

The Whole Armor of God

Our Shining Armor – Part 2

Ephesians 6:15-17a

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Scripture

A few weeks ago we began a sermon series in Ephesians 6:10-24 that I am calling, “The Whole Armor of God.”

So far we have examined our spiritual warfare, our terrible enemy, our only strength, and the first part of our shining armor in this warfare. Today, I want to continue examining the second part of our shining armor in this warfare.

So, let’s read about our shining armor in Ephesians 6:15-17a, although for the sake of context, I shall read verses 10-17a:

¹⁰ Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. ¹¹ Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. ¹² For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. ¹³ Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm. ¹⁴ Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, ¹⁵ **and, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace.** ¹⁶ **In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one;** ¹⁷ **and take the helmet of salvation....** (Ephesians 6:15-17a)

Introduction

In his commentary on Ephesians, Tony Merida says that

he thinks that modern readers look at Ephesians 6:10-24 in one of three ways. Some readers love this passage. They love war movies, fireworks, wrestling, and so on, and they find Paul's "whole armor of God" passage fascinating. Other readers find this section antiquated and ridiculous because of the description of ancient weaponry and warfare. And still other readers find this section of militaristic language fanatical and unenlightened. They have had enough of "holy war" talk and are not sure about fighting devils and spiritual forces of evil.¹

Of course, as we consider Ephesians 6:10-24, we should bear in mind that this passage is not antiquated; it is ageless. It is extremely relevant for today because humanity has not changed. At the core of all our struggles is a spiritual component, and we need to be clear that "we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places" (Ephesians 6:12). And in order to be successful in our spiritual warfare against these forces we need to be properly equipped.

Review

Paul lists six pieces of armor in Ephesians 6:14-17. Last time we examined the first two pieces of armor in verse 14 that are part of the whole armor of God. Let's briefly review them.

I. The Whole Armor of God Includes the Belt of Truth (6:14a)

First, the whole armor of God includes the belt of truth.

¹ Tony Merida, David Platt, and Daniel L. Akin, *Exalting Jesus in Ephesians* (Nashville: B&H, 2014), n.p.

Paul wrote in Ephesians 6:14a, **“Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth....”** The Christian’s **belt is truth**. This refers either to “God’s truth” (that is, Christian doctrine) or to “truthfulness” (that is, sincerity of heart). Probably both aspects are emphasized in Paul’s use of **truth**.

Christians must know and understand biblical truth. They must grow in their understanding of doctrine.

II. The Whole Armor of God Includes the Breastplate of Righteousness (6:14b)

And second, the whole armor of God includes the breastplate of righteousness.

Paul wrote in verse 14b, **“...and having put on the breastplate of righteousness....”** According to Paul, the Christian’s **breastplate is righteousness**. The **righteousness** here could be “imputed righteousness” (that is, the righteousness of Jesus that is credited to a Christian so that he is able to stand before God). More likely, however, it refers “actual righteousness” (that is, specific acts of personal obedience).

Putting on the **breastplate of righteousness** has to do with daily, moment-by-moment obedience to God.

So, the whole armor of God includes the belt of truth and the breastplate of righteousness. These two pieces of armor have to do with *doctrine* and *duty*, *belief* and *behavior*, *truth* and *obedience*.

Lesson

In today’s text, Ephesians 6:15-17a, we learn about three more pieces of armor that are part of the whole armor of God.

Let's use the following outline:

3. The Whole Armor of God Includes the Shoes of the Gospel (6:15)
4. The Whole Armor of God Includes the Shield of Faith (6:16)
5. The Whole Armor of God Includes the Helmet of Salvation (6:17a)

III. The Whole Armor of God Includes the Shoes of the Gospel (6:15)

Third, the whole armor of God includes the shoes of the gospel.

Paul wrote in Ephesians 6:15, “...and, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace.” Kent Hughes describes the soldier's shoes:

The image Paul has in mind comes from the Roman soldier's war boot, the *caliga* or half-boot which the legionnaire regularly wore while on duty. It was an open-toed leather boot with a heavily nail-studded sole which was tied to the ankles and shins with straps. These were not shoes for running...These boots served for marching, especially in battle...Much ancient battle was hand-to-hand and foot-to-foot, like on the line of scrimmage, so these boots gave the Roman soldier an advantage over ill-equipped foes.²

According to Paul, the Christian's shoes is **readiness given by the gospel of peace**. But what did Paul mean? This is a somewhat awkward phrase. James Montgomery Boice says, “Paul uses three words (**readiness**, **gospel**, and **peace**),

² R. Kent Hughes, *Ephesians: The Mystery of the Body of Christ*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1990), 232.

and it is 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?”

And then he answers his own question, “In my judgment the emphasis falls upon readiness to make the gospel known.”³ The reason he comes to that conclusion is that Christians already know the gospel; we would not be Christians if we did not know the gospel. So, Paul must mean something more than mere knowledge or apprehension of the gospel. Paul, therefore, is referring to a readiness to share the gospel with others.

Furthermore, Paul links the gospel to shoes so that just as shoes carry us from place to place, so we are to share the gospel as we go from place to place. Paul is also echoing Isaiah 52:7a, “How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, who publishes peace....”

Spiritual warfare involves sharing the good news of the gospel. Are you able to do this? Do you know who God is, and how your sin has cut you off from God, and how God has provided a remedy so that you may be reconciled with God, and that you must appropriate that remedy in order to be reconciled? And this ability to share the good news is not only for sharing with others; it is necessary to tell it to ourselves too.

Jack Miller, the founder of World Harvest Missions (now known as Serge), is well-known for saying, “Preach the gospel to yourself!” He knew that Christians often forget the good news of the gospel, and we slip into thinking wrong thoughts about our sin and our total inability to save ourselves, and God’s amazing grace and mercy to save sinners such as ourselves. So, we constantly need to preach the good news of the gospel to ourselves. And we also need to proclaim the good

³ James Montgomery Boice, *Ephesians: An Expository Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Ministry Resources Library, 1988), 247.

news of the gospel to family, friends, and strangers too who, without Christ, are on their way to an eternity in hell.

So, the shoes of the gospel means sharing the good news of the gospel.

IV. The Whole Armor of God Includes the Shield of Faith (6:16)

Fourth, the whole armor of God includes the shield of faith.

Paul wrote in verse 16, **“In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one.”** In our spiritual warfare against our terrible enemy Christians are exposed to **“all the flaming darts of the evil one.”** Exactly what are **“all the flaming darts of the evil one”**? Commentator John Stott says, “The devil’s darts no doubt include his mischievous accusations which inflame our conscience with what (if we are sheltering in Christ) can only be called false guilt. Other darts are unsought thoughts of doubt and disobedience, rebellion, lust, malice or fear.”⁴ And John MacArthur says, “The spiritual **flaming darts** against which believers need protection would seem primarily to be temptations. Satan continually bombards God’s children with temptations to immorality, hatred, envy, anger, covetousness, pride, doubt, fear, despair, distrust, and every other sin.”⁵

But there is a **shield** which can be used to **extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one.** John MacArthur describes

⁴ John R. W. Stott, *God’s New Society: The Message of Ephesians*, The Bible Speaks Today (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1979), 281.

⁵ John F. MacArthur Jr., *Ephesians*, MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press, 1986), 359.

the Roman soldier's shield:

Roman soldiers used several kinds of shields, but two were the most common. The first was a rather small round shield, perhaps two feet in diameter, that was secured to the arm by two leather straps. It was relatively lightweight and was used to parry the sword blows of one's opponent in hand-to-hand fighting.

The second kind was the *thureos*, to which Paul refers here. This **shield** was about two and half feet wide and four and a half feet high, designed to protect the entire body of the soldier—who was considerably smaller than the average man today. The **shield** was made of a solid piece of wood and was covered with metal or heavy oiled leather.

The soldiers who carried these shields were in the front lines of battle, and normally stood side by side with their shields together, forming a huge phalanx extending as long as a mile or more....Anyone who stood or crouched behind such shields was protected from the barrage of enemy arrows and spears.⁶

According to Paul, the Christian's **shield** is **faith**. Boice makes an insightful comment. He writes, "Paul is saying that our faith should be like that. It should do three 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."⁷

Boice goes on to say that Paul does not say that Christians are to "**take up the shield of *the* faith,**" as if referring to a specific body of truth. Paul had already mentioned that when

⁶ John F. MacArthur Jr., *Ephesians*, 357–358.

⁷ James Montgomery Boice, *Ephesians: An Expository Commentary*, 248.

he said that we were to fasten on “the belt of truth” (6:14a). No, here in verse 16 Paul said that Christians are to **“take up the shield of faith,”** which Boice says, “[means] a general confidence in God. 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.”⁸

MacArthur agrees with Boice, “The **faith** to which Paul refers here is not the body of Christian beliefs (for which the term is used in 4:13), but basic trust in God—the faith in Christ that appropriates salvation and continues to bring blessing and strength as it trusts him for daily provision and help.”⁹

And Stott writes, “God himself ‘is a shield to those who take refuge in him’ (Proverbs 30:5), and it is by faith that we flee to him for refuge. For 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.”¹⁰

So, the shield of faith is general confidence in God, a faith that lays hold of the promises and power of God.

V. The Whole Armor of God Includes the Helmet of Salvation (6:17a)

And fifth, the whole armor of God includes the helmet of salvation.

Paul wrote in verse 17a, **“...and take the helmet of salvation....”** MacArthur describes the Roman soldier’s helmet:

⁸ James Montgomery Boice, *Ephesians: An Expository Commentary*, 248.

⁹ John F. MacArthur Jr., *Ephesians*, 358.

¹⁰ John R. W. Stott, *God’s New Society: The Message of Ephesians*, 281.

The Whole Armor of God

The fifth piece of God's armor is represented by the Roman soldier's **helmet**, without which he would never enter battle. Some of the helmets were made of thick leather covered with metal plates, and others were of heavy molded or beaten metal. They usually had cheek pieces to protect the face.

The purpose of the **helmet**, of course, was to protect the head from injury, particularly from the dangerous broadsword commonly used in the warfare of that day. That was not the much smaller sword mentioned later in this verse, but was a large two-handed, double-edged sword (*rhomphaia*, see Rev. 1:16; 2:12; 6:8) that measured three to four feet in length. It was often carried by cavalymen, who would swing at the heads of enemy soldiers to split their skulls or decapitate them.¹¹

According to Paul, the Christian's **helmet** is **salvation**. John Stott writes, "But whether our head piece is that measure of salvation which we have already received (forgiveness, deliverance from Satan's bondage, and adoption into God's family) or the confident expectation of full salvation on the last day (including resurrection glory and Christ-likeness in heaven), there is no doubt that God's saving power is our only defense against the enemy of our souls."¹²

Two of Satan's powerful schemes against believers are doubt and discouragement. He wants us to doubt God's personal love and care for us so that we become discouraged about our standing with God.

Kent Hughes makes the following comment about **the helmet of salvation**:

¹¹ John F. MacArthur Jr., *Ephesians*, 360.

¹² John R. W. Stott, *God's New Society: The Message of Ephesians*, 282.

Now consider “the helmet of salvation” placed on our heads by the nail-pierced hands of Christ at our conversion. The helmet assures us that *whatever happens we will be saved and experience victory in Christ*. “For it is by grace you have been saved” (perfect passive participle—*you have been saved, and the results continue on*) (2:8, 9). The helmet infuses optimism about the course of the battle in this world. “Being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus” (Philippians 1:6). The helmet also instills an irrepressible hope—“the hope of salvation as a helmet,” as Paul terms it in 1 Thessalonians 5:8—a bounding hope of future salvation and glory with Christ.¹³

So, the helmet of salvation assures us that God will bring us safely to glory.

Conclusion

Therefore, having analyzed Ephesians 6:15-17a, let us put on the whole armor of God so that we may stand firm against the schemes of the devil.

In our spiritual warfare against the schemes of the devil we must know biblical doctrine, practice daily obedience, share the gospel, believe God’s promises and power, and trust God to bring us home to heaven. When we put on these pieces of armor on a daily basis, we shall begin to experience victory against the devil and his schemes.

May God enable us to put on the whole armor of God so that we may stand firm against the schemes of the devil. Amen.

¹³ R. Kent Hughes, *Ephesians: The Mystery of the Body of Christ*, 241.

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