

**Stand Firm**  
**Ephesians 6:10-24**

Brothers and sisters – there’s a video that was filmed at a watering hole in the Kruger National Park in South Africa that has been circulating on the internet since 2007.

It begins with the herd of African buffalos approaching the watering hole and a couple of the buffalos and a calf begin to wander away from the herd unaware that a small group of female lions are lying nearby – but instead of me telling you all about it, why don’t we just watch it! (*video 1:38 - 6:26*)

Brothers and sisters this video reminds me of two scripture verses. The first one is from 1 Peter 5:8 and it says *“Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.”*

And the second scripture passage it reminds me of is the last section of Ephesians chapter 6:10-24 where Paul talks about putting on the armor of God and standing firm against the devil’s schemes, let me read that for you.

So, with those final words of blessing Paul finishes this letter and he then sent it around to a whole bunch of churches throughout Asia-minor, via his ministry associate Tychicus.

And it is a fitting end to the letter of Ephesians – Paul uses keywords to tie back into the important themes he’s introduced to us and remind us of them and at the same time gives us a rousing call to action, to take up arms and stand firm together in the battle against evil and the evil one.

Because the truth is brothers and sisters, that whether we like it or not we are in a battle with the enemy. We may not have picked a fight with the Devil but because of what God has done in our lives through Jesus Christ – the Devil has picked a fight with us.

And just like those lions in the video, the devil and his demons are scheming – they are lying in wait for us to become careless, isolated and unprotected and then they attack.

So it is imperative that we respond to Paul's call-to-arms as he finishes this letter because all of the important things which Paul has taught us in Ephesians thus far about our efforts to BE the church together; treating each other with love and kindness and forgiveness; overcoming the divisions that separate people from Jesus; turning away from futile thinking of the Gentiles, turning away from any sexual immorality; living a life worthy of the calling we have received; and exposing the darkness by shining the light...

These efforts and actions need to be protected from opposition in order to succeed, and for the Church to grow.

Now in the previous chapters Paul has dealt with the opposition to the establishment and growth of BEing the Church that comes from within ourselves.

He has told us to put off our old self, our sinful nature... and put on our NEW self in Christ, we must no longer think like the Gentiles do but instead be filled with the Holy Spirit; we must

live as children of the light and bear the fruit of the light so there must be no hint of sexual immorality among us.

And Paul has instructed us to overcome the "us vs. them" mentality - which can develop between we who are IN Christ and those who are NOT- by relating to them in such a way that their darkness may be changed by our light.

So Paul has thoroughly addressed the opposition to God's plan for the Church that comes from within us – from our own sinfulness and rebellion – and the best line of instruction on how we are to deal with it, just as reminder to us this morning, is found in 4:32 where he says *"Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you."*

However, opposition and challenges to our BEing the Church and growing as the Church can also come from outside ourselves and the Church as well.

So in 6:11 Paul warns us that we need to take our stand against the devil **and** his schemes, because the devil rarely attacks us head on, instead he works through his schemes.

And the Greek word for schemes here is “*methodia*” and it means trickery, deceit, craftiness, and cunning - and so in his scheming the devil typically works to oppose our BEing the Church through other people and especially people in power or with influence.

This is why Paul has to explain in vs. 12 that “*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.*”

The first recipients of this letter would have experienced opposition in various forms and various levels of persecution from local Roman authorities and religious leaders in Jewish communities. Paul had experienced this for himself personally on his mission trips and he was writing this letter while he was a prisoner, making reference to his chains in vs. 20.

So Paul wants us to realize that the opposition to BEing the Church which we face from people and people of influence and power is really a scheme of the devil. These people are deceived, they are being used and manipulated – because they are still darkness, and their thinking is still futile, and they are not filled with the Holy Spirit.

So Paul says that our wrestling is not against these people but against the spiritual beings who influence and manipulate them to carry out the schemes of the Devil.

And the point here brothers and sisters is that we need to be made aware that the Devil is currently scheming – working through other people – to oppose and prevent us from BEing the Church together in a way that shines light on the darkness, and turns darkness to light.

And these schemes all have one main goal in common, regardless of whatever form they might take. Their goal is to break us apart, to scatter us, to keep us from meeting

together, from connecting and from bonding IN Christ so that we are no longer together BEing the Church.

Because as we saw in that video – when we are by ourselves and on our own we are vulnerable and easily taken down to be devoured, and our faith and trust in Jesus and our willingness to follow Him in obedience dies.

So if this is the goal of the Devil’s schemes then we fight against them by simply staying together and continuing to BE Church as a group in the way Paul has instructed us in this letter. This is why Paul tells us to *“stand our ground, remain standing, and stand firm!”* (vs. 13-14)

As you saw in the video – the herd of Buffalos stood their ground, remained standing and stood firm and they were able to route the lions and save the young calf - so brothers and sisters when it comes to BEing the Church, we are stronger when we are connected and together than when we are disconnected and we are apart.

But when it comes to BEing the Church brothers and sisters – we are more together than the sum of our parts – in other words it’s more than just safety in numbers. As Paul instructs us at the start of this conclusion we must *“be strong in the Lord and is **His** MIGHTY power”*

So the good news is that we can be empowered to have the strength we need to stand firm and remain together as the Church, and we receive this power and strength as we put on the Armor that comes from God Himself.

And most importantly we are to put on this armor together – not only because the pronouns in this passage are plural, but because the armor Paul describes here is the field kit for the Roman Infantry who fought together... not just as a bunch of individuals but as a specially trained unit.

And it was their ability to fight together as a unit which made the Roman infantry so revolutionary and effective in battle, and allowed Rome to conquer the known world and hold an empire together for almost 1000 years – that’s impressive.

When the infantry went into battle they went in formation, they held together in a line three ranks deep – and if you were injured then someone behind you would pull you back and step in to take your place and hold the line.

If the enemy pressed in and pushed you back – those behind you could literally have your back and hold you in place.

If there was a sudden attack of arrows, the unit could form up into a box formation with their shields, covering them like a tank, and move in against the enemy's attack unaffected.

And if they needed to break their enemies' defenses they formed a wedge, put their shields up and simply rammed into the enemy to split the defensive line apart.

And their ability to fight together as a group was only enhanced by the fact that their armor and weapons were more advanced and specifically designed for this purpose. For example – their sword was short, only 18" to 23" in length, which made it easy to maneuver in close combat.

It was designed to be thrust forward to punch through shields and armor and pulled back as opposed to swung about. So it had no cross guard... that would only catch on their shield, and it had a massive pommel to keep it from slipping out of your hand as you pulled it back. It was a weapon for a soldier who fought with a unit.

Another interesting point about the Roman military which Paul imports with this analogy is how the Roman military overcame class and social and eventually even racial divisions.

Once you were in the army none of that mattered anymore, all that mattered was your loyalty to your fellow soldiers and obeying commands – because when you were in battle your very life depended upon these things. You stood, side by side, standing firm holding the line against the enemy as they charged at you, trying to break you apart and scatter your ranks and rout you.

But a well-trained, loyal and courageous unit of infantry soldiers would not break – they stood firm and used their

armor and weapons to beat back the enemy and step by step they would advance and take the battlefield for victory!

Now we could spend a lot of time talking about the individual pieces of gear here – but it's more important that you understand how they equipped an infantryman to fight together as part of a **group** and how the infantry's ability to stand firm and hold their ground was critical to the army winning a battle. Do you understand what I'm saying?

And while there are some helpful understandings we can gain from how the individual pieces of armor are used to illustrate truth and righteousness and so on – I want to focus on how we can actually use these elements of the Christian life so they unify us and empower us to stand firm... so that the Devil's schemes do not break us apart.

And it might be helpful to identify some of the ways that the Devil is currently scheming against us here at Valleyview and I've come up with four that we can look at this morning.

There's the Greener Pastures scheme, the Individualistic scheme, the Good Person scheme, and the Busy Schedule scheme.

Now the greener pastures scheme is really targeted at our youth. The aim is to present influential people having exciting and full lives without any regard for serving or obeying Jesus and make their lives seem more exciting and attractive than a life of serving the Lord. The goal is to lure young people away from the Church in pursuit of these "greener pastures" with false promises of freedom and fulfillment.

We hold our ground together against this scheme by putting on the belt of Truth, where those of us who have already discovered that a life of serving yourself is a false freedom with no fulfillment open up and share this truth with our youth and young adults.

We also stand firm against this lie by making sure that we express and share the truth of how wonderful it is to serve

Christ with each other when we are together so that our youth and young people hear about and find it attractive.

What do our young people think about serving Christ if gathering together for worship is flat... if our programs and teaching material for them are uninspiring?

Brothers and sisters, we don't need to compete with a life of serving one's self and try to make serving Jesus more attractive – it truly already is, we just need to reflect the truth, live that out when we are together and we will hold our ground against this scheme... do you see how this works?

However our enemy is very smart and he doesn't attack from only one angle, he has multi-faceted schemes and so right alongside the "greener pastures" scheme there is the "Individualistic" scheme.

Again influential people in our society – thinkers, artists, lawmakers – have worked over time to create a culture that

celebrates... or rather idolizes the individual person, their rights, happiness and self-expression above all else.

And this "individualistic" scheme has us convinced we are the ultimate authority about what is right and good for us and no one can tell us otherwise. If WE like what a church is doing – then it's good, if WE find the church inspiring and meeting our needs then we'll stay, if not... then we'll leave. So it's easy to see how this scheme works to break us apart right.

But we stand firm against this scheme by honoring and obeying the Word God – using the sword of the Spirit – as the only authority for faith and life together.

Our lives and how we interact together must reflect obedience to the Scriptures and it is important that we're vocal about that obedience motivating our behaviors and decisions so that people who are being targeted by the individualistic scheme can see us submitting to scripture and be encouraged to do the same. In this way we remain standing...

Now the “good person” scheme attempts to subvert the Church as a place where people can attend to show that they are “good people” and it’s a really devious scheme because it actually looks like its keeping us together as a Church since people are attending...

However since this scheme prevents people from admitting their struggles and faults, and staying away or leaving when the struggles get too difficult to contain, no real connection can be made... so it actually separates us from each other while making it look like we’re together, it’s an extremely deceptive and very effective scheme.

So we must collectively put on the Righteousness of Christ so that people get the message that we’re not a collection of nice people who are nice to other nice people, but that we are here at church because of what Christ has done for us, and that we need Christ’s righteousness because we do not consider ourselves to be “good” people – but sinners who need a savior.

And we’re all in agreement on this about each other – amen!?  
And we’ll stand our ground against this scheme as well.

Now the last scheme – the Busy Schedule Scheme - is the craftiest and most devastating one of them all because the Devil takes the good things that God has given us to steward and take care of, things like family and work, and tricks us into gradually giving more and more time to them so that without even realizing it we have less and less time for BEing together as the Church.

And we take away from the time that we have set aside for BEing together as the Church because we’re worried about job security, or we need some extra work, or we need to get away for the week-end and have a break or we’ll burn out, or because we don’t want our kids to miss out on the opportunity to play sports, or be in the school band, or be in Guides or Scouts or dance or karate or soccer...

I think we all know how this works and how it separates us apart from each other.



And I'm going to suggest that we need to use the shield of Faith together here – and as we notice that we are getting busier and busier and our time for church is getting pushed back, we need others to have our back and push back for us.

They can hold us accountable for the times that we are not gathering together and ask *“Why are you choosing that over worship?”* *“Why are your children not out for youth?”*

You see brothers and sisters, our decisions to take time away from Church and spend it on other opportunities are fueled by the flaming arrows of fear and doubt and lies... fear there will not have enough time or money, doubt that we can leave things in God's hands for a day, or the lie that our family will be deprived if we limit their activities.

So we must take the shield of Faith and extinguish these flaming arrows in each other's lives by encouraging each other to trust in God's provision, to acknowledge God is working in all things for our good and nothing catches Him by surprise, and that the only way to pass on this Faith to our kids is to

make sure they are regularly BEing the Church together with us as well.

This is how we fight the scheme of the Busy Schedule together so that we continue to BE the Church and defeat the devil's efforts to break us apart.

So brothers and sisters, do you see how this works?

Now these are just some examples of how we can use these various pieces of God's armor to stand firm in His mighty power – and remain standing together as the Church.

And there is much more we could say about each of them and about praying for each other as part of BEing together and standing firm.

But what I want to you take away from the message today is the awareness of the ways in which the devil is scheming against us to separate us and isolate us from BEing the Church together...

And that – just like the Buffalos in the video – the way we fight back again the enemy is by BEing together, as the Church

And knowing how to use the truth, how to trust in Christ's righteousness, how to stand firm in the Gospel of peace, and live by faith and hope in salvation and speak the Word of God needs to characterize our BEing together.

Now, one final caution we need to heed – because it can be used as a scheme against us...

We often want to judge the quality of what we receive from the scripture on how well it relates to our everyday life – and to that condition I will say this as one final take-away.

What Paul is trying to help us grasp in this letter of Ephesians is that BEing the Church **IS** our everyday practical life and we need to judge whatever else goes on in lives by how it relates and encourages our connection to this amazing creation of Church that God has made us a part of IN Jesus Christ.

Friends, everything else that we are part of is going to pass away at some point and has only temporal value in our lives...

But the Church, the body of Christ - will last into the New Heavens and the New Earth and those who are a part of it will be a part of it forever.

No wonder the devil wants to break up the church and scatter us and defeat us - no wonder Paul ends his letter with a call to arms – eternity is at stake here.

So Brothers and sisters – BE strong in the Lord and in HIS might power and put on the full armor of God. BE the Church together!

Amen.