

The Whole Armor of God

[1 Kings 8:22-30, 41-43, Ephesians 6:10-20](#)

One thing I noticed when studying Jesus' teachings is how he frequently used familiar images to describe spiritual concepts. Jesus was a master at using common things to help people picture what he was trying to say. Things like, "the kingdom of God is like a man who goes out to sow his field...." That was a vivid and familiar scene as pretty much everyone of Jesus' day spent time sowing seeds. "The kingdom of God is like a vineyard...." Again, very familiar as there were many vineyards in the area. "I am the bread of life...." The Torah was commonly known as bread and everyone was familiar with the process of making bread and the importance of bread for everyday survival.

Paul appeared to be similarly gifted with using images of what was familiar to describe spiritual truths. Pastor Gordon

Maxwell noted the similarity of today's scripture from Ephesians to the uniform of the classic Roman soldier of the day. People of Paul's day were VERY familiar with seeing Roman soldiers everywhere they turned. The Ephesians existed in occupied territory; hence Roman soldiers were always about. There is no doubt that this image would come to mind as the church in Ephesus read this letter.

Roman soldiers were highly trained and skilled in the art of warfare. They understood strategy and knew how to accomplish the maximum gain for a minimum of loss. As such, Roman soldiers were known to wear parts of their gear all the time.

There was no rest for a Roman soldier. There was no such thing as an off-duty soldier. They were always prepared for battle.

The three key parts of a soldier's uniform that he always wore were the belt or girdle, the breastplate, and the shoes. It is

interesting that these are the first three parts Paul points out in this letter.

Paul first talked about the belt/girdle of truth. The belt was the key piece of equipment for a Roman soldier. It served three functions. First, the belt was used to tuck in a soldier's robe so that if he needed to run he would not trip. The soldier would pull his robe up between his legs and tuck it into his belt. The second function was to tighten everything up and keep the whole uniform secure. A soldier could not be worried about his uniform falling apart in the midst of battle. The belt was essential to keep everything close to his body. And finally, the belt was used to hold every other part of his uniform. His weapon was secured there. His breastplate was pulled together within the belt. His provisions were stored on his belt. It was probably similar to Batman's belt where just in the nick of time,

Batman would pull out a grappling hook! The belt was probably similar to a woman's purse – everything is in there!

So the belt was central and most important to a Roman soldier. Paul noted that we need to start with securing a belt of truth. We need to know beyond a shadow of a doubt that Jesus died for our sins; that we have stepped forward and claimed that grace for ourselves and asked forgiveness for our sins; and that we are now children of God. Nothing else can happen until the belt of truth is secure.

The next piece of equipment Paul talked about was the breastplate. This is probably very familiar to us as we have seen it on warriors throughout history. The breastplate was made of a metal that was polished to a bright shine so it would reflect the sun when troops would go into battle. The sun would disguise the number of troops and make it appear to be a solid wall of

armed forces. When soldiers would begin marching, with each step they would hit the breastplate with their swords to make it sound as if there were more troops – clearly Romans knew what they were doing in battle. The obvious function of the breastplate was to protect the torso and all the vital organs of the body. The interesting part of the Roman uniform is that everything was made to protect the soldier's front. If he were to succumb to fear and run, he would have no protection whatsoever as his back would be completely exposed for attack. The assumption appears to be that Roman soldiers did not turn and run – they would stand and fight even in the midst of difficulty.

We are told to put on the breastplate of righteousness – that is one of those words that can be difficult to define. One definition for righteousness I found is this: It is an attribute that

implies that a person's actions are justified, and can have the connotation that the person has been "judged" or "reckoned" as leading a life that is pleasing to God. When we put on the breastplate of righteousness we are taking up a lifestyle that is pleasing to God. We are dedicating our lives to God by accepting God's grace for ourselves and making an effort to share that gift of grace with others. We are making a commitment to worship God and not give in to sin, and we are making a stand to hold fast to our belief in God even in the midst of difficult times.

The third part of the uniform always worn by Roman soldiers was his shoes. A Roman soldier would wear thick leather boots that he would take and drive nails through the soles to act as spikes, similar to a cleat on a Golfing shoe to give more traction. This provided a good foothold and a good foundation

to stand and fight the enemy. This way no matter how the enemy pushed, the soldier could not be pushed back; he could not be moved.

Jesus provides us with the gospel of peace as our firm foundation. We develop this foundation by reading and studying the word of God and making it a part of our lives. Our foundation is secure because we are at peace with God. We know God is our strength and our redeemer. We know we are not in the battle alone. So we too put on the shoes of peace.

Paul talked about three other parts of a soldier's uniform – a shield, a helmet, and a sword. These three elements were not worn by the soldier at all times as the other three were. These were only taken up in times of battle. Yet Paul explained the need to put on the whole armor of God, not just the parts normally worn at all times. Why? It seems odd to be prepared

for battle all the time, doesn't it? Perhaps the message is to simply be prepared. Things will come at us from all sides. We need to be armed with the shield of faith as extra protection against the flaming arrows that may find us to be viable targets. Arrows of illness or discouragement or doubt or fear – these can make us question our belief in God. But if we are armed with that extra layer – that shield of faith – we can turn to that faith and say without a doubt that we believe in almighty God, maker of heaven and earth. We are told to take the helmet of salvation – remembering that Christ died for our sins and we are forgiven.

And last but certainly not least, we are told to take up the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. For us today that is our book of the Holy Scriptures. The Bible is not meant to sit pretty on a pedestal and collect dust. The Bible has a purpose - to be read and studied and questioned and pondered. We are

meant to embody the scriptures so they become a part of our very being. God speaks to us through God's word, and also through prayer and meditation on God's word. For a good soldier, the sword becomes an extension of his/her arm – they fit so well together it is hard to picture one without the other. As we go from this place to share God's love with others, let us go prepared, putting on our complete uniform that God has generously provided for us. And when the trials of life come, let us be ready to stand firm on God's promise of comfort and peace and hope and strength in this life, and God's promise of eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.