



Stand Firm

Kicking It Off

How was your 4th of July? What did you do and/or how did you celebrate?

Read

Ephesians 6:10-24

Summary

Think about how much energy we pour into celebrating freedom on the Fourth of July. Fireworks, cookouts, flags, the whole weekend built around remembering what we have been given as a country. None of that is wrong. But it raises a question worth sitting with: do we celebrate the freedom we have in Christ with even a fraction of that enthusiasm? We have been set free from something far heavier than any government could impose, and the victory is already won.

That is where Ephesians 6 lands. Paul closes his letter by telling the church there is a real war going on, but it is not the war we usually think we are fighting. We do not wrestle against flesh and blood. The person who disagrees with you is not your enemy, and the person who agrees with you is not automatically your ally. The real enemy works through ideologies that promise to save us: money, image, causes, even good things like caring for creation or fighting for our rights. None of these things is bad in itself. Each one becomes a bad god the moment we treat it as the thing that will save us.

Here is the surprising part. Paul hands the church armor, and nearly every piece is defensive. The command he repeats is not charge, it is stand. The battle against sin has already been won at the cross, so our job is not to go out and win it again. Our job is to put on what God has already given, truth, righteousness, faith, salvation, His word, and to hold our ground when the arrows come. And the way we hold that ground is prayer, urgent and constant, directed at the only One who can actually answer.

Discussion Questions

1. Was there anything from the sermon or the passage that stuck out to you?
2. Paul says our struggle is not against flesh and blood but against spiritual powers. Who is someone you have been tempted to treat as the enemy, and how does verse 12 reframe that relationship?
3. Good things like money, causes, and even religious freedom can quietly become gods when we look to them for salvation. What good thing in your life is most at risk of becoming a bad god?
4. Every piece of the armor is something God provides rather than something we produce. Which piece of the armor in verses 14 through 17 do you most need to put on right now?
5. The command Paul repeats is to stand firm, not to charge, because the victory already belongs to Christ. Where in your life have you been exhausting yourself trying to win a battle that Christ has already won?
6. Paul ends the letter by calling the church to pray at all times, with the urgency of soldiers in a battle. What would need to change for your prayer life to carry that kind of urgency?

Significant Quotes from Sermon

"Christ is victorious whether or not you celebrate His victory. It is not about you achieving victory. It is about the celebration of what Jesus has done."

"Love the sinner and know that Christ has defeated the sin. When we say we are going to hate the sin, we think it is our job to squash it. I am saying stand firm and praise Jesus that He is victorious."

"The person who shares your ideological beliefs is not necessarily your ally, and the person who disagrees with you is not necessarily your enemy. Your battle is not against this person. Your battle is against the ideology."

"Does that make any of these things inherently wrong? Absolutely not. But it makes it a bad god. These rulers and principalities are not a red devil with a pitchfork. They look like angels of light."

Sermon Notes***Ephesians 6:10-24***

10 Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. 11 Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. 12 For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. 13 Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm. 14 Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, 15 and, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace. 16 In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one; 17 and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, 18 praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end, keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints, 19 and also for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel, 20 for which I am an ambassador in chains, that I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak.

21 So that you also may know how I am and what I am doing, Tychicus the beloved brother and faithful minister in the Lord will tell you everything. 22 I have sent him to you for this very purpose, that you may know how we are, and that he may encourage your hearts.

23 Peace be to the brothers, and love with faith, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. 24 Grace be with all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with love incorruptible.

Outline

1. Name the Real Enemy (Eph. 6:10-13)

- a. We do not wrestle against flesh and blood but against the rulers, the authorities, the cosmic powers of this present darkness (v. 12). The person who disagrees with you is not necessarily your enemy, and the person who shares your ideology is not necessarily your ally.
- b. Even on the cross, Jesus did not call the Romans His enemy. He prayed, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do," while He fought the powers of darkness.
- c. The old phrase "love the sinner and hate the sin" needs a tweak: love the sinner and know that Christ has defeated the sin. Hating the sin puts us on the offensive; knowing Christ has defeated it puts us on our feet, standing firm.
- d. The world sells ideologies as gospels: environmental care, money, racial reconciliation, even religious freedom. None of these things is inherently wrong, but each one makes a bad god. The rulers and principalities look like angels of light.

2. Wear What God Has Given (Eph. 6:14-17)

- a. "Be strong in the Lord" is a passive instruction: be strengthened by someone other than yourself. We stand by the power of God, not our own.
- b. The armor is God's own armor from Isaiah 59:17, where the Lord puts on righteousness as a breastplate and a helmet of salvation. He has now granted His armor to us.
- c. The armor is defensive. There is one offensive weapon, the sword of the Spirit, the word of God, and praise God it is His wisdom and not ours. Human wisdom falls flat in warfare with the evil one.
- d. The first step is recognizing the cosmic battle is real. One of the devil's great lies is that only the material exists, which leaves us open to materialism, consumerism, and greed. The battle is fought by standing on the promises of God: is God in control, and can He provide?

3. Stand by Praying, Not by Charging (Eph. 6:18-24)

- a. Paul ends the letter not with "charge" but with "pray." Prayer is the posture of battle, urgent and fervent, like praying under fire.
- b. "For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery" (Gal. 5:1). Money, image, gender and sexuality, even religion itself become yokes when they become our identity. Anything rooted in the temporary drags us along with it.
- c. You cannot defeat sin by fighting it yourself. Christ has already defeated it, so the battle is against returning to the yoke of slavery, not against sin itself.

- d. Even Paul asks for prayer, not for escape but for boldness to proclaim the gospel. When we are not praying to God, we are usually praying to other gods, wishing to idols that cannot bless us.

Notes

I love the Fourth of July. I love the fireworks, the food, the traditions, and the reminder of what this country's freedom has given us, including the freedom to gather and worship God. There is nothing wrong with celebrating American culture. But every Independence Day I ask myself a harder question, and this year I want to ask it of all of us. Does your Christian culture have any bearing on your life? When you hear "Fourth of July," the word freedom comes to mind, as it should. What comes to mind when you think of your acceptance into the kingdom of God? It should be the gospel and the love of Christ. Do we celebrate the victory we have in Christ with even an ounce of the fervor we bring to celebrating our country's freedom? Our citizenship in the kingdom of God supersedes our citizenship as Americans, not by stripping the earthly one away, but by ordering it. And here is the good news underneath the question: Christ is victorious whether or not you celebrate His victory. This was never about you achieving victory. It is about celebrating what Jesus has already done.

Paul closes Ephesians by telling the church about a war. He has spent the letter building a theology centered on Jesus as the foundation of the church, and the last three chapters explain how the household of God lives in a dark and broken world. Now he says plainly that you have an enemy, and the enemy is working to get you to trade your kingdom citizenship for an earthly one. Some well-meaning Christians want to live as if there is no enemy, as if we can all just get along. But notice what Paul actually says. The command that governs the whole passage, given four times in different wording, is to stand firm. This is not a call to go on the offensive. When I hear language about protecting Christian culture, it often gets wrapped around an offensive idea, as if we must trailblaze and make others follow. I do not find that in this passage. Paul presents a defensive strategy. It begins with being strengthened, and the word is passive. You do not strengthen yourself. You are strengthened by the Lord, and then you plant your feet and withstand whatever tries to knock you down. We stand in a victory already won, because Christ was crucified and rose from the grave.

Naming the real enemy changes everything. We do not wrestle against flesh and blood but against the rulers, the authorities, the cosmic powers of this present darkness. That means the person who shares your ideology is not necessarily your ally, and the person who disagrees with you is not necessarily your enemy. The dividing lines the media and the politicians hand us, rich against poor, side against side, are not the

church's battle lines. Look at Jesus. While He was being nailed to the cross, He did not call the Romans His enemy. He said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." He was not hating the people who mocked Him. He was fighting the principalities and the cosmic powers of darkness. I grew up with the phrase "love the sinner and hate the sin," and I want to tweak it, because when I set out to hate the sin, I go on the offensive and make it my job to squash it. Say instead: love the sinner and know that Christ has defeated the sin. And remember what Scripture calls the church. Not sinners. Saints. You were once living in sin, but the old has gone and the new has come. One of the enemy's lies is that not much has changed, that you are still just a sinner struggling along. The true Christian culture is a culture of standing firm in the victory of Christ.

The powers do not come at us looking like a red devil with a pitchfork. They look like angels of light. The world is constantly passing off ideologies as gospels, things that promise to save you, to save the world, to save us all. I am for caring for God's creation, but if all humanity stopped polluting, it would not save us. I hear that money solves all problems, and it might buy temporary comfort, but it will not bring you eternal salvation. I am for racial reconciliation, and the gospel itself is for Jew and Gentile, for all people, but equality is not the gospel, and I will not preach it as one. And on the other side, I hear that we must fight for our religious freedom. I respectfully disagree, because the right our government grants is superseded by what God has granted. If that earthly freedom were stripped away tomorrow, I would still stand here and preach that there is only one gospel. None of these things is inherently wrong. Each of them makes a bad god. The test I want you to build is simple. When you scroll your feed, ask whose god each message is serving. What is being sold as the thing that will make your life better? The only One who can make your life truly better is the One who went to the cross for you, and He already did all the work.

The way we battle is to wear what God has given. When Paul describes the armor of God, he is not inventing an analogy. He is drawing on Isaiah 59:17, where the Lord Himself puts on righteousness as a breastplate and a helmet of salvation before He goes to battle. God has now granted His own armor to us, His strength, not something bought or built by humans. Nearly every piece is defensive: the belt of truth, the breastplate of righteousness, the shoes of the gospel of peace, the shield of faith that extinguishes the flaming darts of the evil one, the helmet of salvation. There is one offensive weapon, the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. Praise God the weapon is not my wisdom or yours. Your wisdom will fall flat on its face in warfare with the evil one, but His word never fails. The first step is opening your eyes to the battle at all. One of the world's great lies is that there is no supernatural realm, that everything is material, and once you

believe that, the devil can aim every temptation at your body and your possessions. Consumerism reigns where materialism reigns. So when the pressure of money and inflation bears down, the battle line is a question: is God in control, and is He able to provide for you and your family? Standing firm looks like answering yes while the arrows are still flying. It is not pretending there is no war. It is saying, I am absolutely under attack, and I am not scared, because God has given me the power to stand.

Paul finishes not with a charge but with a call to prayer, praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. Your prayer life is a battle. If you were in a physical firefight, you would pray with urgency, and the spiritual war deserves the same. I love the term prayer warriors, because a prayer warrior understands there is a battle for the hearts and minds of the people of God, and prays with a power that comes from the cross. And here is the thing about the person who says they do not pray: we are all praying to something. I wish for the raise, the promotion, the lottery ticket, the person who might like me back. That kind of praying is directed at mute idols that cannot bless you. Meanwhile the God who knows the number of hairs on your head invites you to come boldly. Even Paul, the apostle in chains, asks the church to pray for him, not for escape, but that words would be given to him to proclaim the mystery of the gospel boldly. "For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery." The yokes are everywhere: money, image, the way the world roots identity in gender and sexuality, even religion itself when church attendance and giving become the thing we worship. Whatever roots your identity in the temporary will drag you with it. You cannot defeat sin, and too many of you have exhausted yourselves trying to battle your addictions, your anger, your pride, and your lust on your own. You will always lose that fight, because it was never yours to win. He has already won it. Our battle is against returning to the yoke, and our weapon is dependence on the One who can do abundantly more.

So expect to look different from the world, and do not be shocked by it. My family is not run as a democracy, and when neighbors ask why we live the way we do, the honest answer is that Christ identifies us and His word directs us. I do not need to be in the majority to celebrate my Christian heritage, any more than I need other Koreans around me to be Korean. My identity is not rooted in the majority. It is rooted in what Christ has done for me. Put Jesus back on the throne, because the devil is always working to move Him to a lesser one. Stand firm, and pray to the only One who can bring salvation.

Blog

Many of us are tired in a particular way. Not the tiredness that comes from work, but the low and constant fatigue of feeling like we are at war and slowly losing. The country feels like it is slipping. The people on the other side feel less like neighbors and more like enemies. Every week there is a fresh thing to be alarmed about, a new piece of ground to defend, a new reason to believe the church is under siege and we had better fight back before it is too late. If that is the weather inside you, Ephesians 6 has something to say, and it starts by agreeing with you. There is a war. Paul will not try to talk you out of that. What he will do is tell you that you have misread nearly everything about it: who the enemy is, what the fight requires of you, and what you are actually defending.

His first word is not a call to arms but a call to lean. "Be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might" (6:10). The verb is passive, be strengthened, which is Paul's way of saying the power in this fight was never yours to manufacture. Then he tells us to put on "the whole armor of God" (6:11), and that phrase carries more than we usually hear in it. This is not gear we forge in a workshop and offer up to heaven. It is His own armor. Centuries earlier Isaiah watched the Lord go out to fight for a people who could not save themselves, and he described Him putting on "righteousness as a breastplate, and a helmet of salvation on his head" (Isaiah 59:17). That is the armor Paul now hands to the church. The righteousness is Christ's righteousness, not our record. The salvation is His finished work, not our effort. We are dressed in what He has already accomplished, which means the strength of this fight, and its outcome, belong to Him before they ever reach us.

Then comes the sentence most of us should keep somewhere we will see it every day. "We do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness" (6:12). Flesh and blood. That is the neighbor with the wrong sign in his yard, the relative who shares the posts that turn your stomach, the stranger online who seems to exist only to provoke you. Paul says plainly that not one of them is your enemy. The real enemy stands behind them, unseen, and it is happy to let you spend your whole life swinging at people while it goes untouched. Here is the trap, and it is a quiet one. The moment you decide that a person is the enemy, you have already lost the fight that matters, because now you are doing the enemy's work for him, aiming the strength God gave the church at the very people Christ died to save.

This is a hard word on the weekend we celebrate a nation, which is exactly why we need it now. We like to call America a Christian nation, and then, almost without noticing, we begin treating the nation's enemies as the church's enemies and the nation's battles

as the Lord's. But the powers Paul names do not stop at a border. They are as much at home here as anywhere else, and they are perfectly content to wear red, white, and blue if it will get the church to trade the gospel for a cause. They are just as content to wear any other banner. The powers do not care which side recruits us, and every feed, whatever its politics, is training somebody to fear the people across from them. The ideologies that train us to fear our neighbors, to see the country as a prize to be won rather than a mission field to be loved, those are the front line. Our fight was never against a group of Americans. It is against the powers that want us to confuse a cause, any cause, with the kingdom of God.

This is where the week's favorite word gets complicated. Freedom. We will hear a great deal about it, and about the duty to fight for it. I do not want to be careless with a gift, and the freedoms this country protects really are a gift. But I have heard too much lately about fighting for our religious freedom, as though our deepest liberty were a fragile thing that a court or an election could strip from us. It cannot. Our freedom was not granted by a government, and no government can revoke it. Christ won it, and He handed it to us finished. Paul told another church the same thing in words worth memorizing this weekend: "For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore" (Galatians 5:1). He was writing about a deeper slavery than any government could impose, the yoke of sin and the law, which is exactly why no court or election can reach the freedom he means. Notice the verb. He does not say fight for your freedom, or march for it, or claw it back. He says stand firm in it, because it is already yours, and you cannot lose ground you have only been asked to hold.

That word, stand, governs the whole passage. Four times Paul reaches for it. Stand against, withstand, stand firm, and then "stand therefore" as he begins to name the armor (6:13-14). Every piece he lists is equipment for holding a position rather than storming one. The belt, the breastplate, the shoes, the shield, the helmet, all of it steadies and covers a soldier who means to keep his ground. There is only one weapon in the whole kit, "the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God" (6:17), and even that is not our cleverness or our sharpest argument. It is Scripture, the same word Jesus used to hold His ground when the enemy came at Him in the wilderness. We are not outfitted to advance and conquer. We are outfitted to remain, unmoved, in what Christ has already secured for us.

The enemy knows where to aim. Paul calls the attacks "the flaming darts of the evil one," and the shield that stops them is faith (6:16). The darts are accusations and lies, the whisper that God has forgotten you, that the gospel is not enough for what you are facing, that you had better take matters into your own hands because no one is coming to help. Faith holds the line by trusting the Lord's word over the accusation. It does not

pretend the darts are harmless or that they do not burn. It simply refuses to let them move us off the ground where Christ has set us down.

So when Paul finishes dressing the church for battle, you brace for the order to attack, and it never comes. What comes instead is prayer. "Praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication" (6:18). That is the sustaining act of a Christian at war, and it is the most honest posture we own, because prayer is the open admission that the strength was always His and never ours. And we do not pray alone. Paul asks for supplication "for all the saints," which means the isolated believer, worked into a fury by a screen at midnight, waging a private war against people he has never met, has it wrong on two counts. He has picked the wrong enemy, and he is trying to stand by himself. We were built to hold the line shoulder to shoulder.

The most striking thing is what Paul wants for himself. He writes from prison, chained to a Roman guard, and he asks the church to pray, not that he would be released, not that his accusers would fall, but "that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel" (6:19). The apostle in chains asks only for the courage to keep speaking. The offensive belongs to the gospel, and God advances it through ordinary, faithful witness, not through our determination to win. Our part is not to take over the war but to keep standing, and to keep speaking the truth in love while we stand.

I have come to think that the reason so many of us are worn out is that we have been fighting a war Christ already won, defending ground He already took. He disarmed the powers at the cross (Colossians 2:15). The victory is not in question. What is left for us is not to secure it but to stand in it, and standing turns out to be harder than charging, because it asks us to trust that the Lord will do what only He can do. So this weekend, when the noise tells you the country is the battlefield, your neighbor is the enemy, and your freedom is about to be taken, you can set all of it down. Setting it down is not retreating from the world; it is refusing to fight the wrong war in it. Put on the armor that is really just Christ Himself worn over your whole life. Stand in the freedom He bought you. Pray, and keep speaking the gospel with love, next to the rest of His people. Then go love the neighbor the noise told you to fear, because he was never your enemy, and he may be the very ground where your witness is needed most. And when the smoke finally clears, whatever has become of the nation, you will still be standing, not because you were strong enough to hold the line, but because the Lord was fighting for you the whole time you stood firm in Him.