

STAND
July 5, 2015
Ephesians 6:1-24

“Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness.” Ephesians 6:14

Yesterday we celebrated another Independence Day, marking 239 years since the signing of our Declaration of Independence from England. From its beginning, independence was celebrated in this nation. Settlers exhibited independence in the very act of sailing the Atlantic. They cut themselves free from established, structured lives in their centuries-old homelands, to venture across a foreboding ocean in small, wind-driven ships.

They arrived in an untamed, sink-or-swim wilderness where self-sufficiency, resourcefulness and inventiveness were necessities. As their numbers grew, the nation they established was just like them: independent, resourceful and inventive. It received from many nations the most independent, determined and ingenious citizens they could offer. Thus enriched, it was destined to prosperity.

But the nation's prosperity is not attributable simply to extraordinary people. Notably, it was people who believed in Jesus Christ, and revered the Old and New Testaments. Early settlers were driven to this land by one purpose: that they might freely worship the Bible's God. They were Christian, Protestant and Reformed in their belief, and they established a society that, though imperfect, was an expression of those beliefs. A biblical ethic was strongly reflected in its laws and society. As a result, the nation was known for its work ethic, inventions, productivity and prosperity. “Happy is that people, whose God is the Lord” (Psalm 144:15).

But the independent spirit that we celebrate has its liabilities. Among them are the illusion of self-sufficiency and independence from God. Sadly, these have now become conspicuous traits of this nation—an increasingly godless nation—and will be the cause of its demise.

Last century its Christian core came under assault. Clergymen led the way. Using Christian terminology with new definitions, they denied the reliability of Scripture, and thus its authority. Increasingly the culture reflected their rejection of biblical authority. By the middle of the century, anti-Christ forces removed Bible-reading from government schools—part of an ongoing campaign to remove God-consciousness from public life. Their successes were both a sign and a cause of the moral collapse that followed. The “sexual revolution” abandoned true morality, and illegitimacy increased, abortion became legal, venereal diseases skyrocketed and new diseases developed, and homosexuality grew more and more acceptable.

God's response to those who suppress His truth is to release them unto greater unbelief and debauchery. Romans 1 describes this, and is confirmed once again in the Supreme Court's ruling last month legitimizing sexual perversion, dignifying it as holy matrimony. This signifies that our nation, once so blessed, is now under judgment, “Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. . . . Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonor their own bodies between themselves” (Romans 1:21, 24).

Ultimately, these human actions are animated by Satan himself. “For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world,

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against spiritual wickedness in high places" (Ephesians 6:12). These principalities and powers are a hierarchy of evil spirits who oppose God and are intent upon the destruction of God's people.

When the "God-shaped vacuum" that is within a person refuses to acknowledge the true God, it will be filled by false, would-be gods. It is not surprising, therefore, that Satanism, spiritism, witchcraft and multiple other perverse ideologies, with their rampant rejection of biblical morality, should arise in an era that rejects Scripture. Behind all of this, the spirit rulers of wickedness move their pawns and implement their wiles to destroy the one creature that is created in the image of God: mankind.

They are powerful and intelligent. Our strength is no match for their assault. Living in this pagan, anti-Bible culture, what are Christians to do?

We must cling more tenaciously to Scripture. It is not simply a guidebook for religion, like the literature of all would-be gods, but it is the Word of God. It is alive and powerful, a divine revelation pulsating with the life of God (Hebrews 4:12). From it comes a second birth, the new birth that imparts divine life to the soul (I Peter 1:23). Faith to believe God comes by hearing the Scripture (Romans 10:17). It is the "sword of the Lord," and by it God will defeat all His foes.

The "wiles of the devil" will be withstood by its truth. It supplies the "whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day" (Ephesians 6:13). Armed with its breastplate, shield, helmet and sword; and standing firmly within the knowledge and experience of the gospel that it proclaims, we with prayer and supplication can stand within and against a godless culture, unscathed by its fiery darts.

The Spirit of God gives three admonitions for standing in a wicked age:

I. Put on the whole armor of God.

- * "loins girt about with truth" - Satan is a liar; the father of lies (John 8:44). But truth will outlast every lie, defeating every liar, Satan included.
- * "breastplate of righteousness" - Only Christ's righteousness can protect the vital soul-life
- * "feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace" - A soldier's shoes are designed to equip him for battle. The believer, standing in the "gospel of peace," withstands Satan's assault.
- * "shield of faith" - Scripture-wrought faith will deflect Satan's darts of unbelief
- * "helmet of salvation" - the knowledge of salvation through the Word of God is the believer's protection from discouragement and defeat, enabling him to stand
- * "sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God" - Satan cannot prevail against God's Word.

II. Stand, and having done all, stand.

There is no armor for the back. We must stand against the spirit warriors, armed with the armor God provides us in the Scriptures.

III. Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit

Praying, we are "plugged in" to the source of all power. Prayer makes our armor fit us, which is essential if it is to be effective.