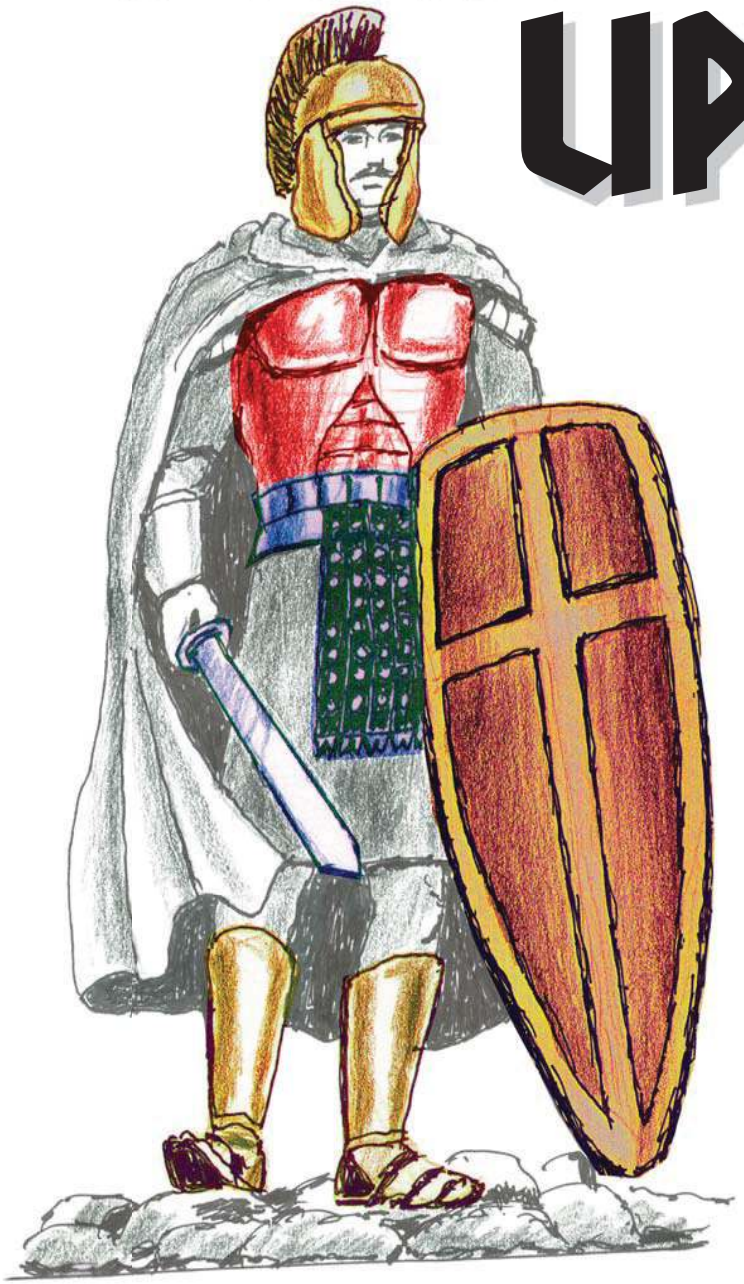
GEAR UP!



ADULT

The Missionary Baptist
Vacation Bible School Literature Committee presents

GEAR UP!

Vacation Bible School Lessons for Adult
Written by Brother Danny Hayes

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LESSON ONE

BODY ARMOR

LESSON TEXT
Ephesians 6:11, 12, & 14

WRITTEN BY
BROTHER DANNY HAYES

Ephesians 6:11,12, & 14
Eph 6:11 Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil.
Eph 6:12 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.
Eph 6:14 Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness

If you have studied much in the way of history, you may have noticed that a large percentage of all historical writings deal with war. There have been thousands of volumes dedicated not only to the history of wars, but also to the knowledge of how to wage them. Indeed, there have been people who dedicated their entire lives to the study of the martial skills. The study of wars in history is very understandable because few, if any, human endeavors are able to bring such dramatic change to our world in as hasty and complete a manner as can war. The study of war as a science is understandable because nobody wants to be on the losing side of a conflict.

War, in fact, well represents the human condition in many aspects. Since mankind turned away from God, we each have a will of our own and often find it to be in opposition with the wills of others. War is simply this concept taken to the extreme. In addition to the conflict that we find ourselves in with others, there is also the struggles that we have with ourselves – between what is right and what we often wrongly desire. Then there is a battle that is much more ancient that often works its way into our human conflicts both external and internal. It is not just the conflict between right and wrong, but between the good of God and the evil of His and our adversary.

This warfare is very real and it rages all around us and therefore it is no accident that Paul used the concept of armor to illustrate the tools that the people of God are to cultivate and use. Look at the world and take note of this warfare. Which side is making progress? Can you tell? If you can't, you need to look closer, because battles are rarely, if ever, fought to a draw. Is God's cause advancing? If not, then why? Is it because the forces of evil are stronger? Or is it because many in God's army have gone AWOL? If we are not in the fight, then we have no right to complain about the advance of evil, because we are surely part of the reason. Paul is encouraging God's people to get into the fight. If you are not actively contending for God's cause, you are not in the fight. But before you get into the fight, you must prepare or you will fail.

THE ARMOR

In verse 14, Paul begins talking about the individual pieces that make up the armor. It is here that he begins using metaphor to teach. He says we are to have our "loins girt about with truth" and to have on the "breastplate of righteousness." Perhaps before we go any further, a little translation would be in order. "Loins" refer to the part of the body from the abdomen down to around the thighs. "Girt" is a verb meaning to encircle and bind tightly.

It is important to remember what these things mean because we will be forming a picture of this armor and building upon that picture as we progress through the lessons. Some of the things that we'll be looking at may have a modern or recent equivalent, but we want to look at the armor as Paul would have seen it and understood it. That being said, let's get started with our picture. You may even want to make a sketch of a man's body and draw the pieces of armor on it as we look at each one.

THE GIRDLE OR BELT - ITS FORM AND FUNCTION

Let's not get "girdle" confused with the modern device of the same name, however the ancient one did have a similarity in that it was wrapped very tightly around the middle part of the body. Think about how the soldiers of Paul's time dressed. They wore tunics, loose fitting and flowing. These tunics were probably very comfortable to wear around camp or when at home, but you might imagine that a full, billowing garment would quickly get in the way when a soldier went into battle. The girdle was the solution. It tied the tunic close to the body so that the soldier would not be in danger of having his movement restricted by a twisted, windswept piece of clothing when in battle. It could be made of something as soft as a strong woven cloth or as tough as leather. The Roman soldier, who was the definitive soldier of the day, used a very wide belt that also had hooks and loops to hold weapons and to which connected other pieces of armor.

In addition to these uses, the girdle also gave support to the wearer. Have you ever seen a weight lifter wear a tightly strapped wide leather belt as he lifted very heavy weights? He wore this belt to help support his body. From the bottom of the rib cage to the pelvis, the only bones that we have are in the spinal column. The spinal column is a wonderfully designed structure, but it gives little support to the internal organs that are in this area of the body. All of the support for these organs comes from muscles. These muscles are made to help us move and work and at the same time support our internal organs, but when dealing with great stresses, such as would be found in battle, they can become overtaxed and then cannot offer the needed strength for the task at hand. The girdle then becomes a help for the body to be able to perform beyond its natural capabilities. It gives a semi-solid structure for muscles of the back and stomach to push against instead of having to form their own structure by flexing and straining.

THE BREASTPLATE - ITS FORM AND FUNCTION

The breastplate was a piece of armor that covered its wearer from the neck to the upper thighs and was made

to fit close to his body. It protected the soft areas and vital organs from injury. Even in Paul's day, a nasty gash on the limbs or even a severed arm or leg could possibly be survived, but a piercing wound to the abdomen or chest caused a painful, agonizing death. It was important to an army for reasons of morale to make sure that their soldiers felt confident in battle and the better protected a soldier, the more confident he is.

The Roman soldier was equipped with the "lorica segmentata", segmented armor that covered the shoulders and thorax and fastened to his belt to hold it tightly in place. There was little chance of his armor shifting in battle, thus there was one less thing to distract a soldier.

GIRT YOUR LOINS WITH TRUTH

Have you noticed that this is the first piece of amour that Paul mentions and that in the order of arming it comes first? Naturally the girdle would have to be put on first, because it would be rendered largely useless to put it on the outside of everything else. It is likewise no accident that Paul metaphorically makes the concept of "truth" the girdle, the foundation of the armor. Nothing else could be the proper foundation for a soldier's armor. A length of rope could possibly hold a weapon or other armor, but could offer no support. A ring of iron might offer support, but would restrict movement and weigh the soldier down. A soldier about to go into battle would accept no substitute, because his cause as well as his life depends upon the soundness of his armor. Without a proper girdle, the rest of the armor is just not as good.

It is the same thing with truth. There is only one truth. There are cleverly devised fables made by men, but they are not truth. The fables may sound good until you need to hang a weapon on them, then they show their weakness. They may feel good until you find that you are in battle and they will not allow you to move freely. We should accept no substitutes. Proverbs 23:23 says "Buy the truth, and sell it not." This truth is the only thing that will at once support us, hold everything in place, and offer a foundation for all good and righteous things to be added to it.

What is this truth? Men have asked themselves and each other for centuries what truth is. They speak of it as if the concept of truth itself is the most important thing, but it is not. The most important thing is what truth says, not what it is. Truth is simply this: the word of God. Since God is the author of truth, then all truth must originate with Him. With that being said, what is the word of God and how can we know the truth when we hear it? We have been given a wonderful gift. We have been given the word of God in written form and from the mouths of His messengers. At the same time, we have been given the Spirit of God who witnesses to us about the truth of what we read and hear. We are not forced to try ourselves to search out the truth from all that we may hear. When the truth is told, it comes from God. God will then, if we desire it, communicate with us through His Spirit by taking the truth that we hear and moving it from our ears to our hearts. Nothing but the truth can penetrate this deeply. We feel that penetration and are made to know, if we will listen, that it is the truth.

The first step in putting on this armor of God is to find the truth of God (which is the only truth) and to wrap it tightly around us. A search might be in order if we find ourselves in a place where His truth is hard to find, but a lifetime of searching would be well worth it if that search ends in our finding it. God will bless us with a spiritual knowledge about the truth if we desire it. He will help us in our search. Then, once we have found this truth, we have the basis for adding the rest of the armor of God. Once we are fully armed, this belt of truth will support our every movement. It will not restrict us, but will free us to do what we have to do (Jn 8:32: "And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.")

THE BREASTPLATE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

The breastplate covers the heart and other vital organs. Now we know that we ourselves have no righteousness. So how do we even have a breastplate of righteousness, much less put it on? The righteousness belongs to and comes from Jesus. He is the only human who ever lived who was righteous. He imputes His righteousness to us when we believe on Him.

As with a physical breastplate, the righteousness of Jesus protects our spiritual "vital organs". The people of Paul's day believed that the internal organs were the seat of thought, emotion, desire, and passion. Is it any wonder then that we need the righteousness of Jesus to protect these things? How better to destroy a man than to stab at his emotions, infect his thoughts, or bruise and pervert his desires and passions? Proverbs 4:23 tells us, "Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life." If we are to keep our lives protected from becoming corrupted, we need to protect our heart from evil influences. We are not able of ourselves to stop the blade of evil from stabbing and corrupting us. What could better protect our heart than to surround and fill it with the righteousness of Jesus?

OUR ARMOR SO FAR

What we have on so far is the belt of truth and the breastplate of righteousness. They are completely interconnected. We cannot possibly have the righteousness of Jesus without believing and being saved. At the same time, if we have found and believed God's truth, then we have the opportunity to put on this breastplate, a wonderful beginning to the armor which God has made available to every man.

In the next lesson, we'll make our armor mobile.

LESSON TWO

BATTLE BOOTS

LESSON TEXT
Ephesians 6:15

WRITTEN BY
BROTHER DANNY HAYES

Ephesians 6:15
15 And your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace;

In our last lesson, we began our study of God's armor with the most basic and first-to-be-put-on pieces of armor - the belt or girdle and then with its connecting breastplate. In this lesson, we continue with the armor by moving to the feet. Remember to update your mental or drawn picture as we talk about the soldier's shoes.

Our feet are ideally designed for the task that they were made for - to provide us a sound foundation. When we move about from one place to another, our feet make that process more efficient and easier. Our feet were designed with an arch between our toes and our heel. Look for this arch in any other animal and you will come up empty. Why? It's because our feet were made to be able to adapt to just about any type of movement that we might need to make. That arch allows us to stand on two feet, to shift our weight to our toes, or to absorb the shock of a hard landing from a jump or running. How many other creatures are able to walk, run, trot, jump, leap, dance, tiptoe, stomp, creep, spring, hop, kick, and stand with just two feet? In addition, man uses his feet in climbing, crawling, swimming, holding, and gesturing.

But the feet, for all their wonderful form, are still made of flesh. Flesh is vulnerable. Flesh feels pain. Flesh can be torn and injured. Our feet need armor. A long time ago, and nobody knows when, somebody invented shoes. Ever since then, shoes have been pretty standard for people in places where the ground is rough on feet. Some primitive shoes were made by simply strapping pieces of bark to the feet. While that may be better than bare feet, it does not constitute a good pair of shoes.

SHOPPING FOR SOLDIER'S SHOES - THESE BOOTS WERE MADE FOR FIGHTING

When we shop for shoes, we may spend a lot of time to pick out the pair with the "look" that we desire. This is what most people do. You're not going to buy a pair of shoes that don't look good to you. But a soldier who understands the rigors of military demands in general and battle in particular will have more practical considerations. He or she will not go for flip-flops or high-heels.

Here are some of the main attributes that a soldier will look for in shoes or boots:

1. Protection - When a soldier is in the heat of battle, he does not want to take time to look down for a place to put his feet. He also does not want to be facing his enemy when his attention is stolen because a sharp stone or stick punctures his foot. A soldier needs to give no thought to his feet during battle. He wants to know that his feet are protected and takes steps ahead of time, namely good shoes, to make sure that they are.
2. Light Weight - A soldier needs to be able to move very quickly in order to give chase, dodge swords and arrows, or to maneuver in a fight. His feet with shoes must not be noticeably heavier than they are at any other time to accomplish all that he must do. A soldier may also have to march many miles in a day. Any unnecessary weight can cause undue fatigue. Good shoes help a soldier move and do not hinder him. Roman boots, or caligae, were made with uppers of leather strips and looked like sandals, which made them rugged, but at the same time, light.
3. Stability - It is important that a soldier be able to stand solidly wherever he is. The Roman's caligae had wide, sturdy, flat soles with hob nails in the soles that acted as cleats. The hob nails helped to maintain footing even in slippery mud. A soldier who does not have good footing has no leverage to apply force with his sword or to absorb force with his shield. Good footing is the foundation of the soldier's fight.
4. Long-Wearing - Shoes that will not hold up over a long march do a soldier no good. There are usually no supply depots out in the battlefield, so it is vital that shoes be made to last the duration of a campaign. Being made of leather, the caligae were very durable.
5. Good Fit / Comfortable - No general wants to see his army limp onto the battlefield. Shoes that injure the soldier are doing his enemies' work for them. They must not flop about on his feet but must become a part of him. Remember that the best shoes are the ones that the soldier doesn't even notice. They let him concentrate on fighting. Caliae strapped tightly onto a soldier's foot, but the open design allowed the foot to breathe, virtually eliminating many foot problems common to the soldier.

THE PREPARATION OF THE GOSPEL

Now that we've talked about physical military shoes, let's spend some time talking about what the shoes represent and why Paul used the

concept of shoes to represent it. Notice that the verse does not say that the shoes are the gospel. What it says is that the shoes are the preparation of the gospel. The key here is that we prepare ourselves in the gospel. The gospel is the gospel. It remains the same no matter what anyone does. If we listen to it, if we don't listen to it, if we carry it to the world, if we don't carry it to the world, it is still the gospel. It is the gospel no matter what we do. The difference comes in what we do with it. If we don't listen to it, it does us no good. However, if we do listen to it, it can become the instrument of salvation. In the case of this verse, Paul is telling us to prepare ourselves in it.

The preparation of the gospel means that we are to have knowledge of the gospel. The gospel is the good news that Jesus, the Son of God, came to earth as a man, lived a perfect life, and gave His life so that depraved mankind could be saved from the consequences of sin and brought into fellowship with God. The most essential way to gain knowledge of the gospel is to experience the salvation that Jesus made possible and by gaining this knowledge, come to know God in a very personal way. We can't just learn about it from a book. Can you know what riding a roller coaster is like by just reading about it in a book? Of course you can't. To really know what it is like, you have to actually experience it. The same is true of many things and the gospel is like this also. The beginning of real understanding regarding the gospel is salvation, because that is when we begin to see its true work, which takes place in our hearts.

Naturally, we cannot stop there. Study is involved. How many times have you read scripture or listened to a sermon and learned something that you didn't previously know? Salvation may be the beginning of understanding, but we have much to learn. Prayer is also involved. God can reveal truths about His gospel directly to us as we seek Him in regular prayer.

Remember that all this preparation is the shoes that we wear into the battle. Let's look at what our feet are for. They carry us to where we want or need to be. Our spiritual "feet" do the same thing. Remember that we are going into battle. The battle is real and it's all around us. So does the fact that it's all around us mean that we're participating in it? No. We have to carry ourselves into battle. Our spiritual feet are our desire to speak, to witness, to prophesy, and to contend for the faith.

To have the will however, is not enough. We have to wrap our desire to get into the battle for God's cause in preparation. A young boy who was a freshman in high school had a strong desire to play football, but he had no experience and no preparation. Most of the boys he wanted to play with had at least two years of experience, but he had never even practiced. That boy went to two practices where he failed miserably at everything that he tried to do. He never went back to practice. Why? Because he was discouraged by his lack of knowledge and performance compared to the other boys. His lack of preparation for what he was going to do allowed him to be wounded, not by the hazards of football, but by his being completely out of place.

It is a great thing to have the desire to serve God. The desire is the first thing that we need when getting into the battle. But if we do not wrap the feet of our desire in the shoes of the preparation of the gospel, we will become wounded just in the act of getting into the battle and will have to drop out.

GOD'S SOLDIER'S SHOES - THESE BOOTS WERE REALLY MADE FOR FIGHTING

Let's look now at how these shoes of preparation protect our feet.

1. Protection - If we are truly prepared in the gospel, we won't have to think about where we are stepping. Having gained much knowledge through salvation, study, worship, and prayer, we will know that God is with us and will protect us. We will have the confidence of really knowing what we are about. We do not run the risk of being wounded by the rough and rocky ground that we walk on. No matter where we go or what situations we encounter, our preparation enables us to concentrate on doing God's business and not on the conditions that we may face.
2. Light Weight - Jesus said "...my yoke is easy, and my burden is light." (Malt. 11:30) These shoes of preparation are light and permit us freedom of movement. As Jesus said, His burden will not weigh us down. When we are in fellowship with Him and following His command, we do not notice the effort that it takes to move about in the battle. We can move from one gospel precept to another easily. We can answer questions, objections and mocking that others may have without pause.
3. Stability - Jesus is the Rock, solid and sure. His gospel is just as stable. When we are truly prepared in His gospel, then we have Rock solid footing. Having footing that shifts in a battle can have disastrous consequences. But if the shoes of our preparation are made of the gospel of Jesus, how can we be shaken? The gospel of peace cannot be shaken, since it is built upon real truth. We have a solid foundation from which we can gain leverage for absorbing blows and delivering them.
4. Long-Wearing - The gospel has stood since the beginning of time. It has been the instrument of salvation for every person who has ever been saved. If the feet of our desire to serve God are shod with the preparation of this same gospel, then we need

not worry about our shoes falling apart. These shoes will last.

5. Good Fit / Comfortable - When we prepare ourselves in the gospel properly, we have experienced its power firsthand. Salvation is where the gospel becomes very personal. Though salvation is common among all people who have found it, it is at the same time highly individual. We see that though salvation was made for all men, it fits us like a glove. When our preparation is correctly begun in this highly personal way, there is no way that this preparation can flop up and down or allow our desire to serve to slide around within it. Salvation fits...and once we have made that preparation, our study, our worship, and our prayers all become highly personal and individual to each of us.

Therefore, when we put on these shoes of preparation, we have then moved a step closer to being truly ready for the battle.

In our next lesson, we're going to be strapping on a very important weapon of defense.

LESSON THREE

SOLDIER SAFETY

LESSON TEXT
Ephesians 6:16

WRITTEN BY
BROTHER DANNY HAYES

Ephesians 6:16
16 Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked.

So far, our Christian armor consists of the belt of truth, the breastplate of righteousness, and the shoes of the preparation of the gospel of peace. In these pieces we have the foundation upon which we secure other armament, protection for our heart, and protection and stability for our feet. Remember to update that picture that we are slowly drawing – the picture of a soldier arming himself.

Up to now, the parts of the armor that we have studied are pieces that the soldier wears. Think back to what we've studied in the first two lessons. In order to really have truth, we must take it and make it a part of ourselves. If we acknowledge truth, yet do not try to live by its virtues, we have not really "put it on." True righteousness, which only comes from God, must become a part of us or we are not really wearing it. The only way to truly put on righteousness is to be accepted by Jesus, and then we are provided with His righteousness. Preparation is not something that we can take off and put back on. Preparation by its very nature becomes a part of us.

The characteristic that defines a soldier however, is not really about what he wears. What really defines a soldier is what he does. Simply stated, a soldier carries out the will of his commander-in-chief, whether that is to defend or to attack. In doing what the soldier does, he uses the tools of his trade. Many occupations have tools that are pretty specific for each of them. The farmer has tractors and tilling implements. The surgeon has scalpels, probes, and clamps. The soldier has weapons.

And just as the soldier has weapons that aid him in attacking the enemy, he also has weapons that are designed to protect him in the event that the enemy attacks him. The idea behind these weapons is simple. They have benefits for the commander and for the soldier that mesh well. The soldier has the benefit of a reasonable hope that he may survive the battle and the commander has the benefit of keeping more of his soldiers alive and fighting. Additionally, defensive weapons tend to make soldiers more confident and to have increased morale as they go into battle. In this lesson, we look at the shield of faith.

WHAT MAKES A GOOD SHIELD?

To determine what constitutes a good shield, we should first define what it

is that a shield is supposed to do. Basically, a shield is a hand carried weapon that is used to keep other weapons from striking the soldier who is carrying it. Quite simple, but if you begin to design a shield, you soon realize that there are trade-offs. To illustrate with a ridiculous extreme, a shield that is in the form of a large dome would ensure that no arrows could strike the soldier from any direction. However, the shield would be so heavy that the soldier could not carry it, might not allow him to even breathe, and it would not allow him to use his own offensive weapons. In essence, the soldier would become a big rock on the battlefield, pretty secure, but making no difference in the battle.

One could also go to the other extreme and make the shield about the size of a pocket watch. This would make the shield very light and easy to handle. However, this shield would give no protection during an attack.

There is no practical way even today, and certainly was not at the time of Paul's writing, to make a huge, lightweight, flexible, breathable shield that would protect 100 percent at all times. Therefore, one must make compromises and then depend upon the soldiers' training to make up for what the shield will not do. The Roman soldier had a shield that was about four feet long by two to three feet wide and curved to fit around him. It was made of double or triple thickness laminated wood and edged with copper alloy. Having a shield of this size and strength gave the soldier ample protection from an arrow barrage when he ducked behind it. However, these shields, though not nearly the dome that was talked about above, were very heavy. The Romans dealt with the weight of the shield by training with even heavier weights. Flavius Vegetius Renatus, a Roman military writer of the fourth century said in his Epitoma Rei Militaris Book 1, "They gave their recruits round bucklers woven with willows twice as heavy as those used on real service..." In other words, the Romans decided to trade lightness for protection, making their shields big and heavy to be of use and then training their soldiers to be strong enough to carry them.

Once the soldier was trained and was strong enough to carry the shield into battle without being hampered in the fight, the shield was a mighty help to him. He could march right up to the enemy. As soon as the enemy began shooting darts (arrows or spears) at him, he could crouch behind this large, sturdy shield. He had a safe place where he could afford to wait for the barrage to end. When it did, he could jump up, run toward the enemy, and engage him in close combat. Once in combat, the soldier held his shield on his left arm and his spear or sword in his right hand. It was like fighting from behind a wall. The Roman soldier was hardly exposed at all.

THE SHIELD OF FAITH

We as God's soldiers have a shield that has been designed for us. However, this shield was designed with no compromises or tradeoffs. It is a shield that offers maximum protection yet still allows us to stay in the fight. It is the shield of faith. Do we think of faith as being something strong like a shield or do we view it as a house of cards that a light breeze could topple? If we view faith as something weak, we should probably take a long, hard look at our own faith. Much of the world today seems to view faith in this way. Those who place science and faith in opposition speak of how science requires proof while faith only requires acceptance. How sad it is that so many people do not understand the true nature of faith.

In Hebrews 11:1 Paul said, "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." Let's break this statement down in the original Greek to really get a grasp of what it means.

Substance - from hypostasis -assurance or confidence

Hope - from elpizo - to expect

Evidence - from elegchos - proof; conviction

So with these clarifications from the original Greek, we can read Paul and see faith take on a very concrete quality. Substance is something real and tangible. It is an assurance that what we hope for, what we expect (Salvation and help from God, to be redeemed and taken to Heaven to be with our God), is real and concrete. We can "take it to the bank". It is that real. It is the literal proof of those things that we cannot see with our eyes. This real, solid, tangible proof is possessed by each person who has it and by no one else. Every person who has ever lived was responsible for finding that proof for himself.

So you see, the world is wrong about faith. True faith requires proof just as science does. But the proof is personal and individual, not universal as are true scientific proofs. We do not blindly accept that Jesus will save us. We must search for Him until we KNOW that we have found Him. We know that we have found Him when He gives us that substance and that proof. When we have this substance and proof, we have access to this strong shield.

WHY DO WE NEED A SHIELD?

This shield is a vitally important piece of armor as is suggested in our lesson text when Paul says "… above all, taking the shield." Why does Paul add the words "above all?" Remember that we are going into battle. What does an enemy do when in battle with you? He does everything in his power to destroy you. The devil is a most formidable enemy. He and those who serve him pursue the goal of defeating God's servants.

So how might he go about doing that? He could indeed destroy our influence and that has been done to many people. If we try to get in the fight without having our lives in order (meaning that we have not girded ourselves with the truth and put on the breastplate of righteousness),

then the devil and his minions have a vulnerable spot to attack.

Have you ever heard of someone who supposedly stood strong against evil but was eventually exposed as a hypocrite? We often talk about God being able to see all that we do at any time. Why do we not realize that Satan can see us also? Satan cannot see the heart as God can, but he surely sees a great many of the deeds of men if not all of them. In Job 1:7, Satan told God that he had been "...going to and fro in the earth, and from walking up and down in it." Peter in 1 Peter 5:8 said that Satan "...as a roaring lion walketh about, seeking whom he may devour." In Rev. 12:10, Satan is called "the accuser or our brethren" who "accused them before our God day and night." We should always be aware that Satan will use our own faults and sins against us to bring us down, ruin our influence, and make us of no effect in the battle for God's cause.

The obvious defense against this is to take away Satan's ammunition by living a truly Godly life. We cannot live above sin, but there are many hurtful and destructive sins that should be easy to avoid. If we live in such a way that we cannot be accused (and living by faith in the living God is the only way that we can) one of Satan's most destructive "darts" has been deflected.

But we should not make the mistake of thinking that Satan has not defeated us if we are not destroyed. Satan really does not care whether we are destroyed or not since he cannot really harm those of us who belong to God anyway. What Satan is after is to prevent the cause of God from advancing. He wants to prevent any other person from being pointed to and finding God. To accomplish this, he does not have to destroy us. All he has to do is to take us out of the fight. A wounded soldier is sometimes a greater asset to the enemy than a dead one. A wounded soldier requires care, which takes other soldiers out of the fight. How many times have God's people spent time and energy trying to help up a wounded or discouraged brother or sister? That was time and energy that could have been spent on advancing God's cause.

We may not understand someone dropping out of the fight. We might ask, "How could this be? They had the truth on their side. They were on the side of righteousness." The Roman army was a mighty fighting force and conquered much of their part of the world in their time, but often the righteous cause did not belong to them. They were better equipped and better trained than most of the people who they conquered. Many of those conquered were people who intended to fight the Romans, yet turned and ran when they saw that they were exposed. The Romans were well protected. They had large, heavy shields. The people who fought them often had no shields. They became quickly demoralized and decided that they could not win, so they refused to fight.

Many of God's people have begun to fight for God's cause only to realize

that their faith was not strong enough to let them stand up to the wicked. While God was always strong enough to protect them, they did not have enough belief that he was. It's not that their intention was not good enough. They underestimated the enemy and they also underestimated God.

Whenever we attempt to stand for God, the wicked will do all in their power to knock us down. They will use words in such a way to make us back down for fear of looking foolish. They will use logic of sorts to draw us down paths from which our arguments will not hold. They will, if they think they can get away with it, use coercion or even physical violence to silence us. Remember that Satan does not have to destroy us, only to make us retreat. It is at these times that we need a large and strong shield to turn these things aside that we may stand firm. Faith is this shield. This shield of knowledge can sustain us while the fiery darts fly at us. It has sustained many who held onto it and hid themselves behind it even as they faced and went through horrible deaths because they would not remove themselves from the battle.

We should continually exercise our faith so that, like the Roman soldier who trained with a heavy shield, we will become strong in its use. We should not be afraid to ask God to prove Himself to us. God Himself expects this. He does not expect anyone to just blindly accept what he or she may read or hear. He is the God who, in Malachi 3:10 said, "... prove me now herewith... "

When we have exercised our faith constantly, we are ready to hold the shield of our faith up throughout the battle and use it to turn all of Satan's tactics away. Like a veteran soldier who has fought in many battles becomes an expert in the use of his weapons, the more that we use this shield, the better able we are to use it in future conflicts. We should remember that this faith is something that God gives us, but the protection it affords depends upon how we use it.

In our next lesson, we're almost outfitted for battle; then, we get the weapon that lets us attack.

LESSON FOUR

WEAPON READY

LESSON TEXT
Ephesians 6:17

WRITTEN BY
BROTHER DANNY HAYES

Ephesians 6:17
17 And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God:

In this lesson, we are examining the remaining pieces of our armor. Here we get the last of our defensive armament and the single offensive weapon that we need - the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit. So far, we have a strong defense consisting of the belt of truth, the breastplate of righteousness, the shoes of the preparation of the gospel of peace, and the shield of faith.

Now, let's look at the picture of our soldier armed with what we've studied up to this point. His torso is protected, as are his feet, and he has a large shield that he can take cover behind. Can you see anything about him that still needs protection? Ducking behind a shield is a very smart defensive move when arrows start flying, but to stay planted behind the shield would be suicide. A soldier has to keep moving or it is easy for his enemy to run around the shield and attack with his sword or shoot him with an arrow. In order to move, a soldier must see and in order to see, the soldier must look around or over his shield. In that case, what is to protect his head? The helmet is the answer.

THE HELMET OF SALVATION

A good helmet is designed to protect the exposed area of the body from the neck up. It will make a soldier feel more secure, but even the helmets of today, with their high tech materials and designs cannot insure perfect safety. The soldier must be able to see, hear, and breathe, so there will be gaps in the protection it affords. Additionally, there will always be weakness due to the materials used. The Roman soldier had one of the best helmets of his day. It offered the best protection possible, but still could allow weapons through its gaps or even be pierced. In the battle we are called upon to join however, we are provided a perfect helmet.

In Psalm 27:1, David said "The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The LORD is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?" In his rhetorical questions, David is making the statement that in having the salvation of the Lord, he has no reason to fear. Let's put this in terms of a helmet of salvation. Is there any weakness, or shortcoming at all to the helmet of salvation? If there were any lack of protection in salvation, David would have had to qualify his statement; however, he did not do that. If there were any weakness in salvation, David might have asked "The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear as long as I never sin again?" or "... whom shall I fear besides Satan himself" David did not qualify his statement because he knew that he was completely protected.

When God in His mercy saves us, we are saved forever, protected from ultimate harm. In this life, we tend to think only of mortal wounds as ultimate harm. This would be mostly true if our death was the end of us, but it is not. We are really eternal beings, our souls being that part of us that came directly from God. We will all exist eternally, but bear in mind that existence is not really the same thing as living. The Bible teaches us that those who have not repented to God and been saved from the consequences of their sin will be cast into a place of torment that God actually created only for Satan and his angels. For all beings cast into that place, eternity will be an existence only, a permanent separation from God and His love. We should consider this end to be ultimate harm because it is the doom of the eternal part of man.

For those who have turned to God for His salvation however, there can never be ultimate harm. The ending state of those who know God will be to rest in His presence. He will remove all sadness, pain, illness, injury, and anything else harmful to them. They will be safe. If this is the undisputed end of God's people, then we cannot be ultimately harmed. If our lives are taken from us in this world, we will awaken in the next, unharmed and utterly safe. How's that for protection? What would a soldier give to have a helmet like that? In order to have such a helmet, we are to submit our whole selves to God, pledging our lives and our hearts, surrendering even our will to Him.

How confident would a helmet such as this make a soldier who was marching into battle? Would it not tend to make him bolder in battle to know that he could not be destroyed? Even those of us who have been saved need to make use of this helmet and strap it on tightly so that we can feel the protection it gives us from everything.

TAKE THE OFFENSIVE

Offensive weapons are absolutely necessary for soldiers. If all they have is defensive armament, they can repel attacks, but they have no way to return the attack to the enemy. If an army is being advanced upon by a force that has only defensive weapons, they can only laugh, because what harm can that force inflict without offensive weapons? The sword is an offensive weapon that is as old as mankind itself and enough to cause an enemy concern.

In fact, swords were not invented by men. The first mention of a sword in recorded history is right after Adam and Eve were banished from the Garden of Eden. Genesis 3:24 says that after God drove them out, "... he placed at the east of the garden of Eden Cherubims, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life. " So the first sword that we have any record of was a spiritual sword that God made. To be sure, man, with his violent nature, figured out the advantages of a sword very quickly.

The sword is a weapon made for very close combat. It does not have the advantage of keeping distance from the enemy that an arrow affords, but it is much more accurate. It is made for advancing not against, but through an army. It is not a weapon for the weak, since a sword is heavy and requires much strength to be able to move it about in order to ward

off the thrusts of the enemy and to strike with power and quickness. It is also not a weapon for the squeamish, since it requires the soldier to look his enemy in the eye and to kill or maim him at close range.

The Roman sword was about two feet long and probably three to four inches wide at the hilt. It was sharpened on both sides and came to a sharp, fine point at the business end. Its hilt was not wide enough to keep an errant blade from hitting the hand and so was probably not made for close swordplay as with classic sword fighting. It was made for the deadly serious business of warfare.

While the Roman sword was a very sturdy, heavily built weapon, the Roman soldier was not trained to use it in a hacking manner, but rather in direct thrusts of the point. This was primarily for two reasons, the first being that the hacking motion was uncontrolled and left the underside of the arm and the torso beneath it exposed. The second was that hacking does not usually result in death as it is most likely to hit only an arm or leg. Even if the torso was struck, the long edge of the blade did not tend to penetrate. Thrusting, on the other hand, is a highly stable, controlled movement that does not open vulnerable areas to attack. Thrusting also is directed at the torso where most wounds are likely to be fatal. This is not a pleasant line of thought, but we will come to a point that relates to it.

THE SWORD OF THE SPIRIT

Our lesson text tells us exactly what the sword of the Spirit is. It is the word of God. The word of God referred to here is not just the Bible. The term also includes the utterances of God that come to man by way of His Holy Spirit. The gospel of John identifies Jesus as the embodiment of God's word (John 1:1-4). These are all God's word, all are in perfect harmony, and they are what Paul describes as this sword. This is not the only place in the Bible that the word of God is compared to a sword. Hebrews 4:12 tells us that "...the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart." In describing Jesus, John in Revelation 1:16 said that "...out of his mouth went a sharp two edged sword... ", speaking of His word. So we have some pretty detailed description of this sword.

In wielding the sword, we are not to use an uncontrolled, hacking approach, but a highly directed thrust, led by the Spirit. There have been many who attempted to carry the word, but used it in such a wild, haphazard manner that it only led to confusion on the part of the people who heard it. They were not made to see their need for God, but became angry or confused. The sword of the Spirit is a precision weapon. If it can pierce, even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, then it is indeed capable of fantastic finesse. We should train ourselves in His word so that we can communicate it with great clarity, going straight to the heart of the matter rather than hacking all around it. It is here that we should look at the essential nature of this sword.

We may carry this sword, but it belongs to the Spirit of God. The

same Spirit that leads and directs us in the battle also directs the effects of the sword. God's Spirit is who determines where the word should go and He directs it where He will. The Spirit tells us when we are to unsheathe the sword and how to use it. Sometimes we know where the thrust of the sword is to go, but at others, we may be told only to thrust and only the Spirit and His target know where the thrust is directed. In a very real way, the sword is the ultimate "smart" weapon because it is directed by the ultimate intelligence in the universe.

This sword, like the carnal type, is made for close combat. Like the sword made of metal, to wield it requires strength and fortitude. It is made to pierce right into a person's very soul. It is made to reprove men of their sin, to convince them of their need for God. God's word may sometimes be a comfort to those who know Him, but to those who do not or are not in His will, it is a blade of fire that drives deep into their inner being. It is a painful thing to be reproved by God's word. When we draw this sword, we may be looking either its target or our wicked adversary right in the eye. It takes fortitude to look a person right in the eye and tell him things that are painful to hear, even if we do know that it is for his own good. We must be strong enough to stay in the battle, thrusting where and as long as the Spirit directs us.

A FEW WORDS ABOUT OFFENSE

Just because we are to carry an offensive weapon does not mean that we are to be offensive in the sense that we offend. Offense in battle means to carry the battle forward, to take the initiative, to move toward the objective. The objective in this battle is to win people to God. We do not do this! God and His word do this. The Word may not accomplish this if we offend people before it can do its holy work. Paul said in Acts 24:16, "And herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence toward God, and toward men."

We should always be mindful of the fact that some people may be sensitive in ways that we are not. They may be easily offended by things that we may consider trivial. When it comes to winning people to God, nothing is trivial! If a person is offended by the reproving Spirit of God, then they are fighting against complete righteousness and are in the wrong. But if they are offended by something that we have said or done that was not directed by God's leadership, then we are in the wrong and could even be responsible in part for that person rejecting God and missing heaven! That would be a terrible thing to be guilty of. We should always make sure that our actions in the battle for God's cause are directed by His powerful, all wise hand.

We now have in our constantly updating picture, all of our Christian armor. In our final lesson, we'll spend some time putting our armor together and using it to make a difference.

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Christian soldier is very well covered, isn't he? We have already made note that in this arsenal that is laid out before us, there is only one weapon of offense. The rest of our armor is made of defensive weapons. This should tell us something. The fact that we are told that we need many defensive weapons tells us that we need much more protection than we do weapons of offense. We see movies and read stories of mighty, valiant men who bravely stand alone against staggering odds with little or no protection and yet through their strength and wits manage to defeat a very powerful enemy. This is not the picture we see of the Christian who is armored as Paul describes. God wants us to be protected. He knows that our enemy is much more powerful than we are by ourselves.

It is a fact that most of the things that we are to learn and experience in our Christian development are for our protection and the advancement of God's cause. Think about it. If your duty were to tell other people how to be saved in an environment where the devil did not interfere, how much would you have to know? Would you have to be "strong in the Lord?" Some strength would certainly be required, but one would not have to devote time and effort to be defensive against Satan. However, the sad fact is that Satan opposes God and he also opposes us when we are working for God. As stated in the scripture text for the first lesson, we wrestle against all types of wickedness just to be able to carry God's word to a world that does not know Him.

THE WHOLE ARMOR

Imagine if you will that you are a soldier in the Roman army, preparing for battle with a particularly tough foe. The battlefield is going to be close, flying with arrows and spears, and full of large, experienced enemy infantry armed with large, sharp swords. Is there a chance that you would think to yourself, "My shield is so heavy. I think I'll just leave it here in camp and fight without it,"? Or how about this: "My feet get so hot in these shoes. I'm going to go barefoot today,"? Of course you wouldn't.

Even if you were not a particularly dedicated soldier, you still would want to stay alive. To go against a very dangerous enemy without being fully armed would be to invite personal disaster. If you were, as you should be, a dedicated soldier, you would want to do everything possible to make sure that your army gains the victory. To do this, you would need to make sure that you were fully prepared for battle. You would not want do anything that might let your comrades, your leader or your country down. That is why you would go into battle fully armed.

When Paul presents the armor of God, he is not laying before us a military buffet. This armor is not a collection from which we can pick the pieces that we want and leave the ones that we might think uncomfortable or difficult to carry. As mentioned in the first lesson, Paul presents this armor as the way to be "strong in the Lord" The armor is then presented in verses 14-17

as a unified whole. Indeed, in verse 13, Paul exhorts us to take unto ourselves "the whole armor of God." If we leave out a single piece, we are no longer wearing the whole armor of God.

Think about the pieces that we've listed above. If we do not have the truth, how can anything else that we might try to use for protection, be true spiritual armor? Likewise, if we have not prepared ourselves in the gospel, how can we carry it to anyone else? So you see, our armor is like one of those tall pyramids of cans in a grocery store display. If you remove one piece, the rest just cannot stand on its own.

We may be tempted to say, "Well if I can carry the shield of faith, then someone else - probably a preacher - can work on being prepared in the gospel." So can any of us have faith for another person? What if the preacher is not around when you need to carry the gospel to someone else? It just doesn't work. The U.S. Army's newest slogan would probably be better suited to the Christian soldier - "An Army of One." Each one of us must be ready to carry out our part of the battle, alone if necessary (though we would certainly have our great Lord and Commander with us). Since a battle can turn in any direction, we must all possess the entire arsenal, an arsenal which God has made available to every person.

STAND!

The reason for taking on this whole armor is not just for our protection as we have said. We take on this armor so that with God's help, which is what the armor truly is, we may carry the day. We are not in this battle just to hold the line, but to advance and to win. In verse 13, Paul first says that we are to take on the armor that we "…may be able to withstand in the evil day." This is important. Battle is very difficult. Our enemy is very strong. It is difficult for us to avoid being overcome by him; therefore we need the truth, preparation, faith, and salvation to withstand him.

But Paul goes further than that. He says that we are to do more than withstand. Paul says that we are to withstand "and having done all, to stand." "Stand" means to hold firm, to continue in our cause. Those who stand in the battle continue to fight. So we are to stand. We are to stand against Satan and his evil. We are to stand for God and His just righteous cause. We are to stand, wielding the sword of the Spirit, which pierces and penetrates the hearts of men.

For a very good example of a soldier of Christ in battle, look at the trial of Stephen in Acts 6:8 through 7:60. Stephen was brought before the council of elders in Jerusalem for teaching of Jesus and performing powerful spiritual works. He was lied against and stood under the threat of physical violence, but Stephen did not back up. Stephen had the truth wrapped tightly around him. A man less armored might have sunk to the level of those accusing him, but he had the breastplate of Jesus' righteousness protecting him, so his heart remained true to the cause.

It is obvious from his disposition of the history of Gods people that his preparation was formidable and his feet were on solid ground. With the help of God's armor, he stood as an oak and did not waver. In verse 54, when the members of the council began to gnash on him with their teeth, his faith held firm and turned back their fiery darts. His helmet of salvation became obvious when, faced with impending death, he actually saw Jesus sitting on the right hand of God. He knew that he was safe from harm, even if he was to be killed. Finally, we see in Acts chapter nine Paul's conversion and the evidence that Stephen had been carrying and using the sword of God's word right up to his own death. Indeed, the effects of the wounds inflicted by this sword carried beyond Stephen's death. This becomes apparent when we see Saul overcome with the conviction that Stephen's words were the word of God.

Stephen however, is not our only model. Think of the multitudes of Christians who were faithful to God unto death. "Unto death" does not mean until they died of natural causes. This means that they remained faithful even as they were being put to death for their beliefs. They did not give up the cause. Even in the throes of death, they stayed in the battle. We have many written records of people from young girls to aged men who died unspeakably torturous deaths while singing praises to God or preaching His word. Many of these people died with only their torturers present. Why would these accounts have survived? It had to be that they had made an impression upon those around them. They were protected by their armor and were wielding their swords until God gave them leave of the battlefield and took them unto Himself to give them rest and peace and safety forevermore.

That same rest awaits every one of us who knows God, but that rest is God's to give at the time that He decides to give it. Until that time, we are called (yes, called) to the battle at hand. And we are not called to die and go to heaven, but to prevail for God in this life. There are times when we have the luxury of looking ahead to what awaits us, but if we do this in the heat of battle, we are apt to lose our focus, not wield our armor properly, and fail. We must put ourselves – physically, mentally, and spiritually - in the battle, and stand. If we belong to God, then the battle is not optional and neither is standing. We must join the battle and in order to join it and to hold firm, we must put on the whole armor of God.

OUR ARMOR - ONE LAST LOOK

As we look at our picture of a soldier now, let us give him action. It is not enough that he is suited in every piece of armor that is available to him. Let us picture our soldier standing firmly, having turned aside, with God's help, the worst that Satan can hurl at him. Then let us picture him marching forward, his sword raised, his nostrils flaring at the scent of impending victory. Let us show his face lit with the confidence that he fights for the just cause of God Himself.

In the Civil War, U.S. soldiers sang a hymn as they marched into battle. In it is the line: “As He died to make men holy, let us die to make men free. His truth is marching on.” Our soldier could well be singing the same song, except the freedom that he seeks to win for men is a true, eternal freedom, which makes his cause even more righteous.

Finally, let us take the picture of our soldier and put our own face upon him. Let us each see ourselves as a soldier of Christ and His Truth. Let us see ourselves every day of our lives as struggling against evil to bring God’s peace and freedom to all men everywhere.