

Stand

Ephesians 6:13 | June 24, 2018 | Bryce Beale

The surest mark of sincere faith is an appetite for holiness.

A million lost men this morning will sit in churches, some few of them here; a million lost women will lead their children in prayers tonight. These are marks of faith, true—but not *sure* marks. Many motives can drive a man to renounce alcohol, and Christ need not be among them. There are reasons beside faith to teach a Sunday school class.

If you desire a sure and certain mark of salvation, do not scan the hands or activities of persons done in public, but check the tongue. Consider the belly. What are their hungers? What are their appetites?

You can change what you do quite easily—ask B. F. Skinner and the school of Behaviorists he initiated. You can even alter some of what you like or dislike by associating objects with pain or pleasure. But to change a fundamental appetite, a true and enduring hunger for something—that you cannot do.

Not, especially, in the case of holiness. So if you find a person, no matter their appearance in other matters, regardless socio-economic status, despite education or lack thereof, who sincerely longs to look like Jesus, you have found a Christian indeed in whom there is no deceit. If by the Spirit they are putting to death the deeds of the body, they will live as children of God.

Today's message is aimed mainly at you who are Christians indeed. We have come to a passage which shows us how not to sin. Yes, if you are outside of Christ you may be interested in stopping some sin so you may be rid of the disgrace or consequences of it—but this interest will not last. No, I am speaking to you whose appetites have changed in your innermost being. You who abhor your own sin, and crave a closer likeness to the spotless Lamb in your conduct, you, I know, will be delighted by this sort of a message.

If I listen closely in the quiet of this room, I will hear a heart faintly say, "Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?" And to that heart I say, "Come and see. This morning, you will learn whom and how." I know another heart burns, burdened by a besetting sin. Well then, let's be done with it! Let's wage war and triumph! There, does your heart leap up in earnestness, excited at the prospect? Very good! Come and see, I say, and I will show you the Nazarene who holds the key to your artificial imprisonment.

Christ did not conquer the legions of hell at cost of his own blood to now surrender up his people to the whims of the devil. Whatever the sin you stumble into, Christ does not want you to stumble into it any longer. He has sucked the poison from your wound—that is, by his death he has atoned for your sins, you will never know the death they deserve—but he has also driven his heel into the adder’s head. The power of sin he means to suffocate in your life.

And if you are a Christian, you hunger for nothing less. You long for holiness. You say, “Where can I find freedom from the persistent presence of sin in my life? Where can I find a will and ability to stand against the raging temptations of Satan and his host?”

Well, come and see.

EPHESIANS 6:13

You will note that this verse is similar to verse 11, which we covered last week. However, we have chosen a different emphasis for today. Last week, we considered the devil and his schemes. Today, we will consider that word at the end of our passage: “Stand.” When the devil does rage, when his temptations rain upon your head like flaming arrows, how do you keep from being felled? How, when the evil hour has passed and the battle subsides, can you still be standing, solid in your commitment to holiness? How can you stand amid the many temptations of the flesh, the world, and the devil?

The answer to that question is presently our aim.

And that answer will come to us in two parts, which we will take one at a time.

A real enemy

Let us then begin with the first part of an answer, beginning in the first part of our text: “Therefore.”¹

There is an interesting logic here. I have already observed that verse 11 and verse 13 are almost identical—they both call us to take up and put on the armor God provides, and they appeal to us on this basis: that only by so doing will we be able to stand. But see how, sandwiched between these parallel passages, sits verse 12.

Verse 11 reads, “Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil.” Someone may ask, “Why is it necessary to put on this panoply of God if we are to stand against the devil. Is there no other way?” And verse 12 answers—see the “For” at

¹ ESV.

the start. A “For” in Scripture explains what came before it—it takes verse 11 and sets it on top of verse 12, which is the basis, the ground, the explanation of verse 11. Why is putting on the armor of God our only way to stand?

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.

You must take up armor because you have so many mighty enemies, and you must take up the armor of God, as opposed to any human armor, because your enemies are spiritual beings. They are demons. No mortal blade will slice them.

Now notice the beginning of our present text, verse 13: “Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand.” Why must you take up this armor if you are to stand? The “Therefore” takes us back to verse 12, puts that verse under the present one. If you do not take up this armor you will fall *because* you have many mighty and spiritual foes.

I do not know how the apostle could have put it any clearer—his logic sets verse 12 beneath the verses around it, makes it the foundational answer to our “Why should we put on the armor of God?” This may seem like an aside, but it is not. It is the first way you will be done with whatever wicked habit assails you; it is the first way you will survive the next temptation that attacks you. It will save your family, preserve your name, and deliver your soul.

The first way you stand against temptation is by remembering verse 12. You must take up the armor, yes, but you must do it “Therefore,” or “For this reason,” and that reason is verse 12. Put more practically, you must cultivate in yourself an ongoing sense that your war with sin is just that—a war.

You will remember Nietzsche’s famous pronouncement about modern man: “God is dead, we killed him.” In other words, we have as a civilization developed beyond the need for an imagined deity. Where once we needed a Creator if we were to explain the order and beauty in the world, now we have Darwinian evolution. The events that our forefathers considered supernatural, we can explain by science. The Reformation shone light upon the world by calling men to think about Scripture; the devil, in a subtle scheme, took that light and shone it directly into our eyes. He summoned men to think about everything except Scripture.

And a consequence of this half-darkening Enlightenment is that we now live in an age dominated by naturalism. Most of our most influential

thinkers see the world as a mostly closed box, a mechanistic system that can be explained entirely, or almost entirely, apart from anything outside of the box, anything supernatural.

The devil threw a flashbang into the West about three hundred years ago, and our ears are still ringing today. We have not yet regained our sight, and so we go about most of our days with very little sense of anything but what is earthly and natural. If someone does not have the self-control to pray, we can identify the natural processes of culture and mind that have limited the attention span, and we can label the problem as psychological. Well sure, psychology is at play because we are dealing with a brain—but that is maybe one-tenth of the story. The other nine parts have to do with an invisible world.

Do you want to win against the next temptation that takes you by the collar? Then you must see the temptation as a temptation. You must open the eyes of your consciousness to a supernatural world where the real battle is being waged.

We see this again in our text: “Therefore,” it reads, because of the demonic enemies of verse 12, “take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day.” In the word “that” you have a purpose. There are demons set against you. But what does that have to do with the command to take up the armor of God? Well, you must take up the armor with this purpose clear in your mind: “*that* you may be able to withstand” them.

Again, the presence of a spiritual world is found in the phrase, “in the evil day.” We have already, in chapter 5, been told to make the best use of our time because “the days are evil.” In other words, because the devil and his hosts are rulers of this world, there is a constant, low-grade influence of temptation exerted upon us every day. But now we find we must prepare ourselves for “the evil day.” Not only is there an ongoing, subtle force pushing us toward sin, but there are particular times when that force rages. The Germans fire every day from their snowy trenches—“the days are evil”—but then they press the attack against the allies in full force to create a bulge in the allied lines—this is “the evil day.”

Paul suggests that only the armor of God can protect you from that evil day, and that you will only take up that armor if you are quite conscious that there are real, spiritual enemies across the valley. A functional naturalist will fall. If you don’t think you have an enemy, why would you prepare to fight him? So if you want to stand when temptation comes, you must form the habit of awareness. You must learn to consider the supernatural world as real as the natural; a demon should be as sure a thing to you as the shoes you are wearing. Sin is not a mistake or a symptom of some psychological imbalance; sin is a spiritual offense

against the living Spirit of God. Angels and devils clash swords as certainly as men do.

Our responsibility

That then is the first step in succeeding against temptation. If you want to stop sinning, or to avoid it when the pressure is high, in the evil day, you must maintain an awareness of the spiritual facts of your situation.

But that is not enough. If you believe in the supernatural, you will want to arm yourself against the foes you now see. And that must be another step—you must arm, or armor, yourself. Over the next several sermons we will consider in detail what that means.

But there is a step between these two for us. And I say for us because we, like any group of Christians, have our own specific tendencies that the devil wishes to exploit. He is happy to take our virtues and twist them into vices, and so Scripture must help us resist the twisting.

Consider again our text and see the structure of it: “Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand.” We may rephrase this as a conditional statement, one of cause and effect: “If you take up the whole armor of God, then you will be able to withstand” the enemy. That is what is meant by the purpose clause, beginning with “that you may be able.” You must do A if you would do B and, in this case, there is no other way to do B but by doing A first. A is the cause, and B the effect.

How simple! Why draw attention to this? Because let’s imagine you have by faith a real awareness of your spiritual foes. You understand the danger of your circumstance and therefore are eager to protect yourself. But the devil knows our church—he knows we hold fast to the sovereignty of God, and that we are what the world might call Calvinists. We believe, in accordance with the Scriptures, that God’s control extends to every atom in the universe, and is not barred from entering the hearts of men to influence their wills. This is a virtue! Call it Calvinism or whatever you will, this is the true teaching of God’s word and we accept it.

Now, when the devil comes upon a church like ours he finds our gates locked securely. He cannot terrorize us with the uncertainties of an Arminian worldview, he cannot batter his way directly in. So what will he do? He will by subtlety look for any opening in the gate. And the opening he is most likely to find is this: that we should, in understanding the sovereignty of God, misunderstand human responsibility. He hopes that we will so detest the words “free will” that we will begin to detest the single word “will.” Hypercalvinism is a slightly darker shade of Calvinism and that’s the color the devil wants to paint you.

What do I mean? Well, have you never had this thought: “I keep giving into this temptation, over and over again. But I know that only the sovereign God can turn my will away from this sin. So why doesn’t God do something? Why does he want me to keep sinning like this?” Ah, you see how close to the truth and how far from it this way of thinking is! How subtle our enemy!

The Scriptures teach that God is sovereign over every event, every will, *and* they teach that man is responsible for his decisions. To believe only God’s sovereignty makes you a hypercalvinist; to believe only man’s responsibility makes you an Arminian. But to believe both—that makes you a Calvinist, a compatibilist who believes God’s sovereignty and man’s responsibility are compatible, and not incompatible, with each other. How they are compatible we do not fully know, but both are asserted in Scripture so we, as people of the book, hold to both.

We believe Peter when he preaches at Pentecost, “this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God”—there is God’s full sovereignty—“you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men”—there is man’s responsibility.² How could Peter blame them, if it was according to God’s definite plan and foreknowledge? Or how could there be lawless men? We do not know, and yet behold, there they are! The notions are compatible to Peter’s mind, and so they will be compatible to ours.

But what does this have to do with our present text? Remember, our text gives a command and a consequence: take up the armor of God, that you may be able to stand. There is a cause and an effect, and we must not be fooled by our enemy into imagining that this is not a real cause and effect. Satan will tell you, when you fail to overcome some sin, that there is nothing you can do. He will attempt to put the blame on God, who could easily any moment deliver you but, apparently, does not want to. “You can’t be blamed, if this is what God decreed.”

But I say, the God who decrees what will happen also decrees how it will happen. He who determines the ends, decides as well what means will get us to those ends. And so when we read, “Take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand,” we say, “Well then, let’s take up the armor. If we have been falling before the enemy, if we have been giving into pornography or lustful looks or gossip or envy or any other vice, then let’s do something about it. We have the means before us, the armor of God, and the lack is not in God but in us. We have not been taking it up.”

Our responsibility is the emphasis in this passage—notice how it concludes: “that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, *and*

² Acts 2:23.

having done all, to stand firm.”³ There is an “all” that we must do if we would stand, and that “all” is everything involved in putting on the armor of God and I think fighting with it. Yes, there are instances in the Old Testament where God’s people were delivered without raising a sword, by angelic armies. But the angels had to raise their swords.

See the newborn nation of Israel, freshly delivered from their captivity in Egypt. God has led them to the Red Sea so that he might flex his arm for their salvation. Suddenly the sound of tramping is heard in the distance, and the Israelites look back to see a cloud of dust—one of the world’s mightiest armies, the Egyptian host, is charging them.

“Fear not,” God says, “stand firm, and see the salvation of the Lord, which he will work for you today. For the Egyptians whom you see today, you shall never see again. The Lord will fight for you, and you have only to be silent.”⁴ Aha, there is the sovereign arm of God, about to fall upon his enemies! God has promised to fight for Israel, so certainly Israel need do nothing, right? They can stay put, they can pass their time in prayer and contemplation entirely at ease, for this is the Lord’s battle.

But see how Moses’ prayers are rebuffed: “The Lord said to Moses, ‘Why do you cry to me? Tell the people of Israel to go forward.’” Why do you cry to me? Because the battle is yours, and you are sovereign, and we are sitting here awaiting the deliverance. But here we have one of the only times when God rebuked the prayer of his people. It was not the time for them to pray, but for them to act. They had a responsibility to move forward toward the sea that God would part for them.

Notice, this did not give them any glory for the outcome of the battle—yet without their moving forward, the battle would not be won. For God, who decided he would kill the Egyptian army, also decided he would kill them by means of the Red Sea. And for that to happen, Israel needed to lure them into it.

Christian, you must take up the armor of God, that you may be able to withstand temptation. If you do not take it up, you will not stand. You will fall. You will sin. But if you take it up, you will not. There is a real cause and effect, and here the cause falls upon you. You must do something!

My generation grew up with the voice of John Piper in our ears, at the beginning of a popular Christian song, saying, “I hear so many Christians murmuring about their imperfections and their failures and their

³ Emphasis mine.

⁴ Ex. 14:13-14.

addictions and their shortcomings — and I see so little war. Murmur, murmur, murmur. ‘Why am I this way?’ Make war!”⁵

You will see in the weeks to come what it specifically means to put this armor on—but you will not be ready to hear that unless you believe there is an enemy and believe that there is actually something you can and must do to stand against him. Do not let go and let God; hold on and let God! Take up the armor and let God; fight until the sweat mingles with your bloody brow and leaves crooked streaks along your face, and let God. Put accountability on your computer, get accountability partners, or get rid of your computer and iPhone, and let God.

Come to church, and go to small group, and let God. Get in the word every morning, and let God. Pray, even when you don’t feel like it, and let God. Stop watching the movies and shows that begin you on the path toward the evil day, and let God. Go talk to that new face on Sunday morning, and let God.

Conclusion

You who crave holiness, come and taste of it.

I have told you why you need this armor—because you have real and malicious enemies who are biting at your soul. I have told you too that you can take it up, you can do something to fight off temptation and to stand in the evil day. But let me finish with one final attempt at persuasion.

As I noted in passing last week, this is, as we find again in our text, “the whole armor of God.” You are responsible to take it up by the strength that God supplies, but you could never have made this armor yourself. I do not want to contradict the command to “be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might.”⁶

The reason you can resist the devil, and he will flee from you, is because this armor of God was forged for you in the fires of Christ’s suffering. To the naked eye the hammer was in the Roman’s hand, as he nailed Christ to the cross. But to the eye of faith, the hammer was all along in the bleeding hand of Christ, and with it he beat the sacred metal of righteousness into a breastplate. He cried out under the agony of our sins as he shaped the shield of faith for us. He cooled the red-hot sword of the Spirit, still aglow from the furnace, in a bath of his own tears.

⁵ John Piper, “Declare War on Sin,” *DesiringGod.org*, Desiring God (Dec. 10, 2014; accessed June 23, 2018); the song is Tedashii, “Make War,” *Identity Crisis* (Reach Records, 2009).

⁶ Eph. 6:10.

Jesus did not die only to deliver you from the penalty of hell, though he did die for that. From the vantage point of the cross he gazed into the horizon with hope and saw his bride, his church, unsinged by the flaming darts of the devil. He gave himself up for her, as we have read in Ephesians, “that he might sanctify her...so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.”⁷

As the life fled from our Savior, the metal of the breastplate solidified. Jesus gave himself up for you, his bride, because he knew that on Wednesday of this coming week you may be assaulted by your enemy. You may receive a bit too much attention from a co-worker of the opposite sex, and might feel the force of infidelity or immorality pushing against you. Ah, but Jesus, jealous for your heart, forged on Calvary a breastplate to cover it. Stand, stand against!

Thursday a volley of fiery arrows may fall upon you, as you are tempted to grumble in the ears of your children about some circumstance Providence has placed you in. And you would fall to one of those arrows, if you did not have, crafted on the hill of the Lord, a shield to hold above you. You will call to mind a passage of Scripture you have memorized for this moment and will choose to believe it, and so, having done all, when every arrow is stuck in the earth, you will be found still standing.

Holiness was bought for us at the cost of divine life, at the high price of Christ’s holy blood. And for that reason, little flock of God, when next Sunday comes and the smoke of a week’s worth of battle clears away, when demons and apostates lie scattered about the field, not only will your soul still be destined for paradise, but you, girded with the whole armor of God and having done all you can, will still be standing.

⁷ Eph. 5:26-27.