

ARMOR AND WEAPONS

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27th Sunday after Pentecost
Revision E

Epistle: Ephesians 6:10-17

Today's Epistle lesson is used extensively in the West during the month of September.

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Background to Ephesians

Paul wrote his Epistle to the Ephesians from house-arrest in Rome in about 62 AD. He had first met with and reasoned with Jews in the synagogue there in about 52 AD on his Second Missionary Journey (Acts 18:19). Although Paul did not stay there long in 52 AD (Acts 18:20), he left Aquila (of the Seventy) and his wife Priscilla there and promised to return (Acts 18:18-21). About 53 AD, Paul returned on his Third Missionary Journey and spent two years in Ephesus (Acts 19:8-10). At this time, the church took a separate direction distinct from the synagogue. On his return to Jerusalem at the end of his Third Missionary Journey in 57 AD, Paul had a very emotional farewell meeting (Acts 20:37-38) with the elders of the Church (Acts 20:17), knowing he may never return.

Ephesus had had a number of distinguished visitors over the years. The Apostle John and the Virgin Mary had gone there to escape the bloodbath of Herod (Agrippa) trying to please the Jews – which resulted in the martyrdom of James the son of Zebedee and the imprisonment of Peter (Acts 12:1-4). That bloodbath began in 44 AD and ended with the death of Herod soon thereafter (Acts 12:20-23). Apollos (of the Seventy) also was in Ephesus in 53 AD and vigorously refuted the Jews showing from the Scriptures that Jesus was the Messiah (Acts 18:24-28).

After the death of the Virgin Mary in the mid 50's AD, the Apostle John returned to Ephesus and worked with a number of Churches in that area: Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamos, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea (Revelation 2, 3). John may have been in the area when Paul wrote his Epistle.

We might note that Paul, in his humility, had been preparing the saints of Asia Minor for the Apostle John between 46 AD and c. 55 AD. When the Apostles in Jerusalem divided up the world after Pentecost and drew lots to see who should go where, John had drawn the lot for Asia Minor. But John was also constrained from going there by the Lord until the death of the Virgin Mary (John 19:25-27).

Today's Epistle lesson refers to the equipping of the 1st century foot soldier. From a quick glance at the items referred to that are applied to the Christian life, most are defensive weapons. And the one offensive weapon referred to is one the Lord uses, not us.

Offensive Weapons of the 1st Century

Considering just those associated with the foot soldier (as opposed to large battering rams and catapults), offensive weapons consisted of:

- Swords
- Bows and arrows
- Slings
- Spears

Swords:

Swords were made in many different styles and lengths but most had two edges. Many ancient armies formed the hilt of their swords in a shape representing one of their gods. Thus the term sword carried a spiritual dimension. When the Scriptures speak of the Lord sending a sword against someone, the implication is judgment and calamity (compare Ezekiel 5:17, 14:17, 21:9; Deuteronomy 32:41-43; Jeremiah 12:12; Leviticus 26:25; Isaiah 34:5). Lies and deceit by evildoers is also referred to as a tongue sharpened like a sword (Psalm 57:4, 64:3; Proverbs 12:18, 25:18).

In today's Epistle lesson the Word (Greek *rhema*: a message or matter) of God is called the sword of the Spirit (Ephesians 6:17). This is also spoken of in Hebrews 4:12, where the Word (Greek *logos*: word) of God is called living, powerful, dividing soul and spirit, and discerning the thoughts and intents of the heart. This obviously refers to the Son of God, the Word (John 1:1-14). At the end of time, the Word (Greek: *logos*) is described as having a sharp two-edged sword that goes out of His mouth (Revelation 1:16, 19:13-15; Isaiah 11:4, 49:2).

The message (*rhema*) of God, or the sword of the Spirit, is thus not the same as the Word (*logos*) of God. The Word of God is a person, the Son of God. John Chrysostom referred¹ to the Word of God as the ordinance of God or the word of command and the Name of Christ!

“If we keep His commandments, we shall kill and slay the dragon, himself ‘the crooked serpent’ (Isaiah 27:1) by these. ‘You shall be able to quench the fiery darts of the evil one’ (Ephesians 6:16); that he might not puff them up, he shows them that above all things they stand in need of God”.

¹ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Ephesians, XXIV, v. 22.

Bow and Arrow:

The longbow was one of the principal weapons of the Hebrew armies. For example, under Jehoshaphat, the tribe of Benjamin had an army of 200,000 men armed with longbows and shields (2 Chronicles 17:17). Some of the stronger men used a longbow made of bronze (2 Samuel 22:35, Psalm 18:34) which was highly feared (Job 20:24) due to the higher velocity of its arrows (which could probably penetrate most armor and shields). Hunters today use longbows to bag big game as large as elk (up to 1200 lbs) and a separate hunting season exists in most states set aside for bow hunters. Today's hunting bows have the killing power of a high powered rifle. The same was certainly true for the bronze bow and possibly also for the longbow.

The imagery of the longbow is used in Scripture to describe the judgment and wrath of God (Deuteronomy 32:41, Psalm 45:5, 58:7, 64:7). His arrows are described as like lightning, and they scatter, confuse and rout His enemies (2 Samuel 22:15, Psalm 18:35, 144:6). For those who don't repent, the Lord has prepared fire arrows (Psalm 7:12-13). In our Epistle lesson, Satan shoots fire arrows at the righteous (Ephesians 6:16). Chrysostom stated² that Satan's fire arrows are both temptations and vile desires; they are "fiery" in that such is the character of these desires. The righteous also are on the receiving end of some of the Lord's arrows as they go about bearing their cross (Job 6:4, Psalm 38:2).

The wicked are described in Scripture in terms of arrows also. With their tongue and by speaking lies, they are referred to as a sharp or deadly arrow (Jeremiah 9:8, Psalm 64:3, Proverbs 25:18). By their attitude, they are compared to a deceitful or treacherous bow (Hosea 7:16, Psalm 78:57).

Sling:

Most people are familiar with the account of David killing Goliath by imbedding a smooth stone in Goliath's forehead (1 Samuel 17:40-50). Not so commonly known is that the army of Israel from the time of the Judges to the time of the captivity consisted of a contingent of slingers (2 Chronicles 26:14). In a civil war between the tribe of Benjamin and the rest of Israel, an army of 26,000 men of Benjamin that included 700 left handed slingers routed an army of 400,000 men of Israel (Judges 20:15-21). Each of the 700 slingers "could sling a stone at a hair and not miss." The sling was also used by the Greek and Roman armies using lead balls instead of stones. The only other reference to the sling in the Bible is the analogy of the Lord's rejection of the wicked as slinging them out of His presence (Jeremiah 10:18, 1 Samuel 5:29).

Spear:

Spears were made in various lengths and weights in antiquity, where longer, heavier ones were used by cavalry and shorter, lighter ones were used by infantry for thrusting. Generally, a warrior carried just one spear, if any. Unlike the longbow and the sling, the hurled spear was a one-use weapon, and therefore of lesser importance. The spear, due to its slower velocity, could be dodged or avoided easier than the arrow or the sling stone. For example, King Saul hurled his spear at David twice and at his son Jonathan once and missed all three times (1 Samuel 18:10-11, 19:9-10, 20:33). Being bigger and heavier than an arrow or sling stone, it could probably penetrate shield and armor better than an arrow or sling stone.

² John Chrysostom, Homilies on Ephesians, XXIV, vv. 14-16.

The only references to spears in the New Testament are the piercing of Jesus' side on the cross (John 19:34) and for riot control when Paul was in Roman custody (Acts 23:23). In terms of our Epistle lesson, one might think of spears as just large catapult-launched arrows or fiery arrows (Ephesians 6:16).

Defensive Armor of the First Century

Defensive equipment consisted primarily of shield, helmet, breastplate, belt and greaves, all of which is generally called armor.

Shield:

Different size shields were used in antiquity. The Hebrew word *tsinnah* refers to a large shield that covered the whole body. On the other hand, the Hebrew word *magen* referred to a smaller shield that might be used for hand-to-hand fighting. The large shields were probably about twice the area of the smaller shields (2 Chronicles 9:15-16). The Greek word *thureos* in Ephesians 6:16 is equivalent to the Hebrew *tsinnah* and is the larger shield. Warriors often had a younger soldier serve as armor-bearer, where the armor-bearer's job was to carry the large shield (1 Samuel 17:21; 2 Samuel 18:15).

Most shields were made using a wood frame covered with rawhide. Some used metal covering also such as brass or copper, or even gold or silver for ceremonial shields. While a shield probably wouldn't stop a direct hit from an arrow, it will deflect the trajectory of the arrow slightly such that the body armor can deflect the arrow via a glancing angle. In order for the shield of faith in Ephesians 6:16 to quench or extinguish the flaming arrows of the evil one, it would need to be one with a metal surface. An arrow striking the metal surface may penetrate the metal, but any flammable material attached to the arrow will remain behind on the metal surface and burn itself out harmlessly.

The allusion, then, implies that faith is the instrument that will extinguish or deflect the flames of the passions that the devil and his legions tempt us with.

Helmet:

Helmets in ancient times were made of various materials: quilted linen, iron and bronze. Hebrew and Philistine helmets were made of bronze (1 Samuel 17:5, 38). Roman helmets probably were also and had a characteristic 6 inch rooster plume along the top and back of the helmet. This served as a shock absorber for blows to the head as well as making the warrior look taller than he was. The helmet also had extensions that came down far enough to protect the sides and back of the neck.

Our Epistle lesson refers to the helmet of salvation (Ephesians 6:17). About 11-12 years earlier, Paul had written to the Thessalonians, encouraging those who are of the day (that is, who walk in the light – Ephesians 5:8) to put on the hope of salvation as a helmet. Isaiah also used this illustration where the Lord Himself put on salvation as a helmet (Isaiah 59:17).

The Apostle Peter wrote, "Therefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and rest your hope fully upon the Grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ" (1

Peter 1:13). The revelation of Jesus Christ is the hope of salvation and resting in this keeps our minds from being dragged down into fleshly activities (Romans 8:5, Philippians 3:19, 2 Corinthians 11:3). The helmet, then, becomes both hope and peace as “the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard our hearts and minds through Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:7).

Breastplate:

The breastplate might also be called body armor, scale armor, or a coat of mail. However, it was not like the woven metal used in medieval times. Instead it consisted of many small metal plates sewn onto a leather garment. Traditionally, it was not worn by everyone but was worn primarily by those who did not carry a shield, such as charioteers and archers (Jeremiah 46:4, 51:3). It did not cover everything; there were some small gaps such as between the sleeves and the body especially if the arms were extended forward (1 Kings 22:34; 2 Chronicles 18:33). King Saul wore scale armor as a breastplate as did Goliath since both would be prime targets for archers. Goliath’s scale armor by itself weighed 125 pounds (1 Samuel 17:5).

Chrysostom spoke³ of righteousness as a life of universal virtue that is as impenetrable as a breastplate. Such a life no one shall ever be able to overthrow. He may be wounded, but no one cuts through him. Thus, Christ said (Matthew 5:6): “Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled”.

Paul spoke to the Romans about putting on the armor of light (or scale armor of light or breastplate of light) in order to cast off the works of darkness (Romans 13:12). He defines putting on the armor of light as walking properly as in the day, putting on the Lord Jesus Christ, and making no provisions for the flesh to fulfill its lusts (Romans 13:13-14). To do so is to put on righteousness; Isaiah spoke of the Lord putting on righteousness as a breastplate (Isaiah 59:17). This is also referred to as a breastplate of faith and love – which is righteousness (1 Thessalonians 5:8). Our Epistle lesson speaks of us putting on righteousness as a breastplate just like the Lord did (Ephesians 6:14).

Belt:

To have one’s “loins girded” referred to fastening a wide leather or fabric belt around one’s waist to tie the long flowing clothes to one’s body and get ready for action. For example, when the angel appeared to Peter in prison, he told Peter to “gird yourself and tie on your sandals” (Acts 12:8); the angel then busted Peter out.

The Epistle lesson speaks of “having girded your waist with truth” (Ephesians 6:14). This implies having one’s life together. Chrysostom refers⁴ to the loins as the foundation of the body both above and below the waist. Girding one’s loins then, binds and holds together this foundation and supports it. Thus, the spiritual loins of our soul are girded with truth; we abhor falsehood and lying and seek out the truth in every line of life. Unbelievers, on the other hand, are incapable of entertaining one deep thought about God or anything above human reasoning because their loins are ungirt.

³ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Ephesians, XXIV, 14-17.

⁴ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Ephesians, XXIII, v. 14.

Isaiah spoke of his day as a time when: “Justice is turned back and righteousness stands far away; for truth has stumbled in the street and uprightness cannot enter” (Isaiah 59:14). He also spoke about the shoot from the stem of Jesse (i.e. Jesus): “Righteousness will be the belt about His loins and faithfulness the belt about His waist” (Isaiah 11:5). The belt was worn on top of the scale armor or breastplate to hold it in place. Thus truth and righteousness go together.

The Apostle John wrote about walking in the light as practicing the truth and walking in truth such that there is no cause for stumbling (1 John 1:6-8, 2 John 1:4, 3 John 1:1-8, 1 John 2:10). Speaking to the Pharisees, Jesus said, “You are of your father the devil, who does not stand in the truth because there is no truth in him” (John 8:44). Like them, others “have strayed concerning the truth” (2 Timothy 2:18). With the belt of truth around the breastplate (or scale armor) of righteousness, we can stand against the wiles of the devil (Ephesians 6:14, 11).

Greaves and Shoes:

Greaves are shin guards and were worn to protect the lower legs. The scale armor extended far enough below the hips to protect most of the upper legs. Goliath wore shin guards made from bronze (1 Samuel 17:6). The enemies of Israel were described as having shin guards that could be burned (Isaiah 9:5); this implies a leather construction probably reinforced with metal. Shin guards do not appear in the Scripture as part of Hebrew army equipment but may have been used.

Sandals (not shoes) were worn by almost everyone in ancient times. Amos 8:6 implies that sandals were relatively inexpensive; they also could be patched and repaired easily (Joshua 9:5, 13). Sandals were generally taken off indoors and often not worn at all around one’s house. One generally ate meals barefoot (Luke 7:38, John 13:5-6); an exception to this was during the Passover when one ate with his belt and sandals on in memory of the haste in leaving Egypt (Exodus 12:11). One also removed his sandals when entering the presence of God (Exodus 3:5, Joshua 5:15) and during times of mourning (2 Samuel 15:30, Ezekiel 24:17ff).

In the Epistle lesson, part of the armor of God includes having footwear in place, ready for action. This footwear is called the preparation of the Gospel of peace (Ephesians 6:15). In his letter to the Romans, Paul alludes to this by quoting Isaiah: “How shall they preach unless they are *sent*? As it is written: ‘How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the Gospel of peace, who bring glad tidings of good things!’” (Romans 10:15, Isaiah 52:7). The “sending” in Romans 10:15 is the Greek word *apostello* from which we get the English word Apostle.

John Chrysostom mentioned⁵ another aspect of being prepared with footwear in place. He made an analogy to Israel leaving Egypt, eating the Passover lamb ‘with your loins girded, your sandals on your feet and your staff in your hand’ (Exodus 12:11). We have an encampment in the desert, where the encampment is our body (2 Corinthians 5:1) and the desert without virtue is the earth today, more desolate than the wilderness Moses passed through. We are on our journey home and we do not lay up any treasure in the desert. If the thief should come, we must in a moment arise and depart for our Exodus. Quoting the Lord: ‘Watch, for you know not at what hour the thief comes’ (Matthew 24:42-43) thus the Lord calls the thief death”.

⁵ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Ephesians, XXIII, Moral.

Using the Armor of God

The whole point of putting on the armor of God is so that we might be able to stand against the wiles or scheming of the devil (Ephesians 6:11). This is how we become “strong in the Lord and in the power of His might” (Ephesians 6:10). Paul points out (Ephesians 6:12) that we need the armor of God to wrestle against:

- Principalities
- Authorities
- Powers (Romans 8:38, 1 Corinthians 15:24)
- The rulers of the darkness of this age
- Spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places
- Not against flesh and blood

The Principalities, Authorities and Powers are the names of various angelic (and demonic) ranks. For more details, see the Feast Day of the Archangels, November 8.

John Chrysostom comments⁶ on this: “Paul does not speak against the fighting, nor against the hostilities, but against the ‘wiles.’ For this enemy is at war with us, not simply, nor openly, but by ‘wiles.’ To use ‘wiles’ is to deceive, to take by artifice or contrivance; stratagems is what those who seduce us use. That is, the devil never proposes sins to us in their proper colors”.

What is the point of Satan’s scheming? He will not end up victorious over the Lord; that has already been decided. His aim, however, is to corrupt us, to ruin the Church (1 Corinthians 3:17), and to have us cast out of heaven. Assisting Satan in this endeavor are the ranks of demons, called Principalities, Authorities, Powers and world rulers of this darkness (Ephesians 6:12). Chrysostom asks⁷:

“How, if we are unarmed, shall we be able to overcome? A harder warfare is this than human warfare and a fiercer conflict. Think how long a time this enemy has been wrestling and for what it is that he is fighting, and be more guarded than ever”.

Regarding being prepared for battle, Chrysostom stated⁸ that our preparation hinges on knowing the Scriptures.

“This is the cause of all evils: the not knowing the Scriptures. We go into battle without arms, and how are we going to come back safe? Thankful we should be if we come back safe knowing the Scriptures, let alone without them.

The armor is needed to withstand this scheming and deception in the evil day (Ephesians 6:13). Paul had just finished encouraging the Ephesians to walk carefully, redeeming the time, for the days are evil (Ephesians 5:16; see also the Epistle lesson for the 26th Sunday after Pentecost for more on redeeming the time). Paul had written to the Galatians a decade earlier

⁶ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Ephesians, XXII, v. 11.

⁷ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Ephesians, XXII, Moral.

⁸ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Colossians, IX, v. 16.

that it is the will of God the Father that we be delivered from this present evil age (Galatians 1:4).

The Lord had said to the Seventy: “Behold I give you the authority to trample on serpents and scorpions and over all the power of the enemy” (Luke 10:19). Chrysostom comments⁹ that we do this by becoming light and by becoming good, which is contrary to the darkness.

“How then, are we to wrestle with the darkness? By becoming light! How with the spiritual hosts of wickedness? By becoming good! For wickedness is contrary to good, and light drives away darkness. If we have a mind, neither will we wrestle at all, for it is because we choose it that there is a struggle, since so great is the power of Him Who dwells in us. All power He has given us, both of wrestling and of not wrestling. It is because we are slothful that we have to wrestle with them. Then let us trample underfoot the power of the devil (Romans 16:20); let us trample underfoot our sins; I mean everything that pertains to this life: wrath, lust, vainglory, every passion”.

Chrysostom stated¹⁰ that arms and armor are of no use unless first the soldier were posted in his own place and aroused from within. The first step is to know how to stand, which is synonymous with uprightness.

“We must arm him from within, and then from without.” Having done that, “the very first feature in tactics is to know how to stand well. And many things will depend on that.” For example, “Watch, stand fast in the Faith” (1 Corinthians 16:13). “So stand fast in the Lord” (Philippians 4:1). And again, “Let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall” (1 Corinthians 10:12). And again, “That you may be able, having done all, to stand” (Ephesians 6:13). “Doubtless then he does not mean merely any way of standing, but a correct way. And as many as have experience in wars know how great a point it is to know how to stand”. In this context *standing* is synonymous with uprightness.

In combating the darkness, we stand with:

- Scale armor of righteousness, faith and love
- Held in place with a belt of truth
- The shield of faith deflects temptation
- A helmet of the hope of salvation guards our minds against deceit
- Our feet shod with a readiness to speak the Gospel to those we encounter and ready to depart if called
- Taking up the sword of the Spirit

Except for the allusion to the sword, all the above equipment is defensive. Paul continues to describe how we take up the Sword of the Spirit: “praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints” (Ephesians 6:18).

⁹ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Ephesians, XXII, Moral.

¹⁰ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Ephesians, XXIII, v. 14.

Just because we have all this armor in place and functioning doesn't mean we will never be persecuted. As Paul wrote this Epistle, he was in chains (Ephesians 6:20) and under house-arrest in Rome. He also spoke about being pressed, perplexed, persecuted, struck down, etc. (2 Corinthians 4:8-9), but yet at the same time being strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man. As the persecution comes, the treasure within us gets refined (2 Corinthians 4:7). And the excellence of the power is manifested as being of God and not of us.

Chrysostom interpreted¹¹ “praying in the Spirit” as “seeking for the things which are according to God, nothing of this world, nothing pertaining to this life.” Chrysostom thought of “being watchful to the end” as implying both vigils (Church service lasting past midnight) and the wakefulness of the soul.

¹¹ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Ephesians, XXIV, v. 22.