

Learning How to Walk:  
*Step Up to the Bullies*  
A Study of Ephesians 6:10-20

Characteristic of Completeness: Spiritual Warfare

Big Idea: The battlefield is relationships in our own camp.

Related Scriptures: John 8:44; 1 Thessalonians 5:8; 2 Timothy 2:3-4;  
James 4:7; 1 Peter 5:8; Jude 9

Belt: Ephesians 4:25

Breastplate: Ephesians 4:26-27; 5:3-11

Boots: Ephesians 2:14-15; 4:1-3

Shield: Ephesians 2:19-22; 4:15-16

Helmet: Ephesians 1:13-14; 4:29

Sword: Ephesians 5:17-18

Introduction:

- A. Today we will finish our study of the book of Ephesians by covering a concluding passage that deals with spiritual warfare. Indeed, ► spiritual warfare is our Characteristic of Completeness for the week. Our text is Ephesians 6:10-20.

I'm thankful that the Apostle Paul deals with this topic because I think there is widespread confusion and misunderstanding about the existence and nature of satanic or demonic activity in our world today.

1. At one extreme, some Christians doubt that demonic activity occurs at all, and thus, they ignore the reality of spiritual warfare. ► Daniel Wallace used to be a doubter. Wallace is professor of New Testament studies at Dallas Theological Seminary and author of *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*. This is not a guy given to shallow, uneducated, superstitious stuff. Several years ago, Wallace was asked to pray for a house where the owner reported poltergeist phenomena. As Wallace prayed, objects began to move. He ► says, “It was small objects, like magnets on the refrigerator flying clear across the room. It was really remarkable.” Wallace is now writing a book arguing that many evangelicals have become unbiblically antinatural.<sup>1</sup>
2. At the ► other extreme are Christians who read demonic activity into almost everything. They focus on rebuking and casting out demons—all kinds of demons, like the demon of overeating, or the demon of debt, or the demon of selfishness—assuming little or no human responsibility for sin.
3. Others ► tend to be preoccupied with the sensational aspects of demonic manifestations—the weird and extraordinary stuff that makes for popular movies like *The Exorcism of Emily Rose*.

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<sup>1</sup> Holly Pivec, “Exorcising Our Demons,” *Biola Connections*, Winter 2006, 12-13.

During one of our staff meetings this last week we talked about the sensational stuff and discovered that, in our circle, we just don't have many sensational demonic stories to tell. The sensational doesn't seem to be norm for anybody we know.

Indeed, noted professor and author, ► Neil Anderson prefers not to share sensational stories about demonic manifestations because they detract from what he believes to be the more common, everyday, unnoticed ways that demons influence our lives.<sup>2</sup>

- B. This morning, I want to do ► two things to arrive at a more balanced, biblical view of spiritual warfare. They are represented by ► the words, “define” and “defend.”
1. First, I want to define the nature of spiritual warfare. I want to discover what we're really up against. I want to help separate the reality from the hype.
  2. Second, I want to learn how to defend ourselves. I want to discover what our role is as believers in spiritual warfare. I want understand how we're supposed to fight.
- C. I want to begin by reading our biblical text. Then we'll go back and learn how to define and to defend. Ephesians ► 6:10-20 says,

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<sup>2</sup> Pivec, 13.

<sup>NKJ</sup> **Ephesians 6:10** Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. ► <sup>11</sup> Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. ► <sup>12</sup> For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual *hosts* of wickedness in the heavenly *places*. ► <sup>13</sup> 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. ► <sup>14</sup> Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness, ► <sup>15</sup> and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; ► <sup>16</sup> above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one. ► <sup>17</sup> And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God; ► <sup>18</sup> praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints— ► <sup>19</sup> and for me, that utterance may be given to me, that I may open my mouth boldly to make known the mystery of the gospel, ► <sup>20</sup> for which I am an ambassador in chains; that in it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak.

I. From this text, I want to ► first define spiritual warfare. Specifically, I glean ► five things we need to know.

A. First, we need to know that ► we are at war. The motif of the entire passage is one of warfare against an evil opponent. Verse ► 11 says we are to put on armor and to stand against the enemy. We are at war.

When we realize that we are at war, our perspective changes. A war-time focus tends to be sharper. Our defenses are up. We are more concerned about unity. Our priorities are clarified. There is greater commitment and sacrifice. We understand that we're on a mission, not a cruise.

B. The ► second thing we need to know is that the enemy is spiritual, not physical. The enemy is unseen and often undetected.

Let's list the descriptors of the enemy in ► Verses 11 and 12. We have ► "the devil." We have ► "principalities." We have ► "powers." We have ► "rulers of the darkness." And we have ► "spiritual hosts of wickedness." And all of these are described as being ► "in the heavenly places." That means they are in the spiritual realm; they are not flesh and blood.

What does all this mean? What are we up against?

1. Let's start with the devil. The devil, also known as Satan is one of many angels created by God before the earth was created.
2. All angels, including the devil, have some characteristics in common. Let me give you a biblical thumbnail sketch.
  - a. Angels are spirit beings; they have no body of their own. They are not flesh and blood. We can't see them.
  - b. They are numerous. In some places in the Bible their number is described as myriads upon myriads which literally means hundreds of millions. As a figure of speech, it means they are virtually innumerable. There are so many that we can be assured that some are in this room right now.
  - c. They are immortal; they do not die. So they have been around since day one of the earth.
  - d. They are intelligent, but not all-knowing. They've had thousands of years to observe human behavior, so they have a good idea about what makes us tick.
  - e. They are strong, but not all-powerful. They are more powerful than humans but not more powerful than God.

- f. They are fast, but not omnipresent. They move quickly, but they can't be everywhere at once.
  - g. They were created holy, but not impeccable. They were originally without sin, but they are capable of sinning.
3. The devil in particular was a beautiful, powerful angel. But according to Ezekiel 28, he became arrogant, and challenged God's right to rule over him. He was the first to sin, opposing God.
  4. When the devil opposed God, the Bible tells us that one third of all the angels joined him in opposition to God, creating two groups: unfallen angels who remain loyal to God, and fallen angels who oppose God.
  5. The devil is the leader of the fallen angels. These fallen angels are sometimes called demons. They are Satan's emissaries. The descriptors in our text—the "principalities," "powers," "rulers of the darkness," and "spiritual hosts of wickedness"—probably refer to various ranks of the demonic army of fallen angels. I suspect the ranks are listed in our text to emphasize the strength and scope of the enemy.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Leon Morris, *Expository Reflections on the Letter to the Ephesians*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1994), 203, notes, "Paul is in no doubt that in the spirit world the powers of evil are strong and varied."

6. The enemy is invisible, but definitely not incapable. Because the enemy is unseen, we can be oblivious to him. It may not even occur to us that some of the struggles we face are a result of spiritual attack. The enemy is spiritual.

C. The ► third thing we need to know is that the enemy has schemes. He’s got certain strategies and tactics. Verse ► 11 says,

<sup>NKJ</sup> **Ephesians 6:11** Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.

The word ► “wiles” is a translation of the Greek word, *methodeia*, from which we derive our English word, “method.” What are the devil’s methods? What are his wiles?

We can learn from the name ► devil. It comes from the Greek word, *diabolos*, which means slanderer.<sup>4</sup> A slanderer is a purveyor of malicious lies. He deceives with intent to destroy. Other Scriptures corroborate this.<sup>5</sup>

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They will not be defied or defeated by any halfhearted effort that stems from a failure on the part of the people of God to realize the magnitude of the opposition they are facing.”

<sup>4</sup> W. Bauer, F.W. Danker, W.F. Arndt, and F.W. Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3d ed., s.v. “διάβολος,” (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), hereinafter abbreviated BDAG.

<sup>5</sup> In John 8:44, Jesus describes the devil this way: “. . . He was a murderer from the beginning, and *does not* stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own *resources*, for he is a liar . . .” (NKJV). Also Revelation 12:9 says, “. . . that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan . . . deceives the whole world . . .” (NKJV).

The devil tempts us to believe lies that pull us away from God and one another and entice us to sin. Satan doesn't make us sin; we are responsible for what we do. But he tempts us with lies. And make no mistake, these lies look good. If they didn't, they wouldn't be deceptive.

- D. The ► fourth thing we need to know is that we need God's strength to fight. God is the source of our victory. If we try to fight on our own strength, we will be routed. Notice in ► Verses 10 and 11 it is the *Lord's* strength and it is *His* armor that enable us to stand.

Our ability to stand firm in battle lies in God alone.<sup>6</sup> Victory is in Christ alone. If we stray from a close relationship with the Lord, if we do not work to maintain a close relational connection with

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<sup>6</sup> Verse 10 says, "Finally, my brethren, be strong . . ." (NKJV). The Greek command to be strong is in something called the passive voice. The passive voice indicates that we who are receiving the command to be strong are not ourselves the source of strength. The strength doesn't come from us. A more literal translation would be "be strengthened," indicating that we are the recipients of strength, but not the source of it. From where does this strength come? In case the use of the passive voice is too subtle, Paul clarifies it by saying plainly, "Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord . . ." (NKJV). The phrase "in the Lord" describes not only a person who have trusted Jesus for eternal life, but also one who is in close fellowship with the Lord—so close, that he knows where the Lord is leading in battle. So close, that he draws upon God's strength for battle. Just in case we might be unclear about this, Paul stresses it again by saying in Verse 10, "Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might" (NKJV). Not your might. Not my might. Not our might together. But we are to be strengthened by the power of *His* might. And just in case we're still no getting it, Paul makes the same point in another way in Verse 11: "Put on the whole armor of God . . ." (NKJV). Notice it's not the armor of yours. It's not the armor of mine. It's the armor of God. And notice it's not part of the armor of God. It's not a little bit now and then when I run into some trouble. It's not even most of the armor of God most of the time. It's the *whole* armor of God. And Verse 18 indicates that the armor is to be prayerfully taken up *always*. And all this is done for a purpose. Paul says in Verse 11 that you do all this ". . . that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil" (NKJV).

Christ, we can expect the enemy to have us so deceived, so discouraged, and so defeated we don't know which end is up. We can have victory. But not apart from Christ.

- E. That brings us to the ► fifth thing we need to know. And it's very important. You see, without knowing this fifth thing, you might be tempted to think, "Well, it's good to know these first four things just in case a ghost appears in my room at night. Or just in case I need to cast out a demon. Or just in case I feel some kind of demonic oppression."

But that's not where the primary battlefield is. The ► battlefield is relationships in our own camp. That's the fifth thing to know, and it is also ► the big idea of my message: The battlefield is relationships in our own camp.

I am convinced that the devil's best work is not reflected in black-clad people who sacrifice animals and draw pentagrams and call themselves Satanists. Rather, the devil's bread and butter is destroying interpersonal relationships. And the front lines are relationships within the church.

1. You say, "Bob, how did you get that from the text?"  
Actually, I got it from the context of our passage. A theme of Ephesians leading up to our text is ► relationships. Paul talks about the relationship of ► believers to one another in the church. Then he talks about the relationship between ► husbands and wives in marriage.

Then he talks about the relationship between ► parents and children in a family. Then he talks about the relationship between an ► employers and employees in the workplace. Then he moves directly into our text about spiritual warfare. Why? Because the battlefield is relationships, particularly relationships in our immediate sphere.

2. The devil would like us to forget this. Forget we're at war. Forget that he is our enemy. Forget that his tactics are to deceive. And be so consumed with personal conflicts in our church and in our homes that we are immobilized. Forget about transforming our community for Christ. Forget about reaching our neighbors. Be preoccupied with how people have offended you. Be disgusted with changes that don't fit your preferences. Be obsessed with theological knit-picking. And take yourself right out of commission.

On 9/11 terrorists used our own planes to destroy our own people. Likewise, the devil will use our own relationships to destroy us, if we let him.

- II. That brings us to ► the second part of my message. Having defined spiritual warfare, now how are we to defend ourselves? I find ► three defensive strategies in our text.

- A. First, ► don't attack. Don't take the offensive. Don't pick the fight. Simply defend, resist, and stand firm against the schemes of the devil. When it comes to spiritual warfare in the church, we play defense, not offense.
1. Notice the point of ► Verse 13 is "to withstand" or "to stand." We are not directed to attack or advance. Rather, we are to resist and to stand firm.<sup>7</sup>
  2. Also note that Paul says we are to take up ► the *armor* of God, not the *weapons* of God. The very nature of armor is defensive, not offensive. It is designed to defend, not attack.

There are ► six pieces of armor listed in our text, and they're all defensive. There's a belt, a breastplate, boots, a shield, a helmet, and a sword. You say, "Bob, isn't a

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<sup>7</sup> This defensive posture of the believer is also corroborated by other Scriptures. For example, 1 Peter 5:8-9 says, "Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Resist him . . ." (NKJV). Also, James 4:7 says, ". . . Resist the devil and he will flee from you" (NKJV). In spite of our call to defend and stand firm, some Christians today seem to be taking an aggressive, offensive stance in spiritual warfare. Some even have a rather smug, cavalier attitude toward Satan and demons. For example, it seems that rebuking Satan has become popular. There are three biblical Greek words which can be translated "rebuke." The general meaning is to correct, punish, or discipline. In the Bible, Jesus rebukes demons. And some people are described as rebuking other people. But, there is not a single New Testament reference to a believer rebuking Satan or demons. Not one. It is neither described nor prescribed. Not only does there seem to be no New Testament precedent for a believer rebuking Satan, but Jude 9 suggests that we should not do so. It says, "Yet Michael the archangel, in contending with the devil . . . dared not bring against him a reviling accusation, but said, 'The Lord rebuke you!'" (NKJV) An archangel is believed to be like a general in the army of good angels. Here, it is said that the archangel, Michael, in his spiritual conflict with the devil, did not dare to pronounce a railing judgment against him, but said, "The Lord rebuke you." The rebuking of Satan seems to be left to the Lord. If the archangel, Michael himself, a leader of the armies of heaven so treated Satan with respect, how much more should we do so?

sword an offensive weapon?” Good question. The Greek word translated, “sword” is a short dagger<sup>8</sup> designed to retaliate; not a long weapon designed to take the initiative.<sup>9</sup>

I think our defense is much like a young child and his father. When a bully comes along, the child is not to pick the fight. And if the bully attacks, the child is to draw near to his father and ask him for protection. In spiritual warfare we are not called to attack, but merely to defend.

- B. The second defensive strategy is to ► operate as a unit. We are to resist the devil together as a church. I believe our text should be viewed from a corporate perspective, not an individual one. Paul does not have in view the individual, solitary Christian in his lonely, spiritual battle against Satan. He is speaking about the corporate defense of the church, Christ’s body.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> W.E. Vine, *Vine’s Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*, unabridged ed., s.v. “sword, μάχαιρα,” (McLean, VA: MacDonald Publishing, n.d.).

<sup>9</sup> In fact, the pieces of armor mentioned by Paul correspond closely to those used by Roman soldiers with one exception. Paul seems to have left out the javelin or spear, a common offensive weapon (*The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, Vol. 5, s.v. “armor,” by W.H. Mare (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1975, 1976), 320, and A. Skevington Wood, “Ephesians,” *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, Volume II, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1978), 89). And, I don’t think this is an oversight. You see, Paul wrote this letter to the Ephesians from Rome while under arrest and constant supervision by Roman soldiers who guarded him. Paul would have been all too familiar with the armor and weapons of Roman soldiers.

<sup>10</sup> Michael Griffiths, *God’s Forgetful Pilgrims*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1975), 160ff.

1. Paul spends the last three chapters of Ephesians talking about relationships within the church which is Christ's body. The context is the church.
2. In addition, the pronouns and directives related to putting on armor are plural throughout our text. It is addressed to the church as an army.
3. And, in the metaphor Paul is using, the idea of a single soldier waging war independently is culturally and historically ridiculous. It just doesn't jibe with how Roman soldiers fought in that day in age.<sup>11</sup>

So, as Christians, we are being called to corporately defend. To be a team. To operate as a unit.

- C. But how? Specifically how are we to corporately defend ourselves? That brings us to the third defensive strategy: ► We are to put on God's armor. Paul uses the metaphor of some spiritual armor to show us how we are to corporately defend ourselves. Each piece of armor represents a way in which we are to operate as an army. Let's consider ► the pieces one by one.

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<sup>11</sup> Craig Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 553-554, says, "In the day of battle, Roman soldiers were to stand their ground, not retreat. As long as they stood together on a flat, open field and did not break ranks, their legions were considered virtually invincible . . . After Roman legionaries closed ranks, the front row holding shields forward and those behind them holding shields above them, they were virtually invulnerable to any attack from flaming arrows . . . A Roman soldier by himself was vulnerable, but as a unified army a Roman legion was virtually invincible."

1. First, we have ► the belt. The first part of ► Verse 14 says,

<sup>NKJ</sup> **Ephesians 6:14** Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth . . .

- a. What is this talking about? Well, before a Roman soldier put on his armor, he put a belt around his waist. That's what it means to gird your waist. That was his first step.

- 1) The belt was an essential part which kept other pieces of armor in place.<sup>12</sup> In fact, one of the most effective means of debilitating a soldier would be to cut his belt because then his protective armor would fall.

- 2) The belt afforded a soldier freedom of movement.<sup>13</sup> He tucked his long outer robe under his belt so it would not hinder his running or fighting.

- b. How does girding our loins apply to us? Frankly, the interpretation of all this metaphorical armor can be

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<sup>12</sup> Harold W. Hoehner, "Ephesians," *The Bible Knowledge Commentary, New Testament*, eds. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck, (USA: Victor Books, 1983), 643.

<sup>13</sup> S.D.F. Salmond, "The Epistle to the Ephesians," *The Expositor's Greek Testament*, ed. W. Robertson Nicoll, Vol. 3, (Reprint, Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1979), 385.

confusing. Nevertheless, I found that things cleared up considerably for me when I remembered certain things about the context of this passage.

- 1) First, this passage is practical, not doctrinal. As is Paul's habit in writing letters, he lays a doctrinal foundation in the first 3 chapters of Ephesians, emphasizing those things which we are to believe. He then turns to practical matters in the last 3 chapters, emphasizing those things we are to do. Therefore, we should expect our text in general and the armor in particular to be more practical than doctrinal.
  - 2) Second, it is also good to keep in mind that the perspective is corporate, not individual. This is a lesson in teamwork.
  - 3) Third, I believe the armor is a kind of metaphorical summary of what has been said earlier in the letter to the Ephesians. So it would be good to look back for previous commands or ideas that are merely being reiterated by this metaphor.
- c. So in light of this, how does girding our waist with truth apply to us? I believe it simply means that we

are to ► be truthful with one another in the church. We are to shoot straight. No lies. No deception. It's a matter of integrity and faithfulness.<sup>14</sup> I think Paul is simply driving home the same idea he presented back in ► Ephesians 4:25, where he says,

<sup>NKJ</sup> **Ephesians 4:25** Therefore, putting away lying, *“Let each one of you speak truth with his neighbor,”* for we are members of one another.

Relational tensions and conflict among the troops are inevitable. We can misunderstand and offend each other. And Satan sorely tempts us. He tempts us to see someone else as our adversary. He tempts us to lie or to cover up the truth or to manage information to protect ourselves or to make ourselves look good or to make someone else look bad or to play some manipulative game.

Paul is saying just be truthful with one another because you're on the same team.<sup>15</sup> If we don't

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<sup>14</sup> Hoehner, 643 and Salmond, 386.

<sup>15</sup> Some believe that when Paul says in Ephesians 6:14, “having girded your waist with truth,” he is referring back to Isaiah 11:5, which talks about how the coming Messiah will one day rule and reign. It says, “Righteousness shall be the belt of His loins, And faithfulness the belt of His waist” (NKJV). This is talking about the character qualities of the Messiah. And, one of the meanings of the Hebrew word translated “righteousness” is truthfulness. This provides further evidence that the belt of truth with which

shoot straight with one another, we'll be shot down by the real enemy.

2. Now, let's consider ► the breastplate. The last part of ► Verse 14 refers to it when it says,

<sup>NKJ</sup> **Ephesians 6:14** . . . having put on the breastplate of righteousness,

- a. The breastplate covered the soldier's body from the neck to the thighs. It was known as the heart-protector.<sup>16</sup>
- b. What does it mean for us to put on the breastplate of righteousness? I think it simply means stop sinning; ► be holy. It's a corporate call to moral purity.<sup>17</sup>

I think Paul is reiterating what he has already said back in Ephesians 5, beginning in Verse 3 and concluding in ► Verse 11, where he says,

<sup>NKJ</sup> **Ephesians 5:11** And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose *them*.

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we are to gird our waist in Ephesians does not relate to doctrinal truth of God's Word, but rather to the character qualities of truthfulness, sincerity, and genuineness of the Christian soldier himself.

<sup>16</sup> Wood, 87.

<sup>17</sup> So Wood, Hoehner, and Salmond.

- c. To continue to fool around with sin, to knowingly tolerate sin in our lives gives the devil an opportunity. I think Paul is reiterating an idea he presented in ► Ephesians 4:26-27. There he says,

<sup>NKJ</sup> **Ephesians 4:26** “Be angry, and do not sin”: do not let the sun go down on your wrath,<sup>27</sup> nor give place to the devil.

Notice the apparent link between sin and giving the devil an opportunity. To the extent that we coddle our own sin, to the extent that we fail to deal with it, we give the devil an opportunity to take us out of commission.

A noted author and seminary professor says,

*When you leave the door open for the devil by not resisting temptation . . . he will enter it. And if you continue to allow him access to that area, he will eventually control it. You won't lose your salvation, but you will lose your daily victory.*<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Neil Anderson, *The Bondage Breaker*, (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 1990, 1993), 180.

- d. Satan tempts us to overlook our own sinful contribution to relational problems, and to angrily pin our problems on someone or something else. And, our sins are not just our personal, private business; the whole church is affected by our failure. Our sin damages the faith and morale of everyone in the church.<sup>19</sup> Paul is calling us to deal with our own sinful responses to life situations. Be holy.
3. Now, let's get to ► the boots. Verse 15 introduces the boots as a part of the full armor of God when ► it says,

<sup>NKJ</sup> **Ephesians 6:15** and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace;

- a. One ancient Jewish historian named Josephus describes the shoes or boots of a Roman as, “all full of thick and sharp nails.”<sup>20</sup> They are like cleats. They allow the soldiers to have unified, firm footing as they stand together in battle.

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<sup>19</sup> So do we need to be perfect before we can come to church? Absolutely not. Otherwise, not one of us could come. Am I advocating a legalistic, judgmental, holier-than-thou mentality that seeks out the sin in others and lays a guilt trip on everybody? Absolutely not. I am advocating the blend of grace, compassion, gentleness, and correction of sin modeled by Jesus Himself. Was Jesus gracious? Yes. Was He compassionate? Yes. Was He gentle? Yes. Was He soft on sin? No. He says, “sin no more.”

<sup>20</sup> Flavius Josephus, *The Wars of the Jews*, Book 6, Chapter 1, Verse 85, translated by William Whiston, *The Works of Josephus Complete and Unabridged, New Updated Version*, (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1987), 731.

- b. What does it mean to us? This is one of the more challenging pieces of armor to interpret.<sup>21</sup>

In calling us to put on our combat boots, I think Paul is calling us to ► preserve unity in the church. He is talking about the unity, harmony, and peace that should prevail within the church as a result of our common faith in the gospel.

Let's look back at what Paul has already said in his letter to the Ephesians to try to find out how these "peace boots" fit into his argument.

- 1) In ► Ephesians 2:14-15, Paul says,

<sup>NKJ</sup> **Ephesians 2:14** For He  
Himself is our peace, who has  
made both one . . .

There's the peace represented by the boots.  
It's the peace or unity among the soldiers—  
both Jews and Gentile—made possible by

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<sup>21</sup> Some have concluded that the boots of Ephesians 6:15 somehow represent our mandate to share the gospel or the good news about Jesus with other people. We do have such a mandate stated plainly in other Scriptures, and this interpretation is possible. Others have concluded that "to put on these shoes could be understood as believing the promises of God in the gospel and counting on them to be true for you. Faith in these promises yields peace in the Christian's life" (Max Anders, "Ephesians," *The Holman New Testament Commentary*, Max Anders ed., Vol. 8, (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2000), 191). This interpretation is also possible.

what Christ did.<sup>22</sup> Indeed, one of the primary meanings of the Greek term for peace is harmonious relationships among people.<sup>23</sup> It describes people working as a team.

- 2) And, there's more evidence to support this unity idea. In ► Ephesians 4:3, Paul says we ought to be . . .

<sup>NKJ</sup> **Ephesians 4:3** endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

There it is again. It's the peace among soldiers. Unity. Harmony. Solidarity. This fits perfectly with the purpose of boots in the metaphor. The boots allow the soldiers to have unified, firm footing as they stand together in battle.

- c. Satan tempts us to divide. He tempts us to advance our own personal agendas and independence. He wants us to fight against each other. We must be diligent to preserve the unity that was purchased by

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<sup>22</sup> The Ephesian church was racially and culturally diverse. In particular, it is believed that there were tensions between Jews and Gentiles in the church (Keener, 539). Some came from pagan or even cultic backgrounds. Others had been orthodox Jews. They all had trusted Christ, but there was a tension of traditions, a clash of cultures.

<sup>23</sup> Vine, s.v. "peace, εἰρήνη."

Christ's blood. Part of that diligence is to be humble, gentle, patient, and loving with each other, particularly with those with whom we differ.

4. Now, let's consider ► the shield. Verse ► 16 refers to the shield, saying,

<sup>NKJ</sup> **Ephesians 6:16** above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one.

- a. The Roman soldier's shield was made of wood; it was about 2½ feet wide and 4 feet long; and it was overlaid with water-soaked linen and leather to absorb fiery arrows, quenching the flames.

When a Roman army was under attack, ► the front rank would turn toward the enemy and kneel together in a line, placing their shields edge to edge to form the bottom row of a wall. The ► second rank would then step forward, placing their shields edge to edge on top of first shields, creating a double row. Each ► soldier was committed to making his shield a part of the common wall of defense.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Griffiths, 163. Keener, 553-554, adds, "After Roman legionaries closed ranks, the front row holding shields forward and those behind them holding shields above them, they were virtually invulnerable to any attack from flaming arrows . . . A Roman soldier by himself was vulnerable, but as a unified army a Roman legion was virtually invincible."

- b. What does it mean for us to take up our shield today? I think Paul is calling us to believe what God says about the church, and, by faith, ► be committed. Be committed to take our place in the church. Be committed to fitting in. Be committed to doing our part.

With the imagery of the shield, I believe Paul is painting a picture of how we are to fit together like puzzle pieces in the church. Believers fitting together in the church is a theme Paul has established earlier in Ephesians using different metaphors or word pictures.

- 1) For example, in ► Ephesians 2:19-22, Paul likens the church to a building in which all believers are bricks being fitted together.
- 2) Also in ► Ephesians 4:15-16, Paul likens the church to a human body in which all believers are parts working together and growing together.
- 3) In our text, ► Paul likens the church to shields fitting together to protect the military unit.

With the various word pictures, Paul is making the point that every believer has personal, individual gifts designed to be used in the church. We are individual pieces designed to fit and work together. The implication is that, in defending ourselves against Satan, we are to be committed to taking our proper place in the church. Find out where God wants you to fit in. Get connected. Take your stand with the rest of us. Don't hang back at the barracks. We need you on the front line.

- c. It takes ► faith to be committed. A commitment to take your place in the church can be a scary proposition, involving work and sacrifice, and even the potential to get hurt.

In the midst of conflict, Satan tempts us to go AWOL. He tempts us to take our shield and go home. Or to use our shield as a lounge chair to sit on the sidelines and point out how others don't seem to be getting the job done.

Here's the truth of the matter. You cannot be replaced. Your shield is as unique as you are. No one else has a shield quite like yours. So, no one else can take the place God designed you to have in the church. Oh, someone else might try to cover for you. But, it just won't be the same. We won't be as

strong. We need each other. Be committed. Let's take up the shield of faith together.

5. Now, let's consider ► the helmet. The first part of ► Verse 17 presents it, saying,

<sup>NKJ</sup> **Ephesians 6:17** And take the helmet of salvation . . .

- a. A Roman soldier's helmet was usually made of bronze with leather attachments.<sup>25</sup> The helmet was a critical piece of armor because a serious head injury could completely debilitate a soldier.
- b. This helmet is characterized as a helmet of salvation. What kind of salvation is Paul talking about? The Bible talks about a number of different kinds of salvation.<sup>26</sup> I think Paul is talking here about a future day in which we will be saved from the very presence of sin in the future, after the Lord returns. I think the helmet of salvation in

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<sup>25</sup> Wood, 88.

<sup>26</sup> First, there is the kind of salvation that makes you a true Christian. If you are trusting in Christ alone as your Savior from sin, you have been saved from the penalty of sin. There is now no condemnation for you. You're going to heaven. This salvation was secured the moment you placed your faith in Christ as your Savior from sin. That victory is already won. It's in the past. It's a done deal. So, I don't think Paul is talking about this aspect of salvation because he's talking to people who have already believed. Second, as believers we are presently being saved from the power of sin. This victory is made possible by Christ, but is achieved day by day, moment by moment, as we lay aside our old sin nature and put on the new self in submission to God. This salvation is happening in the present. Third, we will one day be saved from the presence of sin in the future, after the Lord returns. We will be victorious! I think Paul's emphasis with the helmet is on this future aspect of salvation.

Ephesians is a metaphorical reiteration of an idea presented Ephesians ► 1:13-14, where Paul says,

<sup>NKJ</sup> **Ephesians 1:13** . . . you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, <sup>14</sup> who is the guarantee of our inheritance . . .

Paul wants us to recognize a number of truths about our future salvation, and protect our minds from being deceived on these points.<sup>27</sup>

- 1) First, if you are a believer, the Holy Spirit has sealed you. This happened the moment you trusted Christ as your Savior from sin. To be spiritually sealed by the Holy Spirit means that we belong to God, and that we are the beneficiaries of His power and protection.<sup>28</sup> Our future as children of God is absolutely secure, no matter what.

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<sup>27</sup> In Ephesians 6:17, the phrase “the helmet of salvation” is a possible reference Isaiah 59:17 which describes the future return of Jesus, saying, “For He put on . . . a helmet of salvation on His head . . .” (NKJV). Because this describes the future return of the Messiah and the salvation that He will bring, it appears that the helmet of salvation in Ephesians must somehow refer to believers’ future salvation. This is corroborated by 1 Thessalonians 5:8, where Paul says, “But let us who are of the day be sober, putting on . . . as a helmet the hope of salvation” (NKJV). Here the helmet of salvation idea is coupled with the idea of hope. The original Greek word translated, “hope” refers to a confident expectation of what God is going to provide in the future. Again the emphasis is on the future.

<sup>28</sup> In the first century, a seal normally consisted of a signet ring with the personal insignia of an official engraved into the top of the ring. The ring was used to stamp an impression of the personal insignia in hot wax to validate legal documents, or orders, or public proclamations. The seal symbolized authority and ownership.

- 2) Secondly, as believers, the Holy Spirit was given to us as a pledge of our inheritance. The word pledge literally means a deposit or down payment. It is like earnest money, guaranteeing that the rest is coming.

To have the spiritual pledge of the Holy Spirit is to have the guarantee of our future inheritance, our future salvation. That inheritance will come after this life. As believers, we will then understand many things that are now unclear to us (John 16:23). Our deepest longings will be fully satisfied in the sublime presence of God. Our passions will be absolutely clean and pure, separated from all sin. The troubles from our weak and dying bodies will disappear. And we will receive rewards in heaven according to our faithfulness on earth. That is our inheritance. That is our future salvation. And that should be our focus in time of battle here on earth. That is the helmet we put on to remind ourselves. That is the truth with which we should bathe our attitude.

- d. How do we put on the helmet of our future salvation? I think Paul is calling us to ► be hopeful. To look ahead to our victorious reward in heaven. Be hopeful. To keep the end in mind. Be hopeful.

Satan tempts us to “awfulize” things. To assume the worst. To read scandal and evil motives into difficult situations with fellow soldiers. To grumble and gripe about other people. To become downcast and discouraged and hopeless.

The morale of the church army should be one of supreme confidence and optimism. Be hopeful. Our victory is assured. Be hopeful. We must not let defeatism, gloom, and critical spirits prevail in our midst.<sup>29</sup>

6. The final piece of metaphorical armor is ► the sword. Verse ► 17 says,

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<sup>29</sup> Griffiths, 165, says, “It is essential that we Christians be certain that final victory is ours . . . Pessimistic Christians who walk around glumly talking about the ruin of the church and the post-Christian era, thus spreading defeatism and gloom in the ranks, are like men without their helmets, weakening the whole unit. We need to have that absolute assurance that the gates of hell will not prevail against the church . . . It is not, of course, confidence in our own power, but a confidence in the power of God. As Christians we need to share this spiritual optimism . . . The defeatist attitude of cynics and pessimists can be grievously infectious. The enemy’s propaganda warfare is aimed to persuade us that we can never win. . . . It is the certainty of the victory of Christ that is the helmet of salvation, which all the congregation must wear for battle.” I think the apostle Paul had this kind of positive, encouraging, upbeat attitude in mind when He says in Ephesians 4:29, “Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers” (NKJV).

<sup>NKJ</sup> **Ephesians 6:17** And take . . . the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God;

- a. The sword spoken of here is a short dagger or knife as opposed to a long broadsword.<sup>30</sup> The sword was a retaliatory piece of armor, designed to fend off an enemy who was encroaching.
- b. Our text explains that the sword is the word of God. Nevertheless, the term translated ► “word” is not the usual biblical term used of the Word of God. The usual term is *logos*. The term here is *rhema*. It denotes that which is spoken.<sup>31</sup>

So, it is referring not to the whole of scripture, but to that part which you store in your mind and retrieve when you need it. One scholar explains:

*The reference (in 6:17) is not to the whole Bible as such, but to the individual scripture which the Spirit brings to our remembrance for use in time of need, a prerequisite being the regular storing of the mind with Scripture.*<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Wood, 89.

<sup>31</sup> BDAG, s.v. “ῥῆμα.”

<sup>32</sup> Vine, s.v. “word, ῥῆμα.”

- c. So, to take the sword means to ► be biblical— biblical in the sense that we apply specific Scriptures in the midst of conflict. We must learn and apply the Word of God to our lives. Read it. Study it. Meditate upon it. Memorize it. Have it ready to apply to conflicts.
- d. This relates back to ► Ephesians 5:17-18:

<sup>NKJ</sup> **Ephesians 5:17** Therefore do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord *is*.<sup>18</sup> And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit,<sup>33</sup>

An example of the revealed will of the Lord in the Bible is the principle of going directly to a brother or sister with whom we have a problem to work it out,<sup>34</sup> using words that are not corrupt or unwholesome, but edifying and gracious.<sup>35</sup>

Satan tempts us to bypass the pain of conflict resolution, to take the easier path of not going to the

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<sup>33</sup> See [http://www.moonvalleybible.org/sermons/2005-11-27\\_Ephesians\\_05\\_15-21\\_Bible\\_Study\\_Transcript.doc](http://www.moonvalleybible.org/sermons/2005-11-27_Ephesians_05_15-21_Bible_Study_Transcript.doc) for a discussion of how being filled with the Spirit relates to applying the Bible.

<sup>34</sup> Matthew 18:15

<sup>35</sup> Ephesians 4:29

offending party, but rather commiserating with a widening circle of friends, winning them to our side, dwelling on how awful the other person or situation is.

Paul calls us to deal with one another biblically. To apply the word of God to our relationships, and particularly to our interpersonal conflicts.

- D. Finally, in Verse 18 Paul breaks out of the armor metaphor, looks back on it all, and says, “Do it all with prayer. Prayer should be a part of all of it.” Specifically ► he says,

<sup>NKJ</sup> **Ephesians 6:18** praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints

1. Notice the ► pervasiveness of prayer. “Praying always,” “with all prayer and supplication,” “with all perseverance,” “for all the saints.” Sounds like prayer is all important in spiritual warfare.
2. Notice also that we are to be particularly concerned about upholding our fellow soldiers. Verse 18 says we are to be “watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints.” One scholar observes, “No soldier entering battle prays for himself alone, but for all

his fellow soldiers also. They form one army, and the success of one is the success of all.”<sup>36</sup>

3. I invite you to bring to mind right now a challenging relationship you have with another believer. Someone else in the camp. Maybe it’s your spouse. Maybe it’s a family member. Maybe it’s a fellow church member.

Are you focused on the real adversary? Is the devil deceiving you? Are you caught with your armor down? Are you “praying on” the armor? Are you praying for your difficult brother or sister in Christ?

We can use the spiritual armor as a kind of prayer list. In the battlefield, in our own camp, we can pray through the standard military armor issued by God: be truthful, be holy, be unified, be committed, be hopeful, be biblical. Would you join me in praying through the list?

Father, we are desperately dependent on you for Your strength and Your armor. And, we want to corporately defend what you have given to us. Help us to be truthful with one another, starting with me. Grant us your eyes to see the darkness in our own hearts, so that we may repent be holy. Help us to preserve unity among us. Give us the faith to be committed to Your work. Save us from discouragement and help us to be hopeful. And, in all

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<sup>36</sup> Charles Hodge quoted by Morris, 211.

things helps us to apply Your Word, especially to our relationships. Amen.