

SPIRITUAL WARFARE¹ THE SHOES OF READINESS AND THE SHIELD OF FAITH

Texts

Ephesians 6:10-20

¹⁰ Finally, be strong [in the Lord and in the strength of his might]. ¹¹ Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against [the schemes of the devil]. ¹² For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. ¹³ 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 firm. ¹⁴ Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, ¹⁵ and, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace. ¹⁶ In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one; ¹⁷ and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, ¹⁸ praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints, ¹⁹ and also for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel, ²⁰ for which I am an ambassador in chains, that I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak.

Summary of Message

For this series we have been underscoring the concept of our faith-union with Jesus Christ in order to avoid the error of supposing that the apostle Paul is simply advocating the development of virtues in Eph 6,10-20. Rather, Paul wants us to see the central concept of the gospel—our faith-union with Jesus Christ—from the perspective of spiritual warfare; that we have all that we need to be victorious in and through Christ Jesus. Getting our minds to think and getting ourselves to respond to *all* life-situations in view of this union is something that we need to be very deliberate about.

Concerning the “shoes,” people often mistaken Paul to be saying, “Put on the shoes of the gospel of peace,” when, in reality, he is underscoring that we put on the “shoes of readiness.” How is it that the “gospel of *peace*” creates a disposition of vigilance and alertness? In Ephesians the term “peace” usually refers to harmony that has been stored in *relationships*—both in our relationship with God and with others. This focus on relationship highlights a stronghold that the devil is constantly trying to overtake, for he knows that through broken relationships our hearts become full of bitterness, causing us to become isolated from the community of faith. In isolation, of course, is when the sheep/soldiers are most vulnerable. Therefore, here the apostle is teaching us to be “ready and alert” about the way we *naturally* (sinfully) respond to sinners—namely to respond with sin and to become hardened. Being alert to this reality, we are to respond in a manner that shows the grace and forgiveness we have received through our faith-union with Jesus Christ (Eph 4,31-32).

The shield of faith is to be taken up in particular seasons of life, namely during trials and hardships. While it is true that the entire Christian life will be marked by challenge, there will come times when our faith is uniquely tested. It is vital that we bear in mind, during these times, that God is sovereign and ultimately is effecting good despite the sufferings that beset us. Taking

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up the “shield of *faith*,” then, is bringing to God all your broken dreams and general brokenness and confessing that even now you believe He is in control and working out good. For Christians this is not an abstract hope because of the way in which God has already expressed both His love and power in the cross. Of course, this confession does not mean that we will fully grasp God’s purposes; but it is a reliable confession because of the cross that is “evidence” of God’s faithfulness, wisdom, love and power.

1. Take time again this week to break up into groups of two or three to share a particular situation and/or crisis you are currently facing. Then discuss as a group how our faith-union with Christ Jesus ought to radically reshape the way we both process and respond to the situation. How does knowing that we have been adopted as children of God through faith in Jesus Christ and are destined for eternal glory impact that way you “process” your current crisis?²
2. A basic tenet of biblical counseling is that we are sinners. Therefore, when people sin against us, our most natural tendency is to respond with sin. Share a recent “difference” that illustrates this principle. Do you better recognize the devil’s strategy of “dividing and conquering”?
3. Ephesians 4:31-32 reads: “³¹ Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. ³² Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.” How do you respond when you are sinned against? Is your response closer to verse 31 or verse 32? Share a *current* relational conflict/crisis that you are facing and discuss concrete ways you can respond that reflect kindness, tenderheartedness, and forgiveness.
4. Share an instance or season in life when God worked out good through trial and suffering. With your own testimony encourage others who may currently be facing times of “refining fire.”
5. If you are currently facing a time of “fire,” be courageous and share with your community group members the struggle you are facing. Also express concrete ways that they can help you.
6. Take time together as a group to reflect on the cross—specifically how it expresses both the power of God and His love. Perhaps you can close your time together by singing a song that focuses on the cross. In doing so, help one another to “take up the shield of faith” by exhorting one another to believe in God’s faithfulness and goodness even now during the storm.

² This is a good exercise to do regularly with friends and especially in marriage. We will never begin to appreciate the full application of our faith-union with Jesus Christ unless we become deliberate about applying this gospel-truth to our thinking and living.