

Dear friends in Christ Jesus:

So what shoes do you wear? The answer depends on what you are doing. Here at church, you might wear nice dress shoes. When you are working out you might wear exercise shoes. Is there anything in the Bible that tells us what kind of shoes Christians should wear? There is. In fact, our text from Ephesians today speaks about what we ought to wear from head to toe. But there aren't any running shoes on the list, no baseball caps, jeans or T-shirts. Nor are there any dresses or suits. The Apostle Paul lists only battle armor. Why? Let's find out as we get **A God's-eye View of a Christian's Uniform**.

From time to time the news is full of reports from war-torn cities. Cities that were once flourishing playgrounds are now battlefields. Here in the Phoenix area, we don't have to deal with that, not outwardly, but there is a spiritual battle taking place here and everywhere that demands we take the appropriate caution or we'll quickly become casualties.

This battle, explains Paul, is not against flesh and blood. Your struggle is not with your difficult boss, or crabby co-worker. It's not with the sibling or classmate you haven't spoken to in days because you're upset with each other. Your battle is against Satan and his minions. That's so important to remember when someone hurts us with their unloving words and actions. It's easy to treat that individual as the enemy when in reality Satan is using that person as his pawn. He wants us to react in such a way that would harm our relationship with God and with that other person. But we won't let that happen if we're wearing the appropriate uniform for a Christian.

You already heard that the uniform Paul prescribes is battle armor. But let's be clear on where this armor comes from. It's not something you have to scrape together yourself. No, this armor is something that God gives. Trying to survive this fight with Satan dressed on our own is like going into a firefight with a homemade "bullet-proof" vest made out of cardboard. It might look like the real thing, but the first bullet to tear through its flimsy exterior will prove otherwise. Likewise, Paul urges us to put on the armor that God himself provides for this fight.

So how does this armor work? Well, Paul compares it to the armor that a Roman soldier would have worn. Paul first urges us to put on the belt of truth. Just as a belt holds your pants up so that they don't fall down around your ankles where they will be a tripping hazard, the truth of God's Word keeps us from stumbling over Satan's lies. Satan says that there is no god. He says that this world came into existence on its own. And therefore, you're really nothing more than an intelligent animal and not a moral being who will have to answer for your deeds someday. When you die, that's it, says Satan. There's no heaven, no hell. So you might as well squeeze the most out of life that you can. Do whatever feels right to you. Take whatever you think you deserve to have. That's what everyone else is doing. Why should you miss out?

But along with this belt of truth, we have been given the sword of the Spirit, says Paul, God's Word that tells us how it really is, that God created this world and mankind. And he didn't make us to be his slaves, rather he wanted us to enjoy the blessings of living with him. But sin ruined that relationship so that now, people think that if there is a God, he's nothing more than a demanding boss. But he isn't. He is our loving heavenly Father who sent his Son Jesus to die on the cross to take our sins away. That's what the Bible tells us and when we study the Word it keeps Satan's lies at bay.

But Satan won't cease his attacks because you hold and use the Sword of the Spirit. If anything, he will increase them. That's perhaps why Paul also said to take up the shield of faith to extinguish the flaming arrows of the evil one. Satan is going to do his best to burn his way through your faith. He might do that by getting you to fall into a particular sin or get you to go through the motions of being a Christian. That's why it might be worth remembering that before Roman soldiers went into battle, they would soak their wooden shields in water. This made it a lot more difficult for the enemy's flaming arrows to cause damage. Likewise, wouldn't it be helpful for us to remember that we have been soaked in the waters of baptism? Satan's arrows will come and they will find its mark, but when I remember that I am a forgiven child of God, when I remember that I can say no to Satan's temptations, those arrows aren't going to continue to burn and do permanent damage.

But what about those times Satan's arrows do wound us as we run headlong into sin? Well, Paul reminds us that we've also been given the breastplate of righteousness to wear. You see from time to time I will doubt God's Word and I will do what I know to be wrong. But I'm not going to make it to heaven because I did a good job following Jesus. I'm going to make it to heaven because of *grace*. When Jesus hung on the cross, Roman soldiers gambled for his clothing. Little did they realize that at the very moment he was fashioning for them and us a breastplate, a breastplate of righteousness. This piece of armor is so perfect and so sturdy that not one of Satan's accusations that we are horrible sinners will be able to penetrate. Because we have this breastplate of righteousness from Jesus, we know that the verdict on Judgment Day from God will be: "Not guilty of any sin! Come into my heaven and enjoy eternal life."

That's perhaps also why Paul says that we've been given the helmet of salvation. Jesus' salvation allows us to hold up our head with confidence and joy. We can stand tall because, when Jesus declared from the cross, "**It is finished,**" he wasn't just proclaiming that our sins had been paid for, he was also saying that Satan and all of his minions were finished because their accusations against us are groundless.

There's still one more piece of armor that Paul describes: footwear. Paul put it like this: "**Stand, then...with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace tied to your feet like sandals**" (Ephesians 6:14a, 15). If I could only wear one pair of shoes, it would not be these dress shoes I have on right now. Instead, I would wear hiking boots. That's because with those boots I can go anywhere. I can walk through rivers, I can run across sharp rocks, and I can slog through snow and my feet will be protected. Paul says that a Christian's uniform includes footwear like that. You see when we're wrapped in the promises of God's love and forgiveness through Jesus, we can approach any situation with confidence. We can speak to those who have hurt us and offer them forgiveness. We can speak to those who have suffered a loss and offer Jesus' promise of eternal life. This footwear allows us to stand firm when the world is falling into chaos around us because we have the peace of knowing that our Savior is still in charge.

So, we're all set for battle against Satan. We have God's full armor. We have belt, breastplate, shield, helmet, sword, and combat boots. But we have even more than that. We also have a way to communicate with headquarters through prayer. Listen to how Paul himself used that tool. He said in our text: "**Pray for me also, that when I open my mouth a message will be given to me that boldly reveals the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may speak about it boldly, as it is necessary for me to speak**" (Ephesians 6:19, 20).

Paul surprises us, doesn't he? Instead of saying, "Pray that God will free me from captivity," he asks that the Ephesians would pray that God give him the courage to speak his Word to his captors and to anyone else he came into contact with. That's a prayer you can offer for me too, that I would be bold in sharing the Word, and not just here on Saturday evening and Sunday morning but the rest of the week as well. I pray that for you too. I pray that you would make use of your gospel-peace footwear and take the message of salvation to those who need to hear it.

And no, you don't have to do that alone. God is of course with you, but so are fellow believers. That's another asset we enjoy in this battle against the devil. Paul too benefitted from the fellowship of believers. Sure, he was imprisoned, but believers came to visit and encourage him. And he was now sending one of those believers, a man named Tychicus, to deliver this letter to the Ephesians and to encourage them in their faith.

Isn't that a good reminder that even though we may be outfitted with God's armor that this is still not a fight that we should engage in on our own? We need to keep banding together so that we may encourage one another and pray for each other. We need to keep making sure that our equipment is thoroughly secured, that there aren't any gaps in our armor. Only then will we continue stand firm against Satan and his attacks—attacks that won't stop until Judgment Day.

Sure, our urban area might seem like a pretty peaceful place to live, but don't kid yourself. This is not a playground; it's a battlefield. But through faith in Jesus, you're ready to handle those attacks from Satan because you are wearing the right uniform: the armor of God. Amen.