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Our Great Armor II

Ephesians 6:15-17a

Intro: As Paul lists the spiritual armor that is available to all believers, he began with the belt of truth. The belt was the foundational part of a soldier's battle gear as it helped him remain upright in the midst of close-quarter combat. This is what truth does for the believer. Our enemy is the father of lies and his armies will attack us with deception but when we are familiar with the truth – God's truth – and we allow that truth to permeate through our thoughts, words and actions; we will be more than able to stand against the pernicious lies and constant deceptions that are hurled against us.

The 2nd thing Paul lists is the breastplate of righteousness. This critical piece of battle gear protected the torso, heart and lungs. The spiritual parallel is righteousness but not necessarily the righteousness of Christ that we received when we accepted Christ as our Savior; we already have that but since we have it, we must allow that righteousness to be visible in our daily lives. It is when we decide to deliberately walk in righteousness as our S.O.P. (Standard Operating Procedure) that we successfully begin to deny the enemy any handhold in our great spiritual wrestling match. When we live righteous lives, Satan cannot easily make any inroads into our lives. We refuse to allow him to establish a beachhead in our lives from which to advance his wicked agenda of deceit and destruction.

As we go through Paul's list of spiritual armor you will notice that each piece is actually something that every believer already possesses. These are all spiritual blessings that we have received through and because of our relationship with Jesus Christ. Paul's purpose in listing them here is to encourage and exhort every believer to take up what they already have and employ it effectively to stand up against the wiles of the devil. Every believer has the armor but far too many fail to realize it or they fail to recognize it. Defeat and discouragement is not the spiritual position of a Christian. God has given us the very armor He uses to do battle and we have His Holy Spirit to empower and direct us. Thus, our victory is in Christ and we should walk victoriously all the days of our lives.

15 – The next piece of armor is an item that was near and dear to the heart

of Imelda Marcos, former 1st Lady of the Republic of the Philippines – footwear! In order to stand, as Paul exhorts in v14, believers must also have their feet prepared for battle. No soldier can fight effectively or go about their business without this equipment. Napoleon Bonaparte is credited with saying, “An army moves on its stomach” and, of course, there’s some metaphorical truth to that statement but the reality is, before the rise of mechanized warfare, armies moved on their feet. Even today, no serious combatant is going to advance onto the battlefield wearing flip-flops or crocs. I realize there are some that do but they generally pay for that oversight with their lives. Appropriate footwear is critical for victory, that’s why the US government spent over \$4.5 billion on combat boots alone in 2022.

Roman soldiers had different options for footwear depending on the task at hand. For long marches they would wear short boots with thick, leather soles that offered more comfort. If they were going into battle, they would wear heavy boots that had the soles studded with sharp nails to ensure a good grip. One reason the Greeks under Alexander and the Romans under Julius Caesar were so proficient in their respective military conquests was due in large part to their armies being well shod. This allowed them to undertake long marches over rough terrain at incredible speeds and when they arrived at the fight, they immediately had the advantage of better footing for the battle.

If believers are going to stand and withstand, they must also wear the best footwear that gives them the most advantage over evil. Of course, right here Paul delivers the most awkward phrase in this list of the Christian’s armor. For one thing, it doesn’t specifically mention a piece of armor. We have to assume that Paul means boots or traveling sandals. Again, when he makes the application Paul uses 3 words (“preparation,” “gospel,” and “peace”), and it’s not immediately clear which one is central. Does Paul want us to be shod with the gospel, with peace, or with the readiness to make the truth known?

It’s most likely that the emphasis falls upon a readiness to make the gospel known. Every Christian already knows the gospel; they wouldn’t be a Christian if they didn’t. So this must go beyond mere knowledge and appropriation. It must involve readiness to share the good news with others. The word preparation carries the meaning of a prepared foundation.

Moreover, Paul links the gospel to the soldier's boots or sandals. Given that the gospel is a message and that message is associated with feet here, the sense is that believers are to be prepared to transport the gospel message. Shoes carry us from place to place, and it is as we go from place to place that we're to be ready to speak about Jesus. We must be mobile, flexible and always ready to advance with the gospel of peace.

Why does Paul call it the gospel of peace? It's because it is through the gospel, by our acceptance of the gospel, we enter into a relationship of peace with God. We have peace with God and we receive the peace of God. Not only that, but in this new relationship, we are to be at peace with all of God's people. Now, because we have peace with God and His people, we need not fear the attack of Satan or men. We must be at peace with God and each other if we are to defeat the devil ([James 4:1-7](#)).

It may seem counterintuitive, but spiritual warfare involves the proclamation of the good news and it's no accident that the good news is described here as the gospel of peace. Spreading the message of peace isn't just ironic in the context of warfare. It's exactly how believers are to successfully undermine their spiritual opponents! By sharing and promoting peace, we undermine Satan's ultimate agenda and we advance the kingdom of God. We must be prepared to share the gospel of peace with the lost world each day. The most victorious Christians are witnessing Christians. Satan has declared war but we are ambassadors of peace and, as such, we are to take the gospel of peace wherever we go. It doesn't take a vast number of people to do God's work, but it does take men and women who are equipped, prepared and anxious to share the gospel with others.

Again, Paul didn't get this illustration of spiritual armor exclusively from the equipment of a Roman soldier. There is OT imagery for every piece mentioned in this passage. The believer's footwear is connected to the imagery seen in [Isa 52:7](#). Part of this verse is quoted by Paul in [Rom 10:15](#) as he asserts the necessity that preachers must be sent in order that others may hear the good news and believe in God. This confirms the idea that feet readied with the gospel of peace implies believers must be prepared to carry and proclaim that message. In fact, the proclamation of peace is the key factor in our strategy to undermine and overpower the evil forces that oppose us.

16 – The Roman soldier had 2 types of shields. There was a small round shield that he would use in hand-to-hand combat when it was important for him to be able to maneuver easily, and there was a large oblong shield that he would use when advancing into battle with other soldiers. This second shield, the one Paul refers to here, was about 4 or 4.5 feet long and about 2 feet wide, like a door that covered the soldier's body completely. So when the soldiers advanced in rows, as the Romans did, the enemy was faced with a solid wall of shields—row upon row of them. These advancing columns of a Roman army were called phalanxes, and they were the terror of Rome's foes.

Standing in formation with others, soldiers could lock their shields together to form a protective wall in front and a roof overhead to achieve virtually complete protection from arrow attack. Plus, these shields were covered in leather which could be doused in water to defend against flaming arrows. When the arrows struck the shields, their flames could be extinguished rather than set the shield ablaze. Paul's saying that our faith should be like that. It should do 3 things: (1) it should cover us so that not a portion is exposed, (2) it should link up with the faith of others to present a solid wall of defense, and (3) because it covers our entire person and links up with the faith of our fellow soldiers, it should be able to strike down whatever fiery arrows the enemy hurls at us.

Paul refers to the attacks of the evil one as fiery darts or flaming arrows. Several implications can be drawn from this:

1) These flaming arrows represent a harrowing threat. Being shot at by archers would be disconcerting but flaming arrows would be terrifying. Fast, indiscriminant and highly lethal, flaming arrows could pierce the body then scorch the flesh. They cause panic as soldiers are tempted to throw down their burning shields only to become vulnerable to further arrows. Thus, the flaming arrows of the evil one should be taken as a serious threat that could absolutely devastate any believer's spiritual well being.

2) Arrows are fired from a distance (main advantage). This means that these attacks are not necessarily up close and personal. They come from *out there* and indiscriminately hit whatever they can. Thus, some spiritual attacks from the evil one are just trying to take down whomever they can hit; whoever is least prepared and least protected.

3) While flaming arrows have devastating potential, they are effectively nullified by having the right protective gear. Believers must respect the destructive capacity of such long range attacks from the evil one (economy, politics, culture) but they may also rest assured knowing that their shield of faith is fully able to protect them.

We should note that when Paul speaks of this item of armor he does not say “the shield of the faith” as if he were referring to the specific teachings of Christianity; he’s already included that in his reference to truth as the Christian’s belt. Instead, he says the shield of faith, meaning a general confidence in God and His Word. Our shield against Satan’s arrows is this kind of faith, faith that God can be trusted. It is knowing that when God says that He is able to keep us from falling and present us before His presence with exceeding joy, He means exactly that and will do it. We do not need to fear when we advance into battle. God will go with us and will bring victory.

We see a perfect example of this in [Luke 8:22-25](#). The disciples were clearly alarmed by the ferocity of the storm, to the point where they actually thought they were going to die. But, after Jesus calmed the storm, He didn’t question their courage or their nautical acumen – He questioned their faith! Why? Well, before they ever entered the boat, Jesus said, “Let us cross over to the other side of the lake ([22](#)).” If Jesus says we’re going to the other side, no matter what happens between here and there, you should know that you’re going to make it to the other side. Granted, there was no big explanation of assurance before they launched out into the deep, but they had the Master’s word and that should have been enough. At least Jesus thought so.

The faith Paul is talking about here isn’t saving faith, we already have that, but living faith; a deep seated trust in the promises and the power of God. Faith is the defensive weapon that protects us from the enemy’s flaming arrows. He constantly shoots those arrows at the hearts and minds of believers: lies, blasphemous thoughts, hateful thoughts about others, doubts, feelings, fears (rational or otherwise) and sinful desires. If we fail to, by faith, quench those arrows, they will light a fire within us which may lead us to disobey God. We never know when we will come under fire from the evil one, or how; so we must always walk by faith and use the shield of faith.

And remember, we're not in this battle alone. If you're feeling weak or vulnerable, there are plenty of folks around here who will come along side you and lock their shields in with yours. If the fiery darts got you overheated, they'll be more than happy to throw a wet blanket on you. I've been known to sling a pretty good wet blanket a time or two, myself. Every party must have a pooper, right? It's my special talent!

Of course, the imagery of the shield of faith is also found in the OT. It reflects the protective stance of the Lord, Who promised Abraham, I am your shield ([Gen 15:1](#)). For Israel, He's called the shield of your help ([Deut 33:29](#)). David calls Him my shield and the horn of my salvation ([II Sam 22:3](#)) and a shield to all who trust in Him ([II Sam 22:31](#)). Protection from attack is an expression of the Lord's love and care for His people. Faith, trust or confidence in God's loving care is the effective defensive protection that will keep believers safe from attack.

17a – The final item in the Christian's defensive armor is the helmet that Paul likens to salvation. The Roman helmet was normally constructed of bronze fitted over an iron skull cap lined with leather or cloth. This was yet another essential piece of equipment that protected the head from blows from every direction except a direct frontal attack. But, frontal attacks could be anticipated and effectively parried while attacks from other angles might not be seen in time. Thus, the helmets protection from other angles of attack was critical for the soldier's safety. In fact, the Greek word for helmet is literally a combination of words that mean around the head.

Salvation is pictured as this kind of protection and a soldier would be foolish to go into battle without his helmet. The helmet of salvation could mean merely that we are saved; that would make sense. But in [1 Thess 5:8](#) Paul speaks of putting on as a helmet the hope of salvation, and if that's what he's thinking of here, then he's looking to our destiny rather than our present state. He's saying that our anticipation of that end will protect our heads in the heat (and often confusion) of the battle. The helmet of salvation protects us against discouragement, against the desire to give up, giving us hope not only that we are saved, but that ultimately, we will be saved. It is the confident assurance that God will triumph completely in the end. One of the enemy's most effective weapons against us is discouragement. When we are properly equipped with the helmet of salvation, it's hard to stay discouraged.

It's been said of the troops of Lord Cromwell the Protector that they never lost because, being Calvinists, they knew that their destiny was secure and that they were fighting because God had led them to that spot and would prosper them in that work. There is a sense in which that should be true of us. True, we suffer setbacks in our attempts to live the Christian life. Even Paul said he was sometimes tripped up by Satan's onslaughts: hard pressed...perplexed... persecuted...struck down" (2 Cor 4:8-9). But these momentary setbacks are not the end, nor are they even utter defeats. Paul goes on to say, (2 Cor 4:8-9, 16-18). At times the battle presses around the Christian so furiously that they hardly know where they are or what's happening. That sometimes happens in purely physical warfare too. But what matters is not always that we know where we are or what's happening, but that our great commander-in-chief, the Lord Jesus Christ, knows and has guaranteed the victory.

The helmet of salvation recalls Isa 59:17, where it's worn by the Lord, along with the breastplate of righteousness, in order to battle against His enemies for the sake of justice and salvation. This is the Lord's own armor and we are instructed to be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. The knowledge of God's salvation protects our mind from the enemy's spiritual and psychological attacks. The helmet refers to the mind controlled by God and protected by God's truth. In this vicious spiritual battle, it's possible that believers may lose the hope of victory, succumbing to and reacting from a mindset of pessimism.

But the mind, with its attitudes and convictions, is protected from such traps by the knowledge that God's salvation is certain. He Himself is victorious in battle against His enemies, which in turn ensures that believers are on the winning side of this epic warfare. 😊