

Sanctification
Stand Strong for Holiness
Preparation – Part 1

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In the pursuit of holiness, the power of the Holy Spirit is at work in God's redeemed. They are freed from the old master of death to live unto God. They are breaking old patterns of sinful habit and developing a lifestyle of godliness. Through disciplined training they are seeing transformation come to their bodies, minds, and relationships. These are some of the important topics we have already covered as we look at the overall biblical teaching on sanctification. In the next several sessions, we are going to focus on the heat of the battle. Temptation is the moment of attack when our pursuit of holiness is put to the test. It comes under fire.

Three temporal aspects of the experience of temptation exist—before, during, and after. These aspects of the experience of temptation can be likened to our experience of the corona virus. Before it came, who would have thought things would have gotten this bad? We now find ourselves during the virus event, and we are all looking forward to the time when we can say we are thankful that it is over. Here is the before-during-and-after that the Bible gives us for temptation. Before temptation, we must be prepared. During temptation, we must stand. After temptation we must respond well. The whole process can be called standing strong for holiness. Beginning tonight our next several sessions are going to deal with these aspects of standing strong for holiness. The first leg of standing strong involves being prepared. This leg will require two sessions.

We are going to focus upon . . .

Ephesians 6:10-20

You live differently when you are in a battle than when you are not. Our battle with the Coronavirus has certainly changed the way we live. One urgent fact Christ's followers need to acknowledge is that we live our entire lives in the midst of a battle. Pandemics come and go. But the war in which Christians find ourselves is never-ending. We live on the battlefield. As long as blood flows through these veins, we will be in a battle. We are targets of an enemy who never ceases to attack and scheme. He constantly seeks an opportune moment to strike. This is critical information. Because it is true, we must live in readiness. We must be prepared. So how do we prepare for the moment the enemy strikes? That is what Paul is addressing here in this text.

Paul begins with

1. An Exhortation to Prepare (10-11).

Paul is telling believers to get themselves ready for facing the enemy. He calls it putting

on the whole armor of God so that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. The devil is a schemer. He does not send out a warning. He does not make an appointment with you as to when you are ready to fight. He is a deceiver. The whole idea of an opportune moment is that it is an opportune moment for him to strike. It is when you are most vulnerable.

God warned Pharaoh through his dream that a time of famine was on its way. He had seven years in which to prepare. And because he prepared, Egypt was ready when the famine came. Now through the Apostle Paul, the Lord is telling us to prepare because days of testing are coming. You can't afford to wait until you are tempted. You must prepare today. Do not wait around for temptations to come. Is there a particular area in which you may feel strong? Look out! Make preparations now for that area to be tested!

Next, Paul gives us . . .

2. A Reason to Prepare (12).

He points out that our real enemies are not flesh and blood. Mere human beings are not our enemies. Our battle is with cosmic forces over-and-above the forces that we see. You think a coronavirus is your enemy? You think a Governor or a President is your enemy? You think the Chinese are the enemy? You think a group of elitists conniving under the surface to take over the world is your enemy? No, no. Your enemy is the host of spiritual renegades who defy God in the heavenly places! Their goal is to take you down, not merely to earthly misery, but to take you down to hell itself. The powers of earth are nothing. Cosmic forces in unseen places are the real threat to you. They are battling against you. This is a reason to prepare.

Don't get wrapped up in the things that you see. Do not let your attention be diverted from the real enemy. Be prepared in the right way for the real enemy. Extra reason to be prepared is because it is an enemy you can't see and the enemy is far stronger than what a mere human can do.

That takes us to . . .

3. The Goal of Preparation (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."

The goal of preparation is to withstand the attacks of the enemy when they come. Preparation is a key component of resisting when temptation arises. All that you do in

preparation for the assault, by God's grace, contributes to his power in the moment of the assault so that you can stand and not fall. Jesus gave the parable of two kinds of builders, right. In the sermon on the mount, Jesus describes a wise builder who constructed his house on the rock. He dug down to secure the foundation on the rock. Jesus also describes a foolish builder who constructed his house on the sand. Along came the evil day; rain fell, floods came, the wind blew. The wise man's house stood while the foolish man's house fell. The one who hears and does the words of Jesus was the wise man. He hears the warning and makes preparation for the evil day by doing what Jesus taught.

The goal of preparation is to stand, to withstand the attack, to resist the temptation—to say no to the temptation to immoral physical pleasure; to say no to the temptation to anger, vengeance, bitterness, envy, discontent, malice, prideful arrogance, to steal kill, disobey authority—whatever the temptation to resist—that is the goal.

That brings us then to the matter of . . .

4. How to Prepare

Looking at the remainder of the text, it seems that there are two categories of preparation. There is armor to take up and action to carry out. We are going to start looking at the armor tonight. Next session we will finish the study of the armor and look at the all-important action.

The armor consists of a belt, a breastplate, shoes, a shield, a helmet, and a sword. Those are the metaphors. The substance of the metaphors is truth, righteousness, gospel, faith, salvation, and God's word.

a. The first article in the armor is the belt of truth. The belt worn around the soldier's mid-section was used to gird up his tunic so that he was ready to do battle. For the Christian ready for battle, truth is the belt that girds up his tunic and makes him ready for conflict.

Truth. Certainly it refers to that which is accurate, that which squares with reality. Knowing the truth is essential to be ready for satanic struggle. The devil though the world and through the flesh is a liar. He breathes out lies. He questions the truth. He did it in the garden. And he has never stopped. He suggested he could do things for Jesus he could not do when he tempted him.

When Paul directed the Philippians upon what to set their minds, truth was first there too. "Finally brothers, whatever is true, set your minds upon these things." There are false ideas that permeate our world which we encounter every day. There are ideas which compete for our allegiance. We must be anchored in truth. Part of holding to truth is being determined to get at the truth. Do not allow your affirmations to be determined by what you want. Be certain your affirmations are in accord with the Scripture. Being girded by truth will result in the ability to discern between excellence from error.

But there is a second matter here in regard to the belt of truth. Truth speaks of that which is genuine. A person who is true is sincere. He or she is not marked by hypocrisy. There is not a hidden motive. There is a genuineness of desire. If you don't really mean business when it comes to holiness for the glory of God, you will not be ready to stand when the evil day comes. So cultivate within your heart a certainty that you are true. You love Christ. You are for him. Your life is not about you, it is about him.

b. The second article is the breastplate of righteousness. The breastplate was an essential part of the armor. It shielded the vital organs. It protected those organs which in Jewish thinking were the seat of mind and emotions. These are areas where the attack of temptation can be exceedingly great. Protecting them from satanic assault is crucial. Satan shoots false teaching at our minds, and the idea that our emotions should rule our actions.

When we think of righteousness, we can think of our own manufactured righteousness which is unable to do us any good. We can also think of Christ's righteousness which is God's provision for our justification. But we can also think of the righteousness which is the fruit of the Spirit at work within us to produce obedience to God. This seems to be what Paul is thinking of. We need to suit up each day with an attitude of obedience, desiring, intending, purposing to obey Christ moment-by-moment. In Romans 6:13, Paul says it this way, "present yourselves to God . . . and your members as instruments for righteousness."

Conclusion

So there we are. The pursuit of holiness demands preparation for battle. Two parts of the armor with which we prepare are developing a mind and heart shaped and informed by truth and a daily resolve to obey Christ. Practically speaking this works out as a daily, conscious resolve or determination.