

“Stand firm, then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist.”

Ephesians 6:14a

“The Belt of Truth”

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I. Since Satan has many deceitful schemes we must guard ourselves with the truth which is revealed in Christ (John 18:37) and His Word (John 17:17) because knowing what is true:

1) Guards us when Satan causes doubt (Genesis 3:1)

2) Gives stability when facing false teaching (Ephesians 4:14)

3) Enables us to refute false doctrine (2 Timothy 3:14-17; Titus 1:13)

II. To put on the belt of truth and buckle it (14a), we must:

1) Acknowledge the truth (2 Timothy 3:7; Ephesians 1:13)

2) Study and memorize the truth of God’s Word daily (Psalm 119:11; Acts 17:11)

3) Live by the truth (James 1:22; 1 Timothy 4:16).

“The Belt of Truth”
Ephesians 6:14a

Our Scripture this morning is taken from Ephesians 6:10-14a:

¹⁰ Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. ¹¹ Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes. ¹² For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. ¹³ Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. ¹⁴ Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist...”

Brothers and sisters in the Lord Jesus Christ,

So far in our study of spiritual warfare we have seen the schemes of the devil spoken about in verse 11, and the arsenal of the evil one described in verse 12. We have seen that this is no light battle. This is no mere skirmish, a little uprising of evil that we need to conquer and then its clear sailing after that. No, this is an all out war that always escalates as the devil realizes his time is short and uses every possible scheme to trip up the Christian.

Abraham Kuyper described this war well when he wrote: “If once the curtain were pulled back, and the scene behind it came into view, it would expose to our spiritual vision a struggle so intense, so convulsive, sweeping away everything within its range, that the most fierce battle fought on earth would seem like mere child’s play by comparison.” (As quoted by Sinclair Ferguson, Commentary on Daniel, pg. 215).

Since we are caught up in this battle, and since there is no way to escape the fight of faith, it is crucial that we arm ourselves with the armor that God provides. We have already read in verse 10 how God provides us with His strength, “*Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power.*” Verse 11 and verse 13 both tell us to put on the full armor of God, and then in verse 14 we see the first piece of armor: The first piece of armor is described as a belt.

It probably doesn’t seem like much to us. We don’t think of a belt as having significance for war or for battle. Yet the belt was crucial to the Romans soldiers. It gathered a soldier’s tunic together so the soldier could move quickly. The belt also held the sheath for the sword and was attached to the lower part of the breastplate, so the belt was a very vital part to a Roman soldiers armor.

However, you probably noticed this is not just any belt that Paul describes in verse 14. It is a special belt, “*the belt of truth.*” He is saying as you face the schemes of the evil one

you need to be wrapped in truth, surrounded and buckled with truth, otherwise - if you don't have the truth - you will never stand against the evil one.

In our era of relativism we often hear that there is no objective standard of truth. In other words, your idea of truth may be different from mine and we shouldn't judge each other's conception of truth, because truth is too evasive to pin down. Like Pilate of old, our society asks with a certain amount of skepticism, "*What is truth?*"

Pilate had asked that question of Jesus, after Jesus had said, in John 18:37 "*..For this reason I was born, and for this reason I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me.*"

Jesus is the embodiment of truth. He is the Word become flesh, and God's Word is truth. In John 17:17, as Jesus prayed to His heavenly Father, He prays saying, "*Your Word is truth.*"

"*What is truth?*" Pilate had asked. And today, the 21st century skeptic still asks, "*What is truth?*" And the answer is Jesus is Truth. He came to testify to truth and He is, in the description of John 14:6, "*the Way, the Truth and the Life.*" He is revealed in the Word of God, and God's Word is truth.

That is the essence of truth, and it is a crucial piece of armor in our battle against the schemes of the evil one because it is the truth of God's Word, - the truth of Christ, that -

Guards Us When Satan Causes Doubt

In our study of this passage we have seen how Satan came to Eve, and, what did he do? What part of Eve did he really work on? It was doubt. He wanted to put some seed of doubt into Eve's mind. Some seed of doubt that God really loved her and had her best interest in mind. He said: "*Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden'?*" He implied that God did not have Eve's best interest in mind: "*God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God knowing good and evil.*" (Genesis 3:1, 4).

Eve certainly had access to the truth. She and Adam had walked with God in the cool of the day. She could have undoubtedly called out to God and been reassured by Him who is the Way, the Truth and the Life that He did indeed have her best interest at heart. But instead of protecting herself with the truth of God's Word, she allowed the seed of doubt to sprout within.

Not much has changed over the centuries. The devil is still sly and scheming and one of his favorites ploys is to plant that seed of doubt in a professing Christian's life. Many professing Christians are totally unprepared to stand in the face of the scheme of the evil one planting seeds of doubt. Why can't they stand? Why do so many professing

Christians give in to their doubts about the faithfulness of God and His promises? It's because they have not put on the belt of truth. They have not encircled themselves with God's Word. They may have it through one loop around the waistline, but there's no way that the God's Word encircles them.

Why? One reason for all the doubt is that many professing Christians have never even read God's Word in its entirety. Many have not really meditated, thought through and pondered deeply, the truths of God's Word. Fewer yet have done as the Psalmist did, and hid God's Word in their heart - memorized it - so that they would not sin against Him (Psalm 119:11).

The story is sometimes told about the man who dreamt that his life on earth was over and he was now in heaven. The man was excited to meet the prophets whom God had used to write the Old Testament. There was Ezekiel! And beside him was Malachi! And along side of him was Isaiah. The man struck up a conversation with Ezekiel by saying "What a pleasure to meet you!"

Ezekiel says, "Likewise, delighted to meet you. Tell me what did you think of my book?" And the man, somewhat embarrassed, has to admit he never really read the prophecy that the Holy Spirit inspired Ezekiel to write.

Malachi is there, so he says to the man, in his dream, "Ezekiel's book was pretty long, but mine was short. You must have read mine....What did you think of the prophecy that the Lord inspired me to write...?" Again, the man admits he hadn't really read it, and wakes up in a cold sweat.

In that beautiful 119th Psalm, the Psalmist writes: "*I meditate on Your precepts and consider Your ways. I delight in Your decrees; I will not neglect Your Word.*" (Psalm 119:15-16).

Do you see how important the belt of truth is? Do you see why we cannot neglect a systematic, faithful study of God's Word? It is the Word of God that guards us from the seeds of doubt that Satan is still so quick to sow, and it gives stability when we face false teaching.

Stability When Facing False Teaching

Earlier in his letter to the Ephesian church, in Ephesians 4:11-13, the apostle explained how pastors and teachers are "*to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.*"

Then in verse 14 he shows the crucial importance of maturity, of having the knowledge that comes from being encircled with the belt of truth: *“Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming”* (Ephesians 4:14).

There is so much false teaching on the Bible. And much of it is meant to plant seeds of doubt in the believer, to *“blow us here and there by every wind of teaching.”* If the Christian does not have the belt of truth firmly buckled around their waist they are going to be swayed by all the latest theological trends and teachings, by every wind of doctrine.

And there have been many new *“winds of teaching”* just in your lifetime and mine. In fact, just in the last decade or two, consider how many false *“winds of teaching”* have blown into the church universal, including churches that are supposed to be Reformed in doctrine.

Reformed churches have been blown to and fro by the false teaching of liberalism for more than a few decades. Liberalism in the church is a form of secular humanism in that it makes man, not God, the measure of all things. Thus, already in the 1920's and 30's some churches were declaring as their motto: *“The Bible Contains the Word of God.”* That might sound good, until you realize that what they are implying is that the Bible also contains, errors, myths and legends, and it is up to their astute theologians to discern what in the Bible is God's Word and what is myth and legend.

Currently the Third wave of Pentecostalism is sweeping many away from Scripture into some very unusual experiences. And more recently a new understanding, - a new misunderstanding, - of Justification by Faith, known as *“Federal Vision”* has become very popular in conservative Reformed churches. Our United Reformed Synod last summer took action, as has the Presbyterian Church of America, Orthodox Presbyterian Church, and other conservative Presbyterian and Reformed churches, to warn her members about this new teaching on Justification, also known as *“The New Perspective on Paul.”*

Many people have been swept away, and are now being swept away, by the winds of these false teachings. Many more like them will also be swept away, all because the belt of truth is not firmly buckled around them.

In order to have that belt buckled we must be familiar with our Bibles and not like the man who dreamt he met Isaiah, Ezekiel and Malachi. We need to be like the Bereans. When Paul came to them with the gospel, we are told *“... They received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true”* (Acts 17:11).

Refuting False Doctrine

Third, knowing the truth of God's Word enables us to refute false doctrine. It's important not to be swept away by false doctrine, that's the defensive side of the battle. But there is also an offensive side to every war. We need to refute false teaching, false doctrine, so that even more people aren't swept away by it. Paul taught Timothy that "*All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work*" (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

He tells Titus to use the truth to refute error as well. As Paul warns Titus about false teachers he says this concerning the Word of God: "*This testimony is true. Therefore, rebuke them sharply, so that they will be sound in the faith*" (Titus 1:13).

But how can we refute false doctrine if we don't have the truth firmly buckled around us? We have to know what we believe, and be grounded in the truths of Scripture, in order to refute the many erroneous teachings concerning God's Word.

I trust that we begin to see the importance of the belt of truth. But how do we put that "belt of truth on?" And how do we buckle it so that the truth doesn't come loose...?

Acknowledge the Truth

To put on the belt of truth and buckle it (14a) we must first acknowledge the truth. There are many people who are "*always learning but never able to acknowledge the truth*" (2 Timothy 3:7). The context there is false teachers who are leading others astray. They come with their false teaching, whether it's the Watchtower magazine, or a new doctrinal study from some seminary, or a few new books by the latest popular author. And these false teachers get people to study more material, but in all their studies of "new material" they never really acknowledge the truth of God's Word.

In every person's life there has to be a point where they acknowledge the truth of God's Word. "*Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God*" Paul wrote in Romans 10:17. Likewise, earlier in his letter to the Ephesians, he wrote: "*And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit*" (Ephesians 1:13).

It is the Holy Spirit who enables us to acknowledge the truth, "*for the man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned*" (1 Corinthians 2:14). By God's grace we look at the Bible, and see not just another book, not just the best seller of all time, but we see it and acknowledge it as the Word of God,

the belt of truth that protects us in the spiritual warfare that marks the life of every true Christian.

Daily Reading and Memorization

Once we acknowledge the truth of God's Word we must study and memorize the truth of God's Word daily. However, this seems to be a point where the devil is especially effective. There are so many other things that vie for our attention, many of them good in themselves, that we seem to have no time left for the daily reading and studying of God's Word.

There is also the indwelling sin within us that seems intent on blocking out the Word. When the Bible is read after supper, how many of our minds wander? Many of us have required our children to summarize what was read, or at least say the last word read, just to make them listen. How ironic is it that although we have the only real source of truth in all the world, here in the Scriptures, we so often neglect a personal daily study of the truth?

In that sense we are a lot like an illiterate Scotsman who wanted to learn how to read. A local pastor took the time to teach this man how to read, using the Bible as their textbook. The man was making good progress, but then the pastor had to leave that town for a lengthy time; it was an absence of several months. When the pastor returned he eagerly went to this man's house. He hoped that the man was making progress and had been able to read many more chapters and books of the Bible. He knocked on the man's door, but the man wasn't home. His wife answered the door and the pastor asked her how the man was doing in his reading. Was he able to read more? Had he finished the gospels? Had he read more of the Psalms? The man's wife replied, "He is reading much better than before, but now he has graduated from reading the Bible. He has moved up to newspaper!"

While we may find the story sadly comical, it raises a serious concern for each one of us: How many of us spend more time reading the newspaper, or our favorite sports or home and garden magazines, than we do God's Word? Is it possible that many of us are more like the Scotsman than we care to admit?

However, not only are we to faithfully read the Word, but we are told in Scripture to meditate, that is, thoroughly think over and reflect on the Word, and that involves memorization. The Psalmist says, "*I have hidden Your Word in my heart, that I might not sin against You*" (Psalm 119:11).

Yet, we are often tempted to see Bible memory as an option instead of a necessity, even though Psalm 119:11, along with other Scriptures, teach us that it is crucial to memorize God's Word.

William Gurnall, in his book, *The Christian in Complete Armor* explains the importance of Bible memory by writing: “The memory is the facility which carries the images of things. It holds fast what we receive; it is the treasury where we lay up what we desire afterward to use and converse with. The more clear and certain our knowledge of anything, the deeper it sinks, and the surer it is held by the memory.” Then he adds: “the more weight is laid on the seal, the deeper impression is made on the wax.” (Greatest Christian Classic Edition, 1989, pg. 146).

When I was first told that I should memorize portions of the Bible I was very reluctant, to say the least. If anything there was rebellion in my heart that said, “How ridiculous. I read the Bible faithfully, why should I have to memorize it?” Then in seminary each Friday we were quizzed on Bible memory verses from Berkhof’s Systematic Theology. The first six months of that class I passed the quizzes only because my professor was a truly gracious man. But gradually I saw the greater need to memorize specific Bible verses, and for many years have written down verses on 3x5 cards or old business cards to review them throughout the day.

Then to show that God can use even the poorest of motives for good, I began to memorize whole chapters of the Bible. Some of you may recall the source of my motivation. It happened about six years ago when I had been your pastor for only a matter of months. We had the Lord’s Supper and when the elders came up with the elements and placed them on the table I forgot to serve the elders. I just stood there. I honestly don’t know if it was just forgetfulness on my part or whether I was day-dreaming. I would like to say that I was so deep in prayer and meditative thought that I neglected to serve the elders. But when an elder got up and took the tray and served his fellow elders I realized how great my blunder was. I felt about this high! Fortunately I was still in that “honeymoon” phase that pastors have with their congregations for a short time. You were all very gracious and told me not to worry about it.

But I thought, “If my memory is that bad, I should exercise my memory by memorizing, not just verses, but chapters of the Bible.” Since that time I have focused on memorizing chapters of the New Testament and specific Psalms. What a blessing it is to memorize larger portions of Scripture! That is the only way that you can truly meditate on Scripture, because it is imprinted, - like that wax seal - in your mind and heart.

I am not near as smooth as you Sunday School children. I still remember when you recited Psalm 103 for us, and Exodus 20, the 10 commandments. You did so flawlessly. It is true that it is harder for us older folks to memorize, but it certainly can be done. In fact, we have one member of this church in her 70’s who is in the process of memorizing the New Testament letter to the Ephesians, - in it’s entirety!

I began memorizing Scripture with a bad motive. But God over ruled my bad motives and has caused memorizing large blocks of Scripture to be a great blessing to me. You have an opportunity to memorize blocks of Scripture for a good motive: You and I are caught

up in the battle of the ages, we are in great spiritual warfare, and Bible memory, far from being an option, is the buckle that holds the truth of God's Word in our hearts and minds.

Live By Truth

Third application: We must live by the truth. If you know the truth, if you faithfully read the Word and even memorize portions of it, but don't live by the truth then James 1:22 says you are deceiving yourself.

None of us in this life can perfectly live up to God's Word. We all fail because we are sinners. But that's no excuse not to live by the truth, no excuse not to watch both our doctrine and our life closely. That's another warning of great wisdom that Paul wrote to Timothy. In 1 Timothy 4:16 he warns: "*Watch your life and your doctrine closely.*"

I have not counted, nor do I want to count, how many colleagues of mine have fallen because although they watched their doctrine - they knew the Bible, the catechism, the confessions and the canons, - they didn't carefully watch their life. They didn't keep their belt buckled, figuratively and literally, and brought shame on themselves, grief to their families, consternation to their congregations and derisive laughter to the unsaved in their communities.

You and I must know the truth of Scripture and of Jesus who is revealed in Scripture, but then that truth must be, as Psalm 51:6 puts it, inside of us. David says, "*You desire truth within.*" That refers to our conduct, to the way we live out what we know to be true in our mind.

The devil scores a coup - a great victory, - when he gets someone who knows the truth in his head to fail to live that truth out in his life. He loves it when he can tempt someone to watch their doctrine, but not their life. How important is the warning of 1 Corinthians 10:12 for me, and for each one of you, - "*If you think you are standing firm, be careful that you do not fall!*"

Abraham Kuyper described spiritual war so accurately when he wrote: "If once the curtain were pulled back, and the scene behind it came into view, it would expose to our spiritual vision a struggle so intense, so convulsive, sweeping away everything within its range, that the most fierce battle fought on earth would seem like mere child's play by comparison."

Seeing the intensity of that war, may you and I always keep the belt of truth firmly buckled around our lives. Amen.