

Life Group Study Guide

Ephesians—carefully, reverently, prayerfully considered-- will change our lives. This study is based on a sermon preached Sunday morning at WEFC entitled: *Suit Up* and reflects on **Ephesians 6:14-17**.

Before you begin: Take some time as a group to *pray* that God would be at work in your minds and hearts. There is a real difference between knowing and understanding something intellectually and having a heart that is deeply affected by the truth. Pray that the Holy Spirit will help you to *understand* God's word, *welcome* it into your heart, and then *apply* it faithfully to your lives.

Have someone from your group volunteer to read aloud **Ephesians 6:14-17**:

¹⁴ Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, ¹⁵ and, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace. ¹⁶ In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one; ¹⁷ and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

Last week we noted that Christianity is SAVING FAITH, PLUS FRUITFUL RESPONSE and that Satan's two-fold plan is to destroy faith and deny fruit. Thus, we concluded, Persevering in Faith and Righteousness is the essence of Spiritual Warfare. Intel is essential for victory in any battle. You need to know your enemy and his tactics. **Rev. 12:9-10** gives us the two main ways the devil operates to accomplish his goals. Satan is called: 1) **The Deceiver** (cf. **2 Cor. 4:4, 11:14; John 8:44; Gen. 3:1-5; Rev. 20:3**). The devil aims to enslave us to sin through subtle lies and suggestions. (e.g., "*Did God really say?*"; "*You will not surely die.*") 2) **The Accuser** (cf. **Zech. 3:1-5; Rev. 20:3**). When we sin, the devil quickly points an accusatory finger and condemns us. He wants us to despair and to feel hopeless. He *deceives*, and then he *accuses*. Discuss this jab-hook combo that the devil delivers. What are some lies about God and lies about yourself Satan tries to tell you?

If we are going to *persevere* on the battlefield, we need to be outfitted for war. Last week we saw, in **v. 11 and 13**, that the armour of God enables us to stand. If Adam and Eve, King David, and Simon Peter had been wearing this armour, they would have been able to stand. Can you think of a time this armour would have enabled you to stand?

Paul tells us we are to fight having put on truth, righteousness, peace, faith, salvation, and the Word of God. Let's take them one at a time:

1) The Belt of Truth (v. 14a)

Satan is a liar, but the believer whose life is controlled by the truth will defeat him. The belt is that piece of equipment that holds the other parts of the armour together, and the truth is an integrating force in the life of the victorious Christian. Much earlier in this letter, back in **Ephesians 1:13**, Paul referred to *"the gospel of your salvation"* as *"the word of truth" that you heard when you believed in Christ*. So, we can say that *"truth,"* in Paul's mind, in the context of this letter, appears to refer to *"the truth of the Gospel."* The only way we can withstand the attempts of the devil to lead us into apostasy and ruin is if we believe and trust in the truth of the gospel. If the gospel we believe is not the true gospel, we will be easy prey for the deceitful schemes of Satan. Discuss as a group: What are some false gospels people fall for, and what is the true gospel?

There is another way we can put on truth. Remember, after David fell into sin with Bathsheba he responded to God in **Ps. 51:6**: *Behold, you delight in truth in the inward being, and you teach me wisdom in the secret heart.* That is to say, if I'm all external in my spirituality, none of those externals are ever going to be able to guard me against the wiles of the devil. I must do more than merely speak the truth. There needs to be an underlying absolute truthfulness about my faith in God.

2) The Breastplate of Righteousness (v. 14b)

There are two main ways the Bible talks about righteousness: ethical righteousness and what theologians refer to as *"forensic or legal righteousness."* Is Paul telling us that the way we withstand the enemy is to act ethically, or is he telling us that the way we resist the enemy is by trusting in the righteousness of Christ that is our legal justification before a Holy God? In one sense, I think the answer has to be both. The evidence I'm trusting in the righteousness which comes to me through Jesus Christ is that I'm increasing in righteousness myself. That said, the emphasis here appears to be on wearing Christ's righteousness, that justifying righteousness that is credited to us in the gospel. Remember Paul began this section, *"Be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might."* Not in your own strength! Moreover, all of these armour metaphors employed by Paul in this paragraph are borrowed from the Book of Isaiah. The breastplate of righteousness is a straight lift out of **Isaiah 59:17** (Read also **Is. 11:4, 52:7**).

Clearly, the righteousness Paul has in mind is God's righteousness which alone can bring salvation, and we can import that same meaning into our text. To *"put on the breastplate of righteousness"* is to trust entirely in the righteousness of Christ who lived a sinless life and then transferred us his merits. Practically speaking, emphasizing Christ and his righteousness will help us against a widespread form of spiritual attack.

The devil will often try to derail your faith by assaulting your feelings. He will bombard you with feelings of doubt and feelings of guilt. He will want you to defend yourself by trying to stir up positive feelings, intimate worship experiences, and a false sense of freedom from guilt. What he's actually trying to do is to get you to put your trust in your feelings and in your performance as a Christian. If he can get you trusting in those things, he has you right where he wants you.

We need to be careful not to promote our feelings to a place where our adversary is able to assault us through them and cause severe damage. We must remember that our emotions are not authoritative, the cross of Jesus Christ is authoritative, and nothing else gets to speak on the last day, certainly not our emotional highs and lows. When we're feeling unworthy, and the accuser condemns us, we need to cling to the objective fact of our salvation, *that God made him who knew no sin to be sin in order that we might become the righteousness of God (2 Cor. 5:21)*. That's our breastplate of righteousness.

Side note: that is not an excuse to make statements like "feelings don't matter," so you can justify being an insensitive jerk. Feelings do matter. God does not want you to live in guilt and shame; he wants you to FEEL joy, but not by manufacturing a good mood. Christian joy is rooted in gospel truth, knowing your guilt and shame have been removed at the cross.

3) Readiness that Comes from the Gospel of Peace (v. 15)

The idea here seems to be that the Christian should be fitted with the gospel message of peace, always ready to share it with others. We spread the good news that Christ is our peace. He has destroyed the dividing walls of hostility, uniting new people in himself (**Eph. 2:14-17**). Christians have peace with God and one another, but how does sharing this beautiful news help us withstand our enemy?

Well, it has a wonderful way of confirming us in our faith. There is almost no better way to learn something than to teach it to others. Bible School professors will often ask students to summarize the gospel in 100 words or less to see if they actually understand what they mean one day to teach. Could you do that if someone asked you to? Preparing and then delivering the gospel is a great way to confirm your faith and thwart the efforts of the devil to deceive and confuse you.

4) The Shield of Faith (v. 16)

Roman soldiers typically used two types of shields, a smaller one when fighting as an individual on the move and a larger one when part of a defensive battle line. The word

used here implies that Paul has the larger version in mind. This large shield was the size of a small door. A man could easily hide behind it for protection, certainly from flaming arrows. As to what Paul means by "*faith*," we can return to his words in chapters **1:19** and **3:16-17**. In both passages, we find the same Greek word for faith, and both times it is connected with power. Faith in this context is how we apprehend spiritual power. By abiding with Christ through the Spirit, we become strong to withstand the assaults of our enemy.

In plain English, here is the point: Your best defence against apostasy and fruitlessness is to develop your own spiritual life. By and large, most of the people who crash and burn do so because they neglect the means of grace. They attend church infrequently, are undisciplined in personal devotion, and are careless in their fellowship. They let the tank run dry and are quickly and inevitably overwhelmed. Don't do that; feed your faith!

5) The Helmet of Salvation (v. 17a)

Now we've already seen this in **Is. 59:17**:

"He put on righteousness as a breastplate, and a helmet of salvation on his head"

In Isaiah those things are synonymous – they are both ways of saying that God has armed himself to bring salvation to his people. Likewise, here in Ephesians they are synonymous but they are positioned in slightly different ways. We put on the breastplate of Christ's righteousness, but we put on the helmet of our own salvation. The Bible often speaks of salvation simultaneously as a completed event and as a present process and reality. We see that same idea for example in **Philippians 2:12**:

Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling,

Is Paul telling them to try and work their way into heaven? No, he is saying that saved people need to keep working to understand, experience and live out their salvation. Salvation is a gift we have been given. We have the receipt – we own it; it's ours and can't be taken from us. But we still need to unwrap it and unfold it and let it work its way into our lives like yeast through a batch of dough. That's why we keep preaching the gospel to ourselves after we get saved. It's one of the ways we preserve faith and protect fruit under constant spiritual assault.

6) The Sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God (v. 17b)

The Greek word (*maxairan*) refers to the Roman short sword. That's important. It is often said that this is our only offensive weapon, but that's not Paul's point here. We saw last week that we're called to stand, not attack. A short sword is for dirty, up-close killing. You don't charge the enemy's line with a dagger. You stick him in the ribs as you wrestle.

The grammar of the text implies that the Spirit makes the Word effective. Paul is not saying that the Bible IS the Holy Spirit; he's saying the Holy Spirit uses the Bible and makes it alive and effective in our lives. When we read the Scriptures and memorize them, we put a sword in the hand of the Holy Spirit with which he makes war against the devil inside the fortress of our hearts and minds.

Discuss the temptation cycle found in **James 1:13-15**. How did Jesus interrupt this cycle when he was tempted in the wilderness (**Matt. 4:1-11**; cf. **Deut. 8:3, 6:13,16**)?

How can we escape from the snares of the evil one?

Concluding Thought:

What do you do if you've been defeated?

1) You take courage.

The very fact that you know you've been defeated means you're not spiritually dead yet. You're still able to say, 'Lord, have mercy on me.' You can still, by God's grace, repent. There's always time while we still draw breath to turn, get help, ask for prayer and get back on the battlefield.

2) Learn to distinguish between a battle and the entire war.

Having lost a battle, the devil will try to say to you, 'You're done for.' And you need to learn to say back, 'you may have won this battle, but you have not won the war.' Christ won the war! Christians do not fight *for* victory in the ultimate sense; we fight *from* victory. We have a sure and certain hope that we will overcome, which allows us to get back up and start recuperating in Jesus. Then choose to consciously, painfully, slowly, learn again what it means to put on the whole armour of God. Determine to know and trust God's word, and you'll be able to stand against the evil one.

Close in Prayer