

BRAVEHEARTS

Eph. 6:15,16

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, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness; as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace. In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one. Eph. 6:13-16

So this past week, I've been reminded just by observing the West Hills family as well as some friends outside the church that the things that we're studying here in Ephesians 6 on spiritual warfare and the need for spiritual armor isn't just something hypothetical, or something that's completely out-of-touch with real life, or religious mumbo-jumbo.

Examples:

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. (v. 12)

This is the premise upon which everything else is built, that the apostle Paul, inspired by the Holy Spirit, tells us here. You see, just because you can't see with your own two eyes these rulers, authorities, cosmic powers and spiritual forces of evil does not make them any less real...

We're looking at Ephesians 6, spiritual armor in light of the reality of spiritual warfare. The apostle Paul is giving us a metaphor, a picture taken from his world as a prisoner, with Roman soldiers on each side, and applying it to the lives of God's people. In so doing, he is telling us, very matter-of-factly, that all of life is a war. From the time you came into this world to the moment you depart, your body, your mind, your soul, your family, your marriage, your extended family, your career, your education are all fields of conflict. It's like when you study a war, say the Civil War, you discover that there are battlefields that are scattered all over the place...

If you were to study a person's life, your own life, you'd find all kinds of battlefields. Let's think about this:

- Childhood
- the middle school and high school years
- college years
- early and mid-adult years
- the later years

There are all kinds of battlefields for every stage of life. And there are some attacks that are not age specific – air strikes of discouragement, depression, defeat, demoralization, arrows of developing a critical spirit, of becoming a complainer, a grumbler, a whiner, missiles and grenades that would stir you to cause division, to have an unforgiving spirit and bitterness, to be legalistic and judgmental. Only with eyes to see the invisible will you be able to spot hundreds of battlefields.

Okay, let's look at a couple more pieces of armor.

As shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace.
(v. 15)

Today we have shoes for every imaginable situation...

A soldier's shoes, whether in the first century or the 21st century, are extremely important because his life could very well depend on his shoes. Marching on rough, hot roads, climbing over jagged rocks, trampling through thorns, wading through streambeds – a soldier needs good protection for his feet or he can find himself out of commission with sore, swollen, blistered feet.

When we're talking about the spiritual armor for a follower of Christ, the apostle Paul tells us that you need "shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace." A soldier wasn't ready for battle without his shoes strapped to his feet, and a Christian soldier isn't ready for spiritual battle without the readiness given by the gospel of peace.

Hetomasia – readiness, preparation. We find this same word elsewhere:

In your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, ***always being prepared*** to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you... 1
Peter 3:15

As for the rich in this present age...they are to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ***ready to share*** (1 Tim. 6:18)

Remind them to be submissive to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ***ready for every good work***. Titus 3:1

So there is a sense of preparedness, of being ready.

One of the things that I want for us to see here with the idea of readiness and always being prepared is that Christians are to be ever-missional. You see, a soldier's life is not one that can be compartmentalized. A soldier on the battlefield doesn't schedule his day or his week as to when he'll be ready for battle. And he puts in his time, and then forgets about it the rest of the week or month. Even when a soldier is given opportunities to rest, someone else is keeping watch. And even when he is resting, he's ready, on mission, prepared to engage at a moment's notice, ready to assist a fellow soldier, ready to engage sniper fire, ready to bandage someone who's been wounded. The idea is that of always being prepared, always being vigilant, always being on mission for the cause of Christ is foreign to most of us.

The readiness or preparedness that the apostle writes about here comes from the gospel of peace. There are two elements of this peace that we need to look at:

- Peace with God
- Peace of God

First, peace with God. The gospel of peace refers to the good news, the unbelievable news that believers are at peace with God. There was once enmity between God and me.

Remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. Ephesians 2:12,13

So there's our condition apart from faith in Christ. Separated from Christ, alienated, without hope and without God. But then the good news:

But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace... He came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near. For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God. Ephesians 2:14, 17-19

The marvelous truth that in Christ we are now at peace with God and are one with him.

Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Romans 5:1

We have *peace with God*. It's a reality...

And you and I are to stand in that. Having peace with God readies me, prepares me for the attacks of the enemy that will come, when he will seek to tell me differently

But I also have the peace *of* God. Not only is there no enmity between me and God because his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, is now my peace. But I also can experience the peace of God, the internalized reality of the peace, the shalom, the well-being that Christ seeks to bring into a person's life when we trust in him.

Peace I leave with you; **my peace** I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid. John 14:27

It's the peace that the apostle Paul refers to when he tells us to pray in Philippians 4 –

Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And **the peace of God**, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Philippians 4:6,7

So as I put on the shoes of readiness given by the gospel of peace, I stand with the confidence that there is nothing that can separate me from God because I have peace with God through Christ, and I stand with the wonderful reminder that in the midst of my storms, Jesus gives to me his personal peace as a gift to those he loves.

Then he tells us about 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. (v. 16)

The Roman shield...

So what are the arrows for us?

- Arrows of perpetual temptations, lusts, degrading passions, desires, worldly pleasures that are relentless
- Arrows of trials, illnesses, tragedies, setbacks
- Arrows of west county idolatry; west county is filled with idols; things that we worship with our time and energy and resources and passions, things that give us more confidence and more pleasure than Jesus does, things that we trust and put our hope in, on a day-to-day basis, more than we do Christ.
- Arrows from fellow soldiers – these are some of the worst: when the enemy gets us to shoot arrows at each other – verbal attacks, undermining of character, distrust, creating a spirit of dissension or division, gossip, slander, suspicion, comparison, rivalry, discord
- Arrows that promote self-pride, vanity, self-love, elitism, prejudice, because, although we would never be caught saying it, in our heart of hearts we might be entertaining it, that “my world is better than your world, my child’s college is better than your child’s college, my work ethic is better than your work ethic, my theology is more biblical than your theology, my life is more spiritual than your life, my devotions, my prayers are better than your prayers, my service is more sacrificial than your service, my level of giving is more generous.” These arrows are extremely subtle, almost imperceptible until you ask God’s Spirit to reveal them to you
- Arrows of false teachings that undermine the sovereignty of God, the all-sufficiency of Christ and the glory of the gospel.
- Arrows that seem to encourage us to listen to stupid people and as a result believe stupid things, make stupid decisions and live stupid lives
- Arrows that distract us from being missional and purposeful, so that we waste our days and fritter away our lives on things that have absolutely no eternal significance, so that we’re more aware of who the finalists are on American Idol,

So we take up the shield of faith, that reminds us of just how naked we are without Christ, of the fact that we’re all failures, we’re all rebels, we’re all sinners, we’re all nothing and nobody without Jesus. We hide behind the shield of faith in our nakedness, knowing that there is nothing but nothing about myself of which I can boast, because it is only by God’s grace through faith that I have been saved, and even this was not of my doing, it was the gift of God. I stand behind the shield of faith and “count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith (Philippians 3:8,9). I stand behind the shield of faith and proclaim that “I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.” (Galatians 2:20)

Conclusion: