"Stand Strong"

Did you know that you’re facing an opponent who is after your soul? Hello, I’m Phil Sanders; and this is a Bible study, “In Search of the Lord’s Way.” And today we’re going to see how we can stand strong as Christians. Stay with us!

Hello, and welcome to In Search of the Lord’s Way. We’re here to search God’s Word for His way. We’ve spent the last five years studying together, and today marks the beginning of our sixth year. Over these years, I’ve had the pleasure to be able to visit with many of you who watch this program faithfully, and I thank God for you. This program is the way that we spend time together studying the most wonderful book in the world, the Bible. So thanks for studying with us today; and we want to be a part of your life each week.

The Lord Jesus calls us to take a stand for Him and for what He teaches. Many today want a convenient Christianity that asks little of them. They’re content to practice their faith as long as it doesn’t require much or call for any real sacrifice. They want God to commit fully to them, to hear every prayer and to give every blessing; but they want to believe whatever they like and live however they want. They want a Christianity that never embarrasses them in front of their non-Christian friends. They don’t want a strict morality or to talk about sin. They want; they don’t want to be asked to believe anything that’s different from the popular opinions of the day. They want the crown of life but they don’t want to deny themselves or to take up a cross. Frankly, this kind of a Christianity is a fantasy. Authentic Christianity means taking our faith seriously.

Now, if you want to study more about authentic Christianity, we offer the information on this program free. If you’d like a printed copy or CD of our study and you live within the United States, mail your request to In Search of the Lord’s Way, P.O. Box 371, Edmond, OK 73083 or send an e-mail to searchtv@searchtv.org. Or you can call our toll-free telephone number. That number is 1-800-321-8633. Now, our program has been growing greatly in the last year. We’ve doubled in size in the number of people reach out to, and many of those are outside the United States. And so if you live outside the United States, we offer free material online, and you can stream this program on our website at www.searchtv.org. Well, In Search of the Lord’s Way has enjoyed many, many blessings. We added the CW Plus network in January and the Inspiration Network International in June. We have a short video online telling about our progress in 2013, and we invite you to watch it at searchtv.org.

The Edmond church will now worship in song; we’ll read from Ephesians 6, verses 10 to 13, and we’ll discover how we can stand strong.

Our reading today comes from Paul’s epistle to the Ephesians chapter 6, verses 10 to 13. “Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might. Put on the full armor of God, so that you will 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 the full armor of God, so that you will be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm.” That’s advice from God’s Word. Let’s pray together. Father, we’re grateful for the equipment that You give to us to be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil. Help us, Father, always to love You and to serve You. In Jesus’ name, we pray. Amen!

A spiritual war is taking place, and you’re in the midst of the battle. It’s not a war of guns and bombs, but a personal fight like hand-to-hand combat. At the end only one person will be standing.
Now, our battle isn’t physical; we aren’t wrestling with flesh and blood for our lives. Our battle is spiritual; and we’re fighting for our souls and the souls of people that we love. The battleground isn’t at Armageddon; it’s in your heart and life. And if you aren’t standing at the end, you will be spiritually dead and your soul lost. Now, your opponent is the devil, and he’s been fighting for thousands of years. He knows how to fight; he cheats; and he is very strong. The devil has a strategy, and he intends to win. We cannot take this battle lightly.

And when it comes to spiritual warfare, we cannot be strong enough by ourselves. If we’re going to have sufficient strength in this spiritual battle with Satan, we must have the Lord’s strength. Only the Lord Jesus has enough might to win spiritual battles against the demonic forces in our enemy. We cannot win on our own power.

If you do not know you are in this spiritual fight, you will surely lose. Many Christians are unaware or they ignore this battle. They imagine they can live as they please and can still be right with God. Some believe that once they are saved they can never be lost, but this false doctrine ignores many clear Scriptures that teach otherwise. Hebrews 3, verses 12 to 13 warns, “Take care, brothers, lest there be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. But exhort one another every day, as long as it’s called “today,” that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.” People who take their salvation for granted will be surprised to find out the Lord expects them to stand strong in their faith. Every recruit in ancient times in the Roman army would take an oath of loyalty to the legionary standards and to the emperor as commander-in-chief, swearing to obey his orders and to protect the state. Now, everyone in the Lord’s army also confesses to accept Jesus Christ as Lord and to follow His will. Christianity is serious business.

Now, if you aren’t prepared to fight spiritually, you will surely lose to the devil. The Lord provides the armor that we must possess in order to face Satan. The Roman soldiers of the first century were the strongest fighting force of their day. And to be a legionnaire, one had to endure strict training. And his training would include marching in step, traveling twenty miles in five hours, swimming, basic tactics and battle maneuvers, and how to win at hand-to-hand combat. Now, the Romans wouldn’t send out an untrained man as a legionnaire, and nor can we expect to face the devil unprepared.

You, too, must put your armor on for this fight, or you’ll surely lose. Romans 13, verse 12 says that, “The night is far gone; and the day is at hand. So then let us cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light.” We must have God’s help and equipment to stand against the tricks and the schemes of the devil. So, the Lord provides for His people the armor that’s necessary to win the battle. Paul wrote in Ephesians 6 and verse 14, “Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness.” A Christian’s armor includes “the belt of truth.” Now, the Roman “belt” or “girdle” referred to a leather apron beneath the armor that protected the lower abdomen. The truth is, is like that, it’s a great protector, because it keeps right, us right on track. It keeps us going in the right direction. Truth gives us the best weapon against false doctrines, against moral deceptions, or against counterfeit religion. Now, exposing the devil for an immoral deceiver, which he is, opens the door to defeat the devil.

Next, we have the breastplate of righteousness. The “breastplate” for the Roman army normally consisted of leather that was overlaid with metal, and it protected the chest in a battle. Today, Christians wear the “breastplate of righteousness.” They live morally pure lives and “make their calling and election sure.” They have peace of heart and of mind, because they know that they are right with the living God. Now, this assurance encourages their heart to stay right with God at all costs. They value righteousness. The Lord said, you remember, in Matthew 5 and verse 6, “Blessed are those who
hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.” We need righteousness. In fact, the Lord urges us in Matthew 6 and verse 33, “But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.” Being right with God must be our priority.

More than that, Christians wear “as shoes ... the readiness given by the gospel of peace,” according to Ephesians 6 and verse 15. Soldiers needed shoes like boots so they could move quickly without worry as they faced the enemy. The gospel of peace prepares the Christian to be strong in the Lord as he faces the enemy's deceptions. The more we tell others the good news of the gospel, of the love of Christ, the more we confirm our own faith. When Christians are busy telling others the gospel of peace, they have little time to become self-centered and fall prey to the devil’s schemes.

Just as the Roman legionnaire had an iron or bronze helmet, so the Christian must “take on the helmet of salvation.” Now, the Roman helmet protected the cheeks and it flared wide at the back of the neck to protect the soldier. And so we, too, must protect ourselves with the knowledge of our salvation. Knowing Jesus paid the ultimate price for me and for you to save us from our sins leads us to love Him and to stand strong with Him. Hebrews 12 and verse 3 urges us to “Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted.” When I see what lengths that Jesus went to save me, I grow bolder in my faith and my resolve to serve Him.

The Roman soldier had a short two-edged sword. This sword was twenty to twenty-four inches long and used, was used as a weapon when soldiers were in very close battle. Christians have “the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God” (Ephesians 6 and verse 17). The truth of the Word is certainly able to pierce hearts, and that love and that truth helps them to be able to reach in to someone’s soul and it also helps them to refute those who believe in error.

Paul commanded, “In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one.” Now, each soldier among the Roman army carried a large rectangular shield. Now, Roman soldiers were equipped with these large wooden shields that were four feet high; and the fronts of them were made of leather. Before battles in which flaming arrows might be fired, the leather would be wet down to quench any fiery darts that would be launched at them. Now, after Roman legionaries closed their ranks, the front row would hold the shields forward and those that were behind would hold them above their heads, and so they were virtually invulnerable to any attack from flaming arrows. Faith in Christ Jesus as Lord keeps us safe from the fiery challenges of the devil. It helps us to deflect all the lies and the false doctrines that the devil hurls at us.

So we have this armor to prepare us to fight. But our preparation to fight the devil is not complete without prayer. Ephesians 6, verses 18 to 19 urges us to be “praying at all times.” God protects us when we pray. Philippians 4, verses 6 to 7 says, “Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” Paul here adds two very important ways to stand strong spiritually. First, he wanted us to pray at all times; and second, he wanted us to be alert.

The Lord Jesus said in Matthew 26 and verse 41, “Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.” Prayer keeps our focus on God rather than on selfish desires. And when we prepare for that temptation, we aren’t taken by surprise. When we know that it’s coming, we can handle it much easier. Peter encourages us to be on the alert. We must keep our eyes open. First Peter 5 and verse 8 says, “Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your
adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.” Now, lions prowl and sneak up on their prey in order to seize them. And lions tear their prey apart with their teeth.

I tell you, if you’re not prepared, you’ll lose. But I also want to say if you’re not willing to fight, you will surely lose. Whether you want to fight or not, the devil will come at you. Many Christians don’t want to get involved in this battle; they’d rather ignore the devil’s challenges. And they don’t realize the devil is planting seeds of evil, immorality, and error in their hearts that can capture their souls. And they fall victim to the devil’s schemes because they don’t like conflict. They don’t want to rock the boat, but the devil will rock it. Paul said in 2 Thessalonians 2 and verse 15, “So then, brothers, you stand firm and you hold to the traditions that you were taught by us, either by our spoken word or by our letter.” And we must hold to those divine traditions that come directly from the Lord through His apostles and prophets. The truth that they teach protect us from those false teachings and the counterfeit religion that’s proposed by the devil and by men. God’s Word alerts us to the dangers and it calls us to resist in the evil day.

If you do not give your all in this battle, you will surely lose. Ephesians 6 and verse 13 says, “take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done everything, everything, to stand firm.” Are you doing everything to prepare for that evil day of testing and temptation? If you aren’t reading your Bible and studying your Bible every day, you aren’t doing everything. If your knowledge of the Bible is so limited that you don’t know what is good or bad, right or wrong, or true or false, then you’re vulnerable to Satan’s schemes. If you aren’t worshiping regularly with brothers and sisters, you aren’t doing everything. If your prayer life is weak, you aren’t giving it your all.

If you haven’t thought about your hope in Christ, your strength will falter. If you aren’t hungering and thirsting for righteousness, if you haven’t drawn your strength from your salvation, or if you haven’t given thought to the gospel of peace, how will you be able to stand strong when the devil comes at you?

Being a Christian is more than being part of a social club and getting entertained once or twice a week. Being a Christian is more than simply doing a few good things and being nice to others. Being a Christian demands our full commitment to the Lord. Romans 12 and verse 1 commands us to present our bodies “a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God.” First Corinthians 6, verses 19 and 20 says, “Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? And you’re not your own, for you were bought with a price. And so glorify God in your body.” When we become a Christian, we don’t belong to ourselves anymore. We belong to the Lord: body, soul, and spirit. Jesus paid a dear price so that we might be saved. And we have to commit ourselves fully and give Him our all!

Without a doubt, we’re facing serious, spiritual battles today, just as they faced them earlier. Satan is challenging us from every side. And whether it’s the eye, the flesh, or the pride of life, this world challenges us to be self-centered rather than to love God. Satan is working overtime to produce counterfeit gospels and false religions that he may draw people away from God. Make no mistake! If you give the devil a foothold in your heart, your mind, or your life, he’ll conquer your soul. Don’t lose your soul; be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Let’s pray together. O Father, we pray that You will help us to be strong in the Lord that we might fight against the devil in every way. This is our prayer in the name of Jesus. Amen!

First Peter 2 and verse 11 says, “Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers to abstain from fleshly lusts which wage war against the soul.” Please, don’t take this warning lightly. Don’t spend your days
without a thought about your soul. Don’t imagine the devil will challenge your neighbor, but will never challenge you. Get strong in your faith, in your hope, and in your love by getting strong in the Lord. Ephesians 6 and verse 10 says, “Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might.” Christ is the source of our spiritual strength. To be strong in Him and His teaching is our duty; to remain weak or apathetic is sinful. Strong trust, strong courage, strong endurance, strong hope, strong love, and strong knowledge of His Word will come from getting right with and staying close to Him. We must maintain our fellowship with him at all costs. We must never let up, give up, or grow weary of serving the Lord.

When a person who believes repents and is baptized into Christ, the Lord at that time washes away his sins (Acts 22:16), adds him to the church, counts him as His child (Galatians 3:26 and 7), and saves him (1 Peter 3, verse 21). Now, God wants you to live with Him forever. And the way to live in His house forever is to become a member of His family. The church is God’s family (1 Timothy 3:15). And as His child, you worship with other members of His family by attending church regularly. God has designed the church to meet your spiritual needs and to provide you a loving family. God’s arms are open wide longing for you to come home to Him. Won’t you come to Him, serve Him, and live with Him? Won’t you get involved with a local church of Christ? Take time today to worship with them.

Well, we hope today’s study about being strong has stirred your heart to get strong in your faith. If you live in the United States and want a free printed copy or CD of this message, mail your request to In Search of the Lord’s Way, P.O. Box 371, Edmond, OK 73083 or send an e-mail to searchtv@searchtv.org. Or you can call the Search office toll-free at 1-800-321-8633. Now, if you live outside the United States, download our material. It’s online, www.searchtv.org. We also offer free Bible correspondence courses. Now if you get a hold of us, don’t worry, we won’t ask you for money or put you on a list.

Please get involved with one of the churches in this area, an area where you live. The churches of Christ love you and they really want you to come and worship with them. Well, as always, we say to you, God bless you and we love you from all of us at In Search of the Lord’s Way.