

Take Your Stand
Righteousness Protects the Heart
Ephesians 6:10-18

January 26, 2014

Dr. Steve Horn

Text Introduction: I am continuing a series this morning in Ephesians 6:10-18. First, we overviewed this passage and simply said that as Christians, we are in a battle. We are in a battle for our convictions, our culture, our children, and our churches. As a result, we are in a battle for our families and our future. We are called to take our stand in this battle. Actually, there are 3 main imperatives in this text: Be strengthened by the LORD, Put on the full armor of God, and Stand.

Having given these three imperatives, Paul underscored 7 spiritual weapons that we should avail ourselves to as we carry out these imperatives. We are studying now each of these resources. Last time, we examined truth. We said that truth is the under armor. It is not the most important piece (they are all of equal importance), but it is the first piece. That is, it is the piece that serves as the undergirding of all the other pieces. Today, we consider the second resource—righteousness. Let's read the whole text first.

Text: ¹⁰ Finally, be strengthened by the Lord and by His vast strength. ¹¹ Put on the full armor of God so that you can stand against the tactics of the Devil. ¹² For our battle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the world powers of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavens. ¹³ This is why you must take up the full armor of God, so that you may be able to resist in the evil day, and having prepared everything, to take your stand. ¹⁴ Stand, therefore,

with truth like a belt around your waist,
righteousness like armor on your chest,
¹⁵ and your feet sandaled with readiness
for the gospel of peace.

¹⁶ In every situation take the shield of faith,
and with it you will be able to extinguish
all the flaming arrows of the evil one.

¹⁷ Take the helmet of salvation,
and the sword of the Spirit,
which is God's word.

¹⁸ Pray at all times in the Spirit with every prayer and request, and stay alert in this with all perseverance and intercession for all the saints.

Introduction: The second resource for battling Satan is righteousness. What is righteousness? Righteousness is a word that is used over 250 times in the Bible, over 100 times in the New Testament and then there are various associated words. But, what is it? The easiest thing I know to say to you is that righteousness is the opposite of wrongness. So, we are to put on righteousness (or just rightness) in our spiritual battle. Righteousness protects us. Just as the breastplate protected the soldier's most vital organ—the heart, so righteousness protects our spiritual hearts. The enemy, Satan, wants to attack us. We have probably all learned that a primary area that he attacks is our righteousness, or to use a

different word, our holiness. He wants us to sin, and then he causes us to dwell on our sin. The result? We live defeated lives. We doubt our salvation. We remain silent about our Savior. We fall more in love with our sin than we do our Savior. We fall deeper into sin. We lose the battle. So, in order to keep this from happening, we must fight.

I want you to see several connections this morning that I believe will help us to make this truth come alive in our hearts.

The Connection between Righteousness and Spiritual Warfare

Indeed, we are in a battle. Paul equated his battle with sin to a war.

Romans 7:15-25

¹⁵ For I do not understand what I am doing, because I do not practice what I want to do, but I do what I hate. ¹⁶ And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree with the law that it is good. ¹⁷ So now I am no longer the one doing it, but it is sin living in me. ¹⁸ For I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my flesh. For the desire to do what is good is with me, but there is no ability to do it. ¹⁹ For I do not do the good that I want to do, but I practice the evil that I do not want to do. ²⁰ Now if I do what I do not want, I am no longer the one doing it, but it is the sin that lives in me. ²¹ So I discover this principle: When I want to do what is good, evil is with me. ²² For in my inner self I joyfully agree with God's law. ²³ But I see a different law in the parts of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and taking me prisoner to the law of sin in the parts of my body. ²⁴ What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this dying body? ²⁵ I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, with my mind I myself am a slave to the law of God, but with my flesh, to the law of sin.

It is a battle we must fight, because...

- Unrighteousness invites Satan's activity in your life.

If you allow trash to build up in your house, you are going to get some other things that you don't want. If you allow sin to build up in your life, you are going to get some other things that you don't want. A life that is unchecked by sin is going to be the devil's playground.

- Unrighteousness blocks God's activity in your life.

The problem is compounded by the fact that the activity of God is blocked from our lives. There is power in purity.

The Connection between Righteousness and Truth

- Truth presents God's Standard.

The whole point of our study last week was to show where we get our truth. We get our truth from Jesus, Himself. He is truth. We get our truth from the word of God—the Bible. The Holy Spirit leads us to all the truth. The church helps us by being the pillar of truth.

We also said though, that it is not enough to preach the truth; we must practice the truth. So here it is....

- Righteousness is our response to the truth.

Truth says that sin is sin. Righteousness is whether I allow myself to participate in that sin. I am amazed at the number of times that someone has said to me, "I know what God's word says, but..." Or they might say, "I know it is wrong, but..." Whatever comes next is your true response to the truth. So we see the problem.

This presents a major problem:

God's standard is perfection.

And, we cannot live up to that standard.

The Connection between Righteousness and Salvation

- Imputed Righteousness

This is a fancy word, but it is an important word. This word imputed means that we get our righteousness from God. We know this from a verse like 2 Corinthians 5:21 which says, "He made the One who did not know sin to be sin for us, so that we might become the *righteousness* of God in Him."

We know this from a passage like Romans 3:20-26, which says:

For no one will be justified in His sight by the works of the law, because the knowledge of sin comes through the law.

²¹ But now, apart from the law, God's righteousness has been revealed—attested by the Law and the Prophets ²²—that is, God's righteousness through faith in Jesus Christ, to all who believe, since there is no distinction. ²³ For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. ²⁴ They are justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. ²⁵ God presented Him as a propitiation through faith in His blood, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His restraint God passed over the sins previously committed. ²⁶ God presented Him to demonstrate His righteousness at the present time, so that He would be righteous and declare righteous the one who has faith in Jesus.

We get our righteousness from Jesus. We cannot be righteous in our own strength. But, while this is true, that did not keep Paul, and other New Testament writers from writing about our waging war against sin. So, we can talk about imputed righteousness, but we also talk about imperative righteousness.

- Imperative Righteousness

We are personally accountable to wage a war against sin. Here's what Paul said as recorded in 1 Corinthians 9:24-27:

Don't you know that the runners in a stadium all race, but only one receives the prize? Run in such a way to win the prize. ²⁵ Now everyone who competes exercises self-control in everything. However, they do it to receive a crown that will fade away, but we a crown that will never fade away. ²⁶ Therefore I do not run like one who runs aimlessly or box like one beating the air. ²⁷ Instead, I discipline my body and bring it under strict control, so that after preaching to others, I myself will not be disqualified.

So What?

- Matthew 5:6 Those who hunger and thirst for righteousness are blessed, for they will be filled.

Can you say that you hunger and thirst for righteousness?

- Matthew 6:33 But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be provided for you.

Can you say that you seek first God's righteousness? First? Before you seek pleasure, the approval of others, whatever—first you seek God's righteousness?

- Philippians 3:7-14 But everything that was a gain to me, I have considered to be a loss because of Christ. ⁸ More than that, I also consider everything to be a loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. Because of Him I have suffered the loss of all things and consider them filth, so that I may gain Christ ⁹ and be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own from the law, but one that is through faith in Christ—the righteousness from God based on faith. ¹⁰ My goal is to know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, ¹¹ assuming that I will somehow reach the resurrection from among the dead.

¹² Not that I have already reached the goal or am already fully mature, but I make every effort to take hold of it because I also have been taken hold of by Christ Jesus. ¹³ Brothers, I do not consider myself to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and reaching forward to what is ahead, ¹⁴ I pursue as my goal the prize promised by God's heavenly call in Christ Jesus.

Can you say that today you are pursuing righteousness?