

Armed with the Gospel of Peace

Ephesians 6:15

Halifax: 23 November 2008

Introduction:

For several weeks now, we have been looking at the armour that the Lord has provided for believers.

- We have seen that you,
 - all you who follow Christ,
 - are called to be sure that you keep this armour on so that you may be able to stand in the evil day.
- The picture that Paul paints for the believer is one of continual conflict with enemies—enemies that are stronger than you are!
 - And indeed, history bears out that many churches and many individuals who bear the name of Christ fall...
 - There are many churches that once followed Christ that have had their lampstand taken away...
 - They no longer have the light of the truth in them—they have lost the glorious gospel by which we are saved.
 - They are shells, having the form of godliness, but denying its power.
 - Many of us have had to leave such churches, so we must beware that we don't become what we have left.
 - And furthermore, there are individuals who seemed to begin well for Christ...
 - but whose true colours came forth in the heat of the battle—
 - Some gave in under the pressures of a little pressure from unbelieving family or friends...
 - Others were seduced away from Christ to follow sin.
 - They fell in the evil day of trials or temptations.
 - Some of those who fall in the evil day were never truly in Christ to start with...
 - They only professed, but their profession had no genuine roots in Christ—
 - they were just following along with others, but had no real faith.

- But there are others who truly are in Christ, yet fall in the heat of battle.
 - There is a great difference in them in that they do not fall completely away...
 - They have fallen in a battle, but they will be healed and restored to go on for Christ.
 - They wound their conscience and harm their testimony, but they are not cut off forever.

TRANS> And so we have seen that the armour spoken of here is something we very much need!

It may seem strange to think that those who have trusted in Christ should need armour.

- After all, if the Lord of Glory is protecting us, what can possibly harm us?
- But we must always remember that our Lord Jesus Himself surprised us when He came into the world...
 - His covenant people had come to expect that when He came,
 - He would be elevated in this world with honour and glory such as had never been seen before...
 - That all His enemies would fall at His feet in fear and trepidation and bring homage to Him.
 - But instead, He came in great poverty and humiliation...
 - And instead of rising to a throne of glory in this world, He was raised up on a cross—put there even by His own people...
 - an object of shame and cursing.
 - Now we know that afterward He was raised again and ascended to sit at God's right hand in glory until all His enemies are brought under His footstool...
 - But the scriptures very frankly acknowledge that His enemies have not yet been brought under His feet...
 - And Jesus told His disciples that as long as we are in the world,
 - we will have much tribulation...
 - We are told that we can expect to be treated as He was treated.
 - The world, Satan and his minions, and even our own flesh war against the new life that Christ has given us until the Day of Judgement...
 - And so it is that as long as you are in this world,

- You will need to wear the whole armour of God if you are going to stand.
 - If you are one of God's elect, Christ will keep you to the end...
 - But you must understand that He will not keep you in a cubical, isolated from trouble...
 - He will rather keep you in the armour that He has provided...
 - By His Spirit, He will so work in you that you will wear this armour in a manner sufficient to keep you from receiving a fatal wound.
 - He does not promise to keep you from being attacked,
 - but He promises rather to give you the strength to stand when you are attacked.
 - You see, the way He keeps you is, in part, by keeping you in the armour that He provides.
 - If you are truly His,
 - you will hear His warnings and you will hear His call to wear the armour and you will wear the armour.
 - If you are only a false disciple,
 - you will not take His call to wear this armour seriously and you will fall away to utter ruin.

TRANS> So with this, I remind you how important it is for you to hear your Saviour's call to prepare yourself for conflict.

- He does not promise you a comfortable seat by the fire or a stroll through the garden.
 - This world is not paradise...
 - and as long as you are here, you need to be armed and ready for battle—
 - And after one battle is over,
 - you must not put down your arms, but prepare yourself for the next battle that you may be able to stand to the end.

So far we have looked at the first two pieces of armour that we are to wear...

- First, we saw that we are to see that we have girded our waist with truth...
 - This sash or belt of truth refers to sincerity—you are to see that you are true!
 - You must not go into battle with a divided heart, as one who is half serving the Lord and half serving another master—riches, honours, pleasures—whatever...
 - If you are not sincere in your allegiance to Christ, you will easily turn away when the battle gets fierce.
 - That belt of truth or sincerity is the first piece of armour in the list.

- The second piece of armour is the breastplate of righteousness.
 - We looked at this last week.
 - I explained to you that this speaks of a righteous walk—a blameless life.
 - This righteous walk begins with turning from your sin to the Saviour that God has provided—even to Christ crucified...
 - No one is called blameless who has not first come to Christ to be reconciled to God...
 - And this blameless walk is maintained by an honest endeavour to keep God’s commandments, coupled with a continual confession of sin and ongoing rest in the righteousness of Christ.
 - Without this, you are labouring under guilt and will quickly fall when the battle is engaged—in the evil day.
- The third piece of armour is the one we come to today...
 - It is spoken of in verse 15.
 - It says:
 - “and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace.”
 - As with the other pieces of armour we have looked at,
 - I want to show you:
 - What this is
 - Why it is needed
 - And how you can keep it on.

I. What is this armour that you are to wear on your feet?

A. Let’s look at an overview of the description that is given to us in v. 15...

1. First of all, what is the piece of armour in the Roman panoply to which Paul refers when he says:
 - “having shod your feet”?
 - In the original, the verb translated “having shod” literally means “having bound under.”
 - It refers to that which is strapped onto the bottom of your feet—obviously sandals.
 - The Romans soldiers also wore greaves to protect their legs,
 - but verse 15 is talking about what was worn under the foot... the sandal.

- It is well known that the Roman soldiers wore sandals that were studded with hobnails to give them traction.
 - These sandals were important to enable them to travel swiftly to the battle field,
 - to dash upon their enemies once they were there,
 - and then to keep their footing while the battle was engaged.
 - Many historians have said that the Roman army's success would have been greatly limited if they had not had these shoes.
 - Such shoes had also been worn by the Greeks before them who were noted for the speed with which they travelled, often surprising their enemies.
2. Now let's look at what Paul compares these shoes to...
- It is a rather complex phrase:
 - He compares them to:
 - "the preparation of the gospel of peace"
 - a. The word *gospel* means *good news* so that the phrase *the gospel of peace* means:
 - *the good news of peace,*
 - or, *the good news that there is peace.*
 - It is as it is when there has been a big war and then one day you wake up and hear the news that there is peace!
 - b. And the word *preparation* means just that—preparation...
 - that which *prepares* or *makes ready*.
 - The *gospel of peace*, then, prepares our feet for battle, even as strapping on sandals prepared the Roman soldier for battle.
 - c. It is important to consider the strong connection there was between feet and news in the ancient world.
 - Today, when we think of news, we don't usually associate it with feet.
 - We think of the newscaster on television,
 - or the newspaper headlines
 - or something we receive on the internet,
 - or perhaps we think of the telephone call of a relative to tell us some sort of news.

- But in Bible times, news was not associated with television or computers.
 - It was associated with feet...
 - A messenger would come to you on foot to bring you the news.
- When Paul compares good news to feet in Ephesians 6:15,
 - He is using the imagery of Isaiah 52 where it speaks about beautiful feet... the feet that bring good news...
 - Isa 52:7: How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, Who proclaims peace, Who brings glad tidings of good things, Who proclaims salvation, Who says to Zion, "Your God reigns!"
 - He refers to this same passage in Romans 10 when he speaks about those "preach the gospel of peace."
 - (remember, the word gospel simply means good news)

TRANS> So what is this gospel of peace that Paul refers to that prepares our feet for battle?

B. It is, of course, the news of peace with God!

- The news that God is reconciled to His people!

1. And I say, what good news this is!

a. My friends, the scripture tells us that the whole human race was cast out of paradise because of our sin...

1) You can see this by looking around—

- We are not in paradise!
- There is suffering, there is poverty, there are storms, there are droughts, there are deformities and injuries and hostilities...
- Worst of all, there is death.
 - It is obvious that we are *not* in paradise.

2) Now in our sinful ways, we have turned this all around backwards...

- We look at our situation and we say,
 - "How could a good God allow all this suffering and pain and death in the world?"
 - And rebellious men take this as a proof that there is no good...
 - or at least that He is not a good God!

a) But I tell you, it is just the opposite if we will but hear God's word!

- The reason there is all this suffering and hardship in the world is because God *is* a good God...
 - He is good and the paradise He put us in at creation was good...
 - And because He is good, He cast us out when we became wicked.
 - We did not belong in paradise any more!

TRANS> The very thing that we use to deny His goodness is in fact the proof of His goodness!

- Christian, you don't need to be embarrassed by God's judgements.

b) Think about it...

- (i) If a king is good and he has servants in his kingdom who are deceivers and liars,
 - who are fleecing his subjects...
 - who are stirring up controversy with his allies...
 - who are plotting with his enemies to overthrow him...
 - who are trying to lead his loyal subjects into treasonous rebellion,
 - what will that king do *because He is good*?
 - Will he continue to provide a comfortable living for those wicked servants?
 - No! He will cast them into His dungeon.
 - He will punish them *because* He is good.

(ii) To use an illustration closer to home...

- Suppose a gracious and kind woman opens a day care with an earnest intent of providing a safe place for children...
 - What will she do if she discovers that her workers are abusing the children and molesting them?
 - She will immediately call the authorities to have those scoundrels arrested...
 - She will do this not because she is evil, but *because* she is good.

c) And in the case of the human race before God,

- We committed the worst sort of treason that could be committed...

- Even treason against our Maker who had just blessed us and given us paradise!
- We actually joined ourselves to the one who wished to blaspheme Him and overthrow Him if he could.
- God sends judgement upon us because He is good and holy and just.
- We would understand this all the more if only we could fully see the glory of God!
 - In our darkened estate, we cannot see His glory,
 - but if we could—we would see the horrible wickedness of our rejection of Him as our king...
 - the treachery that is in us in following Satan.

TRANS> And so you see that God, because He is good, cast the whole human race out of paradise and sentenced us to eternal judgement.

- 3) This is a dreadful thing for us...whether we admit it or not.
 - What could be worse than to have our Maker offended with us because He is good?
 - To have the One to whom belongs all power and authority and virtue justly opposed to us forever.
 - Not only are we cast out of paradise for our wickedness,
 - but we are told that there is a Day of Judgement coming when we will be cast into an even greater darkness and misery—
 - even to have the full weight of His wrath fall upon us which we have only begun to taste in this world...
 - What a horrible condition this is...to know that our Maker is at enmity with us because He is good and we are wicked!
- b. But I say, what good news it would be told that He has made peace with us!
 - That He who was at enmity has been reconciled!
- 1) To be told that God has sent His own Son to rescue us from bondage to Satan and from the curse under which we are fallen!
 - a) To be told that God the Son has come to represent His people...
 - That He has come to represent them by bearing their sin—by bearing all of the wrath and judgement that is due to them!

- To be told that whoever out of the wicked race of men believe in Him will not be condemned but will be restored to paradise forever!
 - To be told that our Maker is sending this message into the whole world before the day of judgement,
 - commanding all men everywhere to repent and be reconciled to Him!
 - commanding them to turn from their sin to Jesus Christ for complete pardon and reconciliation!
 - And that He welcomes all who come...
- b) And to be told that God's Son is also pouring out His Spirit on all those He has chosen...
- And that His Spirit releases us from our wickedness so that we want this salvation...
 - That He works in us to change our hearts so that we see clearly the glory of God and beauty of God and the goodness of God and the truth of God...
 - and so that we yearn to be restored to Him and rejoice in the salvation that Christ has procured!
 - He brings us out of the drunkenness of wickedness to do the only thing that makes sense!
 - And that by that same Spirit, He renews us into His holy and righteous image so that we can live in His house forever—
 - so that we can be His sons and daughters and love each other even as Christ has loved us...
 - and so that we can love God and know the truth about Him!
2. Surely after hearing such news we would have to conclude...
- a. That the news of peace with God is so excellent that no other news can compare...
- In fact, that apart from this news, there is really no such thing as good news...
 - All other happiness is empty besides the happiness that this news of reconciliation is to us!
- b. And we would also conclude that this news is everything...
- That to be reconciled to God cannot be improved upon...

- To now have our Maker blessing us rather than cursing us means happiness forever and ever in ways that we cannot even fathom!

TRANS> But how is this good news supposed to be armour for us?

- How does it prepare our feet to stand in battle for the Lord in this world?

II. Why do you need to wear this armour of good news on your feet?

A. First, you need it as an encouragement to keep on marching.

1. Discouragement is one of the worst things in the time of battle...
 - And one of the great causes of discouragement in fighting is when you do not really see that you have anything worth fighting for...
 - If you have no way of life to defend, nothing to die for, then you will not go on.
2. Jesus sends us into the world with the wonderful news of reconciliation...
 - a. Once you are reconciled, you shine as light in the this world,
 - reminding others that they need to reconciled.
 - There you are, a constant reminder to them that they are not right with their Creator,
 - and that there is reconciliation through His Son!
 - b. And I tell you, they do not like to be reminded of this!
 - You are a nuisance to them because you are reminding them of the very thing they are trying to forget...
 - c. They are going to do everything they can to discourage you.
 - They will use many different tactics:
 - 1) Some of them will try to seduce you, showing you the pleasures of sin and sweetly inviting you to indulge...
 - 2) Some of them will try to make you feel guilty for following Christ—that you have turned your back on your own mother or on your own nation...
 - 3) Some of them will try persecute you and try to drive you away from Christ...
 - Their persecutions will range from ridicule and mocking all the way to torture, deprivation, and murder.

TRANS> They will have all sorts of different ploys...

- But the one thing that will be common to them all...

- d. They will try to make it appear that the news of peace is nothing all that worthwhile—
 - nothing to get excited about...
 - nothing to worthy of their attention or of yours for that matter.
 - They will try their best to get you to stop being a bearer of this news...
 - to discourage you.
 - e. And I would say that one of Satan's greatest tactics is to send false teachers into the church who begin to downplay the centrality of the cross...
 - They don't talk about peace with God through the cross...
 - They turn the Lord's Supper into a pretty ceremony and darken the message that we are reconciled to God through a bloody cross.
 - Or they try to change the church into a service organisation.
 - Soon the very gospel of reconciliation is forgotten!
3. You can see how much you will need to have your feet shod with the gospel of peace!
- a. That is, you will need to continually keep the good news before you that God has been reconciled!
 - This is what keeps you going!
 - Christ is the whole reason you live!
 - b. And I say, what will happen when you step into all of Satan's opposition with shoes on?
 - 1) Let the world try to seduce you—you have been reconciled to God!
 - You have something far better to offer them than they have to offer you!
 - Moses forsook riches in Egypt to suffer with God's people in the wilderness rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season.
 - 2) Let them try to make you feel guilty for not following with them...
 - You know that true guilt is the rejection of our glorious Maker!
 - It is not you, but they who need to repent.
 - You have been reconciled to God through the cross!
 - 3) Let them try to drive you away from Christ...

- You would rather die a thousand times than be cut off from your Redeemer.
 - You count a joy and privilege to suffer for Him—
 - to enter into the fellowship of His sufferings...
 - to show with all the prophets and martyrs before you that your love for Him is deeper than your own life...
- c. Do you see brothers and sisters,
- As long as you have this good news of peace under you feet...
 - You will keep on going and nothing can stop you.
 - When you have this new relationship of peace with God, you just want to keep going on for Him.

TRANS> And these shoes will also serve a second purpose...

B. They will keep you from slipping when you are attacked in times of affliction... of sickness, of poverty, bereavement, of rejection...

1. It is in suffering that doubts come knocking in times of suffering...
 - “God does not love you or you would not have this sickness.”
 - “God has no regard for you or he would defend you now from this persecution.”
 - “If you are reconciled with God, you would not be struggling in your prayers as you do.”
 - “If you are truly reconciled with God, you would not be so full of self pity and pride as you are...”
 - “Why do you even bother to go on in this battle?”
2. What a difference it will make if your feet are shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace when these doubts arise!
 - You can dig your hobnails firmly into the ground and say,
 - “Being justified by faith, I have peace with God through my Lord Jesus Christ...
 - “If when I was an enemy I was reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more having been reconciled, I shall be saved by His life, and not only that, but I also rejoice in God through my Lord Jesus Christ, through whom I have now received the reconciliation.”
 - With the shoes of peace on,
 - Your trials will not be able to knock you down.

- Instead, they will add more and more encouragement...
 - because the more they come,
 - the more you will take comfort not in the good things of this world...
 - but in the cross by which you are reconciled to God.
- And more you do that, the more your sense of God's love and of your appreciation for what He has done will grow...
 - Trials will have the very opposite effect on you that they have on those who do not have on the shoes of the gospel of peace...
 - The more you suffer,
 - the deeper your sense of peace will be—
 - the more comfort you will draw from the sure knowledge that you have peace with God through Jesus Christ.

TRANS> My brothers and sisters, you do not want to face the enemy without your gospel of peace shoes on!

- You do not want to walk through the glass and stones and thorns of this world barefooted!
- And that brings us to the third thing...

III. How can you keep this armour on? How can you maintain your sense of peace with God?

A. Well first of all, make sure you have the real thing...

1. There are many who have false shoes of peace with God...

- These shoes (this sense of peace) are not based on the gospel that God is reconciled to us through the cross of Christ...
 - They are based on other things by which you only suppose that you have peace with God...
 - a. They are based on circumstances—
 - that you have been relieved of some affliction, so now you know God loves you...
 - or that you just received some great blessing as proof of His love...
 - or just that things are going well in this world...
 - b. Or if not circumstances, they are based on false theology...
 - That God is love and so does not need to be reconciled to you...

- that Christ is not needed to die on the cross to atone for you,
 - but that He is simply there to tell you that God loves you.
 - Or that God is reconciled because you have done many good works for Him
 - or because you had an experience with Him that warmed your heart...
 - or because you try to do the best you can...
 - Instead of trusting in Christ crucified,
 - you suppose that you have peace with God because of these other things...
2. My friends, false shoes will not be able to keep you standing in the battle...
- a. Peace based on circumstances will crumble (rather than become stronger).
 - As soon as you are called upon to suffer...as soon as the comforts on which you are basing your peace are taken away,
 - how will you stand then?
 - b. And peace based on false theology of the general love of God means that you have already fallen...
 - You have taken comfort in lies and you had better hope that that comfort **will** fail you in this world so that you can repent...
 - If it keeps you at peace to the end, you are much to be pitied...
 - You will be rudely awakened when the Lord Jesus declares to you that He never knew you.
3. Be sure then that you are wearing the genuine gospel shoes...
- The gospel of peace that teaches you that we have peace with God through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ crucified for sinners.

TRANS> So the first thing to do to ensure that you have these shoes is to make sure that you have put on the real article and not a substitute...

- The second thing to do, once you know you have these shoes of the gospel of peace...

B. Second, you must guard against that which will steal away your peace.

1. A refusal to repent of your sins will surely steal your peace...
 - a. Here you have been reconciled to God and pardoned of your sin, but now you are sinning against Him and refusing to repent!
 - When you do this, He will take your peace away.

- You will lose the joy of your salvation—that assurance that you are reconciled to God and have peace with Him.
 - He will chasten you until you repent, and you will be miserable.
 - Before David repented of his adultery, he said,
 - Psalm 32:3-4: “When I kept silent, my bones grew old Through my groaning all the day long. For day and night Your hand was heavy upon me; My vitality was turned into the drought of summer.
 - David’s peace was not restored until he confessed his sin and repented of it—as he goes on to say:
 - Ps 32:5: I acknowledged my sin to You, And my iniquity I have not hidden. I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD," And You forgave the iniquity of my sin. Selah
- b. If you do not lose your peace by impenitence, I fear that you may very likely have a false peace...
- True gospel peace can only be maintained by repentance...
 - If you have set yourself against God in rebellion, any peace you have will not be from Him.

TRANS> So guard against impenitence—lest peace be stolen away.

2. Second, guard against sloth and negligence...

- a. It is very important that you do not neglect the means of grace if you want to keep up your peace...
- You need to continue in God’s word—and in prayer—
 - And you need to be faithful and regular in public worship...
 - Not just any public worship, but public worship where the true gospel is preached and believed.
- b. If we do not continue in God’s word,
- you will slowly lose sight of the wonder of the fact that we have been reconciled to the God of heaven!
- 1) You will grow dull to the marvellous truth that Jesus His Son has come to die for us...
- You need to keep on coming back to this again and again or you will forget...
 - You will lose your appreciation for it.
- 2) Why do we so quickly forget the gospel when it is so wonderful?

- Because it is humbling...
 - We prefer not to think that such measures as the Son of God dying a cursed death are necessary for our reconciliation...
 - Even though the fact that He did and that we are resting in this is the only way of true peace,
 - we continue to be drawn to other things if we do not keep on returning to the gospel again and again.
 - If we do not continue refreshing ourselves in the word.
- c. So do not neglect the word and prayer, both in public and private worship.
 - And of course it is not enough to merely sit through a service or to come before God in a perfunctory way
 - It is only when you meditate on the truth of the gospel that you will keep your feet shod with this precious armour.

Conclusion:

And I say, what a precious thing it is to refresh yourself often in the knowledge of the peace that you have...

- Just to think of the great change that has come to you through the gospel...
 - that you were headed for Hell and now are headed for paradise!
 - that you were cut off from the life of God and now are destined to behold Him in His excellent glory.
 - that you were an object of His divine wrath, but now of His mercy and grace.
- And just to Consider how kind the Lord Jesus has been to you...
 - That He should come to you even while you were yet in your sins and die for you...
 - That even though you were too stubborn to turn from your sins, He should give you His Spirit to transform you and give you a new heart to believe!
- This is such a delightful piece of armour—and such a useful one—
 - See that you have shod your feet with preparation of the gospel of peace.