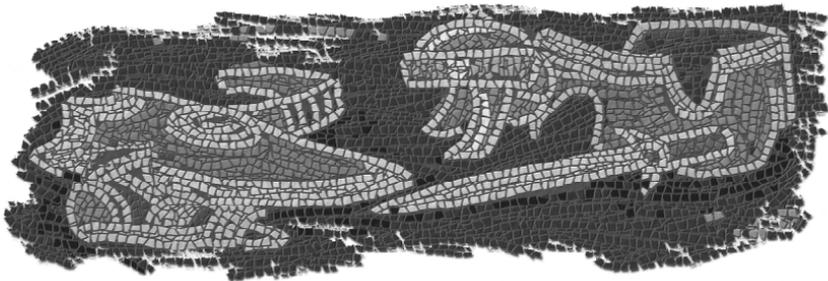


The Christian Armor



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?”

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—some-what 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?

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?

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?

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?

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.”

Maria's Celebration of Joy

by J. H. ZACHARY

Maria Brozozek was a retired tailor from Poland. She wanted to do something to help people in her hometown. One day she learned that a poor family there could not pay their rent, and the apartment owner was planning to evict them.

Maria appealed to the community to donate used items that she could sell to help pay the family's rent.

With this action, Maria's life took a change she could not have predicted. She found other people that needed help. She decided to plan a special day for her community that she called the Celebration of Joy. She planned a number of activities for people to enjoy and asked the community to come and bring used items to donate. After the children performed a play based on a Bible story, Maria held an auction to sell the donated items. The proceeds of the auction were set aside to help the poor within the community.

On another occasion Maria arranged an art exhibition and invited a local artist to provide several pieces of art to sell. Half of the proceeds were given for the poor. On other occasions actors performed in a benefit show to help the city's poor.

When people ask Maria why she is doing this, she tells them that Jesus went about helping the poor and the sick, and God has asked her to do the same. Radio and television stations in town featured Maria's Celebration of Joy, and the city newspaper now runs a column listing the needs of people and sources for help. People have become more aware of the needs of poor children, and provide clothes for them. Disadvantaged children are taken on excursions and field trips to make their lives richer and more joyful.

Because of Maria's compassion for the poor, the attitude of the people in that city toward the Adventist church has changed. A local priest has encouraged his congregation to support the Celebration of Joy and invited Adventists to present a musical concert in their church to benefit the poor. Many people have shown an interest in knowing more about the teachings of the Adventist Church, and Maria is studying the Bible with ten people as a result of her work.

Maria never dreamed that the needs of one poor family would bring so much joy to her city or so many people to a better knowledge of God's love.

MARIA BROZOZEK shares God's love in Legionowo, Poland. Until his death, J. H. ZACHARY coordinated outreach among the Jews and Muslims in the North American Division.