

“Arming” for Victory



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Eph. 6:14–17, 2 Cor. 6:7, Eph. 5:9, Rom. 10:15, 1 Thess. 5:8, Mark 14:38.*

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*).

Key Thought: Every believer must be personally and individually armed as we each find ourselves immersed in the great controversy.

Satan's ultimate goal is to wrest for himself the allegiance that all true believers give to Christ. Before conversion, people belonged to the devil's realm; he ruled over them. Although conversion to Christ takes the believer away from the devil's dominion, it does not completely shatter the devil's power. If anything, Satan increases his efforts to destroy our faith and win us back to himself. He has a vast array of deceptive ploys; Scripture calls them “the wiles of the devil” (*Eph. 6:11*). In the end, though, no matter the enemy's deceptions, ploys, and wiles, he can take no one from Christ who is determined to stay faithful to the Lord (Satan might make our life miserable, but that's another matter entirely).

This week's lesson focuses on the Christian's armor in this warfare. Putting on all of God's armor is our only protection. Therefore, we need to understand the nature of that armor because, without it, we would surely fall prey to the enemy; with it, our victory is assured.

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, November 17.*

The Need for Arming Personally

In Ephesians 6:12, Paul describes the Christian life as a struggle, saying, “we . . . wrestle.” Notice, he uses the plural. The passage reads, literally, “We do not wrestle against flesh and blood” (*NKJV*). Every Christian is brought into the picture. In verse 13 Paul urges his readers to put on the whole armor of God. It is with God’s armor that we are to equip ourselves, and it has been made available for our use. Paul begins the verse with the word *wherefore/therefore*, implying that, in view of the nature of the conflict, such arming is necessary. Paul then describes the way in which the Christian ought to be armed and does so using the imagery of how a Roman soldier would have been armed for battle.

Consider the imagery of Ephesians 6:14–17 carefully. What in the picture impresses you with the fact that here is a struggle that not only involves every Christian but calls, fundamentally, for personal engagement? What does that mean to you that you, yourself, have a fight in which to engage?

The word translated as “wrestling” originally referred to hand-to-hand combat but was later applied to other types of fighting. As used here, although a real hand-to-hand contest with demons may not be in view, the word clearly points to an *individualizing* of the struggle.

The parable of the ten virgins in Matthew 25:1–13, though in a different context than what’s being considered here, nevertheless speaks to the issue of *personal* engagement in spiritual matters. Ellen G. White applies the spiritual conditions of the five virgins to Paul’s description of a class of end-time people who have a form of godliness but lack its power (*2 Tim. 3:1–5*). “This is the class that in time of peril are found crying, Peace and safety. They lull their hearts into security, and dream not of danger. When startled from their lethargy, they discern their destitution, and entreat others to supply their lack; but in spiritual things no man can make up another’s deficiency.” —Ellen G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, pp. 411, 412.

What are some things that only you, yourself, can do for yourself—things that no one else can? (For instance, no one can eat for you.) How do you then apply that same principle to the arming of self for the spiritual conflict in which we are each individually engaged?

Girdle of Truth, Breastplate of Righteousness

“Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness” (Eph. 6:14, NKJV).

Though it’s a little difficult to know the exact nature of the girdle, it seems that in Ephesians 6:14, Paul may have been referring to a leather apron that offered some protection to the lower abdomen but also made freedom of movement and readiness for action possible. In this sense, the girdle was a piece of basic armor. And that armor, said Paul, was “truth.”

Along with the girdle of truth was the breastplate of righteousness. Thus, in this one verse Paul links the concepts of truth and righteousness.

Look up the following texts. How can they help us to understand the link between truth and righteousness, and why are they so crucial for our spiritual protection in the great controversy? 1 Kings 3:6, Ps. 15:2, 96:13, Prov. 12:17, Isa. 48:1, 2 Cor. 6:7, Eph. 5:9.

When the apostle Paul speaks of righteousness as a breastplate in the context of spiritual warfare, he has moral issues in mind. Doing right and practicing righteousness, or, in other words, living out the “truth,” are as vital to Christians in the battle with the powers of evil as the breastplate is to the soldier on the battlefield. When we neglect to do what is right, when we turn our backs on what we know to be the truth, we are easy prey for Satan’s attacks, because we are leaving a wide-open hole in our armor.

At the same time, though this “righteousness” includes living a righteous life, we must always remember the other aspect of righteousness, and that is the righteousness of Christ, which covers the believer and remains the believer’s only hope of salvation. As long as we cling to this truth—that our salvation rests in Jesus—we can be protected from one of Satan’s most efficient spiritual assaults against us: discouragement.

Have you ever been tempted to give up your walk with Jesus because you’ve been discouraged over your life, your character, and/or your actions? If so, why is understanding the truth about Christ’s righteousness so crucial to a strong defense against Satan’s assaults?

Preparation and the Shield of Faith

The Roman soldier armed himself to ensure that his steps would not be impeded on rough terrain. To facilitate movement over all kinds of roads, Roman soldiers often wore shoes studded with sharp nails. Such shoes ensured a good grip, and Paul likens the shoes to the “readiness,” or “preparation,” of the gospel of peace (*Eph. 6:15*).

Read Isaiah 52:7, Romans 10:15, and Ephesians 6:15. Paul’s idea seems to be steadfastness in the Christian life of warfare. In what sense does the gospel of peace provide the Christian with a “good grip” in spiritual warfare?

Ephesians 6:15 may be translated in various ways: “feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace,” “having feet fitted with the readiness of the gospel of peace,” or “having shod your feet with the equipment of the gospel of peace.” The key is a Greek word that can mean “preparedness,” as in a prepared foundation or base. Hence, the gospel of peace as a “prepared foundation” is the peace a Christian experiences as a result of having been reconciled with God through the blood of Christ. This reconciliation gives the Christian a firm foothold from which to engage in the spiritual battle that we all face.

The next piece of armor that Paul speaks about is the shield, which he likens to faith (*Eph. 6:16*). In introducing this armor, the apostle prefaces his point with a phrase that may be translated as “above all” or “besides” or “in addition to all.” What do you think the apostle means by this opening phrase?

The word translated as “shield” comes from the word for “door.” The shield, measuring about four feet by two-and-a-half feet and consisting of two layers of wood glued together, was shaped like a door. Because arrows in those days were dipped in pitch and then set on fire, the wooden shield was covered with leather in order to extinguish the glowing arrows and blunt their tips. This was a prominent weapon among all the weapons of defense.

The spiritual analogy isn’t hard to see: among the “fiery arrows” of Satan are lust, doubt, greed, vanity, and so forth. “But faith in God, held aloft like a shield, catches them, snuffs out the flame, and makes them fall harmless to the ground.”—*The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, p. 1045. This kind of faith is primarily faith in action, a faith that, while including doctrinal truth, goes beyond mere belief. It is a faith that manifests itself in an active defense against the assaults of the enemy. Of course, we can’t save ourselves, and we can’t fight the devil ourselves; our battle is to daily choose the Lord and His ways over anything the devil will throw before us.

Helmet and Sword

The helmet of salvation in Ephesians 6:17 is most likely taken from Isaiah 59:17, although Paul applies it differently. In Isaiah 59, it is God who wears the helmet of salvation; here, in Ephesians, the Christian is called upon to receive it. Whereas the previous items may have been laid out for the soldier to be picked up, the helmet is handed to him. Perhaps this is to emphasize the total “giftedness” of salvation.

In 1 Thessalonians 5:8, Paul speaks of the helmet as the hope of salvation. In Ephesians 6:17, the helmet is depicted simply as salvation. How may this shift in emphasis help to explain how salvation can be a weapon of defense?

Salvation in the New Testament is a present experience that will climax in eternity by way of deliverance from every kind of evil. The victorious helmet that God (*Isa. 59:17*) wears is given to the believer as protection. Because the ultimate goal of the devil’s attack is to deprive Christians of their salvation, the present assurance of salvation that is “given” to them apart from their own works becomes a powerful weapon for surviving the conflict. Truly can the believer in any spiritual conflict proclaim with the psalmist, “O God the Lord, the strength of my salvation, You have covered my head in the day of battle” (*Ps. 140:7, NKJV*).

After mentioning the helmet of salvation, Paul speaks next about “the sword of the spirit,” which is the Word of God. Compare that text with Hebrews 4:12. What important truth is being conveyed by these verses, especially in the context of our battle with Satan?

The temptation of Christ as recorded in Matthew 4:1–10 is a beautiful illustration of how the Word of God can be an effective weapon. The passage should also provide an incentive to Christians to buttress themselves with the truths that are revealed in the Word of God.

So many forces are at play in attempts to weaken our trust in the Bible. What are some of those forces in your own society, church, or culture? More important, how can you defend yourself against any and every attempt (which at times can be very subtle) to weaken your trust in the Word of God?

Praying Always

Ephesians 6:18 begins with the phrase “praying always,” which suggests that praying is connected with the previous verses. The idea is that the putting on, taking up, and receiving of heaven’s armor, all necessitate reliance on God. Hence, “prayer is not another weapon; rather, it is the spirit, the manner, in which the whole armor is to be worn and the battle fought. Paul is here urging it as a perpetual state of mind, a continuous attitude of communion with God.”—*The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, p. 1046.

Study carefully Ephesians 6:18. What words and phrases associated with Paul’s admonition to the Christian regarding prayer suggest alertness and discipline?

The Bible frequently calls on people not to cease from prayer (*Luke 18:1, Rom. 12:12, Phil. 4:6, Col. 4:2, 1 Thess. 5:17*). But in the context of the combat with evil forces that Paul is addressing in Ephesians 6, he stresses the fact that every occasion in life is to be wrapped in prayer. Such an attitude about prayer is no small demand of Christians, especially because our first instinct in moments of difficulty is to consult friends and colleagues, which is fine and has its place. Prayer, though, should always be the first line of defense and is something that we should be always doing.

Ephesians 6:18 begins with the phrase “praying always” and continues with another about being “watchful.” About what are we to be watchful, and why?

When Jesus was in Gethsemane, He told Peter and the other disciples whom He found sleeping to watch and pray (*Mark 14:38*). Before this happened, Jesus had spent some time warning the disciples to watch (*Mark 13:33–37*). From the perspective of Luke, watching is linked with prayer as a constant affair that brings spiritual strength to the Christian. In Ephesians 6:18, the emphasis is on praying for others. No doubt, as we pray for others, we ourselves are spiritually strengthened, and we ourselves are better armed for the ensuing conflict, no matter what form it takes.

Why is praying for ourselves more important for us spiritually than having others pray for us (however important that is)? What does personal prayer do for you that the prayers of others just can’t?

Further Study: Read Ellen G. White, “Importance of Seeking True Knowledge,” pp. 312–314, in *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 8; “The Color Line,” pp. 219, 220, in *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 9; “O God! Help Me to Higher Levels,” p. 105, in *My Life Today*; “Called to Reach a Higher Standard,” pp. 311–315, in *The Acts of the Apostles*.

“In every soul two powers are struggling earnestly for the victory. Unbelief marshals its forces, led by Satan, to cut us off from the Source of our strength. Faith marshals its forces, led by Christ, the author and finisher of our faith. Hour by hour, in the sight of the heavenly universe, the conflict goes forward. This is a hand-to-hand fight, and the great question is, Which shall obtain the mastery? This question each must decide for himself. In this warfare all must take a part, fighting on one side or the other. From the conflict there is no release. . . . We are urged to prepare for this conflict. ‘Be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might. Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.’ The warning is repeated, ‘Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.’ ”—Ellen G. White, *The Youth’s Instructor*, January 10, 1901.

“We must put on every piece of the armor, and then stand firm. The Lord has honored us by choosing us as His soldiers. Let us fight bravely for Him, maintaining the right in every transaction. Rectitude in all things is essential to the welfare of the soul. As you strive for the victory over your own inclinations, He will help you by His Holy Spirit to be circumspect in every action, that you may give no occasion for the enemy to speak evil of the truth. Put on as your breastplate that divinely protected righteousness which it is the privilege of all to wear. This will protect your spiritual life.”—Ellen G. White Comments, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, p. 1119.

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ However much this week’s lesson emphasized the personal aspect of the struggle in which we’re all engaged, as Christians we are part of a larger community. How can the community as a whole help one another in their individual conflicts? What are the practical things that the community can do to help those who are in spiritual need, in whatever form that need may come?
- ❷ How does the military imagery that Paul uses reinforce the reality of the great-controversy motif that is so central to the Bible? Why is it always important to keep the reality of this conflict before us? Who could imagine a soldier on the battlefield, forgetting that he was in a war? How much more important is it for us not to forget either?

Power of Music

Kai Ming was a Christian. Her greatest joy was leading her church choir. Then she met Yen, a Global Mission pioneer who was working in her city. Kai Ming was impressed with Yen's singing and invited him to teach her choir how to sing better. Yen agreed.

Soon Kai Ming realized that Yen knew his Bible well. She asked him to teach her more about the Bible. She invited her fellow church members to join her to learn more of the Word of God. When the leaders of Kai Ming's church learned that Yen was teaching their members Bible truths the leaders didn't believe in, they threatened Yen and warned Kai Ming not to associate with her former church members.

Kai Ming was baptized and opened her home to start a house church. She invited her friends to come and learn more about God. In spite of her former church's edict, Kai Ming invited her former church friends to come and hear Yen teach about God. She wanted her friends to understand God's will and the reasons why she had left her former church.

Within a month of Kai Ming's baptism, 12 people were coming to her house church, seven of whom came from her former church. They wanted to know what had drawn Kai Ming away from their church and the choir that she loved so much.

Kai Ming visited one old woman who was bedridden with a bad back. She prayed for the woman every day, and within a month the old woman could walk again. The woman, her daughter, and her granddaughter began attending Kai Ming's house church to thank God for her healing.

Others came asking for prayer for health and personal issues, and the group prayed for them. When several saw answers to their prayers, they came back and brought others.

Kai Ming made a good living selling blankets. But she yearned to reach more people for God. So, she gave up her blanket business and became a Global Mission pioneer. She has taken over Yen's work in her city, allowing Yen to begin working in another city. In the past three years Kai Ming has led about fifty or sixty people to the Seventh-day Adventist Church, including her two adult daughters.

"I've always believed in Jesus," she says. "But when I met Yen, I learned the whole truth of the Bible. I thank God that He is willing to use me to lead others to Jesus. God is so important in my life."

Our mission offerings help support the work of Global Mission in China and around the world. Thank you for giving.

KAI MING FANG is a Global Mission pioneer in Jiangsu Province, north of Shanghai, China.