

# What to wear to war

Ephesians 5:21-6:23

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## How does this study help me?

Many times this part of the letter to the Ephesians is presented as a children's talk. The structure of the talk takes the pieces of a Roman soldier's armour and encourages children to learn a spiritual lesson from the individual pieces. But is there anything it says to adults?

There certainly is and the place to begin is with two fundamental ideas. Many Western Christians have been infected with an ignorance of the power of evil. So we use this as a lesson for children, but don't take to heart that the devil is real. Paul says we are standing against "the devil's schemes" (6:11). If this was true then, it is true today.

The NT gives us to understand that we live between the time in which the devil had been dealt a decisive blow and his final demise. In a chess game, the word "Check" announces that the game is in its final stage. On the last move, the victor announces "Check mate." In between there is a flurry of activity as the other player tries desperately to avoid total defeat. On the cross and through the resurrection Jesus signalled to the Devil that his demise was certain and his control forever limited. Since then the Devil has frantically tried to avoid ultimate defeat. All that remains is for Jesus to return and announce "Check mate" and destroy the Devil and all his ambassadors.

The second perspective that is fundamental to understanding this last section is that Roman soldiers never fought alone. They fought in a strategic formation, sometimes called a *phalanx*, whose strength depended on team work. Many Western Christians also have been infected with individualism. So we often teach children to be *individual* soldiers. While the nouns describing the armour are singular, the verbs are all plural. It seems the best way to understand this is to see Paul calling on the church to act like a team taking up the armour to withstand the Devil.

## What is going on in this section?

### Reflection on the beginning of the church

- When you review what happened in Ephesus in Acts 19:11-20 how prominent was the demonic? Can you think of any other city in Acts where the demonic was so prominent?

### Closer examination of the armour (6:10-18)

Paul's description of what to wear to war is unique and beginning to understand it requires examination of all the parts.

- Why is the idea of a “belt of truth” (6:14) a strange place to start when describing the armour of a soldier? Who tells lies and who tells the truth (John 6:44-46)? What might Paul be trying to say? (cf., 4:25)
- Paul has talked about “righteousness” earlier in the letter. What fundamental attitudinal change is it associated with in 4:24? What are some of the features of righteousness (4:25-6:9 cf. 4:27)? Why would Paul have to constantly exhort people to put on the “breastplate of righteousness” in the fight against the Devil?
- Again, is there anything odd about focussing on the “feet” next in the description? What was in Paul’s focus when he talked about “peace” earlier (2:14, 15)? How does the Devil win when there is spiritual elitism amongst Christians?
- Who is the specific object of “faith” earlier in the letter (2:8, 3:12)? Paul says a “shield of faith” protects us from the arrows of the evil one. What exactly does the Devil gain by attacking faith in the Lord Jesus? Given that the attack will be sophisticated what might the Devil do?
- In order to understand what might be in Paul’s mind when he talks of the “helmet of salvation” (6:16), we need help from Peter. In 1 Peter 1:3-5 he follows up the shielding effect of faith with what understanding of “salvation”? So it’s likely that when Paul talks about salvation earlier in Ephesians he is thinking of eternity with God. Why is this prospect so important in resisting the deceitful propaganda of the devil’s ambassadors?
- What does Paul tell us is “the sword of the Spirit” (6:18)? How does Jesus use “the sword of the Spirit” in Luke 4:1-13? When you are tempted to rely on money what parts of the word of God could you use?

### **Persistent Prayer (6:18)**

- Surprisingly, Paul talks only about “standing” properly attired and not fighting (6:13). Who then does the fighting? (cf., Rev 19:11-21)
- What are Christians actually asked to do? (6:18)
- How strong is this request?

### **The last word (6:19-24)**

- Paul asks for prayer because he is fighting the Devil (6:19-20). How does he understand his fight? (2 Cor 4:1-6)

### **What about us here and now?**

- Why doesn’t Paul encourage Christians to do something active like exorcisms or breaking up covens?

- C.S. Lewis made the profound observation that the Devil likes two sorts of people: those who believe in the spirit world and are enslaved to it and those who deny there is any spirit world, or that it could deceive them, because they think they are smart and sophisticated. In either case the Devil wins because they are gullible. Why are serious and earnest Christians a third way (a third group) in this regard and thus annoying and frustrating to the Devil?
- If the picture of the Christian in armour is in fact a picture of Christians acting as a team, resisting the devil together, what role is there for the individual?
- Why is it easier to be an activist than to be a prayer warrior?

#### **So what should I do**

- How can you encourage your church to take up the pieces of armour?
- What do you need to do to pray like Paul asks?