

Sabbath School Lesson #13 – Waging Peace – 16-22 Sep 2023

Christ says through Paul: “Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God” (Ephesians 6:16-17). We should be ‘waging peace’ with “the sword of the Spirit.” When John the Baptist was preaching in the wilderness, the soldiers came to him among others, and asked him, “What shall we do?” His answer was, “Do violence to no man” (Luke 3:14). A man with less of the wisdom of the holy Spirit, might have said, ‘Leave the army at once,’ and thus have got them into trouble, and got himself branded as a mover of sedition. But John did not presume to take upon himself the responsibility of telling them how they should act, but gave them a simple Gospel precept, throwing the responsibility upon them. Soldiers who “do violence to no man,” will soon find a place outside the ranks. The Christian soldier is the man who never fights with carnal weapons, and whose only sword is “the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.”

Sunday: The Church: A Unified Army – What is meant by “the church” and how does it become “a unified army”? Whilst in a common parlance the Seventh-day Adventist Church denomination is the visible church on earth, it is important to understand the true church that Christ would present to Himself as “a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish” (Ephesians 5:27). The church is the body of Christ (Ephesians 1:22-23; Colossians 1:18) and it is only those who have “the Spirit of Christ” (Romans 8:9) who are members of the true church of Christ. This must not by any means be understood as depreciating the visible church as a denomination. This is to emphasise the fact that not all within the visible church are Christ’s. “There are many whose names are on the church books, but who are not under Christ’s rule” {COL 304.1}. To unify the members of the visible church into His body, Christ has given gifts: “some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers;” for the purpose of “perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ;” to the ultimate end of “the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ” (Ephesians 4:11-13). The visible church has members who are under and not under Christ’s rule. Before the end, those under Christ’s rule will have matured into “the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God.” The knowledge of the Son of God is the eschatological culmination of the church! It is by the Sonship of Christ that the church become a unified army, for God accepts us only through His Son; we are “accepted in the beloved” (Ephesians 1:6). Satan knows that it is the Sonship of Christ that unifies us and he seeks to destroy our knowledge of the Son of God. But those under Christ’s rule, having the Spirit of Christ, will be a unified army.

Monday: Belt and Breastplate – How does Paul explain it, and what ways have you experienced the idea that truth and righteousness are a protection? “Stand therefore,” Paul says, “having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness” (Ephesians 6:14-17). The first requisite mentioned is truth. One is no more prepared to fight in the cause of God without truth, than he is to take a journey with loins ungirded. He may have great zeal; but without truth his efforts will be worse than useless, for he will be led without knowing it to fight under the banner of the prince of evil. Jesus said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life” (John 14:6). And therefore he who has not the truth has not Christ, and does not know Him. But truth is of no avail unless the individual having it is sanctified thereby, and hence the necessity for “the breastplate of righteousness.” The wise man has said, “Keep thy heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life” (Proverbs 4:23). The only sure safeguard for the heart is the breastplate of God’s righteousness. “Behold,” says the psalmist, “Thou desirest truth in the inward parts” (Psalm 51:6). This truth in the heart, is by which it is cleansed and sanctified, and guarded from the entrance of evil. Let Christ dwell in your heart by faith (Ephesians 3:17) and thoughts, speech and actions, will be right.

Tuesday: Shoes: The Church Wages Peace – The Lesson writer asks: ‘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.’ For the feet there is provided “the preparation of the Gospel of peace” (Ephesians 6:15). Those whose feet are shod with this are ready and eager to publish peace and good tidings of salvation to all men, both far and near. Thus it was with the Apostle Paul, who testified that he was debtor both to the Greeks and to the Barbarians (Romans 1:14) to give them the Gospel, and likewise with his co-labourers, by whom the Gospel was carried to every part of the world. No one is fit to be a soldier of the cross until he is ready to say, “Here am I; send me” (Isaiah 6:8) in response to the call of his Master.

Wednesday: Shield, Helmet, and Sword – How are we to understand these military images in our spiritual warfare, in the great controversy that we are in today? With “the shield of faith,” the Christian is protected against “all the fiery darts of the wicked” (Ephesians 6:16). Faith is trust in the word of the Lord, – confidence in the Lord that He will fulfil His promises to deliver us from the power of all our enemies. No one who had this confidence in the Lord was ever disappointed in it. The Lord cannot deny Himself, and His power is able to save to the uttermost all that come unto Him. The Lord is ready and waiting to save each one of us from all the fiery darts of our adversary. The helmet is “the hope of salvation,” upon which hope the Christian’s mind must ever be fixed. The Apostle Peter also exhorts the church, “Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind; be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 1:13). This is the hope of salvation, for it is the grace of God that brings salvation (Titus 2:11), which Christ brings with Him, when He appears “the second time” (Hebrews 9:28). Lastly, he must take with him “the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.” This is his weapon of offense and defence. But he must remember that it is the sword of the Spirit, and not his own sword; and that therefore it must be wielded by the Spirit. And therefore the Spirit must accompany him. There could be nothing more foolish than to take this sword along and leave the Spirit behind; for since without the Spirit no one can know the word of God, it is only the Spirit in man that understands how to use this sword; and man himself cannot do it. It is a very sharp sword (Hebrews 4:12), and he who undertakes to wield it by his own power is sure to cut himself much worse than he does his enemy. The sword is wielded by “the Spirit of Christ” (Romans 8:9) in us; He says, “I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in Me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without Me ye can do nothing” (John 15:5).

Thursday: Practicing Battlefield Prayer – How important is prayer in ‘waging peace’ and how does Paul help us understand it? God desires to give to us “exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think” (Ephesians 3:20). Of course a petition for such things cannot be put into words. The next clause however says that it is “according to the power that worketh in us;” and the sixteenth verse tells us that the power that works in us is the Spirit. It is the same thing we find when we read in 1 Corinthians and eighth of Romans. “The Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God” (1 Cor 2:10). Therefore the Spirit knows just what God has for us. The deepest thoughts are too great for language, and so the Spirit makes intercession for us with groanings that can not be uttered. But, although there is no articulate speech “he that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God” (Rom 8:27). God knows that the Spirit asks for just the things that He has to bestow. He makes intercession for the saints according to the will of God. And we know that whatever is asked according to God’s will is granted (1 John 5:14-15). “God has sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, Abba! Father!” (Galatians 4:6). The possession of the Spirit of Christ proves that we are the sons of God. Being sons, we can come to Him to ask for things to supply our need, with all the confidence of a child to a parent. But while we have all confidence, our thoughts are as the earth is below the heaven (Isaiah 45:8-9). Not only are our thoughts feeble, but our language is still more so. We can not give proper expression even to the little that we do realise. But the Spirit of Christ helps our infirmity. What wonderful confidence this should give us in praying to God; especially should it give confidence to those who are particularly infirm in regard to language! With these facts before us, how much more forcible becomes the exhortation of Paul, “Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints” (Ephesians 6:18).