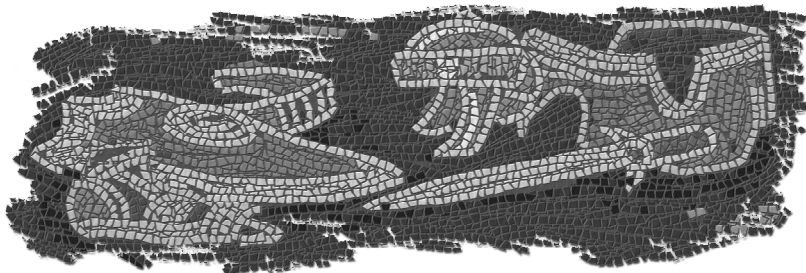


The Christian Armor



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *John 14:6; 18:38; Rom. 1:16, 17; 1 Cor. 1:30; Eph. 6:13-18; 1 Thess. 5:8.*

Memory Text: “Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand” (*Ephesians 6:13, NKJV*).

The whole armor of God. “The Christian life is a battle and a march. In this warfare there is no release; the effort must be continuous and persevering. It is by unceasing endeavor that we maintain the victory over the temptations of Satan.”—Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 453.

While we cannot escape our warfare with Satan, we are given two assurances. First, Christ has already defeated Satan on the cross, and His victory is ours (*Gal. 2:20*); second, Christ has provided us a “whole armor of God” (*Eph. 6:11, NKJV*). Do not miss Paul’s point about the “whole” armor. The apostle lists at least six items that make up this armor. We need them all, because all are forged and furnished by God as one unit, and we cannot afford to neglect one part without weakening the entire armor. This week we’ll study five of the six, saving the last one for next week.

The Week at a Glance: What is the biblical concept of “truth”? What is the “breastplate of righteousness” (*Eph. 6:14*)? How crucial is the “gospel of peace” (*vs. 15*) to the Christian faith? How does faith protect us from Satan’s assaults? What is the “helmet of salvation” (*vs. 17*)?

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, December 24.

“Gird Your Waist With Truth” (*Eph. 6:14, NKJV*)

“What is truth?” (*John 18:38*). Pilate asked Jesus perhaps one of the most important and frequently asked questions in life. Human beings have probed the question throughout history. Consider some of the possible answers: Truth is what’s logical; truth is what works; truth is relative; truth is testable observation; truth is what my religion or priest tells me.

Look up the following texts; how do they help us understand the biblical concept of truth?

Ps. 31:5, Isa. 65:16

Ps. 43:3

Ps. 86:11, 3 John 4

John 14:6

John 14:17

John 17:17

Ultimately, the Christian view of truth is not merely a concept, not a philosophic position, not a rational and logical statement. To a Christian, truth is a Person: Jesus Christ, in whom “the fullness of God” (*Eph. 3:19, NKJV*) and His truth are revealed. The Truth that is Jesus is a saving, redeeming truth: It calls for a death to sin; it calls for a life of righteousness, moral integrity, spiritual coherence, and a faithfulness to God’s expectations in all relationships. Truth involves not only what we believe but also what we do. Only unreserved commitment to Christ can arm each one of us with truth in a world of sin and deception. Hence Paul’s admonition elsewhere: “Put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts” (*Rom. 13:14, NKJV*).

In New Testament times, a Roman soldier tied a belt around his waist to hold up his clothing so he could march without any impediment. The Christian’s belt is truth. Jesus, the Truth, must so envelop our entire being that what we are within or what we are without do not become a hindrance in our spiritual warfare. Our talk and our walk, our worship and our work, will reveal we are subject to Him who is the truth and in whom there is no variation.

How would you answer the questions “What is truth?” and “What does knowing truth do for you?”

Key Text: *Ephesians 6:13*

Teachers Aims:

1. To stress that Christ has already defeated Satan.
2. To understand that we already share in that victory if we claim the gifts God has given to us.
3. To demonstrate that Christ's protection of us is sufficient, whether or not we feel deserving of it.

Lesson Outline:

I. The Whole Armor of God (*Eph. 6:13*)

- A. Warfare with Satan is inescapable for the Christian, and he is the deadliest foe we can have.
- B. Satan is, ultimately, powerless against Christ and against us, to the extent that we are in Christ.
- C. Christ's help to us in this struggle is conceptualized by Paul as armor.

II. The Belt of Truth (*Eph. 6:14*)

- A. The whole armor of God Paul speaks of represents the various aspects of the Christian message.
- B. The Christian message is not complete or effective if we ignore or forego any one aspect.
- C. Faith, "above all," is central to the Christian's personal success in the spiritual struggle.

III. Hope of Salvation (*Eph. 6:17*)

- A. Satan, and life itself, will give us many reasons to doubt our experience of God.
- B. The faith that enables us to withstand this doubt is not merely a belief in certain doctrines but a personal trust in Jesus.
- C. This personal trust is the only personal quality that makes any difference in our final destiny.

Summary: The Bible teaches us that Satan has been defeated by Christ. While we as fallible humans remain vulnerable to Satan's attacks, we can also claim the protection Christ provides for us in His victory. Again, the key is our complete willingness to submit to Christ's authority and to trust in Him.

COMMENTARY

Paul takes this warfare very seriously. Consider the forceful terms he uses to urge the Christians to face the evil one: "Be strong"; "put on"; "stand"; "having done all, to stand"; etc. (*Eph. 6:10-13*). He repeats the command "stand" four times, emphasizing that nothing short of continual watchfulness and readiness are needed to win the battle. Such an experience involves putting on the whole armor of God.

The Breastplate of Righteousness *(Eph. 6:14)*

The second part of the Christian armor is the breastplate of righteousness. If God’s truth as revealed in Christ forms the foundation of Christian life and integrity, that life needs to be guarded by the breastplate of righteousness. A Roman soldier wore a large metal plate from his neck to thigh to protect his vital organs from enemy attack—something like the bulletproof vests of today. The Christian life is protected not by a breastplate made of metal but by the righteousness that has its source and means in God.

How does Paul describe this righteousness? How is it revealed, how is it received, and what does it do for the one who possesses it? *Rom. 1:16, 17; 1 Cor. 1:30; 2 Cor. 5:21.*

Righteousness is a distinctive characteristic of God Himself (*Isa. 59:17, Rom. 3:26, 2 Tim. 4:8*), and this has been revealed through Christ, who has redeemed us from sin (*Rom. 1:16, 17*). It is through this righteousness revealed in Christ that God has justified us (*3:25, 26*)—that is, He declared us to be righteous and has forgiven our sins. Christ’s righteousness thus makes a right relationship with God possible. Surely, then, there is no greater protection against Satan’s attacks than being in a right relationship with God.

“Christ our righteousness” is, therefore, our breastplate. To stand with God, to be robed with the righteousness of Christ, to be forever faithful to God’s saving grace, is to give notice to the devil: “If God is for us, who can be against us? . . . Who shall bring a charge against God’s elect? It is God who justifies. Who is he who condemns?” (*Rom. 8:31-34, NKJV*).

How will righteousness as a right relationship with God be seen in the Christian’s daily life? *Rom. 6:10-14.*

Righteousness, as a right relationship with God, must lead to right living. It is a call to discipleship, where one’s life is consistent with the character of the One who calls, with Christ Himself. To be righteous is to be like Christ—in obedience to God’s law, in moral rectitude, in a life of uprightness and integrity, in extending the love of Christ to all.

How do we put on the breastplate of righteousness? How does this “putting on” relate to the “Christ . . . in me” experience described in Galatians 2:20? Does putting on righteousness call for putting off something else? If so, what?

I. The Armor: “The Whole Armour of God” (*Eph. 6:13*)

Most every product gives details about its origin, and that label says much about the product’s worth and reliability. “Made in Japan” gives a product greater reliability than made in someplace that is not so well reputed. The Christian armor is made in heaven, and every part of it is as reliable as the One who made it: God. The apostle’s command, “Put on the whole armour of God” (*Eph. 6:11*), expects us to remember two essentials. First, the armor is by God, of God, and from God. No part of this armor is human made. Humanity, however strong and sufficient we may pretend to be, is powerless in the making or functioning of the armor. Its only role is to recognize its nothingness, put on the armor, and take on the enemy in the *power of Jesus*. Second, Christian warfare demands that we put on the whole armor. We cannot afford to reject or neglect even one part of it. “The power of his might” (*Eph. 6:10*) is found in the whole armor, and only as we put on its entirety can we “be strong” (*vs. 10*) and “be able to stand against the wiles of the devil” (*vs. 11*).

II. The Armor: Defensive Weapons (*Eph. 6:14-17*)

From his continued exposure to Roman soldiers, perhaps with his hand tied to one of them, Caesar’s famous prisoner is aware of the Roman armor and reflects upon an even more powerful armor that a Christian is privileged to have. That armor has six components. Our study this week covers the first five defensive ones; next week we take up with the offensive one.

1. “Having your loins girt about with truth” (*Eph. 6:14*). The Roman soldier wore a belt to hold his flowing robes firm to the body lest they come in the way of his fight. The Christian’s entire personality—intellect, emotions, ambitions, dreams, and pursuits—must be held firm without vacillation by the belt of truth. Not the philosophic, economic, scientific, or any other human equation of truth but the truth that is Jesus. As Paul wrote to the Romans, “Put . . . on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof” (*Rom. 13:14*). With the entire person girded about with Jesus the Truth, the Christian becomes completely truth-living, truth-telling, and truth-seeking. A gainst such Satan has no power.

Another lesson: In Roman times, a soldier without his belt was considered off duty. But Christian warfare knows no holiday. There never is a time when truth and integrity become options in the disciple’s life.

2. The breastplate of righteousness (*Eph. 6:14*). The Roman soldier wore a breastplate made of heavy metal to protect his body between the neck and hips. The Christian also has a breastplate not made of any human device but by the righteousness of Christ.

For Feet, the Gospel of Peace (*Isa. 52:7, Eph. 6:15*)

Read Ephesians 6:15. What do you think Paul meant with this verse?

Because he was using military imagery in the other verses, Paul was apparently referring to the shoes, or boots, worn by the Roman army. Roman soldiers wore the kind of footwear that ensured a strong grip on the ground during combat. A soldier cannot afford to slide and fall when locked in battle with the enemy. Likewise, Christians, too, need to stand firm and unshakable in the gospel truth in order to be victorious in the spiritual warfare. The New English Bible translation of Ephesians 6:15 makes a telling point: “Let the shoes on your feet be the gospel of peace, *to give you firm footing*.” If feet are our foundation, and they need to be on firm footing for the whole body to remain stable, it shouldn’t be surprising that the “gospel of peace” is the foundation of what we believe. Indeed, no matter how important the other truths we have been given, everything needs to rest upon the foundation of the gospel message of salvation by faith in Jesus Christ alone. If we don’t have that as a foundation, everything else will crumble.

Read the three angels’ messages of Revelation 14:6-12. What evidence in the texts shows us just how basic the gospel is to our message?

Notice, too, that Paul uses the phrase “the gospel of peace.” Peace in the Bible is not so much a negative term as it is a positive one. It stands for a tranquillity that comes as a result of victory over sin and self. It is a relational word—a relationship of reconciliation between us and God (*Rom. 5:1*) and of togetherness between ourselves as the human community, particularly as the community of faith. So, Christians are told to pursue peace at all times (*2 Tim. 2:22, 1 Pet. 3:11*). An estranged relationship with either God or with one another places our Christian calling at risk and leaves us open to Satan’s wiles.

Have you known the peace of the gospel? If not, what changes might you need to make in order to know this wonderful gift for yourself?

Just as Christ the Truth becomes our belt to hold us tight to Himself, so Christ our righteousness acts as our breastplate, protecting every vital organ of spiritual life from the attacks of the foe. With Christ's righteousness as our breastplate, "the heart is united with His heart, the will is merged in His will, the mind becomes one with His mind, the thoughts are brought into captivity to Him; we live His life."—Ellen G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 312.

3. The Shoes of the Gospel of Peace (*Eph. 6:15*). The Roman soldier's shoes had strong straps to be tied to the leg and studded nails to ensure a firm grip on the ground. A soldier cannot afford to stumble or slide. More so Christian soldiers. Their entire profession

Inductive Bible Study

Texts for Discovery: *John 14:6, Galatians 2:20, Ephesians 6:13-18, 1 Thessalonians 5:8*

- ① God sent Truth into the world so we could experience Him. Jesus as Truth made flesh is not just ideology. It is action on behalf of others. Why do you think Paul invited us to "stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth" (*Eph. 6:14, NKJV*)? How does truth help us stand? How does Jesus' example help provide an answer?
- ② Imagine that your 12-year-old child (or grandchild) is sitting next to you. You are reading Ephesians 6:14 when he or she interrupts, "What is righteousness?" How would you explain it? Does your answer include a list of behaviors, attitudes, or actions? Where in Scripture would you go for help in answering the child's question?
- ③ The three angels' messages form the core of the message God has called us to proclaim. Paul depicts the everlasting gospel as shoes on the feet of the Christian warrior. How does Revelation 14:6-12 form the foundation of our mission? Why does Paul call these shoes "the gospel of peace" (*Eph. 6:15*)? How have you experienced peace in your life as a consequence of proclaiming the Advent message?
- ④ Compare, then discuss, Ephesians 6:17 and 1 Thessalonians 5:8. How are the "helmet of salvation" and "the hope of salvation" related? Why do Christians need to "wear" protection on their head? Share some of the challenges you have faced since you accepted salvation and the hope of the Second Coming. Why is a community of faith (the church) important?

The Shield of Faith *(Eph. 6:16)*

This passage tells us three things about faith as a vital part of the Christian armor:

First, “above all” take the shield of faith. “Above all” does not mean this item is the most important but that it is indispensable. What Paul says is this: “Besides all these” (*Goodspeed*) or “with all these” (*NIV*), make sure to take the “shield of faith.”

Second, faith is fundamental to Christian life and victory.

Read Hebrews 11:6. What does it tell us about the role of faith? How does it relate to Ephesians 6:16? How does James 2:18-20 help us understand what biblical faith is, and isn’t?

How do we understand the meaning of “faith” in these verses? It’s not so much to say “I believe *that*” but to assert “I believe *in*.” The former is a mental assent to a body of doctrines (*Eph. 4:13*), whereas the latter is a basic trust in God, a continual trust in His Word and in His promises. Such an abiding trust is absolutely necessary for faith to function as a shield.

“Faith is trusting God—believing that He loves us and knows best what is for our good. Thus, instead of our own, it leads us to choose His way. In place of our ignorance, it accepts His wisdom; in place of our weakness, His strength; in place of our sinfulness, His righteousness. Our lives, ourselves, are already His; faith acknowledges His ownership and accepts its blessing.”—Ellen G. White, *Education*, p. 253.

Such a faith empowers us “to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one” (*Eph. 6:16, NKJV*). Those flaming darts of the enemy come in different forms: temptation, doubt, lust, despair, trial, rebellion, guilt, etc.

The Roman shield was four feet high and two feet wide, made of strong wood and leather, with an iron frame. Shield in one hand and sword in another (our study next week), the soldier was equipped for both defense and offense. Faith in an unfailing God provides us absolute confidence to withstand Satan with all courage. God Himself “is a shield to those who put their trust in Him” (*Prov. 30:5, NKJV*).

In your own experience, what fiery darts has faith shielded you from? Doubt? Discouragement? Fear? Describe the process of how faith has worked in your behalf. What have you learned that you could share with others who might be getting pierced by those same attacks?

stands or falls with their unshakable and unwavering commitment to the gospel of Christ. Satan desires to shake this commitment, but Christian soldiers must not only stand firm for what they believe. They must remain devoted to proclaim the good news. The Christian footwear helps one stand with Christ in obedience and walk for Him in proclamation.

4. The Shield of Faith (*Eph. 6:16*). The Roman shield protected the whole body of the soldier as he moved it about to stop the flaming arrows. In Christian warfare, faith is a fundamental weapon. It protects the entire life and body of a Christian. Hebrews 11 is God's un failing disclosure that without faith it is impossible to please God, to fight the foe, or to walk the spiritual journey. Faith, not as a belief system but as trust and confidence in God. It is this that helps us not only overcome the attacks of the devil but also obtain the "victory that conquers the world" (*1 John 5:4, NRSV*).

5. The Helmet of Salvation (*Eph. 6:17*). A helmet is worn to safeguard the head, for any damage to the brain can be fatal. The brain is the seat of our will, the governor of our choices, and the

Witnessing

Preparing for battle is a carefully orchestrated process. The battle plan is drawn, after which commanders and warriors review it time and time again. Mock battles are staged. Troops are drilled. They receive the type of nourishment required for strength and stamina. They practice suiting up in their protective gear. They learn they cannot go out into battle without their armor.

The soldiers are taught to listen carefully to directions. They are tested on how to avoid capture and, above all, how to follow instructions from the top. They also learn the price of failure and defeat. At all times, the victory prize is front and center for all to focus on.

The epic battle for planet Earth began 6,000 years ago. Two thousand years ago, the battle plan for victory was redeemed by the blood of God's beloved and trusted Son, Jesus Christ.

During the past two millennia, God's army of believers has engaged the enemy, Satan and his supporters, countless times. They are armed with the perfect battle plan—the plan of salvation. While some of God's warriors are lost to the enemy and others stumble from time to time, all eyes remain fixed on the ultimate prize: the promise of heaven and eternal life.

This battle saga is far too important to keep quiet. It is meant to be shared with everyone who will listen. The heavenly Father is still recruiting, and it is up to all of His soldiers to enlist those who have not yet decided to join Heaven's military divisions. They need to know their that victory is assured!

The Helmet of Salvation *(Eph. 6:17, 1 Thess. 5:8)*

Albert was young, handsome, intelligent, and very promising. He was the delight of his parents and a blessing to the small church community with which he shared his love of music, his computer skills, and his knowledge of the Bible. Children sought after him. The older ones knew for sure he would grow to be someone in whom their community could take pride. But on the day he turned 18, disaster struck Albert, plunging his parents into grief and the little Adventist community into unbearable sorrow. Within minutes after leaving home for a nearby store to get something an elderly neighbor needed, a speeding truck dashed Albert's motorcycle from behind, and he landed on his head. "Severe head wounds," the autopsy surgeon said. "If only he had been wearing a helmet. . . ."

A helmet is worn to safeguard the head. In many parts of the world the law requires the wearing of a helmet as a possible protection against varied hazards. In Paul's time, a helmet, made of tough metal just as bronze or iron, was standard gear for soldiers. No sword could cut through it.

So it is in Christian warfare. Believers must put on their helmet to protect the center of their will, for here momentous decisions are made as to where their loyalty and hope shall rest. Paul identifies this "helmet" as the salvation we have been given in Christ.

Read 1 Thessalonians 5:8, where Paul also used the image of a "helmet." What does he call it? How does this verse help us understand what the image itself in both verses means?

As Christians, we have to live with the "hope of salvation" (*1 Thess. 5:8*). And we can have that hope, because that hope is in us; not in what we can accomplish but only in what Christ has done for us. If salvation were acquired by works or by how much we could achieve or by how holy we could become—who would not, eventually, give up in despair? The good news, however, is that Jesus' works, His achievement, His holiness, is what gives us "the hope of salvation." If this hope were based on anything else, that hope would sooner or later be lost.

Thus, though Satan often casts doubts on our salvation experience, we need not fear. As long as we remain in Christ, wearing that helmet of salvation, He is our assurance (*John 6:37-39, Rom. 8:31-39, 1 Pet. 1:3-10*).

If you were to die today, do you believe you would be saved? If so, why? If not, why not?

center of our thoughts. It is the place where life's ultimate question is answered: *Who will I follow?* A saved person has already moved from Satan to Christ, and in order to remain in that position, he or she must wear "the hope of salvation" (*1 Thess. 5:8*). Salvation is a powerful weapon—it describes forgiveness for the past sins, empowerment to live a life of obedience now, and assurance for the future. The believers' standing in the war depends upon their surety of the helmet of salvation. The helmet, in a way, summarizes all the defensive weapons of Ephesians 6.

Life-Application Approach

Icebreaker: When you were little, what was your favorite article of clothing? How often were you successful in putting it on, even when Mom had set out something different? Why does Paul list the wardrobe a Christian should wear? (*See Eph. 6:13-17.*) Why are we so prone to make our own choices when these items provide more protection against the adversary's attacks?

Thought Questions:

❶ Our world offers many philosophies on which to base decisions. Jesus said "I am the way and the truth and the life" (*John 14:6, NIV*). Look up at least one text for each of these three concepts. What was Christ trying to say about what He has to offer? Why is it so hard to let Him be involved in every aspect of our lives?

❷ Imagine you are in Pilate's judgment hall as he considers what to do with Jesus. How would you answer his question "What is truth" (*John 18:38*)? How would you help Pilate discover what truth is in this situation? What clues or elements could he use to come to a decision? Discuss what you have learned about truth as a defensive weapon in the great controversy.

Application Question:

How do you feel about hats? Does your culture encourage them, or are they only an optional fashion accessory? In *1 Thessalonians 5:8*, we are invited to put on "the hope of salvation as a helmet" (*NIV*). What makes that possible? Take a few moments to write out your personal faith statement. In what ways does this mission statement focus and clarify your life? How does it provide a foundation for making choices? How would your faith statement today differ from one you might have written five years ago? What experiences have caused this change?

Further Study: *The heavenly armor.* “If we have on the heavenly armor, we shall find that the assaults of the enemy will not have power over us. Angels of God will be round about us to protect us.”—Ellen G. White, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, p. 1119.

The girdle of truth. “There is absolutely no safeguard against evil but truth. No man can stand firm for right in whose heart the truth does not abide.”—Ellen G. White, *In Heavenly Places*, p. 179.

The breastplate of righteousness. “All who have put on the robe of Christ’s righteousness will stand before Him as chosen and faithful and true. Satan has no power to pluck them out of the hand of the Saviour. Not one soul who in penitence and faith has claimed His protection will Christ permit to pass under the enemy’s power.”—Ellen G. White, *God’s Amazing Grace*, p. 31.

The shield of faith. “Saving faith is a transaction by which those who receive Christ join themselves in covenant relation with God. Genuine faith is life. A living faith means an increase of vigor, a confiding trust, by which the soul becomes a conquering power.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 347.

Discussion Questions:

- ① As a class, discuss the question at the end of Thursday’s lesson. What do the various answers tell us about ourselves and our understanding of salvation?
- ② Many identify truth with a set of doctrines only. Is there a relationship between truth and doctrine? Can one be doctrinally correct yet not have truth? At the same time, can someone have truth but not have correct doctrines? Discuss.
- ③ How is the shield of faith strengthened? How is it weakened?
- ④ As a class, discuss the crucial difference between the assurance of salvation and the dangerous doctrine of “once saved, always saved.”