

Standing on the Promises

Ephesians 6: 11 – 15ⁱ

Grammatically Speaking

In Ephesians chapter 6, verse 15, Paul continued his description of the panoply of God's armor, writing,

¹⁵ ...and, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace.

Ephesians 6:15 (ESV)

So, he started in the middle with the belt of truth, has now worked his way to ground level, and will eventually speak of the helmet of salvation, making clear that the reason we are to put on the whole armor—the panoply—of God, is that when we do, we are covered from head to toe against the evil schemes and attacks of the enemy. This is important because, as Lloyd-Jones noted:

This third piece, which has reference to the feet, reminds us again that the entire personality is engaged in this Christian warfare...that every part of us as Christians is engaged in this conflict. We are not Christians in sections and portions. Our faith takes up the whole life, and the whole man; so we have to protect ourselves at every single point.ⁱⁱ

As I said, from the top of our head to the soles of our feet, but having said that, when Paul came to the feet, he didn't actually name the piece of armor. While the English Standard Version says, "as shoes for your feet," in this case other translations are more accurate, reflecting that the whole statement is the third in the string of adverbial participles that Paul used to describe just how it is that a Christian is meant to stand. As one translation has it:

¹⁴ Stand therefore, **having** girded your waist with truth, **having** put on the breastplate of righteousness, ¹⁵ and **having** shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; ¹⁶ above all, **taking** the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one. Ephesians 6:14–16 (NKJV)

So, the imperative is to stand—that's the command—but we are to stand by having girded our waist with truth, having put on the righteousness of Christ, having shod our feet with the preparation of the gospel, and taking the shield of faith. And, I know, grammar again, but when we understand that the participles explain the verb "stand"—when we understand that the panoply of God's armor is given to serve a singular purpose—then that understanding provides clarification into the meaning of each piece.

As in Lloyd-Jones, "We are not Christians in sections and portions."ⁱⁱⁱ It's not as if our heads need salvation and our feet are meant to be evangelists, nor is this a string of separate commands or suggestions. "Well, you need to be saved, that's job one, but then you also need to have faith, and to know your Bible, and be ready to share the gospel with others. The imperative is to stand with our whole being against the attacks and schemes of the devil, and having done all, to keep standing firm. That's the point here. That's what Paul was saying.

These Boots Were Made for Standing

It's in this light that we turn now to verse 15:

¹⁵ ...and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace... Ephesians 6:15 (NKJV)

Of course, we understand that as Paul developed this analogy, he had a typical Roman soldier in mind, and given his comment in verse 20, where he stated that he was “an ambassador **in chains**”, it may be that he was literally chained to one such soldier while writing or dictating this letter.

So, we start with a glance at the footwear of these soldiers, and there is general agreement here that Paul had in mind the caliga, the half-boot of the legionaries which was a type of sandal that more or less enclosed the foot and the ankle of the soldier in stout leather straps, offering a high degree of flexibility, but protecting the foot from various obstacles. Most important to the design was the heavy studded sole, which provided the soldier with stability, mobility, and perhaps most of all, protection. The old Puritan, Matthew Henry noted:

...the use of [this footwear] was to defend the feet against the gall-traps, and sharp sticks, which were wont to be laid privily in the way, to obstruct the marching of the enemy, those who fell upon them being unfit to march.^{iv}

In a day when many armies marched barefoot, or with only soft leather to protect their feet, this was an effective tactic, but Rome addressed this issue by providing the soldiers footwear with heavy leather soles, and then embedding those soles with hobnails, like studs on a winter tire, to provide for increased traction and stability both on the march and in the battle itself. We understand this to be what the Apostle had in mind with the word translated “readiness” in verse 15, which might also be translated as “preparedness” or even, “equipment”, as one commentator notes:

The Greek. word...

([ἑτοιμασία] het-oy-mah-**see**-ah)

...occurs here only in New Testament. [But] In the Septuagint. it occurs several times, and tends, curiously, to denote equipment in the special form of base or pedestal...^v

An example of this would be Ezra 3, verse 3, a literal rendering of which would read,

³ And they set the altar upon its base... Ezra 3:3 (ASV)^{vi}

where “base” is the translation of the same Greek word Paul used in Ephesians 6. Moule went on:

Such a meaning is obviously in point here, where the imagery suggests not readiness to run, but foothold for standing. Equipment will be a fair rendering.^{vii}

The Readiness of the Gospel of Peace

In other words, the gospel of peace—the gospel of the Kingdom of God—gives us a place to stand. The gospel of peace is the support which we need in this battle

¹² ...against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. Ephesians 6:12 (ESV)

So, we're not talking about putting on "the readiness given by the gospel of peace" in a vacuum, as if Paul were suggesting a simple readiness to proclaim the gospel whenever and wherever we might have opportunity. That is, of course, true, but here we're talking about an understanding of the gospel as so basic—so foundational—to our identity as Christians that it becomes our default response to every situation.

The obvious question then is, "How?" and as I was thinking about this I realized that we have come to one of those places where the Apostle Paul—and God, who breathed out this word through the Holy Spirit—have given us a brilliant reduction that can be taken at face value, while at the same time suggesting a myriad of other possibilities. One way of visualizing this is to think of a set of Russian dolls; you know, those dolls that are kind of like eggs so that when you pull one apart, you find another inside, and another inside that, and so on.

I think, given that the panoply of God is a singular concept, we can conceive of each part being integral to and contained inside each of the other parts. So, we

...put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace... Ephesians 6:15 (ESV)

and find that it is "the gospel of peace" first of all, because it is backed by the truthfulness of God and guaranteed by His faithfulness to keep His promises. Paul mentioned this in Ephesians chapter 1, when he wrote,

¹³ In him... Ephesians 1:13 (ESV)

(that is, in Christ),

...you also, when you heard **the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation**, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, ¹⁴ who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory. Ephesians 1:13–14 (ESV)

Similarly, in Romans 5, verses 1 and 2:

¹ Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. ² Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God. Romans 5:1–2 (ESV)

So, the gospel gives peace, even in this spiritual struggle, because it is founded on the truth—the faithfulness—of God Himself.

In addition, as we saw last Lord's Day, the gospel is the gospel of peace because it clothes us in the righteousness of Christ Himself. As Paul wrote in Philippians 3

⁹ ...not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith... Philippians 3:8–9 (ESV)

That way, when the accuser of the brothers shows up, pointing to our sin and our failures, we simply point him to our God who grants and credits to us the perfect satisfaction, righteousness, and holiness of Christ, as if we had never sinned nor been sinners, as if we had been as perfectly obedient as Christ was obedient for us.^{viii} Do you believe this? Truly? Have you accepted this free gift of God with a believing heart? If not, then turn away from your sin and turn to God through faith in Christ right now. There's no need to wait. "Now is the accepted time. Now is the day of Salvation." And if so, then

¹ There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. Romans 8:1 (ESV)

This is the assurance—the promise of God—and this is the shield of faith, the faith that saves us, and the faith that proceeds from that salvation which we put on as a helmet.

³¹ ...If God is for us, who can be against us? ³² He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? Romans 8:31–32 (ESV)

And where do we find all this? It is revealed and proclaimed in the sword of the Spirit, which is the very sure and certain word of God, because the Word of God is the gospel, and the gospel is the Word of God, every word, every jot and tittle, from Genesis to Revelation. This is the basis on which we engage every argument, "and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ"^{ix} This is the readiness—the equipment—of the gospel of peace.

Here I Stand

It was this readiness that made David, the sweet Psalmist of Israel write.

¹ The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The LORD is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid? ² When evildoers assail me to eat up my flesh, my adversaries and foes, it is they who stumble and fall. ³ Though an army encamp against me, my heart shall not fear; though war arise against me, yet I will be confident. Psalms 27:1–3 (ESV)

It was with this readiness that Martin Luther, having been ordered at the Diet of Worms to recant and repudiate his writings, said,

"Unless I am convicted by Scripture and plain reason (I do not accept the authority of popes and councils because they have contradicted each other), my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and will not recant anything, for to go against conscience is neither right nor safe."

The close to this quote is occasionally disputed, but one scholar has written,

Luther's collected works, issued later under his supervision, give the closing words as, "Here I stand, I can do no other, so help me God. Amen."^x

And whether or not Luther said those words at the Diet of Worms, they reflect precisely the attitude of a Christian soldier who has, as a part of the panoply of God,

...put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace... Ephesians 6:15 (ESV)

One whose conscience is captive to the Word of God, and obedience to Christ. We stand on nothing less than the promises of God Almighty, the gospel of peace, and as we do, may this be our prayer.

“Here I stand, I can do no other, so help me God. Amen.”

-
- i All Scripture citations, unless otherwise noted, *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016).
 - ii David Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *The Christian Soldier: An Exposition of Ephesians 6:10–20* (Edinburgh; Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 1977), 270.
 - iii Lloyd-Jones, *The Christian Soldier*, 270.
 - iv Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged in One Volume* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994), 2319.
 - v H. C. G. Moule, *The Epistle to the Ephesians, with Introduction and Notes, The Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1891), 155.
 - vi *American Standard Version* (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1995).
 - vii Moule, *The Epistle to the Ephesians*, 155.
 - viii CRC (Christian Reformed Church), “Heidelberg Catechism Q&A 60”, in *Ecumenical Creeds and Reformed Confessions* (Grand Rapids, MI: Faith Alive Publications, 1988), 38.
 - ix Cf. 2 Co 10:5.
 - x Dan Graves, “Here I stand, I can do no other, so help me God. Amen.” Christian History Institute, October 20, 2016, <https://christianhistoryinstitute.org/blog/post/here-i-stand-i-can-do-no-other/>, last accessed August 25, 2023.