

Sharing God's Peace



SABBATH—SEPTEMBER 16

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Ephesians 6:10–20; 1 Peter 4:1; 1 Peter 5:8; Romans 8:37–39; Luke 18:1–8.

MEMORY VERSE: “You believe in God. Take that [faith] and cover all of yourself with it. With that [faith] you can stop all the poison arrows of the devil. You have been saved. Wear your salvation [God's plan to save sinners] like [the same as] you wear something on your head to protect yourself. And take with you the big knife or sword of the Spirit, which is the word [Bible] of God” (Ephesians 6:15, 16, WE).



In the story, Christian visits a special room in the palace where he is a guest.

JOHN BUNYAN wrote his book *The Pilgrim's Progress* while he was in jail. The book is a story about a man named Christian. In the story, Christian visits a special room in the palace where he is a guest. The room is filled with different weapons. These weapons are for the soldiers who are in the Lord's army. Before Christian leaves the palace, he visits this room again and puts on a battle suit. This suit will protect Christian against future attacks during his journey to the Shining City.

Bunyan wrote *The Pilgrim's Progress* in 1678. 1,600 years earlier, Paul wrote his letter to the Ephesians. Paul, also, wrote from jail. In Ephesians, Paul says that God's church is the same as an army. God has a battle suit for every member of His church to wear. This battle suit will keep us safe from head to toe as we share the gift of God's peace with everyone on earth.

THE CHURCH: GOD'S ARMY (Ephesians 6:10–20)

Read Ephesians 6:10–20. In these verses, what does Paul say about the types of war that the church fights? Is Paul talking about his own personal fight against evil? Or is Paul talking about the war against evil that the whole church fights?

In Bible times, Greeks and Romans won wars because all the soldiers in their armies supported and helped each other. The soldiers worked together to win. Greek or Roman army leaders taught their soldiers not to behave the same as the wild men from the foreign armies they fought. These wild men didn't follow orders and tried to do things their own way. Their behavior and actions caused their armies to lose against the Greeks and the Romans.

When we understand this idea, we can better understand what Paul is talking about in Ephesians 6:10–20. There are three reasons why we can say that Paul is talking about the church's fight against evil and not his own fight or someone else's personal fight: (1) Ephesians 6:10–20 is the final part of a letter that is all about the church. So, it would be strange for Paul to end his letter talking about a Christian warrior fighting against evil all by himself. (2) At the end of Ephesians 6:10–20, Paul asks the Ephesian Christians to join together in prayer for "all of God's people" (Ephesians 6:18, ERV, also, read Ephesians 3:19, 20). (3) Most important, earlier in his letter, Paul talks about the war that the whole church fights against evil (Ephesians 3:10). This war isn't fought only by one person.

So, Ephesians 6:10–20 doesn't show us a picture of a warrior all by himself fighting alone against evil. Paul talks to the church the same as a general talks to his army. Paul orders the church to put on God's battle suit and to go fight together as one army.

So far, Paul has used many word pictures to talk about the church. Paul compared the church to Jesus' body (Ephesians 1:22, 23; Ephesians 4:1–16), a building/temple that belongs to God (Ephesians 2:19–22), and Jesus' bride (Ephesians 5:21–33). What is the last word picture that Paul uses in Ephesians? Paul uses the word picture of the church as the army of God. We are nearing the evil day (Ephesians 6:13) when God's people will fight the final war in the battle against evil. We are all soldiers in Jesus' army. So, we need to be loyal to God and to each other.



Paul talks to the church the same as a general talks to his army.

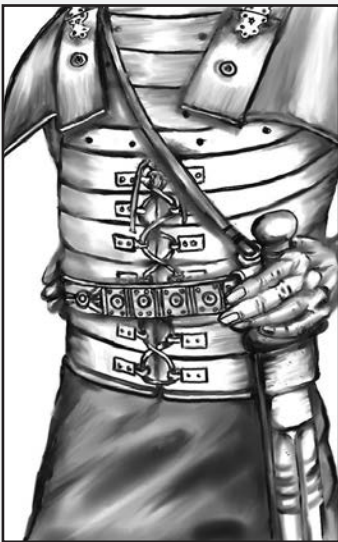
BELT AND CHEST COVERING (Ephesians 6:14)

Paul shows us a picture of Christians getting ready for the fight against evil. What do they do to get ready? Read Ephesians 6:14 for the answer. Also, read 1 Peter 4:1; 1 Peter 5:8; Romans 8:37–39 to help answer the questions.

Paul warns us about the final fight that is coming in the future (Ephesians 6:13). This fight will be the last battle between good and evil, just before Jesus comes back. Paul wants Christians to be ready for this fight (Ephesians 6:14–17). Paul tells us what to do to get ready. “So then, stand and hold on tight to the truth like [the same as] you put on a belt” (Ephesians 6:13, WE; compare Isaiah 11:5). In Bible times, clothes were long and loose-fitting. So, people needed to tie their clothes up around their waists before they started working or fighting (compare Luke 12:35, 37). Paul says Christians must do the same thing that a Roman soldier did. A Roman soldier put a military belt around his waist. The belt was made from leather. Leather straps hung from the belt. Before the soldier went to war, he tucked the ends of his clothes into the belt and strapped them tight. The soldier did this so he wouldn’t trip over his clothes when he fought.

As we see, Paul compares the truth to a belt. We must understand that we don’t own this “belt.” This belt belongs to God. The truth is a gift from God, just the same as His saving mercy is His gift to us (Ephesians 2:8). This gift of mercy is more than an idea. We must accept God’s gift and make it a part of our lives. So, we must “put on” God’s truth the same as clothes. We don’t own God’s truth. We belong to God’s truth, and it protects us.

Next, Paul tells Christians to put on Jesus’ holy life the same as a chest covering or battle suit (compare 1 Thessalonians 5:8). This chest covering is from God, the same as the belt. In Paul’s day, many Roman battle suits were made from small iron rings that were connected together. The Roman covering protected the heart and other parts of the chest and belly from the enemy. In the same way, Christians must accept the spiritual protection that God offers them when He gives them His holy life as a covering. Jesus’ holy life includes His good deeds, His mercy, and Bible truth (Ephesians 4:24; Ephesians 5:9). Our lives will change when we let Jesus live in our hearts. Then we will respect other people and be fair to them.



Paul compares the truth to a belt.

SHOES THAT HELP US BRING GOD'S PEACE (Ephesians 6:15, 23)

A Roman soldier tied on a pair of military shoes before he went to war. The bottom of his shoes was very thick. Special nails covered the bottom of the shoe. These nails helped the shoe to grip the ground better when the soldier stood and fought the enemy (Ephesians 6:11, 13, 14). The nails also helped a Roman soldier not to slip and fall during a fight.

Review the eight times that Paul talks about “peace” in Ephesians: Ephesians 1:2; Ephesians 2:14, 15, 17; Ephesians 4:3; and Ephesians 6:15, 23. Why does Paul use a word picture about war to talk about peace?

Paul says Jesus “Christ is the reason we are now at peace. . . . Christ came and brought the message of peace to you non-Jews who were far away from God. And he brought that message of peace to those who were near to God” (Ephesians 2:14–17, ERV). Jesus “Christ made both Jews and non-Jews one people. They were separated as if there were a wall between them. But Christ broke down that wall of hate by giving his own body. . . . Christ’s purpose [plan] was to make the two groups of people become one new people in him” (Ephesians 2:14, 15, ICB). Christians are messengers for Jesus. They announce Jesus’ peace and His win in the fight against sin. That is what Paul means when he says that Christians put on shoes the same as peace. These shoes help Christians stand ready to fight.

At the same time, we must understand that Paul doesn’t want us to pick up real weapons and fight against our enemies. The shoes are only a word picture for the good news that fills hearts with God’s peace (Ephesians 6:15). Paul also doesn’t want Christians to argue and fight with their friends, coworkers, and family members. Paul wants us to work together. He wants us to show each other mercy, respect, and love (read Ephesians 4:25–5:2). The church must fight. But we fight against evil with peace. Our “weapons” are a heart empty of all pride, a patient heart, forgiveness, love, and mercy. Our “weapons” also include prayer, worship, and praise to God. When we use these “weapons,” we show other people God’s wonderful plan to make all things new in Jesus (Ephesians 1:9, 10).



The shoes are only a word picture of the good news that fills hearts with God’s peace (Ephesians 6:15).

SHIELD, HELMET, AND SWORD (Ephesians 6:16, 17)

When should Christians, as God’s soldiers, use God’s shield, helmet, and sword in the war between good and evil? Read Ephesians 6:16, 17 for the answer.

Paul uses a Roman shield as a word picture. The Roman shield was a large piece of wood that a Roman soldier carried in front of him to protect him from his enemy’s sword and arrows. The wood was covered with leather. The edges of the shield curved back to protect the soldier from blows to his side. In Roman times, arrows were covered in a sticky mixture made from tar and then lit on fire. Roman shields were soaked in water to stop burning arrows. In the same way, God’s shield “can stop all the burning arrows that come from the Evil One” (Ephesians 6:16, ERV).

Paul’s picture of the “shield of faith” (Ephesians 6:16, ERV) helps us remember that Old Testament writers used shields as word pictures for God. God is the same as a shield because He protects His people (Genesis 15:1, NIV; Psalm 3:3). When Paul orders Christians to pick up “the shield of faith” (Ephesians 6:16, ERV), he wants us to trust God in our fight against evil. God fights for us (Ephesians 6:10). God gives us the best weapons (Ephesians 6:11, 13). God also helps us win the fight.

Another part of God’s battle suit, as we saw, is the helmet or head covering. The helmets that Roman soldiers wore can help us understand God’s helmet. Roman helmets were made from iron or brass. A Roman soldier’s helmet had a bowl-shaped covering that protected his head. A metal flap at the back protected his neck. The helmet also had metal parts that protected the soldier’s ears, the top of his head, and his cheeks. Paul uses this word picture to help us better understand God’s saving mercy (Ephesians 2:6–10). When we put on the helmet of God’s saving mercy, we choose to trust in God. We refuse to be afraid of the spiritual evil that makes so many people afraid in the end times (compare Ephesians 1:15–23; Ephesians 2:1–10).

The last piece of God’s battle suit is a powerful weapon. This weapon is the “sword of [from] the Holy Spirit. The sword is God’s word [Bible]” (Ephesians 6:17, NIV). A Roman soldier’s sword was short with two sharp edges. In the same way, the Bible is a sharp weapon that “cuts” through Satan’s lies. The Bible, with all its promises, is the most important weapon in our fight against evil.



God is the same as a shield because He protects His people (Genesis 15:1; Psalm 3:3).

PRAYING ON THE BATTLEFIELD (Luke 18:1–8)

At the end of his war sermon, Paul asks his readers, as God's soldiers, to pray for all Christians everywhere (Ephesians 6:18). Paul also asks his readers to pray for him because he is in jail for being God's messenger (Ephesians 6:19, 20). In Roman times, armies prayed to their gods on the battlefield to help them win the war. We can read about many examples of battlefield prayers in the Old Testament. After Jahaziel orders God's people to fight, King Jehoshaphat leads all the people in Judah and Jerusalem in prayer. The king and his people bow to the Lord and worship Him (2 Chronicles 20:18). Of course, prayer isn't a 7th piece of God's battle suit. But prayer is an important part of Paul's war sermon and an important part of his military word picture (Ephesians 6).

If the church wants to have success in the fight against evil, the church must depend fully on God for strength. Prayer is one way that church members show God that they depend on Him.

As we just saw, Paul also asks church members to pray for him (Ephesians 6:19). Paul asks that the church will pray for God to give him the words to say at the right time. Paul wants their prayers to help him do the work that God gave him to do. God commanded Paul to announce the Good News about Jesus and to explain its wonderful mysteries (Ephesians 6:19). Part of this mystery is God's plan to save non-Jews along with Jews (read Ephesians 3:1–13). Together, these saved ones will be part of God's new human family (Ephesians 2:15; also, read Ephesians 2:11–22). This work is part of God's plan to bring everything into agreement and put all things under Jesus (Ephesians 1:10).

At different times, God's messengers invite His people to come together and pray. Read in Luke 18:1–8; Philippians 4:6; Colossians 4:2; and 1 Thessalonians 5:16–18 about some of these invitations to pray. Which invitation do you like the most? Why?

Why does the Bible so often invite us to pray with all our hearts? Paul's word picture about God's battle suit gives us two possible answers: (1) Prayer helps protect us in the fight against Satan. (2) God's battle suit shows us His promise to make us strong and help us win (Ephesians 6:10–17). Prayer helps us trust in God's promises.



Prayer is one way that church members show God that they depend on Him.



Paul saw his chains as something to wear with pride and honor because he got them while he served Jesus.

ADDITIONAL THOUGHT: “An army in battle became confused and weak unless all its soldiers worked together in agreement. If the soldiers did whatever they wanted, without caring about each other, then the army could not do its work. In the same way, God’s soldiers must act and work together in agreement. No one in the army must think that he is more important than anyone else. When God’s people work together, they will be in perfect agreement. If they do not work together, they will waste time and effort. Their skills will be wasted. Agreement is strength. When a few people work together, under one leader, they will have much success in everything they try to do.”—Ellen G. White, *Spalding and Magan Collection*, page 121, adapted.

“During times of war, governments often sent peace messengers to talk to the enemy. The peace messenger tried to solve the problems between their country and their enemy so that their two armies didn’t need to fight. Paul named himself as God’s messenger for peace. This name fits well with Paul’s military word picture in Ephesians 6. In Bible times, governments were expected to show respect to the peace messenger from a foreign country. But the Romans didn’t show Paul respect as God’s messenger. They put him in chains. Peace messengers wore a special chain that showed everyone who they were. The Romans saw the chains they made Paul wear as something to be ashamed of. But Paul saw his chains as something to wear with pride and honor because he got them while he served Jesus.”—David J. Williams, *Paul’s Metaphors: Their Context and Character* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1999), page 152, adapted.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ① Paul names himself God’s messenger in chains (Ephesians 6:10, NKJV). What is Paul saying?
- ② What does it mean for you and your church to bring God’s peace to an earth divided by war? How can we be messengers for peace in communities that are filled with hate and pain?
- ③ What “arrows of fire” does Satan shoot at you? How can the shield of faith help you put out the fire?
- ④ What does it mean to be a “prayer warrior”? What helpful advice does Ephesians 6:18–20 give to help us start a prayer group?

A FEW POWERFUL WORDS

Alexei Arushanian was from Ukraine. When war started in Ukraine in 2022, Alexei Arushanian was living safely across the border in Poland. Alexei worked for several years in Poland putting new windows into people's homes. But Alexei had many family members in Ukraine, and he was worried about them. Alexei called his family members in Ukraine to make sure they were OK and to ask if they needed any help. He asked his aunt, "How are you, Aunt Lyuda?"

Lyuda said, "All is fine, praise God. We're in hiding."

Lyuda's daughter Nastya and Nastya's young son were planning on joining other Ukrainians who crossed the border into Poland. During normal times, this trip took only a day. But now the trip took two or three days.

Alexei asked his aunt, "Will Nastya and her son come to Warsaw? If they do, ask them to phone me. They can stay with me as long as they need. I can meet them at the border." A short time later, another family member from Ukraine phoned Alexei to say that Nastya and her son already were in Poland. The two of them stayed with a Polish family. Many Polish people kindly offered to let Ukrainians stay in their homes.

Alexei promised Nastya to come for her and her son. Nastya and her son waited outside when Alexei drove to the house where they stayed. The owner of the house was a 60-year-old Polish man. The man walked with Nastya and her son to Alexei's car. Nastya waved goodbye as she got into the car. Alexei opened the trunk to put her stuff and her son's things inside. When the trunk lid opened, Alexei saw several copies of Ellen G. White's book *The Great Controversy* inside. Alexei belonged to a church group that gave people copies of *The Great Controversy*. Not many people were interested in reading, so Alexei and the other members of his church group often had a hard time finding people to accept copies. Alexei grabbed a book. He handed it to the 60-year-old man and said, "I have a gift for you."

The man asked, "What is this book about?"

Alexei said, "It's a Christian book that talks about Christian history from the time of the first Christians to the end times. It is very interesting."

The man accepted the book and hugged Alexei. Alexei was filled with joy. He never expected that giving someone a copy of *The Great Controversy* would be so easy.

Alexei says, "My giving this book to that man was God's plan. I pray that he reads it and accepts the book's message."

This quarter's 13th Sabbath Offering will support the Seventh-day Adventist Church's work in Europe, which includes Poland. Thank you for giving a big offering next Sabbath.

INSIDE Story

by ANDREW MCCHESENEY



"I have a gift for you."

