

We're getting pretty close to the end of Paul's letter to the Ephesians, and it's been an amazing letter – there's so much that we've been able to learn from it, and so much that we've been able to apply in our lives....

And now that we've come to the end, Paul does a bit of a 'summing up'. And what he's really keen for us to understand, is the spiritual reality **behind** what we see happening, and what we experience, in the physical world. The spiritual reality is the struggle between good and evil, and it's a personal struggle. There is a personal being of evil – Satan (or the devil), and his demons, and they are constantly attempting to disrupt the good work of God.

And throughout his letter, Paul has taken up the subjects of: Truth; Righteousness; Peace; The gospel; The word of God; Salvation; and Faith – we've come across each of these over the last couple of months.

And now, he's trying to get us to open our eyes to the **spiritual** aspects of these, and how these things – when we apply them in our lives – help to guard us in this spiritual struggle.

He's trying to get us to understand the spiritual aspect of:

- truth vs. lies;
- The spiritual aspect of Righteousness vs. wickedness
- The spiritual aspect of Peace vs. Discord and Gospel vs. false gospels
- The spiritual aspect of the word of God vs. the twisting of God's word
- Salvation vs. hopelessness
- Faith vs. faithlessness

And Paul urges us to **stand strong** in the Lord, against the schemes of the devil.

And: Truth; Righteousness; Readiness of the gospel of peace; The word of God; Salvation; and Faith – are the armour that God supplies, that **enables** us to stand strong... So, we're going to be studying each of these over the next few weeks, - but more precisely, we're going to be talking about the **spiritual** importance of each of these, in our stand against Satan.

Last week's message, was an introduction to the spiritual battle. And summing it up:

- Be aware
- Be alert
- Stand strong **in the Lord**
- Praying at all times **in the spirit**
- And not just praying for yourself, but for **all** the saints.

And I **do** hope that if you were not able to be at Bush Disciples last week, that you did get my email, and you **were** able to download the message from the www.bushdisciples.church and had a listen to it, because it was a very important message, given what we're carrying on with today.

So, the first piece of **God's** armour (and I want to stress – it's **God's** armour – it's not our armour – it's armour that God gives us)--- and the first piece of it is: the belt of truth.

A Roman Soldier's belt, was like a leather apron that fastened around his waist and covered his loinsⁱ. It was something that

held all of the rest of his armour together. The way I put it, is “*Without truth, you might get caught with your pants down.*”

So, the belt holds all of the other pieces of armour together. And **truth** holds together: Righteousness; The readiness of the Gospel of Peace; The word of God; Salvation; and Faith – They’re all held together by truth – let me explain...

Righteousness.... The breastplate of righteousness is a piece of the armour of God, but what **is** righteousness?

Most people like to think they’re righteous. *I know with nearly every non-Christian funeral I’ve ever done, the family are always very keen to tell me how wonderful the person was – how they never did anything to hurt anyone, and he was a really good bloke....* – what they’re doing, is they’re trying to convince themselves, and they’re trying to convince me, that they were righteous, and so therefore they’ll be ok with God.... But is that true? The truth of the matter, is “No, they’re **not** righteous. They’re not right with God.” **Romans 3:10**“None is righteous, no, not one;

They’re basing their hope, on a false hope. The truth of the matter – and if they opened their eyes and accepted the truth, they could actually depend on God for His righteousness, through the Lord Jesus Christ.

I watched a movie a few months ago “K19 – the Widowmaker”, starring Harrison Ford and Liam Neeson. And it was a fictional story, based on actual disasters that happened in a Russian nuclear submarine. During its sea-trials, it had a pretty major failure in its nuclear reactor.

***Mikhail (executive officer):** Where are the radiation protective suits?*

***Engineer:** We don't have any. The warehouse was out, so they sent us chemical protective suits instead.*

***Mikhail:** They might as well wear raincoats.*

But they tell the men that these special suits will protect them from the radiation... And so, based on this lie, the men take it in turns of putting on their chemical suits, and stepping into the nuclear reactor. They believed they were being protected, but of course, there's no protection against radiation in a rubber chemical suit – it was a lie...

And if your armour of God, is not based on truth, it's as helpful as entering a nuclear reactor, wearing a chemical suit.... And so "truth" is listed as the first piece of armour, and **all** of the other pieces are dependant upon it – it holds them all together – it really specifies what the others are.

When Jesus stood before Pilate, He said ^{John 18:37}**For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world** (What???? It sounds pretty important isn't it??? This is the reason Jesus was born. This is the reason He came into the world – What????) **–to bear witness to the truth.....**

Truth, is **that** important, and yet many people today – even people who claim to be Christians – in reality – they act as if truth doesn't even matter.

We live in an era, where a common phrase is "Truth is relative" "You have your truth – I have my truth"... And two people can both claim to hold two mutually exclusive truths.

So for example, I believe the truth is “No one can come to God, except through Jesus. I believe the bible very clearly teaches that the path to eternal life, is to repent from your sin, believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, make Him Lord, know Him as saviour, and be baptised.”... while somebody else may say “No, the truth is, the Gospel is about loving everybody, and God is love, and so everybody gets eternal life – there is no hell ”....

Can both these statements be true???? No. They are mutually exclusive – they cannot possibly both be true, because they’re opposites. To say that truth is relative, or that there is more than one truth (when they exclude each other), is a lie....

Right throughout this letter to the Ephesians, Paul has talked about the importance of truth. He talks about the **word** of truth, in which we believe. He talks about **speaking** the truth in love (tough love). He talks about being **taught** the truth. He talks about putting away “falsehood”, and to begin **speaking** the truth to one another.... Truth is **very** important...

And there’s two ‘big picture’ concepts of truth here, that I want to take up.

The first is the truth about God (biblical truth and Godly truth), and the second, is truthfulness in our character.

So, let’s begin with the truth **about** God. (theological truth)

What you believe, is important – actually it’s more than important – it’s critical. In chapter one of this very letter, Paul

said:¹³ In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit,

Alright, it's the word of **truth** – not just any old word – not just any old idea about God – the word of truth – the gospel of salvation. And when the **truth** of God's **word**, leads us to believe in the **God** of truth – that's when we are **sealed** with the Holy Spirit.

*On the shelves of book shops these days, there's a whole plethora of books, written by what we sometimes term as "post-Christians" – people who once used to call themselves "Christian" – some of the notable ones were previously ministers or priests, or bishops no lessⁱⁱ, but they've become disgruntled or disenchanted with the church, and so they espouse a **new** form of Christianity – or a new form of 'spirituality' – and it's becoming quite popular (particularly among older people).*

*And the way they sell it, is they say that this **new** form of spirituality, is for those who are tired of being told what they have to believe – It's for those who want to have the freedom to believe...—... alternative ideas... other gospels... other philosophies... other truths..... And of course, it also appeals very much to those who do not want to be told how they have to behave – it's for those who yearn to be their own gauge of good and evil – of sin and righteousness....*

And with their new-found spirituality – their so-called re-invention of Christianity, (something they believe will make Christianity so much more relevant for a new century and a

new generation) – and with this reinvention, personal feelings over-ride revealed truth...

And so what they believe about God, is not based on the truth of the Scriptures – what they believe about God, is all their own ideas – their own construct.... I actually call it, “Modern Day Idolatry”. Idolatry is where we create a god in our own image. And they may not be carving a god out of wood or stone, but they are fashioning a god, based on their own ideas... And so idolatry is exactly what these ‘post Christians’ or so called ‘progressive Christians’ are on about.

They compromise the truth about Jesus Christ, because they believe it will make it a more palatable message for the world to hear. Well, let me let you in on a little secret: If you want to be a disciple of somebody who’s popular in the world, you’d better start following somebody other than Jesus Christ – they crucified Him....

Jesus wasn’t popular, because Jesus is truth, and truth is very rarely popular... *Somebody once said “The truth does not change according to our ability to stomach it. ⁱⁱⁱ”*

Our world today, places “tolerance” as the chief of virtues. Tolerance can be summed up as “live and let live” And “Don’t go telling anybody that they’re wrong”. And because of this idolatry to tolerance, truth about God, ceases to be an absolute, and it becomes a personal choice... – in other words, truth is substituted for lies.

And today, there is a very real battle for truth – a battle which is most critically, being fought in the church.

But the point that Paul is making here, is “What lies **behind** this battle for truth????”

While God is the God of truth, Jesus Christ can legitimately claim “I am the truth”, and the Holy Spirit, is called “The Spirit of Truth”... But what’s Satan? Jesus called him “the father of lies”^{iv}

And when it comes to what we believe about God and salvation, if we depart from truth, we’re no longer following God the Father – we’re following a different father – the Father of Lies.

¹ Timothy 4:1 Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons, ² through the insincerity of liars whose consciences are seared,

My friends, this is very definitely a spiritual battle, and for us to buckle on the Belt of Truth, we have to embrace the truth about God, and reject the lies about God, and have nothing to do with those who tell these lies, because they are actually the teachings of demons.

Of course this battle for truth stretches across everything the Bible teaches us about God and His ways. For every good truth about God, the devil comes up with several ways to pervert it with his lies. And for today I’ve just chosen 4 of the big issues as examples, and I’ve just chosen these, because these are **live** issues in the Christian church in Australia today.

- The Substitutionary sacrifice of Christ

- Repentance of Sin
- The uniqueness of Christ
- Sexuality

The **doctrine of the substitutionary sacrifice of Christ**, is where we see God's love at its greatest.... Because of my sin, I deserve to die. But because of God's great love, He sent Jesus Christ, His only Son, to die in our place – that's the glorious truth.

But it's a truth a lot of liberal Christians cannot accept. They can't accept it, because it doesn't fit their **picture** of God. They can't accept that God is a God of wrath. They can't accept that the justice of God demands that sin must be punished. They can't accept that there is a hell we have to be saved from. And so they say this whole doctrine *paints God as some kind of cosmic child abuser* – what kind of a God would have His own Son nailed to a cross???... And so they begin to teach that the cross is not a message of self-sacrificial atonement for sins – but a terrible tragedy of oppression and abuse by the powerful, over the weak.

That is a lie – and those who believe it, are following their true father – the devil.

In one of the greatest modern Christian hymns – (In Christ Alone), there is a verse that says

*Till on that cross as Jesus died,
The wrath of God was satisfied -
For every sin on Him was laid;
Here in the death of Christ I live.*

And there's a lot of liberals who cannot stomach that verse, and so you go to some church gatherings, and they change it to:

*Till on the cross as Jesus died,
The love of God was magnified.*

Now, there's nothing untrue about that - on the cross as Jesus died, the love of God **was** magnified - there's nothing untrue about that, apart from the fact that they're denying another greater truth, that they are unwilling to sing.

And so we end up with half-truths. Do you know another word for a half-truth? - A lie.

The Repentance of Sin

In many churches today, they preach a different gospel - a social gospel, a prosperity gospel, or a works-based gospel, rather than preaching a gospel of repentance and forgiveness of sin.

The uniqueness of Christ - is the biblical understanding that there is no other way to God. The bible is very clear on this - that any other 'so called' gods, are not gods at all - they're demons. But in the name of tolerance, rather than preaching the truth - that Jesus is the **only** way to God, churches begin inter-faith discussions, and publicly acknowledge integrity in other religions, and they agree that they will not try to convert people to Christianity... What's behind this??? It's not niceness, and it's not to honour God... Satan's behind it, because it's a lie.

Probably the biggest issue - it's gotten a lot of air-play - both in the church and out of the church, is the issue of **sexuality**.

Now, the bible very clearly teaches that sexual perversion, including homosexuality, is an abomination – it is a sin.

But in an attitude of tolerance and acceptance, instead of accepting it's a sin, and falling down on our knees in repentance, and begging God for His mercy, it's being taught that "Hey, this is the way God's made you. You have to celebrate the way you are – embrace your sexuality...." And anybody who dares to stand against it, is branded as "unloving", "intolerant", "homophobic"....

When **any** of these lies begin to be taught within the church, what's going on??? I'll tell you what's going on – Satan is having his say

A lot of these lies, will be brought in under stealth, saying "This is the way we can love people – this is showing grace – it's in the very best traditions of Jesus...."

There's nothing good behind these lies – it's the work of the devil. And you have to put on your belt of truth...

It's much much more, than a differing of opinion... It's much much more, than just having differing points of view.... It's an issue about who rules the church? The God of Truth? Or the father of lies?

And when it comes to the second 'big picture' issue – "the truthfulness of our character" – it also boils down to the same issue. When I tell the truth, I'm taking on the character of God. When I tell a lie, I'm taking on the character of the

devil.” Whether I tell the truth, or whether I tell a lie, is a spiritual decision, and a spiritual action...

During the week, I went into Ag-engineering to buy a little filter for the washing machine. And it's all still a paper-based invoicing system, and I said, "Don't worry about a receipt – I don't need it." And she said, "Oh, I'm sure you or your wife will be able to claim it for something.". And I said, "Oh, there's no worries there – I could easily claim it as a filter and hose clamps for my boomspray – but it's not for my boomspray – it's for my washing machine., and I'm just too honest for that". What I should've said is, "I can't lie, because that doesn't bring God glory".

No matter how innocent or how justified, or how little, you think the lie might be, there's a spiritual battle happening. And every time you give in, and speak that tiny little lie:

- Every time you claim something off your tax that wasn't **really** for work purposes
- Every time you fill out your time sheet, giving yourself an extra half hour of work
- Every time you stretch-the-truth on your heavy vehicle log book, so you can make it home for the night, or get an extra load into the wheat board
- Every time you make an insurance claim and say that those 2 dints both happened at the same time, when they were actually 2 different kangaroos 3 days apart...

When you do that, that's imitating of the father of lies, but every time you tell the truth, you're imitating God.

I reckon we've gone far enough. I thought this'd be a quick message – I was wrong....

I probably should've just said: "Put on the belt of truth".
Believe the truth. Stand up for truth. Have nothing to do with
lies or liars. And always tell the truth.

If truth is your spiritual armour, to believe lies; to tolerate lies,
or to tell lies, leaves you in a state of spiritual weakness, and
open to the attacks of the evil one.

Questions???

ⁱ leather apron worn under armour O'Brien Pillar NT commentary (p.473)

ⁱⁱ John A.T. Robinson, John Shelby Spong, Richard Holloway

ⁱⁱⁱ Flannery O'Connor (p.167) in Rowell EK. Quotes & idea starters for preaching & teaching

^{iv} John 8:44