

Ephesians 6 - Part 1

by Colin Anderson

Colin Anderson's sermon emphasizes the necessity for believers to collectively don the armor of God to stand firm against spiritual deception and to uphold the truth within the local church.

Duration: 39:56

Scripture: Matthew 6:33, 1 Corinthians 12:12-13, Galatians 2:4, Ephesians 6:13-14

Topics: "Spiritual Warfare"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of testing what is being taught or practiced according to the truth of God, rather than being swayed by the personality or amiability of the person teaching. The speaker highlights that we are living in an evil day and urges believers to take up the full armor of God to resist the devil. The sermon also addresses the presence of false teachers and the need for believers to stand firm in their faith. The speaker encourages believers to put on the whole armor of God, which includes having the truth of God in their hearts and watching their conduct as full-time workers for God.

Transcript

Before we read this passage together, I want to say a little word more about how it requires a corporate response, in contrast to just an individual one. It's often pointed out that the letter to the Ephesians is probably a circular letter, and that it has for its theme more the body of Christ, sometimes what we call the church universal, rather than the local church. But I would point out that body truth, that is, truth that is to be understood in relation to the body of Christ, finds practical expression at the local level.

That is, the truth concerning the body of Christ can only be worked out at the local level. The local church is, after all, a microcosm of the body. It is a miniature picture and representation and illustration of what the body of Christ really is all about.

With your finger in Ephesians chapter 6, turn back for a moment to 1 Corinthians chapter 12, where I think we have a very clear indication of what I'm saying, that truth as to the body can only really be carried out in practical terms in the local church. 1 Corinthians chapter 12, verse 12. For even as the body, that is the human body, is one, and yet has many members, and all the members of that human body, though they are many, are one body, so also is the Christ.

Now if we saw that verse on its own, out of its context, we would say that must refer to the body of Christ. Christ being the head, the church universal being his body. Verse 13 goes on to say, for by one spirit we are all baptized into one body, and surely that too must refer to the body of Christ.

Whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, we were all made to drink of one spirit, and so on. But you will notice as you look at the context, that the Apostle Paul takes those grand and glorious truths that relate to the body of Christ, and says, now these have got to be worked out in Corinth, because as the truth of the body is worked out there, each member will function as he should within the body. You and I are called to function within local fellowships.

So then what Paul said to Ephesus, he would also say to other local churches in Asia Minor, besides the church at Ephesus. He would say the same things to the Roman world, he would say the same things to ourselves, and indeed he does say the same things to ourselves this morning, by the Holy Spirit of God. This is a message that must be taken up and applied within the local church.

And this is where the importance of standing together for the truth of God can really be worked out, because we all work within local bodies. But if each one, each church, each local church is to stand together, then each individual believer must of course contribute to that by himself, putting on the whole armour of God. The important point to remember is this, that Paul is not writing to Timothy here.

Paul is not writing to workers here. Paul is not writing to missionaries here. He's writing to all the Christians in the church at Ephesus and elsewhere, in order that they might stand to carry on this spiritual warfare in which we are engaged.

Now that's very important, because the local church, as we have said, is the expression of God's truth on earth. It is, as Paul said to Timothy, the pillar and the ground of the truth. God's truth is exhibited, God's truth is illustrated, God's truth is maintained within and by the local church.

That's why it's so important. That's why the local believers must learn to stand together and work together and be in conflict together for the service of the Lord. So the local church, by its character and conduct, notice those two words, by its character and its conduct, is to set forth and maintain the truth.

Now what are the schemes of the devil? Well we're going to read about them in Ephesians chapter 6, and we'll begin in verse 10, but we want to begin by focusing on the schemes of the devil. Finally be strong in the Lord, and in the strength of his might. Put on the full armour of God, that you may be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil.

For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places. Therefore take up full armour of God, that you may be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm. Stand firm therefore, having girded your loins with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness, having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace, in addition to all taking up the shield of faith, with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming missiles of the evil one.

And take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the spirit, which is the word of God. With all prayer and petition, pray at all times in the spirit with this in view. Be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints, and pray on my behalf, that utterance may be given to me, in the opening of my mouth, to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains.

That in proclaiming it, I may speak boldly as I ought to speak. We're told here that we are to put on the full armour of God, verse 11, that you may be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil. What are the schemes of the devil, and how do we recognise the schemes of the devil? How do we identify his schemes? How do we know if we're up against his wiles? How can we be discerning as to this? After all, the devil is a spirit.

How can I be aware of his presence and work? How can I know that he is active? In an assembly. How do I identify him, seeing he is a spirit? Let me reverently speak now of the Holy Spirit. How do I know when the Holy Spirit of God is at work? Among God's people.

How do we identify the ministry of the Holy Spirit? People say, you know, well the Spirit of God is doing a great work in our assembly. How do we identify that? How do we know that the Holy Spirit is at work in an assembly? Let me suggest to you, this is something that's been helpful to me, because I have wrestled with this concept of trying to get hold of what to us is naturally intangible. We cannot see spirits.

They are invisible. The Holy Spirit is invisible. How do I know he's working? How may I know whether a person is filled with the Spirit of God? Do I know it because of that person's enthusiasm? Not necessarily.

A person could be enthusiastic about something that is quite contrary to the will of God. So it's not just the spirit of enthusiasm. How do I know when God's Spirit is working in an assembly? How do I know when a person is filled with the Holy Spirit? Well, you know that in Ephesians we're told to be filled with the Spirit, but in Colossians the parallel passage doesn't mention being filled with the Spirit.

You know what it mentions, don't you? Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly. And I have made a little study on my own of the activity of the Spirit of God in the Old Testament and the New, and you can always identify his working because it's linked so very closely with the truth of God, the word of God. After all, the word of God is the sword of the Spirit.

When I was born again, I was born again of the Spirit of God. But another way of putting that would be to say, being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible by the Word of God. How do I know when a person is filled with the Spirit? When the word of Christ is dwelling in him richly.

When the truth of God is so motivating that person that what is coming out of him is truth in his conduct, in his reaction to things, in his speaking. He is being controlled, he is being motivated by the Spirit. How do I know? Because the truth of this word is motivating him and controlling him.

He's filled with the Spirit of God. So I can identify that which would be intangible to me, beyond my natural senses, because it is the activity of the Holy Spirit. I can identify it because it is in keeping with this book.

It is producing obedience to this book. Then I know that that person is being guided and is being motivated by the Spirit of God. So I identify the Spirit of God's activity that way.

Now how do I identify the schemes of the devil? How do I know when he's at work? I can't see him. I can't be like Martin Luther and pick up my inkwell and throw it at him. I understand he did that.

They say he did, maybe an apocryphal story, but that's what he's supposed to have done in his anger one day with the devil. He imagined himself as having to have direct confrontation with that evil personage. We can't do that.

How does he work? How can we identify him? By the untruth. Just as we identify the Holy Spirit by the truth, so we identify the devil by the untruth. He is the master of the untruth.

This very word, schemes, is used by the Apostle Paul, that is the word in the original in the Greek, in chapter 4 and verse 14, and that's the only other place it's used, where that phrase is used there. And in verse 14 of chapter 4 we read, as a result we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves, carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, craftiness in deceitful scheming. There it is.

So my best way of interpreting the schemes of the devil in Ephesians chapter 6, is by noticing what the Spirit of God tells us about deceitful scheming in chapter 4 and verse 14. You see, the devil cannot come and work on his own. He has to, so to speak, incarnate himself.

Of course he can't do that, but he has to work through human beings. Our wrestling is not with flesh and blood. But flesh and blood will be the way in which the devil will manifest his activity.

For he works through human beings, just as God, the Holy Spirit, works through human beings, proclaiming the truth, so the devil works through human beings with his untruth. I fear, lest, as the serpent beguiled Eve by his subtlety, your heart, your mind, should be corrupted from the simplicity as to Christ. How will he do that? Well, let's look at that.

2 Corinthians chapter 11, please. 2 Corinthians chapter 11. And we notice verse 3, we've already quoted that.

Look down to verse 13. For such men are false apostles. Now false apostles do not come in the assembly or among God's people wearing a badge, false apostles.

Deceitful workers, mentioned in verse 13, do not come wearing something that indicates that they are deceitful workers. How do they come? They come as apostles. What is an apostle? Someone sent of God.

So if the devil is going to effectively deceive with his untruth people who are committed to the truth, how is he to do it? He's to come as one who is committed to the same truth. I am as you. I also, we were hearing yesterday, I also am a prophet.

What a lie. What a deception. But he's got good credentials.

This man, after all, has prophesied in the past, he's an old prophet. He's a mature individual. We have to accept his word.

No, we don't. As soon as he speaks, we listen. We listen critically.

Not critical of the man as a person, but critical of the words he speaks. And that's the highest honor you could pay to me, is not to be critical of me as a person. I'm full of faults and failings that you don't know anything about.

I'm very thankful you don't. My wife knows a lot more and I know a little bit more still, but God knows me as I really am. No, you don't really know me.

I don't ask you to be critical of me, but I ask you to be critical of my ministry. That gives me courage and confidence to speak the word of God among the people of God that they will listen and they will listen

critically. I'm always pleased when somebody comes up to me and says, in the light of what you said, how does this work out with this scripture? Good.

They're listening. That's an honor. But such men are false apostles, deceitful workers.

They come as apostles. They come as those who are sent of God. They come among you as workers.

Here's somebody ready to work. Here's someone wants to help in the assembly, disguising themselves as the apostles of Christ. And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light.

Therefore it's not surprising. It's not surprising, except to the naive. It's not surprising if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness, whose end shall be according to their deeds.

Now that's unspeakably solemn, isn't it? Satan is best served by those who profess the most. He is not best served by the drunkard in the ditch, by the propagator, by the drug addict. They're a poor advertisement for the devil's work after all.

But he's best served by the clergyman, the minister, the full-time worker, who will become susceptible to his deception. And either by personal intention or involuntarily almost. He is seduced, he is led astray, and he becomes the mouthpiece of the enemy.

And he doesn't have to be an Alexander the Coppersmith, who did all much evil, in order to be Satan's tool. Sometimes he will work, and is very glad to work, through dedicated spirit-filled believers. You say, well how can that be? Well believer, a believer who was spirit-filled, I think you will agree with me, was the Apostle Peter.

He had known what it was to be filled with the Spirit. But as we saw yesterday, he was led astray, under pressure. There were these believers coming down from Jerusalem, and they put Peter under pressure.

And I know what that's like, you know what it's like. Peer pressure. I've got a certain awe for you brethren, I really have.

And you can bring pressure to bear upon me, by saying things. If a gang of you were to gang up on me afterwards, after I've spoken. And you would kind of say, well now brother, we want you to explain that, you know.

Boy, I would feel that pressure, wouldn't I? Sure would. Well here is Peter, a man who's known what it is to be filled with the Holy Spirit. He is not filled with the Holy Spirit at this moment.

Instead, he is being used, I didn't say being filled by Satan, or indwelt by an evil spirit. I didn't say that, but I said he's being used, he's being deceived into being used by the enemy. Because he's not walking, and it's not what he's preaching now, it's inconsistency in his walk, in his conduct.

He's not walking according to the truth of the gospel. And that's the work of the enemy. And that wasn't the first time Peter had been used by the devil.

And I speak with utmost respect for God's servant. You remember that the Lord Jesus had heard from his lips, thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. And almost in the next breath, the Lord had to say to him, get thee behind me, Satan.

Strange to us, that the Lord would address Peter as though he was Satan. But you see, the two were identified in that speech. Peter was the mouthpiece of Satan at that moment.

Get thee behind me, Satan. Our Lord was resisting the devil. Believers in this spiritual warfare must learn to stand and resist the devil.

And this has got to happen within the local churches. We've got to learn to stand together with this equipment on, able by virtue of this equipment, given us by God, along with a dependence on the Lord, being strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might. Local believers have got to learn to be able to stand against the devil.

Not just elders, but all the believers in the church in Ephesus have called upon to put on the whole armour of God, and to recognize his schemes, and to deal with those schemes. Let me summarize where I've gone so far. When we hear something proposed, or taught, or see something being practiced, we must test it.

And we must either accept or reject it, not according to the amiability, the loving manner, or the warm personality of the person who is teaching or practicing this thing. We must test it by the truth of God. We have come, brethren, in 1988, and I say the full armour of God, that you may be able to resist.

Resist in the evil day. Now, when it's a matter of youthful lust, I have to flee them. But when it's a matter of the devil, I have to resist.

I have to stand up, and be a true soldier of Jesus Christ, regardless of the pressure. All the days since Paul wrote, are surely evil days. Or we could say all the days from the crucifixion at any rate, going back a little further, could certainly be characterized as evil days.

Our Lord is now rejected, and by the world disowned, it's an evil day. So all the days have been evil. But there are special times when believers need to be called to stand together, and to fight together for the cause of God.

And I believe that day has come. False brethren, says Paul, in Galatians chapter 2, sneaked in to spy out our liberty, the liberty we have in Christ Jesus, in order to bring us into bondage. So if that was happening in the days of the New Testament, do you think it is not happening today? It certainly is.

Verse 14, therefore we are to stand firm, number one. And here we get to the armor in itself, remembering that as we deal with the different details of the armor, we must not lose sight of the fact that it's the whole armor we're to put on. We have no choice here, we cannot put on one part of the armor and not the other, we must put it all on.

And the putting on of the armor is in order to enable us to stand for our Lord, and to stand for the truth of God in the day in which we live. There are times when we need to stand together, as there were those days in the New Testament, when believers had to specially stand. As after the churches were established, and in the post-apostolic era, when baptism began to be elevated to being the means by which people entered the kingdom of God and became inheritors of that kingdom.

That becomes an evil day. That calls for men of God to stand up and say, no, this is contrary to the word of God. Let me identify what I see as the great evil of our day.

God raised up, and I'm not speaking with favor of the Brethren Movement, I don't know what the Brethren Movement is. It's only a term which has significance for historians. It has no reality.

I don't belong, and I hope you don't belong to the Brethren Movement. Except as a historian would write about it. He would say, well these people were influenced by the Brethren Movement.

But where are its headquarters? It has no headquarters, I hope. What is the evil today that we have to face? I believe what God's people need to be aware of today, is the breakdown of the very truths that were recovered just about a hundred years ago. By subtle means, these things that were held are being broken down and it's happening without us realizing it.

And it's happening by default. It's no good just pointing to others and saying, well they're doing it, or they're doing it. Why are they able to do it? Because of the weakness that exists in local churches.

Because there are no longer men of God in many assemblies who are truly elders who will stand up and say no, this is not the way we go. And that's tough. Because you're fighting against the current.

The current thought is, well these things that were recovered, they really don't matter too much. We can let some of them go. After all we're living in a different age.

Particularly, let me be specific about this. I'm not after any person or persons in particular. But I see it happening through different persons, through different organizations, through different activities that are going on in the assemblies today.

I see these things happening that the authority of the elders is now being lost. It's being lost as a concept because we often have no real elders in some of our assemblies. There are some of our assemblies have to function with leaders.

You can't call them elders. And that's not knocking them. Some of those men are trying to do their best, but they're not elders.

So when the biblical concept of the plurality of leadership is given up and saints seek an easier path, it's time to say no. You know this began a long, long while ago. And maybe it began before my time.

I remember being invited to an assembly after I had come out of Bible school. And I was invited to go to an assembly and they didn't say, we want you to come and be our pastor. They didn't say that.

They said, we want you to come and help us as elders. I sat down with the elders. And as I listened to them talking, I saw what these men were wanting to do.

They were saying in effect, they weren't putting this into words, but they were saying in effect, we're too busy. We're too busy with our businesses and so on to function as a local church. And we want you to come in.

And I knew what would happen. They told me how much they would give me or that they would seek to support me. And there was some sort of commitment on that line.

If only I would come and I would help that local church. And I said, no. And I gave my reason for no.

I said, that's not what I'm in the Lord's work for. I'm here to help men like you do their job. I'm not boasting, but I want to say this because it's, you've got to be practical in this matter.

Does this sort of thing work? I've seen two assemblies where we have gone over a period of three or four years working in those assemblies and our object has been to equip the local saints for the work of service. Then we've left those assemblies. No, they complained when we left.

We'll not be able to carry on without you. I said, if I've done my work properly, you will. Today, those two assemblies don't even know who I am.

It happened so long ago now, but they're flourishing, thank God. And they're standing for the Lord. And I'm committed to that kind of thing.

Now, that's my particular pastoral gift or exercise, if you like. That's what I'm committed to. And I'm not saying that everybody should be committed to doing particularly that type of work.

Not all have the interest and gift and commitment I have to that type of thing. I understand that. Every man must work according to the gifts that God has given.

Every woman must work according to the abilities and the gifts that God has given. But this must be our aim, the establishment of local churches that can function without us. I'm not interested in digging a hole for myself so that when I have to come out of it by death or by removal to some other place, somebody else has got to be put in the hole.

That's not what we're in business for, is it brethren? Well, for this kind of fight, you've got to put on the armour of God. And this is very, very important. You've got to have your loins girt about with truth.

Now, we've said every part of this armour reflects in some way upon the word of God, upon the truth of God, and I believe it does. This certainly does. Your loins girt about with truth.

Now, this is not truth used objectively on others. That's down in verse 17, the sword of the spirit. That's the truth used outwardly.

The loins girt about with truth is surely the truth used subjectively, the truth applied to the man himself so that he can put on the rest of the armour. And that fits in very well with the Roman equipment as I understand it. They put on this belt and then the breastplate and other parts of the armour were attached to this.

So it was essential that you began with having your loins girt about with truth. It was important to do so. Kelly says of this, it is the intimate dealing of truth with the soul so that there is no laxity of heart or indulged will.

We are to search ourselves and to be judged by the truth. That is essential. Brethren, that's not going to happen involuntarily.

I must make a decision to put that piece of armour on. I must definitely discipline myself, as Paul says, unto godliness. It means I must allow the truth of God to affect the inner man.

For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, fornications, thefts, murders, adulteries and so on. Now that's what's in my heart as born into this world. That's not the real me, thank god.

The real me is born again. I'm a new creature in Christ Jesus, but that flesh is still there, ready to trip me up, ready to betray me so that I will be unable to engage in conflict. What do you think the devil would like to do after me exposing some of his wiles here today? He would like me to become an immoral person so you could write off what I said.

He'd love to do that. He'd love to do that with you, my brother, my sister in Christ. Let me say something on the side here for a moment.

My wife and I have been engaged, as I suppose most of us are, in personal counselling. We made a pact together when we began that ministry, and I said to my wife, I'm going to be absolutely watchful, dear, that I do not counsel with women in my study on my own. Brethren, I commend that to you.

Many of you have already seen the importance of that. This is utter folly to have a study at the back of the chapel where nobody's watching, and women come in for counselling. More people have fallen in churches and assemblies that way than any other way, I think.

Here's a woman comes in, distressed, her husband has left her, she's looking for comfort, encouragement, and help, and if you're not watchful, she'll end up in your arms. And if nothing worse grows out of that, yet you so easily could lose your testimony by that kind of thing. So when people come to see me, I say, well, you can see me in my home.

And when they come, naturally I know they want to speak to me, because they've heard me speak. And they think, well there's somebody who may understand my problem, or they've heard that I've been able to help somebody else, so they come. And when they come, I have a little arrangement with my wife.

They hadn't been in the study for more than a few minutes, and just started on the subject. When in comes my wife with a cup of tea, I just thought she'd like a cup of tea. That's just what I want.

I want them to know that my wife is around for their own protection and for mine. And if the occasion is right, and it usually works out beautifully this way, I say, do you know what you're sharing with me, or what you've started to share with me, is something in which my wife has a lot of expertise. Would you mind either talking to her one-to-one, or if you prefer we'll both be here.

Oh, well I'd like you both to be here. Great. And that is a great protection.

And I believe it's very, very important. But that's off the topic. But you see, Satan would like to destroy our testimony, so that our inner life is broken down.

We have lost in our conduct what we're preaching with our lips. You know David's thought life, and let me go a little deeper brethren, before I close today, because I've spent longer on this than I meant to, but I think it's important. David's thought life had become undisciplined.

His inner life had fallen apart. His loins were no longer girt about with truth, when he looked out of that window and saw Bathsheba. It had already happened.

The collapse was already there. You see it isn't just a case of suddenly seeing something, or reacting to a certain situation. There's an inner breakdown first, that has to happen.

Now how do I know that? Well, when David repented, he realized it. He realized where he'd broken down. Of course when you repent you've always got to back to the place where you broke down.

Where you left the pathway. And that's what David did when he repented. Listen to his words, He realized that the breakdown had been inside before he was externally provoked.

And he realized that if he was going to go on with God, he had to put the armor back on again. He had to have his loins affected by the truth, so to speak. So, this is God's truth in the heart.

And if it isn't there, evil motives will take over, because my heart, I speak as a man in the flesh, is evil. And all those things that come from within, out of the heart of man, will take over if I do not discipline myself unto godliness. May God help us as full-time workers to watch our conduct, that the name of God may not be blasphemed, but that we may be true and holy men of God.

Now if I've said anything this morning that hurts you, maybe a cap is fitting. Dear brother, wear it. My brother, my sister, if I've said something that is getting to you, pray about what I've said.

Think about what I've said. Think about it critically. But I love every one of you, even those with whom I disagree, as to conduct in the assemblies today.

But I believe these are days when I have to do what my sermon says I'm to do. I'm to stand. And I'm standing.

Let's see that we all stand. Not for a party, not for a clique, not for the liberals or the conservatives or anywhere in between, but for God and his truth. May he help us to do that.

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