reshaping the city.

Paul remained in Ephesus for over two years, and through his ministry God established the church to whom this epistle is addressed. Years later, writing from a Roman prison around A.D. 62, Paul encouraged this same congregation—believers who had once lived under the shadow of a temple devoted to immorality, exploitation, and demonic influence. Yet it was in this very

place that Jesus fulfilled His promise: *“I will build My church, and the gates of Hades will not overpower it”* (Matt. 16:18). The church in Ephesus did not flourish because of Paul’s abilities or human ingenuity, but because the Holy Spirit sealed, strengthened, and empowered ordinary believers to follow Christ in a culture that opposed everything He stood for.

Against a backdrop of spiritual darkness, moral confusion, and cultural corruption, Christ planted His church, transformed His people, and displayed His power. Paul witnessed these things firsthand, which is why he could confidently write, *“Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think... to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen”* (Eph. 3:20–21).

Chapter 1

What Does it Mean to be a Christian?

Ephesians 1:1-14

Years before Paul brought the gospel to Ephesus, he worked fiercely to prevent its spread, fully convinced that Christianity had to be destroyed. Reflecting on his former life as a Pharisee, Paul wrote in Philippians 3, “If anyone else thinks he is confident in the flesh, I have more reason: circumcised the eighth day, of the nation of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the Law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to the righteousness which is in the Law, found blameless” (Phil. 3:4–6). Paul approved of the stoning of Stephen—who was put to death because of his bold faith in Jesus (Acts 7). And concerning his own salvation, Paul later wrote to Timothy (who would in time become the pastor of the Ephesian church): “It is a trustworthy statement, deserving full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, among whom I am foremost” (1 Tim. 1:15).

What does it Mean to be a Christian?

Fred Sanders, in his masterful book *The Deep Things of God*, writes of the gospel, “The gospel so outstrips our created measurements that it can be measured only against something as immense as God himself.” He goes on to say, “There is one place in Scripture where this sheer greatness of the gospel is most profusely described: the blessing with which Paul opens the epistle to the Ephesians.”¹ In the weeks to come, we will plumb the depths of Ephesians 1:1–14, but for now, I simply want to show you who you are if you are a Christian—and who you can become, by the grace of God, if you are not.

The Christian is Saved by the Will of God (v. 1)

In the very first sentence to these Christians—believers surrounded by some of the darkest evils imaginable—Paul attributes both his salvation and his apostleship to the will of God. The stoning of Stephen, along with Paul’s own role in the imprisonment and persecution of Christians, was not too great for the grace of God to overcome. In fact, a survey of Scripture reveals a consistent pattern: when it comes to the will of man and the will of God, the will of man is always to run

¹ Fred Sanders. *The Deep Things of God* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway; 2017), p. 105.

from God, and it is only because of a will greater than our own that God pursues us—and finds us.

The Christian has the Grace and Peace of God (v. 2)

Before salvation, Paul and the Ephesian Christians—just like you and me—stood guilty before a holy God, awaiting judgment under His righteous wrath. Scripture declares, “...because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God” (Rom. 2:5). But now, because of what Jesus accomplished, the Christian has received the grace and peace of God.

The Christian has the Blessing of God (v. 3)

What the Ephesian Christians possessed before Paul brought the gospel to them was wrath. In fact, Paul describes their condition prior to meeting Jesus in the very next chapter: “And you were dead in your offenses and sins, in which you previously walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air... we too all previously lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath” (Eph. 2:1–3). However, because of the saving work of Jesus, the Christian has now received “every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ.”

The Christian is Saved by God to be Holy and Blameless Before God (v. 4)

Paul was committed to the idol of his religious legalism while the Ephesians were immersed in their worship of Diana; both were far from God, yet it was God who rescued them from their idols and their sin. Why did God save Paul and those who made up the Ephesian church? Why does He save any of us? Verse 4 answers that question for us: “...that we would be holy and blameless before Him.” God saved you to change you, and that change moves you steadily closer and closer to holiness and blamelessness.

The Christian is Made a Son/Daughter of God (v. 5)

Before Jesus, the Christian was a “child of the devil” (1 John 3:7–10) and a “child of wrath” (Eph. 2:3). But through Jesus, the Christian is adopted “as sons and daughters.” As a son or daughter, you who once stood under deserved wrath now stand as a child of God—with all the rights and privileges of a Father who now takes pleasure in you! Because you are a child of God, your inheritance is no longer condemnation, but “the riches of the glory of His inheritance...” (v. 18).

The Christian is Favored by God (v. 6)

According to verse 6, the Christian is favored by God. But why is the Christian favored by God? The Christian is favored because of the “Beloved.” And who is the “Beloved”? The Beloved is the Son of God. The NET Bible rightly translates verse 6 this way: “...to the praise of the glory of his grace that he has freely bestowed on us in his dearly loved Son.” So what this means, dear Christian, is that the only reason you are favored by God is because you are now in His Son,

Jesus Christ. You are favored not because of anything you have done, but because of everything Jesus has already done on your account and on your behalf!

The Christian is Forgiven by God (v. 7)

You who once stood condemned by God now stand forgiven through the Son. The Jesus you once ignored or resisted has redeemed you; the wrath you deserved has been absorbed by Christ; and every sin—every failure, every rebellion, every secret thought—has been fully forgiven. This forgiveness is not partial, not fragile, not conditional. It is complete. And it comes to you only through the immeasurable riches of God’s grace poured out in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

Lord, I did not freely choose you
Till by grace you set me free;
For my heart would still refuse
Had your love not chosen me.²

The Christian is Rich in the Grace of God (v. 8)

If you are a Christian, you have redemption through Jesus—and nothing owing to yourself. If there was, or ever is, any confusion about what moved a holy God to look upon you with favor and redeem you, Paul answers it plainly: “We have redemption through His blood... according to the riches of His grace.” And in what manner did we receive this grace? How did the Almighty choose to distribute it? He “*lavished*” His grace on us (v. 8)!

The Christian has Been Permitted to Know God (v. 9)

When it comes to knowing God, Scripture tells us, “...the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they will not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ” (2 Cor. 4:4). Furthermore, the Bible informs us that, “...a natural person [sinner] does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned” (1 Cor. 2:14). So how, then, does a person come to know the will of God? Only through Jesus—and only according to the “good pleasure of God.”

The Christian has a Future with God (v. 11a)

The One you sinned against—the One before whom you once stood in arrogant rebellion, the One from whom you were blinded, the One before whom heaven and earth have no place to hide and recoil in the presence of His infinite holiness (Rev. 20:11), the One of whom the angels declare, “Holy, holy, holy is the LORD God Almighty, who was and who is and who is to come” (Isa. 6:3; Rev. 4:8)—this God now knows you and favors you, Christian! This is why Jesus said, “My sheep listen to My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; and I give them eternal life, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father’s hand” (John 10:27–29).

² Josiah Conder, “‘Tis Not That I Did Choose Thee,” in *The Choir and the Oratory* (London: Hamilton, Adams & Co., 1836).

The Christian has the Security of God (v. 13)

You, Christian, who were once dead in your sins (Eph. 2:1–3) and are now alive in Christ (2:4), have been sealed by the Holy Spirit. This means that the One who holds you in His hand will keep you in His hand. And according to verses 13–14, God has given you His Spirit as a seal—His own guarantee—serving as a down payment of the glory that is yet to come. Do not ever forget the words of our Savior, dear Christian: “I give them eternal life, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father’s hand” (John 10:28–29).

The Christian is Treasured by God (v. 14)

Finally, you who were once far off, spiritually dead, and hostile toward God... are now treasured by God. The apostle Peter expresses it this way: “But you are A CHOSEN PEOPLE, A royal PRIESTHOOD, A HOLY NATION, A PEOPLE FOR God’s OWN POSSESSION, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light” (1 Pet. 2:9). One way to translate Ephesians 1:13–14 from the Greek is this: “In Jesus, you also, having heard the word of truth—the gospel of your salvation—and having believed in Him, were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is the initial installment of our inheritance until the redemption of His adopted children, who were purchased to be His treasured possession, to the praise of His glory.”

Conclusion

So, who are you, Christian? You are saved by the will of God. You have the grace and peace of God. You have the blessing of God. You are redeemed to be holy and blameless before God. You are a son or daughter of God. You are favored by God. You are forgiven by God. You are rich in the grace of God. You now know God. You have a future with God. You have the security of God. You are treasured by God.

Who are you? If you have placed your faith and trust in Jesus Christ, you are a Christian.

So I leave you with only two questions. First, *how* did God save you? He saved you through Jesus Christ. This is why the apostle Paul uses the phrases “in Christ,” “in Him,” and “through Him” ten times in just fourteen verses. Second, *why* did God save you, Christian? God did it “for the praise of His glory.” Paul uses that phrase at the end of his description of the Father’s role in your salvation (vv. 3–6), at the end of his description of the Son’s role in your salvation (vv. 7–12), and again at the end of the Spirit’s role in your salvation (vv. 13–14).

THE BLESSINGS OF REDEMPTION

¹ Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, To the saints who are at Ephesus and are faithful in Christ Jesus:

² Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

³ 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,

Jer. 31:31–34. “Behold, days are coming,” declares the LORD, “when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, ³²not like the covenant which I made with their fathers on the day I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, although I was a husband to them,” declares the LORD. ³³“For this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days,” declares the LORD: “I will put My law within them and write it on their heart; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people.

Acts 9:13. But Ananias answered, “Lord, I have heard from many people about this man, how much harm he did to Your saints in Jerusalem...

Acts 18:19. They came to Ephesus, and he left them there. Now he himself entered the synagogue and reasoned with the Jews.

See also Acts 19:1-41; 20:17-38.

2 Cor. 1:1. Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and our brother Timothy, To the church of God which is at Corinth with all the saints who are throughout Achaia...

Rom. 8:1. Therefore there is now no condemnation at all for those who are in Christ Jesus.

1 Cor. 1:1. Paul, called as an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and our brother Sosthenes...

Col. 1:2. To the saints and faithful brothers *and sisters* in Christ *who are* at Colossae: Grace to you and peace from God our Father.

Rom. 1:7. ...to all who are beloved of God in Rome, called as saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

2 Cor. 1:3. Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort...

1 Pet. 1:3. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead...

Eph. 1:18–20. I pray *that* the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you will know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints,

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³⁴They will not teach again, each one his neighbor and each one his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ for they will all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them,” declares the LORD, “for I will forgive their wrongdoing, and their sin I will no longer remember.”

Ephesians 1:1-14

³ **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,**

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¹⁹and what is the boundless greatness of His power toward us who believe. *These are* in accordance with the working of the strength of His might ²⁰which He brought about in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly *places*...

Eph. 2:4–6. But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, ⁵even when we were dead in our wrongdoings, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), ⁶and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus...

Col. 3:1–4. Therefore, if you have been raised with Christ, keep seeking the things *that are* above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. ²Set your minds on the things that are above, not on the things that are on earth. ³For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. ⁴When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory.

Phil. 3:20. For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ...

Eph. 3:8–10. To me, the very least of all saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ, ⁹and to enlighten all people as to what the plan of the mystery is which for

Deut. 7:7–8. “The LORD did not make you His beloved nor choose you because you were greater in number than any of the peoples, since you were the fewest of all peoples, ⁸but because the LORD loved you and kept the oath which He swore to your forefathers, the LORD brought you out by a mighty hand and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt.”

Deut. 14:2. For you are a holy people to the LORD your God, and the LORD has chosen you to be a people for His personal possession out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth.

Jer. 31:1–3. “At that time,” declares the LORD, “I will be the God of all the families of Israel, and they shall be My people.” ²This is what the LORD says: “The people who survived the sword found grace in the wilderness— Israel, when it went to find its rest.” ³The LORD appeared

³ 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,

⁴ just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. In love

Matt. 11:25–27. At that time Jesus said, “I praise You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from *the* wise and intelligent, and have revealed them to infants. ²⁶Yes, Father, for this way was well pleasing in Your sight. ²⁷All things have been handed over to Me by My Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father; nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son determines to reveal *Him*.

John 6:44. “No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up on the last day.”

Matt. 25:34. “Then the King will say to those on His right, ‘Come, you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.’”

ages has been hidden in God, who created all things; ¹⁰so that the multifaceted wisdom of God might now be made known through the church to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly *places*.

Eph. 6:12. 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*.

Eph. 2:10. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.

2 Thess. 2:13. But we should always give thanks to God for you, brothers *and sisters* beloved by the Lord, because God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth.

Eph. 5:25–27. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her, ²⁶so that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, ²⁷that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless.

Col. 1:21–22. And although you were previously alienated and hostile in attitude, *engaged* in evil

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to him long ago, saying, “I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore I have drawn you out with kindness.”

Isa. 46:9–10. “Remember the former things long past, for I am God, and there is no other; I *am* God, and there is no one like Me, ¹⁰declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things which have not been done, saying, ‘My plan will be established, and I will accomplish all My good pleasure...’”

Ephesians 1:1-14

⁴ just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. In love

⁵ He predestined us to adoption as sons *and daughters* through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will,

The Gospels & Acts

John 10:14–16. “I am the good shepherd, and I know My own, and My own know Me, ¹⁵just as the Father knows Me and I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep. ¹⁶And I have other sheep that are not of this fold; I must bring them also, and they will listen to My voice; and they will become one flock, *with* one shepherd.”

Acts 13:48. When the Gentiles heard this, they *began* rejoicing and glorifying the word of the

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deeds, ²²yet He has now reconciled you in His body of flesh through death, in order to present you before Him holy and blameless and beyond reproach...

Eph. 4:1-2, 15-16.

Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, ²with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love.... ¹⁵but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all *aspects* into Him who is the head, *that is*, Christ, ¹⁶from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.

Eph. 5:1–2. Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children; ²and walk in love, just as Christ also loved you and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma.

Rom. 8:29-30. For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined *to become* conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brothers *and sisters*; ³⁰and these whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified.

Romans 8:14. For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons *and daughters* of God.

⁵ He predestined us to adoption as sons *and daughters* through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will,

Isa. 42:8. “I am the LORD, that is My name; I will not give My glory to another, nor My praise to idols.”

Isa. 43:25. “I, *I alone*, am the one who wipes out your wrongdoings for My own sake, and I will not remember your sins.”

Isa. 48:11. “For My own sake, for My own sake, I will act; for how can *My name* be profaned? And I will not give My glory to another.”

⁶ to the praise of the glory of His grace, with which He favored us in the Beloved.

Lord; and all who had been appointed to eternal life believed.

Luke 12:32. “Do not be afraid, little flock, because your Father has chosen to give you the kingdom.”

Luke 2:14. “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among people with whom He is pleased.”

Matt. 3:16–17. After He was baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending as a dove *and* settling on Him, ¹⁷and behold, a voice from the heavens said, “This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.”

John 3:35. “The Father loves the Son and has entrusted all things to His hand.”

John 10:17. “For this reason the Father loves Me,

Phil. 2:12–13. So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; ¹³for it is God who is at work in you, both to desire and to work for *His* good pleasure.

Col. 1:19–20. For it was the *Father's* good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him, ²⁰and through Him to reconcile all things to Himself, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of His cross.

Heb. 2:3–4. ...how will we escape if we neglect so great a salvation? After it was at first spoken through the Lord, it was confirmed to us by those who heard, ⁴God also testifying with them, both by signs and wonders, and by various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit according to His own will.

Col. 1:13–14. For He rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, ¹⁴in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

Lev. 17:11. For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you on the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it is the blood by reason of the life that makes atonement.

Isa. 53:5. But He was pierced for our offenses, He was crushed for our wrongdoings; the punishment for our well-being *was laid* upon Him, and by His wounds we are healed.

⁶ to the praise of the glory of His grace, with which He favored us in the Beloved.

⁷ In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our wrongdoings, according to the riches of His grace

because I lay down My life so that I may take it back.”

Acts 20:28. Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.

Acts 2:38. Peter *said* to them, “Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”

Heb. 9:22. And almost all things are cleansed with blood, according to the Law, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.

Rom. 3:23–25a. ...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ²⁴being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus, ²⁵whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith.

Col. 1:13–14. For He rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, ¹⁴in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

Rev. 5:9. And they sang a new song, saying, “Worthy are You to take the scroll and to break its seals; for You were slaughtered, and You purchased *people* for God with Your blood from every tribe, language, people, and nation.”

1 Cor. 1:30–31. But *it is* due to Him *that* you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption, ³¹so that, just as it is written: “LET THE ONE WHO BOASTS, BOAST IN THE LORD.”

Rom. 2:3–4. But do you suppose this, you *foolish* person who passes

⁷ In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our wrongdoings, according to the riches of His grace

⁸ which He lavished on us. In all wisdom and insight

⁹ He made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His good

judgment on those who practice such things, and *yet* does them *as well*, that you will escape the judgment of God? ⁴Or do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and restraint and patience, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance?

Eph. 3:8–9. To me, the very least of all saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ, ⁹and to enlighten all people as to what the plan of the mystery is which for ages has been hidden in God, who created all things...

Eph. 3:16–19. that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner self, ¹⁷so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; *and* that you, being rooted and grounded in love, ¹⁸may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and height and depth, ¹⁹and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled to all the fullness of God.

1 John 3:1. See how great a love the Father has given us, that we would be called children of God; and *in fact* we are. For this reason the world does not know us: because it did not know Him.

Rom. 11:25–26. For I do not want you, brothers *and sisters*, to be uninformed of this mystery—so that you

pleasure which He set forth in Him,

⁹ He made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He set forth in Him,

will not be wise in your own estimation—that a partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in; ²⁶and so all Israel will be saved; just as it is written: “THE DELIVERER WILL COME FROM ZION, HE WILL REMOVE UNGODLINESS FROM JACOB.”

Rom. 16:25. Now to Him who is able to establish you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery which has been kept secret for long ages past...

Eph. 3:3. ...that by revelation there was made known to me the mystery, as I wrote before briefly.

1 Cor. 1:21. For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not come *to know* God, God was pleased through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe.

Gal. 1:15–16. But when He who had set me apart *even* from my mother’s womb and called *me* through His grace was pleased ¹⁶to reveal His Son in me so that I might preach Him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately consult with flesh and blood...

Rom. 8:28. And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to *His* purpose.

¹⁰ regarding *His* plan of the fullness of the times, to bring all things together in Christ, things in the heavens and things on the earth.

Mark 1:14–15. Now after John was taken into custody, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of God, ¹⁵and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.”

Gal. 4:4–5. But when the fullness of the time came, God sent His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, ⁵so that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons *and daughters*.

Eph. 3:14–16. For this reason I bend my knees before the Father, ¹⁵from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name, ¹⁶that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner self...

Phil. 2:9–11. For this reason also God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, ¹⁰so that at the name of Jesus EVERY KNEE WILL BOW, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹and *that* every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Col. 1:16. for by Him all things were created, *both* in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones, or dominions, or rulers, or authorities—all things have been created through Him and for Him.

Col. 1:19–20. For it was the *Father's* good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him, ²⁰and through Him to reconcile all things to Himself, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of His cross.

Old Testament

Deut. 4:20. But the LORD has taken you and brought you out of the iron furnace, from Egypt, to be a people of His own possession, as today.

Deut. 32:9. For the LORD'S portion is His people; Jacob is the allotment of His inheritance.

Ephesians 1:1-14

¹¹In Him we also have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things in accordance with the plan of His will,

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Titus 2:13-14. ...looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus, ¹⁴who gave Himself for us to redeem us from every lawless deed, and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession, eager for good deeds.

Rom. 9:10-12. And not only *that*, but there was also Rebekah, when she had conceived *twins* by one man, our father Isaac; ¹¹for though *the twins* were not yet born and had not done anything good or bad, so that God's purpose according to *His* choice would stand, not because of works but because of Him who calls, ¹²it was said to her, "THE OLDER WILL SERVE THE YOUNGER."

Eph. 3:11-12. *This was* in accordance with the eternal purpose which He carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord, ¹²in whom we have boldness and confident access through faith in Him.

Heb. 6:16-18. For people swear an oath by one greater *than themselves*, and with them an oath *serving* as confirmation is an end of every dispute. ¹⁷In the same way God, desiring even more to demonstrate to the heirs of the promise the fact that His purpose is unchangeable, confirmed it with an oath, ¹⁸so that by two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have taken refuge would have strong encouragement to hold firmly to the hope set before us.

Old Testament

Isa. 42:8. “I am the LORD, that is My name; I will not give My glory to another, nor My praise to idols.”

Isa. 43:25. “I, I *alone*, am the one who wipes out your wrongdoings for My own sake, and I will not remember your sins.”

Isa. 48:11. “For My own sake, for My own sake, I will act; for how can *My name* be profaned? And I will not give My glory to another.”

Ezek. 36:25–28. “Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. ²⁶Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. ²⁷And I will put My Spirit within you and bring it about that you walk in My statutes, and are careful and follow My ordinances. ²⁸And you will live in the land that I gave to your forefathers; so you will be My people, and I will be your God.”

Joel 2:28–29. “It will come about after this that I will pour out My Spirit on all mankind; and your sons and your daughters will prophesy, your old men will have dreams, your young men will see visions. ²⁹And even on the male and female servants I will pour out My Spirit in those days.”

Ephesians 1:1-14

¹² **to the end that we who were the first to hope in the Christ would be to the praise of His glory.**

¹³ **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 the promise,**

The Gospels & Acts

John 14:16–17. “I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, so that He may be with you forever; ¹⁷*the Helper is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not see Him or know Him; but you know Him because He remains with you and will be in you.*”

Acts 2:33. Therefore, since He has been exalted at the right hand of God, and has received the promise of the Holy Spirit from the Father, He has poured out this which you both see and hear.

Acts 15:7. After there had been much debate, Peter stood up and said to them, “Brothers, you know that in the early days God made a choice among you, that by my mouth the Gentiles would hear the word of the gospel and believe.”

Epistles & Revelation

Phil. 1:9–11. And this I pray, that your love may overflow still more and more in real knowledge and all discernment, ¹⁰so that you may discover the things that are excellent, that you may be sincere and blameless for the day of Christ; ¹¹having been filled with the fruit of righteousness which *comes* through Jesus Christ, for the glory and praise of God.

Eph. 4:20–22. But you did not learn Christ in this way, ²¹if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught in Him, just as truth is in Jesus, ²²that, in reference to your former way of life, you are to rid yourselves of the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit...

Col. 1:5–6. ...because of the hope reserved for you in heaven, of which you previously heard in the word of truth, the gospel ⁶which has come to you, just as in all the world also it is bearing fruit and increasing, even as *it has been doing* in you also since the day you heard *it* and understood the grace of God in truth...

2 Cor. 6:6–10. ...in purity, in knowledge, in patience, in kindness, in the Holy Spirit, in genuine love, ⁷in the word of truth, *and* in the power of God; by the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and the left, ⁸by glory and dishonor, by evil report and good report; *regarded as* deceivers and yet true; ⁹as

¹³ 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 the promise,

Deut. 7:6. For you are a holy people to the LORD your God; the LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for His personal possession out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth.

Isa. 42:8. “I am the LORD, that is My name; I will not give My glory to another, nor My praise to idols.”

Isa. 43:25. “I, I alone, am the one who wipes out your wrongdoings for My own sake, and I will not remember your sins.”

¹⁴ who is a first installment of our inheritance, in regard to the redemption of God’s own possession, to the praise of His glory.

Acts 20:32. And now I entrust you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build *you* up and to give *you* the inheritance among all those who are sanctified.

unknown and *yet* well known, as dying and *yet* behold, we are alive; as punished and *yet* not put to death, ¹⁰as sorrowful yet always rejoicing, as poor yet making many rich, as having nothing and *yet* possessing all things.

2 Tim. 2:15. Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a worker who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth.

2 Cor. 1:20–22. For as many as the promises of God are, in Him they are yes; therefore through Him also is our Amen to the glory of God through us. ²¹Now He who establishes us with you in Christ and anointed us is God, ²²who also sealed us and gave *us* the Spirit in our hearts as a pledge.

Eph. 4:30. Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.

Titus 2:13–14. ...looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus, ¹⁴who gave Himself for us to redeem us from every lawless deed, and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession, eager for good deeds.

1 Pet. 2:9–10. But you are A CHOSEN PEOPLE, A ROYAL PRIESTHOOD, A HOLY NATION, A PEOPLE FOR GOD’S OWN POSSESSION, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His

Old Testament

Isa. 48:11. “For My own sake, for My own sake, I will act; for how can My name be profaned? And I will not give My glory to another.”

Ephesians 1:1-14

¹⁴ **who is a first installment of our inheritance, in regard to the redemption of *God's own* possession, to the praise of His glory.**

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marvelous light; ¹⁰for you once were NOT A PEOPLE, but now you are THE PEOPLE OF GOD; you had NOT RECEIVED MERCY, but now you have RECEIVED MERCY.

EXPOSITORY REFLECTIONS ON

HOW TO STAND FIRM

IN THE STRENGTH OF THE LORD

Ephesians 6:10-24

Chapter 2

The Strength of the Lord

Ephesians 6:10

The threat of sin, both within and among Christians who make up the Bride of Christ, has been present since the very beginning. The Bible repeatedly warns us about the danger of "wolves" who seek to harm or mislead those within the church. After three years of strengthening the Ephesian Church through faithful preaching and teaching, Paul gave a powerful warning: "Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. I know that after my departure, savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Even from among your own selves, men will arise, speaking perverse things to draw away the disciples after them" (Acts 20:28-30).

Years later, when Timothy served as pastor in Ephesus, Paul—knowing his time was short—wrote his final letter to warn Timothy of the difficult days ahead. These are days, I believe, that we are experiencing right now. The dangers facing the church are not only external but also internal, and we must remain vigilant, relying on God's strength and wisdom to protect and guide us.

But realize this, that in the last days difficult times will come. For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, slanderers, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy, unloving, irreconcilable, malicious gossips, without self-control, brutal, haters of good, treacherous, reckless, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, holding to a form of godliness although they have denied its power; avoid such people as these. For among them are those who slip into households and captivate weak women weighed down with sins, led on by various impulses, always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth. (2 Tim. 3:1–7)

The threat we Christians face is also deeply personal and internal. The desires of our own sinful flesh are the most immediate dangers confronting us. Scripture warns us plainly: "Do not love the world nor 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 lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life—is not from the Father, but is from the world" (1 John 2:15–16). This is why Paul

urged the Ephesian believers to pay close attention to how they lived: “Be careful how you walk, not as unwise people but as wise, making the most of your time, because the days are evil” (Eph. 5:15–16).

Although there are wolves who infiltrate from the outside and real dangers that arise from within, Paul wants us to grasp the true nature of these threats as he describes them in Ephesians 6:10-13, “Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might. Put on the full armor of God, so that you will 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. Therefore, take up the full armor of God, so that you will be able to resist on the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm.” (Eph. 6:10–13)

The very real dangers we face as followers of Jesus includes wolves from the outside and our flesh and sin from within; however, our struggle is also cosmic, and demonic! My goal is to help you understand just how real and serious this battle is. I also plan to share practical steps you can take to stay strong, resist the devil’s schemes, and stand firm in your faith against the spiritual forces of darkness.

The Reality of Our Spiritual War

Before proceeding to Ephesians 6:10, it is essential to recognize that, as Christians, we are engaged in a cosmic conflict. The Apostle Paul characterizes this as a "struggle," using the Greek term *palē* (πάλη) to depict the nature of close, hand-to-hand combat. In such a confrontation, escape is not an option; one must either choose to stand and contend against an adversary intent on harm, or surrender—risking subjugation or even death.

Prior to becoming followers of Christ, as stated in Ephesians 2:1, we were "dead in our offenses and sins." Verses 2 and 3 further clarify that our former manner of life was in accordance with the one who orchestrates the demonic forces opposed to God and creation: "Among them we too all previously lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath."

It is out of God’s rich mercy, His great love, and His all-sufficient grace that you have been rescued, ransomed, and redeemed through the cross of Christ. If you belong to Jesus today, it is because God made you alive together with Christ (Eph. 2:5). Through Him, God delivered you from the grip of sin and from the dominion of Satan, and according to Ephesians 2:6–7, He “raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the ages to come He might show the boundless riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.”

From the opening chapters of Ephesians we learn that the battle for our souls has already been decisively won by Jesus. Yet we must also recognize that the prince of the power of the air,

together with the rulers, authorities, and the spiritual forces of wickedness, continues to wage war against the people of God. Though defeated, these forces remain determined to discourage, distract, and destroy by any means available. But take heart—your life is held securely in the hands of the One who has already triumphed.

Martyn Lloyd-Jones was right when he warned, “There is no grosser or greater misrepresentation of the Christian message than that which depicts it as offering us a life of ease with no battle and no struggle at all... The first thing we must realize is that the Christian life is a warfare, that we are strangers in an alien land, that we are in the enemy’s territory.”³ His words pull back the curtain on a reality we often prefer to ignore.

Paul makes it unmistakably clear: the Christian life is a war. It is not a metaphorical war, nor a theoretical conflict—it is a real and present struggle. It is a battle we are already in, a battle we must actively engage, a battle that persists day after day against demonic and cosmic powers that will not relent until the very end. But here is our hope: we are not left to fight in our own strength. The power we need does not arise from our willpower, our discipline, or our resolve. Our strength comes from the Lord through His might, His victory, and His sovereign power. Every moment we stand, we stand because He holds us. Every battle we endure, we endure because He strengthens us.

The Call to Spiritual Vigilance

In order to engage the spiritual war in which we find ourselves, we must be both alert and strong. It is no accident that Paul begins this section with the word “*Finally*.” After five chapters filled with rich doctrine, earnest warnings, and profound encouragements concerning what it means to be in Christ and to belong to the Bride of Christ, Paul reserves Ephesians 6:10–18 for his final charge—not because it is of lesser importance, but because of the gravity of the threat that confronts Christ’s people. “Finally” is Paul’s trumpet blast summoning the saints to attention, calling His Church to assemble for action. Sam Storms captures this urgency well when he writes, “There is never a truce or ceasefire. Satan takes no holidays. He observes no Sabbath rest. There may be times of greater or lesser intensity, but never a time to relax or let down your spiritual guard.”⁴

It is also significant that this charge follows Paul’s teaching on Christ-centered marriages, godly parenting, and Christlike conduct in the workplace. These are not incidental themes; they are the very relationships Satan assaulted from the beginning. Marriage—the gift given for human flourishing—was the first institution the serpent sought to compromise. Through his deception, the communion Adam and Eve enjoyed with God and with each other was shattered, and the consequences of that fracture extended into their family and work. When Eve was tempted and Adam stood passively beside her, their struggle was not merely against flesh and blood but

³ Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *The Christian Warfare: An Exposition of Ephesians 6:10-13*, (Grand Rapids, MI: BakerBooks; 1976), p. 21.

⁴ Sam Storms, *Understanding Spiritual Warfare* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Reflective; 2021), p. 290.

against demonic forces of evil. When Cain murdered Abel, that tragic act was likewise the manifestation of a deeper spiritual conflict.

Notice how the enemy attacked: not when Adam and Eve were vigilant or actively engaged in obedience, but when their hearts were idle and their spiritual senses dull. In the same way, Cain's growing indifference to God's voice allowed sin to crouch at the door of his heart until he was overtaken by it (see Gen. 4:1–8). The pattern is clear: when God's people drift into complacency, the enemy does not. He waits, watches, and strikes. For this reason, we must remain vigilant, for our war requires nothing less.

We will address this further when we come to verse 11 and consider how we are to stand against the schemes of the devil. For now, it must be said plainly: You cannot expect to walk in wisdom, or to live in a manner worthy of your calling as a follower of Jesus, if you are not on high alert and prepared for the close-quarters struggle that confronts every Christian. Though you cannot see the devil or his demonic forces with your physical eyes, their activity is no less real. As John Stott so aptly observed, "Beneath the surface, an unseen spiritual battle is raging."⁵

Strengthened by the Power of God

Notice the urgency in the apostle's language. He issues a rapid succession of imperatives: "Be strong" (v. 10), "stand firm" (v. 11), "resist" (v. 13a), "stand firm" again (v. 13b), and once more, "Stand firm" (v. 14). But how are we to obey these commands? How are we to be strong, to stand firm, and to resist? Paul's answer is unequivocal: We do so in the power of the God who raised Jesus from the dead.

The Greek word Paul uses for "be strong" in verse 10 is the same word he employed earlier in Ephesians 1:19. His point is unmistakable—the source of our strength does not arise from within ourselves but from an infinitely greater power. Recall Paul's prayer near the beginning of the letter: "I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you will know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the boundless greatness of His power toward us who believe." He then uses the very same language in 1:19–20 that he uses in 6:10, describing God's power as "the working of the strength of His might which He brought about in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places."

Our strength, then, comes from His might and from nowhere else. It does not originate from our talents, our abilities, our education, or even the sheer volume of Scripture we commit to memory. These are valuable gifts, but they are not the well from which spiritual power flows. True strength comes from Christ alone.

⁵ Tony Merida, *Exalting Jesus in Ephesians* (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2014), 175.

We must get this straight in our churches. In recent years we have witnessed the heartbreaking fall of several pastors and Christian leaders—men whose ministries once shaped and strengthened our own walks with Christ. I think of Ravi Zacharias, Tony Evans, and—most recently—Steven Lawson. Their books sit on our shelves; we have benefited from their sermons; many have been deeply influenced by their teaching. Yet their ministries ended in moral collapse. In Lawson’s case, he preached for years—from his pulpit and on prominent conference platforms—while secretly engaged in an affair with a woman one-third his age.

Nor is this tragic pattern limited to pastors. We have watched well-known Christian songwriters and worship leaders publicly renounce their faith under the banner of “deconstruction,” even as the Church continued singing their music. It is entirely possible for someone who is spiritually compromised—even demonically influenced—to stand before the people of God and appear genuine simply because they possess talent, charisma, and emotional appeal. How easily we confuse skill with anointing, charisma with godliness, and outward gifting with the true power of the Holy Spirit. And how quickly our own spiritual senses grow dull when we drift into idleness and cease to remain watchful against the enemy’s schemes.

Ephesians repeatedly reminds us where our true strength must come from if we are to “walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called” (Eph. 4:1). Consider where Christ is seated according to Ephesians 1:21–23: “far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. And He put all things in subjection under His feet, and made Him head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.” This means that Christ has decisively conquered the rulers, authorities, world forces of darkness, and spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly realms. Every enemy of your soul lies beneath the heel of His omnipotent foot. All the strength you will ever need—to be strong, to stand firm, and to resist in the evil day—is found in Him.

But if you are not abiding in Christ—if He is not your life and your breath—your spiritual senses will inevitably grow dull. If God’s Word is not the truth coursing through your veins; if your heart and mind feast more on the world than on Scripture; if you are more concerned with personal comfort than with preparing your soul to stand before Christ—then you make yourself vulnerable to the enemy’s attacks. You become easy prey.

Yet if you are a Christian, God has not left you defenseless. You have been chosen by the Father to be holy and blameless in Christ (1:4–6). You have been redeemed through the blood of the Lamb for the heavenly city God has prepared for you (1:7–12). You have been sealed with the Holy Spirit and possess all of His Spirit you will ever need to walk in divine strength and resist the devil’s schemes (1:13–14).

So consider this carefully: How much of your heart does the Father truly have? How much of your allegiance belongs to the Son? How much of your life is surrendered to the Holy Spirit?

Consider four Practical Steps to Stand Strong in the Lord”

1. ***Redeem Your Time***

Reduce the time you spend on social media, entertainment, and online distractions. Use that reclaimed time to read, meditate on, and internalize the Word of God.

2. ***Fill Your Heart with Worship***

Instead of allowing secular messages and music to dominate your thoughts, surround your week with songs of praise. Music shapes the heart, and worship prepares the soul for spiritual battle.

3. ***Cultivate a Life of Prayer***

If prayer is not yet a consistent rhythm in your life, begin with the Lord’s Prayer (Matt. 6:9–13; Luke 11:2–4). Gradually increase your time with God—5, 10, 15, or 30 minutes a day—engaging Him in sincere, unhurried prayer.

4. ***Rest in God’s Strength, Not Your Own***

Resist the urge to rush toward solutions in your own wisdom or strength. Instead, heed the command of Psalm 46:10–11: “*Stop striving and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted on the earth. The Lord of armies is with us; the God of Jacob is our stronghold.*”

Chapter 3

Stand Firm Against the Schemes of the Devil

Ephesians 6:11

Some of the pets I enjoyed most growing up were the kind that ate other living things. I spent the first twelve years of my life in South Jersey, just across from the Delaware River, before moving to Pennsylvania on the opposite side. As a kid, my family owned many animals—hamsters, hermit crabs, five Doberman pinschers at one point, and a lot of cats. But my favorite pets were the ones that ate live prey. I had several Redbelly Piranhas that I fed feeder goldfish and the salamanders I caught myself, and I even owned a yellow rat snake that I fed mice.

As much as I've seen, I've never encountered an anaconda in person. That's why a humorous article titled "How to Be Prepared for an Anaconda Attack" caught my attention. According to this list, here is what you are supposed to do if an anaconda decides it wants to make you its lunch:

1. If you're attacked by an anaconda, do not run; the snake is faster than you are.
2. Lie flat on the ground.
3. Put your arms tight at your sides and your legs tight together.
4. The snake will begin to climb over your body.
5. Do not panic.
6. The snake will begin to swallow you from the feet end.
7. Step 6 will take a long time.
8. After a while, slowly and with as little movement as possible, reach down, take your knife, and very gently slide it into the snake's mouth. Then suddenly sever the snake's head.
9. Be sure your knife is sharp.
10. Be sure you have your knife.

Some anacondas can grow up to 30 feet long and weigh over 500 pounds. So let me be clear: you will never catch me lying flat on the ground preparing as an easy meal for an anaconda. Clearly, this list is meant to be funny. But there is a far more dangerous serpent—one Scripture calls the deceiver, the accuser, and the dragon—who seeks to devour our souls. And in a very real, metaphorical sense, while we would never lie down for an anaconda, we often lie down for *him*. Instead of resisting, fighting, or fleeing, we sometimes make it easy for our enemy to do exactly what he desires: to destroy us.

Recognize the Schemes of the Enemy

When Adam and Eve were in the garden, they encountered something far more dangerous than an angry anaconda. They came face-to-face with the ancient enemy himself known in the Bible as Lucifer, Satan, and the devil. Scripture describes him in terrifying terms: the Beast (Rev. 14:9–10), Beelzebub (Matt. 12:24), the Dragon (Rev. 12:9), a roaring lion (1 Pet. 5:8), the god of this age (2 Cor. 4:4), the prince of the power of the air (Eph. 2:1–2), the ruler of demons (Luke 11:15), the ruler of this world (John 12:31–32), and the Serpent of Old (Rev. 12:9).

Of all the places in the garden of Eden Adam and Eve could have hung out, they decided to idly stand unprepared before the one tree they were told not to eat from. It was at that one tree that great Serpent waited and schemed his way into their minds, hearts, and lives. It was the institution of marriage and family the Serpent wanted to attack and destroy, and he did it when Adam and Eve were unprepared! Listen, the Serpent of Old still does the same thing today, the only difference is that he has had more practice at scheming since the Garden. This is why Paul addressed how we can walk in a manner worthy of our calling in marriages, in our parenting, with our children, and in our working (see 5:22–6:9). What “tree” are you idly standing in front of that you should not be?

So let me ask you: What “tree” are you standing in front of that you have no business being near?

You may have laughed at the humorous list of instructions for surviving an anaconda attack, but when it comes to sin and temptation, how often do we spiritually lie down instead of running to the One who has the authority and power to crush the serpent’s head—Jesus Christ? Instead of standing idly beside forbidden trees, we ought to be running to another tree altogether: the cross of Christ. Why? Because, as Paul reminds us, “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” (Eph. 6:12).

So, what are the devil’s schemes? Scripture gives us insight through the names by which Satan is identified—each one revealing something about his character and the strategies he employs against the people of God. He is the Accuser (Rev. 12:10), the Adversary (1 Pet. 5:8), the Deceiver (Rev. 12:9), the Enemy (Matt. 13:39), the Evil One (John 17:15), the Father of Lies (John 8:44), the Lawless One (2 Thess. 2:8–10), a Murderer (John 8:44), the Tempter (Matt.

4:3), the Thief who comes only to steal, kill, and destroy (John 10:10), and the Wicked One (Eph. 6:16). Together, these titles form a portrait of the enemy who relentlessly schemes against God's people. Consider what they reveal:

1. **As the Accuser**, Satan wants to paralyze you with memories of your past failures. His aim is to drown you in shame and guilt so that you hesitate to run to Jesus in repentance. He whispers that your sins are too great for God's mercy, too dark for His love, and too frequent for His grace.
2. **As the Adversary**, the devil burns with hatred toward you. He will use everything at his disposal to tear you down. One of his chief tactics is to isolate you from the people of God, because he knows a believer alone is a believer vulnerable.
3. **As the Deceiver**, he uses counterfeits—cheap imitations of God's good gifts—to lure you away from what truly satisfies. He distorts sexuality, elevates politics to idolatry, and twists good things into ultimate things, persuading you that fulfillment exists apart from God's design.

Satan is your enemy because he seeks your harm. He is the Evil One because he is sinister, malicious, diabolical, vile, and malevolent—directing all of his wicked schemes toward you and the derailment of God's mission. He is not merely a liar; he is the father of lies, and thus he aims to turn you away from every form of truth, especially God's truth revealed in Scripture. He is lawless, having no moral compass. He has been a murderer from the beginning, so he is no advocate for life. He is a thief, and his only intent is to steal, kill, and destroy. Could the warning be any clearer? The first step in standing firm against the devil's schemes is to understand exactly how he schemes.

And remember this: Satan is the very embodiment of evil, but he rarely presents himself as such. He hides his true colors behind a veneer of what appears to be innocence. To discern his strategies, we must not forget that he “disguises himself as an angel of light” (2 Cor. 11:14). His demons do the same. He does not come with a red suit and a pitchfork—rather, he works behind “the rulers, the powers, the world forces of this darkness, and the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places” (Eph. 6:12). We will explore this more in the next session, but for now, we must be sober-minded and alert: the enemy is cunning, patient, and deadly—and he is always scheming.

Resist the Schemes of the Enemy

If you are a Christian, you are at war. You were once dead in your sins, a child of wrath by nature (Eph. 2:1–3), living under the influence and domination of “the rulers, the powers, the world forces of this darkness, and the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places” (6:12). But as powerful as the devil and the demonic realm are, Jesus has already defeated them. Remember Paul's prayer in Ephesians 1:18–19—that the eyes of our hearts would be opened to grasp “the hope of His calling,” “the riches of His inheritance,” and “the boundless greatness of His power

toward us who believe.” The “boundless greatness” of this power is not ours in ourselves; it is the immeasurable power of Almighty God working in us.

Through the cross and the empty tomb, Jesus has conquered Satan along with every ruler, every power, every force of darkness, and every spiritual foe. Hear again Paul’s description of Christ’s victory: “These are in accordance with the working of the strength of His might which He brought about in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion... And He put all things in subjection under His feet, and made Him head over all things to the church” (Eph. 1:19–22).

All things—including Satan himself—are presently under the feet of Jesus. He is the sovereign Head over all. The devil is defeated, and he knows it. Through Christ’s death and resurrection, your salvation was secured (1:7–12; 2:4–5). You must stand against the devil’s schemes, but you can only do so in the strength of King Jesus. That strength becomes yours as you put on the full armor of God.⁶

And take note: in verse 11, Paul does not offer a suggestion—he gives a command: “Put on the full armor of God.” This armor does not originate from us; it belongs to God. It is armor that He has provided, but armor we must actively put on in order to stand firm against the enemy. We will take time in the coming chapters to study each piece of this armor in detail, but for now, we must understand what the “full armor of God” actually is:

1. The Belt of Truth

A Roman soldier’s belt secured all other clothing, keeping it out of the way so he could run and fight unhindered. God’s truth, not “your truth,” is the foundation of your spiritual stability. Yet it will do you no good unless you put it on by obeying God’s Word.

2. The Breastplate of Righteousness

The breastplate protected a soldier’s vital organs. So also, the righteousness of Christ—granted to you by God—is essential for protecting the core of your spiritual life. You will never outgrow your need for Christ’s righteousness.

3. The Shoes of the Gospel of Peace

No soldier can fight well barefoot. Likewise, the Christian who stands in the righteousness of Christ hungers for more of His righteousness. Jesus said, “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness.” The gospel gives us *shalom*—the peace of God—which stabilizes and prepares us to stand firm against the devil’s schemes.

4. The Shield of Faith

The shield Paul refers to is the large, body-length shield designed to absorb volleys of flaming arrows. These arrows represent the doubts, temptations, impure thoughts, and sudden

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 305.

assaults that come from the enemy. Your shield is only as strong as your confidence in God's Word, your dependence on Christ's righteousness, and your conviction that Jesus alone satisfies your soul.

5. The Helmet of Salvation

This is the believer's assurance—the confidence that you belong to Christ and that no one else can give life to your soul. The devil cannot take your salvation, but he can attack your assurance. The helmet guards your mind with the truth that Christ's finished work is sufficient for all your sins.

6. The Sword of the Spirit

The sword of the Spirit is the Word of God—your only offensive weapon. Its effectiveness grows as your knowledge of Scripture grows. God's Word is “living and active... sharper than any two-edged sword” (Heb. 4:12). Sam Storms suggests three primary ways we wield this sword:

1. **We proclaim the Word** (as Jesus did; see also Rev. 12).
2. **We pray the Word** (Eph. 6:18–19; Acts 6:4; John 15:7).
3. **We praise with the Word** (by singing Scripture).

Conclusion

So how can you begin to stand firm against the devil's schemes? For starters, stop lying down and making it easy for your enemy to attack and harm you. Stand firm by choosing to submit to God's truth rather than the culture's definition of truth. Stand firm with the confidence that every ounce of righteousness you will ever need is found in Christ alone. Stand firm in the peace that the gospel of Jesus Christ provides. Stand firm in a faith that believes God is both infinitely good and infinitely greater than everything that stands against you. Stand firm in the security of knowing that you are now a son or daughter of God because you have been made alive with Christ. And stand firm with the conviction that the Bible is the very Word of God—our Spirit-empowered sword—by proclaiming it, praying it, and praising with it.

We stand against the schemes of the devil in the strength of the One who defeated our adversary once and for all. Jesus is the One who beat the beast, bludgeoned Beelzebub, defanged the dragon, and silenced the roaring lion at the cross. The Christ of the cross is the King of kings—infinitely greater than the god of this age. He preeminently and powerfully prevailed over the prince of the power of the air. He reigns on high, and His heel is already upon the throat of the ruler of demons. One day soon, the full weight of His omnipotent heel will crush the skull of the serpent of old—fully, finally, and forever.

Brothers and sisters, you can be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might because He reigns. We stand in the might of the One who declares: *“I am the first and the last, and the living One; and I was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of death and of Hades”* (Rev. 1:17–18).

Chapter 4

Resist on the Evil Day

Ephesians 6:12-13

Can I ask you a question? Why is it that so many Christians are surprised by the supernatural? Think about what we claim to believe. We believe the Bible is true and supernaturally inspired by God Himself. Because we believe the Scriptures are inspired, we confess that God created all things by His omnipotent word. We affirm the existence of a real serpent in the Garden, a real tempter who successfully led Adam and Eve into sin. We believe Satan exists, and that he commands legions of demons. In other words, we say we believe in a supernatural world—yet we often live as if that world doesn’t exist.

One of my favorite stories that illustrates the ongoing battle between the Kingdom of Light and the kingdom of darkness is found in 2 Kings 19:8–37. While we may not have time to examine the entire account, we can focus on some important moments that teach us how to confront the threats we face today. King Hezekiah of Judah received a letter from the king of Assyria—a message filled with pride and intimidation: “Don’t let the God you trust deceive you by saying, ‘Jerusalem will not fall to the king of Assyria.’ You have heard what the kings of Assyria have done to all the lands, completely destroying them. Will you be delivered? Did the gods of nations destroyed by my ancestors—Gozan, Haran, Rezeph, and the people of Eden in Telassar—save them?” (2 Kings 19:10–12).

What was Hezekiah’s response? He stood firm against the enemy, just as his forefather David had instructed God’s people generations earlier: “Some praise their chariots and some their horses, but we will praise the name of the LORD, our God” (Ps. 20:7). Notice what Hezekiah did next:

“Then Hezekiah took the letter from the hand of the messengers and read it, and he went up to the house of the LORD and spread it out before the LORD. Hezekiah prayed before the LORD and said, ‘LORD, God of Israel, enthroned above the cherubim, You are the God, You alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth. You have made heaven and earth. Incline Your ear, LORD, and hear; open Your eyes, LORD, and see; and listen to the

words of Sennacherib, which he has sent to taunt the living God.... But now, LORD our God, please, save us from his hand, so that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that You alone, LORD, are God.” (2 Kings 19:14–19)

God did not save Judah through chariots or horses. Instead, He sent the angel of the LORD, who struck down 185,000 Assyrian soldiers in a single night. So when we read stories like this, why are we surprised? And if God’s Word warns us in Ephesians 6:10–13 about a real demonic realm—rulers, powers, world forces of darkness, spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places—why do we treat such warnings lightly?

Throughout the Gospels, Jesus repeatedly encounters the demonically possessed, and the demons tremble before Him. In Acts 19, we see Jewish exorcists in Ephesus attempting to imitate the miracles they observed Paul perform in the name of Jesus. In a misguided attempt to cast out demons, they declared, “I order you in the name of Jesus whom Paul preaches!” But the evil spirit replied, “I recognize Jesus, and I know of Paul, but who are you?” The demon-possessed man then “pounced on them and subdued all of them and overpowered them, so that they fled out of the house naked and wounded” (Acts 19:11–16). I can’t help but wonder whether Paul had stories like this in mind when he wrote: “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” (Eph. 6:12).

As we consider Ephesians 6:12–13, there are two truths we dare not miss. First, our enemy is spiritual, strategic, and satanic. Second, our battle is immediate, intense, and relentless.

Our Enemy is Spiritual, Strategic, and Satanic

What Paul wants us to understand is that when Jesus said the world would hate us because it hated Him, He meant it. But our real struggle is *not* against the people who oppose the gospel. Our enemy is not those who reject Jesus or embrace the ideologies of this world. Instead, our enemy is made up of “the rulers, the powers, the world forces of this darkness, the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places” (Eph. 6:12).

Ephesians 6:10–13 gives us the most explicit description in the Bible of the Christian’s battle with evil spiritual forces. Paul could not be clearer. Whether he is describing a specific hierarchy within the demonic realm is not entirely certain, but Scripture strongly suggests some form of organized authority among angels—both holy and fallen.

Before examining Paul’s list, let’s consider five things the Bible clearly teaches about angels:

1. **Angels are spirit beings** who possess personhood, created for God’s glory and part of His created order (Ps. 148:2–5; Job 38:4–7; Isa. 6:2–4; Col. 1:16; Heb. 1:14; 12:22; Rev. 4:8).

2. **Angels are temporarily higher than humans**, yet will one day be judged by the redeemed. They are unusually strong, swift, intelligent, and can appear in human form (1 Cor. 6:2–3; Ps. 103:20; Dan. 9:21; Ezek. 28:12; 1 Pet. 1:11–12; Gen. 18:1–3; Mark 16:5).
3. **Angels are limited in ways humans are not.** They cannot marry (Matt. 22:30), cannot experience redemption (2 Pet. 2:4), and are created as angels while humans bear God’s image (Gen. 1:27).
4. **Angels possess intellect, emotion, and will** (1 Pet. 1:12; Jude 6).
5. **Angels appear to have ranks of authority.** There are archangels (1 Thess. 4:16; Jude 9), cherubim (Gen. 3:24; Ezek. 10), seraphim (Isa. 6:2–3), and multitudes of angels (Rev. 5:11). Scripture also portrays Lucifer as a guardian cherub (Ezek. 28:12–17) who held a position of high authority.

We also learn of a war in heaven. The exact timing is uncertain, but it likely occurred sometime between creation and Genesis 3 when Satan appears as the serpent. The angels who followed Lucifer became what Scripture calls demons. Revelation 12:7–9 describes this conflict: “And there was war in heaven, Michael and his angels waging war with the dragon. The dragon and his angels waged war... and the great dragon was thrown down, the serpent of old who is called the devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him.”

The rulers, powers, world forces of darkness, and spiritual forces of wickedness Paul lists in Ephesians 6:12 are these fallen angels—demons organized under Satan’s leadership. Satan himself is only one being and cannot be everywhere at once, but he commands a vast number of demons who carry out his purposes with strategic intent. Our enemy is spiritual, strategic, and satanic. And although our enemy is limited, Scripture teaches the following about what demons can do:

1. **Demons can give superhuman strength** to those they possess (Mark 5:1–20; Acts 19:16).
2. **Demons are not hindered by physical barriers**, just as holy angels are not (Mark 5:9–13; Dan. 9:21–23; 10:10–14).
3. **Demons can harm, oppress, and possess humans** (Matt. 9:32–33; 12:22; 17:15; John 13:21–30; Acts 16:16–18; 19:11–16).
4. **Behind every idol and every false teaching stand demonic forces** (1 Cor. 10:14–22; Gal. 4:3–9).

5. **Demons can influence nations, leaders, and governing authorities**, a theme found throughout Daniel and Revelation.

While it is important to have a biblical understanding of demons and their activity, it is far more important to remember this: they have no ultimate authority over the believer in Christ. Because of Jesus' redeeming work on the cross, the demonic realm was publicly disarmed and defeated. So if any of this discussion creates anxiety, listen carefully to Paul's encouragement in Colossians 2:13–15: "And when you were dead in your wrongdoings... He made you alive together with Him... having canceled the certificate of debt... having nailed it to the cross. When He had disarmed the rulers and authorities, He made a public display of them, having triumphed over them through Him."

This is the foundation upon which Paul calls believers to stand firm and "take up the full armor of God" (Eph. 6:13).

Our Battle is Immediate, Intense, and Relentless

Jesus did indeed disarm the rulers and authorities through His sacrifice on the cross and His triumph over the grave in His resurrection. Yet even though Christ has already won the decisive victory, Scripture warns us that the battle is not over. We are still engaged in a fight—a real, ongoing conflict with demonic forces that stand opposed to God. In this fight, we are commanded to stand strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might by putting on the full armor of God.

Our fight is described as a struggle. The Greek word Paul uses for "struggle" (πάλη) refers to close-quarters, hand-to-hand combat. It is the kind of wrestling where your enemy is not at a distance—you feel his breath, weight, and pressure. Paul's point is that we must be prepared for attacks from afar and from up close. The enemy brings his fight to us in many forms: slander, false teaching, and temptation; doubt, depression, and deception; pressure to compromise; opportunities to sin against God and others; and persecution from friends, family, or even state authorities.

Paul also speaks of "the evil day." This phrase includes the greater final assault of Satan that will occur before Christ returns, but it is not limited to that. The evil day is any day when you find yourself under the enemy's fire—whether from a distance or face-to-face. The evil day describes the whole Christian life, from new birth to physical death. It includes those seasons when temptation feels unusually intense, when spiritual attack seems relentless, when the darkness presses in. Christian, how will you resist in the evil day? You resist by taking up the only help available to you—the help that God Himself has provided: the full armor of God.

Paul gives us three imperatives in Ephesians 6:10–13:

- Be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might.

- Put on the full armor of God.
- Take up the full armor of God, so that you will be able to resist in the evil day.

And when you have done everything—when you have taken up every piece of armor God supplies—then you will be able to stand firm. How, then, do we stand firm?

- **Stand firm with God’s truth.** His truth is the only truth that matters.
- **Stand firm with the breastplate of Christ’s righteousness.** His righteousness is now counted as your righteousness.
- **Stand firm in the peace of God.** You are a beneficiary of His mercy and a child of the Almighty.
- **Stand firm with the shield of faith—soaked in the water of the Word.** God is infinitely bigger than your greatest problems, but you will only realize this as you receive His word.
- **Stand firm with the helmet of salvation.** This is the assurance that you belong to the One who chose you, redeemed you, and sealed you with His Spirit. What can man ultimately do to you when the God of life is for you?
- **Stand firm with the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God.** You hold in your hands the authoritative, life-changing Word that proceeds from the mouth of God Himself.

Chapter 5

Stand Firm with the Belt of Truth

Ephesians 6:14a

On October 31, 1517, a Catholic monk named Martin Luther wrote ninety-five complaints against the Roman Catholic Church and nailed them to the door of All Saints' Church in Wittenberg. Little did Luther know that his statements—intended for scholarly debate—would be taken down, translated into multiple languages, and mass-produced through the newly invented printing press.

Luther wrote his theses because of what he was reading in Scripture. The more he studied his Bible, the more he became convinced that many church teachings and traditions stood in conflict with the clear teaching of God's Word. Eventually, on April 17, 1521, he was summoned to appear before the Diet of Worms to answer for the vast number of books, treatises, letters, and tracts in which he challenged Rome's doctrines.

At the Diet, Luther was given a choice: recant and be welcomed back into the Catholic Church—or stand by his writings and face death as a condemned heretic. Luther requested a day to pray and prepare an answer. When he returned on April 18, he was told to give a simple yes-or-no response. His answer became one of the most significant moments in church history:

“Since your most serene majesty and your highnesses require of me a simple, clear, and direct answer, I will give one, and it is this: I cannot submit my faith either to the pope or to the council, because it is clear that they have fallen into error and even into inconsistency with themselves. If, then, I am not convinced by proof from Holy Scripture, or by cogent reasons, if I am not satisfied by the very text I have cited, and if my judgment is not in this way brought into subjection to God's word, I neither can nor will retract anything; for it cannot be either safe or honest for a Christian to speak against his conscience. Here I stand. I cannot do otherwise. God help me. Amen.”⁷

⁷ Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, vol. 32, *Career of the Reformer II*, ed. George W. Forell (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1958), 112.

Luther was not executed for this speech, though he understood that death was a real possibility. Instead, he was forced into hiding and had to change his name and appearance for his own protection. He stood firm because he believed there is a truth far greater than personal safety—a truth found not in papal declarations or human councils but in the Word of God alone.

We live in a different time than Luther's, but the calling remains the same. If you are a Christian, you belong to the church of Jesus Christ, and therefore you are part of a people of one book—a people shaped, governed, and guarded by the truth found in Holy Scripture.

When Paul wrote his letter to the Ephesians, he did so from prison. Day after day he would have been in the presence of Roman soldiers. The armor they wore became a familiar sight, eventually serving as a vivid illustration of how believers must arm themselves for spiritual warfare.

What is the Belt of Truth?

Paul lists six pieces that belong to the armor of God, seven parts if you include Paul's statement on prayer in 6:18–19 and that there is no power apart from a dependence upon God in prayer. The first piece of armor that he begins with is a belt.

The belt was an important part of a Roman soldier's armor, not because it made the armor look better, but because it served two primary purposes: it was used to tuck in and secure the soldier's garments so he would not trip, and it held the sheath for his sword. It is also worth noting that the belt displayed a soldier's military status and rank. The belt went underneath the armor while remaining visible so that everyone could see he was ready to fight.

As the warrior's belt was critical for his readiness in battle, truth is essential to the Christian life. If we are going to stand in the might of the Lord, if we are going to stand firm against the devil's schemes, and if we are going to resist on the evil day, truth is essential. It is the nature of our God and the character of His Word:

“Teach me Your way, Lord; I will walk in Your truth; unite my heart to fear Your name.”
(Ps. 86:11)

“God is not a man, that He would lie, nor a son of man, that He would change His mind; has He said, and will He not do it? Or has He spoken, and will He not make it good?”
(Num. 23:19)

“The Rock! His work is perfect, for all His ways are just; a God of faithfulness and without injustice, Righteous and just is He.” (Deut. 32:4)

Truth is not only essential to the Christian life; it is the center of the Christian faith! God's fullest and most perfect expression of His truth is His Son: “God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, in these last days has spoken to us in His Son... He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature...” (Heb. 1:1–3). If you are a Christian, you follow Him who said: “I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father except through Me” (John 14:6).

Think about what Paul is saying in Ephesians 6:10–14; the only way you will be able to resist the father of lies (the devil) is by putting on the full armor of God, beginning with the belt of truth! But, dear Christian, what is the belt of truth?

I want you to think about the significance of where the belt is placed. It is the first part of the armor put on, and it is pulled closest to the body. I do not believe I am reading too much into this when I say that the belt of truth is more than just the Word of God (although it certainly includes the Word); it is also our new identity now that we are in Christ! We who were once dead in our sins have been made alive with Jesus (2:4–5). He is now the head of His church, which we are a part of (1:22). We are now His body (1:23). Jesus is our peace (2:17–18). We are His temple (2:21), because Jesus now dwells in our hearts through faith (3:17).

Through Christ, we are one body, sealed by one Spirit, called in one hope, under one Lord, one faith, one baptism, and one God and Father of all (4:4–6). Our identity is now in Jesus, which means that He is our truth! This is why the phrase “in Christ” appears more than thirty times in Ephesians—to show us where our true identity is found.

To put on the belt of truth is to do what we read in Romans 13:14: “Put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts.” To put on the belt of truth is to identify fully with the Jesus who said: “Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple” (Luke 14:27).

If you are a Christian, His truth is now your truth.

Why is the Belt of Truth Important?

To put on the belt of truth is to be so identified with Jesus that you are freed to “walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called” (Eph. 4:1). It means standing on the foundation of the apostles and prophets with Christ Himself as your eye-opening, mind-captivating, life-shaping cornerstone (2:19–20). It means walking in love “just as Christ also loved you and gave Himself up for us, an offering and sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma” (5:1–2). It means willingly submitting yourself to the cleansing water of God’s Word (5:26). And it means identifying with the Lordship of Jesus by doing what He says (see Luke 6:46).

Yet we live in a moment when “my truth”⁸ often trumps all other claims to truth. Since the days of Luther, the world has continued shifting in its approach to what is considered true. The printing press helped usher in the Enlightenment and modernity, where truth was measured primarily by human reason. The worldwide web helped usher in postmodernity, where truth is no

⁸ The modern phrase “my truth” highlights a cultural movement toward individualism and personal expression. Today, people often use it to mean “my personal experience” or “my perspective.” However, this phrase can also suggest that truth is created by each person, rather than being something objective. This idea differs from the traditional Christian belief that truth is rooted in God’s character and revealed through Scripture.

longer determined by logic alone, but also by emotion, intuition, and subjective experience—leading to a culture where everyone feels permitted to craft their own truth.

And now, with the rise of artificial intelligence, we are entering yet another era in which society’s understanding of truth and morality will shift yet again. Just as modernity and postmodernity reshaped culture, so this new era will reshape the world around us—and the church will not remain untouched.

But in a rapidly changing world, one reality remains unmoved: all truth is God’s truth. Truth belongs to our Creator, and lies belong to the devil. Our identity is in Jesus, who is “the same yesterday and today and forever” (Heb. 13:8). The world may change, technology may advance, morality may shift, but God remains infinitely good, infinitely holy, infinitely wise, infinitely just, and infinitely loving.

In a world of shifting truths, God is always true, always honorable, always right, always pure, always lovely, always commendable, always excellent, and always worthy of praise (Phil. 4:8). The God who chose you before creation existed, who redeemed you with His Son’s blood, who sealed you with His Spirit for the day of redemption—that God does not change:

“For I, the LORD, do not change; therefore you, the sons of Jacob, have not come to an end.” (Mal. 3:6)

“Every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow.” (Jas. 1:17)

“God is not a man, that He would lie, nor a son of man, that He would change His mind...” (Num. 23:19)

If this unchanging God is the source of all truth, then why do some within the church feel the need to reshape the Bible’s teaching to fit whatever our world currently celebrates as “true”? This is the unavoidable tension of discipleship: if you are a Christian (or considering becoming one), you follow the One who not only tells the truth but **is** the Truth (John 14:6). As Lord over your life, Jesus will make demands on how you live—not to burden you, but to sanctify you, guard you, and bless you.

If our steadfast and unchanging God is truly the source of all truth, then why do we sometimes feel compelled—even within the church—to reshape His Word to align with whatever our culture currently claims as “truth”? Here lies a vital challenge at the heart of discipleship: To follow Christ, whether you are already His or are just considering the journey, is to follow the One who not only speaks truth but embodies Truth itself (John 14:6). As Lord of your life, Jesus calls you to a standard—not to weigh you down, but to lead you into deeper holiness, guard you, and bless you. In surrendering Him as Lord over your life, you will discover the kind of freedom, purpose, and contentment you were born to experience. Allowing Christ’s Truth to shape you is

not just an act of obedience—it is an invitation to experience His joy, His peace, and His unwavering faithfulness.

To put on the belt of truth, therefore, is to live each day out of your identity in Christ. You cannot “walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called” (4:1) if you are not consciously, intentionally putting on the Lord Jesus Christ (Rom. 13:14).

Because Jesus is the cornerstone of His church, and because the apostles and prophets form its foundation, we who belong to Him are called to be “a pillar and support of the truth” (1 Tim. 3:14–15) in a world that does not know the Truth because it does not know Jesus. Sam Storms said it well: “Satan will always flourish in the midst of theological ignorance.”⁹ This is why fastening on the belt of truth is not optional—it is foundational.

⁹ Storms, Sam. *Confronting Reality of Spiritual Warfare*. Enjoying God Ministries, 15 Jan. 2006. “Satan will always flourish in the midst of theological ignorance.”

Chapter 6

The Breastplate of Righteousness

Ephesians 6:14b

What does it mean to be a Christian? How do you know you *are* a Christian? And what assurance do you have that you will *remain* a Christian? Paul answers these questions repeatedly in the opening chapter of Ephesians. In fact, in one long sentence covering the first fourteen verses, he uses the phrase “in Christ” (or its equivalent) around ten times—and more than thirty times in the whole letter. Here is what he says:

1. In Christ, all spiritual blessings in the heavenly places belong to you (v. 3).
2. In Christ, you were chosen before the foundation of the world (v. 4).
3. Through Christ, you were predestined and adopted as sons and daughters of the living God (v. 5).
4. In the Beloved, you are a favored child of God (v. 6).
5. In Jesus, we have redemption, forgiveness, and the riches of God’s grace through His blood (v. 7).
6. In Jesus, God made known the mystery of His will (v. 9).
7. In Christ, the Father is bringing all things together according to His perfect plan (v. 10).
8. In Christ, we have obtained an inheritance according to the counsel of His will (v. 11).
9. In Christ, we exist to the praise of His glory (v. 12).
10. In Jesus, you have been sealed with the Holy Spirit for the day of redemption (v. 13).

To be a Christian is to be someone who was once spiritually dead but is now made alive with Christ—not because of religious activity, moral effort, or personal merit, but solely because of the saving work of Jesus on your behalf (Eph. 2:1–9). This is what it means to be a Christian.

But how does a person become a Christian? And how does that relate to putting on the breastplate of righteousness? I believe the same posture required to *become* a Christian is the posture required to *put on* the breastplate of righteousness.

Sometime ago I delivered a series of sermons on the Sermon on the Mount titled *Something Greater*. Throughout that series, we observed that the Sermon on the Mount stands not only as the greatest sermon ever delivered, but also as a profound exposition of what it truly means to be an authentic disciple of Jesus Christ.

During our study of the Beatitudes, I explained that the first three Beatitudes—often called the “Beatitudes of Need”—reveal what is necessary for a person to understand the salvation of his or her soul. Let’s consider them briefly, for they help us appreciate the beauty and comfort found in the breastplate of righteousness.

“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”

“Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.”

“Blessed are the gentle (meek), for they will inherit the earth.”

(*Matt. 5:3–5*)

To be poor in spirit is to come to the cross with empty hands—recognizing that you are spiritually bankrupt and have nothing to offer God that could earn or deserve forgiveness. Those who mourn are those who truly see their sin for what it is and grieve over it. The meek are those who understand that their greatest problem is not outside of them but *inside* them—their own sinful nature.

To come to Jesus for forgiveness is to come knowing that there is no righteousness of your own that could save you. It is to mourn the reality that your sins offend the infinitely righteous God. It is to confess that you cannot produce the righteousness necessary for salvation. And when a person truly comes to Jesus this way—empty-handed, humble, repentant—he or she experiences the fourth Beatitude: “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled” (*Matt. 5:6*). And this hunger is satisfied in Christ alone, for “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” (*Eph. 1:7–8*).

What is the Breastplate of Righteousness?

The Roman soldier’s breastplate was form-fitting and extended from the base of the neck to the top of the thighs, covering the thorax and abdomen to protect vital organs such as the heart, lungs, kidneys, and bowels. It was essential for survival. Paul tells us that the breastplate is the second piece of God’s armor—but what kind of righteousness does it represent? Is it the righteousness of Jesus imputed to you the moment you believed? Scripture affirms this glorious truth. “He [God] made Him [Christ] who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him” (2 Cor. 5:21). And again in Romans 5:18–21 we read that through Adam came condemnation, but through Christ came justification—“so that... grace would reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ.” Imputed righteousness means that God no longer sees you as guilty because of your sin; He sees you as righteous because Christ’s righteousness has been permanently applied to your account.

Many Christians, however, struggle with the tension between the Bible's declaration of their righteousness in Christ and their ongoing battle with sin. John Bunyan—author of *The Pilgrim's Progress*—experienced this same tension. In *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*, he described a moment when God opened his eyes to a truth that set him free:

One day, as I was walking in the field, my conscience still somewhat wounded and still fearing that all was not well, these words suddenly entered my soul: “Your righteousness is in heaven.” And I thought, moreover, that I saw, with the eyes of my soul, Jesus Christ at God's right hand. I say, my righteousness was there [in heaven]; so that wherever I was, or whatever I was doing, God could not say of me, ‘He is in need of my righteousness,’ as my righteousness was right in front of him. I also saw, moreover, that it was not my good state of heart that made my righteousness better, nor even my bad state that made my righteousness worse, since my righteousness was Jesus Christ himself, ‘the same yesterday, today, and forever’ (Heb. 13:8).

Now indeed the chains fell off my legs, and I was loosed from my afflictions and irons. My temptations fled away too, so that from that time those terrifying Scriptures of God stopped troubling me; I now went home rejoicing in the grace and love of God. So when I got home I looked to see if I could find that verse: ‘*Your righteousness is in heaven*,’ but I could find no such statement. So my heart began to sink again; the only words which came to mind were these: ‘Of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God – and righteousness and sanctification and redemption (1 Cor. 1:30).’¹⁰

Bunyan's book was first published in 1666, but his words echo what so many of us struggle with today as we seek to “walk in a manner worthy of our calling” (4:1). But is this the breastplate of righteousness that we are to put on along with the belt of truth? The answer is yes... and no. No, in the sense that if you are a Christian, you do not need to apply the righteousness of Christ to your life—this is something only God can do and something He has already accomplished for you the moment you believed (see Eph. 1:7–12). You cannot add to or improve Christ's righteousness; it is finished and complete. This is why the apostle Paul could say,

“I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them mere rubbish, so that I may gain Christ, and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith...” (Phil. 3:8–9).

So in what way is the breastplate of righteousness the righteousness of Christ? We put it on when we live and walk in the confidence that *all we have is Christ, and His righteousness is enough*. John Bunyan discovered this freedom when he realized that all his righteousness was already before the Father in Jesus Christ, who is our righteousness and sanctification. Reflecting

¹⁰ John Bunyan, *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners* (Auburn, MA: Evangelical Press; 2000), pp. 113-14.

on this, he wrote, “Having reached this point, I rested very comfortably here, for some time, at peace with God through Christ. ‘Oh,’ I thought, ‘Christ, Christ!’ There was nothing but Christ before my eyes.... Oh, I saw my gold was in my trunk at home, in Christ, my Lord and Saviour. Now Christ was all—**all my righteousness, all my sanctification and all my redemption.**”¹¹ This, dear brothers and sisters, is what it looks like to take up and put on the breastplate of righteousness. It is God’s to give, and it is now yours to rest in, stand in, and walk in.

This is what it looks like to take up and put on the breastplate of righteousness. It is God’s to give, and it is now yours to rest, stand, and walk in!

Why is the Breastplate of Righteousness Needed?

I am not sure I need to say much to convince you why the breastplate of righteousness is needed, but to ensure that you not only understand its importance but also celebrate that it is yours to wear, I want to point out a few more things. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, one of the great expositors of the 20th century, once said of this piece of God’s armor: “You do not put on the breastplate of experiences; you put on the breastplate of righteousness.” In other words, the breastplate of righteousness—just like the belt of truth—is not something you produce out of your own strength. It is not made from your efforts, your zeal, your moral improvements, or your spiritual performance. It is given by God.

When Paul described the armor of God, he was not inventing imagery from the Roman soldiers he saw around him in prison. His understanding of the armor came from the Old Testament, especially Isaiah 59. In Isaiah 53, we are promised the suffering servant—Jesus—who would be “pierced for our offenses and crushed for our wrongdoings,” bearing the punishment for our sins (Isa. 53:5–10). But in Isaiah 59, this same servant appears again—now as the Divine and Righteous Warrior who comes to save His people. Isaiah 59 begins by reminding us of the real problem: “Behold, the LORD’S hand is not so short that it cannot save... but your wrongdoings have caused a separation between you and your God” (vv. 1–2).

As the chapter unfolds, we hear language that mirrors Ephesians 2:1–3. Isaiah says, “For our wrongful acts have multiplied before You... offending and denying the LORD... uttering lying words from the heart” (vv. 12–13). Then he describes the desperate condition of sinful humanity: “Justice is turned back, and righteousness stands far away; for truth has stumbled in the street... and one who turns aside from evil makes himself a prey” (vv. 14–15). In other words, the human condition is hopeless.

So what does Yahweh do? He acts. He brings the salvation that no sinner can bring for himself. It is in this context that Paul draws his imagery: “He put on righteousness like a breastplate, and a helmet of salvation on His head...” (Isa. 59:16–17).

¹¹ *Ibid*, p.114.

The Divine Warrior promised in Isaiah 59 is the One who conquered sin by suffering the wrath of the Father in our place. The only truly righteous One hung on a cross for unrighteous sinners. With a crown of thorns representing the curse He bore for us, the Divine Warrior gave His life as the perfect offering for sin, and when He declared, “It is finished,” He bowed His head in death to become our salvation.

Oh, dear brothers and sisters—do you see why the breastplate of righteousness is so critically important? Jesus is not only our Divine Warrior; He is the Righteous Branch promised in Jeremiah 23: “Behold, the days are coming,” declares the LORD, “when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch... and this is His name by which He will be called: ‘The LORD Our Righteousness’” (vv. 5–6). Jesus Himself is our righteousness.

To put on the breastplate of righteousness is to walk in the confidence that Jesus is enough—because His mercy is rich, His grace is sufficient, and His love is great. Charles Spurgeon captured this truth beautifully when he wrote: “Saints are so righteous in Jesus Christ that they are more righteous than Adam was before he fell, for he had but a creature righteousness, and the Christian has the righteousness of the Creator... a righteousness which they can never lose, an everlasting righteousness.” To put on the breastplate of righteousness is to stand, walk, live, and run with Jesus as your truth and your righteousness.

This breastplate matters because when you put it on, it protects the vital organs of your faith—especially your heart. Your hope and salvation are not tied to your nation or to whoever becomes the next president. Whatever happens today, tomorrow, on Tuesday, or in any day ahead, your Sovereign is Jesus—the One:

Who walks on the waters,
Who speaks to the sea,
Who stands in the fire beside you;
Who roars like a lion,
Who bled as the Lamb,
Who carries your healing in His hands.¹²

He Himself has said, “I am the first and the last, and the living One; I was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of death and Hades” (Rev. 1:17–18).

¹² Chris Tomlin, *Jesus*, on *Never Lose Sight* (Sixsteps Records/Sparrow Records, 2016).

Chapter 7

Shoes of the Gospel

Ephesians 6:15

There was a time when I couldn't stand the idea of exercise. I was tired of living on cholesterol and blood pressure medication, and eventually I reached the point where desperation became motivation. I wanted to be healthy again. So I joined a gym, hired a trainer, and signed up for a 5K—mostly because I was convinced that if I didn't train for it, I wouldn't survive it. That meant running twice a week and training at the gym three times a week.

It didn't take long for me to learn how crucial the right shoes were.

Growing up just outside Philadelphia, we called anything you could run around in “sneakers.” Depending on where you were raised, you might know them as “tennis shoes.” Before I started running, I had no idea how many variations there were—neutral shoes for those with stable feet, stability shoes for those who pronate or supinate, cushioned shoes, minimalist shoes, trail shoes, and even track spikes. And every runner knows: if you train hard in the wrong shoes, you'll pay for it in your knees, feet, shins, or back.

Shoes matter. They matter when you run, when you hike, when you work, and especially when you fight.

And that's why Paul highlights footwear as the third piece of God's armor. Just as the wrong shoes can leave a runner limping, the wrong foundation can leave a Christian unstable. When Paul tells believers to strap on “the readiness given by the gospel of peace,” he draws on the same idea: in spiritual conflict, the right shoes make all the difference.

What are the Shoes of Gospel Peace?

Most translations insert the word “shoe” to make sense of the Greek. Shoes are assumed and the way it is translated in the NASB is the most literal of all the versions: “...and having strapped on your feet the preparation of the gospel of peace”(v. 15). The English Standard Version translates the Greek in a way that really gets at the heart of the point that I believe Paul is attempting to

make: “as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace.” The question we need to answer is, for what purpose do the shoes of the gospel of peace serve?

The Roman soldier was fitted with a type of sandal that was heavier than what civilians wore. The sole of the sandal was made with several layers of leather that were about ¾ of an inch thick with hollow-headed hobnail spikes on the bottom of the sole. The sandals a soldier of Rome wore were not designed for running but did allow him to keep his footing while standing against his enemy. The shoes Paul had in mind are the type that allowed a soldier to establish himself so that the enemy would not push him back. Now with that in mind, consider Ephesians 6:10–13:

“Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might. Put on the full armor of God, so that you will 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. Therefore, take up the full armor of God, so that you will be able to resist on the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm.”

So, if the shoes Paul had in mind are the type that allowed a soldier to firm up his stance before the enemy, what does it mean to put on the shoes of the gospel of peace for the Christian? I have read in a number of commentaries that to put on the shoes of the gospel of peace is Paul’s way of saying that “believers should always be ready to share the gospel.”¹³

I believe that sharing the gospel is what Paul assumed would be the motive and desire of the Christian who has put on the full armor of God. After all, he was well aware of Isaiah 52:7: “How delightful on the mountains are the feet of one who brings good news, who announces peace and brings good news of happiness, who announces salvation, and says to Zion, ‘Your God reigns’” (Isa. 52:7). Jesus called His followers the salt of the earth and the light of the world (Matt. 5:13–14), and Paul later quotes Isaiah again in Romans 10:15: “How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news of good things.” It is undeniably true that people only hear the gospel when Christians proclaim it. However, is this the main point Paul is making in Ephesians 6:15? I do not believe it is.

The shoes of the gospel of peace are indeed the good news of Jesus Christ—but the good news includes far more than His death for our sins and His resurrection for our salvation. The gospel we strap onto our feet includes these central truths, but it stretches beyond them to the entire scope of what God has accomplished for us in Christ. To see this, we must pay attention to the context of Ephesians 6:10–18. Is Paul telling believers to put on the shoes of the gospel of peace so that they will be ready to tell others about Jesus (see Matt. 28:19–20; 1 Pet. 3:15)? If that were his intent, he might have written: “strap upon your feet the preparation so that you can make

¹³ Tony Merida, *Exalting Jesus in Ephesians* (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2014), 180.

known the gospel of peace.” Instead, Paul tells us to put on the shoes of the gospel of peace so that we will be prepared—but prepared for what?

Why are the Shoes of the Gospel of Peace Needed?

Permit me to answer why the shoes of the gospel of peace are needed, and then I will unpack my answer. You must have the shoes of the gospel of peace securely fitted upon your feet because if you get the gospel wrong, your belt of truth and breastplate of righteousness will be compromised—and you will be vulnerable when you stand before the enemy.

So, what is the gospel? It is the good news that Jesus Christ—the perfectly righteous Son of God—lived in flawless obedience to the Law of God on our behalf, died for our sins, rose triumphantly from the grave on the third day, and now stands forever as creation’s Redeemer.

Jesus is the Son of God

If you get Jesus wrong, you will get the gospel wrong. There is no room for error regarding who Jesus is or what it means to trust Him. As the eternal Son of God, Jesus had no beginning and will have no end. He is not a creature; He is eternally begotten of the Father—distinct from, yet equal with, the Father and the Holy Spirit. Scripture declares, “*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God...*” (John 1:1–5).

This eternal Son took on humanity without ceasing to be God. By the virgin birth, He became fully human while remaining fully divine: “*The Word became flesh and dwelt among us...*” (John 1:14). He is the promised Child of Isaiah 9:6 and the righteous Branch who bears the name “*The LORD our Righteousness*” (Jer. 23:5–6). If Jesus were not fully God and fully man, He could not be the Redeemer humanity desperately needed.

Jesus is Our Redeemer

As the Son of God, Jesus alone was qualified to save sinners and reverse the curse that Adam brought upon creation. Scripture’s image of the kinsman-redeemer required three things: he had to belong to Adam’s race, he had to be willing to redeem what was lost, and he had to possess the means to accomplish that redemption. Only Christ meets all three requirements. He became our true Kinsman, willingly took on our debt, and had infinite power to redeem all that was subjected to futility. Because He fulfilled this role, God “*put all things in subjection under His feet*” and appointed Him as head over all things for the church (Eph. 1:22–23).

Jesus is the Triumphant King Who Is Making All Things New

The Bible proclaims that Christ is God’s “Yes” to every promise (2 Cor. 1:20). His redemptive work secures not only our salvation but the reversal of the curse (Jer. 23:5–6), the destruction of the devil (Gen. 3:15; Rev. 20:1–10), and the final renewal of creation itself (2 Pet. 3:10–13). This is the gospel Peter held before suffering believers: a living hope, a resurrection-secured inheritance, and a salvation guarded by the power of God (1 Pet. 1:3–5). Jerry Bridges put it

perfectly: “The gospel is not only the most important message in all of history; it is the only essential message in all of history.”¹⁴

Why This Matters for the Shoes of Peace

When you stand in the shoes of the gospel of peace, you stand in the reality of everything Christ is—and everything He has done. To “strap on your feet the preparation of the gospel of peace” is to stand firm as one redeemed by the blood of the Lamb. With the gospel fitted securely to your feet, you can say with Job, “I know that my Redeemer lives...” (Job 19:25–27). You can respond to uncertainty as Paul did: “For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain” (Phil. 1:21). You can resist the enemy knowing that “The LORD your God is in your midst, a victorious warrior...” (Zeph. 3:17).

The gospel brings peace because it promises not only our redemption but Christ’s return. When He comes, “*nation will not lift up sword against nation... never again will they learn war*” (Isa. 2:4). The gospel brings peace because, whether in life or death, the redeemed will enter the presence of God with everlasting joy (Isa. 51:11).

This is why the gospel is never something you move on from. You never outgrow it. To take up the armor of God is to stand in the gospel, walk in the gospel, fight from the gospel, and rest in the gospel. This is why Paul exhorts the Corinthians, “*Be on the alert, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong*” (1 Cor. 16:13).

When a believer puts on the shoes of the gospel of peace, he or she is not only stabilized by the truth of the gospel but also compelled to proclaim its riches to the world. The peace Christ provides does more than anchor the soul; it shapes the heart with confidence, gratitude, and conviction. It prepares the believer to stand firm in the evil day and inspires a desire for others to experience the same hope and assurance found in Him.

In light of this, consider the following questions as you reflect on the role of the gospel of peace in your life:

1. Upon what foundation are you presently standing?
2. Are your feet firmly fitted with the full gospel of peace, securely fastened around your life?
3. Are your spiritual “laces” tightened—are you prepared to maintain your footing as you “walk in a manner worthy of your calling” (Eph. 4:1)?
4. Who in your life needs to hear the message of the peace you have found in Jesus Christ?

¹⁴ Jerry Bridges, *The Discipline of Grace: God’s Role and Our Role in the Pursuit of Holiness* (Colorado Springs: NavPress/Tyndale House, 2014), 28.

Chapter 8

The Shield of Faith

Ephesians 6:16

It is often difficult for us to create meaningful space for rest. Many believers, myself included, struggle to slow down long enough to let their souls breathe. Yet Scripture makes clear that rest is not optional; it is essential to a life of faith. As I reflected on the relationship between rest and spiritual strength, I found myself returning again and again to the biblical call to Sabbath.

Among the Ten Commandments, the fourth stands out: “Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy” (Exod. 20:8–11). The first four commandments govern our relationship with God, while the final six address our relationships with one another. The Sabbath command sits between these two spheres for a reason. I am persuaded that Sabbath rest is not confined merely to a particular day of the week but speaks to our ongoing need to withdraw from the noise of life in order to hear God more clearly. Jesus clarified the intention behind the command when He said, “The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath” (Mark 2:27). The purpose of rest is to create space in which we align our hearts with God and are renewed by His strength.

Neglecting rest affects every dimension of our lives. Without intentional stillness before the Lord, our hearts drift toward idolatry, our spiritual foundations weaken, and our capacity to love those around us diminishes. The Sabbath command functions as a hinge: if ignored, both our vertical relationship with God and our horizontal relationships with others suffer. In short, Sabbath rest stabilizes a gospel-grounded faith. It calls us into the posture captured in Psalm 46:10: “Stop striving and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted on the earth.”

With this understanding of rest as our backdrop, we turn to Paul’s exhortation to stand firm in the strength of God by taking up the whole armor He provides:

“Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might. Put on the full armor of God, so that you will 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. Therefore, take up the full armor of God, so that you will be able to resist on the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm” (Eph. 6:10–13).

The schemes belong to the devil, but the armor belongs to God. The belt of truth represents our identity in Christ. The breastplate of righteousness is the righteousness of Christ credited to us. The shoes of the gospel of peace anchor us in the fullness of the gospel—its promise of salvation, resurrection, and the ultimate renewal of all creation. Isaiah captures this hope with profound beauty: “The redeemed of the Lord will return and come to Zion with joyful shouting... sorrow and sighing will flee away” (Isa. 51:11).

It is with this context in mind that we now consider the fourth piece of God’s armor: the shield of faith. To understand it rightly, we must ask two essential questions: What is the shield of faith, and how is it used in the life of the believer?

What is the Shield of Faith?

The shield Paul had in mind was not the small, round shield used for hand-to-hand combat, which was light but left most of the body exposed. Instead, Paul envisioned the large rectangular shield carried by Roman legionaries—a scutum designed to protect the entire body from arrows launched at a distance. Its front surface was layered with leather that could be soaked in water, so that when flaming arrows—arrows dipped in pitch and set ablaze—struck the shield, the fire would be extinguished immediately. Flaming arrows were meant to ignite and destroy anything flammable: structures, supplies, and even opposing soldiers. Spiritually speaking, this destructive intent mirrors the work of the rulers, powers, world forces of darkness, and spiritual forces of wickedness. Their aim is to consume and devastate the people of God, which is why Paul commands believers to take up the shield of faith.

But what exactly is this shield of faith? It is not merely a self-determined resolve to hold on to what we believe. It is not something we gain by trying harder to believe. Nor is it the kind of faith that claims financial, emotional, or physical wholeness as personal entitlement. Paul’s imagery did not originate with Roman armor; it is rooted in the Old Testament. When Abram feared being without an heir, God assured him, “Do not fear, Abram, I am a shield to you” (Gen. 15:1). David declared, “The LORD is my strength and my shield; my heart trusts in Him, and I am helped” (Ps. 28:7). Yet Proverbs 30:5 may express it most clearly: “Every word of God is pure; He is a shield to those who take refuge in Him.” The shield of faith is therefore not faith in faith itself but faith in the character, promises, and reliability of God. It is confidence grounded not in our strength or determination but in the God who speaks truth, proves Himself faithful, and provides refuge for His people.

So which is it? Is God our shield, or is faith the shield? Scripture affirms both. God Himself is our shield, yet our faith functions as the shield because faith is the means by which we take refuge in Him. Iain Duguid explains this well: “Faith is the means by which we flee to God for

refuge. It is how we cling to God and find in him comfort and protection in times of difficulty and distress.”¹⁵ It is one thing to believe intellectually that God exists; it is quite another to flee to the God you know to be true because of how He has revealed Himself in His Word. The more you know God—His character, His promises, His ways—the more readily you will run to Him as your refuge and strength. As Daniel records, “the people who know their God will be strong and take action” (Dan. 11:32b).

The way we cling to God and experience His comfort and protection is through His Word. Paul tells us in Ephesians 5:26 that Christ sanctifies and beautifies His church “through the washing of water with the word.” In the same way, it is the Word of God that saturates and strengthens the shield of faith so that it can “extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one.” This is not merely a New Testament idea; it is a principle woven throughout Scripture. Psalm 119:10–11 reflects the same heart and tone found in Ephesians 6:16: “With all my heart I have sought You; do not let me wander from Your commandments. I have treasured Your word in my heart, so that I may not sin against You.” From Genesis to Revelation, God’s people have always overcome temptation, fear, and spiritual attack by taking refuge in His revealed Word.

How do We Use the Shield of Faith?

It is one thing to understand what the shield of faith is; it is another to know how to use it. To see Paul’s intent clearly, we must pay attention to the structure of Ephesians 6:14–17. Paul presents the armor of God in two distinct groups. The first group contains the pieces a soldier puts on and keeps on as long as he remains active:

1. “...having belted your waist with truth” (v. 14a)
2. “...having put on the breastplate of righteousness” (v. 14b)
3. “...having strapped on your feet the preparation of the gospel of peace” (v. 15)

These three pieces describe the believer’s settled identity in Christ. The belt of truth is your new identity in Him. The breastplate of righteousness is Christ’s righteousness credited to you. The shoes of the gospel of peace anchor you in the gospel’s promise of full redemption. You “put on” these pieces by standing firmly in the gospel—embracing who you are in Christ, resting in His righteousness, and rooting your life in the truth.

Paul introduces the final three pieces of armor with a different expression: “*in addition to all...*” These are the pieces a soldier must actively take up whenever the battle intensifies:

1. “...taking up the shield of faith” (v. 16)
2. “...take the helmet of salvation” (v. 17a)
3. “...take the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God” (v. 17b)

¹⁵ Iain M. Duguid, *The Whole Armor of God* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway; 2019), p. 68.

A soldier's shield, helmet, and sword were essential pieces of his armor, yet they were not always lifted. They were available at all times, but he had to choose to raise them in the moment of attack. In the same way, while your identity in Christ remains secure, you must choose to take up the shield of faith when the enemy unleashes his flaming arrows—temptations, lies, accusations, discouragement, shame, fear, and confusion. If you refuse to lift the shield, those arrows can pierce deeply and set the soul aflame with spiritual harm.

For the Christian, these arrows cannot destroy the soul, but they can wound. They can immobilize you, weaken your confidence, and dull your participation in God's mission. The enemy knows this. He knows you were chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world (Eph. 1:4–6), redeemed by the blood of the Son (1:7–12), and sealed with the Holy Spirit as God's inheritance (1:13–14, 18–23). The devil understands the theological weight of your salvation more clearly than many Christians do. And if he can deceive you, damage your witness, or paralyze you with guilt and shame so that you lose sight of what the cross has secured for you, he will certainly attempt it.

Yet, dear Christian, when the flaming arrows come—and they will—you have a shield that God Himself has given. You may take it up to defend yourself from every assault. God has supplied all that is necessary for your protection, but exercising faith in His promises, depending upon Him daily, and continually saturating your heart and mind with His Word is your responsibility. The shield must be taken up, strengthened, and wielded, for faith in God's revealed Word is the means by which every fiery arrow of the evil one is extinguished.

Conclusion

The enemy will launch his flaming arrows, but we must also recognize another danger implied throughout Ephesians: we are equally vulnerable to self-inflicted wounds when we give in to temptation. The devil cannot make us sin—Scripture is clear that we do that on our own. This is why taking up the full armor of God is essential. When we remember that Christ—not our sin—is our identity, when we rest in His righteousness as our only hope, and when we stand in the truth of every redemptive promise God has made, our resolve to resist sin becomes far more steadfast.

When the flaming arrows fly, you may lower your shield and let them pierce and consume—or you may take up the shield of faith. When the enemy whispers, “You have sinned again, and now you are too filthy for God to love,” you raise your shield, saturated with the Word of God, and reply: “Do not rejoice over me, enemy of mine. Though I fall I will rise; though I dwell in darkness, the LORD is a light for me... He will bring me out to the light, and I will see His righteousness” (Mic. 7:8–9). You take up your shield and declare the truth of Romans 5:8 and 10: “God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us... For if, while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more... we shall be saved by His life.”

Consider Mary and Joseph. Do you not think they endured the relentless barrage of flaming arrows the moment Mary conceived the Son of God while still a virgin? When Gabriel appeared to Mary, he said, “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and give birth to a Son, and you shall name Him Jesus” (Luke 1:30–31). Mary’s only question was how this could happen since she was a virgin. After Gabriel explained that the Holy Spirit would accomplish this miracle, her response was one of pure faith: “Behold, the Lord’s bond-servant; may it be done to me according to your word” (v. 38). Mary could have been overwhelmed by fear—fear of her parents’ reaction, fear of Joseph’s confusion, fear of the judgment of her relatives and neighbors. Instead, she lifted her shield of faith and responded with a song overflowing with Scripture, a song that revealed her heart was anchored in the Word of God.

“My soul exalts the Lord,
And my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior.
“For He has had regard for the humble state of His bond-servant;
For behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed.

“For the Mighty One has done great things for me;
And holy is His name.
“And His mercy is to generation after generation
Toward those who fear Him.

“He has done mighty deeds with His arm;
He has scattered those who were proud in the thoughts of their hearts.
“He has brought down rulers from their thrones,
And has exalted those who were humble.

“He has filled the hungry with good things,
And sent the rich away empty-handed.
“He has given help to His servant Israel,
In remembrance of His mercy,

Just as He spoke to our fathers,
To Abraham and his descendants forever. (Luke 1:47–55)

Joseph could have walked away from Mary in disbelief, but he too took up his shield of faith. He believed that God was not only powerful enough to bring about the supernatural conception of Jesus, but also faithful to fulfill the very promise spoken centuries earlier: “Behold, the virgin will conceive and give birth to a Son, and they shall name Him Immanuel” (Isa. 7:14; cf. Matt. 1:18–25). Joseph stood upon the Word of God, and his obedience demonstrated a faith anchored not in circumstance but in Scripture.

So how does one use the shield of faith? How do you take it up in order to defend yourself? You take up the shield of faith every time you flee to God for refuge through the truth of His Word and cling to Him for comfort and protection in moments of difficulty and distress. Faith becomes a shield when the believer turns to the promises of God, trusts them, and finds in Him the strength to stand against every assault of the evil one.

Chapter 9

The Helmet of Salvation

Ephesians 6:17a

On the night of the first Christmas, an angel appeared to shepherds who were keeping watch over their flocks. Scripture tells us that at the angel's appearing, "the shepherds were terribly frightened." Yet the angel proclaimed to them a message unlike any other: "Do not be afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of great joy which will be for all the people; for today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger" (Luke 2:10–12).

But the story of Christmas does not begin with the shepherds. Nor does it begin with Gabriel's announcement to Mary: "Behold, you will conceive in your womb and give birth to a son, and you shall name Him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David; and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and His kingdom will have no end" (Luke 1:31–33). It does not begin even with the promise made to Joseph: "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife; for the Child who has been conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a Son; and you shall name Him Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins" (Matt. 1:20–21).

The story of Christmas begins much earlier. It begins in the very first words of Scripture: "In the beginning..." (Gen. 1:1). It is a story with an antagonist—the devil. It is centered upon a hero—God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. And it addresses humanity's greatest need—rescue from sin. In the Bible, this story is identified by a single word: gospel, meaning good news. Of this good news Paul wrote, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes" (Rom. 1:16).

Christmas is the story of the promised Savior who is also the promised King—the Lion of the tribe of Judah, of whom it was said: "The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet" (Gen. 49:10). Christmas fulfills the ancient covenant that the Son of David would be unlike any other earthly ruler, for God would "establish the throne of his

kingdom forever” (2 Sam. 7:13). And the Child who would accomplish this, the One who would save His people from their sins, would be called Immanuel, which means: “God with us” (Isa. 7:14).

What is the Helmet of Salvation?

Like the soldier’s shield, the helmet was a piece of armor that could be taken up and set aside as needed. For the Roman soldier, the helmet was typically made of bronze and fitted with cheek pieces to protect the sides of the face and head. As with the breastplate of righteousness, Paul draws his imagery directly from Isaiah 59:17: “He put on righteousness like a breastplate, and a helmet of salvation on His head; and He put on garments of vengeance for clothing and wrapped Himself with zeal as a cloak.” As noted earlier, the Suffering Servant of Isaiah 53—the One pierced for our offenses and crushed for our iniquities—is the same Divine Warrior of Isaiah 59. That chapter opens with these words: “Behold, the LORD’s hand is not so short that it cannot save; nor is His ear so dull that it cannot hear” (v. 1). The One who saves is the One to whom righteousness and salvation truly belong.

When redemption and righteousness lay utterly beyond the reach of sinful humanity, Immanuel clothed Himself in divine armor—“righteousness like a breastplate, and a helmet of salvation”—and entered the world through the virgin’s womb to save His people from their sins. But what does it mean to be saved from our sins? And is salvation something that can be taken up and set aside like a helmet? To answer these questions, we must first understand what Scripture means by salvation.

The term salvation literally denotes preservation or deliverance from harm, ruin, or loss. In the fullest biblical sense, salvation is a reality that spans the past, the present, and the future. Jesus came to save His people from their sins in such a way that they are delivered from the guilt of sin in the past, the power of sin in the present, and the final presence of sin in the future. His saving work addresses every dimension of the curse.

When Adam and Eve sinned, the entire created order was brought under a curse. Humanity’s communion with God was disrupted, death entered the world, and the peace God intended for His image-bearers was shattered. Scripture states plainly: “Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all mankind, because all sinned...” (Rom. 5:12). Regarding this multifaceted reality, Timothy Keller once observed: “The Bible says every Christian stands in the middle of three tenses of their salvation. You can’t understand the glory and the beauty of it unless you see it. In fact, you won’t be able to understand the Scripture and you won’t be able to understand what’s happening to you if you don’t understand.”¹⁶

¹⁶ Timothy J. Keller, *The Timothy Keller Sermon Archive* (New York City: Redeemer Presbyterian Church, 2013).

We stand in the past tense of our salvation.

In Christ, you have been rescued from the penalty of sin. Your guilt has been wiped away, you are wrapped in the spotless righteousness of Jesus, and you now stand justified before a holy God (1 Pet. 3:18). This is not simply a hope, but the unshakable reality for every believer: we have been saved from the penalty of sin.

We stand in the present tense of our salvation.

You are being saved in the sense that God is actively transforming you through the power of His Holy Spirit. The remnants of your sinful nature remain, and the struggle against sin is undeniably real; yet with every passing moment on this side of eternity, you are being shaped into greater Christlikeness. This is the ongoing “fight” the Christian life demands. As Paul exhorts, “Fight the good fight of the faith; take hold of the eternal life to which you were called” (1 Tim. 6:12). This is the present reality of the believer: we are being saved from sin’s power.

We also stand in the future tense of our salvation.

Because we have been saved from sin’s penalty and are being saved from sin’s power, we may rest confidently in the promise that Christ—Isaiah’s Divine Warrior—*will* rescue us fully and finally from the presence of sin. The third verse of *Joy to the World* captures this hope with beautiful accuracy:

No more let sins and sorrows grow,
Nor thorns infest the ground;
He comes to make His blessings flow
Far as the curse is found.

Jesus came to save His people from their sins in the fullest sense—He will make His blessings flow as far as the curse is found. On that day, “death will be swallowed up in victory” (1 Cor. 15:54), “what is mortal will be swallowed up by life” (2 Cor. 5:4), “sorrow and sighing will flee away” (Isa. 51:11), “every tear will be wiped away” (Rev. 21:4), and “all things” will be made new (Rev. 21:5). This is the great and final reality of redemption: *we will be saved from sin’s presence forever and receive a better, more glorious Eden.*

Because of this, the salvation Jesus brings is not something we take off and put on again. So what, then, is the helmet of salvation? According to 1 Thessalonians 5:8, the helmet is “the hope of salvation.” Paul writes: “But since we are of the day, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet, the hope of salvation.” The helmet protects the mind by fixing it on the unshakeable hope that we have been saved, are being saved, and will be saved. This hope anchors us regardless of what the enemy launches at us or what we suffer in this life, for “the night is almost gone, and the day is near” (Rom. 13:12).

How Do You Take Up the Helmet of Salvation?

To take up the helmet of salvation is to live in the reality that this mortal life is not the end and that you are, now and forever, a child of the living God. The helmet of salvation protects the

head—your mind, your thoughts, and your line of sight—so that you can clearly see the hope that is yours in Christ. When life collapses around you, when disease shortens earthly days, when resources vanish, when the proverbial rug is pulled out from beneath your feet, and when it seems that all is lost, the helmet of salvation enables you to respond with gospel-centered hope: “For our momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison” (2 Cor. 4:17).

The helmet of salvation is the assurance of our salvation, and there are two dangers faced by anyone within a Bible-teaching, gospel-centered church. The first danger is believing you are a Christian when you are not. If someone believes that intellectual assent to Jesus is sufficient for salvation while their life remains untouched and unchanged by the power of the gospel, then that person may not possess true saving faith. Genuine saving faith trusts that the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ is sufficient for the salvation of the soul. The evidence of such faith is seen in standing upon what Christ has accomplished in the past, living by the power of the Spirit in the present, and hoping in the full salvation to come in the future. Ephesians 2:8–10 makes this unmistakably clear: salvation is by grace through faith, yet those whom God saves are His workmanship, “created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.” A changing life—one increasingly shaped into the likeness of Christ—is the fruit of genuine faith.

The second danger is that the enemy may tempt you to doubt your salvation. If he can cause you to question whether you truly belong to Christ, he may also tempt you to live nearer to sin than to the Savior who redeemed you. But when you take up the helmet of salvation, you do so while standing in the shoes of the gospel of peace, with your identity in Christ firmly belted around your waist, the righteousness of Christ secured over your chest, and your faith strengthened by the Word of God. When the devil attempts to undermine your confidence in Christ, you lift your helmet knowing that, because of Jesus, “there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (Rom. 8:1).

To take up the helmet of salvation in the presence of the enemy is to do so with confidence, believing that “He who began a good work among you will complete it by the day of Christ Jesus” (Phil. 1:6). When the attacks come and the devil—or even your own flesh—tempts you to doubt the sufficiency of Christ, you answer with the assurance of 2 Corinthians 4:7–9: “We have this treasure in earthen containers, so that the extraordinary greatness of the power will be of God and not from ourselves; we are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not despairing; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed.”

How do we know that the salvation Jesus provides is enough? Because the One born to save His people from their sins is the “Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace” long promised in Isaiah 9:6–7. He is the promised King, “whose times of coming forth are from long ago, from the days of eternity” (Mic. 5:2). The One born King of the Jews is the very One who declared, “I am the first and I am the last; there is no God besides Me” (Isa. 44:6;

cf. Rev. 1:17–18). Jesus can save because He is the righteous Branch of David, called “Yahweh Our Righteousness” (Jer. 23:5–6). He is “the image of the invisible God,” the One by whom and for whom all things were created (Col. 1:15–16). His salvation is enough because, though He existed in the form of God, He “humbled Himself by taking the form of a bond-servant... becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross” (Phil. 2:6–11). This is why we can have absolute confidence in the hope of Ephesians 1:7–8: “In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our wrongdoings, according to the riches of His grace which He lavished on us.”

In light of all that Jesus is and all that He has done to secure your salvation, who are you, Christian? You are chosen by God before the foundation of the world (Eph. 1:4–6). Who are you, Christian? You are redeemed by the blood of His Son (1:7–12). Who are you, Christian? You are sealed by the Holy Spirit until the day when redemption is finally complete (1:13–14). You can have complete confidence that Jesus is enough because He alone is the Divine Warrior who lived the life you could not live and died the death you deserved. Jesus is your righteousness, and He is your salvation.

Some time ago, I read words from Thomas Watson that capture beautifully the magnitude of the salvation Christ accomplished:

“He was poor that he might make us rich. He was born of a virgin that we might be born of God. He took our flesh that he might give us his Spirit. He lay in the manger that we might lie in paradise. He came down from heaven that he might bring us to heaven... that the Ancient of Days should be born,—that he who thunders in the heavens should cry in the cradle,—that he who rules the stars should suck the breast,—that a virgin should conceive,—that Christ should be made of a woman which himself made,—that the branch should bear the vine,—that the mother should be younger than the child she bore, and the child in the womb bigger than the mother,—that the human nature should not be God, yet one with God: this was not only amazing but miraculous.”¹⁷

If you are a Christian, Jesus is the hope of your salvation, for He is the very helmet that guards your mind and steadies your soul. If you are not a Christian, you may receive Him as the hope of your salvation today by surrendering your life to Him as Savior and Lord.

¹⁷ Thomas Watson, *A Body of Divinity* (London: T. Nelson & Sons, 1867), 196.

Chapter 10

The Sword of the Spirit

Ephesians 6:17b

Ancient warfare was fierce. It was close, it was personal, it was dirty, it was aggressive, it was violent, and it was in your face. In preparation for battle, soldiers lined up in tight formation side by side with about three feet separating each soldier so that they could move freely. Every piece of the armor was critically important: The belt kept everything he was wearing in its rightful place, the breastplate protected his vital organs, his shoes were designed so that he could stand his ground and maintain his footing, his shield helped protected him from any weapon that would pierce such as arrows or spears, and his helmet kept his head on his shoulders, protected his mind, line of sight, and neck. The part of his armor that was designed to defend and to harm was his sword.

The sword used by Rome's soldiers between 3BC and 3AD was a double-edged short sword known as the Gladius. Roman legionaries whose shield defended them from the fiery arrows of the enemy received advanced training in using the Gladius to slash the exposed kneecaps or throat of their enemies while in formation and carried their Gladius sword on their belt, or sometimes on a shoulder strap.

When marching into battle, a soldier could never forget his belt, breastplate, or shoes—those pieces of armor were secured tightly to his body, essential and ever-present. Yet, the shield, helmet, and sword could be left behind in the safety and comfort of the camp, tempting some to take them for granted. But no seasoned warrior would ever risk stepping onto the battlefield without these vital defenses—the shield to block deadly attacks, the helmet to guard his mind, and the sword to fight back. Only a foolish or careless soldier would neglect the armor he must deliberately take up and put on; for in the heat of combat, these are the difference between survival and defeat.

A modern equivalent to just how foolish it would be for a Roman soldier to forget any part of his armor is a Russian soldier who became the 2022 winner of the Darwin Awards. The Darwin Awards are those awards given to honor Charles Darwin by commemorating “those who improve

the gene pool – by removing themselves from it in the most spectacular way possible.” Here is the description of the unnamed Russian soldier who won this award:

You are wearing body armor in a warzone. You spot abandoned MacBook. You want MacBook. Where to hide it? With quick reflexes a Russian soldier slid that MacBook into his chest armor pocket, replacing a ballistic plate designed to save his life.

He was killed in Irpin, and his body was retrieved, providing a hearty laugh for all of Ukraine. 'Instant Karma' They reportedly found a stolen iPad as well. Wonder where the iPad was hidden?¹⁸

I am no soldier, and although I love my MacBook Pro and have a great deal of respect for the way it is designed, even I know enough that in a warzone it is best to keep the ballistic plate in the chest armor pocket because a MacBook was never designed to stop a bullet. Yet, when it comes to the armor of God, how often do we intentionally or unintentionally replace that which is designed to protect with philosophies, ideologies, feelings, and practices that serve the enemy rather than our own protection?

What is the Sword of the Spirit

Paul tells us plainly that “the sword of the Spirit... is the word of God.” From Genesis to Revelation, Scripture claims more than 3,000 times to be “the Word of the LORD.” Paul writes, “All Scripture is inspired by God and beneficial for teaching, for rebuke, for correction, for training in righteousness...” (2 Tim. 3:16). Moses reminded Israel, “Man shall not live on bread alone, but... on everything that comes out of the mouth of the LORD” (Deut. 8:3), a verse Jesus Himself used against the devil during His temptation in the wilderness (Matt. 4:1–11). The Psalms declare, “The Law of the LORD is perfect, restoring the soul... the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes” (Ps. 19:7–8), and Isaiah emphasizes God’s authority by reminding us that the Lord looks with favor on “the one who is humble and contrite in spirit, and who trembles at My word” (Isa. 66:1–2).

The written Word of God—contained in the sixty-six books of the Old and New Testaments—is a supernatural, Spirit-inspired, inerrant revelation. Written over centuries by many authors under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, it now stands as the foundation upon which Christ is building His church through “the apostles and prophets” (Eph. 2:19–22). Scripture is not only instructive but powerful, penetrating, and transformative: “For the word of God is living and active, and sharper than any two-edged sword... able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart” (Heb. 4:12). Jesus affirmed the same in His prayer to the Father: “I have given them Your word... Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth” (John 17:14–17). Paul likewise teaches that Christ sanctifies His church “by the washing of water with the word” (Eph. 5:26–27).

¹⁸ “Steel Macbook Armor: 2022 Darwin Award Winner—Confirmed True,” *The Darwin Awards*, <http://darwinawards.com/darwin/darwin2022-03.html>.

So we know what the Word of God is; now we must answer the next question: How do we use it as the Sword of the Spirit?

How Do We Use the Sword of the Spirit

To grasp how we are to wield the sword of the Spirit, it is important to understand the two main Greek terms for “word” found in Scripture: *logos* and *rhēma*. *Logos* is often translated as “word” or “message,” while *rhēma* is translated as “word,” “saying,” or “statement.” In Hebrews 4:12 and Isaiah 66:2 (LXX), *logos* is used to describe the Word of God. In Deuteronomy 8:3 (LXX) and Ephesians 6:17, the word *rhēma* appears. What is the point? Both terms refer to the written and spoken word of God, and both derive their authority from God Himself. Every word in Scripture is authoritative because it is the Word of God, used by the Spirit of God to transform the people of God. When you read or speak the Word of God as given in all sixty-six books of the Bible, you hear the voice of God through His revelation. Paul’s words in Ephesians 6:17 are deliberate and Spirit-inspired: “Take... the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.” God uses the authority of His own words—wielded by His Spirit—to transform, confront, correct, and strengthen His people.

Jesus Himself shows us how to use Scripture as an offensive weapon in Matthew 4:1–11 and Luke 4:1–13. For forty days, Jesus fasted in the same wilderness where Israel wandered for forty years because they failed to believe and obey God’s word. Every temptation the devil presented to Jesus reflected a challenge that Israel had previously encountered and failed to overcome. In contrast, Jesus met each test by quoting Scripture—demonstrating discernment, accuracy, and unwavering faithfulness in His responses.

1. **Temptation of Provision:** Israel grumbled for bread in Exodus 16; Satan tempted Jesus to turn stones into bread. Jesus answered with Deuteronomy 8:3: “*Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.*”
2. **Temptation of Presumption:** Israel repeatedly tested God. Satan tempted Jesus to throw Himself from the temple, even quoting Psalm 91 deceptively. Jesus responded with Deuteronomy 6:16: “*You shall not put the LORD your God to the test.*”
3. **Temptation of Worship:** Israel often worshiped false gods. Satan offered Jesus the kingdoms of the world without the cross if Jesus would worship him. Jesus replied with Deuteronomy 6:13: “*You shall worship the LORD your God, and serve Him only.*”

Two of these temptations were not inherently evil—there is nothing sinful about eating when hungry or trusting God’s protection—but the devil’s scheme was to pull Jesus away from trusting the Father’s plan. That is always his aim. And just as Jesus answered with Scripture, so must we.

Yet we frequently counter temptation with human reasoning rather than God’s Word. We rationalize: “We’re going to get married anyway.” “It’s only a little lie.” “At least it’s not a four-letter word.” “It’s just a few scenes in the movie.” “It only happens once a month.” Our tendency

to question is reminiscent of the serpent's ancient tactic: "Did God really say...?" Consider how the outcome might have changed if Adam had firmly responded with God's Word in the Garden. Imagine the story unfolding differently had he stood on Scripture's authority.

You can take up the Word of God as the sword of the Spirit, or you can leave it sheathed. But no one becomes skilled with a sword by leaving it unused. Skill comes only when the sword is drawn. To wield Scripture with skill, we must read it, study it, memorize it, meditate on it, and immerse ourselves in it until it shapes our instincts, our desires, and our responses. Just as marksmen become more accurate through consistent practice and martial artists advance through disciplined training, Christians also develop proficiency with the Word of God by engaging with it regularly. In the same way that physical skills are refined under the guidance of experienced instructors and reliable resources, God has graciously provided pastors, theologians, scholars, and devoted teachers to help us deepen our understanding and enhance our ability to rightly handle His Word.

Paul told Timothy, "Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a worker who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth" (2 Tim. 2:15). Some assume this applies only to pastors, but Scripture makes clear that every Christian must learn to handle God's Word well. How do we know? Because of Jesus' command to every believer: "Go, therefore, and make disciples... teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age" (Matt. 28:19–20). Every Christian is called to teach—therefore every Christian must learn to wield the sword of the Spirit.

Conclusion

Remember: the schemes belong to the devil, but the armor belongs to God. The sword of the Spirit is no exception. The list of God's armor begins with the belt of truth and concludes with the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God. Throughout this study we have seen that the belt of truth is our identity in Jesus; the breastplate of righteousness is our righteousness in Jesus; the shoes of the gospel of peace are our redemption by Jesus; the shield of faith is provided through Jesus; the helmet of salvation is the hope of our salvation in Jesus; and the sword of the Spirit—God's very Word—leads us back to Jesus. As Paul wrote, "all the promises of God find their Yes in Him" (2 Cor. 1:19–22).

Jesus is not merely God's "Yes" to His own promises—He is God's perfect revelation of Himself because He is the living Word of God. John's Gospel opens with this staggering declaration: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God... All things came into being through Him" (John 1:1–3). And then, the miracle of Christmas: "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us" (v. 14). The One who spoke the worlds into being wrapped Himself in human flesh to redeem the people He created.

Jesus is your belt. Jesus is your breastplate. Jesus is your peace. Jesus is your shield. Jesus is your helmet. And Jesus is your sword. To "be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His

might” is to find Christ to be your life, your protection, your hope, your defense, your righteousness, your truth, and your only weapon against the darkness. Iain Duguid captures this beautifully in *The Whole Armor of God*. What follows is, in many ways, the heart of the Christmas message:

As the Word of God, he [Jesus] spoke the world into existence. As the Word of God, he uniquely reveals to us the Father. As the Word of God, he is God’s final communication to this broken and now redeemed world, come to heal the sick, rescue the lost, restore the broken, and lift up the downcast... The Word of God in its cleansing work serves as a set of shears, a scalpel, and a sword. Ask God to equip you with these three different tools, each one uniquely crafted to help us in the fight against temptation by the world, the flesh, and the devil. All that sanctifying power flows into your life through the work of the Holy Spirit applying his Word. And when you fail and fall, as you often will, the Sword of the Spirit points you back again to the fact that the gospel is still true and Christ’s power is still sufficient to keep you safe and bring you at last into your heavenly inheritance.”¹⁹

This is the hope that steadies us. This is the strength that sustains us. And this is the Savior who equips us—until the day when faith becomes sight and the battle is over at last.

¹⁹ Iain M. Duguid, *The Whole Armor of God* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway; 2019), pp. 101-02.

Chapter 11

The Power to Stand Firm

Ephesians 6:18-24

At the beginning of his letter, Paul prayed that these beloved Christians would grasp the wonder of what it means to be a Christian and what it means to be the Church: “I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you will know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the boundless greatness of His power toward us who believe” (Eph. 1:18–19). Is this not what we long for as well—to see with the eyes of our hearts the hope we possess because God has called us, to comprehend the staggering reality that we are God’s inheritance, and to live in the fullness of the boundless power that now belongs to those redeemed by His Son?

What does it mean to be a Christian? What does it mean to be the Church? The New Testament answers these questions more than two hundred times, and over thirty times in Ephesians alone, with one defining phrase: you are “in Christ.”

Before God spoke creation into existence, He chose you and set His love upon you so that you would be holy and blameless in Christ (1:4–6). Your sin was not great enough to keep you from His love, for He accomplished your redemption through His Son, who shed His blood for your sins and lavished His grace upon you (vv. 7–12). You have been sealed with the Holy Spirit, guaranteeing your complete and final salvation—and all of this was done in Christ (vv. 13–14). What did you contribute to such a salvation? Nothing. Every blessing came to you in and through Christ alone.

The Christ who was raised from the dead and seated at the right hand of the Father is now yours (1:20–21). The Christ who is far above all rule, authority, power, and dominion—He to whom the obedience of the nations belongs and who is head over all things—is now yours (vv. 22–23). And what did you do to receive Him? When you were dead in your sins, a child of wrath, indulging the desires of the flesh and mind, what compelled God to save you? It was His rich mercy, His great love, and His all-sufficient grace that made you alive together with Christ (2:1–9). You are now in Christ, and all because of Christ.

Christian, you who were once far off have now been brought near. Christ Himself is your peace, your truth, your righteousness (2:11–16). You are united to Him and made part of His body (4:1–32). As a member of His Church—the Bride of Christ—you are being cleansed and sanctified by His Word and the power of the Holy Spirit (5:22–32).

So when you reach Paul’s exhortation in 6:10—“Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might”—you already know where such strength is found. It is found in Christ. We are strong in the Lord when we put on the full armor of God, yet the irony is that everything commanded there is already ours through union with Jesus. He is your belt of truth. He is your breastplate of righteousness. He is your gospel of peace. He is your shield of faith. He is your helmet of salvation. He is your sword of the Spirit. We grow strong in the Lord to the degree that we recognize our weakness and our constant need to pursue Him.

The only way you will ever see how weak you truly are is by seeing how big God is, how sufficient Jesus is as your Savior, and how powerful the Holy Spirit is as the One who keeps you.

The Role of Prayer in Spiritual Warfare

With the remainder of this chapter, we turn to Paul’s concluding instruction: how Christians are to pray. Only after understanding the nature of prayer can we grasp how prayer activates and empowers the armor of God.

Ephesians 6:18 contains four sweeping categories of prayer, all anchored in a single Greek word repeated four times—*pas* (πᾶς), meaning “all” or “every.” Some Bible translations use the word “all” for each instance in this verse, while others—such as the NASB—switch between “all” and “every” to enhance readability: “With every [*pas*] prayer and request, pray at all [*pas*] times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be alert with all [*pas*] perseverance and every request for all [*pas*] the saints...” In this, Paul makes it clear: there is no room for indifference or restriction. Prayer should permeate every aspect of the Christian life—every form, every moment, with unwavering perseverance, and for every believer. Listed below are five ways we are to pray:

1. We are to pray in ALL ways to God (v. 18a).

Prayer takes many forms: quiet prayer, spoken prayer, corporate prayer, private prayer; prayer while standing, kneeling, prostrate, walking; prayer with eyes closed or open, with head bowed or lifted up. Because you are in Christ, no posture, place, or method is too ordinary to become sacred ground for communion with God.

2. We are to pray at ALL times to God (v. 18b).

We pray in the evening, in the morning, and at midday. We pray in seasons of suffering, hunger, illness, or joy. There is no hour in which God’s door is shut to His children; no moment in which He is unavailable; no circumstance in which prayer is out of place. The throne of grace never closes.

3. We are to pray with ALL perseverance (v. 18c).

All-times prayer must also be all-endurance prayer. We pray while remaining spiritually alert, because we live between Christ's first advent and His second. Until He returns, we inhabit enemy territory, where our adversary prowls like a roaring lion seeking someone to devour (1 Pet. 5:8). Jesus warned us: "Watch out, stay alert; for you do not know when the appointed time is" (Mark 13:33). Sinclair Ferguson summarizes it well: "Christ is building his church on territory that has been occupied by an enemy. Alertness is always essential when living in a war zone."

4. We are to pray for ALL the saints (v. 18d).

As we pray for ourselves, we must also pray for every believer—those in our homes, our church, our community, and the global Body of Christ. We pray not only for those with whom we agree theologically, but for all who belong to Jesus. This includes spouses, children, grandchildren, friends, and believers across the world. And we pray expecting God to work, for He is able to do "far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think..." (Eph. 3:20).

5. We are to pray in ALL ways and at ALL times in the Spirit.

This final emphasis draws the whole verse together. Prayer is to be Spirit-enabled, Spirit-shaped, and Spirit-empowered. The Holy Spirit is the divine strength behind the armor of God. Without His power, we cannot stand strong, resist the schemes of the devil, or remain firm on the evil day.

Prayer and the Power of the Armor of God

To "pray in the Spirit" in Ephesians 6:18 is not a reference to praying in tongues; that is addressed elsewhere in Scripture, but not here. Praying in the Spirit means praying with the confidence, access, and assurance that belong to those who are in Christ. To pray in the Spirit is to pray knowing that the God who spoke billions of stars into existence with a word hears you as your Father—and that He is able to "do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think" (Eph. 3:20). This is the confidence described in Romans 8:14–16: "For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons and daughters of God. For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons and daughters by which we cry out, 'Abba! Father!'" The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God..."

Earlier in Paul's epistle, in Ephesians 4:30 and 5:18, we learn that being "filled with the Spirit" does not mean receiving more of the Holy Spirit. It means the Holy Spirit receives more of you. The more of your mind, will, heart, and obedience He governs, the more of His power you will experience. The same truth applies here: the strength of the Lord is known more fully as He possesses more fully the whole of your life. This is why the power of the armor of God is not found in your ability to "put it on," nor in your human resolve, nor even in your spiritual disciplines. The power of the armor of God is in the One to whom the armor belongs. Every piece of the armor is Christ Himself—His truth, His righteousness, His peace, His faithfulness,

His salvation, His Word. To “put on” the armor is simply to live in the reality of your union with Him.

And so Paul’s letter comes full circle. What began in Ephesians 1:1–14 with the breathtaking announcement of who we are in Christ now concludes with the call to stand firm in Christ (6:18–24). The One who chose you, redeemed you, sealed you, and united you to Himself is the same One whose strength enables you to resist the schemes of the devil, to persevere in prayer, and to stand firm on the evil day.

Conclusion

The baby born on the first Christmas and laid in a manger is Christ the Lord. He who was born of a virgin is the same One who formed Mary in her mother’s womb. The One through whom all things were created was laid in a manger for the purpose of carrying a cross and dying for sinners. The One who lived the life we could not live, in order to die the death we deserved, is not only our Savior but also our Mediator: “For there is one God, and one mediator also between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself as a ransom for all...” (1 Tim. 2:5–6). Jesus Christ belongs to you dear Christian, not because of anything you have done, but because of His victory on the cross and over the grave: “In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our wrongdoings, according to the riches of His grace which He lavished on us” (Eph. 1:7–8a).

It is no surprise, then, that Paul concludes his letter with a call for those who are in Christ to pray in the Spirit—in all ways, at all times, with all perseverance, and for all the saints. Why? Because in Jesus, “we have such a high priest, who has taken His seat at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens” (Heb. 8:1). If you are a Christian, one of the first truths Ephesians presses upon you is that you are “in Christ.” To be in Christ means you now share an unbreakable union with Him—chosen by the Father, purchased by the Son, and sealed by the Holy Spirit. Prayer is the fruit of that union, the communion we enjoy with God, the direct access we possess because of Christ. Prayer is the supply line by which we experience the strength of the Lord and the power of the armor of God.

Jesus is the belt of truth—your identity in Him—but your security in Him will only be as firm as your confidence that He truly is “the way, and the truth, and the life” (John 14:6). Jesus is your breastplate of righteousness, but your assurance in Him will only be as strong as your certainty that His righteousness is all the righteousness you will ever need. Jesus is the gospel of peace upon which you stand, but your stability in standing firm depends entirely on how deeply you understand and embrace the completeness of His gospel. Jesus is your shield of faith, but the strength of that shield depends on how saturated your faith is in His Word. Jesus is the helmet of your salvation, but the hope that steadies you will only be as effective as your joy in the greatness of that salvation. Jesus is the sword of the Spirit—the Word to whom all Scripture points—but your ability to wield it depends on your willingness to take it up.

Prayer is what happens when we recognize how weak we are and how great God is. Prayer is the evidence of growing intimacy with Christ. Sam Allberry captures this beautifully in his book, *One with My Lord*: “Growth in the Christian life is needing God more, not needing him less. So we will be doing more asking over the years, not less asking. We don’t grow out of prayer, just further into it.”²⁰ This is why it is only fitting that Paul concludes his epistle with an appeal to pray at all times. The more we seek God out of a growing awareness of our weakness, the more we will be shaped into the likeness of Jesus. Sam Allberry expresses this with clarity: “Prayer is not about bending God to our wills but about expressing our own wills as they are being bent to his.”²¹

It is important to remember that our union with Christ does not rely on our performance as believers—our good deeds do not make Jesus more accessible to us. Our connection to Christ is firmly established and eternally secure because of His flawless life and unwavering faithfulness; He is fully available to everyone through what He has already accomplished. However, the extent to which we rely on Him determines how much of our hearts He truly holds. As we surrender more of our mind, heart, and will to Him, we experience a greater outpouring of His strength in our lives. You cannot become “less” in Christ than you already are, but the level of His power within you will reflect the depth of your surrender to Him.

So, dear Christian, the question is simple: How much of you does Jesus truly have? Oh, dear brother... dear sister in Christ... do you not long to see with the eyes of your heart the hope of His calling, the riches of His glorious inheritance, and the immeasurable greatness of His power toward us who believe (1:18–19)? Do you not want your life firmly rooted upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus Himself as your chief cornerstone (2:20)? Do you not yearn for the spiritual fullness that comes from comprehending “the width and length and height and depth” of the love of Christ (3:18–19)? Are you not weary of the shallow thrills this world throws at you, when Christ offers the deep joy of walking in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called (4:1–3)?

If you truly grasped your union in Christ, you would seek the unity to which you are called with all who belong to His church (4:4–6). If you understood what you share with Christ, you would desire to be filled with the Spirit rather than grieve Him (4:30; 5:18). And because of the great redemption you now enjoy, would you not hate the things that displease Him (5:1–13)? Would you not long to come out of this life carrying the aroma of Christ? Do you not hear—even now—the Spirit’s summons: “Awake, sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you” (5:14)?

To be truly strong in the Lord and to stand firm against every scheme of the devil—especially in the darkest moments—becomes a living reality only as you honestly acknowledge your own weakness and come to rest in the absolute sufficiency of Christ: His strength for every need, His

²⁰ Sam Allberry, *One With My Lord* (Weaton, IL: Crossway; 2024), p. 151

²¹ *Ibid.*; p.152.

presence for every moment, His victory for everyone who trusts in Him. May the world unmistakably recognize us—not by our own strength, but because of Christ is us—for the way we love Him, live for Him, and serve those around us.

Ps. 18:31–32. For who is God, but the LORD? And who is a rock, except our God, ³²the God who encircles me with strength, and makes my way blameless?

Ps. 28:7–8. The LORD is my strength and my shield; my heart trusts in Him, and I am helped; therefore my heart triumphs, and with my song I shall thank Him. ⁸The LORD is their strength, and He is a refuge of salvation to His anointed.

Isa. 40:26. Raise your eyes on high and see who has created these *stars*, the One who brings out their multitude by number, He calls them all by name; because of the greatness of His might and the strength of *His* power, not one *of them* is missing.

Ps. 59:16–17. But as for me, I will sing of Your strength; yes, I will joyfully sing of Your faithfulness in the morning, for You have been my refuge and a place of refuge on the day of my distress. ¹⁷My strength, I will sing praises to You; for God is my refuge, the God who shows me favor.

Ps. 68:35. God, *You are* awesome from Your sanctuary. The God of Israel Himself gives strength and power to the people. Blessed be God!

Deut. 31:23. Then He commissioned Joshua the son of Nun, and said, “Be strong and courageous, for you will bring the sons of Israel into the land which I swore to them, and I will be with you.”

THE ARMOR OF GOD

¹⁰ Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might.

1 Cor. 16:13. Be on the alert, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong.

2 Tim. 2:1. You therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.

1 John 2:14. I have written to you, fathers, because you know Him who has been from the beginning. I have written to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God remains in you, and you have overcome the evil one.

Eph. 1:18–19a. *I pray that* the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you will know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, ¹⁹and what is the boundless greatness of His power toward us who believe.

Rom. 4:18–20. In hope against hope he believed, so that he might become a father of many nations according to that which had been spoken, “SO SHALL YOUR DESCENDANTS BE.” ¹⁹Without becoming weak in faith he contemplated his own body, now *as good as* dead since he was about a hundred years old, and the deadness of Sarah’s womb; ²⁰yet, with respect to the promise of God, he did not waver in unbelief but grew strong in faith, giving glory to God...

Old Testament

Josh. 1:6. Be strong and courageous, for you shall give this people possession of the land which I swore to their fathers to give them.

Ps. 20:7. Some *praise their* chariots and some *their* horses, but we will praise the name of the LORD, our God.

Job 29:14. “I put on righteousness, and it clothed me; My justice was like a robe and a headband.”

Ephesians 6:10-24

¹⁰ Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might.

¹¹ Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil.

¹² 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.

The Gospels & Acts

Matt. 16:17. And Jesus said to him, “Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood did not reveal *this* to you, but My Father who is in heaven.”

John 12:31. “Now judgment is *upon* this world; now the ruler of this world will be cast out.”

Luke 22:53. “While I was with you daily in the temple, you did not lay hands on Me; but this hour and the power of darkness are yours.”

Epistles & Revelation

Rom. 13:12. The night is almost gone, and the day is near. Therefore let’s rid ourselves of the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light.

Eph. 4:14. As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of people, by craftiness in deceitful scheming...

2 Cor. 10:3–4. For though we walk in the flesh, we do not wage battle according to the flesh, ⁴for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses.

1 Cor. 15:23–24. But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, after that those who are Christ’s at His coming, ²⁴then *comes* the end, when He hands over the kingdom to *our* God and Father, when He has abolished all rule and all authority and power.

Eph. 1:19b–21. *These are* in accordance with the working of the strength of His might ²⁰which He brought about in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the

¹² 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.

Acts 26:18. "...to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who have been sanctified by faith in Me."

heavenly *places*, ²¹far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come.

Eph. 2:1–2. And you were dead in your offenses and sins, ²in which you previously walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience.

Eph. 3:10. ...so that the multifaceted wisdom of God might now be made known through the church to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly *places*.

Col. 1:13. For He rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son...

Titus 3:1–2. Remind them to be subject to rulers, to authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good deed, ²to slander no one, not to be contentious, *to be* gentle, showing every consideration for all people.

Col. 1:16. for by Him all things were created, *both* in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones, or dominions, or rulers, or authorities—all things have been created through Him and for Him.

Eph. 1:3. 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,

Isa. 11:5. Also righteousness will be the belt *around* His hips, and faithfulness the belt *around* His waist.

Isa. 59:17. He put on righteousness like a breastplate, and a helmet of salvation on His head; and He put on garments of vengeance for clothing and wrapped Himself with zeal as a cloak.

Jer. 23:5-6. “Behold, *the* days are coming,” declares the LORD, “When I will raise up for David a righteous Branch; and He will reign as king and act wisely and do justice and righteousness in the land. ⁶In His days Judah will be saved, And Israel will live securely; And this is His name by which He will be called, ‘The LORD Our Righteousness.’”

Isa. 61:10. I will rejoice greatly in the LORD, My soul will be joyful in my God; for He has clothed me with garments of salvation, He has wrapped me with a robe of righteousness, as a groom puts on a turban, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.

¹³ Therefore, take up the full armor of God, so that you will be able to resist on the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm.

¹⁴ Stand firm therefore, having belted your waist with truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness,

Luke 12:35. “Be prepared, and *keep* your lamps lit.”

John 14:6. Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father except through Me.”

John 17:15–17. “I am not asking You to take them out of the world, but to keep them away from the evil one. ¹⁶They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. ¹⁷Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth.”

Jas. 4:7. Submit therefore to God. But resist the devil, and he will flee from you.

Eph. 5:15–16. So then, be careful how you walk, not as unwise people but as wise, ¹⁶making the most of your time, because the days are evil.

1 Pet. 1:13. Therefore, prepare your minds for action, keep sober *in spirit*, set your hope completely on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

Rom. 13:12-14. The night is almost gone, and the day is near. Therefore let’s rid ourselves of the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light. ¹³Let’s behave properly as in the day, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual promiscuity and debauchery, not in strife and jealousy. ¹⁴But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh in regard to *its* lusts.

1 Thess. 5:8. But since we are of *the* day, let’s be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet, the hope of salvation.

Old Testament

Isa. 52:7. How delightful on the mountains are the feet of one who brings good news, who announces peace and brings good news of happiness, who announces salvation, *and* says to Zion, “Your God reigns!”

Prov. 30:5. Every word of God is pure; He is a shield to those who take refuge in Him.

Gen. 15:1. After these things the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision, saying, “Do not fear, Abram, I am a shield to you; Your reward shall be very great.”

Ps. 5:12. For You bless the righteous person, LORD, You surround him with favor as with a shield.

Ps. 7:12–13. If one does not repent, He will sharpen His sword; He has bent His bow and taken aim. ¹³He has also prepared deadly weapons for Himself; He makes His arrows fiery *shafts*.

Ps. 120:1–4. I cried to the LORD in my trouble, and He answered me. ²Rescue my soul, LORD, from lying lips, from a deceitful tongue. ³What will *He* give to you, and what more will *He* do to you, you deceitful tongue? ⁴Sharp arrows of the warrior, with the *burning* coals of the broom tree!

Isa. 59:17. He put on righteousness like a breastplate, and a helmet of salvation on His head; and He put on garments of vengeance for clothing and

Ephesians 6:10-24

¹⁵ **and having strapped on your feet the preparation of the gospel of peace;**

¹⁶ **in addition to all, taking up the shield of faith with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one.**

¹⁷ **And take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit,**

The Gospels & Acts

Matt. 5:37. “But make sure your statement is, ‘Yes, yes’ or ‘No, no’; anything beyond these is of evil *origin*.”

Epistles & Revelation

Rom. 10:15. But how are they to preach unless they are sent? Just as it is written: “HOW BEAUTIFUL ARE THE FEET OF THOSE WHO BRING GOOD NEWS OF GOOD THINGS!”

1 Thess. 5:8. But since we are of *the* day, let’s be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet, the hope of salvation.

1 John 5:4. For whoever has been born of God overcomes the world; and this is the victory that has overcome the world: our faith.

1 Thess. 5:8–9. But since we are of *the* day, let’s be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet, the hope of salvation. ⁹For God

wrapped Himself with zeal as a cloak.

Isa. 11:4. But with righteousness He will judge the poor, And decide with fairness for the humble of the earth; And He will strike the earth with the rod of His mouth, And with the breath of His lips He will slay the wicked.

Isa. 49:2. He has made My mouth like a sharp sword, In the shadow of His hand He has concealed Me; and He has also made Me a sharpened arrow, He has hidden Me in His quiver.

Hos. 6:5. Therefore I have cut *them* in pieces by the prophets; I have slain them by the words of My mouth; and the judgments on you are *like* the light *that* shines.

Deut. 8:3. And He humbled you and let you go hungry, and fed you with the manna which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, in order to make you understand that man shall not live on bread alone, but man shall live on everything that comes out of the mouth of the LORD.

which is the word of God.

¹⁷ And take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

¹⁸ With every prayer and request, pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be alert with all perseverance and every request for all the saints,

Luke 18:1–8. Now He was telling them a parable to show that at all times they ought to pray and not become discouraged, ²saying, “In a certain city there was a judge who did not fear God and did not respect *any* person. ³Now there was a widow in that city, and she kept coming to him, saying, ‘Give me justice against my opponent.’ ⁴For a while he

has not destined us for wrath, but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ...

Heb. 4:12. For the word of God is living and active, and sharper than any two-edged sword, even penetrating as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

Eph. 5:26. ...so that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word...

Rev. 19:15. From His mouth comes a sharp sword, so that with it He may strike down the nations, and He will rule them with a rod of iron; and He treads the wine press of the fierce wrath of God, the Almighty.

Heb. 6:4–5. For it is impossible, in the case of those who have once been enlightened and have tasted of the heavenly gift and have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit, ⁵and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come...

Phil. 4:6. Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and pleading with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.

Col. 1:3. We give thanks to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you...

Col. 4:2. Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it

¹⁸ **With every prayer and request, pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be alert with all perseverance and every request for all the saints,**

was unwilling; but later he said to himself, ‘Even though I do not fear God nor respect *any* person, ⁵yet because this widow is bothering me, I will give her justice; otherwise by continually coming she will wear me out.’” ⁶And the Lord said, “Listen to what the unrighteous judge said; ⁷now, will God not bring about justice for His elect who cry out to Him day and night, and will He delay long for them? ⁸I tell you that He will bring about justice for them quickly. However, when the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on the earth?”

John 14:13. “And whatever you ask in My name, this I will do, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son.”

John 16:24. “Until now you have asked for nothing in My name; ask and you will receive, so that your joy may be made full.”

Acts 1:14. All these were continually devoting themselves with one mind to prayer, along with *the* women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers.

Mark 13:33. “Watch out, stay alert; for you do not know when the *appointed* time is.”

Acts 4:29. “And now, Lord, look at their threats, and grant *it* to Your bond-servants to speak Your word with all confidence...”

with *an attitude of* thanksgiving...

1 Thess. 5:16–17. Rejoice always, ¹⁷pray without ceasing...

Rom. 8:26–27. Now in the same way the Spirit also helps our weakness; for we do not know what to pray for as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for *us* with groanings too deep for words; ²⁷and He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He intercedes for the saints according to *the will of* God.

1 Tim. 2:1. First of all, then, I urge that requests, prayers, intercession, *and* thanksgiving be made in behalf of all people...

Jude 1:20–21. But you, beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit, ²¹keep yourselves in the love of God, looking forward to the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to eternal life.

Col. 4:2–3. Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it with *an attitude of* thanksgiving; ³praying at the same time for us as well, that God will open up to us a door for the word, so that we may proclaim the mystery of

Isa. 50:4. The Lord God has given Me the tongue of disciples, so that I may know how to sustain the weary one with a word. He awakens *Me* morning by morning, He awakens My ear to listen as a disciple.

¹⁹ **and pray in my behalf, that speech may be given to me in the opening of my mouth, to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel,**

¹⁹ and *pray* in my behalf, that speech may be given to me in the opening of my mouth, to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel,

²⁰ for which I am an ambassador in chains; that in *proclaiming* it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak.

Acts 4:31. And when they had prayed, the place where they had gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and *began* to speak the word of God with boldness.

Acts 21:33. Then the commander came up and took hold of him, and ordered that he be bound with two chains; and he *began* asking who he was and what he had done.

Acts 28:20. “For this reason, therefore, I requested to see you and to speak with you, since I am wearing this chain for the sake of the hope of Israel.”

Christ, for which I have also been imprisoned...

1 Thess. 5:25. Brothers and sisters, pray for us.

2 Cor. 6:11. Our mouth has spoken freely to you, you Corinthians, our heart is opened wide.

2 Cor. 3:12–13. Therefore, having such a hope, we use great boldness in *our* speech, ¹³and *we are* not like Moses, *who* used to put a veil over his face so that the sons of Israel would not stare at the end of what was fading away.

Eph. 3:3. ...that by revelation there was made known to me the mystery, as I wrote before briefly.

2 Cor. 5:20. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making an appeal through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.

Philem. 1:9. ...yet for love’s sake I rather appeal *to you*—since I am such a person as Paul, an old man, and now also a prisoner of Christ Jesus—

Eph. 3:1. For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles—

Phil. 1:7. For it is only right for me to feel this way about you all, because I have you in my heart, since both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel, you all are partakers of grace with me.

²⁰ for which I am an ambassador in chains; that in *proclaiming* it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak.

²¹ Now, so that you also may know about my circumstances *as to* what I am doing, Tychicus, the beloved brother and faithful servant in the Lord, will make everything known to you.

²² I have sent him to you for this very purpose, so that you may know about us, and that he

Acts 20:4. And he was accompanied by Sopater of Berea, *the son* of Pyrrhus, and by Aristarchus and Secundus of the Thessalonians, and Gaius of Derbe, and Timothy, and Tychicus and Trophimus of Asia.

Col. 4:2–3. Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it with *an attitude of* thanksgiving; ³praying at the same time for us as well, that God will open up to us a door for the word, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ, for which I have also been imprisoned...

2 Cor. 3:12. Therefore, having such a hope, we use great boldness in *our* speech...

Col. 4:4. ...that I may make it clear in the way that I ought to proclaim *it*.

Col. 4:7–9. As to all my affairs, Tychicus, *our* beloved brother and faithful servant and fellow bond-servant in the Lord, will bring you information. ⁸*For* I have sent him to you for this very purpose, that you may know about our circumstances and that he may encourage your hearts; ⁹and with him is Onesimus, *our* faithful and beloved brother, who is one of your *own*. They will inform you about the whole situation here.

2 Tim. 4:12. But I have sent Tychicus to Ephesus.

Titus 3:12. When I send Artemas or Tychicus to you, make every effort to come to me at Nicopolis, for I have decided to spend the winter there.

Col. 4:8. *For* I have sent him to you for this very purpose, that you may know about our circumstances and that he may encourage your hearts...

may comfort your hearts.

²² I have sent him to you for this very purpose, so that you may know about us, and that he may comfort your hearts.

²³ Peace be to the brothers *and sisters*, and love with faith, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Col. 2:1–2. For I want you to know how great a struggle I have in your behalf and for those who are at Laodicea, and for all those who have not personally seen my face, ²that their hearts may be encouraged, having been knit together in love, and *that they would attain* to all the wealth that comes from the full assurance of understanding, *resulting* in a true knowledge of God's mystery, *that is*, Christ *Himself*...

Rom. 15:33. Now the God of peace *be* with you all. Amen.

Gal. 6:16. And all who will follow this rule, peace and mercy *be* upon them, and upon the Israel of God.

2 Thess. 3:16. Now may the Lord of peace Himself continually grant you peace in every circumstance. The Lord be with you all!

1 Pet. 5:14. Greet one another with a kiss of love. Peace be to you all who are in Christ.

Eph. 2:14–16. For He Himself is our peace, who made both *groups into* one and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall, ¹⁵by abolishing in His flesh the hostility, *which is* the Law *composed of* commandments *expressed* in ordinances, so that in Himself He might make the two one new person, *in this way* establishing peace; ¹⁶and that He might reconcile them both in one body to God through the

²³ Peace be to the brothers *and sisters*, and love with faith, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

²⁴ Grace be with all those who love our Lord Jesus Christ with incorruptible *love*.

cross, by it having put to death the hostility.

Gal. 5:6. For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything, but faith working through love.

1 Thess. 5:8. But since we are of *the* day, let's be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet, the hope of salvation.

1 Cor. 16:22. If anyone does not love the Lord, he is to be accursed. Maranatha!

Rev. 2:2–4. “I know your deeds and your labor and perseverance, and that you cannot tolerate evil people, and you have put those who call themselves apostles to the test, and they are not, and you found them *to be* false; ³and you have perseverance and have endured on account of My name, and have not become weary. ⁴But I have *this* against you, that you have left your first love.”

EXPOSITORY REFLECTIONS ON

HOW TO

WALK IN HOLINESS

Ephesians 5:1-20; Revelation 2:1-7

Chapter 12

Walk Jesus' Way

Ephesians 5:1-6

Christian, for what purpose did God save you? If Ephesians 1:4 is true—and it is—why did God choose you before the foundation of the world? Why was the blood of Jesus shed on your account? For what end were all your sins forgiven? What moved the Holy Spirit to seal you and keep you until the day of redemption? Did God choose you simply so you would be happy? Was Jesus' sacrifice intended merely for your personal satisfaction? Is the Spirit's seal primarily for your comfort?

Paul's epistle to the Ephesians defines why we exist and what it means to be made alive in Christ. It answers the question of our *purpose* not as a secondary issue, but the essential issue for why we exist. Ephesians gives us a clear answer, both for individual believers and for the Church as a whole as to why are we alive, why were redeemed by the blood of the Lamb, and what we are to do with our lives. The world around us may seem increasingly chaotic. In fact, the word *crazy* doesn't even seem strong enough to describe the days we're living in, but we who make up the church of Jesus Christ is the salt of the earth and a light set upon a hill to light up the darkness (Matt. 5:13-16).

But from the day the church was born at Pentecost, followers of Jesus have lived through catastrophes, wars, tyrants, pandemics, genocides, persecutions, and every kind of turmoil imaginable. And yet Jesus said: "*I will build My church, and the gates of Hades will not overpower it*" (Matt. 16:18). Why has the Church endured? Yes, because every believer is sealed and kept by the Holy Spirit. But also because faithful Christians in every generation remembered two essential things: who they are in Christ and who they once were apart from Christ. Whenever churches forgot either of these truths, they lost sight of their mission—sometimes with devastating consequences.

Last week we lingered intentionally in Ephesians 5:1–2 because those verses anchor everything that follows. Today we're expanding our focus to Ephesians 5:1–6. These verses form a unit: verse 1 and verse 6 act as identity markers, and everything between them only makes sense when

we remember who we are now—and who we used to be. And that brings us back to the central question: For what purpose were you saved? Ephesians 5:1–6 gives us the answer. Let’s turn our attention there.

You Are More Loved Than You Can Imagine

To be a beloved child of God is to be treasured by God Himself. If you are a Christian, this is now your identity. As His beloved, you are the recipient of God’s rich grace—lavished on you for an inheritance that will never run out. The blood of Jesus purchased that inheritance, a payment fully sufficient to cover your past, present, and future sins (Eph. 1:7–11). Because you belong to God, your identity is bound to Christ, the One enthroned “far above all rule and authority and power and dominion” (1:20–21). You who were once far away have “been brought near by the blood of Christ” (2:13). You are beloved because the Son came and “preached peace” to those far off, making you no longer strangers and foreigners but “fellow citizens with the saints and members of God’s household” (2:17–19).

To be God’s beloved is also to be loved by a God who is committed to finishing the work He began in you. He is building His church into a “dwelling of God in the Spirit” (2:22), and you are part of what He is building. This is why He saved you. Happiness may accompany knowing your purpose, but your ultimate purpose is holiness. You were chosen in Christ to be “holy and blameless before Him” (1:4). You were made alive with Christ “for good works” that God prepared beforehand (2:10). Because you have been made alive with Christ, you are being made holy through Christ. God’s timeless command still stands: “You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy” (Lev. 19:2). Peter echoes this when he writes that we must conduct ourselves in reverence because we were redeemed not with perishable things but with “the precious blood... of Christ” (1 Pet. 1:17–19).

As God’s beloved children, we are called to imitate Him—not only in how we love but in how we live—because our Father is holy. This is why Jesus said, “You shall be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Matt. 5:48). Not because perfection is attainable, but because love for God expresses itself in imitation. Jesus makes the connection unmistakable: “If anyone loves Me, he will follow My word... the one who does not love Me does not follow My words”(John 14:23–24). This is exactly what Paul prayed for in Ephesians 3:14–19—that believers would be strengthened by the Spirit, rooted and grounded in love, able to comprehend the vastness of Christ’s love, and filled with all the fullness of God.

So how do we imitate our holy God? We walk in love in the same way Christ loved us. According to 1 Corinthians 13, this love is patient and kind, not jealous or boastful or arrogant. It is not rude, not self-seeking, not easily provoked, and keeps no record of wrongs. It does not rejoice in unrighteousness but rejoices with the truth, bearing, believing, hoping, and enduring all things (1 Cor. 13:4–7).

You Were More Sinful Than You Thought

According to verse 6, the reason the sins listed in verses 3–5 must not even be mentioned among those whom God has made alive with Christ is because when we were dead, we were “sons of disobedience.” But that is *not* who we are now. Before Christ, Paul says in Ephesians 2:2 that we walked in three specific ways:

1. According to the course of this world, meaning we lived in step with values, desires, and a culture opposed to the kingdom of God—loving what God rejects: “the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the boastful pride of life” (1 John 2:16).
2. According to the prince of the power of the air—the devil, the ruler of this present age (2 Cor. 4:4), the roaring lion (1 Pet. 5:8), the deceiver who masquerades as an angel of light (2 Cor. 11:14). We followed him blindly, convinced his path would lead to life, when in reality it led only to death.
3. Governed by the spirit at work in the sons of disobedience, whose fruits are the lusts of the flesh, the indulgence of sinful desires, and the corruption of the mind. This was the spiritual DNA that marked us as children of wrath rather than beloved children of God.

But because of God’s rich mercy, His great love, and His overflowing grace, He made us—who were dead in our sins—alive together with Christ. And if you are alive, you are no longer dead. Resurrection always involves transformation—your old spiritual DNA is replaced with something new. You who could not love God now can. You who followed the spirit of darkness are now empowered by the Holy Spirit. You who walked in step with the devil can now follow Jesus. You who once aligned with the world now belong to the kingdom of God, with the eyes of your heart enlightened to know the hope of your calling and to experience the immeasurable greatness of God’s power (Eph. 1:18–19).

This is why Paul speaks so strongly about the sins listed in verses 3–4—because these sins reflect the values and cravings of our former life. These sins grow out of “the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life” that defined Adam and Eve’s fall and every sin that has followed since (1 John 2:16). So Paul commands: “Sexual immorality or any impurity or greed must not even be mentioned among you, as is proper among saints; and there must be no filthiness or foolish talk or vulgar joking, which are not fitting...” The Greek word for “sexual immorality,” *porneia*, refers to all sexual sin outside God’s covenant design for marriage between one man and one woman—such as fornication, adultery, homosexuality, bestiality, or even lustful thoughts (Matt. 5:27–30). These sins strike at the heart of God’s design because sex is meant to be a covenantal, sacred union that pictures Christ and the Church (Eph. 5:31–32), which is why Scripture warns: “God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterers” (Heb. 13:4).

But it’s not only sexual immorality; impurity and greed must not characterize God’s people either. The Greek word for impurity (*akatharsia*) commonly refers to sexual sin but can include

any moral corruption. Greed refers to craving what is not yours—the fruit of eyes that desire what God has not given. All three—sexual immorality, impurity, and greed—are expressions of idolatry, because they place desire on the throne of the heart and treat sex, pleasure, or possession as a god. Paul says plainly, “No sexually immoral, impure, or greedy person—such a person is an idolater—has an inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God” (5:5). Idolatry is exactly what these sins reveal: the belief that forbidden pleasure can give what only God can provide.

The same is true of sins of speech. Paul warns that “filthiness, foolish talk, and vulgar joking” have no place among God’s people. Jesus said, “The mouth speaks from that which fills the heart” (Luke 6:45). If we have been born again and raised from spiritual death to life with Christ, then what flows from our lips should reflect the change in our spiritual DNA. This is why Scripture speaks so forcefully about these issues: “Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor verbal abusers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you; but you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified...” (1 Cor. 6:9–11).

Paul is not saying believers never sin; he is saying believers no longer live in these sins as the pattern and culture of their lives. Those who are alive in Christ do not bow to the idols of this world. Our satisfaction is no longer found in the prince of darkness but in the God of the living. As one commentator beautifully wrote: “Believers have a God more satisfying than sexual sin and greed, a God worthy of endless thanksgiving, a God who has given them a kingdom.”²²

We who have been made alive with Christ have not been saved for the cheap, anemic happiness the world offers, but for a holiness only God can give through a Christ who alone satisfies. Our purpose is to worship God, not to waste our lives on substitutes that cannot deliver. Because we have new life in Christ, we can now live lives marked by gratitude—thankful hearts that overflow with worship instead of idolatry.

²² Tony Merida, *Exalting Jesus in Ephesians* (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2014), 125.

Chapter 13

Live the Jesus Way

Ephesians 5:7-10

What we read in verses 7–10 is profoundly encouraging if your faith and trust are in Jesus Christ—the only One qualified to atone for all your sins as both the Lion and the Lamb. These verses strengthen the heart of anyone who truly believes that Jesus, while fully divine, also became fully human so He could live the life you could not live, die the death you deserved to die, and endure the full weight of God’s holy wrath in your place while remaining perfectly sinless.

If you are a Christian, you are no longer in darkness. Because of nothing you have done and everything Christ has done, you are now “light in the Lord” and able to “walk as children of light.” You know Him, you trust Him, and you long for His appearing just as Peter described: “Though you have not seen Him, you love Him... and you greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory” (1 Pet. 1:8). And because you are a Christian, you will someday face death with the same confidence Paul displayed when he wrote: “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith... and there is reserved for me the crown of righteousness... and not only to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing” (2 Tim. 4:7–8). This is why we can sing songs like “*He Who Is to Come*” with real hope and confidence:

There is a day coming
When the old will pass away
Every wrong will be made right
No darkness, no night
The Son will light the way

There is a King coming
The One who conquered death and grave
No more pain and no more sorrow
This hope for tomorrow
Is our hope for today

He who is to come
Christ the Son of Man
Riding on the clouds with a crown upon His head
Every eye will see Him
With the nail scars in His hands²³

If you are a Christian, you belong to God as His beloved child (5:1). He chose you before the foundation of the world (1:4), redeemed you through the shed blood of His Son (1:7), and adopted you according to the good pleasure of His will (1:5). You are alive with Christ (2:4–5), and because you are alive with Christ, you are God’s *workmanship*—His *poiēma*—“created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them” (Eph. 2:10).

You Were Saved from the Wrath of God

If you are a Christian, you have been saved from the wrath of an infinitely holy God. You who were once dead in your sins—walking according to the course of this world, indulging the desires of the flesh and mind, and living as a child of wrath—now stand fully pardoned, forgiven, and loved because Jesus willingly endured the wrath you deserved. This is why Paul warns in Ephesians 5:6–7, “Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience.”

When I preached this passage, I explained that “these things” include sexual immorality, impurity, and greed. Sexual immorality is any distortion of God’s design for sex outside the covenant union of husband and wife. Impurity refers to moral uncleanness of any kind, and greed includes not only the desire for possessions but also the coveting of a person sexually who does not belong to you—whether through physical actions or mental indulgence. Scripture warns that these sins provoke the wrath of God. But Paul goes further: God’s wrath is also provoked by filthiness, foolish talk, and vulgar joking, because what flows from the mouth reveals the state of the heart (Luke 6:45). In short, God’s wrath comes because of sin—all sin. As Romans 1:18 declares, “The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of people who suppress the truth.”

So what is “wrath”? The dictionary defines it as strong, stern, fierce anger. God’s wrath is His holy, measured, righteous anger against sin, and Scripture warns of it throughout the Old and New Testaments. To understand the mercy of God, you must understand the seriousness of sin and the intensity of His anger against it. The only divine attribute repeated three times—not once, not twice, but three times—is God’s holiness. Both Isaiah 6:3 and Revelation 4:8 declare: “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord.” Even sinless seraphim cover their faces and feet in His presence (Isa. 6:2), and Isaiah himself cried, “Woe to me, for I am ruined!” (Isa. 6:5). Habakkuk confessed, “Your eyes are too pure to look on evil” (Hab. 1:12–13). Nahum says, “The Lord is

²³ Passion, *He Who Is To Come*, written by Cody Carnes, Kristian Stanfill, and Sean Curran, SixSteps/SixSteps Songs/Capitol CMG Paragon (2024).

avenging and wrathful... He reserves wrath for His enemies” (Nah. 1:2). And the psalmist warns that all the wicked must drink the cup of His wrath to the dregs (Ps. 75:8).

That cup—the cup reserved for the wicked—is the cup Jesus drank. The sinless Son of God, the perfect Lamb, the Bridegroom of the church, came into the world to drink the cup of God’s wrath in our place. As the Nicene Creed declares, He is “God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God... who for us and for our salvation came down from heaven and was made man.” In Gethsemane He prayed, “My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass... yet not as I will, but as You will” (Matt. 26:39, 42). He drank that cup fully when He became a curse for us on the cross: “Christ redeemed us... having become a curse for us” (Gal. 3:13). This is why He said, “The one who believes in the Son has eternal life; but the one who does not obey the Son... the wrath of God remains on him” (John 3:35–36).

Hell is where God’s wrath is finally poured out on the unrepentant, and Jesus described it as the place “where their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched” (Mark 9:48).

You Are Redeemed to Live as Children of Light

If you are a Christian, you who were once a child of wrath are now a child of mercy—an adopted son or daughter of the living God, purchased by the blood of Jesus. R.C. Sproul put it well: “The glory of the gospel is this: The one from whom we need to be saved is the one who has saved us.” And in *The Cross of Christ*, John Stott captured the heart of redemption: “Divine love triumphed over divine wrath by divine self-sacrifice.”²⁴ If you ever doubt how seriously God takes sin or how deeply your sin offended Him, look no further than the cross. It is there your Redeemer bore the holy, justified wrath of God on your behalf. Upon the cross—where Jesus was cursed for you—He was “pierced for our offenses” and “crushed for our wrongdoings” (Isa. 53:5).

Because we have been redeemed by the blood of Christ, we are no longer children of wrath. And because we are no longer children of wrath, we must not become partners with those who continue to practice the very things God’s wrath is reserved for. Christian, you who were once darkness are now “light in the Lord.” As children of light, we are called to live out our new identity in at least four ways:

1. **Walk as children of light by refusing partnership with the sons of disobedience (v. 7).** The Greek word *symmetochos* (“partner”) means “sharer” or “partaker.” Paul uses it in Ephesians 3:6 to describe how Gentiles share in the promises of Christ. We once drank from the broken cisterns of the world, but now we find our satisfaction in Jesus, the Living Water (John 7:37–39).
2. **Walk as children of light by displaying the light of Christ (v. 8).** You are no longer darkness but children of the Light of Life (John 12:36). Jesus said, “*You are the light of*

²⁴ John Stott, *The Cross of Christ* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 15.

the world... let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven” (Matt. 5:14, 16).

3. **Walk as children of light by bearing the fruit of your union with Christ (v. 9).** As you walk with Christ, His goodness, righteousness, and truth will shine through your life. Tony Merida writes, *“Those who walk in light do good works (2:10), live righteously (4:24), and speak truthfully (4:15).”*²⁵
4. **Walk as children of light by living lives that are pleasing to the Lord (v. 10).** We do not live to please people but the One who bought us with His blood. Paul writes, *“You are not your own... therefore glorify God in your body”* (1 Cor. 6:18–20).

So what is the point? Christian, you are a child of a holy God who poured out His wrath on His Son so that you would not be consumed by His justice but overwhelmed by His kindness, grace, love, and mercy. Because you are no longer dead in your sins (2:1), you now walk as one alive in Christ. Walk as one who has been called “out of darkness into His marvelous light” (1 Pet. 2:9). Walk as the forgiven, because “He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God” (2 Cor. 5:21). Walk according to your new identity, for “if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, behold, new things have come” (2 Cor. 5:17). You who were once dead and walked in darkness are now awake and alive—not because of anything you have done but because of everything Christ has accomplished. This is why we sing:

O to grace how great a debtor
Daily I'm constrained to be
Let Thy grace Lord like a fetter
Bind my wand'ring heart to Thee
Prone to wander Lord I feel it
Prone to leave the God I love
Here's my heart Lord take and seal it
Seal it for Thy courts above.²⁶

²⁵ Tony Merida, *Exalting Jesus in Ephesians* (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2014), 126.

²⁶ *Come Thou Fount*, [Shane and Shane] by Robert Robinson and John Wyeth

Chapter 14

Risen to Live Jesus' Way

Ephesians 5:11-14

In 2012, D. A. Carson published *The Intolerance of Tolerance*. Around that time he spoke at a conference I attended, and I remember thinking his message was timely—perhaps even prophetic. But none of us could have anticipated the speed or intensity with which his warnings would unfold. Carson wrote:

“Neither the old tolerance nor the new is an intellectual position; rather, each is a social response. The old tolerance is the willingness to put up with, allow, or endure people and ideas with whom we disagree; in its purest form, the new tolerance is the social commitment to treat all ideas and people as equally right, save for those people who disagree with this view of tolerance. Advocates of the new tolerance sacrifice wisdom and principle in support of just one supreme good: upholding their view of tolerance. So those who uphold and practice the older tolerance, enmeshed as they inevitably are in some value system, are written off as intolerant. Thus banished, they no longer deserve a place at the table.”

The “old” tolerance made room for charitable disagreement; it allowed two people to disagree without declaring one of them mentally unstable. Today, those who hold to the “older tolerance” are not only removed from the cultural table—they are increasingly pathologized. If your convictions about sex, identity, humanity, or moral boundaries do not align with the loudest ideological voices, you are diagnosed with a “phobia” and dismissed as mentally ill.

Before turning to Ephesians 5:11–14, it’s worth considering what the word *phobia* actually means. According to the National Institute of Mental Health (NIH), a phobia is an “intense, irrational fear of something that poses little or no actual danger,” often producing severe anxiety even when the person knows the fear is irrational. Wikipedia calls it an “anxiety disorder... defined by an irrational, unrealistic, persistent and excessive fear.” Merriam-Webster defines a phobia as “an exaggerated, inexplicable, and illogical fear of a particular object or situation.”

To lighten the mood, here are a few common phobias:

1. Acrophobia – fear of heights
2. Claustrophobia – fear of confined spaces
3. Arachnophobia – fear of spiders
4. Entomophobia – fear of insects

And here are fewer common ones:

1. Arachibutyrophobia – fear of peanut butter sticking to the roof of your mouth
2. Nomophobia – fear of being without your mobile phone
3. Plutophobia – fear of money
4. Hippopotomonstrosesquippedaliophobia – fear of long words

Taking a moral stance is not a phobia—it is conviction. The real issue is not whether you have convictions, but what your convictions are rooted in. Are they shaped by the ever-shifting winds of culture, or anchored in something that transcends culture altogether? For the Christian, our moral compass is not set by the loudest voices of society but by the unchanging truth of God’s Word—the foundation laid by the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus Himself as the cornerstone. Paul makes this unmistakably clear in Ephesians 2:19–22: “So then you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of God’s household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the cornerstone...”

Jesus—the King of kings and Lord of lords—did not invite His Church to consider His words; He commanded us to obey them: “Go therefore and make disciples... teaching them to observe all that I commanded you” (Matt. 28:19–20). The prophets and apostles laid the foundation of that command in the Scriptures, and those Scriptures are “inspired by God and profitable for teaching, rebuke, correction, and training in righteousness,” equipping every man and woman of God “for every good work” (2 Tim. 3:16–17). So let’s be honest: if we truly follow Jesus and openly submit to Scripture as the authoritative Word of God, we should fully expect to be labeled “phobic,” “intolerant,” and worse by those still in darkness. Faithfulness to Christ has never been culturally convenient—and it won’t be now.

As people who “were once darkness, but now... light in the Lord,” we are not free to blend in with the values of a world at war with God. We live for what God loves and we oppose what God hates. If we intend to discern what is pleasing to the Lord (v. 10), then we must be willing to live against the grain of a culture that celebrates what God condemns and condemns what God celebrates. As children of light, we belong to the God who pronounces judgment on any society that flips His standards upside down: “Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil; who substitute darkness for light and light for darkness... Woe to those who are wise in their own

eyes...” (Isa. 5:20–21). To walk in the light is to refuse the moral confusion of our age and stand firmly with the God who defines reality.

The Christian Exposes the Deeds of Darkness by Not Participating in It

We now come to Ephesians 5:11, where Paul commands us not to participate “in the useless deeds of darkness.” What does this mean? The NIV renders it, “Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them.” The NKJV says, “Have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them.” The word Paul uses—*synkoinōneō*—doesn’t mean “fellowship” in the formal sense, but it does mean “to share in,” which inevitably implies fellowship. Paul uses the same word in Philippians 4:14 to commend believers for “sharing” in his troubles. To share in something is to join it.

The useless deeds of darkness include (but are not limited to) sexual immorality, impurity, greed, filthiness, foolish talk, and vulgar joking. These are the very things we once lived in before Christ made us alive—when we “lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath” (Eph. 2:3). John describes this same darkness as “the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life”—desires that do not come from the Father but from the world (1 John 2:16).

To understand why we must avoid such deeds, remember the holiness of God. “Holy, Holy, Holy” is the only attribute of God repeated three times (Isa. 6:3; Rev. 4:8). It is a literary device showing unmatched emphasis. And just as Scripture emphasizes God’s holiness, Paul repeatedly emphasizes our identity “in Christ”—a phrase used roughly thirty-three times in Ephesians. To be “in Christ” is to remain in Him, just as a branch remains connected to the vine (John 15:1–4). Sinclair Ferguson summarizes this beautifully: “To be in the Lord is to belong to a new world... Once we were in the darkness. Worse, the darkness was in us. Now we have been drawn into the light, illuminated by Christ the Light of the world. In the Lord we are light!”

If you are now a child of light, redeemed and united to Jesus, why would you want to share in the very deeds from which you were rescued?

Paul doesn’t simply tell us to avoid these deeds; he commands us to **expose** them. This does not mean we should isolate ourselves from the world—that would contradict everything Scripture teaches about God’s mission. God saved His people to enter the darkness as His light. Israel was called to be “a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Exod. 19:5–6)—a people whose very existence would expose the emptiness of sin. Yet Israel repeatedly failed because their hearts remained unchanged. Only Jesus can give the new heart God promised in Deuteronomy 30:6 and Ezekiel 36:26.

You, Christian, are the recipient of these promises. You have been given a new heart, a new Spirit, and a new identity in Christ. Why then would you return to deeds that rob you of joy, corrupt your soul, and attract the wrath of God? These deeds are not only fruitless—they are

dangerous. That's why Paul adds the sobering reminder: "For it is disgraceful even to speak of the things which are done by them in secret" (Eph. 5:12).

The Christian Reveals the Futility of Darkness by Walking with Christ

The only hope for lost humanity is Jesus! He is the only solution for our sin problem. Only through the life of Jesus and the death that He died for sinners can the spiritually dead be raised to new life. Sinclair Ferguson is spot on in his description of what happened when the Christian was saved from the wrath of God: "We have been invaded and transformed by Christ the Light." Now as those who are alive with Christ, we carry the light of Jesus into the darkness of the world, this is why Jesus said, "You are the light of the world.... Your light must shine before people in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven" (Matt. 5:14, 16). So what happens when light invades a dark room? It exposes what is in the room.

One of two things will happen when light exposes what is in the darkness, it will anger those who love the darkness, or it will reveal a better way to those tired and wearied by the darkness. To expose the darkness in the context of Ephesians is to contrast the living against the dead. It is not picket signs on the corner, bumper stickers, or hats that protest the darkness. It is what happens when light pierces the darkness of sin's domain. The light of Christ displayed in and through His people reveals to those in the darkness that there is a better way because Jesus is the only way to experience the kind of redemption of our souls and the forgiveness of all our sins that will grant us true salvation and freedom (1:7). Many will reject Christ as the only remedy for our salvation as intolerant and they will run to the darkness, but there will be some whose sin will be exposed by the light of Christ, and they will run to Him for the life only He can give. This is the point Paul makes in verse 13, "But all things become visible when they are exposed by the light, for everything that becomes visible is light." I think the New Living Translation translates this verse in less confusing way: "But their evil intentions will be exposed when the light shines on them, for the light makes everything visible."

Legislation and laws are good only in that it helps to suppress the evil we humans are capable of, but it can never fix the evil we are capable of. If you are darkness, you will yield the "useless" fruits of darkness to one degree or another. Only the gospel of Jesus Christ can remedy the dark heart of humanity! The gospel of Jesus Christ alone, "is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes" (Rom. 1:16). Christian, you are living proof that the same power that raised Jesus from the grave is still possible today! You serve as a reminder everywhere you go that either the wrath of God can be avoided through Jesus, or the wrath of God is coming upon those who reject Him (see 2 Cor. 2:14-16).

We who were asleep and dead in our sins, are only alive because the light of Christ has shown upon us. It is here in verse 14 that Paul quotes what was most likely an early church hymn composed on the basis of Isaiah 60:1-2 and Christ as the fulfillment of its promise:

"Awake, sleeper,

And arise from the dead,
And Christ will shine on you.”

Here is what Isaiah 60:1-2 promises: “Arise, shine; for your light has come, And the glory of the Lord has risen upon you. ‘For behold, darkness will cover the earth and deep darkness the peoples; but the Lord will rise upon you and His glory will appear upon you.’” This is another scripture passage for those who reject Jesus as God! Only Yahweh has the power to redeem and raise the dead, yet Jesus has done that exact thing in your life; He has done what only God is capable of doing. We who were once dead, heard the voice of Christ, and we arose to follow Him and now we live! We who once enjoyed the darkness, now delight in walking in light of the One who said, “I am the Light of the world; the one who follows Me will not walk in the darkness, but will have the Light of life” (John 8:12).

Pursing Jesus is the only way to fight against our own sin and the temptation to participate in the useless deeds of darkness.

Chapter 15

Walk in Fellowship with Jesus

Ephesians 5:14-21

I understand that Ephesians 5:1–13 is a difficult passage, especially when you consider that pornography and sexual sin are affecting the church at catastrophic levels. Studies show that at least 50% of men and about 25% of women in American churches view pornography monthly. And according to one survey, 43% of Christian men and 20% of Christian women say that their involvement with porn—or any sexual sin—has damaged their relationship with God.

That means some of you who are reading these words feel absolutely defeated. You assume God wants nothing to do with you—that He is disgusted, distant, and done with you. And if that’s what you believe, you have believed the lie of the enemy.

One of the devil’s titles is “the accuser,” and Revelation 12:10 says he accuses the redeemed day and night. Jesus said of him, “He does not stand in the truth... he is a liar and the father of lies” (John 8:44). Satan lies to keep you stuck. He whispers that your sin has pushed you beyond the reach of grace, that God’s wrath toward sin now burns toward you. Yes—sexual immorality, impurity, and greed provoke God’s wrath (Eph. 5:3–6). But if you are in Christ, that wrath has already been poured out on Jesus in your place for your redemption. This is why the Bible states very clearly: “Therefore there is now no condemnation at all for those who are in Christ Jesus” (Rom. 8:1).

This is why we must slow down and take seriously what Paul says in Ephesians 5:14. Remember, this letter is not written to unbelievers but to Christians—Christians whose most dangerous enemy is not outside them but inside their own flesh. Paul knew that war well. In Romans 7:14–23, he confesses the tension every believer feels between wanting holiness and battling sin:

For we know that the Law is spiritual, but I am fleshly, sold into bondage to sin. For I do not understand what I am doing; for I am not practicing what I want to do, but I do the very thing I hate. However, if I do the very thing I do not want to do, I agree with the Law, that the Law is good. But now, no longer am I the one doing it, but sin that dwells in

me. For I know that good does not dwell in me, that is, in my flesh; for the willing is present in me, but the doing of the good is not. For the good that I want, I do not do, but I practice the very evil that I do not want. But if I do the very thing I do not want, I am no longer the one doing it, but sin that dwells in me.

I find then the principle that evil is present in me, the one who wants to do good. For I joyfully agree with the law of God in the inner person, but I see a different law in the parts of my body waging war against the law of my mind, and making me a prisoner of the law of sin, the law which is in my body's parts.

But notice this: Paul is not crushed by this struggle. He is not paralyzed. He does not conclude that God is finished with him. Instead, his cry becomes a confession of hope: “Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free...? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!” (Rom. 7:24–25). That is the posture Ephesians 5:14–21 calls you to.

Because of that, I want to give you four essential practices—a Holy Spirit inspired pathway out of spiritual apathy and into spiritual vitality. We will consider the of the four in this chapter, and we'll consider the other three in the next chapter. But here they are so you see where we are going:

1. Run to Jesus as your only advocate (v. 14)
2. Use your time wisely for what matters (vv. 15–16)
3. Live with an awareness of God's will for your life (v. 17)
4. Be intentional about what you consume into your mind, soul, and heart (vv. 18–21)

Now, why start with apathy? Because apathy is what happens when shame freezes you. Shame is supposed to drive you to repentance—repentance is movement toward Jesus. But when shame becomes your home instead of your alarm clock, it becomes apathy, and apathy becomes the hallway to atrophy. Spiritual atrophy sets in when shame convinces you that moving toward Jesus isn't worth it, or that He won't receive you if you try. But the gospel says the opposite: Jesus runs toward repentant sinners faster than they can run toward Him.

Run to Jesus as Your Only Advocate (v. 14)

Ephesians 5:14 is not so much an appeal to non-Christians to find Jesus, but for Christians. Most commentators/scholars agree that verse 14 is most likely a verse from an early church hymn quoted by Paul that was familiar to the Christians in Ephesus. What I find so fascinating about the placement of verse 14 is that it is sandwiched between verses 3-13 that address the need to refuse to participate in the “useless deeds of darkness” and 15-21 that encourages the Christian to live wisely as children of light.

Here is what I think was going on and why I believe Paul felt the need to write what he wrote in Ephesians 5:3-13. I believe that there were some Christians who were spiritually and morally apathetic towards certain forms of sexual immorality, impurity, greed, filthy and foolish talk, and

vulgar joking. Not only were they apathetic, but their apathy resulted in a type of spiritual atrophy resulting in their participation in certain forms of sin, which Paul listed. In a very real sense, there were some in the Ephesian Church, as is true in churches today, who were slumbering in certain sins. One of the many reasons why I believe this is the case is what is written in Romans 13:11-14,

Do this, knowing the time, that it is already the hour for you to awaken from sleep; for now salvation is nearer to us than when we first believed. The night is almost gone, and the day is near. Therefore let's rid ourselves of the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light. Let's behave properly as in the day, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual promiscuity and debauchery, not in strife and jealousy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts.

As is true with many of the hymns and praise songs you are familiar with, the one quoted in verse 14 is infused with language from the Bible. Indeed, verse 14 contains a wealth of meaning that could warrant extensive analysis and discussion on its own; however, I will refrain from delving into it at length in this context. What I will do is share four scripture passages with you that will open Ephesians 5:14 up to you in the same way they probably did for the Christians in Ephesus. I am not going to say a whole lot about the verses; I only want you to see them for reasons I believe will be obvious. Here are two passages on what is waiting for those who have been redeemed by Jesus:

“Arise, shine; for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you. ‘For behold, darkness will cover the earth and deep darkness the peoples; but the Lord will rise upon you and His glory will appear upon you.’” (Isa. 60:1-2)

“And many of those who sleep in the dust of the ground will awake, these to everlasting life, but the others to disgrace and everlasting contempt.” (Dan. 12:2)

Here is a passage on how the redeemed should respond to God as a Father who loving disciplines His children: “Do not rejoice over me, enemy of mine. Though I fall I will rise; Though I live in darkness, the Lord is a light for me. I will endure the rage of the Lord Because I have sinned against Him, Until He pleads my case and executes justice for me. He will bring me out to the light, And I will look at His righteousness.” (Mic. 7:8-9)

There is a fourth scripture passage I believe is tied to Ephesians 5:14, and it is found in Jonah 1:6. Before we look at that verse, you need to consider the story of Jonah and how he got into trouble after being commanded by God to go to Ninevah (the capital of Assyria) to preach about the coming wrath of God upon Ninevah; Jonah got on a boat to go the opposite direction from where God told Him to go. While in disobedience, we are told, “the Lord hurled a great wind on the sea...” (Jon. 1:4) which made life very difficult for everyone on the boat. While everyone on the boat desperately threw stuff off the boat to lighten it in hopes of surviving the storm, Jonah was sound asleep in the stern of the ship. Put another way: The prophet Jonah was asleep in his sin of rebellion. Finally the captain of the ship found Jonah sleeping and had some words for

Jonah: “How is it that you are sleeping? Get up, call on your god! Perhaps your god will be concerned about us so that we will not perish” (Jonah 1:6).

In summary, it became obvious to the sailors that Jonah was running from His God (1:7-14). When they asked what they needed to do to get Jonah’s God to calm the storm, the prophet told them that they needed to throw him overboard (vv. 15-16). They tried to avoid throwing Jonah overboard, but it became clear that it was their only option, so they threw him into the sea, and while in the sea, “the Lord designated a great fish to swallow Jonah, and Jonah was in the stomach of the fish for three days and three nights” (1:17). While in the belly of the “great fish” Jonah endured the rage and discipline of his heavenly Father because he sinned against Him. Jonah called out to the Lord for help (Jon. 2:1-9), and God delivered His prophet by commanding the fish to vomit Jonah up onto the dry land (v. 10). Awakened from his proverbial slumber from the stern of the ship to the belly of the great fish, Jonah obeyed God’s will upon his life by going to Nineveh to preach the word of God to a people walking in the darkness of their sins and idols (3:1-9).

The whole reason why Jonah fled for Tarshish when God told him to go to Nineveh is because of what Nineveh represented. Nineveh was the capital of the Assyrian empire whose army has been credited with some of the earliest forms of psychological warfare. Nineveh was filled with violent people who were guilty of some of the most horrible things against humanity. After Jonah preached his very brief message about God’s coming wrath, the entire city repented (see Jonah 3:5-10). Jonah’s response was resentment and anger; this is what he prayed after God spared Nineveh from His wrath: “Please Lord, was this not what I said when I was still in my own country? Therefore in anticipation of this I fled to Tarshish, since I knew that You are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abundant in mercy, and One who relents of disaster” (4:1-2).

Against the backdrop of God’s promise of redemption for His people because of the shed blood of Jesus (Isa. 60:1-2; Dan. 12:2), how His redeemed people ought to respond to His loving discipline (Mic. 7:8-9), and Jonah’s story of his rebellion and repentance, consider Ephesians 5:14 again: “Awake, sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.”

Conclusion

Maybe you are like Jonah—sound asleep in your sin. Maybe you’ve slipped back into old patterns because apathy has crept in, or maybe apathy has grown into spiritual atrophy. If you are in Christ, then 2 Corinthians 4:6 describes what God has already done in your heart: “For God, who said, ‘Light shall shine out of darkness,’ is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the Light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.” You are not here by accident. You are here because it is time to wake up. Your enemy wants you stuck, shamed, and spiritually asleep, but your Father calls out to you: “Awake, sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.”

How do you rise? Through repentance—calling your sin what it is and turning from it to Jesus. Scripture promises, “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9). And when shame accuses you, remember your Advocate: “If anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous... the propitiation for our sins” (1 John 2:1–2). The devil is a liar, but Christ is a Savior. Like Micah, we can speak to our failures and to Satan himself: “Do not rejoice over me, my enemy. Though I fall I will rise... The LORD will bring me out to the light, and I will see His righteousness” (Mic. 7:8–9).

Let’s pause and consider Jonah’s experience again. The “great fish” that swallowed him was possibly a sperm whale—one of the rare whale species known for vomiting and for producing ambergris. Ambergris is a waxy, gray substance formed in the whale’s digestive tract that, in its raw state, carries an unpleasant odor. Remarkably, after being expelled and spending time in salt water and sunlight, ambergris transforms into a highly prized and fragrant material, valued between \$15,000 and \$45,000 per kilogram.

Whether Jonah came out bearing the scent of ambergris or reeking of whatever else was in the belly of the whale, we can’t know for sure. His time inside the creature might have left him looking as if he had returned from the grave itself. Yet what truly matters is what Jesus made clear: “For just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the sea creature, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth” (Matt. 12:40). Jonah emerged from the fish marked by a distinct odor, but Jesus rose from the grave having secured our redemption. Our covering is not ambergris or any earthly treasure; we are clothed in something infinitely greater. “In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our sins, according to the riches of His grace” (Eph. 1:7–8). “You were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ” (1 Pet. 1:18–19).

So, dear Christian, do not stay where you are. Do not slumber in your sin. Do not remain apathetic toward the very sins that Christ died for. You are covered by His blood, and therefore “There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (Rom. 8:1). So hear the call again: “Awake, sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.”

Chapter 16

Awakened to Walk in Wisdom

Ephesians 5:14-21

Apathy is “a lack of interest, enthusiasm, or concern.” Atrophy is what happens when something once strong begins to wither through neglect. Spiritually, these two are not strangers to the Christian life. Apathy often grows when shame convinces you to remain where you are rather than to flee to Christ. Instead of letting the Spirit’s conviction lead us to repentance, we allow our awareness of sin to immobilize us. Left unattended, apathy becomes spiritual atrophy—and atrophy is precisely the condition the enemy desires for every believer: weakened, discouraged, unprotected, and convinced that nothing can change.

But God has not called His children to walk through life unarmed, unguarded, or unaware. The entire letter of Ephesians reminds us of who we are in Christ before it ever commands us to stand firm in the armor of God. Before Paul instructs us to “be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might,” he labors for five chapters to show us that our strength does not come from ourselves at all—it comes from being united to Jesus. This is why the pathway out of spiritual apathy does not begin with effort, discipline, or resolve; it begins by remembering what is already true of you because of Christ.

Christian, you were once dead in your trespasses and sins, but God has made you alive with Christ (Eph. 2:1–5). You are redeemed by His blood and forgiven of all your sin (1:7). You are sealed with the Holy Spirit, guaranteed for the day of redemption (1:13–14; 4:30). You are God’s workmanship (2:10), God’s household (2:19), God’s temple (2:21–22), and—astonishingly—God’s inheritance (1:18). Everything Paul will later command you to do in your spiritual battle rests firmly on this foundation: you belong to Jesus, and Jesus has not left you vulnerable.

Therefore, when the Holy Spirit exposes sin in your life, the purpose is never to push you into despair, indifference, or apathy. Conviction is not condemnation; it is an invitation. It is the gentle but firm summons of your Father drawing you back to the cross where your redemption was accomplished and your identity secured. Shame says, “Hide.” Apathy says, “It is easier to

stay where you are.” But the gospel says, “Come. Christ has already borne your shame, and He stands ready to restore” (see 1 John 1:9).

This is why Ephesians 5:14–21 is so important for the believer who desires to walk in the armor of God. It is not merely a moral checklist or a collection of spiritual suggestions—it is a Spirit-given pathway that keeps us awake, attentive, and anchored in Christ. Before we ever stand against the schemes of the devil, we must be awakened from spiritual slumber. Before we strap on the armor, our hearts must be stirred from apathy. Before we resist the enemy, we must be renewed in the Spirit.

Ephesians 5:14–21 is God’s gracious plan to rescue His children from spiritual atrophy and to prepare them to stand firm in the day of evil. It reorients the believer to walk in wisdom, yield to the Spirit, and live in the fullness of the redemption Christ has accomplished. This is where the battle begins—not with our strength, but with His.

Pay Attention to How You Live

In light of the reality and hope that are yours in Christ, Paul continues: “So then, be careful how you walk, not as unwise people but as wise...” (v. 15). This is not a suggestion—it is a command rooted in the weight of everything Paul has already said in Ephesians 1–14. The phrase “be careful” translates the Greek *blepō* (βλέπω), which means “to see,” but with the force of “beware,” “watch out,” or “look carefully.” Paul is calling believers to spiritual alertness. A more forceful rendering captures the urgency: “Watch carefully how you walk—not as unwise people, but as wise.”

Paul’s repeated use of the word “walk” is intentional. Throughout Ephesians, the Christian life is portrayed as a walk shaped by a new identity in Christ. We once “walked according to the course of this world” (2:1–3), but as God’s workmanship we are now created “for good works... that we should walk in them” (2:10). Because of the price of our redemption, we are to “walk in a manner worthy of the calling” (4:1) and no longer “walk as the Gentiles walk” in the darkness of their minds (4:17–18). As beloved children we are to “walk in love” (5:1–2), and as those made “light in the Lord,” we are to “walk as children of light” (5:8). All of this culminates in 5:15 where Paul issues his final and climactic command: watch carefully how you walk. This is the opposite of drifting or coasting. Every step of the Christian life is taken in the midst of a spiritual battlefield, and the enemy works tirelessly to dull the senses, divide the affections, and distract the heart.

So how does one walk with wisdom? Scripture gives a consistent answer: wisdom begins with seeing God rightly. Proverbs 9:10 tells us that “the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom,” which means that true wisdom begins when we grasp who God is and respond to Him with reverence. This was Isaiah’s response when he saw the Lord high and lifted up (Isa. 6:1–5), and Job’s response when God revealed His greatness in the midst of Job’s suffering (Job 42:5–6). Jesus also teaches that wisdom is revealed by what we do with His words: the wise man hears

and obeys, building his life on the rock, while the foolish man hears but fails to act, building his house on sand (Matt. 7:24–27). To walk in wisdom, then, is to live with a reverent fear of God that leads to obedience to His Word. It is the spirit of Psalm 1, where the blessed man refuses the counsel of the wicked but delights in the law of the Lord and meditates on it day and night.

With this in mind, Paul identifies three practical expressions of the wise walk in the verses that follow: first, use your time wisely, refusing to waste your life on what does not matter (v. 16); second, seek to understand the will of God, allowing His Word to shape how you think and live (v. 17); and third, be intentional about what fills and controls you, for whatever directs your heart will direct your walk (v. 18). These are not burdensome commands—they are protections. They are God’s gracious means of keeping His children from spiritual apathy and strengthening them to stand firm in the armor He provides.

Use Your Time Wisely

Life is short. The average human life in America contains roughly 29,000 days—that’s all you get... *maybe*. That number assumes heart disease, cancer, or a fatal accident does not cut your life shorter. Of those 29,000 days, nearly 9,500 will be spent sleeping (about 26 years), leaving only about 19,500 days awake. And those limited waking hours pass far more quickly than we imagine. Consider how the average person spends those days:

- 1,095 days in the bathroom
- 402 days getting dressed
- 365 days looking for things we lost
- 8.5 hours a day—for the average teenager—staring at screens (more than 3,100 hours a year)
- 68.5 days a year on a cell phone (which means the average 14-year-old today will spend roughly 4,516 days—over twelve years of life—on a device by the time he reaches old age)

Let’s pause and recognize this reality: if you are 35 years old, sleeping an average of 6.5 hours a night, and the Lord graciously allows you a full measure of days, you have about 12,960 waking days left. Yet here’s a sobering truth—if you spend America’s average of 7.3 hours a day on screens, nearly 3,942 of those precious days will quietly slip away in front of a device, with far less time given to family, friends, or serving God’s kingdom. That’s almost a third of your remaining life surrendered to distractions, with little of lasting, eternal substance to show for it. Don’t let your days drift by unclaimed. Steward them with purpose and hope, trusting that every moment offered to God can bear fruit that endures.

Here is the point: your time is painfully limited—so do not waste it on what does not matter. When Paul wrote Ephesians 5:16, social media and smartphones did not exist, yet the danger of wasting one’s life on trivialities was just as real. The evil surrounding the Ephesian

church is the same evil surrounding us today; it simply wears different clothing. Ephesus had the Temple of Artemis—we have the pornography industry. Israel faced the worship of Molech—our own culture normalizes abortion to the point of performing procedures out of a bus at a political convention and offering free gourmet hotdogs afterward to celebrate. The names change, but the darkness is the same.

So how do you keep your soul from spiritual apathy and atrophy? How do you “make the most of your time because the days are evil” (v. 16)? You do it by taking God-glorifying risks and making God-exalting sacrifices for what matters in light of eternity. You refuse to give your life to what numbs the soul and instead give yourself fully to what strengthens your walk with Christ. In an evil day, wisdom is not passive—it is intentional, disciplined, and driven by eternal priorities.

Live With an Awareness of God’s Will for Your Life

If you want to walk in a manner worthy of your calling and live wisely while the days are evil, you must know what God’s will is—and then live in light of that awareness. The will of God is not hidden or mysterious. In Ephesians alone, God has already made His will abundantly clear. Before the foundation of the world, He chose you “that we would be holy and blameless before Him” (1:4). You were created, saved, and redeemed in Christ Jesus “for good works, which God prepared beforehand” (2:10). Now that you belong to Christ through His blood, “you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but... fellow citizens with the saints, and... of God’s household... being fitted together... into a holy temple in the Lord” (2:19, 21). Because you are now part of this redeemed household, “we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine” (4:14). Instead, we are to “put on the new self... created in righteousness and holiness of the truth” (4:24). As beloved children of God, we are to “be imitators of God” (5:1), for we are now “children of light” (5:8).

So, what is God’s will for your life? It is that Jesus Christ takes first place—and everything else takes second. Jesus Himself said, “If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me” (Luke 9:23). What is God’s will for your life? It is your sanctification: “For this is the will of God, your sanctification; that is, that you abstain from sexual immorality; that each of you know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor” (1 Thess. 4:3–4). What is God’s will for your life? Peter says it plainly: “Prepare your minds for action, keep sober in spirit, fix your hope completely on the grace to be brought to you... be holy yourselves also in all your behavior; because it is written, ‘You shall be holy, for I am holy’” (1 Pet. 1:13–16).

Hear this and let it sink deep: Anything—any person, organization, job promotion, relationship, opportunity, or desire—that draws you away from God’s will as revealed in His Word is not God’s will for your life. God will never guide you down a path that leads away from holiness, away from truth, away from purity, away from wholehearted obedience, or away from Christ Himself. If you want to walk in wisdom that endures, you must live with an unwavering

conviction about what God ultimately desires for you—and then intentionally align every part of your life to reflect that calling.

Be Intentional About What You Consume in Your Mind, Soul, and Heart

The word *worship* comes from the old expression *worth-ship*. What you give yourself to is what you value, and what you value most is what you ultimately declare to be worthy. What enters your mind finds its way into your heart, and what fills your heart begins to shape your soul.

Earlier in this series, I said, “You have all of God’s love you will ever need, all of the redemption in Jesus you will ever need, and all of the Holy Spirit you will ever need.” Then I asked a question that cuts right to the heart: How much of your heart does God have? How much of your loyalty does Jesus have? How much of your life does the Holy Spirit have? When you believed in Jesus, you were baptized into Christ and sealed by the Holy Spirit once for all. But the filling of the Holy Spirit—His influence, His comfort, His power—comes as He gains more of your heart.

Paul’s instructions in verses 18–21 speak to the *culture of your inner life*. What you allow into your mind will eventually shape the way you think; what saturates your thoughts will begin to direct how you feel; and what controls your desires will govern the direction of your life. This is why Paul begins with a prohibition: “*And do not get drunk with wine...*” His point is simple—do not fill yourself with anything that dulls your spiritual senses. Instead, fill your mind, soul, and heart with the God you were made to know.

R.C. Sproul captures this beautifully: “Paul is saying to drink deeply and constantly, keeping ourselves close to the Spirit of God, so that we maximize the means of grace of His presence and of His power in our lives.”²⁷ Getting drunk—whether on wine or anything else—is debauchery because it places your mind and heart under the control of something that strips you of reason, clarity, and holiness. Alcohol can do that. But so can a smartphone. So can entertainment. So can social media. If Paul were writing a letter to your church today, I suspect it might include a sentence similar to Ephesians 5:18: “Do not bow to your phones to be consumed by your screen time, but be saturated with the Word of God for the good of your mind, heart, and soul.”

Pause and consider this: How can you expect the power of the Holy Spirit to flood your life if the loudest, most consistent voice shaping your mind is a stream of digital noise and distraction, instead of the truth and wisdom of Holy Scripture? If your heart is consumed by what numbs and distracts you from Christ, can you truly call yourself wise—or are you forfeiting the very intimacy with God you desperately need?

So, how do you “be filled with the Spirit” in a world intent on draining your soul? Paul doesn’t leave us guessing. You must saturate your life with God’s Word—let it be your guiding light and

²⁷ R.C. Sproul, *Ephesians: An Expositional Commentary* (Sanford, FL: Ligonier Ministries; 2023), 78.

daily bread. You intentionally encourage and build each other up by “speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs” (v. 19), gathering together in worship that directs every heart back to God. You cultivate genuine gratitude, not because life is always easy, but because you see every good thing in your life as a direct gift from God’s loving hand (v. 20). And you submit—daily, humbly—to the authority of Christ, seeking to honor Him in every relationship, allowing His Spirit to shape your heart, your words, and your actions (v. 21).

In other words, a Spirit-filled life is a Spirit-governed life. And a Spirit-governed life requires intentional pursuit in at least three areas:

1. **Pursue God by seeking to know Him.**

What you know about God will shape how you respond to Him. A deeper understanding of His holiness, His mercy, and His majesty produces a deeper reverence for His will and His ways.

2. **Live the days you have left with determination.**

Refuse to waste the time God has given you. You will live forever, and how you live today is an investment in the joy you will experience in eternity.

3. **Guard what you put into your mind, heart, and soul.**

The more of your heart the Holy Spirit gains, the more of God’s peace, joy, and purpose you will experience.

Chapter 17

The Danger of Orthodoxy

Revelation 2:1-7

Years after Paul departed from Ephesus (Acts 20:17ff), his path eventually led to imprisonment. Yet even behind bars, his heart remained tethered to the church he loved. He wrote to them overflowing with gratitude: “I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints. I do not stop giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers”(Eph. 1:15–16). His letter closed with a blessing: “Grace be with all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with an undying love” (6:24). But nearly thirty years later, Jesus Himself spoke to the Christians in Ephesus: “I know your deeds, your hard work and your perseverance... Yet I have this against you: you have left your first love” (Rev. 2:2–4).

The church in Ephesus was planted around AD 52 by Paul with the help of Aquila and Priscilla. By the time John wrote Revelation in the mid-90s, this congregation had been standing firm in a spiritually hostile city for roughly four decades. Ephesus was not friendly territory for followers of Jesus. Christians had no legal protections, emperor worship was expected, and the city’s economic heartbeat depended on devotion to Artemis. From the moment Paul brought the gospel there, and all the way to John’s vision on Patmos, the pressures on the Ephesian believers only intensified.

Yet by year forty, this church had a strong reputation—one marked especially by doctrinal purity. In a city like Ephesus, any church without rock-solid doctrine would have quickly lost its way. But Jesus commended them: “You cannot tolerate evil people... you have tested those who call themselves apostles and are not, and found them false... you have endured hardships for My name and have not grown weary” (Rev. 2:2–3). He praised them for refusing to tolerate evil, for exposing false apostles, and for standing firm in a demonic spiritual climate. Their doctrinal vigilance kept them from collapsing under cultural and spiritual pressure.

That is the point: sound doctrine kept this church alive. Right theology—orthodoxy—fueled their perseverance. As a church, we spent 46 weeks walking through Ephesians, and Paul repeatedly

urges believers to guard the purity of the faith. Christ is cleansing His people “through the washing of water with the word” (Eph. 5:26). We are “built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the cornerstone” (Eph. 2:20–22). Good doctrine cannot—and must not—be traded for what is more agreeable, less offensive, or more culturally welcomed.

Yet despite all their strength and steadfastness, Jesus had a significant complaint against the Ephesian church—a warning as relevant for us today as it was for them. For all their doctrinal accuracy and perseverance, there remained one issue that threatened their spiritual life from within.

Their Love Was Found Wanting

There was much the Ephesian church was doing well—so well that Jesus Himself praised them for it. But the greatest threat they faced wasn’t the temple of Artemis towering over their city, nor the demonic idols and sorcery Ephesus was known for, nor even the Roman Empire that viewed Christianity as a threat. The danger that threatened them most came from within. The church looked healthy on the outside, but beneath the surface was a cancer that, if left untreated, could become terminal. It was the one thing that turns vibrant orthodoxy into cold, lifeless legalism. Jesus names it plainly: “But I have this against you, that you have left your first love” (Rev. 2:4).

What is meant by “first love”?

If you’re using the NIV or ESV, the verse reads, “*you have abandoned the love you had at first.*” The KJV and NASB translate it as “*you have left your first love.*” So is Jesus pointing to a person they stopped loving or the quality of love they once had? Paul’s letter to this same church gives us clarity. In Ephesians 1:15–16, he celebrates their “*faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints,*” and in Ephesians 6:24 he blesses those who “*love our Lord Jesus Christ with incorruptible love.*” These two bookends tell us the Ephesian church once possessed a deep, vibrant love for Jesus and a genuine, sacrificial love for one another. This is why the NLT captures the meaning so well: “You don’t love me or each other as you did at first!” Their doctrine remained intact, but their affection had cooled.

Whose love abandoned who?

The answer is simple: the Ephesian church left their first love. What Paul thanked God for in Ephesians 1 was the very thing they drifted from by the time John wrote Revelation. Love is what keeps orthodoxy from collapsing into legalism; without love, right living becomes harsh, mechanical, and graceless. This drift is rarely intentional. It happens quietly and subtly—even while serving. During my church-planting years, I once packed up equipment after a long Sunday and drove home only to realize I had left my son, Seth, behind at church. I didn’t forget him on purpose; the work simply absorbed my attention. The Ephesian church did the same thing spiritually—they clung tightly to orthodoxy but slowly loosened their grip on love, leaving a dangerous legalism growing inside the church.

Who was no longer loved?

The answer is both Jesus and His people. When asked the greatest commandment, Jesus joined the two together: “Love the Lord your God... and love your neighbor as yourself” (Matt. 22:37–39). John is even more direct: “If someone says, ‘I love God,’ and hates his brother or sister, he is a liar” (1 John 4:20). The Ephesian church had once been known for “incorruptible love” for Christ and a sincere love for the saints. That love fueled their witness, strengthened their faith, and pushed back the darkness around them. But when that love faded, everything else faded with it.

Revelation 2:1–4 teaches us that Jesus wants more than obedience; He wants our hearts. And when He has your heart, obedience naturally follows.

The Way Back is Always Jesus

What about you dear Christian? Have you lost your love for Jesus and His people? Has your love for Him waned over the years? Have you gotten sidetracked? Think about the days when you first encountered Jesus and believed in Him. Remember the excitement of those days. In many respects, it is very similar to any relationship where you experienced love.

If you are married, think back to the days when you first met. Try to remember what you felt on your first date. Can you recall the day you were engaged? Revelation 2:1-7 reminds me of a funny little article titled, “The Seven Years of the Married Cold.” I am not sure who wrote it, but I first heard about it through a sermon Pastor Greg Laurie preached; here is how the article described the first seven years of marriage dealing with the common cold:

First year of marriage: “Sugar dumpling, I’m really worried about my baby girl. You’ve got a bad snuffle and there’s no telling about these things with all the strep going around. I’m putting you in the hospital this afternoon for a general checkup and a good rest. I know the food’s lousy, but I’ll be bringing your meals in from Rozzini’s. I already have it all arranged with the floor superintendent.”

Second year: “Listen darling, I don’t like the sound of that cough. I’ve called Doc Miller to rush over here. Now you go to bed like a good girl, just for Poppa.”

Third year: “Maybe you had better lie down, honey. Nothing like a little rest when you feel lousy. I’ll bring you some soup.”

Fourth year: “Now look, dear, be sensible. After you’ve fed the kids, and done the dishes, and washed the floor, you better lie down.”

Fifth year: “Why don’t you take a couple aspirin?”

Sixth year: “I wish you’d just gargle or something instead of sitting around barking like a seal all evening.”

Seventh year: “For Pete’s sake, stop sneezing! Are you trying to give me pneumonia?”

I am not sure what you may be feeling concerning your marriage, but my relationship with Jesus has also had its ups and downs. The problem in all of my 33 years since the day I entered into a relationship with Jesus was never with Jesus and always with me. I was the one who found myself growing cold. But when I first came to faith in Jesus, I could not get enough about Jesus nor could I stop talking about Him.

Who is Jesus to you today? Have you grown weary of spending time with Him? When you sing in church is it more about what you like about the song than it is about who we are singing about? Do you find reading your Bible to be boring? Do you find being around His people to be irritating? Is it possible that your problem is less about the Jesus, the church you attend, the and your spiritual lethargy and more about what you have forgotten and left behind?

I don't want you to feel worse about where you are at spiritually. But if you are experiencing a loss of awe and wonder, if you are less grateful for the miracle of your salvation, if you are motivated by duty instead of delight for God, and if you feel pressure to perform, you have lost your first love just as the church in Ephesus did. But here is the good news: I doesn't have to be that way any longer! Listen to what Jesus said to the church in Ephesus and what He is saying to you: "Therefore, remember from where you have fallen, and repent, and do the deeds you did at first; or else I am coming to you and I will remove your lampstand from its place—unless you repent" (Rev. 2:5).

Here is what Jesus tells us we can do to get back to our first love: Rember where you have fallen, repent by recognizing what led you away from Jesus so that you do not do it again, and return to Jesus by serving and loving on His people. It is quite simple:

1. Remember the things you did that deepened your love for Jesus and His people.
2. Repent by begin doing the things that fueled your love for Jesus and His people.
3. Return by finding ways to spend time with Jesus and ways you can serve with His people.

Exod. 29:18. And you shall offer up in smoke the whole ram on the altar; it is a burnt offering to the LORD: it is a soothing aroma, an offering by fire to the LORD.

Gen. 8:21. The LORD smelled the soothing aroma, and the LORD said to Himself, "I will never again curse the ground on account of man, for the intent of man's heart is evil from his youth; and I will never again destroy every living thing, as I have done."

BE IMITATORS OF GOD

¹ Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children;

² and walk in love, just as Christ also loved you and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma.

Matt. 5:48. "Therefore you shall be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect."

Luke 6:36. "Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful."

John 13:34. "I am giving you a new commandment, that you love one another; just as I have loved you, that you also love one another."

Eph. 4:32. Be kind to one another, compassionate, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.

Rom. 8:37. But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us.

Rom. 14:15. For if because of food your brother *or sister* is hurt, you are no longer walking in accordance with love. Do not destroy with your *choice* of food that *person* for whom Christ died.

Rom. 4:25. *He* who was delivered over because of our wrongdoings, and was raised because of our justification.

Heb. 7:26–27. For it was fitting for us to have such a high priest, holy, innocent, undefiled, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens; ²⁷who has no daily need, like those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for His own sins and then for the sins of the people, because He did this once for all *time* when He offered up Himself.

Heb. 9:13–14. For if the blood of goats and bulls, and the ashes of a heifer sprinkling those who have been defiled, sanctify for the cleansing of the flesh, ¹⁴how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, cleanse your conscience from dead

² and walk in love, just as Christ also loved you and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma.

Ps. 16:4. The pains of those who have acquired another *god* will be multiplied; I will not pour out their drink offerings of blood, nor will I take their names upon my lips.

³ But sexual immorality or any impurity or greed must not even be mentioned among you, as is proper among saints;

Matt. 5:27–30. “You have heard that it was said, ‘YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT ADULTERY’; ²⁸but I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart. ²⁹Now if your right eye is causing you to sin, tear it out and throw it away from you; for it is better for you to lose one of the parts of your *body*, than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. ³⁰And if your right hand is causing you to sin, cut it off

works to serve the living God?

Gal. 1:3–4. Grace to you and peace from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ, ⁴who gave Himself for our sins so that He might rescue us from this present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father . . .

Heb. 10:10–12. By this will, we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all *time*. ¹¹Every priest stands daily ministering and offering time after time the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins; ¹²but He, having offered one sacrifice for sins for all time, SAT DOWN AT THE RIGHT HAND OF GOD...

2 Cor. 2:15–16. For we are a fragrance of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing: ¹⁶to the one an aroma from death to death, to the other an aroma from life to life. And who is adequate for these things?

1 Cor. 5:9–13. I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people; ¹⁰I *did* not at all *mean* with the sexually immoral people of this world, or with the greedy and swindlers, or with idolaters, for then you would have to leave the world. ¹¹But actually, I wrote to you not to associate with any so-called brother if he is a sexually immoral person, or a greedy person, or an idolater, or is verbally abusive, or habitually drunk, or a

³ But sexual immorality or any impurity or greed must not even be mentioned among you, as is proper among saints;

and throw it away from you; for it is better for you to lose one of the parts of your *body*, than for your whole body to go into hell.”

swindler—not even to eat with such a person. ¹²For what *business* of mine is it to judge outsiders? Do you not judge those who are within *the church*? ¹³But those who are outside, God judges. REMOVE THE EVIL PERSON FROM AMONG YOURSELVES.

1 Cor. 6:18. Flee sexual immorality. Every other sin that a person commits is outside the body, but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body.

1 Tim. 4:1–3. But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons, ²by means of the hypocrisy of liars seared in their own conscience as with a branding iron, ³who forbid marriage *and advocate* abstaining from foods which God has created to be gratefully shared in by those who believe and know the truth.

Gal. 5:19–21. Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: sexual immorality, impurity, indecent behavior, ²⁰idolatry, witchcraft, hostilities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions, ²¹envy, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you, just as I have forewarned you, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

Col. 3:5. Therefore, treat the parts of your earthly body as dead *to* sexual immorality, impurity,

Eccl. 10:12–14. Words from the mouth of a wise person are gracious, while the lips of a fool consume him; ¹³the beginning of his talking is foolishness, and the end of it is evil insanity. ¹⁴Yet the fool multiplies words. No person knows what will happen, and who can tell him what will come after him?

Ps. 34:8. Taste and see that the LORD is good; how blessed is the man who takes refuge in Him!

⁴ **and there must be no filthiness or foolish talk, or vulgar joking, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks.**

⁵ **For this you know with certainty, that no sexually immoral or impure or greedy person, which amounts to an idolater, has an inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God.**

Acts 19:1–7. Now it happened that while Apollos was in Corinth, Paul passed through the upper country and came to Ephesus, and found some disciples. ²He said to them, “Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?” And they *said* to him, “On the contrary, we have not even heard if there is a Holy Spirit.” ³And he said, “Into what then were you baptized?” And they said, “Into John’s baptism.” ⁴Paul said, “John baptized with a baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in Him who was coming after him, that is, in Jesus.” ⁵When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. ⁶And when Paul had laid hands upon them, the Holy Spirit came on them and they *began* speaking with tongues and prophesying. ⁷There were about twelve men in all.

John 3:16–21. “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him will not perish, but have eternal life. ¹⁷For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but so that the world might be saved through Him. ¹⁸The one who believes in Him is not judged; the one who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God. ¹⁹And this is the judgment, that the Light has come into the

passion, evil desire, and greed, which amounts to idolatry.

Rom. 1:28–30. And just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a depraved mind, to do those things that are not proper, ²⁹*people* having been filled with all unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, *and* evil; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, *and* malice; *they are* gossips, ³⁰slanderers, haters of God, insolent, arrogant, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents...

1 Cor. 6:9–10. Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, ¹⁰nor thieves, nor *the* greedy, nor those habitually drunk, nor verbal abusers, nor swindlers, will inherit the kingdom of God.

Gal. 5:19–21. Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: sexual immorality, impurity, indecent behavior, ²⁰idolatry, witchcraft,

⁵ For this you know with certainty, that no sexually immoral or impure or greedy person, which amounts to an idolater, has an inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God.

⁶ See that no one deceives you with empty words, for

world, and people loved the darkness rather than the Light; for their deeds were evil. ²⁰For everyone who does evil hates the Light, and does not come to the Light, so that his deeds will not be exposed. ²¹But the one who practices the truth comes to the Light, so that his deeds will be revealed as having been performed in God.”

Matt. 24:4-5. And Jesus answered and said to them, “See to it that no one misleads you. ⁵For many

hostilities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions, ²¹envy, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you, just as I have forewarned you, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

Col. 3:5. Therefore, treat the parts of your earthly body as dead *to* sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, which amounts to idolatry.

Col. 1:13. For He rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son...

1 John 3:7–10. Little children, make sure no one deceives you; the one who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous; ⁸the one who practices sin is of the devil; for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The Son of God appeared for this purpose, to destroy the works of the devil. ⁹No one who has been born of God practices sin, because His seed remains in him; and he cannot sin *continually*, because he has been born of God. ¹⁰By this the children of God and the children of the devil are obvious: anyone who does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor the one who does not love his brother *and sister*.

Col. 2:8. See to it that there is no one who takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception in

because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience.

⁶ See *that* no one deceives you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience.

⁷ Therefore do not become partners with them;

⁸ for you were once darkness, but now you

will come in My name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and they will mislead many people."

Acts 26:16–18. "But get up and stand on your feet; for this *purpose* I have appeared to you, to appoint

accordance with human tradition, in accordance with the elementary principles of the world, rather than in accordance with Christ.

Rom. 1:18. For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of people who suppress the truth in unrighteousness...

Col. 3:6. For *it is* because of these things *that* the wrath of God is coming upon the sons of disobedience...

Eph. 2:1–2. And you were dead in your offenses and sins, ²in which you previously walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience.

1 Pet. 1:14. As obedient children, do not be conformed to the former lusts *which were yours* in your ignorance...

Eph. 3:6–7. *to be specific,* that the Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel, ⁷of which I was made a minister, according to the gift of God's grace which was given to me according to the working of His power.

Eph. 2:2. ...in which you previously walked according to the course of this world, according to the

Isa. 2:5. Come, house of Jacob, and let's walk in the light of the LORD.

**are light in the Lord;
walk as children of light**

**⁸ for you were once
darkness, but now you
are light in the Lord;
walk as children of light**

you as a servant and a witness not only to the things in which you have seen Me, but also to the things in which I will appear to you, ¹⁷rescuing you from the *Jewish* people and from the Gentiles, to whom I am sending you, ¹⁸to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who have been sanctified by faith in Me.”

John 12:36. “While you have the Light, believe in the Light, so that you may become sons of Light.” These things Jesus proclaimed, and He went away and hid Himself from them.”

prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience.

Col. 1:12. ...giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in light.

Rom. 13:12. The night is almost gone, and the day is near. Therefore let’s rid ourselves of the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light.

Zech. 8:16. These are the things which you shall do: speak the truth to one another; judge with truth and judgment for peace at your gates.

**⁹ (for the fruit of the
light consists in all
goodness,
righteousness, and
truth),**

Gal. 5:22–23. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.

Rom. 7:4. Therefore, my brothers *and sisters*, you also were put to death in regard to the Law through the body of Christ, so that you might belong to another, to Him who was raised from the dead, in order that we might bear fruit for God.

Rom. 15:14. And concerning you, my brothers *and sisters*, I myself also am convinced that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge and able also to admonish one another.

Lev. 19:17. “You shall not hate your fellow countryman in your heart; you may certainly rebuke your neighbor, but you are not to incur sin because of him.”

¹⁰ as you try to learn what is pleasing to the Lord.

¹¹ Do not participate in the useless deeds of darkness, but instead even expose them;

See Acts 26:16–18.

Matt. 18:15–17. “Now if your brother sins, go and show him his fault in private; if he listens to you, you have gained your brother. ¹⁶But if he does not listen *to you*, take one or two more with you, so that ON THE TESTIMONY OF TWO OR THREE WITNESSES EVERY MATTER MAY BE CONFIRMED. ¹⁷And if he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, he is to be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.”

1 Thess. 2:3–4. For our exhortation does not *come* from error or impurity or by way of deceit; ⁴but just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak, not intending to please people, but *to please* God, who examines our hearts.

Rom. 12:2. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.

Rom. 6:12. Therefore sin is not to reign in your mortal body so that you obey its lusts,

1 Cor. 5:9–10. I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people; ¹⁰I *did* not at all *mean* with the sexually immoral people of this world, or with the greedy and swindlers, or with idolaters, for then you would have to leave the world.

2 Cor. 6:14. Do not be mismatched with unbelievers; for what do righteousness and lawlessness share together, or what does light have in common with darkness?

Rom. 13:12. The night is almost gone, and the day is near. Therefore let’s rid ourselves of the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light.

Col. 1:12. ...giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified us to share in the

¹¹ Do not participate in the useless deeds of darkness, but instead even expose them;

¹² for it is disgraceful even to speak of the things which are done by them in secret.

¹³ But all things become visible when they are exposed by the light, for everything that becomes visible is light.

¹⁴ For this reason it says, “Awake, sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.”

Isa. 60:1–2. “Arise, shine; for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD has risen upon you. ²For behold, darkness will cover the earth and deep darkness the peoples; but the LORD will rise upon you and His glory will appear upon you.”

Isa. 26:19. Your dead will live; their corpses will rise. You who lie in the dust, awake and shout for joy, for your dew *is as* the dew of the dawn, and the earth will

inheritance of the saints in light.

1 Tim. 5:20. Those who continue in sin, rebuke in the presence of all, so that the rest also will be fearful of *sinning*.

1 Cor. 5:12–13. For what *business* of mine *is it* to judge outsiders? Do you not judge those who are within *the church*? ¹³But those who are outside, God judges. REMOVE THE EVIL PERSON FROM AMONG YOURSELVES.

Eph. 5:3. But sexual immorality or any impurity or greed must not even be mentioned among you, as is proper among saints...

John 3:20–21. “For everyone who does evil hates the Light, and does not come to the Light, so that his deeds will not be exposed. ²¹But the one who practices the truth comes to the Light, so that his deeds will be revealed as having been performed in God.”

Luke 1:78–79. “Because of the tender mercy of our God, with which the Sunrise from on high will visit us, ⁷⁹To shine on those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.”

John 5:25. “Truly, truly, I say to you, a time is coming and even now has arrived, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live.”

Rom. 13:11. *Do this*, knowing the time, that it is already the hour for you to awaken from sleep; for now salvation is nearer to us than when we *first* believed.

Eph. 2:1. And you were dead in your offenses and sins...

give birth to the departed spirits.

Isa. 51:17. Pull yourself up! Pull yourself up! Arise, Jerusalem! You who have drunk from the LORD'S hand the cup of His anger; the chalice of staggering you have drunk to the dregs.

Isa. 52:1. Awake, awake, clothe yourself in your strength, Zion; clothe yourself with your beautiful garments, Jerusalem, the holy city; for the uncircumcised and the unclean will no longer come into you.

Mic. 7:8–9. Do not rejoice over me, enemy of mine. Though I fall I will rise; though I live in darkness, the LORD is a light for me. ⁹I will endure the rage of the LORD because I have sinned against Him, until He pleads my case and executes justice for me. He will bring me out to the light, *and* I will look at His righteousness.

Jon. 1:6. So the captain approached him and said, "How is it that you are sleeping? Get up, call on your god! Perhaps *your* god will be concerned about us so that we will not perish."

Prov. 1:7. The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction.

Prov. 15:21. Foolishness is joy to one who lacks sense, but a person of understanding walks straight.

¹⁴ **For this reason it says, "Awake, sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you."**

¹⁵ **So then, be careful how you walk, not as unwise people but as wise,**

John 8:12. Then Jesus again spoke to them, saying, "I am the Light of the world; the one who follows Me will not walk in the darkness, but will have the Light of life."

Eph. 5:1–2. Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children; ²and walk in love, just as Christ also loved you and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma.

Col. 4:5. Conduct yourselves with wisdom toward outsiders, making the most of the opportunity.

Old Testament

Eccl. 12:1. Remember also your Creator in the days of your youth, before the evil days come and the years approach when you will say, "I have no pleasure in them."

Amos 5:12–13. For I know your offenses are many and your sins are great, *you* who are hostile to the righteous and accept bribes, and turn away the poor *from justice* at the gate. ¹³Therefore at such a time the prudent person keeps quiet, because it is an evil time.

Ephesians 5:1-21

¹⁶ **making the most of your time, because the days are evil.**

¹⁷ **Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is.**

The Gospels & Acts

Epistles & Revelation

Gal. 1:3–4. Grace to you and peace from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ, ⁴who gave Himself for our sins so that He might rescue us from this present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father...

Eph. 6:13. Therefore, take up the full armor of God, so that you will be able to resist on the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm.

Gal. 1:3–4. Grace to you and peace from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ, ⁴who gave Himself for our sins so that He might rescue us from this present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father,

Rom. 12:2. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.

Col. 1:9. For this reason we also, since the day we heard *about it*, have not ceased praying for you and asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding...

1 Thess. 4:3. For this is the will of God, your sanctification; *that is*, that you abstain from sexual immorality...

1 Thess. 5:18. ...in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God for you in Christ Jesus.

Old Testament

Prov. 20:1. Wine is a mocker, intoxicating drink a brawler, and whoever is intoxicated by it is not wise.

Prov. 23:20–21. Do not be with heavy drinkers of wine, *or* with gluttonous eaters of meat; ²¹for the heavy drinker and the glutton will come to poverty, and drowsiness will clothe *one* with rags.

Prov. 23:31–32. Do not look at wine when it is red, when it sparkles in the cup, *when* it goes down smoothly; ³²in the end it bites like a snake and stings like a viper.

Joel 2:28–29. “It will come about after this that I will pour out My Spirit on all mankind; and your sons and your daughters will prophesy, your old men will have dreams, your young men will see visions. ²⁹And even on the male and female servants I will pour out My Spirit in those days.

See also: *Gen. 41:38; Exod. 31:3; Num. 27:18; Jud. 3:10; 6:34; 11:29; 13:5; 14:6; 14:19; 15:14; 1 Sam. 6:13.*

Ephesians 5:1-21

¹⁸ **And do not get drunk with wine, in which there is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit,**

¹⁹ **speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your hearts to the Lord;**

The Gospels & Acts

John 14:25–26. “These things I have spoken to you while remaining with you. ²⁶But the Helper, the Holy Spirit whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and remind you of all that I said to you.”

John 16:13–15. “But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come. ¹⁴He will glorify Me, for He will take from Mine and will disclose *it* to you. ¹⁵All things that the Father has are Mine; this is why I said that He takes from Mine and will disclose *it* to you.”

Acts 2:4. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with different tongues, as the Spirit was giving them *the ability* to speak out.

Acts 16:25–26. Now about midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns of praise to God, and the prisoners were listening to them; ²⁶and suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened, and everyone’s chains were unfastened.

Epistles & Revelation

Rom. 13:13. Let’s behave properly as in the day, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual promiscuity and debauchery, not in strife and jealousy.

1 Cor. 5:11. But actually, I wrote to you not to associate with any so-called brother if he is a sexually immoral person, or a greedy person, or an idolater, or is verbally abusive, or habitually drunk, or a swindler—not even to eat with such a person.

1 Thess. 5:7. For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who are drunk, get drunk at night.

Titus 1:5–6. For this reason I left you in Crete, that you would set in order what remains and appoint elders in every city as I directed you, ⁶*namely*, if any man is beyond reproach, the husband of one wife, having children who believe, not accused of indecent behavior or rebellion.

1 Pet. 4:4. In *all* this, they are surprised that you do not run with *them* in the same excesses of debauchery, and they slander *you*...

Col. 3:16. Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms, hymns, *and* spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God.

1 Cor. 14:26. What is *the outcome* then, brothers *and sisters*? When you assemble, each one has a psalm, has a teaching, has a

Ps. 34:1. I will bless the LORD at all times; His praise shall continually be in my mouth.

¹⁹ speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your hearts to the Lord;

²⁰ always giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to *our* God and Father;

John 14:13. “And whatever you ask in My name, this I will do, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son.”

revelation, has a tongue, has an interpretation. All things are to be done for edification.

Rev. 5:9. And they sang a new song, saying, “Worthy are You to take the scroll and to break its seals; for You were slaughtered, and You purchased *people* for God with Your blood from every tribe, language, people, and nation.”

1 Cor. 14:15. What is the *outcome* then? I will pray with the spirit, but I will pray with the mind also; I will sing with the spirit, but I will sing with the mind also.

Rom. 1:8. First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, because your faith is being proclaimed throughout the world.

Eph. 5:4. ...and there *must be no* filthiness or foolish talk, or vulgar joking, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks.

Col. 3:17. Whatever you do in word or deed, *do* everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father.

1 Cor. 15:23–24. But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, after that those who are Christ’s at His coming, ²⁴then *comes* the end, when He hands over the kingdom to *our* God and Father, when He has abolished all rule and all authority and power.

Heb. 13:15. Through Him then, let’s continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to

²¹ and subject
yourselves to one
another in the fear of
Christ.

²¹ and subject
yourselves to one
another in the fear of
Christ.

God, that is, the fruit of lips
praising His name.

Gal. 5:13. For you were
called to freedom, brothers
and sisters; only *do not turn*
your freedom into an
opportunity for the flesh,
but serve one another
through love.

Phil. 2:3. Do nothing from
selfishness or empty
conceit, but with humility
consider one another as
more important than
yourselves...

1 Pet. 5:5. You younger
men, likewise, be subject to
your elders; and all of you,
clothe yourselves with
humility toward one
another, because GOD IS
OPPOSED TO THE PROUD,
BUT HE GIVES GRACE TO THE
HUMBLE.

2 Cor. 5:11. Therefore,
knowing the fear of the
Lord, we persuade people,
but we are well known to
God; and I hope that we are
also well known in your
consciences.

Exod. 15:6. “Your right hand, LORD, is majestic in power; Your right hand, LORD, destroys the enemy.”

Ps. 17:7. Show Your wonderful faithfulness, Savior of those who take refuge at Your right hand from those who rise up *against them*.

Ps. 48:10. As is Your name, God, so is Your praise to the ends of the earth; Your right hand is full of righteousness.

Ps. 139:9–10. *If* I take up the wings of the dawn, *if* I dwell in the remotest part of the sea, ¹⁰even there Your hand will lead me, and Your right hand will take hold of me.

Isa. 48:12–13. “Listen to Me, Jacob, Israel whom I called; I am He, I am the first, I am also the last. ¹³Assuredly My hand founded the earth, and My right hand spread out the heavens; when I call to them, they stand together.”

Ps. 1:6. For the LORD knows the way of the righteous, But the way of the wicked will perish.

A LETTER TO EPHESUS

¹“To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: **The One who holds the seven stars in His right hand, the One who walks among the seven golden lampstands, says this:**

²**‘I know your deeds and your labor and perseverance, and that you cannot tolerate evil people, and you have put those who call themselves apostles to the test, and they are not, and you found them to be false;**

Acts 20:29–30. I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; ³⁰and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things to draw away the disciples after them.

Matt. 7:15–20. “Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves. ¹⁶You will know them by their fruits. Grapes are not gathered from thorn *bushes*, nor figs from thistles, are

Rev. 1:16. In His right hand He held seven stars, and out of His mouth came a sharp two-edged sword; and His face was like the sun shining in its strength.

Rev. 1:20. “*As for the mystery of the seven stars which you saw in My right hand, and the seven golden lampstands: the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches.*”

Heb. 1:13–14. But to which of the angels has He ever said, “SIT AT MY RIGHT HAND, UNTIL I MAKE YOUR ENEMIES A FOOTSTOOL FOR YOUR FEET”? ¹⁴Are they not all ministering spirits, sent out to *provide* service for the sake of those who will inherit salvation?

1 Thess. 5:19–22. Do not quench the Spirit, ²⁰do not utterly reject prophecies, ²¹but examine everything; hold firmly to that which is good, ²²abstain from every form of evil.

Rev. 3:1. “To the angel of the church in Sardis write: He who has the seven spirits of God and the seven stars, says this: ‘I know your deeds, that you have a name that you are alive, and yet you are dead.’”

Rev. 3:8. “I know your deeds. Behold, I have put

² **‘I know your deeds and your labor and perseverance, and that you cannot tolerate evil people, and you have put those who call themselves apostles to the test, and they are not, and you found them to be false;**

³ **and you have perseverance and have endured on account of My name, and have not become weary.**

they? ¹⁷So every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit. ¹⁸A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit. ¹⁹Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. ²⁰So then, you will know them by their fruits.”

John 15:20–21.
“Remember the word that I said to you, ‘A slave is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted Me, they will persecute you as well; if they followed My word, they will follow yours also. ²¹But all these things they will do to you on account of My name, because they do not know the One who sent Me.”

before you an open door which no one can shut, because you have a little power, and have followed My word, and have not denied My name.”

Rev. 3:15. “I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot; I wish that you were cold or hot.”

1 John 4:1. Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world.

2 Cor. 11:12–13. But what I am doing I will also *continue* to do, so that I may eliminate the opportunity from those who want an opportunity to be regarded just as we are in the matter about which they are boasting. ¹³For such men are false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ.

Heb. 12:3–6. For consider Him who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart. ⁴You have not yet resisted to the point of shedding blood in your striving against sin; ⁵and you have forgotten the exhortation which is addressed to you as sons, “MY SON, DO NOT REGARD LIGHTLY THE DISCIPLINE OF THE LORD, NOR FAINT WHEN YOU ARE PUNISHED BY HIM; ⁶FOR WHOM THE LORD LOVES HE DISCIPLINES, AND HE PUNISHES EVERY SON WHOM HE ACCEPTS.”

Old Testament

Deut. 6:4–9. “Hear, Israel! The Lord is our God, the LORD is one! ⁵And you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. ⁶These words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart. ⁷And you shall repeat them diligently to your sons and speak of them when you sit in your house, when you walk on the road, when you lie down, and when you get up. ⁸You shall also tie them as a sign to your hand, and they shall be as frontlets on your forehead. ⁹You shall also write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.”

Jer. 2:2–3. “Go and proclaim in the ears of Jerusalem, saying, ‘This is what the LORD says: “I remember regarding you the devotion of your youth, your love when you were a bride, your following after Me in the wilderness, through a land not sown. ³Israel was holy to the LORD, the first of His harvest. All who ate of it became guilty; evil came upon them,” declares the Lord.’”

Revelation 2:1-7

⁴ **But I have *this* against you, that you have left your first love.**

The Gospels & Acts

Matt. 22:35–40. And one of them, a lawyer, asked Him a question, testing Him: ³⁶“Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?” ³⁷And He said to him, “‘YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND.’ ³⁸This is the great and foremost commandment. ³⁹The second is like it, ‘YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.’ ⁴⁰Upon these two commandments hang the whole Law and the Prophets.”

Matt. 5:43–45. “You have heard that it was said, ‘you Shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ ⁴⁴But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, ⁴⁵ so that you may prove yourselves to be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on *the* evil and *the* good, and sends rain on *the* righteous and *the* unrighteous.”

Luke 6:35–36. “But love your enemies and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High; for He Himself is kind to ungrateful and evil *people*. ³⁶Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.”

John 13:34. “I am giving you a new commandment, that you love one another; just as I have loved you, that you also love one another.”

John 15:12–13. “This is My commandment, that you

Epistles & Revelation

1 Cor. 13:4–7. Love is patient, love is kind, it is not jealous; love does not brag, it is not arrogant. ⁵It does not act disgracefully, it does not seek its own *benefit*; it is not provoked, does not keep an account of a wrong *suffered*, ⁶it does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; ⁷it keeps every confidence, it believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

1 John 4:8–11. The one who does not love does not know God, because God is love. ⁹By this the love of God was revealed in us, that God has sent His only Son into the world so that we may live through Him. ¹⁰In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son *to be* the propitiation for our sins. ¹¹Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.

Rom. 12:9–10. Love *must be* free of hypocrisy. Detest what is evil; cling to what is good. ¹⁰*Be* devoted to one another in brotherly love; give preference to one another in honor...

Gal. 6:2. Bear one another’s burdens, and thereby fulfill the law of Christ.

1 John 3:16–18. We know love by this, that He laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers *and sisters*. ¹⁷But whoever has worldly goods and sees his brother *or sister* in need, and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God remain in him? ¹⁸Little children, let’s not love with

⁴ But I have *this* against you, that you have left your first love.

⁵ Therefore, remember from where you have fallen, and repent, and do the deeds you did at first; or else I am coming to you and I will remove your lampstand from its place—unless you repent.

love one another, just as I have loved you. ¹³Greater love has no one than this, that a person will lay down his life for his friends.”

Matt. 24:11–12. “And many false prophets will rise up and mislead many people. ¹²And because lawlessness is increased, most people’s love will become cold.”

On the love the Ephesian church had at first, see Acts 19:1-20:12, 17-38.

Matt. 5:14–16. “You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden; ¹⁵nor do *people* light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. ¹⁶Your light must shine before people in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.”

On the deeds the Ephesian church did at first, see Acts 19:11ff.

word or with tongue, but in deed and truth.

On how we are to treat those who persecute or mistreat you, see Rom. 12:14-21.

Eph. 1:15–16. For this reason I too, having heard of the faith in the Lord Jesus which *exists* among you and your love for all the saints, ¹⁶do not cease giving thanks for you, while making mention of *you* in my prayers...

Rev. 2:16. “Therefore repent; or else I am coming to you quickly, and I will wage war against them with the sword of My mouth.”

Rev. 2:22. “Behold, I will throw her on a bed of sickness, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of her deeds.”

Rev. 3:3. “So remember what you have received and heard; and keep it, and repent. Then if you are not alert, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what hour I will come to you.”

Rev. 3:19. “Those whom I love, I rebuke and discipline; therefore be zealous and repent.”

⁵ Therefore, remember from where you have fallen, and repent, and do the deeds you did at first; or else I am coming to you and I will remove your lampstand from its place—unless you repent.

See Num. 22:5-25:3; 31:8-16.

⁶ But you have this, that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.

Heb. 10:32–33. But remember the former days, when, after being enlightened, you endured a great conflict of sufferings, ³³partly by being made a public spectacle through insults and distress, and partly by becoming companions with those who were so treated.

Phil. 2:14–16. Do all things without complaining or arguments; ¹⁵so that you will prove yourselves to be blameless and innocent, children of God above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you appear as lights in the world, ¹⁶holding firmly the word of life, so that on the day of Christ I can take pride because I did not run in vain nor labor in vain.

Rev. 1:20. “*As for the mystery of the seven stars which you saw in My right hand, and the seven golden lampstands: the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches.*”

Rev. 2:14–15. “But I have a few things against you, because you have *some* there who hold the teaching of Balaam, who kept teaching Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols and to commit sexual immorality. ¹⁵So you too, have some who in the same way hold to the teaching of the Nicolaitans.”

2 Pet. 2:13b–16. They are stains and blemishes, reveling in their deceptions

⁶ But you have this, that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.

Isa. 6:9–10. And He said, “Go, and tell this people: ‘Keep on listening, but do not understand; and keep on looking, but do not gain knowledge.’ ¹⁰Make the hearts of this people insensitive, their ears dull, and their eyes blind, so that they will not see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts, and return and be healed.”

Gen. 2:9. Out of the ground the LORD God caused every tree to grow that is pleasing to the sight and good for food; the tree of life *was* also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the

⁷ The one who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who overcomes, I will grant to eat from the tree of life, which is in the Paradise of God.’

Matt. 11:15. “The one who has ears to hear, let him hear.”

as they feast with you, ¹⁴having eyes full of adultery that never cease from sin, enticing unstable souls, having hearts trained in greed, accursed children; ¹⁵abandoning the right way, they have gone astray, having followed the way of Balaam, the *son* of Beor, who loved the reward of unrighteousness; ¹⁶but he received a rebuke for his own offense, *for* a mute donkey, speaking with a human voice, restrained the insanity of the prophet.

Jude 10–11. But these people disparage all the things that they do not understand; and all the things that they know by instinct, like unreasoning animals, by these things they are destroyed. ¹¹Woe to them! For they have gone the way of Cain, and for pay they have given themselves up to the error of Balaam, and perished in the rebellion of Korah.

Rev. 2:11. “The one who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. The one who overcomes will not be hurt by the second death.”

Rev. 2:17. “The one who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who overcomes, I will give *some* of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, and a new name written on the stone which no one knows except the one who receives it.”

Rev. 13:7–10. It was also given to him to make war with the saints and to overcome them, and

Old Testament

knowledge of good and evil.

Gen. 3:22. Then the LORD God said, “Behold, the man has become like one of Us, knowing good and evil; and now, he might reach out with his hand, and take *fruit* also from the tree of life, and eat, and live forever...”

Prov. 11:30. The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life, and one who is wise gains souls.

Prov. 13:12. Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but desire fulfilled is a tree of life.

See also, Ezek. 28:11-19; 31:8-9.

Revelation 2:1-7

⁷ **The one who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who overcomes, I will grant to eat from the tree of life, which is in the Paradise of God.’**

The Gospels & Acts

Epistles & Revelation

authority was given to him over every tribe, people, language, and nation. ⁸All who live on the earth will worship him, *everyone* whose name has not been written since the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb who has been slaughtered. ⁹If anyone has an ear, let him hear. ¹⁰If anyone is *destined* for captivity, to captivity he goes; if anyone kills with the sword, with the sword he must be killed. Here is the perseverance and the faith of the saints.

Rev. 22:1–4. And he showed me a river of the water of life, clear as crystal, coming from the throne of God and of the Lamb, ²in the middle of its street. On either side of the river *was* the tree of life, bearing twelve *kinds of* fruit, yielding its fruit every month; and the leaves of the tree *were* for the healing of the nations. ³There will no longer be any curse; and the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and His bond-servants will serve Him; ⁴they will see His face, and His name *will be* on their foreheads.

Rev. 22:14. Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they will have the right to the tree of life, and may enter the city by the gates.

On the “overcomer” and what is promised to those who overcome, see Rev. 2:11, 17, 26; 3:5; 3:12; 3:21; 12:11; 15:2; 21:7.

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