

082221 "To Stand Until the End" Ephesians 6:10-20

Today's passage tells us to put on the whole armor of God. Throughout the whole Bible, the phrase, "full body armor of God", appears only twice in Ephesians chapter 6. In fact, when you say full body armor, you might think of medieval movies or historical dramas from the past. It is an expression that is very far from our daily life. However, there is a reason why the full body armor of God cannot be overlooked only as the stories of the past. Apostle Paul uses this phrase to tell that there is a constant spiritual battle in the lives of Christians. Although it is invisible to our eyes, we must be conscious of the spiritual battle, and in order to win in that battle, we need to properly understand what the full body armor of God means.

Ephesians 6 tells us of five different defensive gears and one offensive gear: belt, breastplate, shoes, shield, and helmet as defensive gears, and the sword or the word of God as one offensive gear. Today, rather than looking at what each of these means, I want you to think about why it is needed and how it can be applied to our lives.

When a soldier is in full battle gear, it becomes very heavy and difficult to move. Do you know how much weight a US soldier should actually carry in combat? It's around 43 pounds on its own. Even the Kevlar helmets can become really heavy when you have it on for a long time. Your neck and shoulders start to get sore. However, soldiers rely on it because it protects them against shrapnel and bullets. All of this is usually very cumbersome. It's heavy and uncomfortable. But what if a battle actually takes place? Would this feel cumbersome? It's not like that. Because it protects lives.

Here is a link to our Christian life. In order to win the spiritual battle, we must be prepared through prayer and the Word of God on a regular basis. When you are in peace, praying, reading the Bible, and even worshipping every Sunday may seem cumbersome. However, spiritual discipline is important to win the spiritual battle.

Today's Bible verse tells us that faith is a shield in spiritual battles. Some might say, "Hey, what's good about believing in Jesus? Nothing gets better right now! Do you believe in an invisible God in the 21st century? What's the use of not missing church and worshipping every week? Problems in life are still there. What's the use of praying? Wishes never come true." Doubts like this shake our hearts. When this happens, you can check the current status of your faith. By the way, what is faith? When people strongly proclaim "I believe", is that faith?

In Acts 16:31, it says: "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you and your household will be saved." To believe in the Lord Jesus means to believe in Jesus as your Lord or master. There are many cases of going to church for a long time, and not letting Jesus become the master of their lives, but living as the master themselves. In this case, they do not believe in Jesus as the Lord!

We each have to check our faith in this passage. Do I really believe and acknowledge Jesus as the Lord and Lord of my life? A storm or hurricane is coming right before your eyes. But, if Jesus is your master, you may think, "It's okay, I still trust that the Lord will lead my way! Even though I am in the valley of the shadow of death, I trust that the Lord will be with me and lead me to green pastures!" The Bible says that such internal conflict, or wrestling, is a spiritual battle.

In addition to the shield of faith, the Apostle Paul says the Word of God is the only weapon we can fight in the spiritual battle. Therefore, the shield of faith and

the word of God should be prepared before the battle, that is, on a regular basis. That way, when you actually fight a spiritual battle, you can win. The reason that Paul described the full armor of God in such detail was to teach the Christians that in order to win in the spiritual battles, we must be fully equipped with all the components of the armor.

There is one thing to pay attention to in today's scriptures. Verse 13 tells us that the purpose in wearing the full armor of God is to stand our ground until the very end. It does not end because we won the fight, but rather, it is to stand even after the fight is won. *"Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand."* (Ephesians 6:13).

The Tuareg nomads living in the Sahara Desert have a unique educational philosophy for their children. They would select a few teenagers and send them on a trip accompanied by a couple adults to the middle of the desert where the sand storms were the most severe. The purpose of the trip was to find a special magic stone. The elders would explain to the kids that the stone is a magical stone that can withstand any hardship and protect them and their families. The adults of the tribe would urge the teenagers going on the trip that no matter the circumstance, to never complain on the trip.

In order to survive in a desert full of scorching heat, terrifying sandstorms, and poisonous scorpions and snakes, it requires diligence and perseverance to withstand all the struggles. Not only that, it also requires patience, courage to withstand any fear, and accurate judgment to find an oasis for resting place. The adults who lead them on the trip have prior experience which allows them to guide the children in this journey. These qualities that the kids learn from the trip are seeped into their lives and become second nature for them.

After months of hard journey in the Sahara Desert, they arrive at their destination. However, there is no magical stone in the mountain where the destination is supposed to be but instead only rugged rocks. At that point, the

adults explain to the kids: "The habits you learned on this trip are the magical stones. Now you all have the ability to withstand any hardship and protect yourself and your family from anything that comes your way."

There is a saying that good habits never betray you. Almost 95% of what we think and do, stem out from our habits in life. People live their lives according to the traits and habits they acquired in their lives. If you look back at what bad habits you have, you can come out from the cycle of repeated failure. John Dryden, an English poet, said that "we first make our habits, and then our habits make us." Bad habits need to be overcome by good habits. In order to make something a habit, it starts from something little. It can be as simple as doing a couple push ups a day that can form the habit of exercising daily.

It is easier to form a good habit rather than to stop a bad habit. Good habits never betray us. This can be tied into our spiritual lives. To live and become more like Christ requires training such as reading the Bible daily, praying from the beginning to the end when you start something, looking at our relationships from the biblical perspective, and so on.

You may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand... When we read the last part of verse 13, sometimes we may think to ourselves "what is the point of standing until the very end? If all is well and done, can't we take a break by sitting down, taking off our belts and resting?" However, if we think about what it means to stand our ground until everything has been done and still stand, we can imagine ourselves boldly holding our ground with both our feet and not sitting on the ground. The word *to stand* in Greek is *histemi*. In the Old Testament, *histemi* has a similar meaning to the Hebrew word *yashab* which means to endure, to establish. Let us take a look at an example of a passage that uses this word.

In Exodus 14, the Israelites leave Egypt and go on a journey to the Promised Land by God's guidance. They are guided by pillars of cloud in the day and pillars of fire in the evening. Furthermore, the Israelites also experience the ten miracles performed against the Egyptians when God rescued them. However, when the Red Sea is in front of them and the Egyptian soldiers are chasing after them, they do not look at the almighty God who led them up to that point. Instead, they only focus on the problem that is facing them which eventually leads them to complain to Moses and even God.

At that point, God tells the Israelites through Moses this: "Do not be afraid. Stand firm and you will see the deliverance the Lord will bring you today. The Egyptians you see today you will never see again. The Lord will fight for you; you need only to be still (Exodus 14:13-14)." In the midst of their struggles, the first and only thing that the Israelites had to do was to not be afraid. In order to stand until the end, the first thing we need to do is to stop fearing. Isaiah 41:10 states "So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand." When the Israelites were in between the Red Sea and the chasing Egyptian army, God did not require them to throw rocks, make a barricade and build boats to cross the Red Sea. God only asked them to stop being afraid.

The second point we must focus on is "to stand still." (Stand firm, stand near, stand prepared, of quality one who does not hesitate, to be of a steadfast mind). The Israelites were in the middle of a spiritual battle in midst of their problem of being stuck between the Red Sea and the Egyptian army. Yet, the only thing God asked of them in that battle was to stand still.

We live in our world by standing our ground. We often describe the world we live in as a sea of desires, a world of darkness, and a harsh life. We must stand our ground in this world and stand still. However, when we stand still, we must think about where we are facing. Exodus does not tell us specifically where we should be turning towards when standing still, but throughout the Bible the answer is

clear. It is to stand facing towards the salvation through Jesus Christ. It is to look towards God and not the world.

To stand still does not mean to cross our arms, close our eyes and not do anything. It means to calmly focus on the message God is giving us and not worry or complain. When we face a difficult hardship, God does not require us to perform something special, but rather just to focus on God and God's word and stand still.

There may be times when we face something like the Red Sea in front of us and the Egyptian army chasing after us. When that time comes, shout in the name of Jesus Christ that I will stand my ground until the very end and look towards God's help in prayers. In everything that happens in our lives, we must not forget our faith. Our faith must become stronger and renewed. Today's message warns us to not cling on to the past when everything was well and good, but to focus on today and the state of faith we are in right now.

Dear sisters and brothers in Christ Jesus, God is continuing to lead our lives just as much as God did for the Israelites when God led them out of Egypt to the Promised Land. The problem that we always face is the fear in front of us. However, if we focus on God through our faith and stand still, the problem does not lie in the hardship facing us, but rather in ourselves who have fallen in the face of it. Have you fallen to the ground? Do you feel like you have no more strength to stand? Even when you feel like that, please think about it one more time and stand up and stand still. I pray in the name of Jesus Christ that we may all experience God's miraculous salvation by patiently waiting on the Lord and standing still. Fairfield Grace, May God's grace and peace be with you and your family, and your business, and your studies, and with the lives of your children. Amen.