

Prayer

Dear Lord God, help me within the turmoil of my everyday life, to turn to You and seek higher things. Teach me how to walk beyond the troubles I experience and find all around me the evidence of the One who made me, cares for me and saves me. And in those moments when I struggle to understand or hold on to the truth of my salvation, hold me closer, and I will praise Your holy name! AMEN.

Prayer Suggestions

Prayer ideas

During the day, pray briefly for each one you have spoken to; bless them, their work and their home

On-going prayers

- **Pray for pioneering scientists.** *God has given us an amazing world with much to discover and use. Pray for scientists who explore it*
- *Give thanks for the work of coastguards and sea rescue services*
- *Pray for those affected by abuse scandals in the Catholic church of Ireland*

Meditation

Dear God, bring peace to me;
The noises of the world have drowned the voice of love;
And now I need Your quiet.

You heal in inner stillness;
By caring thoughtfulness and love, all unconditional;
You tend me perfectly.

And now I sense Your touch,
The ever patient tending of my open wounds and scars;
I feel Your real forgiveness.

This yielding of my soul
Brings life-affirming health and hope for all my future,
In opening every doorway.

And I will ever serve
The One who knows me more than I will ever know
Who cures my soul for life.

Bible passage – Ephesians 6:14-18 (10-18)

¹⁰ From now on, be strong in the Lord and in the power of his might. ¹¹ Put on the complete armour of God, so that you may be able to stand against the strategies of the devil. ¹² For our fight is not against flesh and blood, but against powers, against authorities, against the rulers of this dark world, and against evil spiritual forces in the heavenly world. ¹³ Therefore take up the complete armour of God, so that you may be able to take your stand on the day of evil, and being ready in every way, stand firm.

¹⁴ Stand therefore, with truth bound around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, ¹⁵ and with the ever-ready Gospel of peace worn on your feet. ¹⁶ Above all, carry the shield of faith, with which you will be able to quench all the flaming arrows of the evil one, ¹⁷ and take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God. ¹⁸ With every form of prayer and request, pray at all times in the spirit; keeping alert to do this with all perseverance and praying for all the saints.

Thought for the Day

Text

Ephesian 6:14,15

¹⁴ Stand therefore, with truth bound around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, ¹⁵ and with the ever-ready Gospel of peace worn on your feet.

Thought

You will recognise these as items in the famous 'armour' of God. Here, 'truth' refers to the quality of faithfulness and reliability, 'righteousness' means a right relationship with God, and the Gospel of peace is not a manifesto of pacifism, it is the Gospel that offers us peace with God.

These have all been given to us by God, and in the analogy, they fit close to the body. Make a note of these, and in the course of your day, remind yourself of what the Lord has given you to help you fight against evil. We can only use what we know we have available to us!

Bible Study

Review

This amazing description of the 'complete armour of God' is one of the great treasures of the New Testament. It is a wonderfully evocative text for preachers, and whole books have been written about it, explaining how this intriguing analogy illustrates faith using the armoury of a Roman soldier. Despite cultural problems today with the idea of battle, even children are taught this great word picture, though perhaps with an emphasis on the value of the qualities of truth, righteousness and the Gospel of peace (etc.) rather than waging war, even against evil.

Nevertheless, we must read this passage knowing that Paul's intention was to describe the battle against evil. The picture is painted in an upbeat manner, encouraging readers to stand against the evils of the world. Evil disrupts both the church and the cohesion of society within which the Gospel is proclaimed (see 5:6f.), but this passage suggests that it is far more than this. Paul offers a uniquely individual understating of spiritual warfare; the devil afflicts God's people as well as church and society, and each item in the armoury has its place within the treasury of faith. All are important, and if we pass over any of them, we are poorly equipped to deal with an enemy who exploits every weakness.

Truth is the first item, acting like a belt that secures clothing around the waist (6:14). Here, the word does not mean the truth of the Gospel, for the Gospel comes later and is described as a sword; rather, truth is something like faithfulness and integrity. We will certainly need these reliable and trustworthy qualities in spiritual battle! Next comes righteousness (6:14), and it is a word that is often misunderstood. Essentially, righteousness is a property of God, for He alone is just and 'right', and we are placed in a 'right' relationship with God through Jesus, our Saviour. Righteousness is therefore not to be wielded like a shield or a sword, it is a gift, and Paul describes it as a 'breastplate' that protects the heart. Thirdly, the Gospel of peace (6:15) is the message of the Good news of Jesus Christ, which Paul strangely likens to footwear! His connection of shoes with the Gospel suggests that with the 'Good News', we will be agile in battle!

Fourthly, Paul lists faith (6:16). Throughout the Bible, faith means the relationship of belief, trust and love between the individual and God, but as Paul says by describing it as a shield, it is something to be used. The picture suggest that we deploy it to '*quench the fiery darts of the evil one*'; so when the enemy attacks, we must position ourselves to declare the truth about our relationship with God. Fifthly, Paul describes salvation as a 'helmet', the one armoury item that identifies a soldier clearly in battle. A helmet is not just a form of head protection but an essential distinguishing feature, delineating friend or foe. Likewise, salvation is the common experience of God's people, and the means whereby we recognise each other within the spiritual battles of our own day. The last item is the 'Word of God', which means either the Old Testament, Jesus, or the preached 'Word of God', but it does not matter which we mean. Each of these phrases is God's communication to the world, and by using it as a sword, we both attack the enemy and defend ourselves against falsehood, untruth and all the scheming of the enemy. .

Lastly, Paul adds some instructions about prayer (6:18). Some think that prayer should be added to the spiritual armoury, and there is every reason to add it however we interpret this text. However, verse 18 is itself a request for prayer, asking the reader to pray '*in the Spirit*', '*stay alert*', persevere and pray. The advice is powerful and pertinent, like the advice of a general to troops who will always face the dangers of

warfare. With this advice the soldiers are ready for battle; strengthened and encouraged to stand and persist, for the outcome is certain, with Christ.

Going Deeper

The Bible study goes deeper to look briefly at these issues: The last item of prayer will be discussed further in the next study.

- Truth – around the waist (6:14)
- Righteousness – the breastplate (6:14)
- The Gospel of peace – the shoes (6:15)
- Faith – the shield (6:16)
- Salvation – the helmet (6:17)
- The Word of God – the sword (6:17)

Notes on the text and translation

V15 ‘with the ever-ready Gospel of peace worn on your feet’

Other translations:

‘with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace’ (NIV)

‘as shoes for your feet put on whatever will make you ready to proclaim the gospel of peace’ (NRSV)

You can see that translators have difficulty with this phrase! The Greek reads; ‘and feet shod with the readiness of the Gospel of peace’. Each translator attempts to find a way of expressing ‘readiness of the Gospel’ in a meaningful way, and each Bible version is reasonable. The Greek word I have translated ‘ever ready’ is not straightforward, and means ‘something that makes a person ready’; so it could be translated ‘equipment’, as in some Bible versions, or retain the idea of readiness, as in others. My translation uses the minimum of words so that the phrase does not become a rather elongated explanation, like that found in the NRSV!

V18 ‘keeping alert to do this with all perseverance’

Other translations:

‘With this in mind, be alert and always keep on ... (NIV)

‘To that end keep alert and always persevere’ (NRSV)

Again, there is considerable disagreement about how this phrase is to be translated and how it fits with the rest of the verse. The Greek reads; ‘and being alert in this in all perseverance ...’ The end result depends on the translators view of what the word ‘this’ refers to, and whether this phrase is joined to the last one in the sentence, or is separate from it. I suggest that this phrase offers advice about watchfulness and persistence in prayer during spiritual warfare.

Going Deeper

Truth (around the waist – (6:14)

We quickly assume that truth is like the ‘belt’ shown in pictures of Roman soldiers of the first century. However, Paul does not speak about Roman soldiers; he uses words and pictures known to the people of the day, but not necessarily what we might expect. We use the word ‘truth’ to refer to what is absolutely correct, in a scientific way. Back then, the word was used to describe reality, which for them was like the world, certain and sure, unchanging and reliable, and so the word could mean ‘faithfulness’ or ‘dependability’. In battle, a commander had to know that his troops were dependable, faithful and ‘true’.

In the story of David when he was on the run from Saul, an extraordinary incident occurs in which David volunteered to fight for the Philistines against Israel (1 Samuel 29:1-10). This was a highly contentious move, but the Philistines eventually rejected David from their army because they thought, probably correctly, that he might change sides in the midst of the battle; they could not count on his ‘reliability’ in battle! This is a good illustration of what this passage calls ‘truth’ in spiritual warfare. To be ‘true’ means to be solidly with the Lord for good against evil, and we will not change side. Paul describes this ‘truth’ as something that (literally) ‘girds up the loins’ for battle. Again, this phrase is unfamiliar, yet it is a simple description of a rope that was used to gather up the flowing robes men wore around their waists, and the belt was usually used to prepare for running or other activity. Hence, ‘truth’ (as described here) is our essential preparation for spiritual battle.

Righteousness (the breastplate – 6:14)

The whole Bible is full of the word 'righteousness', indeed, it occurs in the famous incident in Genesis, where Abraham's faith is confirmed by God; 'Abraham believed, and it was credited to him as righteousness' (Gen 15:6). Paul regarded this incident as essential for our understanding of 'salvation by faith' as found in the Old Testament (see his discussion of this very topic in the whole of Romans 4). Righteousness is therefore not the faith that we profess, but the gift of God that we receive because of our faith. Righteousness is 'being in a right relationship with God.

Paul describes this righteousness as being like a 'breastplate', and he does the same in his letter to the Thessalonians (1 Thess 5:8, which is similar to this text). But there is one other place in the Bible where we can find a reference to righteousness as a breastplate, and this is in the prophecies of Isaiah:

'He put on righteousness as His breastplate, and the helmet of salvation on His head; He put on the garments of vengeance and wrapped Himself in zeal as a cloak.' (Isaiah 59:17)

In this prophecy, it was God Himself who put on the breastplate, not His people. However this is only to be expected, for righteousness is indeed a property of God and it is His to give. Paul probably knew this passage, and by speaking of righteousness as our breastplate he clearly pictures God giving His people His own armour. How encouraging it is to receive God's armour for the battle!

The Gospel of peace (shoes – 6:15)

The idea of the Gospel of peace as shoes is enigmatic, and bears thinking about, just as the other items in the armoury. Peace, or course, does not mean peace in general, as if the Gospel should be equated with earthly peace, or any notion of pacifism. We are not fighting to gain an earthly peace, although we may hope that the result of fighting the devil will be to establish peace on earth. To fight for the Gospel means to fight so that men and women might have peace with God first, and peace with each other subsequently. We do not know how many people will find that peace, and some will reject it, but this will not stop us fighting to preach the Gospel.

Why did Paul connect the 'Gospel of peace' with footwear? From archaeological studies, we know that in the first century, a great deal of attention went into the footwear of a Roman army, because it was obvious that an army could not fight if it could not travel, and in those days an army travelled by foot. This, together with the awkward Greek word used by Paul to describe the 'Gospel of peace' (see notes above on 'ever-ready' for verse 15), indicates that Paul thought the shoes were essential and made a soldier ready for the fight. It is also possible that shoes were symbolic of travel, which was necessary for the spread of the Gospel throughout the world. As a pioneer for the Gospel, Paul had walked miles; so for him, the connections between walking and the Gospel were strong.

Faith (the shield – 6:16)

The description of faith in verse 16 famously likens it to a shield. Faith, of course, is the necessary human response to God; this is the evidence of a receptive and repentant heart that Jesus sought to find in the people who called on Him to heal and to bless. There are many ways to describe faith, but it is basically an attitude of the heart characterised by confidence, trust, commitment, pledge, and also love (in its broadest sense). Faith is so essential to our relationship with God through Jesus, that it seems strange for Paul to liken it to a shield that is placed between the individual soldier and the enemy, but this may be the secret of its value.

In contrast to the previous items of armour that were worn on the body, the shield of faith is held and manoeuvred. Paul describes it as quenching the 'fiery darts of the evil one'. So the exercise of faith, not the mere possession of it, is a weapon that can face the attack of the enemy and actively stop it. We should not treat this analogy lightly, for it has powerful meaning. Some commentaries describe how a soldier's shield, made of leather, might be drenched in water in order to perform this task, but I am not sure that Paul intended us to take the analogy this far. His whole picture suggests the active use of faith for the defeat of the devil, and this is surely enough. The purpose of the battle is to win, and a key element of this is the use of faith.

Salvation (the helmet – 6:17)

The connection between salvation and a helmet is often explained like this; the helmet protects our head, and so salvation protects the individual from the enemy. I suggest that what was on Paul's mind was in fact something else, as we can find out by following a Scriptural trail. Along with righteousness, salvation is mentioned in the famous text from Isaiah (59:17) above. This reminds us that salvation is not primarily something we possess. Salvation is God's plan for the redemption of all humanity and the entire world, so the salvation we speak of having when we say 'I am saved', is a gift of God based on our faith, and it is something that is essentially shared by all who are 'saved' by Him from sin.

In ancient times, helmets were often given to soldiers as distinguishing marks to help them know the difference between friend and foe, so the use of the analogy here makes sense. God gives us salvation and if we testify to this, it is like wearing a helmet to let everyone know that we are God's saved people. Surely, in the chaos of the spiritual warfare of our own day, a public witness to salvation is indeed a distinguishing feature of the Lord's people, whatever the church to which they belong.

The helmet does not just identify us to each other; it is also a bold statement to the enemy saying 'here we are!' We might easily forget this side of the analogy, because we do not wish to be attacked! However, we are fighting a battle not simply on our own behalf, but for the Kingdom of God, and it is a battle that will be won. In fighting, we need to know who else is saved, and we need to demonstrate that we are unafraid of the enemy, because we know that he is defeated by Christ. We must let our salvation be known, and wear our own God-given helmet!

The Word of God (the sword – 6:17)

When Paul wrote, the 'Word of God', he meant the Old Testament. However, the disciples had clearly begun to realise that Jesus was the 'Word' (see John 1), and in addition, they were charged with preaching Jesus, preaching indeed the 'Word of God'. Therefore, when we speak of the sword of the Spirit as the Word of God as presented by Paul in this analogy, we should not limit our ideas to Scripture. The written Word is of course an essential ingredient to what we mean by the Word of God, but it is at one with together with Christ and the preached Word.

This, of course is the 'Sword of the Spirit', the famous attacking and defending weapon in the armoury, without which it would be impossible to fight. Of course, we will have to use this weapon, so we will need to know it very well. We need to know God's Word, the Scriptures, we need to know Christ (the Word), and we need to be familiar with the preaching of God's servants in our own day, His prophets who declare His Word. It is not our place to try and dissect the Word and take it apart, as if a soldier dismantled his weaponry before battle! In using the Word, just like a sword, skill is needed to wield it effectively. Playing with a sword can be dangerous; we need to know it and be ready to use it all the time.

(please note, there will be further discussion of verse 18 in the next study).

Application

It is almost impossible to give a brief description of these great truths in so short a space, but each of us knows what we think of these pieces of armoury. Although people commonly speak about the 'sword of the Spirit' as being the one weapon with which we attack, each item is relevant in its own way for both attack and defence, especially when we know against whom we fight and for whom we are fighting. If the Kingdom of God is to advance and the enemy and prince of this world is to be defeated, then all of us in God's church must know and use our armoury.

We can apply this great passage of Scripture in many ways. Some people make a point of praying through the armoury each day to make sure that they are properly ready for the 'battle' of the day. This is commendable, but it should not blind us to the many possibilities open to us. Firstly, we are challenged to accept that in fighting a battle, we all need all the armoury. Our faith is not a faith of options, but of complete unity in Christ and sheer variety in people and application. This is because we fight one battle against Satan, the devil, the evil one; and we fight it individually and together. No one stands to the side and observes, all take part, and all need the armour. With this in mind, we may consider ourselves as in need of this armour all the time. We need to remind ourselves of what we have rather than what we need to 'put on' each day, for example.

The whole armour is itself a gift of God to help us do God's will, and however we remind ourselves of this and use its several parts, we must accept and use it all with grace and with good intent, for the battle at hand, and our Lord has given us all our different parts to play within it.

Discipleship

Questions (for use in groups)

1. What does the complete armour of Christ mean to you, and how do you envisage using it and wearing it?
2. After reading this study, which pieces of the armoury are not exactly what you thought them to be?

3. How may we encourage all God's people to take up the whole armoury of God and use it for the battle of good against evil?

Topics covered by this text

- *Truth*
- *Righteousness,*
- *The Gospel*
- *Faith*
- *Salvation*
- *The Word of God.*

Personal comments by author

I find the details of the armoury of God fascinating. The more you look at them from a Scriptural point of view, the more you discover, and I feel as if I have only just touched at the surface of this great subject. This, of course, is the great gift of an analogy; it enables each one who uses it to dwell on the picture and find more meaning. Strangely, we do not find many such great illustrations within the writing of Paul, but the few we do have (the body, the armour, the building etc.) are of great significance for the whole church.

Ideas for exploring discipleship

- *Consider how you might use the whole armour of God. If you are married, then discuss it and pray about it with your spouse, and if not, then talk to the Lord about it in prayer. The picture has been given in Scripture for a purpose, so what is this purpose within your life?*
- *Pray for the whole church of God, asking that it will engage in the battle of god against evil in appropriate and effective ways.*

Final Prayer

My heart is full of praise and adoration, Lord Jesus, for the things that happen in my life are not coincidences, but God inspired direction for this earthly life of mine! Open my eyes to the greater plans You have for my life and my salvation, Great and Holy Lord, and fill my heart with joy! AMEN
