



Armor

Part 2 – The Belt of Truth

Pastor Ted Cunningham

Dr. Travis Brawner

Travis Brawner: We are jumping into the next of our Armor series, *Belt of Truth*, out of Ephesians 6. We're digging into spiritual warfare and the armor of God. Today, we are talking about the belt of truth.

We had some excitement in the Brawner home this week. My wife texted me on Wednesday and said, "I need to talk to you right away. No one is injured, but I need to talk to you, pronto." I called her and she informed me that there is a snake in our house. Like many of you, she is terrified of snakes. The first thing she said was, "Has it occurred to you we have to burn the house down now? That's the only way to deal with this." She was not home. Our 11-year-old daughter, Kaylin, was home with Lucy Reynolds. I had a break in my day so thankfully I could run home, take care of the snake, get rid of the snake.

Ted Cunningham: What a man.

Travis Brawner: Yeah. Screaming the whole time, right? Then I had to go about the business of calling my wife back and calming her down. I told her some reassuring things like, "Look at the bright side. At least it wasn't hiding in the toilet to bite you when you sat down on the toilet."

Ted Cunningham: And you really only have a 50/50 chance of that ever happening. That's really a slim chance.

Travis Brawner: And like, "Look at the bright side. There was only one because usually where there is more than one..." And I had forgotten to check the toilet. But we got through that. I thought how appropriate, as we're going into spiritual warfare and the schemes of the devil, the serpent, the craftiest of the beasts, that we had a literal serpent in our house. Not just in our house. It was in our bathroom of all places. What I consider to be one of the most private rooms in the home, right? And isn't Satan like that though? He finds his way into the most intimate and private places in our lives. That's why it's so important to put on the belt of truth as we put on the armor of God.

Ted Cunningham: If you have your Bibles, turn to Ephesians 6. We're going through the armor. For the next six weeks, we're going to go through each piece of the armor, starting today with the belt of truth. One of the reasons I'm excited Travis is up here is he is not only an elder here, but he is one of those friends that when I call him... Almost every conversation we have, whether it be on the phone or back here after 8:30 service for the debrief or at gatherings with friends and family, he is a truth teller.

It's important for him to make sure those he is with and around know the truth. He puts falsehood far from him and that is a word of honor to speak over him just because I'm honored to be his friend in that and reminded of the value that is for you and what it needs to be for each one of us.

Today, we're going to jump into the Belt of Truth. Ephesians 6: 1 says, ***Put on the full armor of God...*** So, we're not going to pick pieces like the ones we like, the ones we don't like. We're going after all of this so we can be suited and booted for battle, whatever battle may be facing you. ***...so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes.***

Each week as we go through the pieces of armor, we're going to look at the devil's scheme. A primary scheme, when it comes to this belt of truth, is going to obviously be his scheme, as the father of lies, is to get you to become a liar. And we are going to see how he does that, his strategy behind that. We introduced this last week, but here's an outline of the devil's scheme when it comes to truth. I wish we could take time; I wish we could do a couple of weeks of everything Satan wants you to believe about yourself and everything Jesus says is true about you. Because Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life. And He is the source of all truth. And Satan is constantly coming against that.

Here's what we read. After Adam and Eve were told, "You can eat from any tree in the garden. Don't eat from that tree," immediately, Satan denies the Word of God. **4 "You will not certainly die," the serpent said to the woman.** **5 "For God knows that when you eat from it..."** (you will be woke) I mean, **...your eyes will be opened..."** And Satan wants you to believe that you should constantly be going after new truth, that you should discover new truth and not only discover it, but you should also create it. You should be the manufacturer of it.

I had a seminary professor that told us all the time, "Be creative in your ministries with the way you share the gospel, but don't ever become so creative that you become liberal. And, guys, when you share the gospel, don't be so open minded that your brain falls out." This is why we use commentaries, this is why use the church fathers, because if we're reading something in scripture... and the two problems when we read in scripture is we can see too much or we don't see enough. And Satan says, "You will not die." He denies the word of God and actually says, "Open your eyes to greater truth than what God told you. And then he goes to the third part – **"...and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."**

Whether you are a believer or not, today in the room or online, we all need to be reminded of this. This is true of every single person in here, believer or not, you are not God. I am not God. You are not God. I am not the source of truth. You are not the source of all truth.

So, here's Satan's outline. It's very simple. The devil's schemes against truth. As we put on the belt of truth.

1. Deny the truth. Whatever God said, just deny it outright. Say he didn't say it. I think the subtle scheme of Satan today is just redefine what God said. Have your eyes be open and reinterpret it to fit whatever you want it to say.

2. Open you eyes to new truth and then ultimately, he tells you...

3. Be like God.

Last week, we talked about this in that moment where I chickened out. I was encouraged by many of you with your emails and messages that were very encouraging. Not from what was just said up here, but for how you're going to apply it in your life, how you are going to take this seriously. Some of you are like, "I've been holding back on conversations with my kids that I know they need to hear, but I've been holding back for fear of sounding unkind or unloving. I want to speak the truth in my home."

In Genesis 1: 27, take those three parts of his schemes and you can apply it to any of the scripture and anything we're seeing today as our culture drifts from truth, as we move away from truth. Genesis 1: 27 – ***So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.*** That is the word of God. But we live in a culture today that says that is not true. "He didn't create you with a gender. Open your eyes and see that there are more genders out there. There are dozens of different... And you can identify as whatever you want. Why? Because you are God" is what Satan wants you to believe. "And you determine it."

Go on to Genesis 2, ***24 That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh.*** Satan says, "That's not true. Open your eyes. Marriage is far broader than a man and a woman for a lifetime. It's far broader than that. Do you know why? Because you're God. You can marry whoever you want. Don't listen to God's word."

You can take this to marriage should be honored by all and the marriage bed kept pure. Save sex for marriage. Satan says, "No that's not true. Open your eyes. You can sleep with whoever you want whenever you want. Why? Because you're God; you get to determine it."

This is why Jesus linked Genesis 1 and Genesis 2 together. In Matthew 19, when he was asked about marriage, he goes back to the scripture. ***4 "Haven't you read," he replied, "that at the beginning..."*** So in the beginning. The foundations of marriage and family goes back to the foundation of the earth. ***"...the Creator..."*** Meaning this is God's invitation for us to enter into what he created. He doesn't need our help in defining it. He doesn't need our help in figuring it out. In the beginning, the Creator ***"...made them male and female,'5 and said, 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh."***

Here's the bottom line. If you grew up in church, you heard this. We don't want to fall for the lies of Satan. But I want you to know that's not where his scheming ends, that's not where his strategy ends. He doesn't just want you to believe lies, he wants you to speak lies. He wants every time you open your mouth, for you to be speaking falsehoods about God, others, and yourself. He wants you to lie about God. He is the father of all lies. He wants you to lie about God, others, and yourself every time you open your mouth. He doesn't want you just believing lies, he wants you telling them.

A pastor we looked at from the East Coast last week, Garrett Kell, he says this: "Satan labors to make you a liar like him, and putting on the belt of truth, as we're going to see today, is an act of faith that resists Satan's call to be a liar like him."

Travis Brawner: I think one of the reasons... Maybe you can sympathize with this. One of the reasons that we as Christians, especially evangelical Christians, hesitate sometimes to speak out truth is because we are quick to be called a bigot. That word is used a lot. Bigotry. That in the church there is so much bigotry. I want you to understand something. If you are concerned about the word bigotry, which usually ends the conversation, and that's bothersome because bigotry is utter intolerance for the belief of others.

Anyone that's listening that's concerned that the church may be practicing bigotry, you need to understand we at Woodland Hills fully believe that you are allowed to believe whatever you want. You can, that's the permissive will of God. He allows you to believe what you want. That doesn't mean he's going to tolerate all your beliefs. Our beliefs here are those that Ted just expressed the exclusivity of Christ and on and on. So, many people that may declare that you are a bigot because you believe that Jesus is the only way to heaven. Really? Be encouraged in that if someone declares you to be a bigot because they don't like what you believe, they, by definition, are being a bigot, utterly intolerant of your beliefs. We stand firm and wear the armor of God.

Ted Cunningham: We are utterly intolerant of those beliefs creeping into the church. And can you think... Travis is such a nice guy. Utterly intolerant comes across so kindly from him. Whereas if I say it, it's just really...

Travis Brawner: I had to bring it down a little. So, in Ted's outline, Satan wants you to lie about God, others, and yourself. So, we're going to work through that outline this morning.

Satan wants you first to believe lies about God and then speak lies about God. You hear us talk a lot about our **essential beliefs** here. That's because these are what we believe really define us as Christians and as followers of Jesus. They are not negotiable, they're not debatable among our leadership and in our church and in our teaching. There are the non-essentials, which can be discussed and debated just simply for almost academic exercise, but these are our essential beliefs. They are our essentials because they are the ones that matter. Maybe you've sat in a meeting before where something was discussed where 15-20 minutes in, a decision is trying to be made and you're saying, "Have we really spent 20 minutes on the color of the door knobs in the bathroom," or whatever. That can become bothersome, and you want to talk about the things that really matter. We're talking about the things that really matter, the essentials.

As we talk about the essentials, it's important to understand our essentials, God, mankind, scripture, sins, salvation, eternity, heaven, hell, angels, demons, Satan. In this first thing that we're talking about, that Satan wants you to lie about God, that's the first essentials. All of the other essentials flow through and from that one, the subject of God. And Satan realizes that. When he's trying to convince you of lies about God to get you to speak lies about God, everything else flows from that. He knows if he can get into that one, he's going to be successful.

We believe there is one God, that he is eternal. He existed before anything else existed. That he is the Creator. He created everything else that exists. He is a triune God – Father, Son, Holy Spirit. He is all

powerful, all present, and all knowing. He is both loving and just. He is both incomprehensible yet knowable. That is how God is and that is what we hold fast to.

Let's look at Ephesians 4: - **14 Then...** The then is when we move into spiritual maturity. ...***we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness...*** We hear it again, craftiness of the serpent. ...***of people in their deceitful scheming.***

The schemes of the devil. He is purposeful in what he's doing. He's not just launching grenades out there, trying to see if he can take care of some business. He's scheming, he has a plan for exactly how he is going to take you down. This blown here and there, the wind, I think about flying in an airplane. I know Ted travels in airplanes a lot and there are a lot of turbulence from time to time because of the blowing of the winds.

I hate turbulence on an airplane. Anyone else? You just hate that feeling where you feel like your stomach comes up here. I'm not afraid of dying. It's not that; it's just I hate that feeling of falling. I have an unhealthy fear of falling like my wife had an unhealthy fear of snakes. But when I think of air travel and the wind and the pilots that are trying to get to a destination, there is an air navigation rule called the one in sixty rule. It says that if they are off by one degree in their navigation, in 60 miles, they will be one mile off of their destination. A whole mile. With that one degree. The point there is that Satan knows he doesn't have to knock you completely off the rails. He doesn't have to blindside you completely. In his scheming, if he can get you just one degree off, then he knows that down the road, you might look back and say, "How did I get here?"

Ted Cunningham: Yeah. We've been talking about that with truth drift. We get that culture is moving far away from Jesus and if Jesus is center, they are going far, far away. We've seen it even with the church. We've seen it with believers over the last year and half or two years. We were talking about this last week. I don't feel like I've changed core beliefs in the last two years, but why does it feel like I have or why do people tell me I have? I feel like I'm standing still. I feel like I'm standing my ground. You may feel this same thing. I'm standing my ground, but as the world gets kookier... That's my theological term for you today. As the world takes that one degree... I'd say it's way more than one degree. It feels like two, three, four, ten, twenty degrees way off, it can feel like you're moving. I think the hard part is when you've been standing with other people who are making that move and yet, you're still in fellowship, it can feel... You're in fellowship with them, but it can feel like they're moving so you're like am I moving? We want to stand on Jesus.

It's been interesting the last year and half that my emails start with, "Hey, as one of your most conservative members..." Then that will be followed by someone saying, "As someone left of center..." Again, that kind of always cracks me up that we always have to let people know where we stand or whether we agree with someone or not. I use this illustration all the time. I don't introduce Amy at parties with, "I don't agree with her on everything, but this is my wife." That's a terrible to introduce someone.

But we're all sitting there thinking about truth. I was thinking about the Amazon illustration. Amazon changed the way we trust. Before amazon. I don't know if you know, but we trusted brands – Ford, Chevy, whirlpool, GE. You saw that brand on a television, a dishwasher, a washing machine, or a car, and you knew your parents had it, you knew they had the same machine for 25 years. Let me tell you, those machines aren't being made the same way they were 25 years ago. But we trusted in a brand.

We don't trust in brands anymore, we trust in that 4.7 out of 5. We trust in that 4.3 out of 5. We trust what people say. Look even just through the pandemic. People aren't wanting to trust doctors. They're not wanting to trust scientists. They are trusting their uncles and their cousins. I used it in the first service. If I bust my eardrum on Table Rock Lade today jumping off of a bluff, I ain't coming to any of you to fix my ear drum. I love you, I love your cousins and I love your uncles, but I ain't listening to their advice. Some of you need to know Travis is an ear, nose, and throat doctor. People in the first service were like, "I wouldn't go to a pastor either for fixing my ear drum." But it's a surgery that he does. So, when pastors are talking to me today going, "The congregation, it's tougher to lead." I go, "Well, they're not trusting experts anymore. They are not trusting doctors, scientists, this person or that person. Why do you think they're listening to pastors?"

I just encourage you with that to really think about where you are with truth. Have you drifted? Who are you listening to? Who is your source? Is the person you're listening to grounded in the Word of God? That, to me, is the key. Because when we just start listening to people and it sounds... That's the problem, Travis. I think that scheming sounds good. And it's not.

Travis Brawner: It does. And it can make what you believe sound not good, right?

Ted Cunningham: Hateful, unkind, unloving, bigoted.

Travis Brawner: Exactly. Bigoted... all of those things. And it can make you feel like you're the one that's mean and unkind and bigoted and all of these things. You've heard the term *gaslighting*, maybe. I had to look it up. It turns out it's after a play from the 1930s that used this psychological concept to basically say because of the things you say and the people you get to support it, you can convince someone that they're the ones that are wrong. It can feel that way, can't it? When we are hearing all these messages from the enemy about how what you're saying and what you're believing is wrong and it can eventually wear on you and make you take that one degree.

Ted Cunningham: And I have a survey of 5,000 people that back me up to tell me you're wrong. And it's like well guess what? Five thousand people can be wrong. Two thousand, one thousand people can be wrong. What are we basing our truth on? We're basing it on the World of God, we're basing it on Jesus at the center.

Travis Brawner: Absolutely. And so we move on to the truth about others. Satan wants you to lie about others. As we talked about that God is that central subject of our essential beliefs, we understand that mankind is the first of the others that flow through and from God. We can get an example of this in the Ten Commandments, in God's order that he is first and then his creation, which he created everything that exists, and mankind is the centerpiece of his creation, therefore it is the next one on the

list. We're not bound to the Leviticus law or the Old Testament rules, but they certainly can give us an idea as to the character of God and how he feels about us and desires for us to live.

With the Ten Commandments, we see the first three are our interactions with God and our beliefs about him. And then the next seven are our interactions and beliefs about others. So, as a matter of fact, in Exodus 20: 16, one of them is *you shall not give false testimony against your neighbor*. God desires for us to speak in truth about others. I believe there are many ways and opportunities that we get to lie about others. And again, we know that Satan works by first convincing us a falsehood about others so we will then speak falsehood about others, a two-step process in the schemes of the devil and the way that he schemes against us. I believe that there are a lot of megaphones out there through which the enemy uses to convince us of falsehoods so we will turn around and speak falsehoods – social media, new media, blogging, and I heard this one earlier in our debrief, mom influencers. A lot of people that we're trusting just because of the things they are saying and the way that we can be convinced.

Have you had a song that you listened to in your youth that 5 or 10 years later you really heard the lyrics, maybe even read the lyrics and you're like, "I did not realize that...?"

Ted Cunningham: I sang *That Summer* by Garth Brooks for years before I actually paid attention to the lyrics. I was like I should probably stop singing that song.

Travis Brawner: No more, right? It makes you realize you maybe shouldn't have been listening to Garth Brooks at all.

Ted Cunningham: HEY!

Travis Brawner: I'm sorry. I am a child of the 90s who grew up in Branson. We had one radio station that played country music. I listened to a lot of Garth Brooks growing up. But we digress. There was a song for me, *Hook* by Blues Traveler that I listened to a bunch in college especially. My friends and I would play it and sing out loud with it. Then five to ten years later, I heard the song and I listened to the lyrics. I was like, *Huh, I'm kind of offended at that*. Because they were in this snarky tone saying "I could convince you of anything I want to convince you of." So, I thought this so applies to the schemes of the devil, the way he thinks he can convince us of anything he wants to convince us of.

The lyrics go like this. The first verse says:

*It doesn't matter what I say
So long as I sing with inflection
That makes you feel I'll convey
Some inner truth or vast reflection*

It feels good. That sounds so good. Listen to this; they sound so smart, and they sound so convincing. I must be the one that's wrong.

It goes on: *But I've said nothing so far
And I can keep it up for as long as it takes*

And trust me he will.

*And it don't matter who you are
If I'm doing my job then it's your resolve that breaks*

*There is something amiss
I am being insincere*

Someone may even tell you, "You know what? I'm sorry; I haven't been completely honest with you, now here's what's true." And we keep following these lies from one lie to the next lie and believing.

*In fact, I don't mean any of this
Still my confession draws you near*

It feels more personal, right?

*To confuse the issue I refer
To familiar heroes from long ago*

We call that name dropping. Maybe credential dropping. Ways that people will say things. "Look so and so says this and so and so says that." Again, if you don't believe this, you must be crazy because look who else believes this. I believe this is even manifesting in the church. It's manifesting in our faith among evangelicals online and it's this cancel culture. I know you've talked about it a bunch from up here that we despise it because it is rooted in speaking falsehood about others. Again, Satan doesn't have to knock us off the rails, he just needs that one degree. It doesn't have to be full falsehood that we speak. Sometimes, it's just partial truths that we hear, and we perpetuate. Then what happens is a mob builds up and we cancel this person and we come after them, not speaking truth about people.

Ted, you said something this week that I thought was very good in terms of truth about others and truth about ourselves. You said we can tend to love it when someone speaks truth and it supports our biases and comes against our enemies. But then when someone speaks truth and it comes against us, we don't like it so much.

Ted Cunningham: Yeah. Think about when you grew up, you maybe had parents or friends, families, coaches, teachers, that maybe shared lies about you to you on a regular basis. Remember, as children, we see everything, we hear everything, we forget nothing, and then we repeat. And these lies became messages written on your heart. Then these lies told from others about you became lies you started believing. I hear it in counseling all the time. People then begin speaking these lies about themselves and they believe it's true. Maybe you've just come out of a bad marriage, and over the last ten years, your ex-husband now, your ex-wife just spoke lie after lie after lie about you. I've been there with the spouse sitting there going, "This must be true."

Just because someone says it, doesn't make it true. You need to hear this. Right now, if you're in here, if you're watching and you feel worthless, I want you to understand that's a feeling, not the truth. And today, putting the belt of truth for you, you need to be reminded, going into all of Genesis 127, you were created in the image of God. You have automatic, intrinsic value. You're personally autographed by God. You have value.

We read in Psalm 139, ***13 For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. 14 I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well.*** If you've been walking around with the lies that others have been saying about you, it's time for you today to know the truth about yourself. And we need to get good at being able to move away from the lies that people tell. You heard me say it last week. I don't want to be a pawn of Satan, I don't want you to be a pawn of Satan. And I want to get good at recognizing the pawns of Satan that are bringing lies against me. Speaking the truth about who you are.

Last week, when I talked about chickening out, an entertainer friend came up to me and said, "Brother, I'm right there with you. I open my mouth, I know what it can cost me."

Literally, some of you can speak something on Facebook and it's not going to cost you, or if it does cost your business... I know there are folks in here that speak pretty boldly online. I'm thinking that's costing them something. This entertainer said, "I get the emails like you do. I say something and people tell me, 'I don't need to be inundated with God when I come to your show. Just sing and make me laugh and shut up.'"

Can I just encourage my entertainment friends? Don't be silent. You join me and we won't be silent. Speak up when it costs you ticket sales. Speak up when it costs you.

After I had the conversation, I was encouraged by my friend. I went home and I wrote this little thing called *I will not be Silent*. This is my declaration. If you want to make this your declaration... I may post it later today for you to say, "I'm taking this." Edit it, make it your own. But we put on the belt of truth to start this series through the six pieces of armor. Let this be your belt.

This is my declaration about truth and decisions I've made even just in the last couple of weeks. They are random thoughts that I finally brought together and tried to make some sense out of it.

I will not be silent. I am a child of God, his Spirit is within me, his word is a fire in my bones. I am in the Lord's army. The Holy Spirit gives me the words I need in every situation. I know the truth because it is written.

As the world drifts far from truth, I will stand my ground. Satan hates God, His Word, my marriage, my family, and my church, and he will stop at nothing to take me out and he'll stop at nothing to take us out. I will speak up against the devil's schemes and strategy. He is not all powerful and his days are numbered.

I will not be silent for fear of landing on his radar. I will not cower when accused of being unkind, unloving, a bigot, or homophobic. I refuse to be a pawn of Satan. I will stand through the battle, I will be standing at the end of the battle, I will stand in the battle with others who choose to speak as well.

When others follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons, I will speak up and I don't care what it costs me. I will speak the truth in love, with compassion and kindness. And as Paul asked for prayers, pray for me that whenever I speak, the words maybe given to me that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel. Pray that I may declare it fearlessly as I shall. I will not be silent.

That is my declaration and I hope that is your declaration as well.

Travis Brawner: Thank you for that, Ted. I'm going to ask you to stand as we close together today. We want to pray over you that you would believe and speak truth about God, about others, and about yourself. After the service, the prayer team will be down front if anybody wants to pray with someone. If you have not yet chosen to place faith in Christ, we pray that the blindness of the enemy would be removed from you, and that you would see the glory of the Gospel of Christ.

Father, we love you. We give you praise and glory. We are thankful for this church and for this church family. We're thankful for the truth that you give us. We ask that you help us to put on the belt of truth as well as the rest of your armor, Lord, so that we can stand against the schemes of the enemy, the devil. We pray that his tactics would be powerless against us as we stand in the holy name of Jesus Christ.

As we call upon your Holy Spirit, Lord, stand with us in your omniscient power, stand with us in our homes, in our church, in our schools, in our offices, in our stores, in our attractions, in our shows, in our businesses, our restaurants, ministries, even in our recreation, in our sports, Lord, in the hospitals as we drive in our cars, as we walk along the way, as we have conversations at the dinner table, in every aspect of our lives, as we lay our heads down to rest at night, stand with us.

We love you and we give your praise in the name of Christ. And everyone agreed and said... Amen.