

THE FULL ARMOR OF GOD

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ

From the words of this week's section of St. Paul's Letter to the Ephesians, we are to discover that the Church standing together clothed in the issue of God can, and will defeat all the slings and arrows of the devil. This entire passage's instructions are written in the second person plural. This means that the verbs (action words) indicate the action is to be done by the community, i.e. "all of you." This means that the clothing, fight, putting on of the various parts of armor, and standing firm in the faith are done by the entire community. Each Christian is joined to the whole congregation in the fight against the evil foe(s). No one need take on the Satan alone, and in divine truth, one cannot stand unless he or she remains part of the community. St. Paul is speaking to you as a collective force. Our text begins:

Finally, all of you be empowered in (the) Lord, and in the might of the strength of Him.

In this last section of encouragement to the saints of the united Christian congregation, the Apostle begins with the passive. He is proclaiming the power of God upon them, not of their own choice, but of God's doing. To be clothed is to be covered, to have the body protected. It is done for the members of the congregation by the Lord through His Word. In being so clothed, you are given the might of His strength. Remember, Jesus bound the strong man (*Matthew 12:29; Mark 3:27*). His strength and might are also given to those who are clothed in Him.

St. Paul calls for the members of the congregation to all wear the same uniform.

Here, in these verses, he calls for individuality to be put aside and the unity of all to be in the Gospel. He goes on to use the familiar, the defensive gear of the Roman legionnaire, to describe how those united in Christ are clothed, as our text continues:

All of you must be clothed by the full armor of God, for the purpose of (having) your power to stand against the scheming of the slanderer.

This sentence begins with the command to everyone in the congregation to wear the same protective gear. Everyone is to be fully equipped with the equipment of defense. Then, equally and adequately equipped, the Christian warriors as a whole are able to make a stand against their adversary. This also means that the believers are prepared to stand a military watch, to be alert and armed for defense of the community.

Now, the enemy is named with a description of his attributes – scheming and slandering. The Adversary is more than a petty schemer. He is crafty, and able to attack with many means, and to be deceptive in doing so. He is called “devil” which accurately describes his character – that of one who brings false accusations against innocent people. (Remember, those clothed in Christ are declared innocent, so the slander against them/us is by nature, false). The letter continues:

Because for us the hand-to-hand fight does not remain with blood and flesh, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the worldly strong ones of this darkness, against the spirits of the evil one in the heavenlies.

St. Paul describes this battle with the evil charge-bringer as hand-to-hand combat.

This is the most personal, intimate type of close contact. In this type of fight, the nature of

the defense, and the strength of the soldier is key to turning away the would-be killer. This is close-contact spiritual warfare, and the forces of the evil one are allayed against the congregation of Christ. Four times the united, battle-ready Church hears the word we translate “against” in the list of enemies, thus intensifying the struggle. The minions of evil are named:

- Rulers – every demon rules over his own principality (Lenski 1937, 660).
- Authorities – each evil one exercises his authority in his principality (ibid).
- Worldly strong men of this darkness – Evil rules throughout this world, which is in darkness and the shadow of death (Luke 1:79; Isaiah 9:2).
- The spirits of the evil one in the heavenly realms – the wickedness that covers all the earth, and produces evil on earth. This is evil that is apart from the evil in men, it is spiritual evil that originated in heaven with Satan and now covers the earth (Lenski 1937, 662). Having named those who are against the united congregation, a conclusion is presented:

On account of this, all of you must have taken up the full armor of God, in order that all of you might be empowered to stand firm in the day, the evil one. Then, all of you carrying all these things stand.

Here the last preparations for battle are described. Because of who and what the united Christian community battles, we are again called upon to join together all taking up the same clothes for protection. This united, armored community receives God’s power to stand firm in the day the evil one attacks. The verse concludes with the encouragement that having been armored by God in Christ, the assembly will stand. The

soldier's individual equipment may seem heavy and cumbersome, but when it is used as God intends, it presents an effective barrier against the devil's attacks.

All of you must stand together, girding yourselves about the hips with truth, and putting on the breastplate of the righteousness.

The text continues with an overt, in English, command to stand together. Only in the unity of Christ, will the community remain firm, alert and withstand the devil.

The first piece of equipment issued is the waist belt. This belt is named Truth. Wrapped by it the things that may trip the soldiers of the cross are bound up. Prior to battle, the legionnaires would bind up their robes to free their legs and feet for better mobility. This girdle goes about the waist, the midsection of the body. Thus we may say that Truth centers the Christian and prepares him for the fight against slander, lies and deception.

The second defensive armor donned is the breastplate. This covers the vital organs, heart and lungs, and protects one from mortal injury to those areas. Here it is named Righteousness, which again is put on us by Christ. In Him, the individual Christians are covered at their most vital parts according to the ancients, with that which makes one right before God.

In the thinking of the ancients, the heart was not known as the seat of emotions. Rather, the heart was believed to be the dwelling place of heavenly beings. In Paul's writings, it is the dwelling place of the Holy Spirit.¹ Further, the heart was known as the

¹ (Romans 5:5; II Corinthians 1:22; Galatians 4:6; and in Ephesians 3:17, of the Lord) (Bauer 1958, 404)

source of the whole inner man, including knowledge, wisdom and spiritual insight. The members of the congregation continue to don their issued gear:

Then, strapping on the feet with (the) preparation of the Gospel of the Peace in all things,

Christian feet are clothed with the Gospel of peace. The sandals described were the type that often laced up the calf, preventing them from being easily lost, or giving unsure footing. Only in the peace of Christ can the Christian, as part of the community, stand firm and not slip when assaulted by the evil ones. These war-sandals were often armored and reinforced for use in the close-in fight. We note that they are called Good News of peace. The prophet wrote, “How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him bringing the Good News, who causes to publish peace, who is bringing Good News of good, who publishes salvation, who says to Zion, ‘Your God reigns’” (*Isaiah 52:7*).

all of you take up the large rectangular shield of the Faith, by which all of you will have all powers (against) the castings of the evil one – the burning arrows to quench.

The word St. Paul uses, “thureos,” that we translate shield, describes a four-cornered, door-shaped defensive weapon. It was designed to cover most of the body of a soldier. It came to symbolize the Roman legion soldiers. At the time of St. Paul’s letter, the “thureos” was often covered with leather on the side facing the enemy. This could be soaked in water, and thus help extinguish the flaming arrows that struck it. The leather was often surrounded by a metal frame, with an iron boss in the center for strength. While the thureos or “scutum (Latin)” was issued to legionnaires as an individual defensive tool, tactics developed to give it a group/unit use. One of these tactics used

often by Romans when faced with projectiles, missiles and flaming arrows was the “turtle” (testudo). It was most often seen in use during sieges.

In forming the turtle formation, the soldiers would close up any gaps between them. Each man would grip the sides of his “thureos” and hold it next to those of the men on his right and left. The front rank of soldiers would hold their shields together in front of them, covering their bodies from shin to face. Each man in the middle would place his shield over head, balancing it upon his helmet. This is illustrated below.

When necessary, those soldiers on the sides and back of the formation could adjust their position to provide full coverage. This formation, when used correctly, provided an excellent unified shield against arrows and flaming darts. Legionnaires could move, though slowly, with good cover and little fear of being individually cut down by any projectiles the enemy might hurl at them. The Thureos of the Faith, indicates that while it is issued into the hands of the individual Christian warriors, it is used most effectively against the slings and fiery arrows of the devil, temptations and struggles of the Faith, when the warriors are joined together for protection.

St. Paul is also careful to use the definite article, “the” with the word we translate “faith.” This is the faith confessed by the Christian community. It is the faith of Church of Christ, entrusted to the army of Christ, who is our Commander. This faith is not the pop-Christian “Jesus and me.” It is the faith of the Church as confessed in her creeds, held by the faithful, and joined together under one Head, Christ Jesus.

Therefore, when the enemy, the devil, faces the saints formed into the turtle formation, he faces a unified barrier protecting the soldiers behind the joined shields. He does see the feet, but these are shod in the Gospel, which is anathema to him. Fight as he will, his arrows and fiery darts cannot penetrate, nor burn the door-shields of the congregation. With their robes girded under truth, the warriors of God are prepared to move, united under the command of Jesus.

Further, if the devil were to look closer at the united church, he would see that even the uplifted thureos rest on the helmets of Salvation, Christ himself. Further, should he be so bold as to try to approach close enough to the turtle, he will have to face the thrusts and slashes of the Law and Gospel, against which he cannot stand. And if by chance one of his assaults were to penetrate the united shields, it would be stopped by the breastplates of Christ's righteousness.

Then, all of you take the helmet of the Salvation and the short, two-edged sword of the Spirit, which remains the word of God.

St. Paul now describes two implements of war, issued to individual Roman legionnaires. The first is the helmet, literally the "about the head." The second is the short sword.

The head covering is named the "helmet of Salvation." Salvation is none other than Jesus Christ. To place Christ upon the head as a defense is to figuratively cover the place where the ancients believed to be the center of the intellect and imagination. Salvation, that is Christ, is not only to be felt, but to be known at the center of one's thoughts. With

Jesus covering one's thoughts and imaginings, the devil cannot penetrate and corrupt them.

The short-sword was a defensive weapon used for the close-in fight in hand-to-hand combat. It was sharpened on both sides of the blade and could be used for either slashing or thrusting. Its range was limited to the length of the warrior's reach, unlike the pike or javelin, which were offensive weapons. The Lord moved Paul to figure this defensive sword for close work as the "sword of the Spirit." He tells us what he means, when he says that this remains the word of God. This word is not the "Word" used of Jesus, the "logos." Rather it refers to the entire word of God as He has revealed and preserved it throughout the ages in what we call the Bible.

With this figure, we are reminded that the Word of God is a two-edged sword (Hebrews 4:12).² It was also used for executions and to describe dreadful bloodshed (Revelation 6:4). In Matthew's Gospel (10:4) the short sword describes that which will divide the believer from even his or her closest relatives.

In other words, the sword of the Spirit is the Holy Spirit working through Word of God rightly divided into Law and Gospel. This Word, used in the defense, is the entire Word of God against which the devil and his minions cannot stand. It is this Sword of the Spirit with which Jesus on the cross mortally wounded the serpent in fulfillment of Genesis 3:15.

The peace which passes all understanding guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus

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Pastor Michael A. Morehouse

SOLI DEO GLORIA

Translation, second draft:

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On account of this, all of you must have taken up the full armor of God, in order that all of you might be empowered to stand firm in the day, the evil one. Then, all of you carrying all these things stand.

All of you must stand together, girding yourselves about the hips with truth, and putting on the breastplate of the righteousness. Then, strapping on the feet with (the) preparation of the Gospel of the Peace in all things, all of you take up the large rectangular shield of the Faith, by which all of you will have all powers (against) the castings of the evil one - the burning arrows to quench.

Then, all of you take the helmet of the Salvation and the short, two-edged sword of the Spirit, which remains the word of God.

² As opposed to this, for example, Revelation 1:16, 2:12&16, and 19:15 use a different word, transliterated "romphaia." This is a large, broad sword (Bauer 1979, 737). Therefore it is not the same weapon, and was more usable for the offense than the defense due to its extended reach.