

# Soldiers Of Christ, Arise



*"Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. 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." (Ephesians 6:10-11)*

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## Introduction

- I. Near the end of the Apostle Paul's life, Roman soldiers constantly surrounded him.
  - A. He grew up in the presence of the most extraordinary military power ever known.
  - B. After arriving as a prisoner in Rome, a soldier was literally chained to Paul night and day to ensure he would not escape (Acts 28:16, 20).
  - C. Modern military historians usually consider the Roman Legion the world's first professional army.
  - D. "The Roman imperial army was the earliest of the world's standing armies in which the soldiers were regularly recruited, and cared for, and finally pensioned off, by the state" (Michael Grant, *The Army of the Caesars*, xv).
  - E. The armor of the legions was distinctive, and with it, they subdued the world.
  - F. In his epistles, Paul used figures of speech that reflected what he saw in the world around him.
  - G. He told Timothy to "wage the good warfare" (1 Tim 1:18) and to "endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ" (2 Tim 2:3).
- II. Drawing from real-life observations, Paul told Christians to put on the "whole armor of God" (Eph 6:10-20).
  - A. The words translated as "whole armor" (Gr. *panoplia*) denote the "whole armor" of the heavily armed Roman soldier.
  - B. As soldiers of Christ, Christians must stand for the truth (Eph 6:11, 13-14).
    - 1. Unblemished in character with a genuine zeal that is tempered with wisdom.
    - 2. Knowledgeable of the written and revealed word of God.
  - C. The welfare of Christ's cause depends upon us standing for the truth.
  - D. Our weaponry must not be carnal since we are not fighting a fleshly battle.

## Discussion

### I. The Gospel Armor

- A. The girdle of truth (Eph 6:14).
  - 1. This was not an ornament—it bound the other pieces together and gave the soldier freedom of movement.
  - 2. The NIV renders this clause as: "with the belt of truth buckled around your waist" (Eph 6:14).
  - 3. "In a culture where the people wore long loose-fitting robes, garments were tied close to the body when quick action was required. Here, the believer is summoned to stand, therefore, literally, 'having girded (*perizoënnymi*) your loins in truth.'" (Arthur Patzia, *Ephesians, Colossians, Philemon*, 288)
  - 4. The center of our armor is truth (John 17:17).
  - 5. We move about this world more freely because we know the truth.
  - 6. Isaiah portrays the Messiah as wearing the belt of righteousness around His waist and faithfulness as the sash around His body (Isa 11:5).

- B. The breastplate of righteousness (Eph 6:14).
1. In first-century reliefs, only the centurions had a *metal* cuirass (breastplate); the common foot soldier had a *leather* corselet with leather shoulder pieces.
  2. The breastplate of a Roman spearman was used to protect the heart and other vital organs.
  3. God Himself wears righteousness like a breastplate (Isa 59:17).
  4. Our heart is covered by righteousness (Ps 119:11).
  5. Words are no defense against accusations, but a righteous life is.
- C. Feet shod with the gospel of peace (Eph 6:15).
1. "But most important of all were his heavy boots (*caligae*), or rather sandals, which were in many ways more serviceable than modern army boots. Their soles, made of several layers of leather and heavily studded with hollow-headed nails, varied considerably in thickness; perhaps three-quarters of an inch was about the average. Strips of cloth or fur were sometimes placed inside the sandals, and they were fastened to the foot by ankle thongs." (Michael Grant, *The Army of the Caesars*, xx)
  2. "The military successes both of Alexander the Great and of Julius Caesar were due in large measure to their armies' being well shod and thus able to undertake long marches at incredible speed over rough terrain." (A. Skevington Wood, *Ephesians*. EBC 11. Comments on Eph 6:15)
  3. The footwear of a Roman soldier gave him a firm footing during battle.
  4. The footwear was designed to make it challenging to walk backward.
  5. Our sound footing must be supplied by the gospel of peace (Rom 10:15; Isa 52:7).
- D. Taking the shield of faith (Eph 6:16).
1. Roman shields were composed of leather or wicker.
  2. The standard size was four feet high by two and a half feet wide.
  3. "The word Paul uses is not that for the comparatively small round shield; it is that for the great oblong shield which the heavily armed warrior wore. One of the most dangerous weapons in ancient warfare was the fiery dart. It was a dart tipped with tow dipped in pitch. The pitch-soaked tow was set alight and the dart was thrown. The great oblong shield was made of two sections of wood, glued together. When the shield was presented to the dart, the dart sank into the wood and the flame was put out. Faith can deal with the darts of temptation. With Paul, faith is always complete trust in Christ. When we walk close with Christ, we are safe from temptation." (William Barclay, *The Letters to the Galatians and Ephesians*, 183)
  4. "Early legionary shields were oval in shape but in the 1<sup>st</sup> century they became rectangular, although curved to fit the body. A legionary shield (*scutum*) was made of thin sheets of wood glued together and bound round the edges with wrought iron or bronze. The center was hollowed out for the hand grip which was protected by a metal boss. The outer surface of the shield was covered with leather on which were fastened decorative bronze plates." (Leslie and Roy Adkins, *Introduction to the Romans*, 39)
  5. The change from small round to large rectangular shields meant the soldiers no longer needed to wear greaves (shin pieces), and thus their mobility significantly increased.

6. The Roman Legions commonly used the “testudo” (tortoise formation) during battles, particularly sieges against fortified cities.
7. “Lastly, a word must be said about the *testudo*, which could be used either in advance or retreat against a violent attack of hostile weapons. The soldiers of the front rank, closely linked together, protected themselves by holding up their shields in front of them as screens, while the rear ranks raised their shields above their heads, and in this way produced an artificial roof, against which javelins and spears might strike with impunity. The success of this formation depended upon the men keeping close together, so as to avoid any gaps in the barrier of shields. Such a disposition might be employed instead of the *orbis* in a retreat under fire, but it was most commonly used by detachments advancing to the siege of a town or a camp.” (H. M. D. Parker, *The Roman Legions*, 256)
8. Our enemy does not always attack directly (Heb 11:32–38).
- E. The helmet of salvation (Eph 6:17).
  1. This headgear was generally of bronze, fitted inside with an iron skullcap lined with leather or cloth.
  2. We are to take this helmet from God—it is our salvation (Eph 2:8–9).
- F. The sword of the Spirit (Eph 6:17).
  1. “The offensive armor, as described by Josephus, consisted of the *pilum* or throwing-spear, the *gladius* or Spanish sword, and the *pugio* or dagger slung on the left and right sides respectively.” (H. M. D. Parker, *The Roman Legions*, 251)
  2. “Weapons for attack included the *pilum* or javelin, two of which were carried by each man. The *pilum* was 7 ft. long, the top 3 ft. being of iron. The sword (*gladius*) was a double-edged weapon about 2 ft. long and 2 in. wide. Carried in a scabbard attached to a belt on the right-hand side of the body, it was a stabbing rather than a slashing weapon and designed for use in close fighting. The scabbard was usually made of wood and leather held together by bronze. On the left-hand side of the body there was a dagger (*pugio*) in a bronze or iron scabbard suspended from another belt. Daggers seem to have been withdrawn from the legionary armory by the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> century.” (Leslie and Roy Adkins, *Introduction to the Romans*, 39)
  3. “Weapon training was most important. The intelligent use of the sword is mentioned particularly in a surviving Roman training manual. The method taught was to thrust, rather than to slash at an opponent; for a slash-cut rarely kills, but a thrust makes a deep penetration of the vital organs. The Roman short sword was clearly designed for stabbing, with its sharp angled point, though it could be, and certainly was on occasion, used to effect cutting strokes.” (Michael Simkins, *Warriors Of Rome*, 28)
  4. Our only offensive weapon is the word of God (Heb 4:12).
  5. Christ fought Satan in the desert with this weapon (Matt 4:1–11).
  6. We are never wasting our time when we are sharpening our swords—don’t let it get rusty.
- G. Our armor must be put on correctly (Eph 6:18).
  1. The armor is to be donned with prayer (cf. Acts 4:29–31).
  2. Pray always—pray intensely—pray for others.
  3. We are foot soldiers in His army; God is in control.

## II. A Lesson From Rome

- A. The Jewish priest and general Flavius Josephus lived during the zenith of Rome's military glory.
1. He was made a citizen by Vespasian and traveled with the legions.
  2. Roman soldiers always carried their weapons with them—even in peace.
  3. "They do not begin to use their weapons first in time of war, nor do they then put their hands first into motion, while they avoided so to do in times of peace; but, as if their weapons did always cling to them, they have never any truce from warlike exercises; nor do they stay till times of war admonish them to use them; for their military exercises differ not at all from the real use of their arms, but every soldier is every day exercised, and that with great diligence, as if it were in time of war which is the reason why they bear the fatigue of battles so easily; for neither can any disorder remove them from their usual regularity, nor can fear affright them out of it, nor can labor tire them; which firmness of conduct makes them always to overcome those that have not the same firmness; nor would he be mistaken that should call those their exercises unbloody battles, and their battles bloody exercises." (Josephus, *The Jewish War*, 3.72–75)
  4. "Now they so manage their preparatory exercises of their weapons, that not the bodies of the soldiers only but their souls, may also become stronger: they are moreover hardened for war by fear; for their laws inflict capital punishments, not only for soldiers running away from their ranks, but for slothfulness and inactivity, though it be but in a lesser degree; as are their generals more severe than their laws, for they prevent any imputation of cruelty toward those under condemnation, by the great rewards they bestow on the valiant soldiers; and the readiness of obeying their commanders is so great, that it is very ornamental in peace; but when they come to a battle, the whole army is but one body, so well coupled together are their ranks, so sudden are their turnings about, so sharp their hearing as to what orders are given them, so quick their sight of the ensigns, and so nimble are their hands when they set to work; whereby it comes to pass, that what they do is done quickly, and what they suffer they bear with the greatest patience." (Josephus, *The Jewish War*, 3.102–106)
  5. If only we could become as familiar with the weapons of our warfare (Acts 17:11).
- B. What caused their military downfall and, finally, the downfall of Rome itself?
1. Nearly all historians agree that Rome brought about its own downfall.
  2. "It is the just and important observation of Vegetius, that the infantry was invariably covered with defensive armor, from the foundation of the city to the reign of the emperor Gratian. The relaxation of discipline, and the disuse of exercise, rendered the soldiers less able, and less willing, to support the fatigues of the service; they complained of the weight of the armor, which they seldom wore: and they successively obtained the permission of laying aside both their cuirasses and their helmets. The heavy weapons of their ancestors, the short sword, and the formidable pilum, which had subdued the world, insensibly dropped from their feeble hands. As the use of the shield is incompatible with that of the bow, they reluctantly marched into the field; condemned to suffer either the pain of wounds, or the ignominy of flight, and always disposed to prefer the more shameful alternative. The cavalry of the Goths, the Huns, and the Alani, had felt the benefits, and adopted the use, of defensive armor; and, as they excelled in the management of missile weapons, they easily overwhelmed

the naked and trembling legions, whose heads and breasts were exposed, without defense, to the arrows of the barbarians. The loss of armies, the destruction of cities, and the dishonor of the Roman name, ineffectually solicited the successors of Gratian to restore the helmets and cuirasses of the infantry. The enervated soldiers abandoned their own, and the public defense; and the pusillanimous indolence may be considered as the immediate cause of the downfall of the empire.” (Edward Gibbon, *History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, 3.271–272)

- C. Is the gospel armor too heavy for you?
  - 1. Do you “earnestly contending for the faith” or apologize for it (Jude 3)?
  - 2. Our weapons are for pulling down strongholds (2 Cor 10:3–5).
  - 3. We must attack the citadels of error—not just hold our own.
  - 4. When General MacArthur was called home from Korea, he reminded Congress that “war’s very object is victory, not prolonged indecision.”
  - 5. Jesus declared that the man not with Him is against Him (Matt 12:30).
  - 6. The Devil does not attack under his own banner; sometimes, he advances under a flag of truce (2 Cor 11:14).

#### Invitation

- I. The welfare of the cause of Christ depends upon your willingness to stand.
- II. Confederate General Thomas J. Jackson was one of the commanders at the first battle of Bull Run (called the Battle of First Manassas by Confederate forces).
  - A. When both the right and left flanks of the Confederate army fell back, Jackson’s troops held firm.
  - B. General Barnard S. Bee rallied his disorganized men with these words: “There is Jackson standing like a stone wall.”
  - C. This did not mean that Jackson stood there useless like a stone statue—it meant that he and his men stood firm in the heat of battle.
- III. Christians are engaged in a great spiritual warfare.
  - A. Sometimes, we think we are waging war when all we are doing is running around and making a lot of noise.
  - B. We have to take a firm stand against the advancing enemies of truth.

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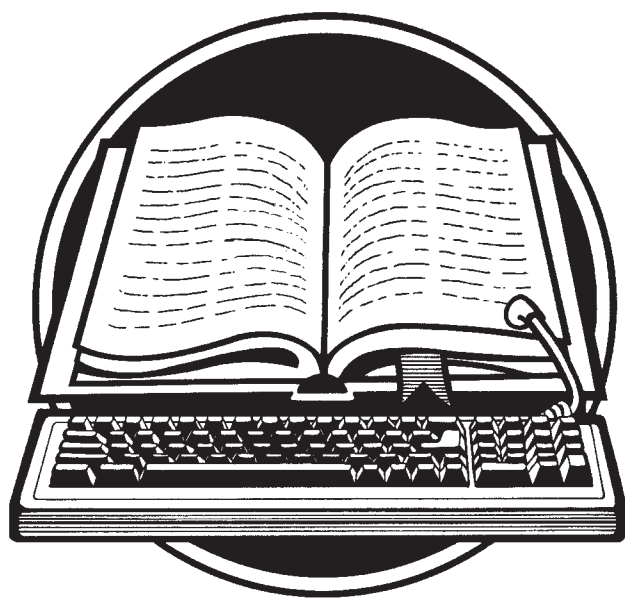












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