

"Girding the Belt of Truth"

Ephesians 6:13–17

March 8, 2026

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Ephesians 6:13–17 (PowerPoint)

Preface

Until last week, we have shared about the matter that "our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against various evil spirits, and that we must stand firm against the schemes of the devil."

From today, we would like to think about the next matter: "taking up the whole armor of God so that we may be able to stand firm."

The first thing we would like to consider is the word in verse 14:

"having girded your waist with truth."

Part One

Here, as the whole armor of God, six kinds are listed.

They are the belt of truth, the breastplate of righteousness, the gospel of peace, the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit—six kinds of armor.

We discover that these six pieces of armor are not merely listed, but that there is also a deep meaning in their order.

First of all, the phrase **"gird your waist with the belt of truth"** must appear first. More than that, it is only when this is present that the remaining five kinds of armor come to have meaning.

When we actually examine the content, we can see that **"girding the waist with the belt of truth"** becomes the foundation, the basis, and the ground of everything.

If this foundation and basis are weak, then everything that follows afterward will not be able to demonstrate its effectiveness.

The clothing of the Jewish people at the time when the Epistle to the Ephesians was written, about 2,000 years ago, was quite different from the clothing we wear today.

It was a garment made of a single piece of cloth like a poncho. When the head was put through it, it became a long garment hanging down to the feet, and unless the belt at the waist was firmly tightened, one could step on the hem of one's own clothes.

Because it was made of one piece of cloth, it was probably very comfortable clothing to wear, but there were inconvenient aspects when moving actively. In order to move easily and be active, one had to firmly tighten the belt at the waist. If one does not firmly tighten the belt at the waist, then no matter how splendid a breastplate one wears, no matter how easy-to-move-in shoes one puts on, no matter how one takes a shield to protect the body, puts on a helmet to protect the head, and holds a sword, one cannot move. On the contrary, because one has put on armor, it only becomes heavy and difficult to move, and instead of armor that helps one, it may become shackles that destroy oneself.

In other words, **“girding the waist with a belt”** is the basic condition for fighting properly, and without it one cannot fight at all—it is the fundamental prerequisite.

As I was meditating on this phrase, **“gird your waist with the belt of truth,”** I remembered something that a senior in the American football club often said to me when I was a university student.

He would repeatedly say,

“Hey Ishikawa, what is far more important than thick arms, thick legs, or a thick chest is the abdominal muscles. If you don’t have abdominal muscles, thick arms, thick legs, and a thick chest mean nothing. On the other hand, even if your arms aren’t thick, your legs aren’t thick, and your chest isn’t thick, if you have strong abs, you are far stronger than someone who is simply big. Strong abs are like the handle of a whip—the handle part. Only when the handle is firm can you finally snap the whip sharply. That’s the kind of body it becomes. That’s why I do 300 sit-ups every day. With that sagging belly of yours, you won’t win.”

Indeed, that senior, with a body weight of 84 kilograms, once knocked upward with a single punch an All-Japan player who weighed 120 kilograms and was called a “Christmas tree” in those days.

Truly, for those who believe in Jesus Christ, **“girding the waist with the belt of truth”** corresponds to the abdominal muscles of the body. If that part is not firm, no matter how strong the other parts may be, that strength cannot be demonstrated.

In order for us to be strengthened in the Lord and in the power of His might, to stand firm against the schemes of the devil, not to fight the wrong opponent with the wrong battle, but to properly fight the battle against the various evil spirits, we must first firmly gird our waist with the belt of truth.

Part Two

Then, what does it mean **“to gird the waist with the belt of truth”**?

When we look at the First Epistle of Peter, there are words of the apostle Peter that say something similar.

1 Peter 1:8–13 (PowerPoint)

In verse 13 there is the phrase **“prepare your minds for action,”** but if you look at the margin of the Bible, you will find that the literal translation of this phrase is **“gird up the loins of your mind.”**

Therefore, the literal translation of verse 13 becomes: “Therefore, gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and set your hope completely on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.”

For what purpose, then, do we gird up the loins of our mind?

It says that **in order to eagerly wait for the grace that will be given when Jesus Christ appears**—that is, at the time of the Second Coming of Jesus—we gird up the belt of our mind.

It says that **to hope for the Second Coming of Jesus, to hope for the time of His return, to hope for what will occur at His return, and to hope for the grace that will be given to those who believe in the Lord Jesus at His return—that is what it means to firmly gird our waist with the belt of truth.**

Without hoping for the return of Christ, it does not become a matter of girding the belt of truth around our waist.

Indeed, just as Jesus Himself said, when Jesus comes again everything will be completed, everything will be set in order, everything will end, and everything will begin anew. This is the very core of the gospel, and it means making that the foundation.

Without the foundation of expectation for the Second Coming—eagerly waiting for the grace that will be given when Jesus returns—the righteousness of the breastplate will no longer be the righteousness taught by God. The gospel of peace worn on the feet will not be the peace taught by God. Faith will no longer be the faith that is like a shield that extinguishes all the flaming arrows shot by the devil. The helmet will no longer be the helmet that protects the head—the command center of the body that continues to wait with reason, intellect, and mind for the salvation of the end times, which is the most important salvation for humanity. And the word of God will not become the sword that is sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing of soul and spirit, joints and marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

If we do not tighten the belt of truth—that is, eagerly waiting for the grace to be given when Jesus Christ appears—then believing in Christ may end up becoming nothing more than a kind of comfort, healing, or mental care that disappears with time.

If it comforts me, heals me, suits my preferences, and keeps my mental condition stable, then it may seem like something useful and good. But if it disturbs my heart, confuses me, strikes me, makes me kneel, humbles me, lowers me, makes me pass through misfortune and sorrow, and does not treat the present me gently, then believing in Christ may cease to be righteousness, peace, faith, salvation, or the word of God. It may be reduced to a mere religion for personal benefit.

The gospel taught by the Bible may be degraded into a human-centered religion that is not worthy of belief.

For those who believe in Jesus Christ—for what purpose they fight, for whom they fight, and with what goal they put on the whole armor of God and fight—nothing of this can be spoken apart from the fact that Jesus came 2,000 years ago and the promise and revelation that Jesus will come again.

If one still tries to speak without that, it will become like an empty box—only the box is splendid, but it contains nothing.

Whether the worldview and values of those who believe in Jesus Christ are aligned with waiting for the grace that will be given at the Second Coming of Jesus Christ—or not.

Whether that is their foundation—or not.

If it is not, then no matter how wonderful the armor one puts on, it cannot become armor for fighting the battle that must be fought against the opponent that must be fought.

Part Three

Perhaps one of the greatest reasons why the wall of one percent of the Christian population in Japan has not been broken may be that we have not firmly girded the belt of truth around our waist. There have been times when this thought has come pressing deeply upon my own heart.

When groups that were called so-called new religions, such as **Aum Shinrikyo** and the **Unification Church**, were causing situations that shook society, what did the church do at that time?

Did we not begin to say something like this: "Since Christianity in Japan is also treated as a foreign religion and even called something that smells of butter, in order not to be suspected like other new religions, perhaps we should not speak about the end of the world or the Second Coming of Jesus Christ—things that would be like tightening the belt of truth around our waist—but instead speak only

about things that are relatively well received by people and easy for people to accept, such as being loved, being forgiven, being protected, and being guided." While the church, Christians, pastors, and seminaries were doing such things, before we realized it, even among Christians the awareness of the Second Coming became faint. Sharing and teaching that spoke about the Second Coming and held hope and expectation for it became rare. In this world filled with dazzling and glamorous appearances that are nothing more than hollow decorations, have we not gradually come to focus only on how comfortably we can live, and begun to think that whether one believes in Jesus or not makes little difference?

Rather than the Second Coming of the Lord Jesus, have we begun to focus on how we live now? Rather than the Second Coming of the Lord Jesus, how pleasantly we can spend our present life? Rather than the Second Coming of the Lord Jesus, how happily we can live in this world? Instead of speaking about the Second Coming of the Lord Jesus—which might make people pull away from us—we may have begun speaking only about pleasant stories, entertaining stories, funny stories, and delicious stories that attract people's hearts. And while doing so, have we not, before realizing it, forgotten to tighten the belt of our waist—that is, eagerly waiting for the grace that will be given when the Lord Jesus comes again—and left it loosened?

Are we truly tightening the belt of the loins of our mind, eagerly waiting for the grace that will be given when Jesus Christ appears?

Are we actively living, as soldiers of Christ who have truly put on the armor of God, using the life given to us for the battle that is pleasing in the eyes of the Lord? These are the thoughts that come to mind.

Previously, during a certain Bible study meeting, a person who had been baptized for more than ten years shared with us and said, "Pastor, what is the Second Coming? I have never heard about the Second Coming of Jesus, nor have I ever studied it."

Then everyone there prayed together with serious expressions.

The Bible indeed ends with the conclusion that everything will end and everything will be made new with the Second Coming of the Lord Jesus.

Jesus Himself certainly said so as well.

Matthew 24:3–14, 23–44 (PowerPoint)

For us Christians, girding our waist with the belt of truth does not mean merely eating, drinking, and somehow surviving so that we are not crushed by the worries of daily life. Rather, it means eagerly waiting for the grace that will be

given when heaven and earth pass away at the Second Coming of Jesus Christ and the new heaven and the new earth begin.

Let us turn to Second Timothy.

2 Timothy 4:1 (PowerPoint)

In other words, if one cannot sympathize with the content of verse 1, then there is no necessity to read the words of verse 2 and following.

Only “in view of the appearing of Jesus Christ and His kingdom, who will judge the living and the dead,” do the words from verse 2 onward—“you Christians, live your life in this way”—come to stand.

If we do not tighten our waist with the appearing of Jesus Christ and the coming of the kingdom of God, then no matter what we put on afterward, it will not truly be wearing anything.

Even if we try to wear it, it would only be like putting on stylish clothes and striking a cool pose just for taking a photograph—nothing more than a superficial show without substance.

Let us read from verse 2 onward.

2 Timothy 4:1-5 (PowerPoint)

Because there is the Second Coming, we proclaim the Word.

If we are not eagerly waiting for the grace that will be given when Jesus returns, we will not be able to proclaim the Word.

The apostle Paul left these words as his final testament: People may desire to hear only things that are pleasant to the ears. Instead of the sound teaching and the gospel taught by the Bible, they may turn aside to myths according to their own preferences, turning their ears away from the truth. Not only that, they may even become those who spread such fabricated stories—and not even realize that this has happened.

If we firmly tighten the belt around our waist and truly fight according to this Word, we may suffer loss as we live in this world.

We may be reproached by a husband, by a wife, by parents, by children, by friends, or by colleagues.

Our neighbors may ridicule us and treat us as strange people, saying, “Are you okay? Nobody lives like that. You should get out of that suspicious place.”

Therefore, in order to avoid such things, perhaps we do not tighten our waist with the belt of truth, but instead fight a battle like striking the air. Even when striking the air, we sweat, so we say, "I had a good sweat," and feel satisfied. Such a thought brings a sense of tension.

It makes us wonder whether we are secretly hiding our confession of faith deep in a safe, as if hiding something precious, living as though we do not believe in Jesus, and stiffening ourselves before the world in the same way as those who do not believe in Jesus.

Part Four

When we look at Philippians chapter 3, it speaks about this in a way that is painful to hear.

While pointing out how those who believe in Christ and those who do not believe in Christ differ, it calls believers in Christ to live out their confession of faith boldly.

Philippians 3:17–21 (PowerPoint)

If there is one of the greatest trials, temptations, or pitfalls attacking the Christian faith today, it may be that all the spiritual blessings in the heavenly places that God has given have been changed into material blessings.

That is, material blessings such as:

If you believe in God you will become healthy.

If you believe in God you will earn money.

If you believe in God things will go well.

If you believe in God you will obtain what you desire.

If you believe in God you will overcome any difficulty and everything will turn into something satisfying.

Eighteen years ago, when I took the ordination examination of the Japan Alliance Christ Church, the assignment was to write a paper about the Second Coming of Jesus and the end times. Allow me to close this sermon by reading what I wrote in the conclusion of that paper.

I wrote something like this:

"The third reason why the Second Coming and the end times are not spoken about within Japanese churches may be that, in a situation where people are materially satisfied, speaking about the end of the world seems to be nonsense. The world moves within a human-centered or atheistic, science-supremacist current. And before we realize it, even Christians, as they live riding the flow of the world, may no longer be able to find hope in the biblical view of the end times.

It is well known that Protestant missions in Korea reached twenty-five percent of the population after one hundred years. However, it has now reached a plateau and cannot easily surpass the wall of twenty-five percent. Of course there are many reasons why mission work does not progress, but one of them may be the lack of a biblical eschatological hope.

The explosive spread of Christianity in Korea took place from the colonial era through the Korean War and into the military regime era. At that time, pastors strongly proclaimed the Second Coming of Jesus Christ and hope for the end times. People received this hope as something real, felt it deeply, and shared that passion with others.

Even today in Korean churches, fortunately, the end times and the Second Coming are often spoken about, and they are always included in baptism classes. However, the way they are received now may be quite different from the past. Korea became a democratic nation and achieved remarkable economic growth, greater even than Japan's postwar growth. This has certainly been beneficial for the nation and the church. Yet for Christians who have come to immerse themselves in materially satisfied lives, not everything may have been good. This is because the end times and the Second Coming no longer feel like a realistic hope.

Instead of the end times and the Second Coming, purchasing a new house or a new car, belonging to a better school or workplace, and becoming winners in a society governed by relative values may seem like more realistic hopes.

The same can be said about Japan. Japan is materially filled in every respect. For Christians living in such Japan, how much of a hope are the end times and the Second Coming?

In a sense, there may be a situation in modern society similar to the background of Peter's epistles. False teachers speak of incorrect views of the end times, and some are swept away by those teachings and abandon their faith. Others are Christians who can no longer place their hope in the end times or the Second Coming. It is hard not to feel that these things are similar.

In such a situation, should we not learn from Peter, who boldly, confidently, and zealously proclaimed the end times taught by Jesus Christ?

If we see the end times and the Second Coming as the completion of salvation, then would not Christians who cannot find hope in them end up abandoning salvation halfway?

Even in the denominational teaching materials titled *Basic Things the Bible Teaches*, *Church Life the Bible Teaches*, and *Family and Social Life the Bible Teaches*, the end times are hardly mentioned. Especially since the latter two are aimed at Christians, there could well be more sections about correct eschatology. Satan himself leads people to become buried in human-centered and secular lives, to forget the end times, and to live comfortably settled in this world.

Therefore Christians should not be swept along by the world, but while looking up to the eternal life of the kingdom of heaven, should root themselves in an existential faith that longs for the end times, fulfill the redemptive-historical mission entrusted to them by the Lord, and live out their faith as best as they can. While maintaining firmly our attitude of longing for the end times, rather than being concerned about when exactly the end will come, we should consider what kind of posture of faith we should have as we face the approaching end, and pursue godliness and holiness."

Conclusion

For those who believe in Jesus Christ, the Second Coming of Jesus and the end times are not fear, but thanksgiving, hope, and joy.

How blessed this is.

As those whom Jesus calls blessed, let us tighten the belt of truth around our waist and walk together without taking our eyes off Jesus.

Let us pray.

Benediction: 1 Peter 1:13