

Read Ephesians 6:10-18 together. So far, in describing the full Armor of God, Paul has told us to put on the Belt of Truth and the Breastplate of Righteousness. Looking back, how would you summarize the purpose of these first two pieces of armor?

It's important to remember that with each piece of armor, Paul is showing us how to clothe or cover ourselves in Christ. Jesus is the truth that holds everything else together. Jesus' righteousness has been put on us so that we are not reliant on our own. If we want to withstand the devil's schemes, living with Christ as our truth and as the source of our righteousness is essential. This also impacts our relationship with God and others. Jesus makes us right with God while at the same time drawing us into a relationship with the world that reveals his truth and presence.

Important for today is the reminder that righteousness requires us to be in right relationship, not just with God, but with our neighbor.

Today, Paul tell us to fit our feet with, "the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace." In a paragraph all about spiritual warfare and armor, why do you think Paul points to peace?

Paul is reminding us of what Christ has accomplished through his death and resurrection and, at the same time, pointing to what us putting on the Armor of God is supposed to result in. Both in our own lives and in his world. The Gospel is an announcement of peace. Peace between God and human in our salvation and, ultimately, peace in all of creation.

Read Isaiah 32:16-17. The prophet Isaiah, whom Paul draws his inspiration for this text from, tells us that the result of righteousness will be peace. How does righteousness produce peace between us and God?

Through the righteousness of Christ, our sins are forgiven, we are justified (declared sinless and worthy to be a child of God), and we are sanctified (we are made new – into the image of Christ.) Because of all of this, we are able to be at peace with God. Sin no longer separates us.

Read Ephesians 2:13-22. What does Paul say Jesus' purpose was in his death and resurrection?

"His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace." The Bible often lumps people into two groups. There were the Jews, or the Israelites, and everyone else. There was God's chosen family, and the rest of the world (the Gentiles). Paul makes the claim here that Jesus has not only reconciled both of these groups to God, but that he has reconciled these groups to each other. He has destroyed the barrier between them and the hostility that existed between these different groups of people, making peace. Jesus' death and resurrection certainly was meant to create peace between us and God, but also, peace between people, today.

Read Ephesians 2:19-21 again. How important would you say peace with others is to the ultimate mission and goal of Christ in our world?

Paul has already described Jesus' work as the creation of a "new humanity." Now, he points to a present reality and future goal in which there are no longer foreigners or strangers, but only fellow citizens within God's kingdom. While we often picture judgement through our individualist lens, imagining ourselves standing alone before God, Paul paints a different picture. Here he describes all of us, held together by Christ, as one building being presented as a holy temple in the Lord.

Our peace with each other is a sign-post or an image to the world of what heaven is like, of what our God desires.

Paul doesn't tell us to put the Gospel on as our sandals, but rather, to fit our feet with the readiness that comes from the Gospel of peace. What do you think he is saying?

With Christ as our truth and wearing his righteousness, Paul is telling us to go... to move... to be ready, always, and to go on the offensive. This armor isn't just a defensive measure against the devil's attacks... it is an offensive against them. Paul is telling us to go bang against the very gates of hell.

How does the pursuit of peace in our world today thwart the plans and schemes of the devil?

The devil loves pitting us against each other. The lies and selfishness that have led to so much division in our world – between countries, ethnicities, races, political parties, and so much more – lead us to fight, to divide further, to hate, and to destroy. When we can pursue and find peace, we undo the harmful work the devil has brought to bear on the earth. We reveal a better way.

Do you believe that there could be peace?

Allow your group to answer honestly. The goal here is to challenge them. Within Christianity, there seems to be a thread of belief that there will always be pain, there will always be war, there will always be division and discrimination, because there will always be sin. Too often, we allow that viewpoint to lead us into lives of apathy and isolation. Over and over again, God calls his children to be peacemakers in this world. Never are we told to be idle and wait for peace to arrive one day. In fact, we are told that peace has already arrived. Jesus came. And he has given us his peace.

Read John 14:27. As he promises to give us the Holy Spirit, Jesus says, "my peace I give to you." Where do you see the need for peace in our world today?

There are a lot of answers that could be given here. Encourage your group to share their thoughts.

What is something that you could do to be a peacemaker into that situation?

Again, let your group share. Encourage one another and brainstorm how we could be peacemakers in our own relationships and communities.

Close your time in prayer, thanking Jesus for the work of peace that he has brought into our lives and asking him to help us be ready, always, to be peacemakers in his world today.