The Armor of God

by

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Ephesians 6:10-18 NIV
10 Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power.
11 Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes.
12 For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.
13 Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand.
14 Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place,
15 and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace.
16 In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one.
17 Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.
18 And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord’s people.

Paul penned his letter to the church at Ephesus about 30 years after the death and resurrection of Jesus. It was during this time that 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 both moral and ethical behaviors, all designed to ensure believers are living 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 a religious people. Religion played a very important role not only in the life of the everyday citizen, but also in the army. Every army camp was required to have shrines to the gods and some legions were even dedicated to a particular god. Religious ceremonies were celebrated by the army on a regular basis. Rome's main problem with Christians was that they did not worship Rome's gods. 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

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

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Christian “army” would also be closely associated with the God of heaven and earth.

By the time Paul wrote the letter to the Ephesians, the Roman army had been learning, adapting, and improving their weapons for more than four hundred years. A soldier in the Roman army was commonly referred to as a “ legionary.” The army preferred to enlist young men from rural areas, rather than cities, as rural people were seen as harder working, and better able to withstand the rigors of outdoor living. One of the things that is credited to the success of the Roman army was the bonding of the soldiers. 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 was 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 a 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 clerks, engineers, supply personnel and messengers.²

The soldiers participated in strenuous marching drills and maneuvers. After this they were then drilled in battlefield maneuvers (including the hollow square, wedge and the famed testudo formations). They were also trained in signaling so that they could 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, but they weighed twice the mass of their actual counterparts, which was used to acclimatize the soldier with fatigue and weariness that could easily happen in the heat of the battle.³ During times of peace, when the army was not training, they were engaged in building roads, bridges, and other infrastructure projects.

Before Paul starts his list of armor, he first gives us the reason for wearing it. The reason is the phrase “stand firm.” Verse 13 and the first part of 14 say "Therefore put on the full armor of God, 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...." The word "stand" is the Greek word ἵστημι - histēmi, which means, "to stand fast against an enemy, as opposed to running away."⁴ The Roman army soldier was forbidden to run away from a battle, and cowardice was a capital

offense, punishable by death.\(^5\) 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 to stand firm to keep from being washed away, if we can. This was not the Roman army idea of standing firm. To stand firm against an enemy onslaught, the Roman army would link shields and move 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 counter attack. The whole point of this is that standing firm would have been completely impossible if the soldier had not been wearing all of his armor.

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 so that we can put it into perspective today. Another important question we need to ask is this: What did the armor mean to the Roman soldier? It was the soldier, after all, 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 take a look at the Roman soldier of the first century era.

It is important to note that Paul's listing of the armor is not given 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 that he assigned to them. 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 the last item of clothing 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.

**The belt of Truth**

**Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist** (verse 14). Paul starts out with buckling, or girding (to wrap around) our loins (waist, or lower back) with the belt truth. The belt that the Roman soldier wore, however, was a special type of belt. Only someone in the army could wear this belt because it was specifically made to hang weapons from. 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 both in and out of uniform as a badge of honor. The belt was

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\(^5\) Rosemary Moore, *Disciplina.* (The Encyclopedia of Ancient History, 2012)
approximately 2½ inches wide and covered with metal plates.

The metal plates had two general purposes. The first was to hang weapons from at the same time stiffening the leather and preventing it from curling from the weight of the weapons. Daily rations and supplies were also hung from the belt. The second was to show rank, status, and affiliation to other groups. The plates were either molded or embossed and in some rare cases, decorated with paint. The sword was fixed 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. Truth is therefore, that which is consistent with the mind, will, character, glory, and holiness of God. To put this another way: Truth is the self-expression of God. This is the belt from which our weapons hang.

Spiritual Application

So how did the original readers of the letter (and the church today for that matter) view Paul's analogy of the belt of truth? 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. It should only be used in truth. For example, many people teach that homosexuality is okay because God is love and therefore loves homosexuality. They may also claim that since God loves the homosexual, he approves of homosexuality. They re-translate the verses so that it makes 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. “Lying lips are an abomination to the Lord,” (Proverbs 12:22 NASB). “No rotten talk

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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 both our lives and others, that we do it in truth. 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 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. \(^7\) 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. \(^8\) The belt of truth accomplishes this for us in a way that gives glory to God.

**The Breastplate of Righteousness**

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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 a decoration and proudly recount the story of a battle that had been won.

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

**Spiritual Application**

So how did the original readers of the letter (and the church today for that matter) view Paul's analogy of the breastplate of righteousness? The Greek word “dikaiosune” (δικαίοσυνη) is translated in this verse as “righteousness.” In other passages of the New Testament, it translated as “justice.” It means both righteousness and justice. It would not be incorrect to list this piece of armor as the breastplate of righteousness/justice. Righteousness is what God does as a warrior - it is justice at work. 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 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 opinions to what the breastplate of righteousness represents. The first opinion is that the 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 it is an internal righteousness of the believer that consists of virtue that comes through sanctification. Sanctification is the process through which God makes us more and more like Christ.

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More than likely, Paul 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 says “and found in Him, not having a righteousness 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 “He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.” Righteousness is something we are, not something that we do. It is the righteousness of God within us that affects what we do; it not what we do that makes us righteous. As believers, we must conduct ourselves righteously, and the breastplate of righteousness causes that to happen.

Just as the Roman soldiers would point to their decorations and proudly recount the stories of battles that had been won, Christians should do the same thing. Brag about your God who wins battles for you and do it publically 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.

The Boots of the Gospel

And with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from 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 more than likely think of them as sandals, or shoes, or open boots. The caligae worn by the Roman soldier were specifically designed with long marches in mind. The thick sole of the caligae was the secret of the boot. Hobnails, small iron nails (think cleats, or studs) which were nailed through the soles, kept the footwear together and prevented the soles of the boots from wearing out too quickly. The hobnails were placed all
around the edge of the sole and in some shoe designs on the surface of the sole. The hobnails not only added durability to the boots, they also added a noise factor. A cohort marching down a stone road tended to sound like three cohorts marching, which the Romans used to their advantage as a type of psychological terror factor. The hobnails also helped to prevent the boot from slipping and sliding on wet ground, allowing the soldier to both stand firm, and to forge ahead. The Romans were aware that proper footwear on the battlefield was an essential part of 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 advantage 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 become very slippery. The Roman soldier could not afford to slip on the bloody ground and fall. His boots prevented that from happening.

**Spiritual Application**

So how did the original readers of the letter (and the church today for that matter) view Paul’s analogy of the boots of the gospel? The word “preparation” (translated as “readiness” in many versions) in verse 15 (Greek word hetoimasia - ἑτοιμασία) could be translated as “firm footing; foundation.”13 Yes, the Christian should be prepared to make known that the gospel has a power which can replace the strife, despair, hate and ruin of this world with the peace, 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 command about the gospel of peace. "And He said to them, 'Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned'” (Mark 16:15-16). As valuable as is firm footwear, preparation, or readiness communicates the holy impatience to get the good news of peace out.14 The apostle Paul walked countless miles in delivering the good news. During that time frame, the gospel was spread was by people walking from town to town. 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

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reconciliation of people to God and to one another.\textsuperscript{15} In fact, the feet of those disciples, who were delivering that message of peace, are figuratively described as beautiful: \textit{“And how shall they preach unless they are sent? As it is written: ’How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace, who bring glad tidings of good things!’”} (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 keeps us grounded. Jesus quoted scripture to the devil and that sure footing gave him victory. It will give us victory as well.

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.\textsuperscript{15} In fact, the feet of those disciples, who were delivering that message of peace, are figuratively described as beautiful: \textit{“How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can anyone preach unless they are sent? As it is written: ’How beautiful are the feet of those who bring the gospel of peace, who bring good news!’”} (Romans 10:14-15). 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 keeps us grounded. Jesus quoted scripture to the devil and that sure footing gave him victory. It will give us victory as well.

Shoes allow you to walk across painful terrain without experiencing the discomfort or pain. Think about that for a moment. Just as shoes allow us to walk on otherwise painful terrain without fear, so the preparation of the gospel of peace allows us to traverse the otherwise painful trials and tribulations of life without fear. It is because we know that what awaits is greater than anything we could possibly suffer in this world (Romans 8:18). The Bible makes it clear that, when God's Kingdom is established and the entire world begins to 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.

\textbf{The Shield of Faith}

\textit{Take up the shield of faith with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one} (verse 16). The standard shield used by the Roman soldier in Paul's day was called a “scutum.” It was rectangular in shape measuring 36 inches wide by 48 inches long. If a soldier could afford it, he could purchase a leather cover to keep his shield protected from the elements when it was not in use. The shield weighed in at 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. Soldiers would regularly coat 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

a combat situation. The oil also has the added benefit of making the shield waterproof, and therefore a useful, but cumbersome, umbrella when it was raining. The shield was also used as means of visual identification. Shields were painted to identify the soldier's battle unit, and identified which cohort the soldier was attached to.

Even at 10 pounds, the shield was light enough to be held in one hand and its large height and width covered the entire wielder, making him very unlikely to get hit by arrows or spears or other small missiles. The primary purpose of the 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 whose heavy single edged sword could easily penetrate and rip through the scutum.

While the Roman shield did a good job of covering the torso of the soldier, its crucial advantage was in its offensive capacity. The metal boss, or umbo, in the center of the shield also made it an auxiliary punching weapon as well. 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 which created a tremendous amount of noise, as a means to instill psychological terror into their enemies. One 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” which is the Latin word for tortoise. (See the photo for a depiction of a very small tortoise formation.) This tortoise formation protected the entire squad from arrows and allowed them to move forward at the same time. 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.

Flaming arrows were not normally used in warfare; with one exception, night battles. At night, a wall of flaming arrows soaring through the air could be a terrifying sight. However, flaming arrows had a tremendous disadvantage.

a. They were heavier than normal and couldn't travel as far.

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17 Ibid.
b. What you put on the arrow that caused it to burn also caused erratic flight causing most arrows to miss their target.

c. Since archers tended to be in 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. When a flaming arrow hit a Roman shield, the olive oil coating would extinguish the arrow. Olive oil has low volatility due to its very high flash point (550 degrees F) and does not easily burn. When you can get it to burn, it burns very slowly. When a flaming arrow hit a Roman shield, the olive oil prevented the wood from immediately catching on fire, giving the soldier enough time to break it off with his sword.

**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 fiery darts of the devil; that does not necessarily mean that we are on the defensive. Let me explain. A Roman army that was 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 allows the army to keep pushing forward. They are not cowering fear, they are protecting themselves as they move forward, until they are close enough that 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. The church is called to put the powers under siege.\(^\text{18}\)

There are many spiritual implications in the shield of faith. It is important 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. It is also important to remember that shields can be interlocked together. As a Christian, you are not in the fight alone. We can join together and interlock our faith. The story in Luke 5:17-26 is about four

\(^{18}\text{Thomas R. Yoder Neufeld, } Ephesians, \text{ Believers Church Bible Commentary (Waterloo, Ont.: Scottdale, Pa. }, \text{ ©2002), 302.}\)
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. Your faith is demonstrated by and through taking action, which brings about the powerful results that are associated with it. When you have faith you absolutely believe in something; so much so that you put whatever you have on the line to prove that it will be so. For example, we believe in God, whom we have not seen, and believe that our sins are forgiven, which we cannot prove by natural means. It takes God's supernatural faith to receive salvation. Where do we get it from? We get it from God's Word. Romans 10:17 says, “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, God's supernatural faith enters us. Once we receive God's supernatural faith at salvation, it doesn't leave us. Galatians 5:22-23 says, “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, FAITH, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law” (emphasis mine). 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 wouldn't not go into battle without his shield, yet as Christians we seldom use it. Why? 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 just doubt that they have enough faith to get the job done, and this is a huge problem for Christians. We remember that Jesus was always chiding his disciple for having so little faith and we think that we are the same, in having so little faith. This is the result of bad teaching and nothing could farther from the truth. Jesus almost always rebuked the disciples for having “little faith” when his divinity and identity was on display for all to see. It is not so much a case of the disciples having “little faith” so much as it is a case of their not using the faith they already had. They just couldn't seem to grasp that Jesus was exactly who he claimed to be. Each time this happened, he would tell them that they had "little faith."

Consider Romans 12:3 where Paul wrote, “For by the grace given to me, I tell everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he should think. Instead, think sensibly, as God has distributed a measure of faith to each one.” Some versions say God has given us the measure of faith and other versions say God has given us a measure of faith. The translators get away with this because there is no word between distributed 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 out so that no one gets more than anyone else. We are 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 that was the same size and weight as the soldier next to him. The shield was standard issue, and so is faith.

What about Matthew 17:20 which talks about faith the size of a mustard seed? **And Jesus said unto them, Because of your unbelief (disbelief, lack of trust or confidence): for verily I say unto you, if ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you.** The disciple didn’t believe they could cast the demon out in the first place, hence Jesus criticizes them for their unbelief. The comparison is not between the size of the disciples’ faith (mustard seed) but between what happens when that faith is planted (and produces huge results). Jesus never said that their faith was the size of a mustard seed, but rather, when used, would produce a large result, 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 are treating 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). In Mark, Jesus tells them that this case requires prayer - not a form or an approved rite, but an entire life bathed in prayer and its concomitant faith. In Matthew, Jesus tells 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 is the measure of faith that each person receives? The Bible does not come out and state exactly what that measure is. However, we can use Ephesians 6:16 to figure it out. We are each given a shield and I think that 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 simply don’t use it. If only using the amount of faith equal to a mustard seed can move a mountain, just 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 protects 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 type of damage. In very few places in the human body are so
many important organs found in such a small compact area. The purpose of the helmet is to protect all of these vital organs simultaneously.

The Roman Legionary helmet was 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 or darts. The brow guard would deflect sword blows away from the eyes and face. The cheek guards protected the cheeks and jaw. Extra padding and lining were placed inside the helmet to absorb the shock of sword blows. Some, but not all helmets had ear protectors riveted in place. Roman helmets generally left the ears exposed because hearing was considered to be of utmost importance during a battle. If the ears were covered by the helmet, the soldiers might not hear commands given by the Centurions.

The helmet protected the soldier's head, face, and neck without blocking too much of his vision. The helmet is one of the most important pieces of Roman armor, and oddly enough, one of the most difficult to make. Roman helmets of the New Testament period were hand-beaten out of a single sheet of iron or brass. This process actually takes an enormous amount of skill. Each soldier had to have a helmet that made for his 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 when it came to protecting their soldiers.

Centurions typically wore a transverse crest, meaning that it ran from side to side (ear to ear) across his helmet. It is believed that centurions wore these crests in battle during the early Empire to serve as a visual reference and rallying point for their men. The Commander of a Cohort would wear a crest on his helmet than fore to aft, from the forehead to the neck. 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**

So how did the original readers of the letter (and the church today for that matter) view Paul's analogy of the helmet of salvation? This is what fascinates me most about the helmet of salvation.

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20 IBID. pg. 81
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 again. The Greek word for salvation, used in this verse is soterios-σωτήρις (which is an adjective - descriptive word). As an adjective, soterios should be interpreted as “bringing salvation.”

The helmet represents not just our own salvation, but the message that we as Christians have to offer the world. 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. 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. The helmet of salvation would be used to protect our mind, the seat of our thoughts. Spiritually speaking, the helmet of salvation (and salvation itself) provides hope and protects the mind against anything that would disorient or destroy the Christian, such as discouragement, lies, or deceit. The problem is that we often defeat ourselves with our own negative thinking. We dream up the worst possible scenario and concentrate on it. We take off the helmet and instead of thinking as God would like us to, from his perspective, we think like the devil would like us to, from his perspective.

How do we use the helmet of salvation?

1. We must renew our minds. Let's face it, our minds are the battlefields on which we fight everyday. 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. Old ideas, opinions, and worldviews must be replaced. 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 be very sensory creatures. What we cannot fathom with our five senses, we tend to disregard. If we allow them to, circumstances may convince us that God does not really love us or that His Word is not true. 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; and 1 Peter 1:8–9).

3. Keep an eternal perspective. When life crashes in around us, we must remember to look to God. 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

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21 Thomas R. Yoder Neufeld, Ephesians, Believers Church Bible Commentary (Waterloo, Ont.: Scottdale, Pa., ©2002), 303.
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 of the opportunities Satan uses to entrap us. Sin should no longer be an option for us because we recognize ourselves to be “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? Besides you, I desire nothing on earth.” 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 was a short, one-handed sword, from 24 – 30 inches with a double edged blade and a very sharp tip and 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 wooden hilt, where the soldier's hand holds onto the sword, featured a rounded grip, with four finger ridges carved in to allow a comfortable and firm hold upon the sword. The gladius was a stabbing sword for close in, or hand-to-hand combat. The sharp tapered tip could also penetrate enemy armor making it a very deadly close-in weapon.

Each soldier was fitted with his own sword, with the sword’s length being in direct ratio to his body height. Soldiers often would etch their names into the sword for easy identification. All soldiers were taught to fight with their sword using their right hand; as the shield was carried with the left hand. It was in the crush of battle that occurred when the Roman army was pressed up against the enemy army, and pushing their way through; that the gladius proved its worth. It was the ideal weapon for stabbing the enemy in these conditions; longer weapons were useless in

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close quarters combat due to the lack of room long slashing swords and thrusting spears required. The Roman soldier was taught to deploy his sword horizontally, so that it could easily pierce the enemy's ribs and penetrate to his vital organs. Holding the sword horizontally also allowed it to be swung back and forth with devastating results.

**Spiritual Application**

Hebrews 4:12 (ESV) says “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.”

So how did the original readers of the letter (and the church today for that matter) view Paul's analogy of the sword of the Spirit? The all-powerful sword of the living God is able to 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 serious 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, it is our responsibility and duty to use His Word to discern the truth and then 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). Keep in mind that the main purpose of the sword, in this context, is to cut through the lies the enemy throws at you and to defeat him. The word of God will slice right through the lies and deception that stand in your way.

When Jesus was being tempted by Satan, he did not cower in fear and trembling. Satan misquoted scripture, and put it out of context, in an effort to get Jesus to sin. Jesus did not use the sword of the Spirit as a defensive weapon, he used it as an offensive weapon. Jesus counterattacked (struck back) by using scripture correctly, truthfully, and in context. Jesus knew how to use his sword. Three times Satan tempted, and three times Jesus counterattacked with scripture. There are a few sword lessons we can learn from Jesus' encounter with Satan.

Do not believe everyone who can quote you scripture. Modern history is strewn with cults who twisted the Scriptures to their own destruction (2 Peter 3:16). And no, discerning their evil intentions is not “judging,” it is godly wisdom. There is also an example in the New Testament when the Sadducees, taking scripture out of context, posed to Jesus a hypothetical situation that they thought was an airtight argument against the resurrection. He responded, “You are deceived, because you don’t know the Scriptures or the power of God.” and, “Haven’t you read what was spoken to you by God?” (see Matthew 22:23-32).

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As you read the Bible, ask yourself continually how this part fits with that part and that with this. It is when the pieces start to fit together that we are most secure from distortion.

   a. Fast and pray that God will open your eyes to see the true and wonderful things written in his Word.

   b. Obey what you do understand and you will be surprised to see how much more you will begin to understand.

To be a soldier using the sword of the Spirit, we need to have a strong desire to be diligent, to be holy, to be Spirit-filled and we start by going to the Scriptures and reading it ... reading it 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 that this not easy, but you're going to hold on to, and understand even better, what you give away. 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, you interpret it, you correlate it with itself, you meditate on its truths, let it then sink deep into your heart and mind, and then you teach it. And I will tell you by experience what you give away through teaching, or simply sharing with others, you keep ... you retain. This is one way that you become capable of using the sword effectively.

We are in a war. The purpose of the war is to expand God’s kingdom here on earth. We do that by winning souls. Every person who accepts Jesus as their personal Lord and Savior, and becomes a Christian, is an expansion of God’s kingdom. The sword of the Spirit is used to advance the message of the gospel. However, in order to use the sword, you must know your Bible. You cannot advance the message of the gospel if you don’t know what it is. Head knowledge is not enough. You need heart knowledge to be effective. Heart knowledge is living out what you know in your head. Your life may be the only Bible that some people every read. There a lot of people who can quote a lot of scripture but live the life of a pagan. They don’t really believe the scripture that can quote. Don’t be that person. Be a real Christian and live what you believe. Use the word of God to expand his kingdom for his glory.

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 main duty of the army was not to quell rebellions, but to protect the empire from outside influences. In a manner of speaking, their first duty was to keep the peace. It is quite possible the Ephesians read Paul’s letter about the “armor of God” from that perspective.
The armor was to protect from the damaging effects of outside influences. When you look at the armor presented by Paul, it severely limits the damaging effects of outside influences that can so easily distract Christians and take their focus off Christ.

Ephesians 6:13 gives us a call to stand firm twice. **Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand.** So how exactly did the Roman soldier stand firm? When the army was facing a counter attack, they would dig in with their hobnailed boots, link their shields, and brace for the shock. Standing firm was not an individual effort, it was a group effort. There are Roman battle reports that not even chariots could easily break through a tortoise formation. The best way that Christians can stand firm is to do exactly 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.

It is easy conclude that the sword is the only offensive weapon in Paul’s list. This however, is simply not true. The shoes for example are fitted with hobnails that allowed the soldier push forward. The shield was used a punching weapon, to knock the enemy off his feet. The helmet of salvation is to “proclaim” the gospel (an offensive tactic). So while many pieces of the armor have defensive capabilities, they also have offensive capabilities as well. It is important to keep this in mind because the Christian army is to be on the offensive against the authorities, powers of this dark world, and the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.

Ephesians 6:18–20 closes this passage on armor with a call to prayer. **“Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints; and for me, that utterance may be given to me, that I may open my mouth boldly to make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains; that in it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak.”**

1. **Praying always with all prayer and supplication:** The idea is all kinds of prayer, (the word supplications means requests, and petitions), or prayer upon prayer, at all times. We should use every kind of prayer we can think of. Group prayer, individual prayer, silent prayer, talking prayer, walking prayer, kneeling prayer, eloquent prayer, groaning prayer, constant prayer, fervent prayer - (you get my point) just pray, and don’t stop praying.

   a. We can say that it is through prayer that all the individual pieces of the armor of God go to work. In theory, the prayer–less Christian can be strong and wearing all the armor; in theory. In reality however, I don’t think a prayer–less Christian can be effective at all in spiritual warfare. I don’t think a Christian could accomplish much of anything if he failed to go into battle through prayer.
b. Quite often we just don't pray because we are simply overconfident in our own abilities. Winston Churchill, in speech to Britain in 1941 said: “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.” We think to ourselves, “I've got this,” when in all actuality, we don't. Prayer takes our confidence off of ourselves and puts it onto God.

2. **For all the saints** (verse 18): We can battle spiritually not only on our own behalf, but also on the behalf of others. The soldier isn’t only concerned for his or her 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 very 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 that you share life and battles with. Are you part of a century? A “century” is what I would refer to a small group, or 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 on a continual basis. They never let their guard down. Yet we as Christians seldom, if ever, train 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 level of skill – this proficiency with the Word of God – comes by using it. We have to be familiar with the Bible, and we must have our spiritual senses sharpened by it in order to make full use of this piece of armament God has given us.

Remember that we are at war. Being a Christian can therefore be dangerous and is not for the faint of heart. This why God gave us armor to wear, 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) “**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.

Use the word of God to expand his kingdom for his glory.

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