

## Stand Firm

*Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. 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. 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.*

Ephesians 6:10-13

Continuing the final segment of our study through Ephesians, Kingdom War, we will continue to address the cosmic and spiritual war that rages around us. For the past two sermons, we have focused upon the nature and methods of our enemy. We first noted that our opponent is not a fellow human but rather a host of demonic forces of evil belonging to the realm of the spirit. We then addressed the schemes of the devil, noting his endless desire to us death and destruction through temptation and accusation of sin.

We now move into the slightly less heavy topic of how we are to behave against Satan and his minions. As we have stated, Paul gives three commands for us within verses 10-13: stand firm, be strong, and put on the whole armor of God. The first is our position in battle, the second is our disposition, and the third is our call to arms.

Paul uses some form of the word *stand* four times in verses 10-14. In verse 11, he calls us to *stand against the schemes of the devil*. In verse 13, he summons to both *withstand in the evil day* and to *stand firm*. Finally, in verse 14, he summarizes by simply stating *stand therefore*. The basic cumulative command of the apostle is that we must remain steadfast even in the midst of mighty waves of resistance. We have seen that our enemy's supreme goal is our destruction or, at least, our misery, and his only real weapon against us is sin. Paul is, therefore, commanding us to resist his assaults, to stand firm against every temptation and accusation that he uses to strike us. While we could draw out many implications from this command, we will focus primarily upon three. First, we must stand with vigilance and watchfulness. Second, we must stand firm without fleeing or yielding. Third, we must stand in our own place.

### STAND VIGILANT & WATCHFUL

Standing necessarily involves a certain degree of strength. What we take for granted as such a basic posture is quite difficult to maintain. The parents' delight in their baby's first-time standing is not unfounded. The progression from being unable to support their head to keeping balance on their two feet is significant. Likewise, after suffering a severe car accident, my father's first-time standing back on his feet was a triumphant moment. Indeed, standing requires health and strength.

We must also be awake to stand. Few can remain upright while dozing off, and even if someone manages to sleep on their feet, their guard is so sufficiently let down that virtually anything could

knock them to the ground. Standing, therefore, implies wakefulness. In Mark 13:32-37, Jesus speaks about His return, saying,

But concerning that day or that hour, no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. Be on guard, keep awake. For you do not know when the time will come. It is like a man going on a journey, when he leaves home and puts his servants in charge, each with his work, and commands the doorkeeper to stay awake. Therefore stay awake—for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or in the morning—lest he come suddenly and find you asleep. And what I say to you I say to all: Stay awake.

1 Peter 5:8 more pointedly addresses our present topic saying, “Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.” The ideas of staying awake and being watchful bring to mind the imagery of a watchman upon the walls of a city. Their work was simply to stand upon the wall, watching for any approaching enemy. The watchman was most needed at night, when an enemy might best come undetected, but the night also brought the most difficulty, for the watchman needed to remain awake and vigilant at all hours of the night. The best posture for the watchman, therefore, would be to stand.

As Peter warned, our enemy is constantly prowling about for someone to consume, and he never rests from his mission. At the end of Jesus’ temptation, Luke records that Satan left “until an opportune time” (Luke 4:13). Thus, even the devil’s retreats are merely in the hope of discovering a better strategy of attack another time. For example, although you may successfully stop yourself from bringing up a word of gossip about one of your coworkers, you later find yourself reading and sharing with someone else the latest gossip about some celebrity. Indeed, trying to escape from temptation can sometimes feel like a large-scale game of Whack-a-Mole, as soon as one fails another is already popping up. Satan’s onslaught is purposely unceasing, so we must stand against him awake, watchful, and vigilant.

William Gurnall succinctly summarizes the danger of falling asleep, saying, “The weakest temptation is strong enough to foil a Christian who is napping in security.”<sup>1</sup> Strength and skill mean nothing if you are not conscious. An alert child is better off than a dozing and careless soldier. Never cease, therefore, your vigilant stand against sin.

If this constant watchfulness sounds exhausting, then perhaps we are beginning to understand Paul’s words to Timothy shortly before his martyrdom, as he said, “For I am already being poured out as drink offering, and the time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith” (2 Timothy 4:6-7). Paul was ready to face death and be with Christ because death was his finish line, the end of his lifelong battle. He was ready to enter his eternal rest after a life of standing awake and alert. For Paul, death was like sleep to an exhausted laborer. Indeed, no sleep is better than that which follows a hard day’s work, and no sleep is less restful than what follows a day of sloth and negligence. Similarly, our stand against the evil one is constant throughout this life, but the rest is made the sweeter by the labor which precedes it. Stand against Satan’s schemes with unending vigilance and watchfulness.

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<sup>1</sup> William Gurnall, *The Christian in Complete Armor*, 301.

## STAND FIRM

Standing firm and withstanding also implies a refusal to flee or yield. When soldiers receive the command to stand, they understand that they are not to give any ground to their enemy. They are to maintain their position at all cost. James 4:7 urges us to do this very thing against our enemy, “Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.” We bow our knee in submission before God alone; we resist Satan. Indeed, notice the radical difference between submitting to God versus submitting to Satan. If we submit to Satan, yielding to his schemes, we become like the fools “who lie in wait for their own blood” (Proverbs 1:18); we destroy ourselves. However, submission to God is, paradoxically, our strength. Through our weakness, we receive His might. Through confession and repentance, we receive grace upon grace through Christ our Lord. Submitting to God enables to resist the devil, while yielding to Satan sets us against the Almighty.

In 2 Timothy 2:16-19, Paul writes about some fail in this endeavor:

But avoid irreverent babble, for it will lead people into more and more ungodliness, and their talk will spread like gangrene. Among them are Hymenaeus and Philetus, who have swerved from the truth, saying that the resurrection has already happened. They are upsetting the faith of some. But God’s firm foundation stands, bearing this seal: “The Lord knows those who are his,” and, “Let everyone who names the name of the Lord depart from iniquity.”

Pay attention to the contrast that Paul made: although “God’s firm foundation stands,” they “have swerved from the truth, saying that the resurrection has already happened.” They departed from God’s sure foundation and, therefore, did not stand firm. They failed to heed the warning of Proverbs 4:27, “Do not swerve to the right or to the left; turn your foot away from evil.”

We must, therefore, stand firm against the devil’s devices, refusing to yield or to flee. Although he is a roaring lion, our sins are cleansed by the blood of the Lamb. In fact, our ability to stand comes from having been seated with the Father “in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus” (2:6). Sitting is, of course, a posture of rest. The author of Hebrews begins his letter by declaring of Christ that “after making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high” (Hebrews 1:3). He clarifies the significance of this action in 10:11-14 by contrasting Jesus’ sacrifice upon the cross to the sacrifices offered by the Levitical priests:

And every priest stands daily at his service, offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God, waiting from that time until his enemies should be made a footstool for his feet. For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified.

The priests stood to offer sacrifices because the sacrifices never ended. Jesus, however, offered His single sacrifice, and now He sits at the Father’s right hand because His work is done. This seating is what Paul referenced in 2:6. Through His work of atonement, Christ has raised us to life after being dead in our sins, and we are now seated in Him with the Father. He has perfected us “for all time;” therefore, we too are sitting down. The war against sin has been won.

The war is not, however, over. Notice how Hebrews 10:14 moves from past tense to present tense. Christ *has perfected* for all time those who *are being sanctified*. Our sin has been paid once for all

time; however, the battle against sin is still being fought in the present. Thus, Paul calls us to stand even as we are seated. The decisive battle was waged upon the cross, and by it, our victory has been secured. Yet the fighting continues a little while longer. Our hope, therefore, must be in the triumph of the cross, even as we keep needing to kill our sin more and more.

In Romans 5:1-5, Paul gives a wonderful summary of how our salvation by grace alone enables us to stand firm:

Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God. Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.

## **STAND WHERE CALLED**

Finally, as we stand, we must make sure that we are standing where Christ our captain has called us. In battle, an infantryman was not properly equipped or trained to fight among the soldiers of the cavalry. Or in modern military, an officer overseeing a warship is highly unlikely to also be an active fighter pilot. Similarly, we are each called to different stations, roles, and responsibilities in life, and it is within that calling that we must stand.

In 1 Corinthians 12:12-31, Paul compares the church to a body composed of various members.

For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit.

For the body does not consist of one member but of many. If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would be the sense of hearing? If the whole body were an ear, where would be the sense of smell? But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. If all were a single member, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, yet one body.

The eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you," nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." On the contrary, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and on those parts of the body that we think less honorable we bestow the greater honor, and our unpresentable parts are treated with greater modesty, which our more presentable parts do not require. But God has so composed the body, giving greater honor to the part that lacked it, that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one

another. If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together.

Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it. And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healing, helping, administrating, and various kinds of tongues. Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? Do all possess gifts of healing? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret? But earnestly desire the higher gifts.

And I will show you a still more excellent way.

The same thought applies to standing where Christ has placed us. Do not envy the gifts and placing of a fellow brother or sister in Christ. We should each say like Paul, “by the grace of God I am what I am” (1 Corinthians 15:10). Indeed, one thought that has often guarded me from coveting another person’s gift or placement is the reminder that God always gives strengths with corresponding weaknesses. For instance, my natural (and slightly obsessive) musings are very helpful for preparing sermons each week; however, most of the biggest conflicts with my wife came from me forgetting some simple task that I initially had every intention of completing until my mind began to ponder something else. We should also remind ourselves often that strengths and giftings do not equal ease. Just because someone makes their place among the body of Christ look easy does not mean that they are not serving at great cost.

Of course, Galatians 6:2 commands us to “fulfill the law of Christ” by bearing “one another’s burdens.” Yet what I am warning against is envy veiled as concern. To this, 2 Timothy 4:5 is our command as well: “fulfill your ministry.” Do the work which Christ has uniquely equipped you to accomplish. In John 21, Jesus spoke to Peter of his future martyrdom, but Peter responded by asking what would happen to John. Jesus replied, “If it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you? You follow me” (John 21:22)! Likewise, we each have received our own call to follow Christ, and being faithful to do so must be our chief concern.

Yet standing where we are called should also be an encouragement to us because regardless of where Christ has called us to stand, we are all soldiers under Christ as our captain. While a soldier is ready to die at the command of his captain and for his country, no individual soldier is called to develop the overall strategy for winning the war. Likewise, we should find comfort in knowing that Christ is bringing His kingdom and building His church. Although the hoards of hell may rage and the God’s people may appear to dwindle, our King is always in control. He will steer global events for the proclamation of the gospel just as He always has. We must simply be faithful where our Lord has stationed us, and a glimpse back at the household commands is prime example of our various stations.

One of the great Satanic deceptions is to toss our priorities into chaos. We easily become anxious and worried about global events because they feel much more important than doing the same thing again at work or reminding your child for the fiftieth time that you should not pull on dog’s ears. Yet those ordinary events should receive our greater attention and concern because they are events that are actively being shaped by us. Most of us will never realistically be given the chance to affect a matter of foreign diplomacy; we will, however, be given the chance to teach our children why Jonah

was wrong to hate the Ninevites, even though they were not a righteous people (and then more importantly, how Jesus loved us even though we were not a righteous people).

God is not calling us into a solo last stand against the forces of darkness; Jesus did that on our behalf. Instead, He is calling us to stand faithfully wherever we are. Stand against the devil's schemes every day at work. Stand against his devices each day as you bring up your children in the fear and discipline of the LORD. Stand against Satan's wiles as you love your wife or respect your husband. Stand faithfully where you are being alert and awake and without fleeing or yielding "as a good soldier of Christ Jesus" (2 Timothy 2:3).