9-29-19

Ephesians 6:14-17

We, as Christians, are engaged in war. This is a simple fact that we don’t have any choice about. Once we decide to follow Christ, we have an enemy who is bent on our destruction. Our enemy is satan and he has a large army that continually fights against us. Remember that satan hates God and will do anything he can to harm God’s creation. Of all God’s creation, it is the human race that He loves most. It is because of this, that people undergo the most violent and sustained attack from satan.

When satan successfully tempted Adam and Eve into rebelling against God, he enslaved the human race. He became the prince of this world. Satan has no love for human-beings. He wants them enslaved to him so that they cause the most destruction to God’s creation and turn His blessings into cruses. At the end of their servitude, these people face an eternity of suffering in hell. Satan can count on God’s justice; he knows that sin against our infinitely holy God can only be personally repaid by an eternity of facing God’s wrath.

In His great mercy, God sent Jesus right into the midst of satan’s kingdom. Jesus offered a way for us to escape this slavery to satan and to avoid eternal damnation. We Christians have accepted this gracious offer from Jesus; in other words, Jesus has led the captives free. We know that throughout history, there have been slaves to human masters who sometimes escaped. The masters were never happy about this. It is the same with satan. Because of his intense hate, satan goes into a rage when he loses one of his slaves. Before we became Christians, satan hated us; once we become Christians, he counts us as enemies.

We are counted as enemies now because one of our primary duties is to spread the Gospel whereby we plunder satan’s house. We help other slaves escape. Because he can never have us back from the strong hand of the Father, satan will instead seek to hinder us in fulfilling our ministries to Christ. Hence, he has declared war on us and we have no choice but to be involved. To ignore this battle is to ultimately fail in our calling by Christ; it is to let down the One who gave His very life for us.

Paul tells us back in verse 12 that, “our struggle is not against flesh and blood”. It is difficult to remember this because satan works through his slaves and it is easy to focus on them. But Paul goes on to tell us that our fight is truly “against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places”. Our battle is spiritual and if we use weapons and defenses of this world, we will lose. We must use spiritual armor and weapons because the fight is spiritual. We must learn that the spiritual world is very real; in fact, the spiritual world will last forever while this physical world will pass away.

To help us, Paul tells us about physical things we can see and touch to help us understand the spiritual. So far, we have looked at girding our loins with truth. This girding is foundational; without this, our other armor can be rendered useless. This girding with truth gives us confidence in dealing with the spiritual world. We learned that the truth is contained in the Bible; not only is it contained in the Bible, but the whole Bible is truth. This is because the whole Bible is God’s word and God’s word is truth. It is because we believe in the truth of the Bible that we can have confidence in the other pieces of armor and weapons.

We also considered that Jesus Christ is God’s Word incarnate. Jesus is truth because He is God’s word, and again, God’s word is truth. We must put on Christ; we must be in Christ.

Next we looked at the breastplate of righteousness. This breastplate protects our inner man, who, through Christ, has become the new man. When we become Christians, we are covered in righteousness. We know that this righteousness is not our own; it has graciously been bestowed upon us by God and it is Jesus’ righteousness. Jesus took our sins and gave us His righteousness. God can only look upon righteousness; now He can look upon us because when He does, He sees Jesus’ righteousness.

This righteousness is our defense against satan’s accusations of our sin and failings before God. Although his accusations may be correct, they are meaningless because we are covered in the righteousness of Christ. This is our breastplate of righteousness.

We come now to verse 15: and having shod your feet with the preparation of the Gospel of peace. In our physical world, this is referring to footwear. The soldiers in the Roman army wore sandals, but these were not the normal sandals worn by the people. The strapping that held these sandals in place not only went over the foot and behind the heel, but continued around the ankle and up the calf. This was to make sure that they were absolutely secure and wouldn’t slip or slide around; and certainly wouldn’t come off.

Additionally, the soles were thick and had cleats on the bottom. The thickness protected against rocks and other things on the ground. They also protected against one of the tactics of the enemy which was to bury sharp sticks in the ground with the points sticking up a little out of the dirt. If the bottom of the foot could be injured, it would make it much more difficult to fight. Something similar took place during the Vietnam war in the form of punji sticks. Protection of the foot is important.

The cleats were for traction. It is obvious that having slippery footwear would be detrimental in battle. The last thing a soldier needs to be worrying about is trying to maintain his footing. Recall how often in this section of Scripture we are told to “stand firm”. This is probably the most important reason for having the proper spiritual footwear; so that we do not slip from standing on the truth.

This particular verse gives us cause to think for a while: What is meant by “the preparation of the Gospel of peace”? The “Gospel of peace” is fairly easy: This is the good news of Jesus Christ by which we are saved from hell and granted eternal rest and peace in the presence of God. But how do we put that together with “preparation”?

This is often said to basically mean that we are to be prepared to spread the Gospel: And we are to spread the Gospel. It is a command of Jesus from Matthew 28:19, “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations”. As we read the New Testament, we see that this was a primary focus of the apostles. And, in 2 Timothy 4:2 we read, “be ready in season *and* out of season”. We are to spread the Gospel, and there is no denying that doing so is an attack on satan’s kingdom.

But we must also consider the context of this passage. The passage is about standing firm in battle. So, how do we apply this verse to that context? It helps to know that the word translated “preparation” carries several ideas. It conveys the sense of “preparedness”, “readiness”, and “to be equipped”. The Gospel in this case, becomes the equipment by which we stand. The Gospel is our spiritual war sandals; the Gospel is our spiritual combat boots. We stand by the Gospel and let nothing sway us; we hold the Gospel true such that there is no compromise.

Again, our belt of truth is what gives us our strength and conviction about the Gospel. The Bible tells us that there is no other way to salvation than Jesus. We don’t deserve any way to salvation, so, it is a great show of mercy that God provided a way for us; He didn’t have to do that. Yes, to claim that there is only one way to heaven is extremely exclusive; but at the same time, that way is open to anyone who wants to take it. As Jesus said in John 6:37, “the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out”.

It is very clear in the Bible that the way to eternal life is through faith in Jesus Christ as Saviour. Because the Bible tells us this, we know that it is true. Here we have the powerful spiritual footwear that does not slide around on our feet and has more than enough traction to keep us from slipping. To “shod our feet with the preparation of the Gospel of peace” is to settle in our hearts that we are saved by Jesus. We cling to this as absolute truth and accept no compromise. Compromise is a tool satan uses to try to get us to slip and lose our footing; we must resist him in this.

There are lots of folks today who just focus on being nice and doing kind works for others. The idea being that if they avoid “big” sins and do good, they will be okay before God. And if we simply look at things on the surface, we might be led to ask, “*Why would God send a nice person to hell*? The first thing is our footwear; the true Gospel says nothing about being nice, it says to believe on Jesus Christ by faith. Because of that belief, we don’t slip. Then we can understand that all sin condemns us to hell because any sin is against an infinitely holy God who is infinitely just; unless we accept Christ, we must pay the price of that justice ourselves.

Another strong movement among church groups is ecumenicalism. This is simply different churches or denominations joining together for some cause or to worship together as brothers and sisters in Christ. Sounds good; but we need to be careful. As long as the churches agree on primary doctrines, this can be done and is a good thing. However, there is a push to include groups such as Mormons, Jehovah’s Witnesses, and Roman Catholics. We cannot do this. These groups believe in a different Gospel; they believe in a different route to salvation. In order to join with them, we would have to compromise on our primary doctrine of Jesus as the only way.

Notice that Paul emphasizes that this is a Gospel of peace. Peace is something else we gain by holding firmly to the Gospel. Once we are secure in the knowledge that we are saved by faith in Jesus Christ and not in our works, we have peace of mind knowing that we are safe. We don’t have to wonder if there’s other things we have to do. When satan attacks by telling us we aren’t good enough, we can sigh and know that we are not; but that Christ has us covered. And even more important than peace of mind, we have peace with God.

Romans 5:1-2 sums things up for us:

Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have obtained our introduction by faith into this grace in which we stand; and we exult in hope of the glory of God.

Prayer

Merciful God, how grateful we are for Your Gospel. It is indeed “good news”. In mercy and love You sent Your Son Jesus, to be the propitiation for all our sins. Our beloved Saviour endured Your just wrath in our place, so that we might enjoy eternity with You.

LORD God, Your word tells us that Jesus is the only way to You. We acknowledge that this one way is far more than we deserve and is a demonstration of Your great love for us. Help us, LORD, by Your Holy Spirit to respond to Your love. Remember that we are but dust; we are sheep; and we desperately need Your direction and guidance.

By Your word You reveal to us that the spiritual world exists and You provide what we need to resist our adversary; to stand justified even in the face of his accusations. It is by Your grace, through Jesus Christ, that we withstand him; it is all by Your strength and it is all for Your glory.

We pray and proclaim these things in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord

Amen