



Clothed in Righteousness: Follow the Lamb!

2 Corinthians 5:17-21

Background for the Leader

The scripture for this lesson, 2 Corinthians 5:17-21, is all about reconciliation. *The Dictionary-Concordance of the New Revised Standard Version* defines reconciliation as: “To establish a state of peace between two persons, or between God and man through Christ.” In his letter to the Corinthians, Paul was explicitly referring to peace between God and man, the word man meaning all people on earth. Does humankind lack peace with God? If so, then are we at war with God? Technically, yes. Some theologians express the relationship in exactly that way, as a state of war. Since the fall from grace by Adam and Eve, God’s human creations have struggled against a sinful nature that destroys our harmony with God – our being right with God. In the days before Christ came to earth, people attempted to restore the oneness with God through ritualistic sacrifices that were offered before the Jewish High Priest for the atonement of their sins. Then God gave humanity the greatest gift the world has ever known – His own Son, who was at once both human and divine, to become the sacrificial lamb. The gift was free, yet the price was high. To be forgiven and receive reconciliation requires only our belief in Jesus Christ and acceptance of Him as our Savior and Lord. For this, the cost was His life, and He paid it willingly on our behalf.

A Prayer for the Leader: Heavenly Father, guide me as I prepare for this lesson about your miraculous grace that reconciles us through Christ. Help me to fully understand the magnitude of that gift, then lead me as I present the lesson to our group, directing my thoughts and my words to impart the message that you would have us receive. Amen.

A Note for the Leader

To prepare for this lesson in advance:

1. Have Bibles or copies of the text on hand for individual use.
2. Obtain a picture or drawing of a Roman soldier outfitted for battle to use for the third activity and assign Ephesians 6: 11-17 to a reader; (For additional information about the armor and its comparison to God’s protection, see *Be Rich!* by Warren W. Wiersbe, Chariot Victor Publishing, 1979).
3. Prepare a chart containing two columns: Soldier’s Clothing and the Protection It Provided and the Christian’s Clothing and the Protection It Provides for Activity Four (on handouts if the activity is to be done individually or in small groups) or on poster board or large sheet of paper (for a whole group activity).
4. Have copies of the antiphonal reading made for the closing activity. The completion of all five activities will require approximately one hour.

If you need to shorten the lesson, preview all activities and their approximate length in minutes (given in parentheses following the activity title), and select those you will use.

Leading the Bible Study

Activity One: Lesson Scripture (15 minutes)

After sharing whatever information you deem to be appropriate for your group from the *Background for the Leader* section, it is recommended that you first read the scripture for this lesson together in the whole group and discuss the following questions:

- What does the expression “in Christ” mean?
- How do we become completely new?
- In light of our sinful natures, why would God freely give us reconciliation through Christ?
- What did Paul mean when he said that God did not count our trespasses against us?
- Why and how does reconciliation make us ambassadors for Christ?
- How did God make Jesus “be sin” for our sakes?

Activity Two: Meditation on the Lesson Scripture (15 minutes)

Dismiss the group for private, individual prayer, re-reading, and personal reflection of the passage from the formational approach. (*Note: see the Bible study entitled “By Our Fruits We Are Known” for a description of the formation approach*). After about five minutes, reconvene the group to share individual insights.

Activity Three: Clothed in Righteousness (5 minutes)

Using the picture or drawing of a Roman soldier as a visual aid to understand fully the analogies in Paul’s description of the armor of God, ask the person responsible to read Ephesians 6: 11-17 aloud, then share the following information with those present. If the group is large enough, you may want to copy descriptions of the separate pieces of armor on slips of paper for different individuals to read.

Information for the Leader: In his epistle to the Ephesians, Paul used various pieces of the battle attire of a Roman soldier to explain the armor of God. Citizens of that area were very familiar with the uniforms of the Roman soldiers who occupied the land and therefore easily understood the comparisons and appreciated the significance of God’s protection. Paul admonished the Ephesians to wear the armor of God as protection against evil or sin that separates us from God. He specifically referred to the devil as the force who appeals to humans’ sinful nature in the attempt to destroy their righteousness or the peace of their reconciliation with God.

The Roman Soldier’s Armor: *The belt of truth, translated in the KJV as “having your loins girt about with truth,” referred to the girdle around a soldier’s waist that held the other pieces worn on the upper body together. It also had an attachment that held the soldier’s sword. The breastplate covered the soldier’s body in both front and back from his neck to his waist and was made of heavy metal plates or chains. On his feet, the soldier wore sandals with hobnails in the soles designed to give him better footing when engaged in fighting. His shield was made of wood, but covered with tough leather to protect him, as he held it in front of his body, from spears and arrows. It was common practice in those days for soldiers to dip their arrows sometimes in a flammable substance and ignite them before shooting them. Roman shields were*

constructed to interlock around the edges so that a long line of side-by-side soldiers could defend themselves against the enemy in a solid wall. A helmet made of a hard material covered the head for resistance against impact. The sword worn in the belt was short and sharp and intended for hand-to-hand combat. Thus outfitted, the soldier was clothed from head to toe with protection for his body and life against the enemy who intended to destroy him.

Activity Four: Follow the Lamb! (10 minutes)

Using the prepared chart which lists the pieces of a Roman soldier’s armor, the protection each piece provided, and the Bible-specified Christian’s clothing, compare how Christians who are clothed in the righteousness of God are as equipped and ready to follow the Lamb as the soldier was for battle. This activity can be discussed by assigning each item to small groups or individuals, or by leading the whole group, item by item. Notes about the Christian’s protection should be added to that part of the chart as responses from participants are offered.

Sample Chart:

Soldier’s Clothing/Protection	Christian’s Clothing/Protection
belt to hold other parts of his armor in place and to hold his sword in readiness for battle	belt of truth
breastplate of heavy metal to prevent sharp objects from piercing his heart or lungs	breastplate of righteousness
sandals with hobnailed soles to provide firm footing in battle	shoes for your feet that will help you proclaim the gospel of peace
leather-covered wooden shield to deflect arrows, ignited arrows, and spears and further protect his body	shield of faith
helmet to prevent head injuries	helmet of salvation
short, sharp sword for fighting	sword of the Spirit/word of God

Sample Responses of Christian Protection:

Belt of the Truth sets the Christian free from his/her sinfulness and allows reconciliation with God. It also holds the weapon that defeats the devil – faith in Jesus Christ.

Breastplate of Righteousness covers the Christian completely, enabling that person’s rebirth and empowerment through the grace of God.

Shoes to Strengthen his/her feet so that she or he is ready and able to go forth,

proclaiming the good news heard first by shepherds on a hillside, long, long ago: Peace on Earth, Goodwill to Men!

Shield of Faith deflects the temptations of Satan, even the fiery ones that could go straight to Christian's hearts, because the Lamb of God rescued the world from sin and nothing can separate his followers from the love of God. As a body of believers, the church provides additional strength in which its members are interlocked in faith.

Helmet of Salvation protects the head and thus the mind of a Christian from harm and focused on following Jesus.

The Christian's weapons in hand-to-hand fighting with the devil are the Word of God and the guidance of the Holy Spirit. They provide sharp, decisive defense against all temptations.

Activity Five: Antiphonal Response (5 minutes)

As a closing prayer lead the group in oral reading of the following response:

Leader: Lord, in reconciling us you have made us new.

People: **Because we are in Christ, everything old has passed away.**

Leader: You have entrusted the message of reconciliation to us,

People: **And not counted our sins, wiping our slates clean.**

Leader: You have made us ambassadors for Christ,

People **The Savior who was without sin, yet became sin, so that our sins could be pardoned.**

All: **Now grant us your peace as we cloth ourselves in your armor and set forth to proclaim the good news. Amen.**

About the Writer

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CLOTHED IN RIGHTEOUSNESS: FOLLOW THE LAMB!

2 Corinthians 5:17-21

The Webster dictionary defines righteous as doing what is right, just, upright, or godly. So in order for us to be clothed in righteousness, we must surround ourselves daily with the love of Christ. This should be our motive for living each day. We must seek God's will for our lives so that we become a new creation altogether. When we allow Christ's love in our hearts our previous moral condition will pass away and Christ will take control of our lives.

As long as we allow ourselves to be unsettled by guilt, frustrated or confused we cannot be at peace with ourselves or discover true peace in our relationships or situations with others. However, if we allow the love of Christ to cloth us in righteousness we will seek to communicate His peace and no longer see people from a competitive or negative point of view.

Each new day is an opportunity for us to begin anew, to seek forgiveness, and pray for God's wisdom so that by our words and deeds we might aim to bring others to know Jesus Christ. We are to consider ourselves Christ's ambassadors - His personal representatives here on earth. The Lamb of God, who knew no sin, is our perfect example to follow. Therefore, the challenge for us is to arise each day, clothe ourselves with righteousness, and follow the example of the Lamb.

How did you dress today?

PRAYER:

Heavenly Father, we thank you for Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God, who is our perfect example of righteous living. We ask for forgiveness of our sin and pray for wisdom so that we might communicate love and peace in our life today. Help us to take time every day and prepare our minds and hearts to accept your guidance in order for us to clothe ourselves with righteousness. Amen.

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