

EPHESIANS

WHO I AM AND WHY IT MATTERS

Today is our final study in the book of Ephesians. Over the past few months, we've focused on our identity in Christ (who we are and why it matters). When you trusted Christ for salvation, your life was changed and set on a new course. According to the book of Ephesians, Jesus makes a difference in how we speak, forgive, treat others, use our time, view marriage, parenting, etc. Today, in the final verses of this remarkable book, we learn how to stand firm in our battle against Satan and his schemes as we pursue God's will for our lives.

Discussion Questions:

1. Looking back at your sermon notes, what encouraged or challenged you the most?

Read Ephesians 6:10-12

2. Truth is becoming increasingly hard to find today; the slow fade to falsehood tempts us all (Ephesians 5:15-16). What can this slow fade look like in our lives? Why does it happen? Why do we quickly lose sight of the fact that we have a real spiritual enemy?

If we're not careful, we'll quickly find ourselves being "carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming" (Ephesians 4:14). Satan is the great deceiver – the father of lies having no truth in him (John 8:44). He hates God. Hence, his mission is to discredit Him by confusing His children, twisting the truth just enough to lead us to false beliefs about God, ourselves, others, and the world.

We quickly lose sight of the fact that we have a real spiritual enemy as we neglect daily time in the Word due to the demands of life, placing our "to-do" list, sleep, and other things above it. We are all tempted by Satan to neglect the Word. Subconsciously we think that "I can make it today without that." "I've got too much to do!" "I'll do it later when I get everything else done." "I need sleep more than that." The problem is, everything else doesn't ever get done, we remain exhausted, and time in communion with the Father in His Word doesn't happen.

3. The big idea of these final verses in Ephesians is for Christians to stand firm in the strength of the Lord. How does Paul describe the work of our enemy in these verses? What are the implications of the repeated call to stand firm (v. 11, 13, 14)?

Our enemy, the devil and "evil rulers and authorities of the unseen world," are powerful, evil, and strategic. Therefore, our battle against them should not be fought while sitting down. We're called to

stand – which is the ready position for entering battle – a spiritual battle we fight from a place of strength. We stand in the strength/power of God, which enables us to resist our enemy.

Read Ephesians 6:13-17

4. What correlation is to be made between the commands “stand your ground,” “be strong in the Lord,” and “put on every piece of God’s armor” so we can resist the enemy? Discuss the role of intentionality.

Not only are we told to stand our ground, an intentional step on our part, but we are also reminded that the strength we need for the battle isn’t our own – it’s the strength of the Lord that we take up while putting on God’s armor. Like producing spiritual fruit, we stand firm against the enemy as we abide in Christ. We must willfully stand. We must deliberately put on God’s armor. We must swing the sword of the Spirit.

D.A. Carson once famously said, “People do not drift toward Holiness. Apart from grace-driven effort, people do not gravitate toward godliness, prayer, obedience to Scripture, faith, and delight in the Lord. We drift toward compromise and call it tolerance; we drift toward disobedience and call it freedom; we drift toward superstition and call it faith. We cherish the indiscipline of lost self-control and call it relaxation; we slouch toward prayerlessness and delude ourselves into thinking we have escaped legalism; we slide toward godlessness and convince ourselves we have been liberated.”

5. Discuss each piece of God’s armor. What are they? Why do we need them? What does it look like to put them on each day?

- **Helmet of salvation**

- A helmet protects the head and is where our mind is located. Putting on the helmet of salvation is continually taking up the hope of eternity that God gives us through salvation.
- Through faith in Christ alone, our salvation is a settled fact; we will be with the Lord when we die.
- So why do we need the helmet? Because Satan will try to rob us of this future hope while we stand in this present reality. Satan will tempt us to doubt and condemnation.

- **Breastplate of righteousness**

- This piece of God’s armor points to the ongoing work of Christ in our hearts after salvation.
- We are to be ruled by Christ’s righteousness in every area of our lives as we live in this fallen world. There will be a constant tension in our flesh between the temptation to sin and the choice to live in accordance with God’s will. We need the breastplate of righteousness to guard us from sin.

- **Belt of truth**

- The Belt of Truth is the first piece of armor listed in our passage because, without truth, we are lost, and Satan’s schemes will overpower us, rendering all other pieces of armor useless. The belt of the Roman soldier was thick, heavy, and had a practical purpose: storing the soldier’s sword and other weapons.

- Satan's mission is to discredit God by confusing His children, twisting the truth just enough to lead us to false beliefs about God, ourselves, others, and the world. The only way to recognize lies and falsehoods is to know the truth. How do you keep from a slow fade? Fix your mind daily on Christ and His Word, the Sword of the Spirit.
- **Sandals of the gospel of peace**
 - The Bible promises many things. Two of Jesus's promises are the presence of trials and pain and suffering (John 16:33) and the presence of the peace of God (John 14:27). We love promises, but that first one is hard to like! We spend much time and energy protesting pain as if it's not supposed to be in our lives.
 - When evil entered the world, so did pain and suffering. God has taken that which was never intended to be and is using it to produce in us increased faith (1 Peter 1:6-9), endurance, character, and hope (Romans 5:3-4), the ability to relate to and comfort others (2 Cor. 1:3-4), the heart to learn God's decrees (Psalm 119:71), dependence on God (2 Cor. 12:9-10), and many other things. God takes all pain and suffering and works it for good (Romans 8:28), giving us His peace in the process when we turn to Him and trust Him in the midst of suffering.
- **Shield of faith**
 - A shield symbolizes protection. It can communicate stability, toughness, boldness, no retreat, no surrender. What is the purpose of the shield of faith? To extinguish the fiery darts of the enemy. Shield-bearers would often soak their shields so when fiery arrows would be shot at them from the walls of cities, the shields would extinguish the fire upon contact. Shields were essential. A blanket of protection. The first barrier against the attack of the enemy.
 - What does this practically look like?
 - "You're not good enough" → "Jesus is good enough."
 - "Your future is doomed" → "My future is secure."
 - We must carry the shield of faith to fight against the enemy's lies all day.
- **Sword of the Spirit**
 - The sword of the Spirit is the Word of God. Interestingly, this is the only offensive weapon that God has given us. Every other piece of the armor is defensive in nature against the attacks of Satan. The ONLY thing God gave us to fight back with is the Word of God.
 - Hebrews 4:12 calls Scripture "living and active" – the only book in history that can transform and change hearts. As we read Scripture, it reads us! As a believer, the Holy Spirit that lives in you longs for the Holy Scripture. He interacts with it as you read, transcending your thoughts, beliefs, fears, and feelings.
 - This tells us why we should build our lives around the Word of God
 - How can you get MORE of the Word in your life?
 - How can you be UNDER the Word more in your life?
 - How can you memorize MORE of the Word in your life?

Read Ephesians 6:18-24

6. In addition to putting on every piece of God's armor, Paul implores us to pray. What does Paul say about prayer in these final verses? What keeps us from prayer? How can we grow in prayer? What can we learn from Paul regarding vulnerability and prayer? Do you hesitate to ask for prayer? Why?

In these verses, Paul tells us to pray in the Spirit at all times on every occasion, stay alert, persist in prayer, and pray for other believers. It seems Paul wants us to have rich, active prayer lives.

John Piper once said, "Prayer is a war-time walkie-talkie, not a domestic intercom for ringing up the butler to change the thermostat. It is a war-time walkie-talkie to call in firepower because the enemy is greater than we are."

In his book, "Pray Like Monks Live Like Fools," Tyler Staton writes, "Pray as you can. Start where you are. Put this book down and talk to God. Talk to him about the little details of your life you're sure he doesn't care about. Talk to him about the ways he has let you down or disappointed you. Talk to him about the blessings heaped on you that you could never deserve. Talk to him about the anxiety you're carrying today. Just talk to him. Prayer is not the memorization of facts or highlighting of key phrases; it's a relational discovery."

7. What's one personal takeaway from today's study you can focus on applying in your life this week?