

# The Armor of God

by

Steven P. Wickstrom

All scripture quoted from the ESV unless otherwise noted.

Ephesians 6:10-18:

<sup>10</sup> Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might.

<sup>11</sup> Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil.

<sup>12</sup> 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.

<sup>13</sup> 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.

<sup>14</sup> Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness,

<sup>15</sup> and, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace.

<sup>16</sup> In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one;

<sup>17</sup> and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God,

<sup>18</sup> praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end, keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints,

## Introduction

Paul penned his letter to the church at Ephesus about 30 years after the death and resurrection of Jesus. During this time, Paul was in prison in Rome for the first time (Ephesians 3:1;4:1), making Ephesians one of the four epistles commonly known as the Prison Epistles. The others are Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon. The letter to the Ephesians touches on a wide range of moral and ethical behaviors, all designed to ensure believers live up to the Christian calling. Paul wanted to ensure that the church was maturing in Christ, and this letter provided the instructions to make this happen.

The Romans were very religious people. Religion played a significant role not only in the life of the everyday citizen but also in the army. Army camps were required to have shrines for the gods, and some legions were dedicated to particular gods (such as Mars, the god of war). The army celebrated religious ceremonies regularly.<sup>1</sup> Rome's main problem with Christians was that they did not worship the Roman gods.

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<sup>1</sup>John F. Shean, *History of Warfare*, vol. 61, *Soldiering for God: Christianity and the Roman Army* (Leiden, the Netherlands: Brill, 2010), 7.

Christians were seen as atheists, denying the gods of Rome. For Paul to describe Christians as wearing armor would not have been seen as unusual by the early Christian church. Since the Roman army was closely associated with gods of Rome, the Christian "army" would also be closely associated with the God of heaven and earth.

Armor is a covering that protects a soldier's body during battle. When Paul gave his armor of God discourse in Ephesians 6:10-18, what did his original readers see in this visualization? The letter of Ephesians was written to people who saw Roman soldiers on almost a daily basis. They were very familiar with Roman armor, and Paul's analogy would have had a special meaning to them. What did this armor mean to them? We need to understand what the armor meant to them to put it into perspective today. Another important question we need to ask is this: What did the armor mean to the Roman soldier? After all, it was the soldier who wore the armor, and Paul is telling us to do the same. Understanding what the armor meant to the Roman soldier of Paul's day and age will help us to put it into perspective as to what that means to us today as well. Before we answer these questions, let's first look at the Roman soldier of the first-century era.

By the time Paul wrote the letter to the Ephesians, the Roman army had been learning, adapting, and improving their weapons for over four hundred years. Soldiers in the Roman army were referred to as "legionaries." The military preferred to enlist young men from rural areas (farmers) rather than cities. Farmers were considered hard-working and better able to withstand the rigors of outdoor living. The bonding of the soldiers is one of the things credited with the success of the Roman army. They viewed themselves as family and were deeply committed to each other.

Around the empire, people and nations feared the Roman armies due to their fighting ability. Their army was highly disciplined, expertly trained, and organized to operate like a well-oiled machine. The army went into battle in a "block" formation. Each "block" would march in step, moving as a single unit, responding to trumpet calls. The smallest unit, a "contubernium," referred to as a "tent group," consisted of eight men who shared a tent. The members of a tent group fought together, side-by-side in battle. Ten "tent groups" were organized into a larger unit called a "century." (A typical century had 80 men rather than 100.) These eighty men were under the command of a Centurion. The basic fighting unit was a "cohort" composed of six centuries (480 men plus 6 Centurions). A "legion" was composed of ten cohorts. A legion would have 4,860 fighting men, plus 300 cavalry, clerks, engineers, supply personnel, and messengers.<sup>2</sup> The Commander of the Legion carried the title of "Legatus Legionis," or Legate, for short.

The soldiers participated in strenuous marching drills and maneuvers. They also drilled in battlefield maneuvers (including the hollow square, wedge, and the famed

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<sup>2</sup>Pat Southern, *The Roman Army: A Social and Institutional History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 100.

*testudo* formations). Signaling was an essential skill that allowed them to communicate with other divisions across the battlefield. All soldiers received training in weapons handling for hand-to-hand combat. Interestingly, the faux swords and shields used in practices were made of wood and wicker. The fake weapons weighed twice the mass of their actual counterparts. This weight acclimated the soldier with fatigue and weariness that could quickly happen in the heat of the battle.<sup>3</sup> During times of peace, the army engaged in building roads, bridges, aqueducts, and other infrastructure projects.

Before Paul started his armor list, he first gave us the reason for wearing it. The reason is the phrase "stand firm." Verse 13 and the first part of 14 states, "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.. Stand therefore ...." The word "stand" is the Greek word "stēnai - στήναι," (Strong's G2476) which means "to stand fast against an enemy, as opposed to running away."<sup>4</sup> The Roman army soldier was forbidden to run away from a battle. Cowardice was a capital offense, punishable by death.<sup>5</sup> When we think of the phrase "stand firm," we tend to think of it as a defensive position. We think of a giant wave about to crash over us and that we have to stand firm to keep from being washed away if we can. This image was not the Roman army's idea of standing firm. The Roman army would stand firm against an enemy onslaught by linking shields and moving into a "tortoise" formation (more about that later). This formation was very effective against cavalry and chariots. The soldiers assisted each other in standing firm until the charge was over, and then they would immediately counterattack. The whole point is that standing firm would have been impossible if the soldier had not been wearing all his armor.

It is important to note that Paul's armor listing is not in the order that a soldier would have used to put on his armor. An actual soldier would have started with undergarments and ended with the shield. Instead, Paul seems to have listed the armor in importance to the spiritual principles he assigned. Please realize the order in which they are given is not as important as what they represent. For example, Paul starts out with the belt of truth, but in all actuality, the belt was one of the last items to be put on. Paul's list also leaves out some of the weaponry carried by the soldiers and does not even mention the undergarments. So please understand that this is not an all-inclusive list of what Roman soldiers wore or carried into battle.

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<sup>3</sup>Pat Southern, *The Roman Army: A Social and Institutional History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 136.

<sup>4</sup>Zodhiates, Spiros. *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament*. Iowa Falls, IA: World Bible Publishers, ©1992.

<sup>5</sup>Hanson, Marilee. "The Roman Army" <https://englishhistory.net/romans/the-roman-army/>, June 13, 2022

## The Belt of Truth

Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth (verse 14). Paul starts with buckling or girding (to wrap around) our loins (waist or lower back) with the belt truth. The belt that the Roman soldier wore was a particular type of belt. Only someone in the army could wear this belt because it was specifically made from which to hang weapons.



Only a soldier could wear a sword in public. The belt to which the sword was fastened was the distinguishing mark of a soldier. With or without a sword, the wide belt classified the wearer as a soldier. Soldiers wore their belt in and out of uniform as a badge of honor. The belt was approximately 2½ inches wide and covered with metal plates.

The metal plates had three general purposes. The first was to hang weapons on. The second was to provide stiffening for the leather, which prevented it from curling from the weight of the weapons. Daily rations and supplies also hung from the belt. The third purpose was to show rank, status, and affiliation to a particular legion. The plates were molded or embossed and, in some rare cases, decorated with paint. Finally, the sword was affixed to the belt on the right side and a dagger on the left. Special plates with protruding buttons were used to attach the weapons.

Since the belt represents truth, we must ask the question: What is truth? During Jesus' trial, Jesus told Pilot that he came into the world to testify to the truth. Pilot cynically posed the question: What is truth? According to the gospel of John 18: 33-38, Pilot did not give Jesus the chance to answer the question. Perhaps he did not want to hear the answer that Jesus would have given him. Earlier in John 14:6, Jesus made the statement, "I am the way and the truth and the life." His whole life pointed to God. He did what God told him to do, said what God wanted him to say, and went where God wanted him to go. God the Father is "the God of truth" (Psalm 31:5; Isaiah 65:16). Truth is not just part of God's character; it is who he is; God is truth. God is the source and author of truth. Truth is absolute, and is not subjective. Something cannot be both true and untrue. *Truth is therefore, that which is consistent with the mind, will, character, glory, and holiness of God.*<sup>6</sup> To put this another way: *Truth is the self-expression of God.* This is the belt from which our weapons hang.

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<sup>6</sup>Steven J. Lawson, "What is Truth," Ligonier Ministries the teaching fellowship of R.C. Sproul, September 1, 2010, accessed, <http://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/what-is-truth/>.

## Spiritual Application

Remember that the Roman soldier's belt had two main functions: to hold weapons and to display status and affiliation. Why is it important to hang our weapons on truth? Since our sword is referred to as the word of God, how we use it is vital. The word of God should only be used in truth. For example, many people teach that homosexuality is okay because God is love and therefore loves homosexuality. They re-translate the verses to make it look like God is not against homosexuality at all. When a person uses the Bible to promote sin, it means that person is not wearing the belt of truth.

The belt was also used to display status and affiliation. Truth displays our affiliation with Christ. Truth may be the first in Paul's lineup because it is part of the nature of God. "Lying lips are an abomination to the Lord," (Proverbs 12:22 NASB). "No rotten talk should come from your mouth, but only what is good for the building up of someone in need, in order to give grace to those who hear." (Ephesians 4:29 HSCB). We must be careful when applying the Bible to our lives and others that we do it truthfully. Truthfulness displays our status as Christians and our affiliation with Christ. Someone who has dedicated their life to Christ should not be walking around telling lies. Lies are of the devil and indicate a problem with the heart. Truth is of God and indicates a heart washed clean through salvation.

The belt is a symbol of what truth is and what truth does. Not only does truth display our affiliation with Christ, but it also displays what Christ is doing in us. Jesus is truth (John 14:6); therefore, we cannot really have truth (Christ) unless truth (Christ) has us. Truth is inseparably related to, and linked, with action. Our weapons hang from it. This makes them based in truth. Since it is wrapped around our waist, it encompasses our whole personality. It is important for Christians to be identified by a visible symbol that shows who they are, who they stand for, and who they represent.<sup>7</sup> The exercise of truth is more than a matter of being honest because integrity and trustworthiness are essential components of readiness for the struggle with the rulers, authorities, and powers of evil listed at the beginning of the passage.<sup>8</sup> The belt of truth accomplishes this for us in a way that gives glory to God.

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<sup>7</sup>John Alexander Mackay, "When Truth Is a Belt," *The Princeton Seminary Bulletin* 59, no. 1 (1965): 4-14.

<sup>8</sup>Thomas R. Yoder Neufeld, *Ephesians*, Believers Church Bible Commentary (Waterloo, Ont.: Scottdale, Pa. :, ©2002), 299.

## The Breastplate of Righteousness

Having put on the breastplate of righteousness (verse 14). The breastplate (called a lorica by the Romans) covered the chest and abdomen and had a corresponding plate that covered the back. Its major function was to protect the heart and lungs from all directions. They were made of bronze or leather. A leather lorica cost less money, so only officers wore brass. The enlisted soldiers upgraded to metal as soon they could afford it. It provided 360 degrees of protection. Both front and back were handmade for



the individual and were either latched, laced, or buckled together (sometimes all three). This breastplate provided a lot of protection. While it couldn't stop everything, it was very effective for the close hand-to-hand combat the Romans were famous for. This armor was efficient at deflecting swords and daggers.

Many soldiers would decorate the front of the breastplate by embossing or painting it with their unit's logo and depictions of battles they had participated in. You could see how many battles and campaigns the soldier had participated in simply by looking at his breastplate. The decorations on the breastplate spoke of military achievements that had benefited the empire. Sword strikes and spear dents became stories that were told around the campfires and to civilians who cared to listen. A soldier would point to the decoration and proudly recount the story of a battle that had been won.

High-ranking soldiers tended to have two loricas, one they wore into battle, and the super decorated one they wore in public. Some surviving Roman statues of various Caesars and generals depict one or more of the Roman gods on them.<sup>9</sup> It was a public testimony to the god(s) who not only kept them safe in battle but also won the battles for them as well.

### Spiritual Application

The Greek word "dikaiosune" is translated "righteousness." In ancient Greek literature, *dikaiosune* referred to virtue and excellence. The term refers to the (human) characteristic of being "just;" a more exact but grammatically less correct translation would be 'justness.'<sup>10</sup> *Dikaiosune* is occasionally translated as "justice" in other passages of the New

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<sup>9</sup>David Janssen, "The Roman Cuirass Breastplate Statue and Paul's Use of Armour Language," *Colloquium* 46, no. 1 (May, 2014): 55-85.

<sup>10</sup>Rose Cherubin, "Nicomachean Ethics V: Justice (Dikaiosune)," *Notes on Nicomachean Ethics Book V* (George Mason University, n.d.), <http://mason.gmu.edu/~rcherubi/nev.htm>.

Testament. It means both righteousness and justice.<sup>11</sup> Listing this armor as the breastplate of righteousness/justice would also be correct. In ancient Rome, justice and virtue were inseparable. What is virtue? Virtue is behavior that demonstrates high moral standards. The Roman soldier showed justice (virtue) in his excellence, courage, character, and worth. The army expected soldiers to be just (and virtuous) people.

Righteousness is what God does as a warrior – it is justice at work.<sup>12</sup> God is a holy God who cannot and does not tolerate sin. An individual whose "iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered," is the individual to whom God imputes righteousness (Psalms 32:1-2; Romans 4:6-8). The justice of God demands that the penalty for sin is death. According to Romans 3:23, we have all sinned and deserved the death sentence. Fortunately, Christ died for our sins so that we wouldn't have to (1 Peter 3:18). Christ's righteousness, imputed to us, satisfies God's justice. Wearing the breastplate of righteousness satisfies the justice of God. Our heart and soul are protected in and through Christ. The blows of the enemy cannot take that away from us.

There are two prominent opinions as to what the breastplate of righteousness represents. The first opinion is that righteousness is our imputed righteousness that came through Christ's sacrifice. "Imputed" is a theological word that simply means Christ's righteousness is credited to the believer's "account." The second opinion is that the internal righteousness of the believer consists of virtue and excellence that comes through sanctification. What is sanctification? Sanctification is the process through which God makes us more and more like Christ.<sup>13</sup>

I think Paul likely had both in mind when he penned this verse. Since the cuirass consists of two pieces, it is conceivable that the front piece represents our imputed righteousness that comes through salvation and the back piece represents the righteousness or virtue that comes through sanctification. Or vice versa.

Righteousness comes from God. Philippians 3:9 (NASB) says, "and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from *the Law*, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which *comes* from God on the basis of faith." 2 Corinthians 5:21 says, "For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." Righteousness is something we are, not something that we do. The righteousness of God within us affects what we do; it is not what we do that makes us righteous. As believers, we must conduct ourselves righteously, and the breastplate of righteousness causes that to happen.

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<sup>11</sup>Spiros Zodhiates, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament* (Iowa Falls, IA: World Bible Publishers, ©1992).

<sup>12</sup>Thomas R. Yoder Neufeld, *Ephesians*, Believers Church Bible Commentary (Waterloo, Ont.: Scottdale, Pa. :, ©2002), 300.

<sup>13</sup>David H. Wenkel, "The Breastplate of Righteousness' in Ephesians 6:14," *Tyndale Bulletin* 58, no. 2 (Jan, 2007): 275-87.

Just as the Roman soldiers would point to their decorations and proudly recount the stories of victorious battles, Christians should do the same thing. Brag about your God who wins battles for you, and do it publicly as much as possible. As divine warriors for God, our breastplate represents the triumphs that have been achieved through Christ. The breastplate of righteousness is a call to identify with the virtues and behaviors that come from righteousness. We should be wearing them proudly for all to see. I think a better name for the breastplate of righteousness would be the "breastplate of virtue."

## The Shoes of the Gospel

As shoes for your feet, put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace (verse 15). The Contemporary English Version (CEV) says it this way, "Your desire to tell the good news about peace should be like shoes on your feet." Verse 15 brings to mind the joyful exclamation of the Old Testament prophet: "How lovely upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, who announces peace and brings good news of happiness, who announces salvation, and says to Zion, "Your God reigns!" (Isaiah 52:7 NASB)

The Romans called them "caligae." We would be more than likely to consider them as



sandals, shoes, or open boots. Specifically designed with long marches in mind, the caligae worn by the Roman soldier had a thick sole which was the shoe's secret. Hobnails, which are small iron nails (think cleats or studs), were nailed through the soles, kept the footwear together, and prevented the soles of the boots from wearing out too quickly. The hobnails added durability to not

only the shoes but also a noise factor. A cohort marching down a stone road tended to sound like three cohorts marching, which the Romans used as a psychological terror factor to their advantage. The hobnails also helped prevent the boot from slipping and sliding on wet ground, allowing the soldier to stand firm and forge ahead. The Romans knew proper footwear on the battlefield was essential to the uniform.

An additional feature of the hobnails was that they provided traction on dirt and grass. Just as athletes today use cleats to give them an advantage on soft or slippery surfaces, the Roman boots gave the soldier the same edge on the battlefield. The hobnails prevented the soldier from sliding and allowed him to "dig in" while physically pushing against an enemy. The hobnailed boots also assisted if the soldier needed to rapidly change directions by preventing the feet from sliding. In hand-to-hand combat, the ground would quickly become covered in blood and very slippery.



The Roman soldier could not afford to slip on the bloody ground and fall. His boots prevented that from happening.

### Spiritual Application

As shoes for your feet, put on the *readiness* given by the gospel of peace. I think a better name for the shoes of the gospel would be the “shoes of readiness.” The word “readiness” (translated as “preparation” in many versions) in verse 15 (Greek word *hetoimasia* - ἑτοιμασία) could be translated as “firm footing; foundation.”<sup>14</sup> If we did that, the verse would look like this: *As shoes for your feet, put on the firm footing given by the gospel of peace (verse 15)*. Christians should *prepare* to demonstrate that the gospel has a power that can replace the strife, despair, hate, and ruin of this world with the peace and joy, love, and life of God's salvation. But that is not the gist of this verse. You cannot go into battle on slippery ground; you need firm footing or a good foundation to stand on. Jesus' final command to His disciples contained a declaration about the gospel of peace. *“And He said to them, ‘Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved; but whoever does not believe will be condemned’”* (Mark 16:15-16). As valuable as firm footwear is to us, preparation or readiness communicates the holy impatience to get the good news of peace out.<sup>15</sup> The apostle Paul walked countless miles to deliver the good news. People spread the gospel by walking from town to town during that time. Our methods of transportation and communication have changed, but the need to spread the good news has not.

The “gospel of peace” is a message about what God has done in and through Christ's death, and what God is now wanting to do in and through the readers/hearers of this letter: effect the reconciliation of people to God and to one another.<sup>16</sup> The feet of those disciples, who were delivering that message of peace, are figuratively described as beautiful: *“And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written: ‘How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!’”* (Romans 10:15). The gospel is, in a manner of speaking, the shoes (or hobnailed boots) that we wear. The Bible acts like the hobnails, or cleats, that gives us a firm footing and keep us grounded. Jesus quoted scripture to the devil, and that sure footing gave him victory. It will give us victory as well.

Have you ever walked on hot pavement or sharp rocks without shoes? Shoes allow you to walk across painful terrain without experiencing discomfort or pain. Think about that for a moment. Just as shoes enable us to walk on otherwise painful terrain

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<sup>14</sup>Spiros Zodhiates, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament* (Iowa Falls, IA: World Bible Publishers, ©1992).

<sup>15</sup>Thomas R. Yoder Neufeld, *Ephesians*, Believers Church Bible Commentary (Waterloo, Ont.: Scottdale, Pa. :, ©2002), 301.

<sup>16</sup>Michael J. Gorman, *Becoming the Gospel: Paul, Participation, and Mission*, The Gospel and Our Culture Series (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2015), 98.

without fear, the preparation of the gospel of peace also allows us to traverse the otherwise painful trials and tribulations of life without fear. It is because we know that what awaits is more significant than anything we could suffer in this world (Romans 8:18). The Bible makes it clear that when God's Kingdom is finally established, the world will live God's way faithfully. The resulting peace will be universal. There will be no more war or fear, only the worldwide peace that comes from God's way of life.

## The Shield of Faith

In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one (v16). The standard shield used by the Roman soldier in



Paul's day was called a "scutum." It was rectangular, measuring 36 inches wide by 48 inches long. If a soldier could afford it, he could purchase a leather cover to protect his shield from the elements when it was not in use. The shield weighed about 10 pounds and was made of 3 layers of wood similar to modern plywood with a metal rim to cause swords to bounce off the edge rather than get stuck in it. The shields were not tailored for the individual but came in one size fits all versions. Everyone got the same size and weight shield as everyone else. Steam was used to bend the shield giving it a semi-cylindrical shape. Soldiers regularly coated the shield with olive oil to keep the wood from drying out and becoming brittle. If the wood became brittle, it would easily shatter in combat. The oil also has the added benefit of making the shield waterproof and, therefore, a useful but cumbersome

umbrella when it rained. The shield was also a means of visual identification. Shields could be marked to identify which century, legion, and cohort to which the soldier was attached.

The shield was light enough to hold in one hand, and its considerable height and width covered the entire wielder. The advantage of its size was that it made the soldier less likely to get hit by arrows, spears, or other small projectiles. The primary purpose was to "shield" the soldier from sword strikes during hand-to-hand combat. While its composite construction was sturdy, the shield could break from a heavy cutting or piercing blow which was experienced in the Roman campaigns against Carthage (200 BC). The Carthaginian's heavy single-edged sword could easily penetrate and rip through the scutum.

While the Roman shield did an excellent job of covering the torso of the soldier, its crucial advantage was in its offensive capacity. The metal boss, or umbo, in the shield's center also made it an auxiliary punching weapon.<sup>17</sup> If you could knock an enemy soldier off his feet with your shield, he became an easy target to stab and kill. If you could knock an enemy soldier off his feet with your shield, he became an easy target to stab and kill. The Romans also used the intimidation tactic of striking their swords in unison against their shields, creating a tremendous amount of noise. This noise was a means to instill psychological terror into their enemies.<sup>18</sup> One of the unique ways the Roman used their shields was to tighten their formation and link (interlock) their shields together. The Romans referred to this formation as a "testudo," the Latin



word for tortoise. This tortoise formation protected the entire squad from arrows and allowed them to move forward simultaneously. There are reports that even chariots could not smash through a tortoise formation. The Romans would also modify the tortoise into a triangular

shape, or wedge, which they used to crack open enemy lines.

Armies seldom used flaming arrows in warfare, with one exception, night battles. A wall of flaming arrows soaring through the air at night could be a terrifying sight. However, flaming arrows had several tremendous disadvantages.

- A) They were heavier than normal and couldn't travel as far.
  - B) What you put on the arrow that caused it to burn also caused erratic flight causing most arrows to miss their target.
  - C) Archers tended to be in the rear, firing over their own troops into enemy lines.
- Flaming erratic and heavy arrows often caused as much damage to their own army as to the enemy's army. The flaming arrow was more of a scare tactic than anything else. You could see them coming and have time to take cover.

The olive oil coating extinguished the flame when a flaming arrow hit a Roman shield. Olive oil has low volatility due to its very high flash point (500 °F) and does not easily burn. When you can get it to burn, it burns very slowly. (This made olive oil so popular to use in lamps in Biblical times.) When a flaming arrow hit a Roman shield, the olive oil prevented the wood from immediately catching fire, giving the soldier

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<sup>17</sup>David Sim and Jaime Kaminski, *Roman Imperial Armour: The Production of Early Imperial Books*, ©2012), 146.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 147.

enough time to break it off with his sword. Other than use as a scare tactic, flaming arrows would be pretty much useless against an army.

### **Spiritual Application**

So how did the original readers of the letter (and the church today for that matter) view Paul's analogy of the Shield of Faith? We tend to think of the shield as a defensive tool, but we need to rethink this in light of spiritual warfare. While I understand that Paul describes the shield as being used to fend off the devil's flaming arrows, that does not necessarily mean that we are on the defensive. Let me explain. A Roman army storming an enemy city (an offensive maneuver) would use their shields (a defensive maneuver) as they advanced to fend off the arrows of the archers defending the walls. The use of shields allowed the army to keep pushing forward. They are not cowering in fear; instead, they protect themselves as they move forward. When the soldiers are close enough, the archers can no longer use their arrows against them. The image of the shield of faith is thus every bit as offensive as it is defensive, if not more so. The church is called to put the spiritual powers under siege.<sup>19</sup>

There are many spiritual implications in the shield of faith. First, it is essential to remember that the shield is much an offensive weapon as it is a defensive capability. When you are under attack from the enemy, push back and knock him off his feet. Mark 11:23-24 tells us to use our faith and speak to the mountain. Use the shield of faith to knock that mountain into the sea. Secondly, it is essential to remember that shields can be brought together. As a Christian, you are not in the fight alone. We can join together and interlock our faith with the Christian standing next to us. The story in Luke 5:17-26 is about five friends who interlocked their faith and broke through a roof so they could lower their friend down to Jesus. Verse 20 says that Jesus saw "their" faith and was moved to action. Don't be a solitary Christian, be part of a unit so that you can protect each other with your faith.

Please understand that faith is not just saying that you believe something. Faith is demonstrated by and through taking action, which brings about the powerful results associated with it. When you have faith, you believe in something, so much so that you put whatever you have on the line to prove it will be so. For example, we believe in God, whom we have not seen, and that He forgave our sins, which we cannot prove by natural means. It takes God's supernatural faith to receive salvation. Where does faith come from? We get it from God's Word. Romans 10:17 states, "**So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.**" We access God's faith through His Word. When we hear God's Word, the Holy Spirit empowers it, and if we receive the truth,

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<sup>19</sup>Thomas R. Yoder Neufeld, *Ephesians*, Believers Church Bible Commentary (Waterloo, Ont.: Scottdale, PA:, ©2002), 302.

God's supernatural faith enters us. Once we receive God's supernatural faith at salvation, it doesn't leave us. Faith becomes a permanent part of our born-again spirits.

We sometimes use the God kind of faith that is present in our spirits, and other times we don't. A Roman soldier would not go into battle without his shield, yet as Christians, we seldom use it. Why is that? There is no lack of faith within any true Christian. There is just a lack of knowing and using what God has already given us. Most people don't doubt that faith works; they doubt that they have enough faith to get the job done. This doubt is a huge problem for Christians. We remember that Jesus occasionally scolded his disciples for having so little faith, and we think we are just like them. This results from incorrect teaching, and nothing could be further from the truth. Jesus almost always rebuked the disciples for having "little faith" when his divinity and identity were displayed for all to see, yet they didn't see it. It is not so much a case of the disciples having "little faith" but a case of their not using the faith they already had.

Consider Romans 12:3, where Paul wrote, *“For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned”* (emphasis mine). The word “according” is the Greek word “emerisen - ἐμέρισεν” (Strong’s G3307), which means “to distribute.”<sup>20</sup> The word “measure” is the Greek word “metron – μέτρον” (Strong’s G3358), which means “unit of measurement.”<sup>21</sup> The Greek word “metron” is a noun that is accusative neuter singular. What does that mean? Nouns are the words for persons, places, things, and concepts. In Greek, accusative indicates the noun is the direct object (receiving the verb's action) in the sentence. Neuter indicates that the noun is neither masculine nor feminine. Singular (in Greek) indicates that the noun is not plural.

Some versions say God has given us THE measure of faith, and others say God has given us A measure of faith. The translators get away with this because there is no word between “according” and “measure.” It literally reads, “God has distributed measure of faith to each.” Logically speaking, Paul is telling us that we cannot think of ourselves more highly than others because we all receive the same amount of faith. It is carefully measured so that no one gets more than anyone else. Remember, the Roman shields were not tailored for the individual but came in a one-size-fits-all approach. Everyone got the same size and weight shield as everyone else. We're all on the same level when it comes to faith. God doesn't give faith the size of a mustard seed to one person and faith the size of a boulder to another. We each get the same amount. Every Roman soldier used a shield the same size and weight as the soldier next to him. The shield was a standard issue, and so is faith. We each get the same-sized shield of faith.

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<sup>20</sup> Spiros Zodhiates, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament* (Iowa Falls, IA: World Bible Publishers, ©1992), 960.

<sup>21</sup> Moises Silva, *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology and Exegesis*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2014), 3:293.

What about Matthew 17:14-21, which talks about faith the size of a mustard seed? In this instance, the disciples could not cast a demon out of a young boy. The disciples later asked Jesus why they could not cast out the demon. “It is because you don't have enough faith! But I can promise you this. If you had faith no larger than a mustard seed, you could tell this mountain to move from here to there. And it would. Everything would be possible for you.” (Matthew 17:20). Verse 21 adds, “But the only way to force out that kind of demon is by praying and fasting.” The disciples ran into a problem when the demon was stronger than they were. But in addition, that type of demon required prayer and fasting along with faith, to cast out. The comparison was not between the size of the disciples' faith but between what happens when that faith is planted (and produces tremendous results). Jesus never said that their faith was the size of a mustard seed, but rather, when used, would produce a significant effect like a mustard seed. At a superficial level, the disciples did have faith. They expected to be able to exorcise the demon. They had long been successful in this work, and now they are surprised by their failure. So why didn't their faith work? They treated the authority given them (10:1, 8) like a gift of magic, a bestowed power that works regardless of the person (say the magic phrase, see the magic results). Jesus told them this case requires prayer and fasting - not a form or an approved rite, but an entire life bathed in prayer and its concomitant faith. In Matthew, Jesus told his disciples that what they need is not giant faith (or even tiny faith) but true faith — faith that, out of a deep, personal trust, expects God to work.

So what exactly is the measure of faith that each person receives? The Bible does not come out and state what that exact measure is. However, we can use Ephesians 6:16 to figure it out. We are each given a shield, which (I think) is the measure of faith. You cannot go into battle with a mustard seed taped to your arm and expect it to deflect anything. Faith must be the size of a shield because that is how Paul describes it. The problem is that we don't use it. If only the amount of faith equal to a mustard seed can move a mountain, think of what you can accomplish if you used the whole shield! The problem is not that you don't have enough faith; the problem is that you aren't using what God has given you. He has given you a shield; you need to use it.

## **The Helmet of Salvation**

**Take (put on) the helmet of salvation (verse 17).** It is important to remember what the helmet protects. It protects the head, which covers some of the most important sensory organs, such as the eyes, ears, nose, and mouth. It also protects the brain, which is highly susceptible to shock and, therefore, very sensitive to any damage. In very few places in the human body are so many vital organs found in such a small compact

area.<sup>22</sup> The helmet's purpose is to protect all of these critical organs simultaneously. As an offensive weapon, soldiers used their helmets to butt, spear or ram an enemy with the crown or top of the helmet.

The Roman Legionary helmet was a standard issue for all troops. These helmets tended to be conical in shape and made from brass. The helmets had a small extension



at the back as a neck guard to protect the back of the neck from sword blows and aerial projectiles such as arrows. The brow guard would deflect sword blows away from the eyes and face. The cheek guards protected the cheeks and jaw. Soldiers added extra padding and lining inside the helmet to absorb the shock of sword blows.<sup>23</sup> Some, but not all, helmets had ear protectors riveted in place. Roman helmets generally exposed the ears because the hearing was considered essential during a battle. If the helmet covered the ears, the soldiers might not hear commands the Centurions gave.

The helmet protected the soldier's head, face, and neck without blocking too much of his vision. The helmet is one of the most critical pieces of Roman armor and, oddly enough, one of the most difficult to make. Roman helmets of the New Testament period were hand-beaten from a single sheet of iron or brass. This process takes an enormous amount of time and skill. Each soldier had to have a helmet for their head size and shape. There was no one-size-fits-all helmet because the Romans realized that each person's head was a different size. The Romans were not about to take any chances to protect their soldiers.

Centurions typically wore a transverse crest, which ran from side to side (ear to ear) across their helmets. Centurions wore these crests in battle to serve as a visual reference and rallying point for their men. The Commander of a Cohort would wear a crest on his helmet that ran fore to aft, down their helmet. The purpose of the crest was to provide easy recognition for lower-ranking soldiers and also gave the battle commander a view of where his commanders were.

### **Spiritual Application**

What fascinates me most about the helmet of salvation: Paul is writing to Christians. This begs the question: Why do Christians need to wear the helmet of salvation? Do Christians need to be saved? Well, no, they already are saved. We can conclude, therefore, that the helmet of salvation does not refer to getting saved or becoming born

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<sup>22</sup>David Sim and Jaime Kaminski, *Roman Imperial Armour: The Production of Early Imperial Military Armour* (Oxford: Oxbow Books, ©2012), 79.

<sup>23</sup>David Sim and Jaime Kaminski, *Roman Imperial Armour: The Production of Early Imperial Military Armour* (Oxford: Oxbow Books, ©2012), 81.

again. The Greek word for salvation, used in this verse is “soteriou – σωτηρίου” (which is an adjective - descriptive word). As an adjective, soteriou should be interpreted as “bringing salvation.”<sup>24</sup> In the context of putting on the armor, however, the image of grasping the helmet of salvation is meant to place on the church the task of bringing liberation to those in bondage.<sup>25</sup> In order to *bring* the message of salvation, you must first thoroughly *know* the message of salvation. It must be more than head knowledge; it must also include heart knowledge. It requires a deep relationship with God to be a salvation bringer.

The helmet protected the Roman soldier against damaging and deadly blows to the head. Likewise, we should use the helmet of salvation to protect our mind, the seat of our thoughts. Spiritually speaking, the helmet of salvation provides hope and protects the mind against anything that would disorient or destroy the Christian, such as discouragement, lies, or deceit. Salvation is not just a one-time event – justification, but an ongoing day-by-day process called sanctification. The process of sanctification causes us to become more Christlike.

How do we use the helmet of salvation?

1. We must renew our minds. Let's face it; our minds are battlefields where we fight daily. The outcomes of those battles determine the course of our lives. Romans 12:1-2 instructs us to renew our minds by allowing the truth of God's Word to wipe out anything contrary to it. We must replace old ideas, opinions, and worldviews with Biblical ones. We must allow God's truth to continually wash away the world's filth, lies, and confusion from our minds and adopt God's perspective.

2. Reject doubts that arise from circumstances. We human beings tend to be very sensory creatures. We tend to disregard what we cannot fathom with our five senses. If we allow them to, circumstances may convince us that God does not love us or that His Word is false. It is impossible to have faith and doubt at the same time. God rewards our faith. With the helmet of salvation firmly in place, we can choose to believe what appears impossible (Hebrews 11:6; 1 Peter 1:8-9).

3. Keep an eternal perspective. When life crashes in around us, we must remember to look up. Our salvation is the most precious gift we have received, and the most precious gift that we can give. Keeping our eyes on that can help us weather life's storms. We can choose to live our lives by the motto "If it doesn't have eternal significance, it's not important" (see Matthew 6:20; 1 Corinthians 3:11-13).

4. Remember that our victory is already accomplished, and the battle is already won. When we consider ourselves "dead to sin but alive to God" (Romans 6:11), we eliminate many opportunities Satan uses to entrap us. Sin should no longer be an option

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<sup>24</sup> Spiros Zodhiates, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament* (Iowa Falls, IA: World Bible Publishers, ©1992), 1362.

<sup>25</sup> Thomas R. Yoder Neufeld, *Ephesians*, Believers Church Bible Commentary (Waterloo, Ont.: Scottdale, Pa. :, ©2002), 303.



for us because we recognize ourselves as "new creatures" (2 Corinthians 5:17; 1 John 3:9). By doing so, we effectively cut off many avenues of failure.

5. We need to find all our hope in Him. Psalm 73:25 says, "[Whom have I in heaven but You? And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you.](#)" Our helmet is most effective when we treasure what it represents. The salvation Jesus purchased for us cannot share the place of importance in our hearts with earthly things. When pleasing the Lord is our supreme delight, we eliminate many of Satan's lures and render his evil suggestions powerless.

## The Sword of the Spirit

*The sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, (verse 17).* The standard sword used by the Roman soldier was called a "gladius" (Latin word for sword). This weapon was a short, one-handed sword, from 24 – 30 inches, with a double-edged blade and a very sharp tip. The sword only weighed about 3.5 pounds. This short-length sword allowed a soldier to step inside the enemy's guard and thrust the sword in just about any direction at a very deadly speed. The gladius was made from high-carbon steel, which made the blade much stronger than iron or bronze. The wooden hilt, where the soldier's hand held onto the sword, featured a rounded grip, with four finger ridges carved in



that allowed a comfortable and firm hold upon the sword.<sup>26</sup> The gladius was a stabbing sword for close-in or hand-to-hand combat. However, the sharp tapered tip could also penetrate enemy armor, making it a deadly, close-in weapon.

Every soldier was measured to see how tall they were. The sword's length was in direct ratio to his body height. The Gladius blade was to have a length equal to the distance from the elbow to the fingertips. This length prevented the sword from catching on the ground when the soldier was in a fighting stance. Soldiers often would etch their names into the sword for easy identification. All soldiers trained to fight with their sword using their right hand and the shield with their left hand.

It was in the crush of battle that occurred when the Roman army pressed up against the enemy army and pushed their way through; the gladius proved its worth. The gladius was the ideal weapon for stabbing the enemy in these close-quarter

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<sup>26</sup>Pat Southern, *The Roman Army: A Social and Institutional History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 212.

conditions. Longer weapons were useless in close-quarters combat due to the lack of room required by long-slashing swords and thrusting spears. The Roman soldiers trained to deploy their swords horizontally, which allowed the blade to easily pierce the enemy's ribs and penetrate vital organs.<sup>27</sup> Holding the sword horizontally also allowed it to be swung back and forth with devastating results.

### **Spiritual Application**

Hebrews 4:12 states, "For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart." The all-powerful sword of the living God can cut through every defense our enemy can raise, down to the very division of bone and marrow. This sword does not bounce off the enemy; instead, it pierces through, causing severe damage to him. When wielded by a servant of God, nothing can withstand its ability to cut straight to the core of a matter and uncover the truth. (Remember that the sword hangs on the belt of truth when not being used.) As soldiers in God's army, we must use His Word to discern the truth and follow it through. When God's Word shows us something wrong in ourselves, we can use this spiritual weapon to "surgically" remove the offending thoughts and actions (2 Corinthians 10:4-5). Its primary purpose, however, is to cut through the lies the enemy throws at you. The word of God will slice right through the lies and deception that stand in your way.

While being tempted by Satan, Jesus did not cower in fear and trembling. Satan misquoted scripture and put it out of context to get Jesus to sin. Jesus used the sword of the Spirit as both a defensive and offensive weapon. He deflected Satan's misuse of scripture and counterattacked (struck back) using scripture correctly, truthfully, and in context. Jesus knew how to use his sword. Three times Satan tempted, and three times Jesus defended himself and then counterattacked with scripture. There are a few sword lessons we can learn from Jesus' encounter with Satan:

1. Do not believe everyone who can quote scripture. Modern history is strewn with cults who twisted the Scriptures to their own destruction (2 Peter 3:16).
2. As you read the Bible, ask yourself how this part fits with that part and that with this. When the pieces start to work together, we are most secure from distortion.
3. Fast and pray that God will open your eyes to see the true and wonderful things written in his word.
4. Obey what you understand, and you will be surprised to see how much more you will begin to understand.

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<sup>27</sup>Patrick Kelly, "Iron of the Empire: The History and Development of the Roman Gladius," [www.myarmory.com](http://www.myarmory.com), accessed, [https://myarmory.com/feature\\_ironempire.html](https://myarmory.com/feature_ironempire.html).

To be a soldier using the sword of the Spirit, we need to have a strong desire to be diligent, holy, and Spirit-filled. We start by going to the Scriptures and reading them repeatedly. Don't just read the Bible; meditate on it. By that, I mean to sit back and really think about it. Think about how it applied to the original readers, and think about how it applies to you. As you ponder what you read, give attention to its truth. And then maybe the most helpful thing you'll ever do is teach it. I realize this is not easy, but you're going to hold on to and understand what you give away even better. Find some faithful men or women and teach them what someone taught you. These are the processes that make it your own. You read it, interpret it, correlate it with itself, meditate on its truths, let it sink deep into your heart and mind, and then teach it. And I will tell you by experience what you give away through teaching or simply sharing with others you keep and retain. Teaching others is one way that you become capable of using the sword effectively.

## Final Thoughts

There are a few closing comments I would like to give you about how to the armor of God. In the first century AD, the primary duty of the army was not to quell rebellions but to protect the empire from outside influences. Perhaps the Ephesians read Paul's letter from that perspective. Likewise, the armor was to protect from outside influences. When you look at the armor presented by Paul, it severely limits the things that influence and so easily distract Christians, causing us to take our focus off Christ. Verse 13 gives us a call to stand firm twice. **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.** So how exactly did the Roman soldier stand firm? When the army faced a counterattack, they would dig in with their hobnailed boots, link their shields, and brace for the shock. Standing firm was more of a group effort than an individual effort. There are Roman battle reports that not even chariots could easily break through a tortoise formation. The best way Christians can stand firm is to do what the Roman army did. We make sure our feet have the boots of the gospel strapped on, and we link our faith with the faith of fellow Christians. Standing side by side, gathered in the name of Jesus, agreeing with each other in faith makes us a force to be reckoned with.

Ephesians 6:18-20 closes this passage on armor with a call to prayer: **"praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end, keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints; and also for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains, that I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak."**

1. Praying always with all prayer (verse 18): The idea is all kinds (types) of prayer or prayer *upon* prayer. We should use every kind of prayer we can think of. Some

different types of prayer are: group, individual, silent, shouting, walking, kneeling, eloquent, groaning, constant, earnest, (you get my point); just pray.

2. We can say that it is through prayer that all the individual pieces of the armor of God go to work. Therefore, theoretically, the prayer-less Christian could be strong and wear all the armor; but never accomplish anything because he failed to go into battle through prayer.'

3. We often don't pray because we are simply overconfident in our abilities. Winston Churchill said to Britain in the early days of the Second World War: "I must drop one word of caution, for next to cowardice and treachery, overconfidence leading to neglect and slothfulness, is the worst of wartime crimes."<sup>28</sup> We think to ourselves, "I've got this," when in reality, we don't. Prayer takes our confidence off of ourselves and puts it into God.

4. **For all the saints** (verse 18): We can battle spiritually on our behalf and for others. The soldier isn't only concerned for their own safety. He feels an instinct to protect and to battle on behalf of others. Remember the tortoise formation. Praying for and with others is a good idea when involved in spiritual warfare. You are not an army of one. There are saints in front, behind, and beside you. They are there to fight with you and for you. Your Christian brothers and sisters are here to fight with you and you with them. We are an army that fights together.

Do you remember what a tent group was? Are you a member of a tent group? Do you have a small group of Christians that you are close to? You should. If you don't have a tent group, find one or start one. You need a small group of Christians with whom you share life and battles. Are you part of a century? A "century" is what I would refer to as a small group, cell group, or discipleship group. These Groups come in all shapes and sizes - married couples, singles, men, women, kids, no kids, workplace, under 20, over 40 - the list goes on. No matter where you are in life, there's a group for you. The church you attend is your "cohort." All the tent groups and centuries come together to fight as a cohort. Cohorts then join together to fight as a legion.

Roman soldiers trained for battle continually. They never let their guard down. Yet we, as Christians, seldom, if ever, prepare ourselves for battle. The author of the book of Hebrews rebuked his readers for not training. "For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food. For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil" (Hebrews 5:12-14). This skill level -

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<sup>28</sup> Churchill, Winston. "Speech Broadcasted by Prime Minister Winston Churchill." February 9, 1941. <https://www.ibiblio.org/pha/timeline/410209awp.html>.

proficiency with the Word of God - comes by using it. We must be familiar with the Bible and have our spiritual senses sharpened by it to use this piece of armament God has given us.

Remember that we are at war. Being a Christian can be dangerous and is not for the faint of heart. Therefore, God gave us armor because trouble, tribulation, suffering, and pain are part of the Christian life. Remember that God offers us His victory in the midst of trouble. Every soldier experiences pain and gets wounded from time to time, but God's grace sees us through. 1 Peter 4:12-13 (HCSB) states, "Dear friends, don't be surprised when the fiery ordeal comes among you to test you as if something unusual were happening to you. Instead, rejoice as you share in the sufferings of the Messiah, so that you may also rejoice with great joy at the revelation of His glory." Above all, remember that you are not alone in your battles. Call on your brothers and sisters in Christ to come alongside and fight with you. Call on your tent group, your century, your cohort, and your legion. You are not a solitary soldier. You are part of Christ's legion, so go and be a legionary of Christ.

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