

Holding It All Together

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[0:00] You know, life change happens when somebody gives his or her life to the Lord Jesus. And when you do that, it's a surrender to Christ. And when it's real, there's proof of that surrender.

It shows forth. It authenticates the commitment. And your life serves as a proof. One proof that your life ought to show if you're in Christ is that we live by the truth.

People can see it in our lives. We trust God at his word and it shows forth through our lives. He makes us trustworthy. He makes us truthful. We also have a commitment to live righteous lives. We're not perfect, but we consistently yield our lives to the Lord. Ask him to show us what's wrong. When he shows us what's wrong, we respond to that. We strive to live right.

We show a different effort when we're in the Lord Jesus. Another proof is that we live out the gospel. And I'm going to explain that to you this morning. But salvation begins with conversion.

[1:07] That's a one-time occurrence, a one-time decision that our Christian life begins with. You don't have a Christian life unless there's been a time when you've surrendered your life to the Lord Jesus Christ.

And that is the start. But it's a life for Christ from that day forward. Now, I want you to notice the armor of God this morning. Because we've been talking about spiritual warfare and how the evil one is working in our world and what he's doing and his strategies and how we are to combat that and all that stuff.

But I'm telling you, the best defense we got, as well as offense, honestly, in this spiritual battle is found in Ephesians chapter 6. It all kind of comes back to this. I told you from the very beginning that we'd be kind of tethered to Ephesians chapter 6.

And now we're kind of getting to the nucleus of it all. But it explains our protection against spiritual warfare. And it's made up of godly traits and godly helps that protect us from the enemy.

I want you to see how the apostle Paul puts this and read it in basically its entirety. Ephesians chapter 6 verse 10 says this. Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might.

[2:16] Put on the whole armor of God that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. For we don't 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.

Now, what that passage speaks of, go back to that for just a moment. What that passage speaks of when it talks about authorities and cosmic powers and present darkness against the spiritual forces of evil. It means there's an unseen war going on around us.

It's even more real than the seen war or the seen battles. But it's even more real than that. But it influences every one of those spiritual battles that we see evidence of.

And there's some who've tried to take this passage and clearly define the military ranks of the evil presence.

Be careful. Be careful. What he's telling us is that there is, we don't wrestle against rulers and authorities, but against the cosmic powers over this present, against the spiritual forces of evil.

[3:26] It's not a fleshly battle here. We're not fighting other people. We're fighting evil forces. That we can't see, and it's very real. And because of that, verse 13 says, 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.

Stand, therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace.

In all circumstances, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one, and take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

The apostle Paul is describing our spiritual protection, and he describes it as a Roman soldier's battle gear. Now, what we'll begin today is a deep dive into each part of this armor.

But I want you to notice something before we get started with it, because I have preached on this passage many times over the years, but I've never seen it like I saw it this time when I was studying.

[4:39] I want you to notice something. In verse 13 and 14, it says this, So, in other words, the first three pieces of battle gear, if you're a Christian today, if you've surrendered your life to the Lord Jesus Christ, you have the belt of truth.

Having put on the breastplate of righteousness. Having put on the readiness given by the gospel. You're equipped to those things. We have the truth. We have imputed righteousness in Christ. We've received the gospel. We just have to rely upon those gifts from God. Don't look for them. You got them. Use them. During the aftermath of Helene, we did without power for 10 days.

Our generator died on the second day, and we were reluctant to bar another one. I'm thankful that several people offered to, they had generators, let's bar them.

No, they'll get the power back on. They'll get the power back. They'll get, maybe, they'll get the, maybe. And we went without anything for five days, and finally someone insisted, and he came by and set up a generator, wired it in, and all that stuff.

[6:03] But in the times of darkness, I remembered that we had these flat solar lights that we had bought that you put in the bed, the garden bed in front of the house, in the flower bed, and we hadn't taken them out of the box.

They were still clean. And so I peeled off the cover of them and put them out on the sidewalk to let them sun or fire up or whatever, and did that for a day.

And then one evening when Dawn was gone, I came back in. I cut those things on. I put them all over the house. Looked like candlelight. And she came home and said, what meanest thou this? And I believe in solar now. But we utilized what we had. It's what we had. And we made the most of it. Listen, my friend.

We need to realize what we have in Christ. And if you're here today and you don't know the Lord Jesus as your personal Lord and Savior, I want to begin to show you today what you can have in the Lord Jesus.

[7:12] And if you are a child of God, you've surrendered your life to the Lord, you need to realize what you've got in Christ. And you need to utilize what you've got. And then, notice the second part of this.

Then take up the shield of faith. That's a decision, folks. Take up the helmet of salvation, the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God.

After we realize and utilize what we have, we take up the shield, the helmet, the sword. So today I want to look at verse 14 about what we have in Christ.

Just the very first part of this. It says, 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, standing, therefore, having fashioned on the belt of truth.

Now the belt was first put on over the tunic when a Roman soldier was putting on his battle attire. It was an essential piece.

[8:18] It had many purposes. The primary purpose was to serve as a protective piece for the midsection of a soldier. It was a protective leather garter of sorts.

But it was also the central link in this fighting outfit that they wore. He secured the breastplate to it. The sword would be kept in a holster on that belt.

Possibly a dagger would be on the other side. It also served as a way for a soldier to gird his loins in the winter when he wore a long robe.

And what he would do is by lifting, by reaching the back of that robe, he would pull that up, both pieces up, and tuck them in. And he would gird his loins in that way.

That gave him a mobility and a freedom to move that a long robe would not allow. Free movement in battle. He did that so it wouldn't be a hindrance to him.

[9:24] And if he was off duty, he could unbuckle that belt. He could allow that girdle to release. Let that long robe go back to flowing. However, when in battle, he'd buckle his protective gear that kind of held everything else together.

Now, why does Paul refer to the belt of the armor of God as a belt of truth? I believe it could be a reference to Isaiah 11 verse 5.

Isaiah 11 verse 5 says, Righteousness shall be the belt of his waist, and faithfulness the belt of his loins. In other words, truthfulness holds it all together.

Truth and truthfulness are what protects the most vulnerable parts of our walk with God. They'll help you walk with God. They'll help you run with the Lord. They'll help you fight alongside the Lord without a hindrance, without a hiccup.

It all comes back to the truth. Now, let me explain what I mean by truth here. There's a lot of people that don't understand what truth is today.

[10:32] I want you to understand what truth is, okay? The truth that I speak of this morning in the belt of truth is not the objective truth of the gospel message.

Let me tell you what the objective truth of the gospel message is. The gospel truth, and we use that phrase sometimes flippantly, don't, okay?

Because this is what the gospel truth is. The gospel truth is that Jesus came to the earth, born of a virgin, lived a sinless life, training others to live by truth and freedom found only in him.

The gospel truth is that he died a substitutionary death for us, and he paid a price for our sins. The gospel truth is that three days later, thank God, he rose again, defeating death and hell, and told us to share his message as we went.

And then he ascended into the Father, ascended into heaven to sit at the right hand of the Father and speak up for you and me as our advocate. The gospel truth is that he's coming back, as we sang a little while ago, to take us to be where he is where we can spend eternity with him.

[11:48] That, my friend, is the gospel truth. That is objective truth. You may say, well, preacher, I don't agree with that. Well, guess what?

You're wrong, okay? And I would say I don't care, but it's not true. I do care. I want you to believe the truth of the gospel.

I want you to live the truth of the gospel. And the reality is that the truth of that is not based upon our belief of it or not. It's true.

We can believe it or not. It's still truth. The truth is not our decision. We don't have that kind of power. That's the truth, but that's not the truth that this belt's talking about.

The truth that this belt stands for is the effect that that truth, the gospel truth, the effect that it has on our lives.

[12:46] The truth that the belt's talking about is a believing, living truth. To having been fastened on with the belt of truth.

No one can put this on for us. God's fastened that on to us, and we need to rely upon it. When we believe in our hearts, the real truth about a very real Lord.

And when we've done that, it will change our lives. Faithful truth becomes practiced in our lives. And when faithful truth is practiced in our life, it's going to hold everything else together.

Now, let me explain that. The first step is this, that we honestly come to Christ. We honestly come to Christ. I believe the key passage in the New Testament about our faith in Christ is Romans 10, 9, that says, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.

I want to be clear about something. When it speaks here of confessing the Lord, it does not speak of repeating a prayer with the rest of the congregation, but really meaning it.

[14:02] If I tell everybody to bow their heads and close their eyes and repeat this prayer after me, now, if you prayed that prayer, and if you did what I told you to do, everybody would have prayed that prayer.

And you prayed that prayer, and you really meant it, raise your hand. Now, if you've raised your hand, you just gave your heart and life to the Lord. That's not true, folks. It's not true. If you didn't mean, I'm not saying you can't get saved that way.

I'm just saying that prayer, don't do it. It's a heartfelt belief that happens. And you can follow your tail in front of you straight to the slaughter if you want to, but the reality is you have to make a decision for the Lord Jesus Christ.

He's not speaking of whispering in a preacher's ear, listen, I don't want to make a big deal out of this, but I want to get saved. I don't really want anybody else to know about it. It's just between me and you. My faith's private. It's not what he's talking about.

He's not talking about telling your mama after years of her trying to convince you to do it, that you'll do it. He's not talking about joining hands with somebody else and looking at them and saying, if you'll do it, I'll do it.

[15:03] Let's go together. That's not what he's talking about, friend. He's speaking of boldly speaking up about your faith, no matter who is listening. Now, we get a clue here because he uses in that Jesus is Lord.

Okay, and that phrase there gives us strong clues to what the Apostle Paul was talking about. Because after the ascension of Christ, there were things in the Roman Empire got difficult for the followers of Christ.

And the time came when Roman soldiers had the authority to demand anyone at any time to pay homage to Caesar. And they would demand it.

And when they did, the faithful citizen, Roman citizen, would take a pinch of incense, would throw it into a small altar fire, and declare, Kaiser Curus, which is Caesar is Lord.

Now, what they said were they were pledging allegiance to the empire, which was personified in Caesar.

[16:06] And they were declaring Caesar as their divine leader. When Christians, true, bold Christians, were put in that spot, they would respond, Easis Curius, or either Christos Curius, which is Jesus is Lord, or Christ is Lord.

And when they did, many of them were killed instantly. We know that Paul was imprisoned for continuing to buck the empire with the message of Jesus.

We know that John was exiled on the island of Patmos to try to shut him up, to get him no longer to talk about the gospel. And you know what he did? He had a vision from the Lord to give to the churches of Turkey about what in the world was going on, and what was going to happen, and what was happening, and what was going to happen.

And that's where the book of Revelation, it don't have an S on the end of it, friend. The book of Revelation, that's where that came from. It was one big revelation. Anytime somebody stands up and says, I want to talk to you about revelations, he don't know what he's talking about, okay? I'm just going to tell you. That's a pet peeve of mine. I'm sorry. I shouldn't have said that. Just because he got the name wrong don't mean he knows what's... Anyway, the writer of Hebrews says this about those folks.

[17:36] Hebrews 11, 35 through 37 says this. Some were tortured, refusing to accept release so that they might rise again to a better life. Others suffered mocking and flogging and even chains and imprisonment.

They were stoned. They were sawn in two. James, the apostles thought to be one. They were killed with the sword. To stand against the Roman Empire for any reason is serious.

To stand against them for a rival of faith, commitment, and life dedication is deadly. It's treason. And for Christians to be confronted at any time and stand strong for the Lord, whenever it came, took a true commitment.

That's what the apostle Paul was talking about in Romans chapter 10. And that's what he's referring to in Ephesians chapter 6 when he talks about the belt of truth. That's the evidence of one who truly has committed his or her life to Christ.

An unashamed, honest commitment to Christ is what conversion is. That's what true salvation is. You have to honestly come to Christ.

[18:42] That's believing in your heart that God raised him from the dead. And because of that, you are forever changed. Now, it is my fear that this church is like a lot of churches and that there is possibly a lot of people that have membership in this church that have never truly given their heart and life to the Lord Jesus Christ.

I promise you, you come down here this morning and say, I want to join this church. That is not where salvation comes from. That's a fruit of salvation. It's an evidence of salvation, but that's not where it comes from.

There's a lot of people in church that don't apply the truths of the faith into their lives. And that's not real salvation. Listen to what the Hebrew writer said. Hebrews chapter three, what he says about this.

He says, take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil and unbelieving heart leading you to fall away from the living Lord. But exhort one another every day as long as it's called today that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.

For we have come to share in Christ if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end. As it is said today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion.

[19:53] Some say, well, can you lose your salvation? Not if you ever really got it. Not if you ever really got it. You know what my concern is? A lot of people never got it and they think they did because they repeated something, because they followed somebody, because they did whatever they told them to do, because they signed a document or whatever the case may be.

They went through a class or whatever. Listen, friend, it's a personal strength. It's honestly committing your life to Christ. And the real evidence of salvation is a heart that's set on Christ and not sold out to selfish rebellion.

That's what the belt of truth is talking about. It's also talking about honestly living for Christ. The Christian life begins with conversion.

It has to, but when one believes enough to commit his or her life to him, it's also being faithful to the premises of the faith. The belt of truth speaks to one's faithfulness to the Lord.

It speaks of sincerely walking with the Lord. Don't just believe it. Apply it faithfully. Be faithful to God. Be faithful to his word. Be open to God's leadership. Be honest with God.

[21:03] There's a responsibility that comes with accepting God's gracious gift of salvation. We don't do that in our own strength, but we have a responsibility to respond as God speaks.

And once we're saved, we have been fastened with the belt of truth. We got to use it. We got to use it. There's folks today sometimes that have a belt on their jeans, but they don't know how to use them.

That wasn't in my notes. That's dangerous. But the way you properly use them is you pull your britches up, okay?

And I'm sorry, Don don't like me to say britches. It makes me sound redneck. But y'all know what I'm talking about, don't you? See? I told you they would. Tighten it.

Use it. And if it's been fastened on us as believers, we got to use it. We got to put it in to use.

[22:06] Be faithful. It's not in our strength, but we have a responsibility to respond when he speaks. And we're to set our minds on the things of God.

I was reading this morning and I came to my scripture for the day. God gives me a scripture, a verse every day when I'm reading his word. I ask him to before I start reading. God give me a verse for the day. I put that on social media, but I also try to apply that to my life and I pray through that verse.

And I came to my favorite, one of my favorites, my favorite today anyway. I got a lot of favorites, but anyway. Colossians 3, 17, and whatever you do in word or deed, do everything.

Don't leave any of it out. Everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him. Every word, hello. Think about that a minute.

Every deed, do it all for the Lord. we are to seriously pursue the truth of his word, to allow it to saturate our lives and prepare us for the task at hand.

[23:16] If we're not careful, we'll go through the spiritual motions of going to church, reading our Bible sporadically, praying half-hearted prayers, and still let the garbage of this world just seep into our thinking.

And if we're not careful, we'll look up and we'll live our lives and raise our kids and spend our money just like the rest of the world does instead of honestly living for Christ.

Living by the belt of truth, having fastened that on is honestly living for Christ, honestly girding up, understanding the war in which we're in and preparing for it.

Honestly tightening up, honestly committing our lives, honestly living for the Lord Jesus. And lastly, it's also honestly winning in Christ. Winning in Christ.

Hebrews 12, verse 1 and 2, I love it. It follows the hall of fame of faith, which is Hebrews chapter 11, which talks about all those Old Testament heroes of the faith that stood so strong for the Lord.

[24:25] Man, I'm telling you, it's special. And then he follows it by saying this, therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight and sin which clings so easily and let us run with endurance the race that's set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

You know what I think of when I read that? And I don't know if this is how it happens, but this is what I think of. When I was visiting Israel, I went to, I went to, to Philippi by the sea and they, they, they, they had their, Caesar's spot there and they had a hippodrome, which, which was a, which was a, it was, hippa is horse in Greek and it was, it was a horse track is what it was.

And there were stands around it. Looks like a, a track field is what it looks like. And, and I was, I was, I was looking at that and thinking when those people fill up those stands and, and look and watch that, in my mind, when I read this, what I think about is as if there's not a horse track there.

There's not a Olympic track there. It's just hollow of sorts. It's just, and, and they're just, they're just peering down and looking at us. Now, I don't know if any of that's the way it is. I don't mean sounding, but, but I'm just telling you there's a cloud of witnesses and they're cheering us on.

You say, well, what do people in heaven see about what's going on? Well, I'm telling you, there's no tears so they can't see a lot of what's going on in America. I can tell you that. But, but I do believe they're cheering us on. And, and it says that because we have such a great cloud of witnesses, because there's been so many who have went before us, carried the faith before us, let us lay aside every weight.

[26:22] You know what that means? Take that robe and get it out of the way. Get that robe out of the way. Gird your loins. The sin that so easily entangles us, run with endurance.

The race that's set before us. When I was getting out of high school, they started coming out with these, these pants, these warm-up pants that had buttons going down the side.

I think they've come and gone and come back and then left again, probably since that time. I don't know. But I always wanted some of them. And when I got to this passage, I just wanted to take them and rip them off like I saw those guys do.

And can you imagine what would have happened with that? Thank God I never tried that. But anyway, it might have changed the sermon. But I love sports, but I don't like to just play to be playing.

I want to win. I want to win. I enjoy a football game, but I enjoy it a lot more when my team wins. Somebody came in here kind of sad-faced this morning.

[27:23] I said, did y'all get a moral victory yesterday? Because one of these teams played a mighty good game and just faltered at the end. A couple of them did, actually.

And I said, was that a moral victory? She said, no, I want to win. And I said, that's exactly right. That's exactly right. That's what your coach said, too. In the spiritual race, we need to win, friend.

This is crucial. We're not playing games here. We don't have next week. We got one shot at this. One shot. We better make the most of it.

However, we're not going to win by watching the world, by being like everybody else, by giving half an effort. We have to keep our eyes on the prize.

We have to keep our eyes on Jesus. He found us. He saved us. He perfects us. He paid the price for us. He made the investment in us.

[28:23] He has endorsed us. He has enabled us. He has empowered us to win in Christ. And we have to run unhindered to win.

And that means to do what it takes to remove all hindrances out of the way. But we don't do that on our terms. We have to have the initiative to use the belt of truth that's been fastened on to us as children of God to acknowledge it, to live by it.

We get honest with God and we ask Him, Lord, show me the things in my life that does not line up with who you want me to be and who I am to be in you.

I like the way the psalmist put it. In Psalm 139, 23, and 24, he said this. Listen to this prayer, friend. Search me, O God, and know my heart.

Try me and know my thoughts and see if there's any grievous way in me and lead me in the way everlasting. When we sincerely pray that before the Lord and then we change our lives in accordance with what He shows us because through the Word of God and through the Spirit of God living in us, He'll show us what we need to do.

[29:46] And in order to do that, we have to be honest. We have to be marked by wearing the belt of truth in our lives and utilizing it and using it and living with openness and humility before the Lord.

You say, I just wish the things in my life would be held together. I just wish I could hold things together.

Well, I'll tell you how you do it. You put on the belt of truth. You live by it. You honestly commit your life to Christ.

You honestly live for Christ. And then by His power, by His plan, trusting in Him, you honestly win in Christ.

And when we do, to God be the glory. He's the one that gets the glory. He's the one that does the work. We just got to do our job along the way.

[30:42] Amen? Every head bowed and every eye closed. Listen, I would be wrong, I believe, to not give you the opportunity to surrender your life to the Lord Jesus today.

There may be one here today who's never surrendered his or her life to the Lord Jesus. And I'm telling you what I've told you today. That belt of truth that's been fastened onto you don't apply to you yet.

You got to surrender your life to the Lord. You got to believe that objective truth of the gospel truth. Live your life for it. Just surrender to Him. He'll empower you to do everything you need to do.

You just need to surrender your life to Him. Maybe you're here and you've done that but you did it privately. You did it quietly. You whispered it. You didn't do it boldly. And as I spoke of boldness, Jesus showed us that we do that through baptism.

We let others know. I call it the first step of obedience in Christ. We baptized several last week thankful for that. God always seems to use that to draw others to an awareness of their need for it.

[31:46] If you're here today and you've never been baptized as a believer, I encourage you to come. We'd love to guide you. We'll set that up. Maybe God's drawing you to be a part of this church and you know that. You feel like God's leading you.

I encourage you to come today. I'd love to guide you in that. Or maybe you're here and like Brian talked about, there's stuff going on in your life. There's, there's, you got the belt of truth fastened on you but you're not utilizing the tools there.

And you need to lay that down before the Lord today and make that right before you leave here. I don't know how God's leading you but I promise you you'll never be satisfied until you follow Him completely.

So just trust Him and follow His lead. Lord Jesus, I love you and I thank you for your word. Thank you Lord for the truth. Help us Lord to live by it, God.

Help us to respond as you speak to our hearts and lives. In Jesus' precious name. Amen. Amen.