
Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth.

(Ephesians 6:14)

Introduction

The Lord Jesus Christ is the way, the truth and the life, which means that no one can be accepted by God apart from him (John 14:6). In many ways, this is precisely what the Reformation was all about—and what it *continues* to be about. We dare not ignore the Reformation, nor those humanly responsible for it. Tim Chester and Michael Reeves highlight that “the Reformers are not embarrassing grandparents—they are vital conversation partners with the potential to renew and reinvigorate our churches.”

If the “*truth as it is in Jesus*” (4:21) remains central to our corporate confession and practice, then we will *continue* to grow in grace and in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. But this requires that we *continue* to stand, with truth, like a belt, around our waist.

Previously, we began our study of this first piece of armour. We were exhorted by the text to prepare ourselves for battle. In this study, we will complete our exposition of the belt of truth with the reminder that we must *continue* in the truth—for it is always under attack, and our allegiance to it is always under attack. This is the nature of spiritual warfare from the very beginning.

Revelation 12 symbolically illustrates the attack of the serpent against the seed of the woman (cf. Genesis 3:15). The evil one has been biting at the heels of the seed of the woman ever since Genesis 3:15. He tried to destroy the true Israel of God but, by God’s covenantal faithfulness, she prevailed (vv. 1–6). The Lord Jesus Christ cast out the strong man (Matthew 12:22–29) and his kingdom was established (vv. 7–12). The devil sought to destroy the church after Christ’s ascension, but the Lord protected her (vv. 13–16).

But the devil is insanely relentless, even in the face of incontrovertible evidence of his defeat (Ephesians 3:8–11). And so he continues to wage war with the offspring of the true Israel of God, the church throughout the ages (v. 17). The church, the Israel of God, is described as “those who keep the commands of God and hold firmly to the testimony of Jesus.” In other words, believers are those who continue to wear truth like a belt around their waist. Like those who have gone to battle before us, let us conquer by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of our testimony (v. 11)—the testimony of Jesus (v. 17) or, as Paul put it, the truth as it is in Jesus.

Note that their response was motivated by confidence that what they were clinging to is *true*. They were facing life and death choices (for “they did not love their lives to the death”). In other words, they were willing to die because of their conviction concerning the truth of the blood of the Lamb and because they were persuaded of the truth of the word of their testimony.

In the words of Paul, they had girded their waist with truth; that is, they were tightly bound to God’s authority, and their affections were protected.

So, we know that we must be prepared concerning the battle for truth. But what else do we need if we will continue holding this conviction?

We Must Be Persuaded if We Will Put on Truth

In fact, the Christian is persuaded that there is a thing called Truth, that it belongs to God and that is revealed in God's word and ultimately in God's Christ.

The apostle Peter exhorted his readers, "Gird up the loins of your mind ... as obedient children, not conforming yourselves to the former lusts, as in your ignorance, but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in your conduct" (1 Peter 1:13-15).

Peter was addressing the same theme as Paul: how to live for the Lord in the midst of a world opposed to the Lord. And it begins with preparing our minds. We must be *persuaded* in our minds that the Bible that dictates our behaviour (that which is holy) is in fact truth. We must be persuaded that it is "true truth."

But how do we become persuaded? Let me suggest a few things.

Firm Presupposition

First, we need a firm presupposition. God is God and we are not. His word is therefore true. Assume it, accept it, and act upon it. The Bible assumes God's existence (Genesis 1:1), and we must accept that assumption of we will come to God (Hebrews 11:3). This is why Psalm 119 is so important; why doctrine of inspiration and inerrancy are so important. We need to trust the truthful voice of the truthful Shepherd; we need to be bound tightly to his side!

There is a very real battle for the mind. So, what are you doing to win this battle? What are you feeding on? That is, what are you reading? To whom are you listening?

Faithful Preaching

Second, we should prioritise teaching truth—as MacArthur put it, unleashing the truth one verse at a time.

What is the purpose of preaching? That is, what is its goal? Preaching aims at revelation and transformation (see 2 Corinthians 3:12-18). Chester and Reeves write,

For the Reformers preaching was more than simply the transfer of information. The reality is that most of the time most of the congregation know the truths contained in the sermon. If you view preaching as simply a process of education, then you will tend to pursue novelty, and that is a dangerous path to pursue.... A wife does not want new information on her wedding anniversary. She wants her husband to reassure her of his continuing love.

This is precisely what preaching is designed to accomplish. Reeves continues:

The real problem, I suspect, is that often people do not like what they hear through God's Word, read and preached. They want a word that allows them to circumvent the call to take up their cross daily. They want a word that justifies their desire for self-fulfillment or their sense of self-importance.

He concludes, "The challenge of the rule of Christ in his Word is both different from and similar to the challenges faced at the time of the Reformation."

Faithful—that is, truthful—preaching builds us up in the truth. It does so by revealing and explaining the truth, by exhorting us to be bound to the truth, and by emboldening us that it is the truth. The truth of God is truth about God that comes from God. We need to hear this—*especially* in a day in which people do not believe!

Expose yourself to exposition. Soon after my conversion, I travelled with a group of fellow students to Florida on an evangelistic trip. As we were traveling on the bus, I was suddenly struck with a terrible thought: What if this is all a big psychological trip? I wish I could say that my doubts quickly dissipated, but it in fact took several weeks of exposure to books and preaching before I realised that my doubts had faded. I learned, then, the truth of Romans 10:17—that faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.

Gospel-centred preaching is essential! Ed Welch writes,

Troubling circumstances will always come. Life is hard. When difficult circumstances and our hearts meet, a conversation breaks out between the two—back and forth, back and forth—and the conversation can be wise and hopeful, or it can be foolishness that parades as wisdom.

Our troubles usually start the internal conversation: "This is painful. Why is this happening?" Then it gets messy. Spiritual beings whisper, "Does God really care? Can his words be trusted?" Our hearts can submit to those questions, and we can adopt them as our own: "Maybe he doesn't really care. Wouldn't a good father protect his children from these things?" Meanwhile God himself speaks. We could condense his many words this way: "Look to Jesus, crucified and raised from the dead. The crucified one who suffered—he is the evidence of unfailing love in affliction. Suffering raises many questions, and for most of those questions you will have to trust me—that my love is more sophisticated than you know." Our task is to hear God's voice, believe his words, and follow Jesus even when life is hard. Back and forth, back and forth. Trouble comes at us; we respond. The Devil questions our responses; we respond. God's Word in Jesus Christ tells the real story about our suffering and speaks hope; we respond. And the conversation continues. Who wins? Who will have the final word?

Here is the correct answer: Let Jesus and his gospel have the final word! You can never hear the gospel too much!

Fortifying Partnerships

Third, we need focused, fortifying and fellowshiping partnerships. We need to help one another to be grounded in the truth—to be bound both *by* and *to* the truth. We do this because of our affections, both for the Lord and for one another.

Welch helpfully writes,

Weakness—or neediness—is a valuable asset in God’s community. Jesus introduced a new era in which weakness is the new strength. Anything that reminds us that we are dependent upon God and other people is a good thing. Otherwise, we trick ourselves into thinking that we are self-sufficient, and arrogance is sure to follow. We need help, and God has given his Spirit [who is called the “Spirit of truth”] and each other to provide it.

He continues, “We were meant to walk side by side, an interdependent body of weak people. God is pleased to grow and change us through the help of people who have been recreated in Christ and empowered by the Spirit. That is how life in the church works.”

That is how life in *any* local church needs to work. It is, but we need more of those who will walk side by side.

Sometimes we need help getting the belt on. And sometimes we need to be willing to ask for help. At the same time, we need to be on the lookout for those who need this kind of help. Each member is responsible to put this belt on; it is not merely the responsibility of the church’s eldership. The elders must help each member to fulfil his or her responsibility, but members must take the responsibility. Elders help by teaching, training and exhorting—and then by getting out of the way.

Practically, we need to care. We need to be compassionate. We need to connect. We need to grow in competence. Listen to Welch one more time:

In our era we consult experts, professionals, and specialists, but when you look at your own history of having been helped, it’s likely that you’ll notice very few experts among those who have helped you. Who were your helpers? Were they professional counsellors or specialists? Probably not. Most often, they were friends—the regular, everyday people in your life. Friends are the best helpers. They come pre-packaged with compassion and love. All they need is wisdom, and that is available to everyone.

If we love one another, we will want to “liberate” one another in accordance with John 8:32. Sinful attitudes, sinful behaviours, and sinful theologies enslave people. Let us love one another enough (after having loved the Lord!) to “free” one another from the bondage of sin. *Relate* to one another, *read* with one another, *remind* one another, pray with (*reinforce*) and for one another, and *rebuke* one another when necessary.

We Must Persevere in Putting on Truth

As we are persuaded of the objective “truth as it is in Jesus,” we must *subjectively* respond to this truth. We must do something with it. As Foulkes observes, this participle is, “conveying the sense of a deliberate personal action.” It is eternally vital that we persevere in the putting on truth, otherwise we are not a disciple of Christ. I didn’t say that, Jesus did: “Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed him, ‘If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed’” (John 8:31).

As observed above, the church is called to be truth-filled, but the result of this is that we will be *truthful*. We will be sincerely committed to living out the truth. “Paul’s point is that truthful character, along with a knowledge of the truth, holds one together in the fight” (Hughes). And one of the greatest illustrations of this is found in Acts 4:23–31.

And being let go, they went to their own companions and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said to them. So when they heard that, they raised their voice to God with one accord and said: “Lord, you are God, who made heaven and earth and the sea, and all that is in them, who by the mouth of your servant David have said:

‘Why did the nations rage,
and the people plot vain things?
The kings of the earth took their stand,
and the rulers were gathered together
against the LORD and against his Christ.’

For truly against your holy Servant Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel, were gathered together to do whatever your hand and your purpose determined before to be done. Now, Lord, look on their threats, and grant to your servants that with all boldness they may speak your word, by stretching out your hand to heal, and that signs and wonders may be done through the name of your holy Servant Jesus.” And when they had prayed, the place where they were assembled together was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they spoke the word of God with boldness.

Acts 4 opens with a conflict over the truth of Jesus (vv. 1–22). The Sanhedrin—the Jewish religious council—rejected Jesus’ claims and the apostles who preached those claims. The leaders instructed the apostles not to preach the gospel any longer. The apostles verbally committed to obeying God rather than men and, being released, they travel back to the church to report back to them. That is where the text above picks up.

How would they and the church respond? They responded by putting on the belt of truth. Notice several aspects of this.

First, observe that they tightened the belt of true ecclesiology (v. 23). They went directly to their fellow disciples and reported back to them. They recognised that the local church is the place where God is at work. They applied the truth of the priority and the power of the Christ-centred local church.

We are to be a church of conviction—concerning God’s truth. We should be prepared for an assault on the truth. We should be a people and place where humble certainty is a pervasive ethos: the truth that the church is central to God’s purposes.

Second, they tightened the belt of true kneeology (v. 24a). That is, they lifted their voice to God in prayer. They affirmed the truth that prayer is essential, the truth that God wants us to pray, the truth that God answers prayer. In fact, their prayers were a means of tightening the belt of truth. They put on this piece of armour with prayer.

This is where humble certainty comes from. Corporate prayer is essential if we will persevere. We must take whatever opportunities we have to gather with fellow believers for prayer.

Third, they tightened the belt of true theology (v. 24b). They prayed to the “sovereign Lord, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and everything in them.” They recognised that God is God and they were not, that God is the sovereign Lord and therefore in control. I recently had to learn this in [my own experience](#).

William Barclay tells the story of a “papal envoy threaten[ing] Martin Luther with what would follow if he persisted in his course.” They warned him that in the end he would be deserted by all his supporters. “Where will you be then?” demanded the envoy. “Then as now,” Luther answered, “in the hands of God.”

We need to embrace the truth concerning God. Theology drives kneeology, for biblical theology drives us to our knees! Humility is key to kneeology!

What are you doing to develop your knowledge of God? Are you using the market day of the soul? Are you reading, studying, and listening to hear more about God? After all, as Tozer once observed, what you think of when you think about God is the most important thing about you. Are your thoughts about God true?

Fourth, they tightened the belt of true doxology (v. 24b). They acknowledged the truth that God is to be acknowledged and praised in all circumstances. These words concerning God—that he “made the heaven and the earth and the sea and everything in them,” says Knowling, “form the earliest known Psalm of Thanksgiving in the Christian Church.”

Are you committed to the truth of *solī Deo gloria*—that everything must be done to the glory of God alone?

Fifth, they tightened the belt of true bibliology (vv. 25–28). They believed that God’s word would come to pass—that the truth of God’s word is true. They shared the conviction that Scripture is God’s Word. As Charles Erdman observes, “They were commissioned to witness for Christ, and now the supreme rulers of the nation had positively forbidden all testimony in his name. Their minds turned for comfort to the Scriptures.”

But why? Because of their conviction that they are the very *truth* of God! Because they shared the belief in God’s word, they could pray with boldness.

If we properly fasten the belt of truth, we will have a worldview that will serve us well in a hostile world. As I write these words, legislation is before the South African parliament for government to regulate all religious organisations and practitioners. At the same time, just this past week, a Johannesburg high court rules that corporal punishment in the home is unconstitutional and that spanking is therefore a criminal offence. As Christians and churches face these challenges, we must face them armed with God’s truth if we will respond in a way that honours him.

Sixth, they tightened the belt of true missiology (vv. 29–31). They embraced the truth that the church is on earth for one reason: for the fame of Jesus’ name. This is where truthful bibliology leads us. In fact, it is where *all* the “ologies” lead us.

Speaking of the signs and wonders that were performed here, Calvin writes,

Seeing that one miracle had [stung] the enemy so sore, how is it that these holy men desire to have new miracles done daily? ... We conclude that ... they make so great account of the glory of God, that, in comparison to this, they set light by all other things.... The same must we also think of boldness to speak. They knew that the wicked could abide nothing worse than the free course of the gospel; but because they know that that is the doctrine of life, which God will have published whatsoever befall; they do undoubtedly prefer the preaching thereof before all other things, because it is acceptable to God.

This truth is inseparable from a true pneumatology (v. 31). Richard Longnecker helpfully writes,

Most significant is the fact that these early Christians were not praying for relief from oppression or judgment on their oppressors but for enablement “to speak your word with great boldness” amid oppressions and for God to act in mighty power “through the name of your holy servant Jesus” (v. 30). Their concern was for God’s word to go forth and for Christ’s name to be glorified, leaving to God himself their own circumstances. With such prayer surely God is well pleased.

And the next verse affirms that indeed he was!

Let us unite in prayer for the proclamation of the gospel, for the propagation of the glory of God, for the progressive gladness of the nations. Let us go forth and charge the gates of hell, persuaded that souls will be saved, churches will be planted, and God’s glory will cover the earth as the waters cover the seas! Let us expect great things from God and therefore attempt great things for God.

Finally, they tightened the belt of true eschatology (vv. 32–35). By “eschatology,” I mean the truth that there is more to life than this life; the truth that a day of judgement is coming and that we all will give an account. This truth drives us to lay hold on eternal life to the glory of God (1 Timothy 6:12).

Practically, we let go of what we have for the good of others (including their eternal good), to the glory of God. Let us embrace the truth of an eternal perspective and show the falsity of life lived only for the here and now. After all, what shall it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses his own soul?

Christian, God will grace us with perseverance to the end. But he expects us to respond. Let us continue daily to put on the belt of truth, by the power of Christ, to the glory of God. We will continually find that the truth as it is in Jesus will set us free.

AMEN