

Have you ever made a **bad** decision in life – which you thought at the time... was the ***right thing*** to do... but you did **not** consider a very significant detail... and the decision ended up being a ***costly*** mistake...? ... Maybe you forgot to evaluate the balance in your checking account... or did not consider another purchase that had not showed up (yet) on the bank's website for your account... Or maybe you scheduled an appointment for a time when you already had an important meeting somewhere else. Wouldn't it be nice if you could always focus on every important detail when you make all of your decisions...?

Imagine what it would be like to run a country... (or even better)... how critical it would be to consider every detail for decisions you need to make in leading an army into war.

In 1939... Germany included a small little detail (that most leaders never would have considered) when Germany launched its “blitzkrieg” across Europe. They had the *foresight* to pre-think how they would keep all of their combat vehicles on the move. It would take massive amounts of fuel. The weakest link in Hitler's plan to conquer the world was the fuel supply-chain. How would they keep the supply flow of the precious fuel out in the field where it would be needed...?

Hitler's plans relied on surprise attacks. If their enemy saw their reserves building up in a particular area – the enemy could figure out where the German army was headed next. (Plus) rails could be destroyed and tanker trucks loaded with fuel could be targeted.

The most inventive minds in Germany went to work on the project... and worked under the strictest secrecy. But they **did** it. They reached a viable

solution that made German advancement seem unstoppable. It was such a simple solution. A small detail. Their answer came to be known as “the jerrycan.” Yes... it was a perfectly designed gas can of the right weight... shape... and carrying handle.

Before their campaign was launched they filled hundreds of thousands of jerrycans and easily moved them to strategic locations. The German war vehicles could be refueled faster than using any other implement... stay on the move... and fuel supplies could show-up anywhere without being detected.

Adolph Hitler and the Nazis knew what was vital to their war effort... and they prepared meticulously. With sustained determination... they made themselves ready for victory. ... **[P A U S E]** ...

Compare this to the average Christian today. ... “Hmmm??? – War? ...What do you mean war??? I became a follower of Christ to enjoy PEACE and happiness. ... YOU may be at war... but I’m certainly not!...”

Our passage in Ephesians... we saw (*beginning last week*)... says that we are engaged in a spiritual war with a very formidable enemy who is more dreadful than any human forces ever assembled on earth has been – at any time.

Ephesians 6:12

Many of us are very familiar with this verse... maybe even a little too familiar. I don’t know how *many* sermons you have heard preached on this verse... or if it even causes a sleight thump in your heart - anymore. But I would like for you to know... as we begin today... that whenever this verse is TRULY BELIEVED... it is very LIFE-CHANGING. ... **[P A U S E]** ...

Today (and for the next couple of weeks)... we will be engaged in our spiritual weapons training... for our provision... protection... and power in this war. Today I will cover the battle equipment that is mentioned in Ephesians 6:14. Next week I will cover verse 15... and the following week we will delve into verse 16's implements for war.

Please look with me at the first piece of our **NECESSARY** spiritual armor... in verse 14.

Ephesians 6:14a

You might be familiar with other versions of the Bible which translate this verse saying: "*gird up your loins with truth...*" ... Most of us today don't "gird our loins"... do we? ... Today we buckle belts around our waists. ... The belt of a Roman soldier's uniform (however) did more than hold his pants up... or add a bit of personalized or stylish flare to his attire. No. This heavy... *six-inch-wide* leather belt... secured the soldier's tunic... as he charged into battle... so that the material wouldn't hamper his movement.

Roman soldiers always wore a tunic. This was an outer garment and was simply a square piece of cloth with holes cut-out for the head and arms. Before the fight... the loose-fitting tunic could easily trip (or encumber) the soldier – unless it was tucked under this belt. Without the tunic being cinched-up under the belt... the soldier would be powerless in battle.

Maybe you have seen slapstick comedy routines... where people laugh at the clown (or comedian's) trousers drooping or falling down. It may be funny in a comedy routine – but never funny with a soldier who is engaged in a fight. ... In preparing for this message... I read about a great battle in the past... that was won by a clever general who told his men to cut the

belts of their enemy while they were sleeping. The next morning the enemy troops were so busy holding up their trousers that they weren't able to shoot their guns and... therefore... they lost the battle. We are told to be girded with truth in the face of the enemy. Truth is that which holds everything together.

This belt would also help hold in place a soldier's breastplate and the sheath of his weapon. ... So the (seemingly UNIMPORTANT) belt... had the important function of keeping him free... protected... and agile enough to attack or defend - whichever the situation in battle required.

Paul writes that **TRUTH** (*likewise*) performs the same kind of crucial function in spiritual warfare. ... Truth holds our spiritual armor in place and safeguards against deadly entanglements. ... So we had better be sure that we understand how Paul wants us to recognize this critical element that he labels "truth." ... This is some kind of inner strength – that gives us battle-winning confidence.

Commentators have looked at "truth" in two ways... since it can have two basic meanings. ... First... it can mean "the truth of God." (In other words... Paul may be referring to Christian doctrine... or the specific content of God's revelation in the Bible.

Is Paul's meaning that we put on the belt of truth... by filling our hearts and minds with the Word of God – because it is the truth...? Maybe... but perhaps not.

(You see)... if that were what Paul was PRIMARILY thinking... he would have (most likely) included a definite article – "THE truth"... Notice that he

did not write: “fasten on the belt of the truth (the specific truth in His Holy Word.)

The second way of understanding Paul’s meaning of “truth” might (instead) simply refer to “truthfulness” or “sincerity.” The word for “truth” that Paul used in the original language of the New Testament is the same word for “sincerity.”

Whenever the Greek word $\alpha \lambda \eta \Theta \iota \alpha$ is used in the New Testament... it can mean *either* “truth” or “sincerity”... and we must depend on the context to determine which would be the best. (Here our context is that there is no definite article... “the”... “the truth”) so I am inclined to understand that Paul’s meaning is more of the idea of “sincerity” rather than THE specific truth that we find in God’s Word.”

HOWEVER - I must admit that I think John R. W. Stott is right when he suggests that “*we do not need to choose between these alternatives.*” (You see)... real sincerity (or inner truthfulness)... begins with a knowledge of God (He is truth)... and a knowledge of the truth of God (if it really is known)... inevitably leads to a life of sincerity (single hearted - not being duplicitous)... consistent with God’s character... (LISTEN!...) we will become sincere / single-hearted people - only as we feast on the revealed truths of God.

(And) when you stop and think about it... when you are being sincere... you are being – what (?)... TRUTHFUL / open / honest. You are not presenting any image of yourself that “*FUDGES*” the truth (even a little.) ... Truth and sincerity – are two nuances of the same concept.

Insincerity makes a Christian soldier's pants fall down... as they run into battle. A lack of sincerity makes our breastplate fall down over our knees and ankles (tripping us)... (And) it makes our sword (that is attached to the belt) inaccessible.

Pretending to be sincere – when you know that you're not... leaves you unprotected and very vulnerable in the spiritual war that surrounds us. But a man or woman of integrity... (a Christian with a clear conscience)... can face the enemy without fear. Unless we consistently practice the truth... we cannot effectively use the sword of truth. ... Once a lie gets into the life of a believer... everything begins to fall apart. Look what Paul wrote to Timothy:

1 Timothy 1:18-19 (ESV)

¹⁸ This charge I entrust to you, Timothy, my child, in accordance with the prophecies previously made about you, that by them you may wage the good warfare, ¹⁹ holding faith and a good conscience. By rejecting this, some have made shipwreck of their faith,

The result of lacking sincerity is spiritual impotency – and a shipwreck of their faith. But the opposite is true of those who cinch up their armor with sincerity. Single-minded sincerity (having integrity... or keeping a good conscience) makes it possible to unflinchingly face the enemy.

How has your battle been going lately...? If it has not been going as well as it should... you must tighten your belt. ... So let's take a deeper-dive into this concept of "sincerity."

FIRST OF ALL: Sincerity implies a DESIRE TO PLEASE GOD.

1 Corinthians 10:31 (ESV)

³¹ So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.

We often supersede the glory of God... by operating from our own selfish motives – for the things we do. ... Every action we take... everything we do at work... at home... with friends... where we shop – if our MAIN DESIRE was not to please God – we have not been a sincere follower of Jesus. ... Jesus has asked us to do ALL for the glory of God! So to the extent that you and I do anything SIMPLY to please ourselves... we have been insincere.

- ✓ Let's fasten our belts right now. ... How many things have you done this week... where you can honestly say:
- ✓ *"I did THIS solely to please God... and not simply to please myself..."*
- ✓ *... "I said those things (I conversed that way... I had those conversations... I said those things...)... not to make myself look good... but to glorify God..."*
- ✓ *"I showed my displeasure to THAT person... because it was the best way to honor God – not because I wanted them to know that I will not be treated that way..."*
- ✓ *"I was kind to THAT stranger – not so that others will be kind to me – but I did it ONLY to please God..."*

We might ALL have some belt-tightening to do...

Even though it might hurt... God could NOT care less about anything we do (here) at Living Water... or at work... or at home... if anything has clouded our objective *"to do all to the glory of God"* (to please Him.) Whenever we do not have a single-eye to please God – we are being insincere.

OK... I am going to zoom-in a little closer on this matter of cinching our belts. ... This past Wednesday I was having an elongated "pin-drop-moment lecture" with my students at the college in Bend. Everybody was wide-awake and listening intently. Muscles were tight. Stillness filled the room... as I hit a well-protected nerve deep inside every student. ... I give

this lecture every term in my Interpersonal Communication course (usually with similar responses) – but Wednesday they seemed more dialed-in.

“We all have multiple identities. You do. I do. We all do. ... Your self-image (how you see yourself... the **TRUE YOU**... the **REAL YOU**... the self that you know yourself to be when no one is looking)... is often very *different* than the image you try to *project* for others to see. ... You have a carefully protected “PRESENTING” self that is often NOT-THE-SAME as the real person that you know you REALLY ARE.)

We all have foibles... defects... shortcomings (things that we don't want anyone to see)... but we also have a polished (all-shined-up) image that we want everyone to think is the real us. (Now) what happens when our “PRESENTING IMAGE” gets challenged...? If it gets threatened (if we sense someone is **NOT** buying into it... they are NOT believing what we want them to believe about us... (even though WE know it is NOT true about us...)) how do we OFTEN respond...?

Perhaps we have all heard the term “*Defense Mechanisms.*” What is it that these mechanisms are defending? (The answer is – we are defending our PRESENTING SELF whenever it is threatened/challenged/unbelieved... even though we know that it isn't the REAL us.)”

That was the introduction and things got even more quiet as I listed out many common defense mechanisms. Students were nodding their heads and confessing that they use them... and now they knew why. ... From *there* we were able to discuss how damaging it is to our relationships... and the foolishness of trying to defend the lie of our PRESENTING self.

But I want to tell **YOU** that it is even MORE foolish and damaging as believers *in our spiritual warfare*. ... By tightening the belt of truth... we will start making our PRESENTING self and our REAL self - **one-and-the-same**. ... Tighten your belt of truth. Ask God to make you more aware of

your PRESENTING self and those times when you are actively working to project and maintain it. ... Confess it. Don't get tripped up in battle.

FIRST OF ALL: Sincerity implies a DESIRE TO PLEASE GOD.

SECOND OF ALL: Sincerity implies that we will STOP MAKING SNAP DECISIONS IN OUR LIFE.

We make far too many decisions in our lives that are based on pride-filled assumptions. We don't have all the information necessary to make the right choice... but we think that we do... because we assume too much. We do not stop and pray NEARLY enough... and we often suffer through the consequences.

When Jesus and His disciple (Nathaniel) met for the first time... Jesus informed him that He saw Nathaniel under a fig tree where he had been contemplating prophecy. When Nathaniel approached the Lord... Jesus remarked: "*Behold an Israelite indeed in whom there is no guile...*" (Having no guile means "having no deceit"... or "one who is sincere...") ... Why did Jesus declare Nathaniel to be so sincere...? What did Jesus notice...? Let's take a look at this passage in John... to discover something about what sincerity is.

John 1:45-47 (ESV)

⁴⁵ Philip found Nathanael and said to him, "We have found him of whom Moses in the Law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph." ⁴⁶ Nathanael said to him, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Philip said to him, "Come and see." ⁴⁷ Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him and said of him, "Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no deceit!"

Nathaniel was prejudiced against people who came from Nazareth. (*I sort-of know what that is like... coming from Bakersfield... "Can anything good*

come from Bakersfield?") Nathaniel assumed nothing good could ever come from Nazareth – especially NOT the Messiah. This prejudice would have made most people make a snap decision. “*Na! I’m good. I’ll stay here. I don’t need to go check this Jesus dude out...*” ... Jesus knew Nathaniel did not make that kind of a snap decision... but got up to get further information... and Jesus called THAT “sincere.” ... [P A U S E] ...

Sincerity in us... would have us stop making so many instant decisions... because our pride would have us believe that we already know enough and don’t even need to pray about it.

(LISTEN!) ...All through the day... you and I need to be shooting up prayers to the throne of God and asking God two things: “*God is this Your will?*”... and “*Lord... please make me willing to follow WHATEVER Your will is in this matter... even if it is not what I am inclined to do... initially.*”

Ephesians 6:14b

The breastplate of righteousness is as essential to us as the Roman soldier’s breastplate was to him. Our enemy (“*the accuser of believers*” - Rev. 12:10 calls him)... loves to direct his arrows at the heart of our faith. He tries desperately to convince us that God can’t bridge the gap our sins have created. He hopes to plant seeds of doubt of God’s infinite grace. He lobs missiles of guilt and shame and condemnation toward us... tempting us to believe that the love and forgiveness of God must be conditional.

But when we stand firm in the knowledge that God has declared us righteous based solely on the blood of Christ and empowers us to live holy lives by the Holy Spirit alone... the devil and his wicked workers must retreat in defeat. ... So let’s turn our attention (in the short amount of time

that we have left)... toward understanding (now) this concept of “righteousness.”

Like truth... righteousness can be taken in two ways. It can refer to what in theology is called imputed righteousness... the righteousness of Jesus Christ reckoned to a Christian’s account that enables him to stand before God. Or it can refer to specific acts of righteousness—personal holiness... as we might say.

In the third chapter of Zechariah there is a scene in which Joshua the high priest is standing before the angel of the Lord in the temple... and Satan is also standing there to accuse him. ... Since we are told that Joshua is dressed in filthy clothes... representing his and the people’s sin... Satan must have been pointing to these and declaring forcefully that Joshua was not fit to stand before the Lord in this office. It is a clear case of spiritual warfare. But the angel of God intervenes.

“*Take off his filthy clothes,*” says the angel. Then... in place of the filthy clothes he had been wearing... the angel gives him new rich garments and a clean turban for his head. ... Clearly this symbolizes the righteousness of Christ *imputed* to him — the clothes were not something Joshua acquired for himself... but rather were something given to him — and it is in this righteousness (*alone*) that he is enabled to resist Satan’s vile accusations.

On the other hand... it is significant that immediately after Joshua had been invested with rich robes and a clean turban (symbolizing God’s righteousness)... the angel gave Joshua a charge to be holy.

Zechariah 3:7 (ESV)

⁷ “*Thus says the LORD of hosts: If you will walk in my ways and keep my charge, then you shall rule my house and have charge of my*

courts, and I will give you the right of access among those who are standing here.

So imputed righteousness is not to be divorced from actual righteousness. It is **because** he had been made righteous that Joshua was to live righteously.

In this passage... Paul is urging those who already are Christians to “put on” God’s armor. (And) since they are Christians... they have already been clothed with God’s righteousness. (So...therefore)... the only thing they can put on is practical holiness expressed in righteous thoughts and deeds.

2 Corinthians 2:15-16 (ESV)

¹⁵ For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing, ¹⁶ to one a fragrance from death to death, to the other a fragrance from life to life. Who is sufficient for these things?

Do you have a righteousness “which is through faith in Christ — the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith” (Philippians 3:9)?

If not... all you have to do is renounce dependence upon the rags of your self-righteousness and humbly ask. His righteousness will guard your heart as effectively as the finest breastplate. Why not do this now? And with that righteousness comes a righteous life... a marvelous offensive weapon in the hands of Christ.