

Isaiah 59:16-19 (Opening)

- 16 *He saw that there was no man,
and wondered that there was no one to intercede;
then his own arm brought him salvation,
and his righteousness upheld him.*
- 17 *He put on righteousness as a breastplate,
and a helmet of salvation on his head;
he put on garments of vengeance for clothing,
and wrapped himself in zeal as a cloak.*
- 18 *According to their deeds, so will he repay,
wrath to his adversaries, repayment to his enemies;
to the coastlands he will render repayment.*
- 19 *So they shall fear the name of the LORD from the west,
and his glory from the rising of the sun;
for he will come like a rushing stream,
which the wind of the LORD drives.*

The battle had been going on all day. In fact, it actually started yesterday. Everyone was tired. They'd marched over a hundred miles in the past five days just to get to the battlefield. The enemy outnumbered them two to one. They were sent here to this small rocky hill with one order – hold the line. They were the end of the formation. If the enemy got past them, the entire line would fall.

They couldn't fail. And with their commander having the name "YHWH Saves", how could they lose? I'm sure the men of the 20th Maine didn't see it that way at the time, though. With some soft professor of religion and romance languages as their commander, I'm sure they hoped against hope that the enemy would just leave them alone; but that didn't happen.

When we're faced with an enemy that seems to be everywhere, what do we do?

Well, we need to have the vision that was given to Elisha's servant, so we can see the army that is supporting us in this huge battle we're involved in.

We know the good guys, the spiritual beings that are fighting for light; we know the bad guys, the spiritual beings that are fighting for darkness. But what is our place in this battle? Do we even have a place? We don't have the training to be front-line warriors.

Let's look at Ephesians 6: 10-20, and we'll see what we're supposed to do.

Ephesians 6:10-20

¹⁰ Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. ¹¹ Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. ¹² 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. ¹³ Therefore 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. ¹⁴ Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, ¹⁵ and, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace. ¹⁶ In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one; ¹⁷ and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, ¹⁸ praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints, ¹⁹ and also for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel, ²⁰ for which I am an ambassador in chains, that I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak.

Paul tells us that he is in an ironic predicament. He's an ambassador, a representative of the King of the Universe, a spokesman for His cause. Ambassadors historically have had relative immunity when it comes to the laws of the country they are in. But Paul, well, Paul was different. The ESV translation I just read says "in chains", but the Greek is singular.

The Romans had very specific ways of restricting prisoners. If they were really bad people, and needed to be controlled very closely, they were shackled hands and feet. This restricted movement and kept the prisoner under very tight control. But if the prisoner had gained more trust, or was less of a threat, he would be chained to a soldier with one chain. This way his guard was always aware of where he was.

So, while Paul was writing his letter to the church in Ephesus, he was constantly in the presence of a Roman soldier, a Legionnaire, who was responsible for keeping track of him. Maybe that's where he got the imagery of the armor of God from.

Let's break down what Paul says about our place in this battle, what we should wear and what we should do.

First, Paul says that God is our strength. We don't need to be strong on our own, God will provide the strength that we need for this battle. His power will provide what we need, not our own strength.

Verse 11 tells us what we need to do; put on the whole armor of God and stand. Just like the 20th Maine at Gettysburg, we need to hold the line; we don't need to rush at the enemy across the field, because he's coming at us. Let him expend all the energy to run across the field; we'll just stand here and wait.

Some important points about this verse. First the Greek word translated as "whole armor" is panoplia, literally "all the weapons", or "all the tools". That's where we get the phrase "Panoply of God" used in third verse of "Soldiers of Christ Arise":

*Stand then in His great might, with all His strength endued,
But take, to arm you for the fight, the panoply of God;*

This is amazing, powerful armor. But it isn't God's armor, armor that He wears. It's armor that God has provided for us, armor that He made for us to wear in this great battle.

The Roman Legionnaires were an interesting group, militarily speaking. Legionnaires were Roman citizens who were usually from the middle class, and though they were paid a wage for their 25 years of voluntary service, they provided their own arms and armor. It would be like telling people enlisting in today's Army that they had to bring their own rifle and protective gear once they joined.

But since we're adopted by God, we get to wear the family heirloom armor, passed down over generations to us from our Father. He provides our protection in this battle.

And what's our command for the battle? Stand against the foe, not attack, and not defeat. That's not what we're directed to do. The accuser will attack us, that's a given. We don't need to seek him out. Our orders are to be ready for him, and stand firm against him when the battle does come.

And it will come.

Verse 12 describes what the battle is like. We're not fighting humans here. That would be easier; we wouldn't need God's armor to fight humans; we could use human armor for that. But since our enemy is not an earthly enemy, we need something better than armor made by man. And we're not just shooting arrows or throwing rocks at each other. In fact, our list of equipment doesn't include anything to attack at long range. We're made ready for close-in, hand-to-hand, face-to-face, eye-to-eye, personal combat.

So, in verse 13, Paul tells us to take up the panoplia of God. Here, the phrase "take up" implies more than possession; we need to do more than **have** it. We need to put it on and use it. I have several swords in my house that I've collected over the years, but they end up hanging on the walls, not being used for what swords were designed for. Don't take the panoplia of God and put it on display! You need to put it on and use it or it won't do you any good.

Paul finishes verse 13 by telling us that by using the armor we will be able to withstand "the evil day". It's not a day as in the 24 hour period that includes daytime and night. It's day as in a time period in general, and it's evil because of the battle that we face. We'll not face the battle just once, but many times during our time here, so the evil day won't be only once. And again, Paul tells us that what we're to do in the battle is "stand". Not attack, not vanquish, but stand.

The Greek word translated as “withstand” in the ESV is anth-is’-tay-mee. That same Greek word is used in James 4:7 and 1 Peter 5:9, only it’s translated as “resist”.

James 4:7

⁷ Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.

1 Peter 5:8, 9

⁸ Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. ⁹ Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world.

So, now we get to the equipment; Paul’s description of the panoplia of God, and the reason we can stand firm. Our warriors today would call it “the full battle rattle”.

First up in verse 14 is the belt. A more literal translation of verse 14 would be having girded yourself with truth, or wrapped truth around your middle.

The primary part of the Roman Legionnaire’s equipment is his belt. The belt holds the sword in place, but also connects to the breastplate to keep it from flopping around. The belt is also used to hold the cape out of the way during a fight so that it doesn’t tangle you up.

God’s truth is what holds everything together when we’re resisting the accuser. Think of it this way; a girdle is considered a foundation, and girding ourselves with truth is using the firm foundation of God to hold everything together during the battle.

Next we have the Breastplate of righteousness. The chest is the most vulnerable part of the body in a face-to-face battle. That’s where all the

vital organs are; our core. Without a breastplate, you can't survive any attack that actually makes contact with you. Proverbs 11:4 says:

Proverbs 11:4

*⁴ Riches do not profit in the day of wrath,
but righteousness delivers from death.*

The breastplate of Righteousness will protect us from the deathblow our enemy, the accuser, wants to attack with. But we aren't righteous. We have no righteousness of our own. God provides us with our righteousness.

Jeremiah 23:5, 6

⁵ "Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. ⁶ In his days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell securely. And this is the name by which he will be called: 'The LORD is our righteousness.'

Next, in verse 15, we have the shoes. We can't go to battle in our bare feet, now, can we?

Roman soldiers wore thick soled sandals made from very heavy leather, laced up the leg almost to the knee to make sure they wouldn't come off. Also, the sole of the sandal was covered with "hobnails", iron nails to provide traction in any situation.

But the sandals are of the "Gospel of peace". What does Gospel mean, anyway? The Greek word is euaggelion (yoo-ang-ghel'-ee-on), which was the term used by the ancient Greeks as a proclamation of victory in battle. In the story about the messenger who returned to Athens with news of the result of the battle of Marathon, the messenger brought euaggelion.

Paul uses the irony of this warfare analogy tied with the good news of victory belonging to peace. When you are assured of victory, you are much more ready to stand in the battle!

The most visible piece of the panoplia is the shield. This was not just some wimpy little round piece of wood strapped to your arm. That would be a buckler. This shield is the shield carried by the Roman Legionnaires. It was about 4 feet high and 3 feet wide, curved, and weighed about 25 pounds or so. It was made like plywood, layers of wood crossing directions so it was strong in every direction. They were designed to protect the entire front of the soldier from long distance weapons, but were also used in close combat. If you rested it on the ground, about all your enemy could see over the shield was your head and shoulders.

The Romans has some interesting battle tactics with their shields that I think apply to Paul's description of how we use it. Paul says we use it to "extinguish all the fiery darts of the evil one". Actually, the Greek says that the shield is what does the extinguishing, we just hold on to it. That's an accurate representation of how the Romans would use it, but not entirely.

The Romans had a special formation to protect from long-range weapons like burning arrows, rocks, spears, or anything like that. It was called the "testudo", which is Latin for tortoise. The men would stand shoulder to shoulder in a tight formation, holding their shields in front of them so they overlapped somewhat; so there were no gaps in the front of the line. Then the next row of soldiers would hold their shields over the heads of the soldiers in front of them, at an angle. Finally, a third row of soldiers would hold their shields directly over their heads, overlapping the second row of shields. This formation was almost impenetrable to small flying weapons. Once the borages of arrows were over, both sides would close to hand-to-hand combat.

The enemy tries using those flaming arrows against us, but with the shield of faith, we're protected from them. When that doesn't work is when the enemy rushes against us. Like I said before, we don't need to go out looking for him; he'll find us and attack us.

So, in verse 17 we have the last two pieces of the equipment. First is the helmet of Salvation. The helmet protects our head from attacks, by way of the joyful confidence given us by way of salvation from eternal separation from God.

1 Thessalonians 5:8

⁸ But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation.

The last piece of the equipment is the only piece that can be used to attack with, but I don't think that's its purpose; the Sword of the Spirit. Paul is probably thinking about the Roman Gladius sword here, a short sword with a blade about 2 ½ feet long, specifically designed for that close-in, face-to-face combat. The soldier could hide behind his shield and use his sword to attack the enemy that was close in, or could use the sword as added protection for the head, which was above the shield, parrying the blows aimed at the head and shoulders.

In the book of Hebrews we get another good description of this part of the panoplia.

Hebrews 4:12

¹² For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

It's a very powerful weapon.

Using Jesus' temptation in the desert as an example, every time the accuser attacked Jesus, he replied back to him with scripture. Each time

He replied back with scripture, it weakened the accuser's position against Him. That's how we're to use the sword of the spirit, not to attack the accuser when we feel ready, but to counterattack, to fight back, to hold our ground and not retreat.

Jesus could attack the accuser, because as God, He was in authority over him. We aren't God, and don't have the authority over the accuser, and he knows that. We need to remember that. God and Jesus have authority over everything, so we need to make sure we're not attacking, but are only defending or counterattacking when we're attacked. In Jude, we see that even Michael the archangel, a peer with the accuser at the least, doesn't attack, but allows God to do the attacking:

Jude 1:9

⁹ But when the archangel Michael, contending with the devil, was disputing about the body of Moses, he did not presume to pronounce a blasphemous judgment, but said, "The Lord rebuke you."

So, we're supposed to stand, and use God's panoplia, His divine warrior's equipment, to protect ourselves from the attack. We don't need to win the battle, because that's what Jesus does in the end. We know He wins because we've been told that through John's revelations.

But how do we just stand there and take it? Verse 18 tells us how. We need to be in constant communication with the commander. Here, Paul talks about prayer; keeping the lines of communication open, and supplication; sharing needs, wants, and desires. If, during the battle, part of the battle line starts to weaken, we can call for reinforcements in that place.

Paul was not in any physical battles that we know of, but we do know he spent a lot of "quality time" with soldiers; and if there's one thing that soldiers like to do, it's tell war stories (and they may or may not be

true). Paul tells us how we can stand our ground in this battle. But he also asks for help in his mission as ambassador.

In verses 19 and 20, Paul asks the Ephesians to pray for him, so that he can share the victorious good news of the battle with the people around him. Paul knew the final outcome of the battle would be God winning and the accuser losing. Our little part of the battle seems big to us, and in our view of things it is everything we know as Christians. The battle rages on around us day and night, and the attacks come from all directions.

Like the men of the 20th Maine, things can look bleak sometimes. Things look especially bleak just before the battle is won. But also like the 20th Maine, we need to stand our ground and help protect the flank of our fellow soldiers, our brothers and sisters in Christ. We don't fight alone; we're in this battle together. If we stay together and fight as one, we're stronger than if we try to go it alone.

1 Peter 5:6-11 (Closing)

⁶ *Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you,* ⁷ *casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you.* ⁸ *Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.* ⁹ *Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world.* ¹⁰ *And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you.* ¹¹ *To him be the dominion forever and ever. Amen.*

Questions

1. The book “Wild at Heart”, by John Eldridge, includes a suggested prayer based on Ephesians 6:13-18. It’s based on the full armor of God, and the way that gladiators would prepare for their contest.

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, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist ...” *Lord, I put on the belt of truth. I choose a lifestyle of honesty and integrity. Show me the truths I so desperately need today. Expose the lies that I’m not even aware that I’m believing. “... with the breastplate of righteousness in place...” And yes, Lord, I wear YOUR righteousness against all condemnation and corruption. Fit me with your holiness and purity—defend me from all assaults against my heart “... and your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace ...” I do choose to live for the gospel at any moment. Show me where the larger story is unfolding and keep me from being so lax that I think the most important thing today is the soap opera of this world.*

“In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one ...” *Jesus, I lift against every lie and every assault the confidence that You, Jesus, are good, and that You have good in store for me. Nothing is coming today that can overcome me because You are with me. “... Take the helmet of salvation ...” Thank you, Lord for my salvation. I receive it in a new and fresh way from you and I declare that nothing can separate me now from the love of Christ and the place I shall ever have in your kingdom. “... and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God ...” Holy Spirit, show me specifically today the truths of the Word of God that I will need to counter the assaults and the snares of the Enemy. Bring them to mind*

throughout the day. "... 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 saints." Finally, Holy Spirit, I agree to walk in step with you in everything, in all prayer as my spirit communes with you throughout the day.

What do you think of this? Do you think that this would be helpful preparing you for your daily battles?