**THE FULL ARMOUR OF GOD**

***Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, 15and with*** ***your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. 16In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the*** ***flaming arrows of the evil one. 17Take the helmet of salvation and*** ***the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.***

Ephesians 6:14-17 (NIV)

The purpose of the spiritual armour is *‘so you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes … so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. Stand firm then …’* (6:11,12,13). This four-fold emphasis on the need to ‘*stand’* shows Paul’s concern for Christian stability. Christians with no firm foothold in Christ are easy prey for the devil.

The term ‘*full armor’* in ‘*Put on the full armor of God’* (6:11 and 13) translates the Greek term *panoplia* and described the complete armour of a heavily-armed soldier. In Isaiah 59:17 it is God Himself who is depicted as a warrior fighting to vindicate His people, ‘*He put on righteousness as his breastplate, and the helmet of salvation on his head; he put on the garments of vengeance and wrapped himself in zeal as a cloak*.’ The armour and weapons remain His but are now shared with us. We have to put on the armour, take up the weapons and go to war with the powers of evil.

Paul details the six main pieces of a soldier’s equipment – the belt, the breastplate, the boots, the shield, the helmet and the sword, and uses them as pictures of the truth, righteousness, good news of peace, faith, salvation and the word of God which equip us in our fight against evil spiritual powers. Paul was very familiar with Roman soldiers. He had met many in his travels and as he dictated ‘Ephesians,’ he was chained to one. Although it was unlikely his bodyguard wore the full armour of an infantryman on the battlefield, the sight of him close by would certainly have kindled Paul’s imagination.

‘*Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist’* (6:14). Paul’s tense would be more accurately translated ‘having buckled the belt of truth around your waist.’ The order in which the pieces of armour are described is the order the soldier would put them on. The belt is strictly not part of the armour, but before the armour can be put on, the garments underneath need to be held in place. The metaphor of ‘girding’ was often used in the Bible because it described what had to be done first to hold the flowing garments on those days in place before work could be done (Luke 12:35; 1 Peter 1:13), a race run, or a battle fought. Isaiah 59:17 (God the warrior) and the description of the Christian’s armour in 1 Thessalonians 5:8 do not mention the belt/girdle but Isaiah 11:5 says of the ‘*shoot … from the stump of Jesse’* (Isaiah 11:1) that ‘*Righteousness will be his belt and faithfulness the sash around his waist*.’

The Christian’s belt is ‘*truth*.’ Paul doesn’t say ‘the truth’ which means he is more likely thinking of the undergirding of truth in the sense of integrity, sincerity or *‘truth in the inner parts’* (Psalm 51:6). God clearly requires truth in the inward being (integrity, sincerity, honesty) which is the opposite to deceit, hypocrisy or play-acting. God loves transparent truth and this is all part of Paul’s thinking.

The second piece of armor is ‘the breastplate of righteousness’ (6:14) which must be ‘*put on*.’ It is commonly assumed that because we have a breastplate, that there is no protection for our back. The obvious conclusion is that we must always face our enemy and never turn and run and so expose our unprotected back to him. Preachers make much of the need to have others stand with us to protect our back by explaining how Roman soldiers took responsibility for each other. While Roman soldiers did protect each other, the breastplate often covered the soldier’s back as well as his front.

Isaiah 59:17 first speaks of the breastplate of ‘*righteousness’* which was probably Paul’s inspiration. From 2 Corinthians 6:7 where Paul writes of ‘*weapons of righteousness in the right hand and in the left’* it seems his emphasis is on uprightness of character, the moral righteousness of someone walking in their new standing of justification. Just as we cultivate truth to overthrow the devil’s deceptions, so we cultivate ‘*righteousness’* (of conduct and character) to resist his temptations.

Next comes ‘*your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace’* (6:15). There is strong consensus that Paul has in mind the caliga, the half boot of the Roman legionnaire, which was made of leather, left the toes free, had heavy studded soles, and was tied to the ankles and shins with straps. These equipped him for both long marches and prevented his foot from slipping in battle. The word ‘*readiness’* in ‘*your feet fitted with the readiness* *that comes from the gospel of peace’* can have two quite different meanings. The first is ‘preparedness’ and pictures the Christian soldier prepared and ready to take out the gospel of peace and offer it to others (Isaiah 52:7). Another meaning of ‘*readiness’* is a prepared foundation (Psalm 89:14). This would give the meaning here that the knowledge of the dependence on the gospel that gives a Christian peace of heart and life is part of the necessary equipment if he is to have a firm foothold in the conflict. This is how the NEB understands the text, *‘let the shoes on your feet be the gospel of peace, to give you firm footing.*’ Both are true in themselves though the second fits the context better.

The fourth piece of armour is ‘*the shield of faith’* (6:16) which we are to take up ‘*in addition to all this*.’ The Greeks had two different words for ‘*shield*.’ The first word described a small, round, manoeuvrable shield. The second word, and the word used here, was a long, oblong shaped shield, measuring 1.2 metres by 0.75 metres and which covered the whole person. It had two layers of wood glued together and was covered first with linen and then with hide. It was bound with iron above and below.

This shield was especially designed to protect against the flaming arrows of the enemy, arrows dipped in pitch, set alight and then fired. The ‘*flaming arrows of the evil one’* could be thoughts of doubt, disobedience, rebellion, lust, fear or guilt. Our shield is ‘*the shield of faith*.’ Faith lays hold of the promises of God in times of doubt and depression, and faith lays hold of the power of God in times of temptation. A soldier whose shield had caught flaming arrows still had to be careful not to panic. The shield was made of wood and would partially burn. The motion of throwing it around would not only make it blaze more fiercely, but would expose the soldier to the enemy’s spears. Faith keeps us calm in the face of fiery assaults.

The fifth piece of armour was ‘*the helmet of salvation’* (6:17). The helmet was made from a tough metal like bronze or iron and had an inside lining of felt or sponge that made the weight bearable. Only an axe or hammer could pierce the metal and in some cases a hinged vizor added frontal protection. In Isaiah 59:17 the divine warrior wears *‘the helmet of salvation’* as the worker and bringer of salvation. For Christians, salvation is essential for our survival and safety in battle. It includes God’s gift of salvation from the penalty of sin, but even more as His delivering help to protect us from the power of sin. The parallel in 1 Thessalonians 5:8 (‘*the hope of salvation as a helmet’*) points to final deliverance from the very presence of sin. Without that future hope to fortify, without the present deliverance, and the confidence of rescue from the bondage of the past, the Christian could easily be wounded, even mortally, in the battle. We need to know that God ‘*shields* (our) *head in the day of* *battle’* (Psalm 140:7).

The sixth and last weapon is the ‘*sword’* (6:17). Of all the armoury, the sword is the only one that can be used for attack as well as defence. Paul is thinking of close, personal encounter and describes the short sword, the machaira. It is ‘*the sword of the* *Spirit’* (6:17) which is defined as ‘*the word of God.*’ In the book of Revelation, it is seen coming from the mouth of Christ (1:16; 2:12; 19:5; cf. Isaiah 11:5). God’s own word is a sword in His hand, a sword that lays bare, separating the false from the true (Hebrews 4:12), bringing judgement (Isaiah 11:4; Hosea 6:5) but also bringing salvation. Here the ‘*word of God’* is used more as a defensive weapon on behalf of the person who holds it. The word is the Spirit’s sword. The word(s) of God came from the Spirit (2 Timothy 3:16; Hebrews 3:7; 9:8; 10:15; 1 Peter 1:11) who remains always the Spirit of truth (John 14:17). Jesus’ own use of the word of Scripture in His temptations (Matthew 4:1-10) is a clear illustration and incentive for Christians to fortify themselves with the knowledge and understanding of ‘the word.’ We need the same conviction and power to defend ourselves against the enemy. Paul chose ‘*rhema’* for ‘word’ (in ‘*the word of God’*) rather than ‘*logos*.’ We don’t quote the whole canon of Scripture against the devil but only that portion or portions appropriate to our situation.

Paul has given us six pieces that make up the whole armour of God – the belt of truth, the breastplate of righteousness, gospel-prepared footwear, the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit. God supplies the armoury but it is our responsibility to put it on and use it. Our enemies are on every side and so must our armour be.

Without direct referencing these studies have drawn, sometimes heavily, on:

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