

Therefore, Stand

This morning I am continuing in the series that I started several months ago on Spiritual Warfare. And we are in the home-stretch, now, of the series. In this home-stretch, we are talking about how we can successfully do battle with Satan. We have learned about his tactics and his power. We have learned about entry points—ways that we can open ourselves up to demonic oppression through unchecked anger, through involvement in the occult, through sexual immorality, through legalism.

But now, in this last part of the series, we are talking about how then do we do battle? How do we succeed as a church that is involved in spiritual warfare, as individuals and as families, as citizens of this country? We see things that are clearly undermining the foundations of this country. How do we do battle? How do we fight?

Last week I spoke about a foundational matter in doing battle and that is the need for high morale, the need for faith, for rousing ourselves in the biblical conviction that, in fact, victory has been achieved, it has been won.

I am going to underline that truth again, but today I want to take a second prerequisite of successfully battling with Satan. And that is our need to take a stand. Open your Bibles to Ephesians 6:10-14:

“Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes. 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. 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. Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place...”

Now, in interpreting the scriptures one of the things that you can do in your own scripture study is to underline in a passage all the repeated words and phrases that the author uses because very often an interpretive key to the text concerns repeated words and phrases. And as we read this text, what we find is that the word “stand” is mentioned four times in these five verses.

In verse 11: “Put on the full armor of God that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes.

Verse 13: “Put on the full armor so that when the day of evil comes you may be able to stand your ground and after you have done everything to stand...”

And verse 14: “Stand firm then...”

What Paul is trying to communicate to us is that standing, taking a stand, standing firm is an essential prerequisite to successfully doing battle with the devil. To do battle with Satan, you as a Christian and we as a church, must be able to stand. To take a stand; to withstand.

This word “stand” is key in this whole section of scripture. Watchman Nee, a Chinese Christian leader in the first half of this century, divided up the book of Ephesians into three sections. He said Ephesians 1-3 is sit; Ephesians 4-5 is walk; and, Ephesians 6, particularly from verses 10 on, the exhortation is stand.

Sit—we are seated with Christ. Ephesians 1-3 tells us our position in Christ and our positional righteousness. 4-5 tell us how to walk, therefore, based on the position that we have in Christ. Chapters 4 and 5 tell us how to live. And Ephesians 6:10 and forward, as it speaks about spiritual warfare, calls us to stand. Stand therefore. Learn to take a stand.

Now, what I want to communicate today is that spiritual warfare is a large part of your understanding and your getting hold of this principle of standing. Spiritual warfare is, in other words, largely a matter of resistance, of holding your ground, of being willing to push back when you are pushed. The apostle James tells us in the book of James, “Resist the devil and he will flee from you.”

1 Peter 5 says the same thing in verse 8. Peter says, “Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour, resist him.”

Paul uses the word “stand.” What we are going to see is that this is precisely what Christians do not do. We retreat. We run away. We give ground. We compromise. We waffle. We look for the escape hatch. We are leaping out the window. When things get hot, we bolt for the door. We rationalize. We roll over. We try to mix God’s will and what Satan is suggesting. We do everything other than simply stand. Stand therefore...

Well, that is what I am going to preach on today—learning to stand. First, let’s pray.

Now, we have repeatedly seen both from life, it is our experience, and also from the study of scripture that the Christian life is a fight. And it is a fight not just with human beings, but as Paul tells us in Ephesians 6:12, 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. We are fighting, struggling, on

a continual basis with the demonic forces that are arrayed against God and everything connected with God, namely us—followers of Jesus.

And this word “struggle” is really an interesting word. When Paul says “our struggle is not against flesh and blood,” that is not so much a word drawn from warfare or from a military context so much as from a sports context. The word really means “wrestling.” We wrestle, we are involved in close hand-to-hand struggle with the demonic.

See, I think Paul used the word “struggle” to heighten for us the sense of the closeness of the struggle that we are engaged in. That the warfare that you are involved in with the demonic is not like modern warfare. You don’t sit around in an air conditioned bunker somewhere looking at a bunch of computer screens and simply punch a button so that a missile fires out at a target fifty miles away. The warfare is not a matter of a video game kind of thing where you are soaring over a series at a rate of 2-3 mach speed; 1500 mph, dropping laser-guided bombs. And you just cruise out.

Paul says no, that the warfare, the struggle that we are engaged in with the demonic is more like hand-to-hand Civil War combat with fixed bayonets, wrestling the opponent to the ground.

Have you noticed in your life that the spiritual warfare that you participate in is very close to you? That there are times that it is so close that you feel like the devil is breathing in your face. You can feel his hot breath right in your face as close as your spouse. In fact, it might be coming through your spouse. It is as close as the members of your family coming right into your home through your children, through your parents. Sometimes you are amazed at how close the struggle is coming right through one of your friends. A co-worker’s comment. Your partner in business or ministry.

Indeed, it gets closer than that. You suddenly realize that the warfare is actually being conducted under your skin. It is going on in your flesh. So close that sometimes you feel like your mind is going to explode. Have you noticed that? That the struggle actually occurs in your mind. There is this battleground and the lines are drawn and you feel yourself pulled one way and pulled the other. Tempted and trying to fight. One part of you is rationalizing and the other part is saying, “No, no.” You are a witness of this incredible tug of war going on, but it’s happening in your brain.

That is what Paul is getting at. The warfare that we are involved in is very, very intimate. And Satan, who is highly intelligent, knows all of the pressure points, all of our Achilles’ Heels. He knows just how to get under our defenses and under our ribs. That one area that is left open, that one unguarded door that we’ve left open, he always goes for that door.

Now, last week I spoke about the fight of faith. Today I want to talk about the fight of resistance. To conduct this fight we must be willing to stand. As I mentioned in the opening of this talk, four times in Ephesians 6 as Paul is referring to spiritual warfare, he calls people to stand. Standing is the key to doing spiritual warfare.

I want to turn to an Old Testament text to establish my point. You see, the Old Testament is largely a picture of spiritual warfare conducted on a physical level. So much of what you see going on in the battles that the Jewish people fought in the Old Testament are meant to instruct us in the tactics and the strategies necessary to do battle with Satan. Why so much warfare in the Old Testament? Paul says these things are written down for your instruction. They are examples for us. In this case, examples of how to conduct spiritual warfare.

So flip over to 2 Samuel 23. And this is one of those really loved passages in the scriptures. It speaks about David's mighty men. You know, these heroes that really know how to fight. Courageous men. I mean when these guys came out on the battlefield, the 2 Samuel 23 heroes of the faith, they were playing "Rocky" music in the background. They are singing, "Getting stronger..." you know. You can see the American flag flapping in the breeze.

We read in 2 Samuel 23:8,

"These are the names of David's mighty men: Josheb-Basshebeth, a Tahkemonite, was chief of the Three; he raised his spear against eight hundred men, whom he killed in one encounter."

I think he would win on American Gladiators, especially in their jousting contests, don't you?

But the people I want to focus on here are the next two people, Eleazar and Shammah.

It says regarding Eleazar:

"...son of Dodai the Ahohite. As one of the three mighty men, he was with David when they taunted the Philistines gathered at Pas Dammim for battle. Then the men of Israel retreated, but he stood his ground [and underline that—stood his ground] and struck down the Philistines till his hand grew tired and froze to the sword. They brought about a great victory that day. The troops returned to Eleazar, but only to strip the dead. Next to him was Shammah son of Agee the Hararite. When the Philistines banded together at a place where there was a field full of lentils, Israel's troops fled from them. But Shammah [and you can

underline this] took his stand in the middle of the field. He defended it and struck the Philistines down, and the Lord brought about a great victory.”

How was the victory of the Lord achieved in the battles of Israel? What you see in the life of Eleazar and Shammah and the passage from Ephesians 6, is that certain people are willing to take a stand. There are some committed folks, some folks who are loyal to God and God’s ways, some folks who have become convinced that this is the only way to live, that life is found in faithfulness to God and in nothing else. There are at least a few people who take a stand, who resist.

You say, “Well, what does it mean to take a stand. To stand there, having done all to stand? What does it mean?”

Well, first of all, approaching it negatively, it means that you don’t retreat. People who take a stand are people who don’t retreat. It says in verse 9 that unlike Eleazar the men of Israel retreated, but he stood his ground. And then in verse 11 it says that Israel’s troops fled, but Shammah took his stand.

You know, the world is full of people who retreat in the face of opposition. And when I think about retreating, I think about the number of escape hatches that the world offers us. You know, if your marriage doesn’t work out, there is always the escape hatch of divorce. And so many people enter marriage with that in their minds. You know, there is a place to retreat to. They don’t enter marriage saying, “Well, I am going to be taking a stand. I know that opposition may really come. I know that the Philistines may attack. I know that I might go through these kinds of problems, but I am committed to taking a stand in the middle of this and work on my marriage and work them out and continue to fight to keep this marriage going. I will fight. I will fight.”

No. There is always that thing in the back of the mind that says, “Well, you know, if this doesn’t work out, you can always leave.”

Do you know, this idea of an escape hatch, of allowing there to be a way out, particularly when it comes to your major commitments in life like marriage, do you know that just lays an explosive charge at the foundation of marriage? Do you know, people who stay successfully married are people who have barred the door. There are some doors in life—your relationship with God; your relationship with your spouse—there are some doors in life that you bolt, you lock and you say, “I can’t get out of this room. Here is where I take my stand. No retreats.”

But the enemy is always coming along and saying, “Oh, but can’t you crack the door just a little? Can’t you back down? Won’t you retreat from your super-hard position? After all, you don’t want to be a legalist, do you?”

And one of the ways that he gets Christians to retreat is by exaggerating the number of people who, in fact, do retreat. See, the enemy comes along when we are feeling pressured and what he says to us is, “Listen, virtually everyone else in your situation has fled. You know, you are about the only one who is really trying to hold the ground. Everyone else has run off on the abortion issue. Everyone else has run off when it comes to trying to give your money to the church and to the work of the Lord. Nobody else does that anymore. Certainly nobody else tithes anymore! Everybody else has retreated from a biblical stand when it comes to how to raise your kids, especially on what kids should be allowed to watch on TV. Everybody else has left. You know, you are all by yourself out there in the middle of the field, fighting the battle.”

The enemy exaggerates the number of people who have retreated. To use one illustration, let me talk about the issue of marital unfaithfulness. See, the propaganda mills of the enemy have really been working over time for about fifty years regarding the number of people who are unfaithful in their marital commitments. You know, the old Kinsey Report on sexual behavior back in the 1940's said that over half of all men are unfaithful to their marital vows during their marriages. And then a Cosmopolitan report, a Cosmo report, said that 54% of married women are unfaithful, have at least one affair. In the Hite Report, Cher Hite came along and said that 72% of married men were adulterers—3 out of 4. And recently in an issue of *Marriage and Divorce* they said that 70% of all Americans engage in marital affairs at some point during their married life. Well over the majority, the enemy says. Well over the majority. Three out of four Americans are doing it. And here you are in a bad marriage trying to take your stand, and there's that attractive, available coworker or friend who understands you in a way your spouse never did. Everybody else is doing it. Why don't you retreat and give in?

The truth is that according to the best random studies of American sexual behavior where there isn't a political purpose in it to advertise the OK-ness of infidelity, just random sexual studies done by competent researchers, they found that six out of seven Americans are, in fact, faithful to their marital vows during the time they are married. Now, if they are separated, they are going through a divorce, that is something else. But during the time that people are living together, six out of seven Americans, survey after survey, come back as being faithful to their marital vows.

Then he exaggerates and comes along with these inflated statistics of the number of teenagers having sex. He comes to teenagers and basically says, “You are the only virgin left. There isn’t anyone else.”

I remember in high school I thought to myself, “My goodness, I don’t know anyone who isn’t using drugs.” That wasn’t true. But the propaganda machine had been worked up like Nazi propaganda during the war. The Germans would go into a town and they would say, “Throw down your weapons. The cause is lost. You are alone. You are abandoned.”

And to strengthen our resolve so that we don’t retreat, the Lord speaks to us the way he spoke to the prophet Elijah and said, “You are not alone. There are many, many people out in the field with you who are similarly taking a stand. Don’t retreat. Fear not. You don’t have to.”

Not everyone gives in. Not everyone has an affair. Not everyone goes to the marriage altar having given up their virginity. Not everyone cheats on their taxes. Or cheats on an exam. Not every teen uses drugs or hates their parents or walks away from Christ.

People who take a stand don’t retreat. People who take a stand don’t compromise. Taking a stand means that there are certain principles that you will not compromise. That there are some things that you have a conviction about and you hold firm to. And Satan is always offering a compromise.

“If not a full-scale retreat, Rich, perhaps we can meet half way. Don’t stand your ground totally, but maybe we can meet half-way.”

I see this aspect to spiritual warfare all the time as women and some men are picking a marital partner. Satan comes along and says, “You know, I know that one of your

priorities is that your partner in marriage be a Christian. But you know, you are not getting any younger and this person that you are in love with is a very nice person. And so, let's erase that conviction that you used to have, that your number one priority in picking a person for marriage would be someone who was radically in love with Jesus Christ. Let's erase that from the number one position. Hey, there aren't that many folks out there like that. And, again, remember the biological clock is ticking, ticking, ticking."

So we will compromise and we will say that it is sufficient if they go along with you in your following of Jesus and if they are nice. You stand your ground.

"You just bow the knee to me," Satan says, "Just bow a little bit because God won't give you what you want without my help. You need my help. See, your Father is not a good enough provider. You can't trust him all by himself. You need my help. You need one foot in the world and one foot in the kingdom."

You got to give the devil his due and those who stay strong say, "No. I am going to trust God to provide for me without your help, thank you Satan. I don't need to tip my cap to you at all. And I will not bow even a little. And I will not erase my convictions."

Doesn't it bum you out? Isn't it incredibly troubling to see how many people just erase old convictions and compromise stands? You say, "Will they not stand up for anything?"

The Girl Scouts of America recently changed a 70-80 year old policy that Girl Scouts needed to say that they believed in God. Now they say, "Well, that is not really very important. That is not really what we are all about. You can say you believe in God or anything else for that matter. We will just erase that."

And the Boy Scouts are coming under incredible pressure. There are five or six law suites right now standing against the Boy Scouts filed by the ACLU. The heat is on. Stop standing up for your convictions.

You see it with the Republican Party now. We can't keep this firm anti-abortion stand. No, we have to give it up.

And then Americans continually complain that their leaders seem to have no convictions about anything, just blow with the wind. You must be willing to take a stand.

And so I ask you where is it, at what point, will you say, "I am standing here. I will not compromise. I take my stand in the middle of the field. This far, no further."

Brothers and sisters, there must be some points of resistance in your life where you push back, where you simply push back. There must be some things that for you are simply unthinkable. I am sorry; it is unthinkable that I, as a Christian, would cheat on my taxes. It is unthinkable that I, as a Christian, would have an affair. That my children would engage in certain practices. I push back. It could be the tiniest things like saying to your kids, "I am sorry. Sunday morning is for the Lord in our family. We are going to church. You spend every other day out in the world, but you are not going to be involved in your select soccer or your traveling baseball or your football, or ballet or dance, or your tournament or your play on Sunday mornings. Sunday mornings for our family is for the Lord."

Wednesday evening is for kinship. I am sorry. I will not work. We draw lines. Those are my convictions. I am not trying to throw them on you and say that that is what you need to think. But you need to have points of conviction.

See, Christians must take a stand. Even when it comes to the things that the Lord has done in your life. How often Christians get ripped off from the healing that the Lord has done in their lives. The Lord really speaks to you and brings you through a profound process. You know, you learn some new truths. Does that mean that is the end of the matter? You know, you have had this experience and God has spoken to you and He has really enlightened you about something. Is that the end of the matter? How naive to think that Satan will just say, “Well, I will let that truth settle in your life and never keep attacking it.”

And you have to keep fighting for it. Have you noticed that you can have wonderful experiences, the light really goes on and you say, “Oh, my goodness. I never saw that before. You know, that sermon really opened things up for me.” And then immediately it is just ripped off because you didn’t take a stand. You didn’t fight for it. You didn’t resist the devil.

You know the people who have accomplished great things for Jesus Christ have mainly been people who didn’t necessarily forge new ground. They didn’t necessarily come up with anything novel or original. They weren’t particularly creative in their thinking, but in the face of pressure and opposition, simply took their stand and didn’t give in. Some of the folks that we admire, the luminaries, the greats in the Christian faith, were folks who just took a stand.

Martin Luther, as he was being tried as a heretic for his views regarding salvation, was being examined in Rome. He was all alone. He was before the Pope and cross-examined by this great scholar. The scholar said to him, “You have no right to call into question the most holy orthodox faith instituted by Christ the perfect law giver. Proclaimed

throughout the world by the apostles, sealed by the red blood of the martyrs, confirmed by the sacred council, defined by the church in which all our fathers believed until death and for which now we are forbidden by the Pope and the Emperor to discuss lest there be no end of debate. I ask you Martin Luther, answer candidly, do you or do you not repudiate your book and the errors they contain?"

And Luther replied, "Since then your majesty and your lordships desire a simple reply, I will answer. Unless I am convicted by scriptures and by plain reason, I do not accept the authority of the Pope or councils for they have contradicted each other. My conscience is held captive by the Word of God. I cannot and I will not recant anything. For to go against conscience is neither right nor safe. [And then he uttered his famous words] Here I stand. I cannot do otherwise. God help me."

Let me summarize up 'til now. What I am trying to say is that the Christian life is a life in large measure of resistance. It is an offensive battle. It is holding the ground in your marriage, in your family, in your faith, in your doctrine, in your morals. It is holding the ground. Not giving in, not wavering, not compromising, not retreating.

There are so many football teams that play a great offensive game, but they don't play good defense and they lose. And there are so many churches that are reaching out and spreading out, but as they spread and as they grow, they aren't holding the ground. They aren't holding onto the historic faith that has been delivered in the scriptures, holding the ground morally. And they are going to lose. There is slippage.

You say, "OK. I want to defend. I want to hold the ground. I want to be able to resist the devil and what he does in coming against me, against my family, against the church. What do I need to do?"

Well, flip back over to Ephesians 6. This is how we defend. The purpose of Ephesians 6 is to tell us how to fight and how, in particular, to take a stand. Ephesians 6 says in order to stand you need to put on the full armor of God. Verse 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.”

Verse 12 describes the power of Satan, the strategies, the principalities, all that is arrayed against you and verse 13 says without putting on the armor of God, you can't possibly take your stand.

The reason why Christians compromise and retreat and leap out the escape hatches and run and waver and waffle is because Christians are not putting on the full armor of God. For without the full armor of God, you will give in. The forces arrayed against you are too great. You will never be able to hold your position in your family. You will never be able to hold your position at your job, in your school, with peer pressure, unless you have the armor of God on. The armor that God provides.

See, you can't fight Satan with human weapons, human reason, human counsel, what you can come up with. He is too strong. He is too smart. The pressure is too great. Have you noticed that when you are attacked, your humanly created defenses collapse.

Let me give you an illustration so that you understand your need for the armor that God provides. Let's just use the illustration of anxiety. Say you are an anxious person and you want to hold your ground and stand in God's peace. You are trying to stand in God's peace. But the warfare starts heating up and it gets really, really close to you, this hand-to-hand combat. It is going on so close that it is in your mind. And you are suddenly bombarded with anxious thoughts. So now you are doing battle with the enemy

regarding that weak point in your life, anxiety. And you are trying to stand. How are you going to do it?

Have you noticed that your human reasoning just doesn't hold the ground for you? You will start worrying and then you will say, "Well, I know I am just being silly. I am getting myself all worked up and nothing is probably wrong. I mean, here I am worrying about all the what-ifs. I mean, the probability that anything is wrong is a million to one."

How long does that argument hold up against the power of anxiety that Satan wields. Nothing is probably wrong. I am sure I am just being silly. Satan runs through that like a hot knife through butter and says, "Well, the probability that the plane may crash is a million to one, but you could be the one." "The probability that your children are kidnapped could be a million to one, but they may be kidnapped."

"The probability that you have cancer at your age may be very slim, but hey, you know that ache, that pain may be cancer."

Have you noticed that your human reasoning is just a paper-thin defense that Satan just runs right through as though it doesn't exist? You say, "Well, maybe I won't reason my way out of it. I will use insight. Oh, I understand now why I get anxious. My family was very anxious and I can look back and see that my mother dealt with things in a worrisome way. And, oh boy, you want to talk about worriers—my father is a classic worrier. He worries about everything. Now that I have this insight, surely that will defend me as I understand the family system that I was raised in. That will defend me against the onslaught of Satan's attack."

He just rolls over that like a tank over a little speed bump. I am sure insight about your problems has worked as powerfully in your life as it has in mine, which has virtually provided no help at all.

Paul's point is that nothing humanly conceived of, our reasons, psyching yourself up to do battle against Satan, the little pep talks, all of your lists of pros and cons about why you shouldn't do something—nothing like that can equip you to take your stand against a supernatural, awesomely powerful, subtle lying enemy. The only thing that is going to work is the armor that God provides. You need the whole armor.

Paul runs through seven weapons, seven pieces of armor that we need to defend ourselves. We say, "Well, you know, I don't have time to pray, but I am out of the house. I am gone. I am on the run strapping on another piece."

We can't pick and choose through the armor and say that we are going to be able to successfully defend the ground. We need the whole armor.

And it is interesting that there are seven pieces of equipment that Paul mentions. The number "7," you may know, is probably the most important number in the Bible. It is mentioned over six hundred times. It is the number in the Bible of complete-ness. There are seven days in a week. The Sabbath is the seventh day. Jesus spoke seven last words from the cross. You will see that the book of John is wrapped up around this number seven. There are seven signs and wonders in the book of John. Seven "I am" statements in the book of Revelation. There are seven angels blowing seven trumpets. There are seven bowls of wrath; seven seals on the books; seven churches; seven lamp stands; seven last plagues.

Two times he says, “Put on the full armor of God.” And so Paul is trying to talk about the Christian in complete armor and says that there are seven weapons that you need in order to stand your ground. In verse 14 it says:

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

The belt of truth was a leather belt that went around a Roman soldier’s waist. Paul is taking these weapons from Roman soldiers that he had seen. In fact, I believe that there was a Roman soldier standing right next to him in the jail cell when he wrote this. And he is sitting there writing this letter and looking at this big Roman soldier and he is thinking: “Could you turn around a little bit? I just want to notice what is on your back there. OK, good.” And he is writing it all down. “You know, I am not getting a good enough portrait here.” I think the whole thing is kind of funny. This guy is the captor and Paul is basically using him for the purpose of teaching us spiritual lessons.

Well, around the Roman soldier’s waist was a belt. A big leather belt that the Roman soldier would use to pick up the hem of his garment. They used to wear long skirts, basically, long robes. And in order to do battle so that they wouldn’t trip over the robes, they would pick up the hem of the thing and tuck it in the belt so that they could fight man-to-man.

I don’t think it is any accident that Paul says that where you begin in standing your ground is by putting on the belt of truth. The truth is, I believe, the whole of the scripture, the full counsel of God, the whole thing, the whole truth found in the Bible. And I think there is an order to these weapons. I don’t think that Paul just sort of randomly goes through it. In fact, he doesn’t start at the head and work down to the feet. He starts with the weapon of the truth, the whole counsel of God found in the Bible.

Now, later on we will find that we need a sword which is the Word of God. But I think that is the particular application of certain scriptures to the specific problems that you may be facing. You know, the particular lies that the enemy is firing at you and you use the scriptures to carve away the lie and to assert what is true.

But here I think he is talking more broadly about the general foundation that you use for living life. The starting point that you have for facing life. The thing that holds your life together. One way of putting it is that when you go out into the world, you know, you get dressed and you are walking out the door ready to face life for the day. The work place, people that you are going to meet. You are walking out the door to your women's group or you are walking out the door to church, you are facing life. What is your starting point? What is the base that you are proceeding from? What is the lens through which you look at life?

Here I am, I am facing a dilemma, a decision, a problem. How do I approach it? How do I think about it? Well, I could take as my starting point, I could take as the lens through which I look at life, my feelings. Some people do. They have as their final authority, their feelings. And so we can say, "Well, I know the Bible says that victory has been achieved by Jesus Christ at the cross. And I know the Bible says over and over I can win against this particular problem. But, you know, I feel so defeated. I feel so helpless. I feel so powerless that I just can't fight. And what you are saying is that your feelings are the final authority. Your bad feelings, your feelings of defeat, your feelings of depression, you know, the way your skin crawls. You can't battle this, or at least you feel that you can't. Your emotions have just gotten you way down. "No, I can't rouse myself."

Sometimes it is not your bad feelings that control, it is your good feelings. I just can't see how this can be wrong when I am so happy. You know, my boyfriend, my girlfriend and I are sleeping together. We are absolutely happy. We are in love. How can it be wrong? I feel so happy.

I am so happy now that I am driving this sports car. It must have been a wise purchase. Sports cars, that's what every old baby boomer wants. I feel so good. Certainly my being happy is the final answer. It is the determinant. It is the judge of whether something is OK or not OK.

How do you approach life? Do you operate out of a feelings base? Maybe the final authority for your decisions and the way you face life is your reason. It all has to do with whether you can understand. You face problems or difficulties, trials, and you say, "Well, I just can't understand why God is allowing this." And because you can't understand it, then you decide that you have to fix it yourself independent from God and not wait upon the Lord. That you have been trying to wait upon the Lord, but that is not working. It is not working to believe in God anymore. You have to go at it yourself because you don't understand. And so the final authority in your life is not what God said, it is not who God is, it is not who God said you are, it is what you can see at the moment. And many, many people cave in because really the final authority in their life is how much of their particular situation at any moment they can understand.

Now, I don't understand why my family has gotten sick or why I am going through this financial crisis. Why I have had this marital problem. I can't understand why I am experiencing stress in school. I put in everything that I was supposed to. I kept my nose clean and boy it just doesn't seem to be paying off. I don't understand it, therefore, I

need to collapse and give up on God. This whole thing must not be true. You forgot Proverbs 3 that says,

“Trust in the Lord with all your heart and don’t lean on your own understanding.”

Well, maybe your starting point in authority is the opinion of the experts. Oh sure, you might have some ancient stuff somewhere in the Bible, but you know the assured findings of modern science says this. My counselor, my therapist tells me that my whole problem is my upbringing, my whole problem is my parents. Maybe my therapist or the therapist that I have for my kids really doesn’t operate from a base in a Bible, but he has three degrees.

Do you know that if you don’t start with the truth found in the scriptures, that you really only always have just one alternative. And that is purely human, changeable authority, either your authority or the authority of other people. That if you don’t start with the belt of truth, with the truth found in the Bible as the controlling lens through which you look at life and you look at problems and you look at your marriage, that the controlling power in your life is just going to be changeable, fallible human authority.

There are only two alternatives: either you accept God’s authority; God’s Word; God’s mind; God’s counsel on the matter, no matter what your feelings are, no matter how you presently understand it, no matter that you can’t really see how it will work out; that at the moment it doesn’t really feel like God loves you - it doesn’t matter what your therapist says, what the experts say, what the opinion polls say - you are either going to follow purely human reasoning or you are going to follow God’s mind and God’s reasoning. Did you know that purely human reasoning has never come up with God’s answers. That the wisdom and reasoning of men and women not only can’t understand

and can't see the wisdom and reasoning of God, but in the wisdom and reasoning of men and women, Paul says, "Jesus Christ was crucified."

The only thing that human beings could see was somebody that was a threat. The only thing that human beings could reason when they saw Jesus Christ was somebody who was coming against their power base. The only thing human beings could see was somebody who needed to be gotten rid of. In the wisdom, in the reasoning, in the opinions, in the feelings of men and women, we hung Jesus on a cross.

You want to know how to stand and resist in a world filled with so many enemies? We have to approach life from the truth found in the Bible. And this truth, found only in the scriptures, gives us stability for life. That when you start living life out of the whole counsel of God, you find that your life suddenly starts getting stable. I have noticed this over and over again in people that I find are spiritually healthy. And by that I mean that their lives are not just like this: up and down; up and down; up and down. They have gotten away from operating from a purely human base of their feelings at the moment, or their understanding at the moment, but more and more they are getting controlled by the counsel that they are finding in the scriptures. To stand, you've got to have stable footing. You need a base in the truth. And not only stable, but you won't be constantly bewildered about life. I have noticed something else about these people. They are not fumbling. They are not hesitant. "Gee, I don't know what to think about what to do with my kids and how to handle them."

"How to think about marriage and how to think about work and my money." Their minds are more and more clear. They have understanding as the Psalmist says, "More than all their teachers." So many Christians are so hesitant, standing around like the

people in Elijah's day, wavering between two opinions. And the Lord comes along and says "How long will you waver? How long will you be so hesitant? Take a stand on my truth." Christians who build their lives on the truth are also not surprised by trials that come their way because the scriptures tell us not to be surprised at the fiery ordeal. They are not surprised.

They are not surprised by spiritual warfare. They are not surprised that things are tough. They are not bemoaning their faith. They are not self-pitying.

Folks who have stabilized as a result of being saturated with the scriptures are stable, they are confident and they are more and more getting free from the devil's grip. Didn't Jesus say that? If you continue in my Word, you are truly my disciples and you will know the truth and the truth will set you free. That you will get free from the devil's grip the more you walk in and continue to live out this truth found in the scriptures.

Perhaps today you are aware of the fact that there is a point in your life, a place where you need to take a stand, to draw the line in the middle of the field and say, "I can't keep retreating, not on this one." Maybe it's with your kids, a son or daughter, maybe it's with a spouse or ex-spouse, maybe it's with a parent or coworker – maybe, just maybe it's with yourself and your standards, your practices, your behaviors. You've given ground for too long. It's time to stand firm.

I'd like to pray a prayer of commitment to Jesus Christ with you. There are some of you here today who see that your life really has gone as I've described, up and down, back and forth, because you've built it upon something other than the truth found in Christ, and that's not a good foundation for life.