

EPHESIANS

blessed to be a blessing

WEEK TEN

Ephesians 6.10-13

If there was ever a cause for implementation of biblical passages, it is here. After reading this week's passage on the armor of God, our final jaunt into the land of Ephesians, let's be sure to devote ourselves to actually *using* these instructions daily.

In case you have not observed or experienced it yet in your life, the enemies of God are still present, wreaking havoc on this world. As is fitting for our passage, we will clump "evil" and "consequences of living in a broken world" in the same category. These come in many forms, sometimes subtle, sometimes blatant: sickness, death, hopelessness, spiritual darkness, betrayal, disaster, war, starvation, tyranny, abuse. Christ's first coming leashed these powers, so they do not have the authority to do anything they please whenever they please. But, they are still a force to contend with until Christ comes again and smashes once-and-for-all-time any power or sway they may have in our world, subduing them forever (Amen!). Until then, we wait, not as ones who cower in a corner and hide our faces but stand firm as dedicated, believing people of God, strengthened and fully equipped for battle against His enemies.

Being a Christ-follower is not a passive activity. Specifically related to this passage, we are to put something on – the full armor of God. A Roman soldier did not look like a soldier, was not ready for battle, nor could publicly identify with the army until he had his full garb on. His plain, day clothes just didn't cut it. The author of Ephesians is telling us that our plain, day clothes (e.g., habitually walking out the door in the morning without aligning ourselves with God, applying solely human "wisdom" to life situations, fully relying on the TSA to protect us, etc.) is just not going to cut it! We absolutely must begin to clothe ourselves with God's provision to display to the antagonistic forces that we will not tolerate their taunting or tactics any longer. We stand as God's people; therefore, we have a Father, King, Savior, and Rock Who stands for us, covenanting His life for us. Let's explore together what these provisions are. We cannot afford to be ignorant or exposed any longer.

Ephesians 6.14-17, Part I

The source of our provisions for standing as ones who identify with the Lord against the enemy's tactics is the Lord Himself. Isaiah (11.1-5, 59.16-17, 52.7, 49.2) teaches us that it is the Lord who dons these supernatural garments to accomplish His purposes, and He supplies them to His own to that end. Think about it: these provisions can be used defensively, to protect oneself from the onslaught of forces that go against God, AND they can be used offensively, to gain more "territory" for the Lord by standing for what He stands for (justice, reconciliation, peace, healing). The author of Ephesians is now summarizing for us in graphic form the major themes he has already written about in the letter. These themes of **truth, righteousness, readiness, faith, salvation**, and the **word of God**, when donned, represent the real deal – the genuine follower of Christ, and ones on which we are to focus our priorities for living.

The belt of truth gives us the imagery of something that secures special gear to our person for our use and to carry around with us wherever we go. Now that we have new lives in Christ, speaking truthfully or representing truth in other ways is to be our goal. As awkward or difficult as this can be sometimes, it can greatly dispel dark footholds the enemy likes to establish, sometimes ever-so-subtly, in relationships. It is critical, therefore, that we strive for truth in our dealings with people. God honors the truth, and we need not fear the outcome if we are dedicating ourselves to that end. There is something extremely valuable about maintaining a clear conscience before Christ as well. Be very aware of situations that are tempting you to hide or skirt truth, praying to God for the courage and wisdom to stand for truth and apply it faithfully and with proper timing in your life.

Ephesians 6.14-17, Part II

Standing for **righteousness** for those who are not able to do it for themselves is a major theme for the Christian. Only God knows when injustice will finally and completely be smashed to the ground and put to rest. Until then, we are to lock arms with the Lord and rout it. **Pray that God will break your heart for what breaks His.** I fear that this statement may be turning cliché, but here is a warning: this prayer is not for whims! Your heart will break. You will shed tears. Your stomach will ache. But if that is what it takes to mobilize us to ACT on behalf of the innocent, the abused, the weak, the falsely accused, so let it be!

Also, let us not be caught sleeping or unaware. Strap on those shoes and be ready and waiting at a moment's notice for the King's prompting toward **peace**. Restoration of unity between God and humanity and the universe is the end game, yet in the meantime, there remains much opportunity to stand for peace, whether in the Church, your family or neighborhood, among your friends, among your enemies, and between racial groups. Take a few steps towards peace in one of these areas this week, and do not give up. Be prepared for some God-action as you take steps of faith toward reconciliation.

Faith in God is and will be our greatest protector in every circumstance. The shield referred to here in this passage is the very large kind that could protect the whole body. It measured four feet long and two-and-a-half feet wide.¹ Have you ever been tested by trials where your faith was all you had to fall back on? Human wisdom or worldly recourse could not touch the despair of your circumstances. Exercising full faith in *God's* strength, in *His* provision, and in *His* trustworthiness is truly our only hope in this world.

Prayerfully ponder this week the direction and assets the Lord provides for us to fully live out our faith in bold confidence.

Lincoln, A. T. (2002). *Vol. 42: Word Biblical Commentary : Ephesians*. Word Biblical Commentary (429–460). Dallas: Word, Incorporated.

Ephesians 6.14-17, Part III

Our only hope for **salvation** now and eternally, from situations that vex us to ones that threaten to cause us great agony or harm, is the Lord. One cannot read the Psalms or Isaiah without getting a strong sense that God is most decidedly our salvation, and that those who hope in Him will not be disappointed (Isaiah 49.23). God in Christ has fought the battle and the win is decisively in our favor! This salvation is the first gift that we need to receive to be firmly established in Him in life and in death. Won't you take a moment now to receive His offer, to be rescued from the pit of despair, to be helped and protected, and to be set apart for greater purposes than you can possibly imagine? Hallelujah! We now turn to another most sacred gift....the word of our Lord God.

There was no Bible as we know it when the author of Ephesians was inspired to write this letter. Ephesians itself may have been written even before the first Gospel account was scripted.^{1,2} Christ-followers relied mainly on the Hebrew Scriptures (the "Old Testament"), especially if they were Jewish, and stories told orally about Jesus and His sayings, the disciples, and the history of the early Church. Hardcopy (which would much later become the "New Testament") was not generated and circulating until about 30-50 years after Pentacost.¹

The most important thing to remember is that we can never overestimate the significance and purpose and value of the **word of God**. Through the Spirit, it has power and dimension and effect WAY beyond what we can fathom. It may look like just a collection of words to some, but these inspired, sacred words have the power to transform, guard, and influence. Our King Jesus Himself used them to shut up the devil and his crafty ploys to slander, deceive, and sway (Matthew 4.4-10, Luke 4.1-13). Take up your sword then, dear brothers and sisters, the sword of the Spirit. Get to know how it feels in your hand. Become intimately familiar with the power it has to transform your mind and your heart and your life! The word of God truly is a game-changer.

¹ Arthur G. Patzia, *The Making of the New Testament: Origin, Collection, Text, and Canon*. Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 1995.

² Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible Book by Book*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002.

Ephesians 6.18 à

Have you heard of the *Rule of Faith*? Its basic meaning as it relates to the practice of our faith is this: the songs we sing and the words we pray are what we believe. It stands to reason then that we had better make sure that these songs and prayers reflect solid theology because they influence what we believe to be true about God in Christ.

Our 10-week walk through Ephesians has given us the chance to absorb many incredible core truths of our faith. Take time to refresh your memory often on these truths, and allow them to infiltrate your prayer life. If your prayer life seems dull and lifeless, then allow the Spirit to refresh it and have greater impact. Search the Scriptures diligently and use these sweet truths to guide your prayers for "*all occasions*." The Spirit and the Truth empower and enliven our prayers. Remember, our faith is not an isolated affair but a continuation of billions of faithful, seeking, sometimes desperate people who have gone before us in prayer to the Person of God.

Know this: "*the prayers of a righteous person are powerful and effective*." (James 5.16). We are declared righteous through God's reconciling work in Christ. So speak up! Speak to your King on behalf of yourself, yes, but also significantly on behalf of others, who desperately need us to stand-in-the-gap for them in prayer. Ask the Lord to make you sensitive to others' needs and then pray for those who suffer injustices, who have had to withstand tragedy, or those who are facing giants of unimaginable proportion. Pray for Church and other ministry leaders, who, at any given moment may be battling the torrent of the enemy's attempted harassment. Do not be caught sleeping, but remain vigilant in this task, for God hears our prayers and overturns injustices, heals, protects, and powerfully *moves* in response to them. It is a grand mystery why the God of the universe would hear our pleas and respond in kind.

May this last word encourage us to remain diligent in the task of prayer: "*We are taught [in the Psalms] how, if at any time we are plagued with various doubts, to fight against them until the mind, freed, rises to God. And not that only: but amid hesitations, fears, trepidations, we are still to rely on prayer until some solace comes*."¹

¹Don Postema, *Space for God: Study and Practice of Spirituality and Prayer*. Grand Rapids: Faith Alive, 1997, p 116 quoting Calvin from Battles's *The Piety of John Calvin*, 27-28.