

Waging Peace



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: Eph. 6:10–20, 1 Pet. 4:1, 1 Pet. 5:8, Isa. 59:17, Isa. 52:8–10, 1 Thess. 5:16–18.

Memory Text: “In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one; and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God” (Ephesians 6:16, 17, *ESV*).

In John Bunyan's devotional classic, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, written while he was in jail, Christian is escorted into a palace armory and shown “all manner of furniture [weaponry], which their Lord had provided for pilgrims, as sword, shield, helmet, breastplate, all-prayer, and shoes that would not wear out. And there was here enough of this to harness [fit] out as many men for the service of the Lord, as there be stars in the heaven for multitude.” Before Christian departs, he is again escorted into the armory where “they harnessed [fitted] him from head to foot with what was of proof [impenetrable], lest, perhaps, he should meet with assaults in the way.”

Bunyan's writing in 1678 recalls a document written some 1,600 years earlier by the apostle Paul, the Epistle to the Ephesians, also composed in prison. In it the great missionary apostle imagines a great army, the church, visiting God's armory and suiting up in the divine *panoplia*, the Greek term for full, head-to-toe armor. God's armory holds enough of the finest weaponry for every soldier in His army to be “clad with northern steel from top to toe,” as they set forth to wage peace in His name.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, September 23.

The Church: A Unified Army

Read Ephesians 6:10–20. What is Paul saying about the kind of warfare the church is engaged in? Is Paul primarily depicting just an individual believer’s spiritual battle against evil, or the church’s corporate war against evil?

Victory in Greek and Roman warfare was dependent on the cooperation of the soldiers in a military unit and especially in their support for each other in the heat of battle. Individualism in battle was regarded as a characteristic of barbarian warriors, dooming them to defeat.

There are important reasons to support the idea that Paul, in line with this usual military understanding, is primarily addressing the church’s shared battle against evil in Ephesians 6:10–20: (1) The passage is the climax of a letter that is all about the church. It would be strange for Paul to conclude his letter with a picture of a lone Christian warrior doing battle against the foes of darkness; (2) At the end of the passage, Paul highlights Christian camaraderie in his call to prayer “for all the saints” (*Eph. 6:18–20, ESV*); (3) Most significant of all, earlier in the letter when Paul discusses the powers of evil, he places them over against the church, not the individual believer: “So that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places” (*Eph. 3:10, ESV*).

Thus, Ephesians 6:10–20 does not portray a solitary, lone warrior confronting evil. Instead, Paul as a general addresses the church as an army. He calls us to take up our full armor and, as a unified army, vigorously and unitedly press the battle. Paul chooses to conclude his thoroughgoing emphasis on the church, which has included sustained descriptions of the church as the body of Christ (*Eph. 1:22, 23; Eph. 4:1–16*), the building/temple of God (*Eph. 2:19–22*), and the bride of Christ (*Eph. 5:21–33*), with a final metaphor, the church as the army of the living God. Since we are approaching “the evil day” (*Eph. 6:13*), the final stages of the long-running battle against evil, it is no time to be fuzzy about our commitment to God or our loyalty to one another as fellow soldiers of Christ.

In what ways can we, as a corporate body, work together in the great controversy, in order to help each other in our struggles against evil, in whatever form it comes?

Belt and Breastplate

How does Paul imagine believers beginning their preparation for the battle against evil? *Eph. 6:14*; see also *1 Pet. 4:1*, *1 Pet. 5:8*, *Rom. 8:37–39*.

Paul's warning of an intense battle (*Eph. 6:13*) prepares readers for his final call to stand (his fourth, *compare Eph. 6:11, 13*) and is a detailed call to arms (*Eph. 6:14–17*). Paul describes the action of "girding up one's waist" (*compare Isa. 11:5*). Ancient, loose-fitting garments needed to be tied up around the waist before work or battle (*compare Luke 12:35, 37; Luke 17:8*). Paul imagines the believer suiting up in armor as would a Roman legionnaire, beginning with the leather military belt with its decorative belt plates and buckle. From the belt hung a number of leather straps covered with metal discs, together forming an "apron" worn as a badge of rank for visual effect. It served the essential function of tying up the garments and holding other items in place.

Truth is not the believers' own; it is a gift of God (*compare salvation in Eph. 2:8*). It is not, though, to remain abstract, a distant asset without any transforming impact on their lives. They are to "put on" God's truth, to experience and use this divine gift. They do not so much possess God's truth as God's truth possesses and protects them.

Paul next urges believers to put on "the breastplate of righteousness" (*compare 1 Thess. 5:8*). Like the belt of truth, it is of divine origin, being part of the armor of Yahweh in His role as the divine warrior (*Isa. 59:17*). The body armor used by soldiers in Paul's day was made of mail (small, intertwined iron rings), scale armor (small, overlapping scales of bronze or iron), or bands of overlapping iron fastened together. This body armor or breastplate protected the vital organs from the blows and thrusts of the enemy. In an analogous way, believers are to experience the spiritual protection offered by God's protective gift of righteousness. In Ephesians, Paul associates *righteousness* with holiness, goodness, and truth (*Eph. 4:24, Eph. 5:9*), thinking of it as the quality of treating others justly and well, especially fellow church members.

In what ways have you experienced the idea that goodness, holiness, and truth can be a protection?

Shoes: The Church Wages Peace

A Roman soldier, preparing for battle, would tie on a pair of sturdy, military sandals. A multilayered sole featured rugged hobnails, helping the soldier hold his ground and “stand” (*Eph. 6:11, 13, 14*). Paul explains this military footwear with language from Isaiah 52:7, which celebrates the moment when a messenger brings the news that Yahweh’s battle on behalf of His people is won (*Isa. 52:8–10*) and peace now reigns: “How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, who publishes peace” (*Isa. 52:7, ESV*).

Review the eight times Paul highlights peace in Ephesians. Why does he use a detailed military metaphor when he is so interested in peace? *Eph. 1:2; Eph. 2:14, 15, 17; Eph. 4:3; Eph. 6:15, 23.*

Paul celebrates peace as the work of Christ, “our peace,” the One who preaches peace “to you who were far off and peace to those who were near” (*Eph. 2:14–17, ESV*), drawing Jew and Gentile together into “one new humanity” (*Eph. 2:15, NIV*). By keeping alive the gospel story of Christ’s rescue and His creative work of peace, by celebrating His victory past and looking toward the victory shout in the future, believers shod their feet and stand ready for battle. Like the messenger in Isaiah 52:7, believers are messengers proclaiming the victory of Christ and His peace.

Paul, however, does not wish us to understand his call to arms as a call to take up military weapons against our enemies. That’s why he describes believers as proclaiming “the gospel of peace” (*Eph. 6:15*). Nor does he wish believers to be combative in their relationships with others, since he has been emphasizing unity, edifying speech, and tenderheartedness (*see especially Eph. 4:25–5:2*). The church is to “wage peace” by employing the gospel arsenal of Christian virtues (humility, patience, forgiveness, etc.) and practices (prayer, worship). Such acts are strategic, pointing toward God’s grand plan to unify all things in Christ (*Eph. 1:9, 10*).

How does the following quote help us understand what Paul’s military imagery should mean in our lives as believers? “God calls upon us to put on the armour. We do not want Saul’s armour, but the whole armour of God. Then we can go forth to the work with hearts full of Christ-like tenderness, compassion, and love.”—Ellen G. White, [Australasian] Union Conference Record, July 28, 1899.

Shield, Helmet, and Sword

When and how should believers as combatants in the great controversy use the shield, the helmet, and the sword? *Eph. 6:16, 17.*

Paul's *shield* is the large, rectangular shield of a Roman legionnaire. Made with wood and covered with leather, its edges curved inward to guard against attacks from the side. When soaked in water, shields were "able to quench . . . fiery darts" (*NKJV*), extinguishing arrows dipped in pitch and set on fire. Paul's description of the "shield of faith" reflects the Old Testament use of the shield as a symbol of God, who protects His people (*Gen. 15:1, Ps. 3:3*). To take up "the shield of faith" (*Eph. 6:16*) is to enter the cosmic battle with confidence in God, who fights on behalf of believers (*Eph. 6:10*), supplies the finest weaponry (*Eph. 6:11, 13*), and who ensures victory.

At the same time, the Roman battle helmet was made of iron or bronze. To the bowl that protected the head were added a plate at the back to guard the neck, ear guards, a brow ridge, and hinged plates to protect the cheeks. Given the essential protection the helmet provided, "the helmet of salvation" (*Eph. 6:17*) symbolizes the present salvation believers experience in solidarity with the resurrected, ascended, and exalted Christ (*Eph. 2:6–10*). To put on "the helmet of salvation" means to reject the fear of spiritual powers so common in the time and, instead, to trust in the supreme power of Christ (*compare Eph. 1:15–23, Eph. 2:1–10*).

The final item of armor is "the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God" (*Eph. 6:17*), referring to the Roman legionnaire's short, two-edged sword. The usual battle tactic was to throw two javelins (not mentioned by Paul) and then draw the sword and charge, employing the short sword in a thrusting motion. The believers' sword is "the sword of the Spirit" in that it is supplied by the Spirit, a weapon identified as "the word of God." Paul steps forward as general and issues a call to arms, speaking promises of hope and victory from the divine Commander in Chief. It is these promises, issued in Ephesians 6:10–20, that constitute "the word of God" as the lead weapon in the battle against evil. The "word of God," then, refers to the broad promises of the gospel that we find in the Bible.

Even if we might not like so many military images, what should this imagery teach us about just how literal the great controversy really is and how seriously we should take it?

Practicing Battlefield Prayer

In concluding his battle exhortation, Paul urges believers as soldiers to participate in crucial, continuing prayer “for all the saints” (*Eph. 6:18, NKJV*) and for himself as imprisoned ambassador (*Eph. 6:19, 20*). This call to prayer can be seen as an extension of the military imagery, since calling out to God (or to the gods) in prayer was a common practice on the ancient battlefield. To cite a biblical example: following the battle exhortation of Jahaziel, Jehoshaphat leads “all Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem” in falling down “before the LORD, worshipping the LORD” (*2 Chron. 20:18, ESV*). While prayer is not a seventh piece of armor, it is an integral part of Paul’s battle exhortation and military metaphor.

In the first of two prayer requests, Paul asks the addressees to participate in fervent, urgent, and perseverant prayer “for all the saints” (*Eph. 6:18, NKJV*). If the church is to be successful in its battle against the powers of evil, it will need to practice dependence on God through Spirit-inspired prayer.

Paul’s second prayer request is for himself: “and also for me” (*Eph. 6:19, ESV*). He asks for prayer that God might grant him the right message (“that words may be given to me”), at the right time (“in opening my mouth”), delivered in the right way (“boldly to proclaim”), and addressing a most important theme, “the mystery of the gospel” (*Eph. 6:19, ESV*). This last phrase refers to what we might call the “open secret” of God’s intervention in Christ to redeem Gentiles along with Jews (*see Eph. 3:1–13*), creating “one new humanity” (*Eph. 2:15, NIV; see also Eph. 2:11–22*) as a signal of the overarching plan “to unite all things” in Christ (*Eph. 1:10, ESV*).

Review the following “calls to prayer” in the New Testament. Which one inspires you most? Why? *Luke 18:1–8, Phil. 4:6, Col. 4:2, 1 Thess. 5:16–18.*

Why are believers so often urged to participate in earnest, persevering prayer? Paul’s military metaphor suggests two answers: (1) the threat of spiritual battle against an array of supernatural enemies is dire and real; and (2) God’s promises of spiritual strength and victory are illustrated through Paul’s military imagery (*Eph. 6:10–17*). Earnest, persevering prayer provides opportunity for us to listen carefully to these promises, to celebrate them, and to thank God for the resources of His grace.

Further Thought: “An army in battle would become confused and weakened unless all worked in concert. If the soldiers should act out their own impulsive ideas, without reference to each other’s positions and work, they would be a collection of independent atoms; they could not do the work of an organized body. So the soldiers of Christ must act in harmony. They alone must not be cherished. If they do this, the Lord’s people in the place of being in perfect harmony, of one mind, one purpose, and consecrated to one grand object, will find efforts fruitless, their time and capabilities wasted. Union is strength. A few converted souls acting in harmony, acting for one grand purpose, under one head, will achieve victories at every encounter.”—Ellen G. White, *Spalding and Magan Collection*, p. 121.

What is the significance of Paul’s labeling himself “an ambassador in chains” (*Eph. 6:20, ESV*)? Ambassadors often played challenging roles during wartime; so, Paul’s self-description fits the context of his military metaphor. Ambassadors were to be treated with the respect due the person or country that sent them. So there is stark contrast between Paul’s status as ambassador for the Supreme Ruler of the cosmos and the utter disrespect signaled by his *chains* (literally, “chain”). However, since ambassadors would wear a “chain of office,” Paul’s mention of a “chain” may be “spiced with irony,” in which he sees his chain as “a decoration to be worn with distinction.”—David J. Williams, *Paul’s Metaphors: Their Context and Character* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1999), p. 152.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 In your corner of a world divided and at war, what does it mean for you and your congregation to “wage peace”? How can we be agents of peace in a world so increasingly characterized by aggression and violence?
- 2 What particular “fiery darts” are being hurled in your direction? How can you ensure that the “shield of faith” is in place to extinguish them?
- 3 We sometimes speak of “prayer warriors.” How might we conduct “prayer ministry” based on Ephesians 6:18–20?
- 4 How should we treat those who are wounded on the battlefield of the great controversy? How should we treat the Christian believer who, in the heat of the battle, flees out of fear or openly capitulates to the other side?

Power of a Few Words

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY

When armed conflict erupted in his homeland of Ukraine in 2022, Alexei Arushanian was living safely across the border in Poland, where he had worked for several years installing windows in people's homes. But he had many relatives in Ukraine, and he was worried about them.

He called relative after relative to check on their well-being and to see if he could help. "How are you, Aunt Lyuda?" he asked.

"All is fine, praise God," she replied. "We are in hiding."

She said her daughter, Nastya, and her young son were planning to join refugees spilling across the border to Poland. During normal times, the trip would have taken a day. But now the trip would take two to three days.

"Will they come to Warsaw?" Alexei asked. "Have them call me. They can stay with me as long as they need. I can meet them at the border."

A short time later, another relative called from Ukraine to say that Nastya and her son were already in Poland. They had crossed the border and were staying with a Polish family who had opened their home to them. Many Polish people generously offered temporary housing to refugees.

Alexei called Nastya and promised to come for her and her son.

She and her son were waiting when Alexei drove up to the house. The 60-year-old owner of the house accompanied Nastya and her son to the car. Nastya waved goodbye as she got into the car, and Alexei opened the car trunk to place her and her son's belongings inside. As the trunk lid opened, he saw several copies of Ellen White's *The Great Controversy* inside. Alexei belonged to a church group that distributed the book, a difficult task with few receptive people, and he always kept several books in the trunk. Alexei grabbed a book. "I have a gift for you," he told the 60-year-old man.

"What kind of gift?" the man asked, curiously.

"It's a Christian book that contains the history of Christianity from the first Christians who defended the truth after Christ returned to heaven to the events that will occur at the end of the world," Alexei said. "I think that you will find it interesting."

The man accepted the book. Then he gave Alexei a big hug. "Thank you," he said.



Alexei was overjoyed. He had not expected it to be so easy. "This was the will of God," he says. "All I had to do was say a few words, and he took the book. I pray that he reads it and that his wife and children read it, too. I hope that he accepts it."

This quarter's Thirteenth Sabbath Offering will go to the Trans-European Division, which includes Poland. Thank you for planning a generous offering next Sabbath.